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Tom Cunningham
It is the business of the missionary to set the convert free. This involves the release of the mind; not by denouncing the evils of heathenism by so letting in the light, that evil is seen to be evil. And it involves the release of the body; that one who no longer thinks as a heathen should no longer be compelled to act as a heathen.

The Alliance of Protestant Missions, “Policy of the Alliance,” 1919.

EUL AP Gen/763.

The missionaries endeavoured to rescue the depraved souls of the Africans from the “eternal fire”; they set out to uproot the African, body and soul, from his old customs and beliefs, put him in a class by himself, with all his tribal traditions shattered and his institutions trampled upon. The African, after having been detached from his family and tribe, was expected to follow the white man’s religion without questioning whether it was suited for his condition of life or not.

Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 1938

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself. Except where stated by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own. It has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree.


Signed:

Tom Cunningham, 10 September 2018
Abstract and lay summary

This thesis is a social and cultural history of the Church of Scotland Mission to Kenya (CSM) and a study of colonialism in Kenya’s Gikuyu highlands during the period between c1906–c1938. The thesis identifies and critically examines a principle that underpinned and informed much of the thought and practice of this particular Christian mission’s colonial-evangelical project: the mission’s modernist, imperial, liberal, ambition to “uplift,” “emancipate,” and “develop” Gikuyu by inculcating new, individual, conceptions of the self through the radical transformation of their physical culture in general, and their bodies in particular. The thesis explores how this corporeal, colonial project challenged and connected with pre-colonial Gikuyu conceptions of embodiment, improvement, and self-mastery. And it explores its contested place among a number of competing colonial projects in the region at this time.

Immortalized in Gikuyu novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo’s 1965 classic The River Between, commemorated in plaques, monuments and church buildings in present-day Gikuyuland, and still alive in the memories of Gikuyu Presbyterians today, the CSM’s “civilising mission” has nevertheless been largely overlooked, under-played or misunderstood, in much of the historiography on colonialism in this otherwise heavily researched region. Using archival material together with oral history interviews with dozens of one-time mission students and their descendents, I offer a new history of the CSM arguing that it is crucial to our understanding of colonialism and its legacies in this part of the world.

At its heart, the thesis documents and explores the CSM’s fraught and contested attempt to re-make Gikuyu persons totally, and by means of their bodies. I dub this “Muscular Christianity,” re-purposing a term prevalent in late-Victorian Britain which referred to patriotic protestant reform movements aimed at developing boys and young men morally and physically through exercise and games. The missionaries of the CSM were Muscular Christians in this sense. But this was just one facet of their altogether deeper and wider-ranging attempt to turn Gikuyu into modern, imperial, Christian subjects with appropriately “civilised” bodies. The CSM’s corporeal colonial-project included but was not limited to: a sustained effort to reform Kenya’s colonial labour system, which they alleged had a deleterious effect upon the colony’s “able-bodied” males; a high-profile campaign against the Gikuyu custom of “female circumcision”; and the whole series of everyday techniques and pressures they brought to bear upon scholars in their boarding schools – from ablution regimes to clothing regulations, from technical training in crafts to athletics programmes. Examining pre-colonial Gikuyu conceptions of the body and the person, I show that one of the most significant aspects of the CSM’s colonial-evangelism was the emphasis
it placed upon the cultivation of forms of embodied individuality which were completely new in this part of the world.

The CSM played an important, if ambivalent, role in the colonisation of Gikuyuland. Seeking to fundamentally re-organise almost every aspect of the lived world of Gikuyu people, they were, in a sense, the most thorough-going of Kenya’s colonisers. Nevertheless, the CSM’s “Muscular Christianity” contradicted the established trends of the colonial order, which relied upon the assertion of racial boundaries, subordination, and the enforcing of authority through violence and oppression. Thus, the CSM were far from whole-heartedly supported by Kenya’s other colonisers, many of whom regarded their “civilising” project with anxiety, condemning it for the “detribalising,” and therefore “destabilising,” effects it was purported to have upon the colonised population. By the same token, the mission occupied an ambiguous place in Gikuyu culture: though many Gikuyu decried and resisted the mission’s advance, thousands of others actively sought out a CSM schooling, seizing the liberal promises of Christianity and literacy, and embracing the new styles on offer at the mission station. By the late 1920s another kind of “Muscular Christianity” had emerged in Kenya’s Gikuyu highlands – that which informed the political imagination of the anti-missionary, and anti-colonial, ethnic patriotic movement of the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), whose general secretary was the one-time CSM educated Johnstone “Jomo” Kenyatta. The thesis culminates with an analysis of Kenyatta and the KCA’s attempt to establish Gikuyu as a “body politic.”
For my family, Maddy, Mum, Dad, and Matt.
Acknowledgements

A project of this scale and duration incurs many debts, and there are several people I would like to thank. I would like to thank my supervisors Paul Nugent, Brian Stanley and Tom Molony for all their guidance during the past five years. I have learned how to be a historian under their watch. I would especially like to thank Tom Molony who provided crucial pastoral support at key moments during the writing up period. The research was made possible by the financial support of an Economic and Social Research Council 1+3 award. The research has also been supported by smaller grants and bursaries which have enabled me to undertake more extensive fieldwork research than would otherwise have been possible, and to attend conferences and workshops: the University of Edinburgh Global and Transnational History group research expenses award (supported by Tina Picton Phillips), the Royal Historical Society research expenses scholarship, and a research grant from the British Institute in Eastern Africa.

I am grateful to the Presbyterian Church of East Africa for providing me with permission to undertake the research. I was welcomed, assisted, and provided with warm hospitality in PCEA churches throughout central Kenya. At the Church of the Torch, Kikuyu, I was helped by Kenneth Njoroge, Georege Gachihi and the family of Edward Njoroge Samson. During my time at Tumutumu I was given invaluable assistance and support from Catherine Njambi, Anne Wairimu, Susan Ngendu, Samuel Kibura, Epafarah Kimunyu, and Josiah Ngu-Ngige. At Chogoria I was fortunate to be in the hands of Micheu Gitonga and his brother Keneth Murithi who taught me a lot about the area and its history. Charles Ndayu was a generous host in Nyeri and Othaya. A number of individuals offered invaluable research support and assistance during research in Kenya in particular I would like to thank Richard Ambani, Alfred Anangwe, John Gatu, Kibacia Gatu, George Kaguchia, David Kinyua, Douglas Kiereini, Gerishon Kirika, Evans Muiru, and Paul Mwangi for everything they did to help me.

My research in Nairobi was enhanced by spending time at the British Institute in Eastern Africa. In Nairobi I was fortunate to be part of a stimulating and friendly research community. I am especially grateful to Joost Fontein, for the role he played in building this community as director of the BIEA, his predecessor, Ambreena Manji, and to Olly Boles, Marie Gravesen, Enid Guene, Neo Musangi, Devin Smart, Caleb Owen, and Emma Park all of whom made the research experience extremely productive and enjoyable. Pete Lockwood’s friendship and insight has been key and continues to motivate me. In Edinburgh I have benefitted from being part of a lively African Studies and postgraduate community. Michael Crawley, Maurice Hutton, Declan Murray, Henry Mitchell, have provided special levels of intellectual and moral support. Jamie Furniss and Emma Hunter, John Lonsdale and Bernhard Struck, have been generous with their time; they have
provided crucial intellectual support, encouragement, and have helped me to become a better scholar. I would also like to thank Stephen Conway and James Sutherland who in their own, different, ways have played important roles in my development.

I could not have done this without the unceasing love and support of my family – my wife Maddy, my parents, Michael and Felicity, and my brother, Matt – to whom I owe everything. My parents-in-law, Rachel and Sandy, have been immensely supportive too, and I am especially grateful to Rachel for proof-reading large sections of this thesis at the eleventh hour. From start to finish my family have taken an interest in my research. They have offered reassurance, optimism and practical support. They have backed me to the hilt, and I will be forever grateful for this. Maddy deserves special acknowledgement. She has lived with this project for the last five years. It has been incredibly tough and demanding at times, yet she has remained a constant source of enthusiasm and happiness and I could not have done it without her.
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A note on the fieldwork and research

This thesis is based primarily on archival research undertaken in the U.K. and Kenya, and oral history interviews conducted in central Kenya on four research trips: July 2013, September-December 2014, June-September 2015, January-April 2016. The majority of archival research was undertaken at two venues: University of Edinburgh Library Centre for Research Collections (where my principal sources were the papers of John William Arthur, the papers of Arthur Barlow and *Kikuyu News*) and the archive of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) in Nairobi which I helped to restore on my fourth and final fieldwork trip between January and April 2016.¹ 

As noted in the footnotes and bibliography I have drawn from source material from a range of other archival repositories. These include but are not limited to: the University of Nairobi archives (for the ethnographic papers of Arthur Barlow); the Kenya National Archives, Nairobi; the National Library of Scotland (for the papers of Archibald Irvine); and the British National Archives at Kew, London (which I principally used for reconstructing the history of the “circumcision crisis” in chapter 7).

The original idea for this research project came about while I was in Iten, Rift Valley Province in 2011. Iten, the “home of champions”, is the marathon-running capital of Kenya, if not the world. As has been widely commented on in the sports media, the running success of the town has a lot to do with the Irish mission school, St. Patrick’s which has produced several Olympic and world champion distance runners. My initial intention for my Masters’ degree and PhD was to undertake a history of Kenyan athletics. It was this project that took me to the papers of John Arthur in the university library which I first accessed in the autumn of 2012.

My first research trip, in July 2013, was a three-week visit to central Kenya during my Masters’ degree for research on my dissertation on sport and the CSM in Kenya.² On that trip, I was introduced to Alfred Anangwe a research assistant at the Kenya National Archives, who provided me with invaluable early support. Alfred and I travelled via *matatu* (minibus) to Chogoria where we stayed for three nights and sought out potential informants. It was a speculative trip but we had success, meeting among others the Reverend Elias Kabii, who was one of the first African Presbyterian ministers at Chogoria. Reverend Kabii gave up two successive afternoons to provide us with his life history and the history of the Chogoria mission. Alfred provided research assistance,

¹ https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP847 [Last accessed September 2018]. A reflection on the Endangered Archive Project can be found in the Appendix.
in some form or another, on each of my subsequent research trips. I returned to Chogoria on each trip and met with Kabii each time.

During each of the three main periods of fieldwork I was based at the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA) in Nairobi, and took trips from there to Kikuyu, Tumutumu and Chogoria stations. Between September and December 2014 I undertook nine weeks of one-to-one formal Gikuyu language instruction, four days per week, four hours per day, at the Anglican Church of Kenya language school in Nairobi. I spent most week-day afternoons at the Kenya National Archives. I will be forever grateful for the extremely patient and thoughtful guidance of my Gikuyu language teacher, George Kaguchia. With his avid interest in the history and anthropology of Gikuyuland Kaguchia provided helpful advice and guidance on my research. At the start of that research trip I made contact with the now late Reverend John Gatu, former moderator of the PCEA (whom I refer to in chapter 6). I spent several afternoons at Gatu’s family home in Karen. He happily fielded questions on almost any aspect of the history of missionaries in Gikuyuland and provided me with source material from his own archive including the photographs of Horace Philp.

I first accessed the archive of the PCEA at the end of September 2014. Having gained permission to undertake research in the archive from the PCEA head office in “South C”, a district of Nairobi some twenty minutes by motor bike outside of the city, I was anticipating working there every afternoon during the first trip. But in its dilapidated and abandoned condition it was immediately obvious that that would not be possible. In the weeks that followed my supervisor Tom Molony (who was in Edinburgh) and I put together an application for a British Library Endangered Archives Programme grant to undertake a project to restore the archive and partially digitise it, beginning in January 2016.

While in Kenya I spent time in and around the CSM’s three mission stations. In each place I aimed to seek out and spend time with people who had been through a CSM schooling, or people who were the descendants of early converts. I was often mistaken for a Scottish missionary. On occasion it was awkward when I had to explain that I was not a practicing Christian and that I did not have any connection to the Presbyterian Church. Yet I was made to feel extremely welcome in each place. This was undoubtedly because of my interest in the history of the Scottish mission. I spent two consecutive weeks at Tumutumu mission station in November 2014, returned for three consecutive weeks at the end of July until the middle of August 2015, and made a number of weekend or over-night visits on each of the three main periods of fieldwork. I spent three weeks in Chogoria at the start of July 2015, a weekend there in 2014 and two weekends there in 2016. I visited Kikuyu station a number of times, on morning or afternoon trips from Nairobi, and stayed
at the station a for a night or two, three or four times. At Chogoria I received the generous hospitality of Gitonga Micheu, whose father, the late Obadiah Micheu was one of the first Kenyan PCEA minister’s in the area.

The interviews I conducted in these places were a valuable way of building up and supporting my reading of the missionary archival material and the ethnographic material. I want to mention this here because it is not sufficiently reflected in the footnotes to the thesis since it was simply not possible to note every bit of information I gleaned from these conversations. I generally allowed my hosts to direct me to the people they believed would be most interested in my research and most willing to speak about the CSM. Alfred Anangwe joined me for parts of my stays at the mission stations. As a seasoned researcher he helped me ask the right questions. As a Luhya, he too was an outsider in these Gikuyu-speaking areas and if the respondent did not speak English or did not wish to, we had to find somebody who could interpret. Across all my periods of fieldwork I recorded over one-hundred spoken interviews, and had many more informal conversations. I asked my respondents questions about how the missionaries were remembered, about *thabu*, about initiation, about going to school. I transcribed the most useful and important English-language interviews. Every Gikuyu-language interview that I felt was useful I arranged to be transcribed. This was done by my language teacher George Kaguchia, and by professional interpreter Evans Muiru. I would be happy to share copies of these transcriptions for research purposes. I have full transcriptions of all the interviews I quote in the thesis.

By far the most rewarding and useful period of fieldwork was my final stint during which time I spent practically every week day for three months working in the PCEA archive in the bell-tower of St Andrews church, Nairobi. The hands-on work of restoring the archive – cleaning up the room, removing dust from files, re-boxing, re-ordering and cataloguing the material – gave me unique access to the richest repository of source material on the CSM.
Introduction

On Monday 5 October 1908 Doctor John William Arthur of the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) took a team of boys from his mission station at Kikuyu for a game of football against Canon Harry Leakey’s Church Missionary Society (CMS) at Kabete. It was, Arthur later reported in the CSM’s bulletin for home parishes *Kikuyu News*, “A Great Football Match.” The respective mission schools proclaimed a “general holiday [...] in honour of the momentous occasion.” Accompanying Arthur and the “Kikuyu First XI” were “a goodly following of supporters” including Mrs Scott and Miss Marion Stevenson, who “added much to the beauty if not the playing strength of the team.” The Director of Public Works for East Africa Protectorate, William McGregor Ross, travelled from Nairobi, to referee the game. Before the match, tea was served to the “ladies,” the team captains (Arthur and Leakey), and the referee.

The match itself receives scant attention in Arthur’s report; the result (Kabete, 3 - Kikuyu, 2) is mentioned only once. The match was “great” not for anything that happened on the pitch within 90 minutes of play, but because it contributed to no less than the advance of Christian civilisation in this part of East Africa. Its influence, Arthur believed, reached outwards, into the respective mission stations and even beyond: “It was the first time they had ever seen a game of football,” Arthur wrote of the spectators, “quite a number” of whom were “highly painted warriors, relics of a day fast giving place to the playing fields of sport, in which manliness, courage, and unselfishness shall add their quota to the formation of Christian character.” And the football match extended deep into the bodies and souls of the “lads” on the field; Arthur concludes his report thus:

In closing let me say that it is our hope in these our games to stiffen the backbone of these our boys by teaching them manliness, good temper, and unselfishness – qualities amongst many others which have done so much to make many a Britisher, and which we hope to instil into our boys in such a way as to make them strong men indeed. Our belief is that our games may be, when properly controlled, a mighty channel through which God can work to the uplifting of this race. They need to be strengthened in the realm of their physical nature, where Satan so strongly reigns, and how better than by the substitution of their own evil dances by such a game as football, inherent in which are magnificent uplifting qualities.

Until his retirement from the Gikuyu highlands of Kenya – as the “East Africa Protectorate” became known in 1920 – three decades later, Doctor Arthur oversaw a colonial-evangelical project that was aimed at fundamentally re-organising almost every aspect of the lived world of Gikuyu

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people. It was a project that placed special emphasis on the radical transformation and “civilisation” of Gikuyu physical culture in general, and the body in particular. The missionaries of the CSM, of which Arthur was leader from 1911 until 1937, pursued a “civilising mission,” holding that in order for Gikuyu to be Christian they first had to be “civilised.” One of the CSM missionaries, George Grieve, explained their approach like this:

*The purpose of a Mission is:*

*The evangelisation* of the people. This was the sole object of the Missions in Kenya at the outset, and is still the only object of many of them at the present day.

*Why has this purpose been departed from?*

Because a knowledge of reading is necessary if the Bible is to be placed in the hands of the people. Because, there being no socialising or educative agency in the field at the time [before the missionaries arrived], it was necessary to broaden the basis so as to include other essential things, e.g. Better homes; cleaner bodies.2

The chapters which follow offer a history of the CSM during the years c1906-c1938, the years when Doctor Arthur was part of the mission. Many possible histories of the CSM could be told. In this thesis, my principal aim is to focus on offering a critical examination of their civilising mission, exploring the role of this transformational project of “uplift” in relation to the colonisation of Gikuyuland. I explore how this corporeal, colonial project challenged and connected with pre-colonial Gikuyu conceptions of embodiment, improvement, and self-mastery. And I examine its contested place among a number of competing colonial projects in the region at this time. My overall arguments will be brought out in the seven chapters and conclusion that follows. The purpose of this introduction is to signpost some of the arguments and themes while giving an indication of why I believe this thesis is important, and the existing scholarship on which it is based and to which it contributes.

**The Muscular Christians**

Though the missionaries of the CSM did not themselves use the term, the mission was a “Muscular Christian” institution – especially under Doctor Arthur. The term “Muscular Christianity” was coined in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century.3 Not always deployed favourably it referred to the protestant cultural movement and political theology that emphasised the importance of physical

---

2 George Grieve to Special Committee of the Kenya Missionary Council (2 April 1929), PCEA I/DB/8.
exercise, organised games, and rigorous discipline in the moral training of young boys as a means of bolstering “manliness,” patriotism and Christianity in an age of empire and industrialisation. Empire was especially important to those who identified as Muscular Christians: “If asked what our Muscular Christianity has done,” wrote one British public school master in 1901, “we point to the British Empire. Our Empire would never have been built by a nation of idealists and logicians.”

Muscular Christianity connoted a particularly social, campaigning, form of Christianity. The “muscular” signalled a rejection of the liturgical, priestly and therefore supposedly “effeminate” world of Anglo-Catholicism. At the same time, it represented a rejection of more austere, puritanical models of Christianity which framed games and outdoor adventure as an unholy indulgence in the world of the flesh. St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians – “honour God with your bodies” – was a popular rallying call.

This thesis is in part about how the CSM carried this brand of Christianity to colonial Kenya and how they attempted to implement it on the ground in the region I am calling “Gikuyuland” (below). Chapter 1, for instance, describes the games-obsessed, imperialistic, backgrounds of the missionaries of the CSM; chapter 3 shows how this informed the way they “saw” and represented Gikuyuland as they arrived in the country and sought out potential converts; chapter 5 analyses the programme of training in the CSM’s boys’ boarding schools. It is important to stress, however, that in this thesis I am using the term “Muscular Christianity” in a way that is also distinct from these conventional definitions and that is unique to me: as a useful, catch-all, phrase to capture this mission’s preoccupation with the physical being of the people they sought to convert. It would be to misrepresent this thesis to describe it as a history of Christianity (“Muscular” or otherwise) although that is an aspect of the study. First and foremost what follows is best understood as a history of colonialism in which the focus is on the particular kind of colonialism that inhered in the CSM’s civilising mission.

The way I use it in this thesis, “Muscular Christianity” encompasses a range of initiatives, techniques and practices undertaken and deployed by Arthur and the CSM that included but were certainly not limited to games: from their concerted efforts to convince the Kenya colonial government to introduce labour regulations that would nurture the lives and well-being of the colony’s workers ensuring that they really were – as the term went – “able-bodied natives” (chapter 4); to their campaign to eradicate female genital cutting, a practice that was a long-standing part of Gikuyu initiation ceremonies which repulsed the missionaries who regarded it as a “primitive”

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4 J.G. Cotton Minchin, Our Public Schools: Their Influence on English History (London, 1901), 113.
6 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.
practice that was blocking Gikuyu from becoming civilised and Christian (chapter 7). A central argument, which I make explicitly in chapters 4 and 5, is that in pursuing their Muscular Christian “civilising mission” the CSM were in effect endeavouring to introduce into colonial Gikuyuland forms of colonial power that closely correspond to what Michel Foucault termed “biopower”: a form of power “whose task it is to take charge of life [through] continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms,” a form of power that is “centred on the body as a mechanism, its disciplining, the optimisation of its capacities.”

In this way my research has been informed by, but seeks to make a new contribution to, the established body of literature on the so-called “Games Ethic” and its role in the British Empire. This scholarship, represented most prominently in the work of J.A. Mangan, demonstrated the enthusiasm for sport and games among British officials and missionaries throughout the empire. Mangan and others showed that a Muscular Christian ethos informed the rhetoric and practice of imperialism; sport was used both as a device in the selection and recruitment of administrators and as a tool in controlling and “developing” subject races. This research represented a significant development in the historiography of imperialism, enabling us to see how such “everyday” venues as playing fields and gymnasiums could be important venues for the assertion and functioning of colonial power. That, however, was often less than fully realised in this literature: by focussing exclusively on games the tendency in this scholarship was to overlook and occlude the often violent colonial contexts in which the “games ethic” was deployed. At its worst this literature could be resolutely blind to the specific setting under examination such that a “case study” of the introduction of cricket in a school in the Gold Coast could look much like a case study of the games ethic in Ceylon. The games themselves, meanwhile, were sometimes represented in a way that made their application seem wholly jovial. Reviewing Mangan’s Games Ethic Terence Ranger was given to wonder “whether Africans and Indians would find the eccentricities of our ancestors

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In this thesis I endeavour to show how games were but one aspect of the CSM’s Muscular Christianity. Further I situate their programme of “uplift” within its colonial context and within its Gikuyu setting (using fieldwork, Gikuyu-authored sources, and oral history interviews) to explore how it was received and made use of by its intended subjects.

Missionaries, colonialism and the “question of the body”
John Arthur is a prominent figure in the history of Gikuyuland. His name is well-known among members of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), the successor church to the CSM, which today claims an estimated 3,000,000 members throughout Eastern Africa. As I demonstrate in chapter 6, several of the first and second generation of Gikuyu Presbyterian Christians recall Arthur, his CSM colleagues, and their Muscular Christian civilising mission with admiration and affection. In Gikuyuland Arthur was, and is, referred to as “Rĩgĩtări” (meaning “doctor”) or “Doctor Arthur.” “Doctor Arthur” is the sobriquet which I use throughout this thesis, in part to distinguish him from his close friend and CSM colleague, Arthur Barlow who was the mission’s expert linguist and principal architect of the standard Gikuyu-English dictionary.

Both within and outwith PCEA circles, Doctor Arthur and the CSM are generally regarded as agents of a very particular colonial project. As Wunyabari Maloba has put it recently, during his time in Kenya “Doctor Arthur came to be seen as a symbol of Western cultural arrogance; a champion of cultural imperialism.” The Scottish mission are represented in this way by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o in his seminal novel of 1965, *The River Between* where they are embodied in the fanatical, almost comic, character of “Reverend Livingstone” (I discuss this novel in chapter 6). Elsewhere in the historical literature on colonial Gikuyuland there are references to the “dour, suspicious Scots,” who with their “meticulous methods” and “Calvinist faith in the virtue of labour,” sought to establish “industrial Europe amidst the primeval jungle,” and set about attempting to constrain a “sensuous African body culture” with their “order” and “discipline.”

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11 [http://pceaheadoffice.org/index.php/helix-framework-17](http://pceaheadoffice.org/index.php/helix-framework-17) [up to date as of September 2018].
In this thesis I argue that the CSM’s civilising mission ought to be understood as a form of colonialism. It is for this reason that throughout the thesis I refer to the CSM as “colonial evangelists,” borrowing a term that was first elaborated by anthropologist Thomas Beidelman in relation to his work on Anglican missionaries in Ukaguru, Tanzania, and which was later used by Jean and John Comaroff in their well-known ethnographic history of protestant and non-conformist missions in nineteenth-century southern Africa.16 Beidelman used the term argumentatively, famously describing missionaries as “the most naive and ethnocentric, and therefore the most thorough-going, facet of colonial life.” Whereas, he argued, other colonisers – such as officials, settlers, traders – pursued more limited, utilitarian aims, “missionaries invariably aimed at overall changes in the beliefs and actions of native people, at colonization of heart and mind as well as body.”17 It is important to stress, therefore, that in describing the missionaries of the CSM as “colonial evangelists” my aim is not to make a polemical argument nor cast a moral judgement but rather to say something specific about their role in Gikuyu history.

The missionaries of the CSM only on occasion identified themselves as “colonial”: in their context this was an adjective chiefly used to describe Kenya’s private, non-official, “European” settlers. But their project ought to be regarded as “colonial” not least because, as I document in chapter 4, they aspired to support settler capitalism even if they criticised its abuses. Moreover as I demonstrate in that chapter and, perhaps most clearly, in chapter 5, the missionaries of the CSM sought out and came to occupy a formal place within the apparatus of colonial rule in Gikuyuland. The missionaries acted like, and sometimes on behalf of, the colonial government in the Kikuyu native reserve (a term I define below). In fact, much more than was ever officially required of them the CSM endeavoured to formally extend the British empire’s presence into the country. They sought, moreover, to do the intimate, affective, integrative work of government on the ground in the African areas, promising government that they would turn Gikuyu into loyal obedient, hard-working imperial citizens, promising Gikuyu “liberation” within the paternalistic structures of the British empire. Given their role as formal, official, colonisers the CSM have received surprisingly little serious attention from Gikuyuland’s historians.

The thesis is an examination of the particular kind of colonial project the CSM undertook which, as I demonstrate, often ran counter to that of Kenya’s other colonisers. In what follows I aim to document how the CSM regarded their mission as one that was “liberating” and


17 Beidelman, Colonial Evangelism, 5-6.
“emancipatory.” I give a full account of the ostensibly benevolent aspects of the CSM’s programme such as the work they did building schools, spreading literacy, pursuing welfare reform in the colony, and hosting sports days. My argument is that these measures ought not to be regarded as existing “outside” colonial power relations, or as “exceptions to” colonial rule, but aspects of a specific kind of colonial power. In particular, the evidence presented supports the broad argument made by Megan Vaughan in her 1991 work, *Curing Their Ills*, that the kind of colonial power exercised and applied by missionaries was a “productive” form of power that was aimed at maximising life and encouraging, the development of individual subjectivities.\(^{18}\)

This thesis is a contribution to recent historical scholarship which has focussed specifically on, and problematised, the ways in which missionary work in the age of empire often raised pressing questions in relation to both the physical being of the people missionaries sought to convert, and the missionaries’ own bodies.\(^{19}\) I have borrowed the sub-title “question of the body” from Tony Ballantyne’s recent study of protestant missionaries and Māori in the nineteenth century.\(^{20}\) Following this literature, and informed by recent anthropological perspectives that have encouraged scholars to think “beyond the body proper,” the premise on which the following chapters are based is that “the body” as it is often conventionally understood – as a discrete, skin-bound, rights-bearing, anatomical, unit that supports the individual – is a particular, unique historical formation.\(^{21}\) The chapters that follow aim to historicise “the body,” and go beyond treating it as a given.\(^{22}\) In chapter 2 I use early colonial-era ethnographic material together with oral history interviews to tentatively and speculatively reconstruct the ways in which the people living in Gikuyuland at the eve of colonial conquest might have conceptualised and experienced their


selves and their bodies. In chapter 3 I show that when confronted with Gikuyu modes of embodiment and personhood the missionaries of the CSM regarded them with fascination, unease and as “less-developed.” In chapter 7, I discuss how and why female initiation represented a particular challenge to the missionaries’ conception of a whole, healthy, Christian body.

The thesis explores the practical, often quotidian, seemingly banal, “outer” means by which the missionaries of the CSM sought to remake the inner being of Gikuyu and conducted their work of “uplift”—such as football, clothing, and hygienic measures. In chapters 6 and 7 I use predominantly Gikuyu-authored sources to examine how older, precolonial modes of embodiment and personhood informed the ways in which Gikuyu responded to the mission.

**“Gikuyuland” and its histories**

I use the term “Gikuyuland” as others have done, to designate roughly the area that lies between Nairobi and the north-facing slopes of Kirinyaga (Mount Kenya) and between the Nyandarua (Aberdare) mountain range in the west and the Tana river in the east (Figure 1). In present-day terms, “Gikuyuland” is located in the centre of Kenya. “Gikuyuland,” as I am using the term, incorporates what became the colonial administrative districts of Kiambu and Thika in the south, Fort Hall and Nyeri further north, and Embu and Meru in the north east. All told it is a region of approximately 6,000 square miles. During the period in question all of the CSM’s mission work took place within this region, principally in and around their three main mission stations: Kikuyu (sometimes referred to as “Thogoto”—a Gikuyu corruption of “Scotland”) which was located ten miles west of Nairobi; Tumutumu which was located fifty miles as the crow flies north-west of Kikuyu station; and Chogoria which was located further north, on the eastern slopes of Kirinyaga. I describe these stations in chapter 3.

A mountainous country, with dense forests and fertile soil, Gikuyuland presented those who settled there (first, Bantu cultivators who migrated to the country between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries from throughout Africa then white Europeans at the start of the twentieth) with markedly better prospects than the arid, hot, open plains that surround it and into which it dramatically slopes to the south, east and north. The Nyandarua range and its forests that form the western flank of Gikuyuland catch heavy rainfall. The rivers that flow down from it, eastwards, dramatically corrugate the landscape, creating a series of parallel hilltop ridges and deep gorges which cut latitudinally across the country: these structured the organisation of social and political life in the nineteenth century, as I discuss in chapter 2. Gikuyuland was nominally brought under

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British colonial rule in 1895 with the declaration of the British East Africa Protectorate. At that time there were about one million people living in Gikuyuland. Though ravaged by the great famine of 1899-1900, it was one of the most populous parts of the Protectorate.  

![Diagram of Gikuyuland c1906-c1938](image)


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To the west of Gikuyuland lie the verdant pastures of the Rift Valley. From 1905, when the decision was made to make East Africa Protectorate a settler colony, these lands were reserved for whites, or “Europeans” as they were officially categorised (an assignment that included South-Africans of European descent). I describe the settler-capitalist economy, and the CSM’s relation to it, in chapter 4. The initial wave of white immigration in the first decade of the twentieth century saw whites claim land in Kiambu and Thika, but in 1905 a system of “native reserves,” copied from South Africa, was introduced in East Africa Protectorate and most of “Gikuyuland” was designated as a “native reserve.” A strict policy of segregation was introduced to manage the flow of persons between “European” and “native” areas.25 Underpinning the reserve system were twentieth-century anxieties about bodies of different races coming into contact. “Between Whites and Blacks” wrote the architect of the system, John Ainsworth, “there are essential mental and spiritual, as there are obviously physical, differences. These must make undoubtedly for the recognition that between White and Black there exist definite reasons why the social and political life of each must be located within their own spheres.”26 The only Europeans allowed to buy land and settle in the native reserves were Christian missionaries.

Gikuyuland is one of the most heavily researched parts of Africa and in undertaking this history of the CSM I have benefitted immensely from the rich corpus of scholarship that exists on the region. I have endeavoured to reflect my enormous debt to this literature throughout the thesis by acknowledging authors in the text and in the footnotes. Here I want to indicate what I consider to be the two principal contributions this thesis makes to scholarship on Gikuyuland’s colonial past, which are historical as much as historiographical.

First, the thesis is a response to the recent body of work on punishment, incarceration and colonial control in Gikuyuland.27 This literature has revealed the particularly punitive character of

colonial rule in Gikuyuland. Supporting the findings of earlier work on the colonial state in Kenya, the recent literature has demonstrated that though largely absent from the government of life on the ground in the African reserves the colonial state in Gikuyuland was remarkably adept when it came to punishment and labour recruitment.\(^{28}\) Imprisonment was used by the Kenya colonial state on a scale that was unparalleled by any other African colony at this time. This was acute in Gikuyuland where, for example, by 1911 though the colonial government had yet to build a single school or hospital in the native reserve, had five prisons.\(^{29}\) An elaborate legal system, meanwhile, ensured the compulsion and coercion of African labour on a scale that made Gikuyuland comparable to the most intensive labour producing regions in the Belgian Congo and South Africa. So rigorous was the system of labour camps and penal mechanisms in Gikuyuland that the region has been dubbed a “carceral archipelago.”\(^{30}\) In light of this research, this thesis in a sense asks: how did such a “liberating,” “emancipatory” programme of “uplift” as the CSM’s function in this setting? The thesis makes an empirical contribution to this line of scholarship by using new primary source material to document how the colonial-evangelists of the CSM attempted to work in this environment, and how they reconciled their civilising mission and imperial aspirations with the more exploitative elements of settler colonial capitalism.

Second, the sections of the thesis that locate the history of the CSM’s civilising mission in its colonial history, are complemented by sections which attempt to read it on Gikuyu terms. Chapter 6 essentially asks: “why did thousands of young Gikuyu suddenly begin to seek out mission schools in the 1920s?” Chapter 7, meanwhile, asks: “why, in 1929, did hundreds of mission-educated, Christian Gikuyu men suddenly reject the missionary programme, endorse the practice of female circumcision and begin to valorise customs they had once willingly abandoned?”

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\(^{29}\) Branch, “Imprisonment and Colonialism in Kenya, c.1930-1952.”

In attempting to answer these questions I have drawn extensively from, and aim to contribute to, an existing body of empiric and theoretical research on Gikuyu social practices and beliefs by John Lonsdale, Greet Kershaw, and Derek Peterson. These scholars have documented how risky, speculative, individual migrations and momentous moments of generational dissent and rupture have been a historic part of Gikuyu conceptions of civic virtue. I develop some of the insights of their work, first in chapter 2, in relation to Gikuyu modes of embodiment and Gikuyu conceptions of the person. In that chapter I document, for instance, the apparently central role played by moments of rupture, separation, and purging in maintaining the health and wholeness of individual persons and the social body. Then, in chapters 6 and 7, I demonstrate how the “move to school” (in the 1920s) and the rebellion against the missions (in 1929) were informed by historic Gikuyu beliefs and practices regarding bodily wholeness and generational renewal. The evidence presented suggests that as well as being locations for a specific kind of colonial discipline, CSM mission stations were incorporated into Gikuyu social practices and, as such, became avenues for achieving the old ideal of self-mastery.

1. The Muscular Christians go to Africa

In 1913, about five years into his time as a CSM missionary in the Gikuyu highlands of the East Africa Protectorate, and two years into his time as head of the mission, Doctor Arthur received a letter from his father that contained a poem for him and about him by a schoolboy at Arthur’s alma mater Glasgow Academy.¹

Onward Christian Soldier,
Arthur is his name
Doctor his profession
Healing all his aim.
From our School he sailed
Scholar, teacher, too
At His Master’s bidding
Seeking Service true.

Out from Christian Scotland
Up through Afric’s plains
Up to high Kikuyu
And it’s mountain chains
Teaching dark skinned natives
Of a Saviour’s love
Preaching the Great Father
And a Heaven above.

Forward Christian Soldier
With your Boys Brigade
Teaching lads true courage
Football used to aid
Healing poor sick bodies
Training willing hands
Planning, cheering, helping
Folks from many lands.

Hold the Christian banner
High before them all
Sound the Gospel trumpet
Blow the bugle call
Tell to all the heathen
Christ has died to save
Shout the mighty message
Risen from the grave.

Through the schoolboy’s eyes Arthur is active, commanding and conquering - going forward and onward, blowing his bugle, waving banners, telling all, healing all, planning, helping and shouting. Africa - a place of plains, mountains and heathen “dark-skinned natives” – is a place waiting to be domesticated by Arthur, who in the process will forge himself. It is a manly poem about “Master’s” and “soldiers” and “Fathers” and “folks”; a “white Saviour” among “helpless Natives.” It endorses a particular kind of manliness – gentle yet dominant, domestic yet soldierly. The natives, gendered as “lads,” have bodies that are “poor and sick” but their hands are willing and ready to be trained - by football, medicine, and the Boys Brigade. That Arthur preserved it, in pristine condition, suggests that he treasured it.

This chapter is about the societies in which the would-be missionaries of the CSM grew up. It is about the culture of the CSM, its missionaries’ moral geographies, their ideas about Africa and their ideas about gender. The reason I open with the schoolboy’s poem is because it brings together and draws attention to the interplay between three domains of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century imperial culture which were integral to the CSM but which we might generally be inclined to keep separate: an imperial imagery of Africa; a physiological way of seeing that framed “the body” as an object for improvement and training; and a public discourse on “manliness.”

Born in Scotland and elsewhere in Britain during the final quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth, the missionaries who filled the ranks of the CSM during the period before the Second World War were born into a country that, for a century, had witnessed rapid industrialisation and had become, with growing self-assurance, an imperialist country. It was a country marked by an ascendant bourgeoisie, increasingly rigid and embedded notions of racial hierarchies and racial distinctions, and increasingly sharp category distinctions of gender and sexuality. The population was beginning to identify as “national subjects,” a sense of identity that was bound up with Empire and Christianity. A period of high imperialism, and for some (including the would-be missionaries of the CSM and their parents) a period of religious revival and evangelicalism, in turn-of-the-century Britain, narratives of progress and improvement mixed with, and indeed were generated by, counter-narratives of degeneration and decline. In middle-,

lower-middle, and upper-middle-, class societies in which those who would join the CSM grew up, emphasis was placed upon the moral and physical constitution of persons; and images of Africa, a cult of athleticism, and a new discourse on manliness came together in ways that were at times intense and profound, working together to generate the figure of the manly Christian soldier.

An Imperial Imagery of Africa

By the end of the nineteenth-century images and representations of “Africa” were a greatly elaborated and deeply embedded component of metropolitan cultures and identities in Britain (and indeed elsewhere in Europe).¹ For over a century images of the continent had been regularly presented to British audiences in public lectures, adventure fiction, travel literature, moralising works, and advertisements - by explorers, traders, imperialists, missionaries, and commercial

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companies, by people who had travelled there and even by those who had not. Whether the representation was “positive” or “negative” “Africa” stood for what “rational,” “enlightened,” “civilised,” “mature” Europe was not: “sensual,” “dark,” “savage,” “child-like.” These images shaped European notions of personhood and senses of being-in-the-world, and informed normative attitudes as to what was “good,” “noble,” “correct” and “decent.” They served as a counter-image against which a modern, bourgeois, self-consciousness was formed.  

The constellation of images that coalesced around Africa in imperialist, industrialising Britain during the nineteenth century fashioned Africa as a site of imperial conquest, expansion, and exploration. Africa was framed as a place that needed to be acted upon, made-known and made-visible. Reflective of the emergence of a new dominant epistemology that was scientific and universalising and revolved around techniques of looking, naming, surveying, measuring, rationalising, and ordering, “Africa” was constructed as a place “beyond” European ken. Enshrined in the vocabulary that surrounded Africa, particularly in the nineteenth-century were calls for invasive action. A “dark continent” it demanded to be lit up. Fetishized in terms of the tantalising potential of its “interior” – deep, and hitherto “closed-off” – it was reified as an entity that could be opened up, penetrated, and explored. An “untouched” land, Africa invited future, tactile, interference. In this gendered and often sexualised imaginary, Africa was touted as a site where men could forge themselves and assert their masculinity.

During the eighteenth century European scientists, intellectuals and social elites made African people visible in terms of where they placed within a universal schema of “man.” Africans were held to occupy the very bottom rungs of a ladder of civilisation that had the European (or, more accurately an idealised image of the “rational man”) at the top. This imagery remained remarkably resilient into the late nineteenth century and indeed beyond. It embedded the notion that African people were closer to nature than their encultured, and historicised European counterparts. At the same time as discourses in the metropole were constructing “the child” as a “blank slate” and as “pre-cultural” – empty vessels that would be inducted into civilisation and history by the process of aging, schooling, and “growing up” - Africans were constructed as “child-like”: subject to their environment rather than masters of it, bound by animal instincts, lacking a clear sense of self, and lacking the interior refinement associated with self-control.

In the nineteenth-century, and during the time when the would-be missionaries of the CSM were growing up, Africa and Africans were increasingly and repetitively represented to European audiences in racial and racist terms that strengthened and legitimised the associations

5 Comaroff and Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution: I, 100.
between “the dark continent,” “black bodies,” and “dim minds.” Discourses on African persons – their bodies and interiorities – were increasingly rooted in biological notions of race. At the start of the eighteenth century scientific, political and intellectual discourses in Europe had held, generally-speaking, that it was moral, political, economic, and environmental circumstances that separated the “savage” from the “civilised.”

During the nineteenth century “Otherness” was increasingly seen in terms of physical endowment. By the end of the nineteenth-century it was a taken-for-granted “fact” that the world was comprised of biologically distinct “races,” from different lines of descent, with different intrinsic aptitudes, characteristics and traits, each with notable and distinctive physical forms. Surface-level somatic features – facial structures, head shapes, skin colour, body shape – were taken to be indicative of supposed internal characteristics. A high density of social, intellectual, and scientific discourses surrounded “the African” (a.k.a. “the savage,” “the native”) that “understood” and “explained” “bini” (a gendered ascription which speaks to the masculine gaze of this way of seeing) in terms of his physical makeup. Invariably these discourses outlined the limits and capacities of his state – what was “fixed” and what might be altered – and they were loaded with proscriptions for how he might be dealt with, governed, and improved.

Such images of Africa had proliferated in Britain during the campaign for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, and they intensified again toward the end of the nineteenth century, with the “Scramble for Africa” and the particular moments that propelled the Scramble. The death of David Livingstone in 1873, the siege of Khartoum and death of Commander Charles Gordon in 1885, and the Boer War, in particular generated a great volume of public literature about Africa. Albeit in quite different ways, these events were marshalled in the press and in literature for middle-class school children – particularly boys – as calls for honourable intervention in Africa, awakening a sense of paternalistic Christian and medical duty to the people living in the world’s “sore” and stirring militaristic zeal for white saviours and imperial conquerors.

The image of Africa for the would-be missionaries of the CSM

Exposed to images of Africa and Africans during childhood and youth, the missionaries of the CSM “saw Africa” before they travelled there. If the CSM’s own literature is anything to go by, the dual notion that 1) Africa was a dark continent in need of saving and that 2) they themselves were to be the agents of its salvation, had a profound effect upon them. As I show throughout

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this thesis, the missionaries of the CSM conceived of their work in Africa in masculinist, imperialistic, and even militaristic, terms. But their image of Africa and of themselves was also informed by currents within bourgeois Christian culture in the late nineteenth century which though connected to Empire, were not reducible to it. This was pre-eminently the case for the two CSM missionaries whose lives were the most documented, John Arthur and Marion Stevenson.

John William Arthur was born in Glasgow in 1881, to wealthy parents who were evangelical Christians. His father, John William Arthur (Senior), a Glasgow merchant and head of the Calico Printer’s Association, had been instrumental in the establishment of the Scottish Rugby Union and had been captain of the Scotland national team in the first ever international rugby union fixture – a fixture against England, in 1871.8 Arthur Senior, along with Arthur’s mother, had been influenced by the preaching of American evangelicals Moody and Sankey who toured Scotland between 1874 and 1875 preaching of the need for Christian revival in an age of urbanisation, industrialisation and moral decay.

From an early age John Arthur was surrounded by a Christian imaginative geography that, to borrow Graham Dawson’s words, called for the “vigorous pursuit of moral reform and the regeneration of a corrupt, worldly, society, [and] the taming of the wilderness” and placed emphasis on the importance of “a particular kind of courage, initiative and authority.”9 As a schoolboy Arthur was an active member of the Boys’ Brigade, an all-male Presbyterian youth movement established in Glasgow in 1883. The Boys’ Brigade combined prayer, voluntary work, with military exercises and outdoor activities. It had as its object “the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom among Boys and the promotion of habits of Perseverance, Discipline, Self-Respect and all that leads towards a true Christian Manliness.”10 While a medical student at Glasgow University between 1898 and 1903 he was part of the Children’s Special Service Mission, preaching the Bible to children across Scotland.11

In 1939, after he had retired from mission work, Arthur told the Cupar Rotary Club: “Ever since I was a small boy. I have been interested in the early explorations of that land [Africa], and of a very early age it became my desire that I would follow the band of missionaries of whom David Livingstone was the chief.”12 Arthur credited Livingstone with “laying bare” the “great heart

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of Africa,” “making it possible for Missions, Governments, and Commerce to bring in their civilising influences, which have made Africa free.”13 Further, he claimed to have been “fired with a desire” to be a missionary after reading The Story of Mackay in Uganda, the biography of the Scottish missionary Alexander Mackay who established the first Christian mission in Uganda.14 But the decisive moment for Arthur in his vocation came, according to his CSM colleagues R.G.M Calderwood and Arthur Barlow, when Arthur was twelve years’ old. He had a “deep spiritual experience” upon listening to an an address in the Chapel at Crieff Hydro in 1894 by Dr Harry Grattan Guinness (the founder of the Congo-Balolo Mission in 1888) which “led him to Africa, and maintained in him an unshakable sense of vocation, and of being in the place and work that his Saviour had appointed for him.”15

Figure 2. John William Arthur (“Doctor Arthur”). John Arthur Photos, EUL.

Arthur travelled to East Africa Protectorate, by steamer via the Cape of Good Hope, during November and December 1906. Before he travelled he familiarized himself with the country by reading Joseph Thomson’s *Through Masailand*, and Governor Charles Eliot’s *East Africa Protectorate*.16 The former, published in 1885 was one of the earliest, and most widely-read, travel narratives of East Africa; Arthur credited Scottish explorer Thomson with making “known the existence of Kenya Highlands.”17 Eliot’s book, published in 1905, emphasised the promise and potential of Britain’s latest imperial possession in Africa, describing its lush interior as “a *tablua rasa*” and a “white man’s country.”18

Africa loomed large in the young Marion Stevenson’s mental universe too, if her biographer and fellow CSM missionary Isobel Scott is to be believed.19 Stevenson was born in Forfar in 1871. She arrived in East Africa Protectorate in 1907 just a few months after Arthur and worked as a CSM missionary until her sudden death in 1930. Referencing Livingstone’s influence on the general spirit of the age, Scott portrayed the world in which Stevenson grew up as entranced by an Africa that was feminine and pliant: “The interior of the Continent was still a blank on the map. Africa captured the imagination of Europe and began to throw her spell – for her own weal or woe – over civilized lands.” Scott encouraged her readers to see Stevenson as one among many who were moved by “a genuine desire to help a land that had never been able to help herself.”20

Stevenson’s father was a Church of Scotland minister. Stevenson’s mother, in Scott’s words, was “an ideal minister’s wife.” Two of Stevenson’s uncles had been missionaries in India. Her father’s first (deceased) wife was a cousin of David Clement Scott who during Stevenson’s childhood was the head of the Scottish Mission in Blantyre, Nyasaland, and would become the head of the CSM in Kikuyu in 1901. According to Scott, Stevenson’s “first wish to be a missionary came to her at the age of five” but being a brilliant scholar with high expectations she and her relatives believed she would go to Asia.21 Sending her to Africa, said one, was like “using a Toledo blade to hack down a tree,” another said she “should be sent to the Brahmin caste in India.” Her case was defended by a friend who said she was needed in Africa because “the deeper the degradation the finer the instrument required.”22

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20 *ibid*. 57.
21 *ibid*. 20.
22 *ibid*. 52.
Stevenson grew up in Edinburgh and attended John Watson’s Institution and the Ministers’ Daughters’ College. Unable to go to Edinburgh University (which did not admit women), she spent the year 1890 in Germany studying language and music before sickness forced her to return to Scotland.  

“Quite wonderfully supple and wiry as a little girl” in the school playground the young Stevenson was unrivalled in the playground in a skipping-rope game called “vengeance.” After schooling, Stevenson played golf, she “was an excellent walker, and when cycling came into vogue she enjoyed going further afield with her friends and exploring parts of Scotland.” Her otherwise “splendid constitution” was, however, undermined by an unnamed inherited condition. Scott presents Stevenson’s life as a constant battle against a failing body, with Stevenson bearing “pain and weakness with the outward fortitude of a stoic.” She coped, and excelled, according to Scott, because of her “definite self-discipline,” her “very strict rules for herself,” and her “devotion to service.”

Figure 3. Marion Stevenson. Left: “At the age of 5 when the Call came.” Right: Stevenson in 1907, “The year of going to Africa.” Scott, Saint in Kenya, 16, 54.

23 ibid. 19, 27.
24 ibid. 19.
25 ibid. 38.
26 ibid. 29.
27 ibid. 5.
According to Scott, a lecture on Africa in Edinburgh in 1892 by David Clement Scott had a profound effect on Stevenson. Clement Scott spoke of how as well as planters, settlers and government officials, Africa needed missionaries who – being benevolent – would “save” “the African” from the “fate of the Red Indian of the West.” Isobel Scott highlights the internal struggle this triggered in Stevenson: she was “deeply moved […] and in her heart her desire became, more than ever, an incandescent flame of purpose. It had its inevitable reactions of doubts and despairs and heart searchings within herself for the cause of the constant baulking of what was to her so clear a call.”

Stevenson joined the CSM in 1906, at the relatively late age of thirty-five, when David Clement Scott returned to Scotland to recruit “a lady worker […] to carry out work amongst the Kikuyu women and girls.” During the decade prior, after hearing Scott’s lecture Stevenson worked for the Church of Scotland, establishing their Foreign Mission Committee’s magazine, *The Outpost*, organizing exhibitions of overseas mission work, and arranging “Missionary Demonstrations” for children’s Sunday Schools – a task that included getting some children to dress up as “natives” by using cocoa powder and “African-hued grease paint.”

Stevenson, like Archibald Clive Irvine who would join the CSM in 1918, was influenced by the Keswick Conventions which she began attending in 1903. Similar to the Moody and Sankey movement that Arthur’s parents (and Isobel Scott) had been involved in, Keswick was in part a response to a perceived rise in corruption and degradation linked to the industrial age. It emphasized the need for Christians to completely “surrender” themselves to God (to borrow its terminology). It stressed the need for prayer, placed ritual importance upon the public confession of sin, and promised personal revelation. Isobel Scott claimed that Stevenson’s involvement in the Keswick Conventions “transformed” Stevenson whose “body, as well as soul, was braced into wholeness by this gift of the Holy Spirit.”

**An age of training**

As well as being an age in which representations of African Others were pervasive, the second half of the nineteenth-century in Britain has been described as an “age of training” and an “age which loved physical achievement.” The would-be missionaries of the CSM were born at a time that had just witnessed an extraordinary explosion of sports and physical culture. The period between 1850 and 1880 saw, for instance: the first University Boat Race (1856) (an annual rowing
competition between the universities of Oxford and Cambridge); the introduction of standardized measurements, distances, and times in track and field athletics; the establishment of the mountaineering Alpine Club (1857); the foundation of the British Football Association (FA) and the first FA Cup final (1871); and – as we have seen – the first international rugby union fixture, between England and Scotland (1871).\(^{31}\) Cricket which had been played since the eighteenth century became a prime attraction with matches attracting tens of thousands of spectators. A wide spectrum of other activities, pastimes, and games were formalised (if not formed): such as lawn tennis, badminton, croquet, archery, golf, cycling, boxing, wrestling, yachting. Macmillan’s, a monthly literary periodical, in 1870 described young men of the time as “possessed by a mania for every species of athletic contest.”\(^{32}\)

The “mania” for games, training, and physical achievement was initially closely, and almost exclusively, connected to all-boys’ “public” schools, their “old-boy” networks, and the country’s elite universities. But by the turn of the century, games and ancillary forms of physical training such as drill, calisthenics, weights and Indian club exercises, and gymnastics, had spread far beyond this initial social niche, throughout society.\(^{33}\) They were promoted in the associations and clubs such as the Young Man’s Christian Association (f.1844), the Young Women’s Christian Association (f.1855), the Girls’ Friendly Society (f.1875) and the aforementioned Boys’ Brigade (f.1883). They were endorsed by social reformers, educationalists, and medical professionals, who championed the moral, physical, and educational benefits of exercise. By the start of the twentieth century, sport and games were a major part of everyday life in Britain and physical education was an embedded feature of education systems.

Among the loudest advocates of the spread of games and physical culture, were male educationalists, imperialists and members of the established Presbyterian and Anglican churches. If in earlier periods Christian spokesmen had celebrated the cerebral over the corporeal, or else puritanically despised games as indulgent and sinful, this generation of “Muscular Christians” endowed “athleticism” with immense moral and physical importance. In “Health and Education” (1874) one of his many paens to the healthy body, Charles Kingsley who was perhaps the most famous Christian exponent of athleticism, emphasised the importance of games in keeping the blood oxygenated, and in developing “the raised chest,” “upright carriage” and strong “upper torso” that were needed for a healthy life. He lauded games for keeping boys healthy in both work and morals, imparting “virtues which no books can give them” – “daring and endurance […]

\(^{31}\) ibid. 123-140

\(^{32}\) ibid. 136.

temper, self-restraint fairness, [and] honour,” and for making girls into clever, alert, and graceful women.34

Much can be, and has been, said about the “age of training” and “physical achievement” and many different histories can be told of it not least among them histories of nation-building, of health, and of leisure, time, and consumerism in industrial Britain. But for the present purposes two points are salient. First, it was deeply connected to empire and race, gender and sexuality.35 In Britain’s public and private schools in particular, games and physical activity were accompanied by and closely associated with images of empire and notions of imperial duty; the games-based curriculum in these schools was repeatedly and explicitly endorsed as a means of training the male offspring of Britain’s social elite into healthy, robust, and quick-witted imperial servants. Heley Hutchinson Almond, who as the headmaster of Loretto School Edinburgh in the 1880s, endeavoured to promote “Muscular Christianity” in Scotland justified this by asking: Who would make a better soldier and imperial servant? “the boy who has pored over books and papers at the town crammers, or the one who has constantly steered the ball through a football scrummage, or stalked wild-duck, or ridden straight to hounds?”36 Similarly, Reverend Welldon, headmaster of Harrow between 1881 and 1895, claimed that Britain’s ascendency as an imperial power had far more to do with sports than studies: not only for the healthy servants they produced but for “the pluck, the energy, the perseverance, the good-temper, the self-control, the discipline, the cooperation, the esprit-de-corps” they imparted.37 As has been widely documented, by the turn of the century athletic distinction and physical prowess was among the key criteria for recruitment of British men to the colonial administration.38

But the connection between the age of training, gender, and empire was not limited to its role in making men who could “stand guard in jungle, desert and mountain pass” (to borrow J.A. Mangan’s words).39 As it extended throughout society, to men and women who would never themselves staff colonial outposts, games and exercise were energised by new discourses of racial fitness and sexual discipline, spurred on by an almost frenzied nationalism on the one hand and

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34 Charles Kingsley, “Health and Education” (1874), accessible at: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17437/17437-h/17437-h.htm
35 Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Managing the Body; See also: Jacob, Working out Egypt.
37 Quoted in Mangan, The Games Ethic, 36.
anxieties about national degeneration on the other.\(^{40}\) Sport and games proliferated in an age of perceived internal and external threats: disease, decay, crime, fatigue, homosexuality, madness, and foreign Others. In the final decade of the nineteenth century, and during the first decade of the twentieth, games and sport were seized upon by associations such as the British Girls’ Patriotic League, the Lads’ Drill Association, the Duty and Discipline Movement, the National Council of Public Morals, and the Boy Scouts.\(^{41}\) Like the earlier Boys’ Brigade these patriotic, militaristic, and moralistic organisations, championed visions of the nation that reinforced a sense of racial and national uniqueness, and emphasised the important and separate spheres of men and women.

Second, taking a long-view the “age of training” can be seen as one moment in a broader process of modernity in which the relationship between persons, bodies, and power was reorganised. The discourses that surrounded games and physical activity at the turn of the century testify to the entry of “the body” into the domain of power and politics during the modern period; it is an example of the emergence, from the eighteenth century of “disciplinary power” and “biopolitics,” of societies oriented around the government of humans as living beings, the maximisation and regulation of their physical life, the promotion of the care of the self, and to new styles of power that worked through “the forming of obedient individuals, the training of behaviour by the full time-table, [and] the acquisitions of habits.”\(^{42}\) Specifically, and of particular importance for what follows in this thesis, the age of training is an example of how the sacred subject of both bourgeois and Christian modernity – self-governing, sovereign, self-constituting – was configured as an embodied subject, whose inner improvement could be achieved through outer work.

The CSM and athleticism

The healthy body, physical training, and athletic achievement were integral elements of the ethos of the CSM. It was part of their colonial-evangelical transformative programme for Gikuyu; and the missionaries were themselves *homo athleticus*. If they did not themselves have stellar backgrounds of athletic success, they professed to a love of physical activity, emphasised their capacity for strenuous work, and celebrated these traits in their colleagues: an athletic body, an indefatigable work ethic, a vigorous approach to life were highly valued by the missionaries.


This was particularly the case with Doctor Arthur and the discourses that surrounded him. As a medical student in Glasgow in the 1890s, Arthur had set the university’s record for the 440-yard sprint, and captained the rugby team. While studying tropical medicine in London in the 1900s, he had trials for the Scotland national rugby union team. In Kenya, he played competitive football and recreational tennis at weekends. Together with fellow CSM missionaries George Gordon Dennis and George Alexander Grieve he established the Kenya section of the East Africa Mountaineering Club, and during his two-and-a-half decades in East Africa he made eight (unsuccessful) attempts to summit Mount Kenya and one successful ascent of Kilimanjaro.

Arthur was described by his peers as an “out-of-doors man,” “of splendid physique,” “strong,” “capable,” “energetic,” “tireless and enthusiastic.” “One recalls [...] a man of tremendous physical fitness and tireless energy” wrote Calderwood, in an obituary of Arthur published in Kikuyu News in 1953:

A good athlete and footballer in his early days, he found relaxation not so much in a “quiet” holiday as in mountaineering or fishing […] if he felt really tired, to get up at 4 am and go off for 50 or 100 miles on a fishing expedition, returning late at night, was a real rest.

Arthur was not the only distinguished athlete in the CSM. Arthur’s predecessor at the head of the CSM, Henry Edwin Scott (the husband of Isobel Scott) was a “good all-round athlete” with a “fine physique,” and “full of vigour.” He had captained the University of Edinburgh football team as a student in the 1880s. He had also, as his obituary in Kikuyu News pointed out, been “a strong swimmer” and “an enthusiastic member of the territorial Volunteer Reserve.” In 1909, he established a branch of the YMCA in Nairobi. Henry Scott’s predecessor, meanwhile, David Clement Scott, had also excelled in games during his degree in Arts and Divinity at Edinburgh. His biographer, Alexander Hetherwick described Clement Scott’s “strong, handsome, muscular frame.”

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45 EUL AP Gen763.
enjoyed country-sports, shooting ducks and hunting rhino during their early years in East Africa Protectorate (Figure 4). Philp described Barlow as “quick in sight and hearing and with his gun in pursuit of game.”

Archibald Clive Irvine and Robert Macpherson, recruited to the CSM in 1917 and 1928 respectively, were keen footballers. Doctor Andrew Shaw, who joined the CSM in 1931 was “a keen badminton player” and had been “actively engaged in Boys’ Brigade work.” Rev John Duncan who joined two years later, brought with him four years’ experience as a “group scoutmaster” in Edinburgh.

After the First World War, personal histories of distinguished military service added a new complexion to this discourse on athleticism and physical and moral fortitude. Missionaries like George Alexander Grieve (who was appointed in 1920 and became the first principal of the Alliance High School), A.G. Gilbert and William Walker (two carpentry instructors recruited in 1921) and Robert Calderwood (who was appointed in 1921 and later succeeded Arthur as the head of the CSM) might not have joined the mission with a record of athletic achievement but their war experiences were marshalled by their peers in a similar fashion. In their appointment notices in Kikuyu News we learn that Grieve came with high expectations having four years’ service in France where he “rose to the rank of captain”; that Gilbert had received the Distinguished Conduct Medal after the battle of Beaumont Hamel; and that Walker, like Clive Irvine, had served in the Royal Air Force. Calderwood, the son of one of the longest-serving and well-known Church of Scotland ministers, came with a Military Cross for bravery having been gassed as a soldier in the Highland Light Infantry.

As we have seen in the case of Marion Stevenson, a “games ethic” was not exclusive to the men of the CSM. Another example is Stevenson’s biographer Isobel Scott. Often photographed on her bicycle, on horseback (Figure 6), in a motorcar or on a motorcycle in Gikuyuland, while growing up in Scotland Scott was a keen yachtswoman. According to a friend she would come “ashore each evening with dishevelled hair, glowing cheeks and exuberant delight” and she “never showed a trace of uneasiness” in strong breezes or hissing waves.

54 On Shaw: KN, 115 (March 1931); KN, 134 (December 1935).
55 “Appointment Notice,” KN, 124 (June 1933).
56 “Appointment Notice,” KN, 73 (July 1920).
57 “Appointment Notice,” KN, 76 (May 1921).
58 “Appointment Notice,” KN, 71 (January 1920); KN, 76 (May 1921).
59 “Appointment Notice,” KN, 78 (November 1921).
60 Andrew Stewart, “Mrs Henry E Scott: Some Memories of a gracious and saintly Lady,” n.d. but c.1927, TT. See also: John Arthur, “Mrs Scott,” KN, 46 (January 1914).
Watson, the Dundee-school teacher and CSM missionary from 1899 to 1931, meanwhile though never described as “athletic” as such was written about (by Arthur in this case) in terms of her “unbounding energy of body, mind, and spirit,” her “vigour,” and her capacity for “strenuous” work.\(^6^\)

Generally speaking, where sports and healthy bodies are concerned, the CSM were far from unique among missions in this age of colonialism. My purpose in providing this brief insight into the athletic biographies of the missionaries is less to provide details that have not otherwise been noted by historians. As the following chapters will attest the “muscularity” of the CSM’s Christianity matters. It was not a mere side-detail, or an interesting facet of their colonial evangelism but at its very core. Not the games and the physical education \textit{per se} of course, but the broader set of disciplines, practices, ideas and discourses of which this commitment to games and physical training was part and was perhaps one of the clearest expressions of: the improvement, the cleanliness, the uplift, the seizing hold of persons’ bodies, and the working upon them in the name of civilisation, conversion and betterment. What this survey of the cult of athleticism in the CSM shows is the CSM’s commitment to the cultivation of persons (including themselves) from the “outside, in.”

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{figure4.png}
\caption{Arthur Barlow and co. “Duck Shooting in Kenia.” EUL BP Gen1786/11.}
\end{figure}

Figure 5. “Dr Horace Philp and his Rhino.” 1910, EUL BP Gen1786/11.

Figure 6. “Mrs [Isobel] Scott, ca.1908.” John Arthur Photos, EUL.
Manliness in the age of empire and the age of training

In the strictest sense of the term the CSM was, unquestionably, a “patriarchal” institution. Male authority was an institutionalised aspect of the mission. All the leadership positions went to men. Women were expected to occupy roles that were not simply “separate” from but were subservient to their white male colleagues (though not their black male subjects). If they were not a “missionary wife” (a category that technically excused them from any actual mission work so that they might be able to focus on home duties) their title was often simply “lady missionary” – a category that specifically highlighted their gender and entailed work that was deemed suitable to their “nature”: nursing, teaching domestic science and homecare. A lot could be written about femininity and womanliness in the CSM and how the female missionaries navigated this patriarchal order. What I want to do, though, is put the spotlight onto the men and the masculinity around which the mission was apparently organised.

An age of empire and an age of training, turn-of-the-century Britain was also an age that witnessed the emergence of a new model of masculinity. As John Tosh has put it: “the nineteenth century was clearly pivotal in entrenching an entrepreneurial, individualistic masculinity, organized around a punishing work ethic, a compensating validation of the home, and a restraint on physical aggression.”62 Given its apparent extension throughout multiple layers of society – from the doctor to the tenant farmer, the schoolmaster to the factory owner – this model of masculinity might reasonably be described as the “hegemonic masculinity” of turn-of-the-century Britain.63 However, as with the emergent categories of race and class, “manliness” during the nineteenth century was a paradox – appearing ever-more fixed, durable, and taken-for-granted it was at the same time fragile, unstable and underpinned and generated by profound uncertainties and anxieties. One expression of this is the proliferation of public writing on the normative aspects of manliness and proper masculinity. As Tosh has written elsewhere: “probably at no time has public debate about the attributes of manhood been so vigorous as during the Victorian era.”64

The new manliness, and the closely related cluster of attributes and qualities it entailed (physical vigour, toughness, straightforwardness, seriousness, stoicism, courage, self-mastery, self-discipline, duty, paternalism), was generated, dialectically, against a series of threats to male dominance: the growth in sedentary work (especially for male social elites); increasing numbers of wage-earning women; a sudden increase in industrial-related diseases and illnesses; a rapidly

63 The notion of “hegemonic masculinity” was coined by Robert Connell in Masculinities (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
growing working class population. The new dominant and publicly espoused ideals of masculinity became hegemonic at the expense of alternative masculinities which were rendered subversive, out-dated, inappropriate, sinful, or even criminal. Aggression, and disregard for the home, the family, and children – behaviours that might in previous eras have been markers of manliness - were vilified and subjugated by new chivalric codes promoted in churches, schools, workplaces and in popular discourse that emphasised the importance of domesticity, refinement, protection of the weak, and care of dependents. Meanwhile, conviviality and leisureliness, once integral to pre-Victorian bourgeois and aristocratic notions of (gentle-)manliness were now things that the good man had to keep in check lest he be deemed untrustworthy, unreliable, or wasteful, or lest he risk being labelled “a shirker,” “a skiver,” or “effete.” The nineteenth century’s new codes of sexual discipline condemned promiscuity and signalled an end to an age where limited tolerance was shown to homosexuality.65

As Tosh and others have shown, the nineteenth-century societies in which the missionaries of the CSM would have grown up were marked by increasingly sharp category distinctions between men and women, with masculinity and femininity increasingly linked to the male and female sexed-bodies, respectively. The nineteenth century witnessed the acceleration and intensification of the differentiation of men and women on the basis of their reproductive roles and the boundaries between male and female were made clear and intensively policed. Deeper histories of male-female difference that long predated this era were, during the nineteenth-century invested with scientific, biological, certainties and moral authority creating for men and women each, separate and increasingly standardised, hegemonic, sets of expectations about what was appropriate, legitimate and acceptable.66

Empire was integral to this emergent gender regime, generating the capitalist-industrial relations that required organised, efficient, disciplined, productive (and reproductive) persons; providing a context for the proliferation of counter-images of black Others against which new masculine (and indeed feminine) subjectivities were formed; and spawning an immense volume of imaginative literature and juvenile fiction that provided idealised images of boyhood, manhood, and “proper masculinity.”67 The new technologies of print culture and mass communication enabled an explosion of novels, magazines, and newspapers that projected images of adventurous, unashamedly unintellectual yet-noble and caring “decent chaps,” forging and finding themselves

66 From the shift, during the eighteenth century, from a “one-sex” model to a “two-sex” model of reproductive anatomy: Thomas Laquer, Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990). For the training and development of “modern and male female bodies” in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Managing the Body.
while dispensing justice and order in colonial settings. As suggested by the schoolboy’s poem with which this chapter opened, and as we will see in future chapters, the missionaries of the CSM themselves contributed to this genre of colonial fiction. Indeed, the missionaries of the CSM – male and female – adhered to and supported this gender regime. Itself partly produced through a history of imperial entanglement with Africa, the missionaries of the CSM were among the imperialists who then sought to “export” it to Africa seeking to train Africans into model gendered subjects.

Men and Manliness in the CSM

It was not only medical expertise and a history of sporting prowess that Doctor Arthur brought with him to Kenya. When he arrived at Kikuyu mission station, on New Years’ Day 1907, Arthur came with heaps of personal belongings, packed into dozens of heavy crates (Figure 7). Judging by Arthur’s photographs from those early days, a document from a decade later – titled “Recommendations and Advice to New Missionaries – Kikuyu and Tumutumu” – is a handy guide as to what the crates contained. “A bed, bedding, bedroom and bathroom ware, table linen, cutlery, crockery, cooking utensils, table lamps and stationary,” rugs, drugs, medical equipment and food – “tinned meat and fish,” “pudding stuffs, oatmeal, raisins, currants.” He would have taken multiple items of clothing – “clothing suitable for summer in Scotland” which was plain and easy to wash – such as tweed suits and lighter-weight suits; “boots, shoes, and stockings”; and Khaki “working clothes.” It is possible some of the crates included second-hand garments donated from churches and schools in Scotland for the African children at the mission. Since it was the responsibilities of the “lady missionaries” to bring out sewing machines, irons, rubber hot-water-bottles, eiderdowns, and sunshades, we can assume these items were not in Arthur’s outfit. But he did bring a tennis racquet, rugby balls, a bicycle, a gramophone, framed photographs, decorative pictures, and a typewriter.

Doctor Arthur’s extensive wardrobe and his ornate abode at Kikuyu mission station is indicative of the importance of notions of “civility,” “gentility,” “refinement” and “domesticity” to missionary ideals of manliness. This was the “other face” of missionary masculinity – the complementary opposite to the “team-games-and-cold-showers” side. The masculinity endorsed by the CSM was one that called for both: warmth, geniality, familiarity, and domesticity on the one hand and dourness, resilience, stoicism, and ruthlessness on the other. The good manly missionary could operate comfortably in both modalities and knew which aspect to draw upon and perform

68 ibid.
69 “Recommendations and Advice to New Missionaries – Kikuyu and Tumutumu” (1917), PCEA I/CG/4.
70 Isobel Scott, “Kikuyu garments,” KN, 74 (October 1920).
as he navigated public and private life. This was the Christian soldier – gritty yet gentle, adventurous yet austere, robust yet refined – a man who was the master of himself and master of his body, in control of his person and emotions.

Figure 7. “The Doctor and His Boxes.” 1907, John Arthur Photos, EUL.

Figure 8. “The Doctor’s Home.” John Arthur Photos, EUL.
Although these qualities were simultaneously “external” and “internal” – of the man’s outer trappings and of his supposed inner state – they were primarily “secular” attributes: they were behaviours and mannerisms that had more to do with a man’s standing in the eyes of other men (and women) rather than man’s standing in the eyes of God.71 The complete package, in CSM eyes, was the man whose two-sided manliness was undergirded by an inner spirituality, deep faith, and real Christian conviction. As we have seen the CSM emphasised the notion of being “called” to mission work. The appointment notice of William Tait (Figure 1, back row, left), a carpentry instructor who was recruited in April 1910, is a good example of the kind of manliness they valued in the CSM. Tait was described, positively, as not a man who makes loud professions of religion but [...] a man of strong religious leanings, with – deep in his heart – a spirit of service and love of Christ and an earnest desire to win souls. Mr Tait is a strong, robust, well-set up young fellow, with a quiet unassuming demeanour, and one who gave the impression of strength of character.72

For his part Arthur was described as a “gentleman.”73 He apparently exhibited the “traits of leadership – initiative, courage, and vision.”74 Described in his obituary notice in the Glasgow Academy school newspaper as “the sort of man that we ourselves would like to be,” the discourses that surrounded Arthur reconstructed him in terms of the double-sided nature of missionary manliness and his deep interior refinement.75 He had, according to Robert Calderwood both a “deep capacity for friendship” and a “real capacity for leadership” as well as being a “man who believed greatly in prayer.”76 “He brought with him,” wrote Arthur Barlow, “not only the seriousness of high purpose, but all the gaiety and humour of his young manhood” and he was replete with “pent-up evangelistic fervour.”77

As we will see in the chapters that follow, the model of manliness that the missionaries of the CSM endorsed – quiet, calm, austere, paternalistic – might have been ascendant in nineteenth-century metropolitan Britain but it was decidedly less “hegemonic” in colonial Kenya. Indeed, as Tosh has famously argued, places like the East Africa Protectorate provided “a space where redundant masculinities could flourish,” offering the opportunity for a “flight from domesticity,” attracting “the black sheep, the misfit and the desperado.”78 Not only did few colonisers share the

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71 To paraphrase Tosh, “Masculinities in an Industrializing Society,” 335.
72 “Mr Tait” (1909), PCEA I/A/5.
74 Scott, Saint in Kenya, 146.
missionary’s commitment to imparting bourgeois, Christian models of manliness to Africans, many saw it as positively dangerous to do so.

Conclusion

Africa and Empire were woven into the subjectivities of CSM missionaries long before they went to Kenya. The missionaries of the CSM carried with them to the Gikuyu highlands a sense of ethical duty that was bound up with notions of correct masculinity and their own racial superiority. Believing in their own civilizational advancement, or taking it for granted, their notions of honour and decency assumed African neediness and African helplessness as it assigned to them the roles of savours, improvers, and “uplifters.”

An example of this mentality is the schoolboy’s poem with which this chapter opened. In that poem, “Africa” functions as a setting that enables the missionary man – the “Christian soldier” – to maximise his manliness. In this view, Africa and Africans called upon, exercised, and developed the missionary’s capacity for kindness and domesticity while simultaneously testing and cultivating their resilience, adventurousness and physical capacity. Exercising their paternalistic duty, saving, helping and liberating, Africa was seen by the missionaries of the CSM was a site where they could forge themselves as honourable modern Christian subjects. As Arthur Barlow, a CSM missionary who we will meet in subsequent chapters, wrote to his father upon arriving in East Africa Protectorate in 1904: “It seems to me that I have been taken out of all the rush and distracting flurry of civilized life for a special purpose; I believe this quiet time has been given to me to make myself bodily and spiritually and I mean to make good use of the time.”

As the following chapters will attest, however, the “Africa” of the schoolboy’s imagination – the “Africa” to which these missionaries had been exposed to in their childhoods – was difficult to find in the Gikuyu highlands of the early twentieth century. Kenya – with its comparatively sophisticated legal, penal and administrative structure, with its prisons, detention camps, native reserves, borders, and police force, a colony increasingly defined by white-settler capitalism, an exploitative and notoriously abusive labour system, and a colonial government obsessed with security and paranoid about racial mixing and sexual affronts – would present the missionaries with few opportunities for the gentle itinerating, heroic adventure, and gallant paternalism they had read about in their youth.
According to Gikuyu ways of thinking, nobody is an isolated individual. Or rather, his uniqueness is a secondary fact about him: first and foremost he is several people's relative and several people's contemporary. His life is founded on this fact spiritually and economically, just as much biologically; the work he does every day is determined by it, and it is the basis of his sense of moral responsibility and social obligation. His personal needs, physical and psychological, are satisfied incidentally while he plays his part as a member of a family group, and cannot be fully satisfied in any other way.


There are two common myths about Gikuyu. One – the one voiced by Kenyatta in the epigraph – is that they did not exist as individuals before the colonial period. This myth speaks of communality. In some versions of this myth precolonial Gikuyuland is presented as a world closer to “nature” than “culture.” In its positive form, it tells of an idyllic, egalitarian pre-contact world. In its negative form it speaks of superstition, backwardness and a world unthinkingly governed by “tradition.” The second myth is that Gikuyu are, were, and forever-have-been, “individualistic.” Seemingly in stark contrast to the first, this myth speaks of the importance of fame, reputation and the historic ideal of *ũاثِي* – or “self-mastery.” The emphasis is on “culture” rather than “nature” and the triumph of the former over the latter. It has been expressed in the story of origin which tells of how, centuries ago, brave and pioneering forerunners made the highlands of central Kenya “Gikuyu-land,” hewing a civilisation out of the wilderness – converting forest into private property through their autonomous, sweated efforts. This myth has found its form in stereotypes of Gikuyu as a people who are inherently predisposed to success in commerce, politics, and power. Construed positively, it speaks of intelligence and quick-wittedness, and a deeply-rooted, noble tradition of “uprightness.” Construed negatively, it speaks of disloyalty, untrustworthiness, and greed.

This chapter is an attempt to recover Gikuyu conceptions of the body and the person prior to the colonial period. I invoke these two myths because in engaging with this topic I have found myself confronting them at almost every turn. I have found that, taken alone, neither of them provide a satisfactory insight to turn-of-the-century Gikuyuland; but there is a certain truth in both of them when read together. In this chapter my aim is not to argue for one nor the other, but to transcend the dichotomy, by understanding what kind of a social order made it possible for two such seemingly different mythologies to emerge in the first place.

Informed by the insights of recent scholarship which has problematised and historicised the body and the person, this chapter is an attempt to answer two broad, related questions: “how,
on the eve of colonial contact, did Gikuyu imagine, conceptualise, and ‘live-in’ their bodies?” and “what, for Gikuyu at the point of being colonised, did it mean to be a ‘person’ and what did it require to enjoy the full rights of a person?” These are, of course, enormously ambitious questions for which the answers can – in a work of this length – only ever be provisional and speculative. Nevertheless, such questions are worth posing and attempting to answer: for doing so enables us to open-up and explore an aspect of the lived-world of the people on the receiving end of colonialism. As subsequent chapters show, understanding something of the nature of persons and bodies in precolonial Gikuyuland helps to explain why, during the colonial period, some new ideas and practices took hold while others did not.

I am particularly interested in confronting some of the beliefs and practices of precolonial Gikuyuland which might strike contemporary readers as obscure, perplexing and even obscene – as they indeed appeared to many of the colonials who first encountered and wrote about them. This will be important for future chapters since these became areas of contest and contention during the colonial period, especially between Gikuyu and missionaries. For reasons that are at once understandable yet also limiting, there has been a tendency in the scholarly literature to overlook or write off these features of the lived-world of turn-of-the-century Gikuyuland. I am aware that re-presenting them runs the risk of repeating and reinforcing sensationalised colonial discourses which sought to induce shock, horror and repugnance at allegedly “primitive” Africans. Nevertheless, my aim in this chapter is to recover some of the strangeness that has been lost in the recent literature and to deal with it in a critical and humane way as a means of capturing the particularities and peculiarities of everyday life in this part of the world at this time. A generation of historical scholarship has for reasons that are morally and politically noble and historically useful emphasised “similarity” over “difference.” With caution, my aim in engaging with Gikuyuland’s precolonial past is to place the emphasis on difference, especially what I take to be the at times radically and profoundly different ways in which turn-of-the-century Gikuyu inhabited and thought about their bodies. Many of the phenomena and practices described and analysed below operated at the level of the taken-for-granted and the matter-of-fact; during the colonial period they were to become sites for immense conflict.

Because the communities of Gikuyuland were, prior to the colonial period, non-literate, reconstructing their history is an inevitably challenging and problematic enterprise which, as such raises productive questions about historical enquiry in general. In this chapter I rely primarily on ethnographic and anthropological literature generated during the colonial period. Chiefly I draw from two texts which will be familiar to many – especially scholars of central Kenya – Jomo
Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya* and Louis Leakey’s *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903.* Both works were produced during the inter-war period by authors who were born in Gikuyuland at the turn of the century and who came of age, lived, died, and were buried in the region (Louis Leakey was the son of Harry Leakey the CMS football captain referred to in the introduction). Both works were shaped by the “structural-functionalist” approach to social anthropology emerging at the time (Kenyatta’s was produced under the supervision of Bronislaw Malinowski at the London School of Economics); and as such both attempted to provide an essential or total, almost exhaustive picture of Gikuyu society prior to colonial contact. Both claimed to provide an empirical, neutral, “objective” view of turn-of-the-century Gikuyuland. For these reasons and others they are immensely problematic sources. As a great deal of scholarship on them has already argued, their notion of a pristine, Gikuyu past was a fabrication and problematically re-presented the region and its people in a way that was timeless, homogenising, and which downplayed difference, disagreement, and change.

Nevertheless, for all of the above reasons, they are also immensely useful sources; and however problematic it might be, such empirical material provides at least an avenue into Gikuyuland’s past. In my handling of these sources I have been greatly informed by the scholarship which has read them as subtly-political texts and which has exposed the vested interests of the authors. In this chapter however my aim is to revisit these sources as empirical texts. Setting aside (for now) the obvious post-colonial critique that they are merely “representations,” in this chapter I deliberately deploy a certain methodological naiveté in order to exploit the richness of these sources for the information they contain about body practices, and understandings of the body and the person. To enhance and supplement my reading of these sources I have also drawn from a range of other colonial-era ethnographic material, some of which will be well-known to scholars of the region, others less so. These range from the archaeologists Routledge and Routledge’s 1903 work *With a Prehistoric People,* ethnographies produced by administrators such as Charles Hobley, H.R. Tate and H.E. Lambert, and ethnographic material generated by the missionaries of the Church of Scotland on whom subsequent chapters of the thesis focus. I have drawn from

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3 Although Leakey’s work was published posthumously, in 1977, it was based on research undertaken during the 1920s and 1930s.
ethnographic material authored by Gikuyu, especially the works of early Church of Scotland Mission converts, Stanley Kiama Gathigira and Charles Muñoro Kareri. Like a number of scholars before me I have also made use of T.G. Benson’s *Kikuyu-English Dictionary*. Published in 1964, the dictionary was principally based upon research undertaken in the early 1900s by Scottish missionary Arthur Barlow and his principal assistant Rueben Muriuki wa Kihuha as well as by A.G. McGregor, Leonard and Gladys Beecher, and Matthew Njoroge wa Kebetu of the Church Missionary Society. It testifies to the richness and complexities of Gikuyu idiom and it is a further source of information about life in the region at the turn of the century. My reading of this literature has been enhanced by the oral history interviews I conducted in the region between 2014 and 2016 with elderly Gikuyu Presbyterians.

Two, apparently starkly different, pictures of the social and political order emerge from descriptions and accounts of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Gikuyuland. These two pictures parallel the two myths introduced at the start. On the one hand, the sources describe a society that was highly ordered and socially-stratified and was, as such, peaceful and harmonious. Gikuyuland can look and sound like a society in which each and every person had a well-defined role and a well-understood set of duties and responsibilities depending on their age, gender, and marital status. Sometimes we catch more than a glimpse of what appears to have been an extraordinarily elaborate system of rules and proscriptions which governed – in seemingly absurd degrees of specificity – the conduct of individuals and their relations with others. There are, chiefly, two versions of the rule-governed, orderly, society. Sometimes it looks and sounds like an unequal yet agreeable society ruled under the benign dictatorship of senior male elders. Sometimes it looks more like a communalistic, egalitarian society – a society in which power and authority was so thoroughly diffused throughout the society, with everybody’s roles so clearly circumscribed, that nobody wielded absolute power.

On the other hand, other sources, and sometimes the very same sources, present a totally different picture. Here Gikuyuland looks like a chaotic, disorderly, society marked chiefly by

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dissent, disagreement, and even ruthlessness. Like the orderly society, the dissent society emerges in the literature and oral history retellings in multiple forms. Sometimes it looks and sounds like Gikuyuland was a place crowded with speculative investors and pioneers, where life was all about amassing wealth and fame and avoiding hunger and disease, and where achieving this invariably meant disobeying authority, breaking rules, and edging-out others. In some accounts, relations between the sexes and the generations, and among members of the same age-group and sex, seem not to have been harmonious but tense, fractious, and competitive. In such re-presentations of Gikuyuland, jealousy, secrecy, and suspicion trumped communal togetherness. For some, it seems, there was no such thing as “society” in Gikuyuland prior to colonial contact. They present it as a Hobbesian state of nature – where there was a complete absence of governance and might equalled right. In this view, strangers and outsiders were shunned, the weak neglected. Women, children, the impoverished, diseased, or disabled had no chance of wealth, fame or reputation. Thus Alessandro Maimba, who joined the Italian Consolata Mission in the early twentieth century, described the time prior to the arrival of the colonisers as follows:

The men of importance were only those who had strength, such as the fierce warriors who could handle shield and spear, and the rich. The fatherless were of no significance, except if the one who had strength went to serve with a rich man with cattle. [Even then] he would earn only his food; and when he lost his strength to herd the livestock, he was driven away like a good-for-nothing.\(^9\)

In reality, Gikuyuland was neither of these things and both of them. As two generations of Gikuyuland-historians have shown, there is something significant and specific to the social, cultural and political dynamics of the region about the distinction between “order” and “disorder.”

The early work of anthropologist Greet Kershaw, John Lonsdale’s magisterial oeuvre on Gikuyuland’s “moral economy,” and more recent work by Yvan Droz, Derek Peterson and Robert Blunt have shown, it was less the case that everyday social life and politics were completely and in their entirety one of the two mutually exclusive options: “orderly” or “disorderly.” Rather, these were the two spectres that shaped and structured moral debates, social practice, and political

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\(^9\) Quoted in Cavicchi, *Problems of Change in Kikuyu Tribal Society*, 84-85.

thought in the forest highlands of Gikuyuland. To use perhaps more historically and regionally appropriate terminology we might refer to them instead as “civilisation” and “wilderness.” The source material can appear contradictory but in it a picture builds up of how normative ideas about disorderly wilderness generated normative ideas about orderly civilisation in late-nineteenth century Gikuyuland – normative ideas which played a central part in informing the exercise of power, the organisation of politics, the disciplining of people, and the way people themselves disciplined and ordered their own everyday lives.

In the existing scholarship the focus is on ideas, and moral and political thought. Social practice, specifically bodily practice, however has remained only peripheral to these scholars’ analyses. It is that which I want to bring into full view in the remaining part of this chapter by looking at the ways in which this normative order, which revolved around material, yet historically-constructed, distinctions between “civilisation” and “wilderness,” gave shape to body practices, ideas about the body, and ways of being-in the body. That is, I want to develop the bodily, corporeal dimension to what is already known about Gikuyu moral and political economy. This will be essential for understanding the impact and significance of the bodily interventions made by the colonial evangelists of the CSM.

To engage with Gikuyu normative ideas about the body and body practices, the notions of “blockage” and “flow” and an associated vocabulary of enclosures, accumulation, and retention on the one hand, and rupture, release, emission, and renewal on the other, are incredibly useful heuristic tools. Such terminology, moreover, allows us to identify crucial links between Gikuyuland’s social-political order and its physical, material culture. Just like in political affairs, and just like in common social practices for maintaining a domesticated homestead, the management of the body was a delicate balancing act between accumulating and distributing, amassing and releasing, opening and closing, incorporating and emitting.

**Being born. And being born again.**

Under most circumstances, these sources tell us, the birth of a child to a man and woman who were married was a very great thing and a cause for celebration. When a woman realised she was pregnant after missing one or two menstrual cycles, she was to inform her husband. For one to three lunar months, they were more or less obliged to have frequent full sexual intercourse; this

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would prevent the child being “born a weakling” for the father’s semen, like the mother’s breast milk, was understood as a kind of blood that would give strength to the unborn foetus.\textsuperscript{12} When the birth was approaching, the mother would nominate a midwife, who was required to be a woman past child-bearing age. The mother would pay the midwife by offering her a gourd of millet-meal gruel. When labour commenced the mother would retreat to her own hut. The midwife would be called for and only she could have physical contact with the mother at this stage. The mother’s hut was, in any case, a womb-like setting, dedicated to nurturing. It was where a family’s food was stored, and where all the cooking took place. It was a warm, smoky, vital container. The fire on the hearth of a mother’s hut was extinguished only in the most extreme circumstances.\textsuperscript{13}

Immediately after birth, the sex of the child was announced by the midwife calling out from the hut – five times for a boy, four times for a girl.\textsuperscript{14} The father, waiting in anticipation, would respond to this by procuring his child’s first feed, drawing blood from the neck of a bullock (if the infant was male) or from a young cow (if the infant was female).\textsuperscript{15} He would enter the hut, offering first a gourd of the blood for the mother to drink before putting some on the baby’s tongue. He would bring sugarcane – five pieces if his child was a boy, four pieces if it was a girl.\textsuperscript{16} If the child was born in an “unusual way” (feet first, for example) or if they were born with extra digits, or cleft lips, they were deemed to be “blemished” which might damage their options for marriage later in life.\textsuperscript{17} Twins were killed immediately if it was a woman’s first birth, and the birth was considered a miscarriage.\textsuperscript{18} Like babies born without eyes or with ambiguous sex organs, they were considered to be \textit{kírema} (cursed). They were killed by suffocation, by stuffing grass into their mouths.\textsuperscript{19} Such “monstrous-birth” scenarios would require the mother, midwife and the hut in which the birth took place to be cleansed and purified by a \textit{múndo-múgo} (medicine man).\textsuperscript{20}

In the days after birth, only the father and the midwife could enter the woman’s hut. Furthermore, no stranger was permitted to enter the homestead in which the mother’s hut was situated. Everything was done to limit the chances of the infant coming into contact with substances that could strip away energy – substances such as faeces and human blood. A protective charm made from the skin of a sacrificed ruminant would be placed around the infant’s neck. The

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Leakey, \textit{Southern Kikuyu}, 512.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Leakey, \textit{Southern Kikuyu}, 168.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} \textit{cf.} Muhoro, “Irua” and Holding, “The Birth of a Child.”
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Holding, “The Birth of a Child.”
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Muhoro, “Irua.”
  \item \textsuperscript{17} E. Mary Holding, “Death, Death Rituals, Spirits and Ngai,” (n.d. c1940), KNA Mss/7/1.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Leakey, \textit{Southern Kikuyu}, 528-529, 550, 566, 1286; E. Mary Holding, “End of Infancy,” (n.d. c1940), KNA Mss/7/1.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Leakey, \textit{Southern Kikuyu}, 528-529.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Leakey, \textit{Southern Kikuyu}, 527-528.
\end{itemize}
baby was to be in constant physical contact with the mother. Mothers nurtured their new-borns by constantly weaning them and massaging their infant’s entire skin surface, head to toe and toe to head, with oils – mutton fat in the case of boys, castor oil in the case of girls. Meantime, the mother was fed copious amounts of njabi beans by her midwife.\(^{21}\)

Neither the infant nor the mother was permitted to leave the mother’s hut, and nor was the baby washed with water, until several days (and, sometimes, several weeks) after birth. These were aspects of the ceremonies by which the child acquired a name. These ceremonies might have gone something like this. Some days after birth, while still in the mother’s hut, the midwife would pour a large calabash of cold water fetched from a nearby river or stream over the baby.\(^{22}\) The midwife would shave the mother’s hair and rub ndago and ira (sweet-smelling, white powders made of ground dried leaves, understood to be cooling agents) onto the foreheads of the mother and child.\(^{23}\) The child’s name was known in advance but it did not acquire it until this point. First-born sons were named after their father’s father; first-born daughters after father’s mother. Second-born sons and daughters were named after their mother’s father and mother’s mother respectively. Once washed, named, shaved, and doused with cooling powders, the mother and infant could leave the hut and enter the community for the first time. Sometimes this was marked by a ceremony in which the intestines of a sacrificially slaughtered goat were hung above the doorway of the mother’s hut, with its blood dripping over the opening onto the mother and infant as they emerged from the womb-like dwelling into the courtyard.\(^{24}\)

There is much that I have left out, of course. Not least the feasting and ceremonial drinking that occurred after the birth, and the sprinkling of roasted meat and libations onto the earth of the homestead as an offering to the ancestors. Although this account is a construct, being comprised from information I have compiled from the accounts of others, it serves a useful purpose in bringing into view some of the core topics which will be in the remainder of this chapter. We catch a sight of how bodily substances were assumed to have an excessive potency, of the anxieties around physical contact and proximity, of the importance of enclosures and flows in bodily and social life, and we see something of precolonial Gikuyuland’s apparently strict (if perhaps, to modern audiences, “grotesque”) codes of conduct.\(^{25}\)

First, however, the description serves as a useful point of entry for a discussion about how “the person,” and “the body,” were conceptualised and configured in Gikuyuland. It is worthwhile...

\(^{22}\) Leakey, *Southern Kikuyu*, 515.
\(^{23}\) *ibid*. 515.
\(^{24}\) Muhoro, “Irua.”
to begin by stating that, as the Europeans who first started codifying Gikuyu languages and customs quickly found, Gikuyu vocabulary suggested an ontology which, in a number of key respects, was similar to their own. Gikuyu lexicon accounted for individual notions of the self; distinguished mind from body; and, moreover, apparently drew distinctions between metaphysical, supernatural “inner” essences and physical, natural bodily containers. A mũndũ (pl. andũ) was an embodied person: “a human being of bones, flesh and blood,” as Louis Leakey put it.26 It was understood that every mũndũ would die, and that when they died their physical body – that is, their nwĩrĩ – would rot in the earth or be eaten by hyenas.27 Each mũndũ, during his or her life was animated by their ngoro which one early translator defined as “heart” or “soul.” That translator was A.W. McGregor of the Church Missionary Society, who in 1904 defined the adjective a ngoro as “internal,” “inward,” and “mental.”28 In other early definitions, ngoro was “will,” “character,” “personality.”29 It was “mind,” “affections,” “whole ‘inner man’,” “the seat of a man’s immortality during life.”30 Gikuyu proverbs collected during the early colonial period speak of the unique private, nature of each person’s ngoro and, as such, seemingly attest to a strong conception of individual personhood: Ngoro ni mutitu mutumanu na ndugitonyeka ni mundu “The heart is a thick forest which cannot be penetrated by anybody”;kirũtĩ kirũ ngoro gituúnagirũ “the forest in the heart cannot be cut down by somebody else.”31

Yet, at the same time it also seems to have been the case that persons were considered as re-incarnations of the grandparents after whom they were named; and that even if their namesake were still alive that the two shared an inner essence. This re-birthing and interconnectedness of the generations was one of the aspects to which Kenyatta was referring in his statement on individuality. New-borns, as well as being their own persons, were also regenerations of past generations and, accordingly, versions of their own yet-to-be-born grandchildren. When making this point to me in interviews, respondents liked to tell me that sometimes a person carried the dispositions and traits of their namesakes in ways that could be uncanny.32 Gikuyu bodies in this sense sheltered an inner person who existed across multiple temporal planes: past, present, and future.33 Several conventions and social practices reaffirmed a person’s consciousness as strongly

26 KED, 300-301; Leakey Southern Kikuyu, 990.
27 KED, 200.
29 Louis Leakey, Southern Kikuyu.
30 KED, 313. See also: entry for kũrũru, 201.
32 Interview, Johnson Ndiritu (born 1933) and Rose Wangũ Ndiritu (born 1936), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 20/6/15. See also Holding, “The Birth of a Child.”
related to the senior and junior instantiations of their selves, for instance living namesakes sometimes used a special handshake when greeting each other, and could address one another as *wakine* (“my equal”).

There was a conception, then, of the person as both a historically unique individual on the one hand, and as an eternally returning and regenerating being on the other. We do not know whether these were competing beliefs at the time, and, if so, which was dominant, or whether both conceptions simply co-existed. What is significant, though, is the way in which they speak to a central dynamic in Gikuyu moral thought: the tension between what John Lonsdale has termed “linear” and “regenerative” conceptions of time and progress. When it comes to thinking about these conceptions in relation to the person, and their body, this tension is striking. Because, as we only begin to glimpse in the foregoing description of the rites and practices surrounding childbirth, a person’s course through life appears to have been conceptualised as both a linear, progressive, journey through time (and, moreover one surrounded by strong normative conceptions about what constituted a successful life) and in cyclical terms as a constant process of being born and reborn, being made and unmade, growing stale and being renewed.

In both respects, linear and cyclical, there was an element of “achievement” to being and becoming a person. Personhood was not automatically granted upon birth and not accorded to everyone. It was secured and, apparently, repeatedly transformed through the series of rites of passage which punctuated a person’s life course. Economically taxing and often physically demanding, these rites of passage seem to have determined who qualified as a person and who did not: the “cursed” infants, with “abject” bodies, for instance, appear to have not. These rites of passage drew heavily upon the symbolism and language of birthing. They were called *mambura*, the root word of which “-amba” means start, begin, commence. They appear to have been just as instrumental in the (re)constituting of personhood as the person’s “actual” (biological) birth. So rupturing and profoundly transformative were the successive “re-births” a person underwent in their life-course, that one is given to wonder whether the person who passed through them was understood to be the same as the one who entered them.

The ceremony in which mother and child were brought out of the mother’s hut in a birth-like sequence was one such *mambura*. Some have gone so far as to state that until this point the child was not regarded as a person; and that, accordingly, if the child died before it had undergone

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34 Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 16.
36 KED, 8-9.
the naming and “coming out” (of the mother’s hut) ceremonies, the family were not required to host one of the costly ceremonies that marked a person’s death. Another was the ceremony of *kuciaruo keri*, or “second birth,” which took place some three to ten years after birth. It has similarly been regarded as the moment when somebody became a person. Another name for the ceremony was *guokia mwana ibu-ini* “returning the child to the womb” for the rite involved mother and child returning to the mother’s hut. In the hut they were bound together with the intestine of a sacrificed ruminant which – like the umbilical cord – was cut by an officiating healer. The rite enforced a separation between mother and child; after undergoing it they were no longer to share the same sleeping area. The rite re-“opened” the mother’s reproductive capacities too, marking the end of the *mũbingo* (literally, “closed”) period during which it was taboo for her to become pregnant. Further it altered her status and the status of the child’s father; those whose children had been “born again” would have a much greater chance of receiving a burial, and avoiding the usual fate of being taken out to the forest to die. Burial ceremonies were also *mambura*; costly rites of passage through to another life stage – as an ancestor – through which only those whose lives deemed worthy could pass.

Through *mambura* personhood was secured, transformed, and developed. What is most striking about them, however, is that they appear to have been understood as not only transforming a person’s social standing, but also the substantial qualities of their bodies. It is that to which I will now turn. I want to do so primarily in relation to what was, by all accounts, the most significant re-birth in a person’s life: *irua* – the initiation ceremony which, by means of rigorous physical training, intimate gendered guidance from nominated elders, and the public cutting of their genitals, a person came to be regarded as a responsible adult.

provides a perfect opportunity to add another layer to the analysis and to consider directly Gikuyu understandings of the body.

**Transforming the person and their body**

In a way that was profoundly different to biomedical notions in Western Europe at this time, which regarded “the body” as an inert, knowable, unidimensional object (and one that remained identifiable as essentially the same “thing” after death) Gikuyu bodies appear to have been understood, experienced, and “lived-in” as composites of diverse substances which were unpredictable, only partially knowable and manageable, and in constant flux. As such, bodies (as I explain in further detail below) emerged as sites where a confrontation between “nature” and “culture” played out. Inhering in the substances of which the bodies were composed, was the same excessive, elemental force that inhered in nature. Bodies contained, in this way something of the dense forest “wilderness” – the wilderness which surrounded and threatened Gikuyu civilisation, against which Gikuyu civilisation had been forged, and which, at the same time, provided the sustenance which made civilisation, wealth and fatness possible. Bodies constantly threatened to become wilderness if the substances they contained were not duly managed. From this perspective, *mambura* in general and *irua* in particular can be seen as a means by which Gikuyu society sought to bring civilised order to unruly nature.

In the existing historical and anthropological literature on *irua*, the emphasis is on the social and political rights it allegedly conferred, and on its moral and sexual dimensions, particularly in relation to its role in the governance of reproduction. As almost all the sources on *irua* state, a primary function of the rite was that it turned children into social adults. The initiated person was, in Kenyatta’s loaded term, a “citizen.” They became (in theory) independent from the authority of their parents; and having passed through the rite they were eligible to get married, have children, own land, and sit on decision-making councils. Kenyatta’s contemporary, the CSM-educated Stanley Kiama Gathigira put it in even stronger terms: *irua* made somebody into a full, whole, complete person. Indeed, customarily the term *mündū* was typically reserved only for a person who had been initiated. Children and the uninitiated, meanwhile, were sometimes referred to as

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merely nyamū.\textsuperscript{43} It meant “animal” but also connoted, generally any living thing, or simply “stuff, material substance.”\textsuperscript{44}

Most conventional accounts of \textit{irua} describe the rite in terms of its dual function in simultaneously “opening” and “disciplining” the candidate’s sexual capacities. On the one hand, we are told, the rite ushered the initiated person into an age where they had knowledge about sex, and were permitted to have sexual intercourse. On the other, it chastened them. It did so physically, through the cutting of their genitals (the foreskins in the case of men, the clitoris and sometimes the labia in the case of women). And it did so morally through advice and guidance on correct behaviour. As Presbyterian minister and theologian Charles Ndanyu put it to me: “Just as I throw that part of my body – you know, the foreskin, or the cut bits of girls – you throw away childishness and childhood. From now on you are not a boy, or you are not a girl, you are an adult.”\textsuperscript{45} It cut “maturity through pain,” as elderly women in the 1990s told Jean Davidson.\textsuperscript{46} CSM missionary Arthur Barlow contended that the lives of young initiated men were about containment as much as release: “He ceases to act like uninitiated boys and speaks only about matters appropriate to grown men. He does not tread in the ashes, nor say ‘I’m hungry!’ like a boy. Also he speaks courteously, and when he meets women or elders he makes way for them.”\textsuperscript{47} These sources emphasise how the rights and sexual freedoms bestowed by \textit{irua} came with certain expectations about conduct. They speak of how, unlike the unsexed children they once were, initiated men and women could not sleep in the same area (married partners, domiciled in separate huts), and could not eat in one another’s company.

The candidates selected to undergo \textit{irua} together would form a \textit{riika} (pl. \textit{mariika}) – an “age-set.” A \textit{riika} was a corporate unit of “age-mates” who were not blood-relatives, but who, having been initiated together, were for the duration of their lives bound together in a sibling-like relationship. It could comprise of as few as half a dozen or as many as several hundred individuals. Successive age-sets would, collectively, form a generation age-set, another corporate unit which could comprise of as many as twenty or so neighbouring age-sets.

These are all significant aspects of \textit{irua}, and to some of the broader social codes and norms surrounding discipline and uprightness, I will return. But what we only glimpse in such accounts is the way \textit{irua} relied upon, invoked, and transformed bodies that were conceptualised and

\textsuperscript{43} Edmondo Cavicchi, \textit{Problems of Change}, 16.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{KED}, 341.
\textsuperscript{45} Interview, Charles Ndanyu, interview conducted near Nyeri, 30/7/15. \textit{cf}. Leakey, \textit{Southern Kikuyu}, 633.
\textsuperscript{47} Arthur Barlow, “The Complete Education of a Kikuyu,” (n.d.), UN BP BAR 1/2/7; See also: Interview, Japhet M’Ritha (born 1924), interview conducted near Chogoria, 15/7/15.
inhabited in a way that was profoundly different to the anatomical, biological, individuated body of Western modernity. As containers of composite and unpredictable, potentially wild, substances a principal way in which Gikuyu appear to have thought of their bodies was in terms of the body’s capacity to accumulate and “swell” and conversely, its propensity to suddenly loose volume through leakages and discharges. Strength, energy, and power came from the accumulation of the right kinds of substances and the balancing of the right levels; yet excessive retention or an imbalance in substances could be dangerous, even fatal. The substance which made a body healthy could grow putrid, decay, and become unclean. An exhaustive account of irua, is of course, beyond the scope of this study, but what I want to do here is pick out some of the details from the ethnographic record to substantiate these claims and make the informed speculation that one of the primary purposes of irua, like other mambura ceremonies, was to re-make persons by purging, transforming, and renewing their bodies.

Irua ceremonies did not take place uniformly and at the same time throughout the whole of Gikuyuland; rather they were highly localised, provincial affairs. All about re-birth and renewal, the logics and practices of irua ceremonies played heavily upon the tensions between build-up and release, enclosure and opening. For instance, while the privilege to decide to instigate a ceremony appears to have rested firmly in the hands of a locality’s council of elders (about which I will say more below), it equally appears to have been the prerogative of youth to prove and display to their seniors that they were ready.48 This meant demonstrating, perhaps through performance of song-dances, their physical strength and a readiness for sexual maturity. Uncircumcised children were seen as virgin enclosures in whom substances and energies had been building up and accumulating over time. The ideal candidate on the eve of their circumcision was a burgeoning container, about to overflow its limits. Timing was crucial for if they “burst” — if a boy ejaculated before he was initiated or if a girl had her menses before she was initiated — the ceremony was jeopardised and a cleansing ritual had to be performed. Similarly, a term for one who was prevented from being initiated altogether was kĩgũmu.49 It meant one who was stale, musty, moulding, rotten, decaying, and was associated with the image of a fruit which had ripened and started to putrefy.50

Once nominated to be part of the irua ceremony candidates would be prepared for the rite by being fed and fattened with nutritious food (beans, grains, oil and water) and “filled up” with

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48 Interview, Doctor Leonard Gitonga, interview conducted at Chogoria Hospital, 9/7/15; Interview, Francis Muruja (1922-2016), interview conducted near Chogoria, 15/7/15.
49 Gathĩgĩra, Miikari re Agikũyũ, 50.
50 KED, 122
guidance and inspiration from their seniors. As Milka Kagendo, an eighty-year-old who lives near Tumutumu mission station, told me: “For you to pass through that initiation, first you had to be strong. You had to be strong enough to be able to pick up a person and throw them. Little girls, young girls, weak girls, were not circumcised until they were big, old, or strong enough.”

The day of the cutting might have gone something like this. Very early in the morning on the day of their cutting, the candidates were taken to bathe in a river. Leakey remarked that this was comparable to the cold water poured over babies in the rites that followed childbirth. From the river, the candidates were led to a circular clearing in the forest: a secure enclosure that had been ritually-purified by an elaborate set of “encircling” rituals, performed by a *mundo mugo* (medicine man) the day prior. Male and female candidates were taken to separate areas for their cutting. After entering a boisterous circle of spectators, the naked candidates would squat, with their legs apart, their eyes set firmly up to the sky, their heels dug firmly into the ground, and their back against their nominated supporter (a young initiated man in the case of male initiates, a young initiated woman in the case of female candidates). The *mũrũthia* (circumciser) would enter the enclosure of spectators dressed in ornate clothing, ululating, dancing, and brandishing a knife. The *mũrũthia* would move between the candidates cutting them, taking care not to wipe the knife so as to allow blood to pass between them. For the candidates, at this stage, containment was crucial.

A cry or a gasp as they were cut could lead to them being branded a *kĩrũũgi*, a stigma associated with cowardice they might carry for the rest of their lives and could damage their marital chances. Literally a “grasshopper,” it meant one who jumped or winced, during their initiation.

After the public spectacle of their genital cutting, the initiation candidates would spend weeks, sometimes months, recovering in homo-social secluded womb-like settings, which one elder when describing it to me compared to a caterpillar’s cocoon. They recovered and regenerated in close-contact together, contained in warm, smoky, banana-leaf stockades located in secret forest locations. The emphasis was on recovery, restoration and retention; according to

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51 Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 136; Leakey, *Southern Kikuyu*, 608; Interview, Milka Kangendo (born c.1933), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 26/7/15; Interview, Francis Muruja (1922-2016), interview conducted near Chogoria, 15/7/15.
52 Interview, Milka Kangendo (born c.1933), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 26/7/15.
54 *ibid.* 608.
55 Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 146
56 Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 146; Interview, Charity Mwiande (born c.1920), interview conducted near Chogoria, 14/7/15.
57 KED, *kĩrũũgi*, 416; *kĩrũũgi*, 422
58 For weeks/months: Interview, Beatrice Nduta Kimondo, (born c.1924), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 29/7/15. For “cocoon”: Interview, Francis Muruja (1922-2016), interview conducted near Chogoria, 15/7/15.
some accounts the hibernating candidates were not permitted to speak, had to keep their eyes closed, and refrained from movement. The circumcised initiates appear to have been understood as existing in a transitional state that left them raw, exposed, vulnerable, and highly receptive to instruction. They were delicate, fragile, embryonic vessels that had to be handled with care: in *Facing Mount Kenya* Kenyatta underlines this pointing out that if even one candidate was cut or scratched or bled at this stage it threatened to jeopardise the *irua* ceremony for all the candidates.

The only person allowed to come into contact with them was their nominated supporter, who had stood behind them during their cutting; this person would bring them enormous quantities of nutritious food and oils for them to massage into their skin and offer them advice and guidance on matters of sex and marriage.

The final ceremony of *irua* was called *kuumithio* (“being brought out”), and in others *gĩciarwo* (“to be born”). This was the moment they exited the recovery huts and re-entered the community. For this, the candidates were made as fat as possible. Their skin was made smooth, oily and shiny. They were made to look big, fat, and powerful. Their heads were shaved and all the hair on their backs, chests, arms, legs removed – like new-borns. Sometimes, after exiting, they performed a dance as a spectacle of their virility. At this point the candidates were referred to as *ciiniri* (“those who have come out”) and in others as *muumo* (“the emerged”). Those whose *irua* was interrupted, incomplete, or deemed abnormal or imperfect, meanwhile, acquired names such as *githairũ* and *gĩthayo*; they were opprobrious terms that were associated with children who had had a defective birth, such as babies who were born feet-first.

Much has been written on the different “roles” and “duties” that came with each life stage of a Gikuyu person; what has received less attention is how each life stage seems to have brought with it a new kind of body. Gikuyu physiological theory appears to have held that the substances of which bodies were comprised were apparently “hot” or “cold” in essence and apparently gendered as “male” or “female.” Depending on one’s age and gender, there were different expectations about the “correct” levels of these substances within the body. The diets, body-ointments, skin pigments, and exercises deemed appropriate for a young initiated male (*a mwanake*), for example, were different to those appropriate for a young initiated female (*a mũrĩtu*). By the

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60 Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 143.
63 Interview, Milka Kangendo (born c.1933), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 26/7/15.
64 Leakey, *Southern Kikuyu*, 687, 690.
65 KED, 488.
same token, the bodies of the initiated were composed of a different substance to the uninitiated; and the bodies of young initiated persons were different to those of married elders with children of their own, and came with different prescribed body-practices.

For example, while the bodies of aanake (the plural for “mwanake,” a man who had been initiated but was not yet married and did not have children) were “hot,” the bodies of the aathuri (the plural for muuthuri, a married man with children), especially those whose children had been initiated, were “cool.” Indeed it appears to have been incumbent upon each to maintain their relative state of heat by managing their bodily substances; and it appears this could have been altered by coming into contact with one another.

The aanake were regarded as “warriors.” Initiation made them a locality’s defence force. In folklore and fable they rustled cattle and killed leopards; they fought in raids against rival warriors, battling with shields, spears, and knobkerry clubs. The mwanake doused their bodies in mutton fat and thigira a blood-coloured ochre – a hot substance which was understood to increase tenacity and virility (Figure 1). They were sexually active – their reproductive powers having been cut open in irua. They ate such foods as meat, honey and sorghum millet known to boost fertility. They abstained from eating “cold” foods or “white” foods associated with women such as tree beans and tomatoes and would – apparently – never eat the little birds, termites, and insects that children fed on. The aim of the aanake was, as one Gikuyu elder put it, to do things that would help him to “become solid” (kiũmata – the root verb of which “-mata” means “coagulate; become viscous, thick, heavy”). According to Kenyatta and others, the most important aspect of the mwanake’s life were those which increased their physical strength, power, dexterity and gracefulnes: dancing, mock-fighting, foot-racing, and jumping. Such activities apparently altered and enhanced the mwanake’s body and person substantially – making them “hotter,” more potent

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and virile. So brimming with potentially dangerous heat were the warriors who returned from a successful raid that they would be doused in milk before participating in the everyday practices of community life.\(^7\)

Figure 9 (left) “Young Kikuyu Man” (n.d. c.1909), Arthur Barlow Photos, EUL BP/Gen 1786/9 – note the body paint and ornamental hairstyle. Figure 10 (right) “Kikuyu Elders,” (n.d. c.1909), Arthur Barlow Photos, EUL BP/Gen 1786/9 – note the mũthori staff and the shaved heads.

They appear to have been understood as being of a fundamentally different essence to senior males. In some parts of Gikuyuland īrua, as it opened the sexual energies of the youth, closed the reproductive capacities of their parents who were forbidden from procreation after their first child had been initiated.\(^7\) Once a mother and father’s first-born child had been initiated, they were eligible to undergo their own initiation ceremony into elderhood. According to Kenyatta the ceremony that inaugurated a man’s status as a mũthuri (elder) culminated in the sex organs of a slaughtered goat being “slit and worn as a bracelet on his right wrist.”\(^7\) This, Kenyatta writes, was


\(^7\) Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 203.
to indicate the tempering of the man’s inner fire, his hot temper and sexual potency. Unlike the *aanake* who had elaborate, ornamental hair-styles, the *athuri* of Gikuyu had shaved heads. They did not wear red-ochre. They did not carry spears and shields but a staff (the *mũthegi*) which was decorated with fragrant, cooling, *maathai* leaves (Figure 2). Another term for a *mũthuri* was a “*mũbooreri*.” Rooted in the verb “-hora,” which meant “become cold, be inactive (of a lamp, fire etc.) go out,” it referred to one who was gentle, quiet peace-loving.

Gikuyu bodies were lived-in and treated in ways which would strike modern European colonial observers as spectacularly “open,” or “permeable.” There was much to the practice of everyday life and ritual ceremonies that apparently relied upon the fact that the ebb and flow of the substances within a person’s body could be altered not only through eating and drinking but also through their porous skin-surface. In such a context it mattered a great deal who or what one came into close proximity with, had physical contact with, and exchanged substances and bodily fluids with – which in part accounts for the apparent proscription that the midwife who came into contact with the pregnant mother had to be a woman past child-bearing age.

**The body as a social relation, the embodiment of social relations**

In a number of key respects, Gikuyu modalities of personhood and embodiment at the turn of the century appear to have been closer to what anthropological theorists have termed “dividuality” than “individuality.” A “dividual,” to borrow Richard Werbner’s recent formulation, is someone “who is composite or partible and permeated by others’ emotions and shared substances.”

Africanist scholars working in a range of quite different regional and historical contexts have found the term a useful heuristic to capture the apparently pronounced ways in which the personhood of their research subjects is, or was, socially-embedded, relational and interconnected. The term captures not simply a “mental” sense of self, but a mode of embodiment linking notions of the

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75 KED, 163; On the “*mũbooreri*” see: Arthur Barlow, “Good and Evil,” KN, 37, (1912).


self to the body, material culture and human and non-human substances. McKim Marriott, who coined the term in his work on Hinduism, put it like this:

To exist, dividual persons absorb heterogeneous material influences. They must also give out from themselves particles of their own coded substances – essences, residues, or other active influences – that may then reproduce in others something of the nature of the persons in whom they have originated.78

Had the term been at his disposal, Kenyatta may well have declared precolonial Gikuyu “dividuals” as he declared the historical novelty of “individuality.” In my view, the chief utility of the term, however, lies less in forcing an absolute and mutually exclusive distinction between “Gikuyu” (or “African”) and “Western” modalities of personhood (after all, are not the latter also “permeated” by others’ emotions and substances?) and more in the way it helps explain certain aspects of turn-of-the-century Gikuyu body practices, at both quotidian and ritual levels.

Porous, mutable, and radically discontinuous over time, Gikuyu bodies also seem to have been understood as comprising of substances which were highly charged, “humming” with potent energy that could be productive or destructive. Body parts and bodily substances appear to have been understood as containing something of the essence of the person to whom they belonged, even if those parts or substances had long exited, or been detached from, their bodies.79 Certain forms of sorcery (urog) were based upon this “fact,” as sorcerers could bring physical harm to a person by using their hair or blood, for instance.80 By the same token, sharing or exchanging bodily substances seems to have been understood and experienced as affective and transformative, not simply at a biological level but in terms of personhood. The body and its substances, in this way, were social relations such that the making of a blood pact or (as was common in the build-up to an initiation ceremony) blessing a candidate by spitting saliva onto their chest, was actually understood as having an agentive role in forming a social relationship and not just “symbolic” of one.81 Similarly, spending time in close physical contact in confined, secluded spaces – like the candidates as they recovered from initiation or the mother and her new-born infant – appears to have been understood as having the capacity to produce (and in some cases damage) durable bonds between persons.

Furthermore, non-human substances, especially those with the capacity to flow – animal blood, honey, beer, milk – appear to have been understood to have the metonymic capacity to “stand-in” for persons’ own bodily substances. Edible gifts, like the gourd of millet-meal porridge offered from the pregnant mother to the nominated midwife, or the food brought to candidates recovering from initiation, worked to create relationships between the persons consuming them. Such practices relied upon and invoked a conception of personhood not as something that was rigidly confined within the sealed-up walls of the individual, anatomical body but as something that leaked out of persons and something that could be extended or distributed across multiple bodies.

It seems, then, that in turn-of-the-century Gikuyuland social relations had a substantial quality; that social relations were not regarded as bonds that existed “externally” between atomised individuals, but were incorporated within and productive of persons themselves. It seems that, being embodied, social relations contributed to the growth and strength of a person. Indeed, Gikuyuland’s male elites spoke of their social relations as their wealth and their bodily matter. They spoke of their “ĩrĩ” – which was their “fortune,” “the good things” of their life, their “property including wives, children, livestock, gardens,” their “progeny,” but also their “sustenance, substance.” They spoke of their útonga, which was their “wealth” but also, similarly, their “substance,” their “physical strength, stamina,” and their “power to procreate.” In this way, forging bonds with others and accumulating dependents contributed to the enlargement of a person. By contrast, not doing so was stigmatised. The derogatory term mũĩrĩ referred to “a solitary person without children or relations. A person of no importance.” It is to pre-empt the argument of future chapters somewhat, but one of the clearest examples of the male household head’s conception of their body as extended across his dependents comes from during the colonial period, in the 1920s: it is that of the father who cursed his uninitiated daughter for leaving the family home to join the Scottish mission with the pronouncement: “My body is not your body, my blood is not your blood, my flesh is not your flesh. You are not mine, you are dead, we are separated for ever and ever!”

A person’s “body,” in this way, did not simply connote the anatomical unit with a skin-surface. It could be extended over and incorporate other people, and things. By the same token personhood was not rigidly contained within the skin-walls of the anatomical body, it could extend into other persons. The Gikuyu social order comprised of multiple overlapping social “bodies.”

83 KED, 189; Kinoti, African Ethics, 34-36.
84 KED, 549.
85 KED, 454.
One of these was the *riika*; another was that of the localised household (as in the example above). Each could be described as a “body politic” though such a description risks glossing over the significant fact that they each invoke physical, corporeal bodies, rather than simply existing on a symbolic or metaphorical level.

A *riika*, for example, was a body born out of an *irua* ceremony. *Irua* ceremonies took place during one of the two harvest seasons, that is, upon the cessation of the *mbura ya mwere* (the rains of the millet) or *mbura ya njahi* (rains of the beans). Preparations for them were made at the start of the rains, a period that was referred to as *kĩhu* (the “big womb”). A *riika* ceremony did not happen every harvest. Rather, like mothers, regions would observe *mũhingo* (closed periods) sometimes across several successive harvests, in which no new *mariika* were born. The ceremonies were sponsored by a nominated elder man and elder woman who acted as “father” and “mother” in the rites before and after the initiation. The root word of *riika*, -ika meant “one.” The most romanticised descriptions of the *riika* present the candidates, having shared their blood during their cutting and having recovered in close-contact together, as emerging out of *irua* as a collective body, such that any physical threat to one of them was regarded as a physical threat to the other.

A general point of agreement in the sources is that *irua* forged a new blood-relation between them turning them into “brothers” and “sisters” such that even though they were not literally blood-related they became so, being prohibited, for instance, from marrying one another.

I now want to ask: if this really was the social order of late-nineteenth-century Gikuyuland, where did it come from? Who decided it? And how was it enforced? Posing, and attempting to answer this question, allows us to add a more critical, historical, dimension to the aforementioned rituals, practices, and conceptions of persons and bodies.

**Bodies and Power in nineteenth-century Gikuyuland**

Gikuyuland was settled during a long process, stretching back into the seventeenth century, by migrants who came from near and far, from the neighbouring Maasai and Kamba regions, from the Indian Ocean Coast and from the Great Lakes region to the south. They came as individuals or small bands, on foot, along valley floors; they cut paths into the dense forests, navigating the corrugated landscape with its deep ravines and fast flowing rivers. Using axes and iron crowbars, they hacked living spaces out of its wilderness, erecting thick, thorny, hedges and mud-clad fences to protect themselves and their dependents from the threatening wilderness – to separate, as it were, their emergent culture from external nature. It is thought it would have taken at least a year

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88 KED, 184, 386.
of such labour to clear sufficient land for a homestead, and a generation of slow, laborious labour subsequently to make a fertile, productive farm on such a settlement.\footnote{Leakey, \textit{Southern Kikuyu}, 168-169; Kershaw, \textit{Man Man From Below}, 18-31, 89; Lonsdale, \textit{“Moral Economy,”} 333.}

For a long time into the nineteenth century the small “communities” of the Gikuyu highlands relied on a “forest economy,” mixing agriculture and pastoralism with hunting and foraging.\footnote{Charles Ambler, \textit{Kenyan Communities in the Age of Imperialism: The Central Region in the Late Nineteenth Century} (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1988); Kershaw, \textit{Man Man From Below}, 20; Muriuki, \textit{A History of the Kikuyu}, 33.} When it came to eking out livelihoods and earning reputations in such an environment, bargaining and brokering played a more important role than violence, which seems to have been only episodic and small-scale. Deals were cut with hunter-gathers (the forests’ first occupiers) and between “pioneers” who made provisional pacts of allegiance and forged blood-brotherhood bonds to assist one another in the back-breaking work of hewing a homestead-village out of the dense woodland. The death toll was high.\footnote{Kershaw, \textit{Man Man From Below}, 25.} Hunger and starvation were not uncommon. Women and infants died in pregnancy. Perhaps as many as two-thirds of children died before puberty.\footnote{Leakey to KLCE, volume I, London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1934, 676.} Wild animals – leopards, elephants, snakes – were a perpetual threat. People were maimed or killed while hunting or felling trees. The forest that surrounded the settlements these “forerunners” established was a source of life, wealth, and power but it also threatened their very existence.

The living spaces they built were designed to defend the human life they contained against the encroaching of an unwanted, external, wilderness while at the same time providing limited points of access and entry into the wilderness which, after all, sustained life and was a potential source of wealth. A hut was an enclosure, within an enclosure (a homestead) (Figures 3 and 4). They were fenced-in, sealed up units. The entrance-points to the enclosures were few, and they were closely guarded. The entrance to a hut was called the “mũromo” which also means mouth, lips, gullet, oesophagus.\footnote{\textit{KED}, 403.} And, like the orifices of a human body, what passed into and out of these passages was closely monitored. Homesteads tended to vary between two and seven acres.\footnote{Kershaw, \textit{Man Man From Below}, 22-23} They were fenced off from the outer wilderness by a dense hedging and had one entrance. Inside was the household-head’s hut (thingira) and the wife or wives’ huts (nyumba) (Figure 4). Sons stood to inherit land around their mother’s hut; and their son would stand to inherit land around their mother’s hut, such that a productive, reproductive, homestead would “swell” over generations. These huts were circular, squat and windowless. The only noticeable opening was the minuscule hole in the heavily thatched roof which allowed but a small whisper of smoke to exit from the
hearth within. The mouth-doorways were tiny and well-concealed. Gikuyu huts and homesteads would strike the Europeans who first sighted them as indicative of their inhabitants’ shyness and suspicion. The darkness, defensiveness, crowdedness and smokiness of local spaces presented a disquieting challenge to modern European sensibilities which, as we know, during the corresponding time period had come to place immense emphasis on the productive value and disciplinary utility of spaces which were open and geometrically designed so as maximise the visibility of those inhabiting them.

Figure 11. “Subdivisions of a hut (Nyũmba).” Louis Leakey, Southern Kikuyu, 144.

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With no kingdom or centralised authority (unlike, for example, nearby Rwanda and Buganda, but like other societies in Eastern and Central Africa), Gikuyu was labelled a “stateless” or “acephalous” society by Europeans. The political system that emerged out of these forest settlements was characterised chiefly by a labyrinthine latticework of councils, or courts, run by male elders. These courts were called *ciama* (pl.), *kiama* (sing.). They debated and adjudicated on matters such as land disputes, debt-disagreements, accusations of witchcraft, assault, trespass, theft and murders; as we have seen, they also decided on when initiation ceremonies would take place.  

They were famously parochial. Their discussions were highly secretive, and their jurisdictions strictly localised, hence the saying *kiama gĩtirũgũa rũũ* “the Council does not jump across the river.” The smallest genre of court in terms of geographical scope appears to have been the *matura* courts which brought together representatives from a collection of homesteads within a given locality; there would have been thousands of *matura* courts throughout Gikuyuland. *Miaki* courts operated at a larger scale, comprising of representatives from a collection of local *matura* courts. The courts with the widest geographical scope were *ngo’ngo* courts – which roughly translates as “ridge” (or, hillside) courts. They comprised of representatives of a collection of *matura* courts. Furthermore, at each level – *matura, miaki, ngo’ngo* – there were junior and senior chambers; the latter occupied by the senior generation age-set, the latter occupied by men of the junior generation age-set. Gikuyu, as Greet Kershaw put it, did not enjoy equal access to decision-making. Although there were corresponding women’s courts the aforementioned *ciama* were, by all accounts, exclusively male institutions. They were the domain of the wealthy and the successful: being initiated, owning land, being married and having a child initiated appear to have been the prerequisites for accessing the most junior of courts.

In a very important sense, however, nobody “had power” in precolonial Gikuyuland. Rather, power emanated from outside the social order, swirling around, above and below persons. The work of elders in the various courts was less that of ordering and commanding and more that of attempting to direct, channel, and harness a power and force that was external to them and could never be fully known by them, as mere humans. Their work was not that of “mastery” but “management” – as Robert Blunt has neatly put it. Political decision making, as indeed with much quotidian social practice, involved then “an elaborate logic of gambling in which

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102 Blunt, “Kenyatta’s Lament.”
participants tried to manage and channel forces that were inherently “wild” and excessive.”\textsuperscript{104} In terms that resonate with Kenyatta’s statement on the “individual,” Blunt has described the political economy of Gikuyuland prior to colonial intrusion as one built upon a refusal of “the ontological centring of sovereignty.”\textsuperscript{105} Power could be directed and harnessed but it could never be contained or “possessed” by any one person or any single institution. Indeed the term mũthuuri ("elder") connoted not one who rules, but one who chooses, or one who decides between options.\textsuperscript{106}

\textit{Power} was, in this way, nature. It was that which was external to “culture” – society’s Other, civilisation’s Other. It was the “wilderness.” Or – more accurately – power was the excessive, unpredictable, potent force which inhered in nature, constantly threatening to become “wilderness” and engulf society if it was not harnessed appropriately. Yet it was also the stuff which made civilisation possible, the stuff on which society fed and got fat, and on which social reproduction depended. As such, nature was both society’s fuel and its perpetual menace. From this perspective, the rites, rituals, and practices discussed in the foregoing appear to have been mechanisms by which Gikuyu society, or at least its wealthy male elites, sought to manage and harness the power of nature.

Containing and comprised of the excessive, unpredictable “stuff” of nature, human bodies also demanded careful management but could never be fully mastered. Bodies were locations for a constant balancing act between incorporating and amassing something of nature’s power on the one hand, and emitting, and releasing it, on the other. The governance and management of bodies, as with much else in Gikuyu social, political, and moral practice was marked by a tension between knowing when it was necessary, appropriate and virtuous to retain, and when it was necessary, appropriate and virtuous to distribute. Human bodies were enclosures, with porous boundaries through which vital yet excessive substances could pass, and with openings into and out of which potentially life-giving and life-threatening substances entered and exited. Like homesteads, they were miniature civilisations, simultaneously energised and threatened to be engulfed by the wilderness that surrounded them.

\textit{Civil and uncivil bodies in the wilderness}

The destructive force of the wilderness was manifest in \textit{thahu} – which was, by all accounts, a spectre of immense significance in the guiding of persons’ behaviours, their organisation of space, their management of their bodies, their habits, and their interactions with substances and with others.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{104} ibid. 171.
\textsuperscript{106} KED, 532; Cavicchi, \textit{Problems of Change}, 17.
\textsuperscript{107} Leakey, \textit{Southern Kikuyu}, 1232-1280.
That European colonial arrivals had a great difficulty attempting to comprehend and translate thahu was in no small part due to their modernist conceptions of the person as an individual, rational agent with an individual, anatomical body. Trying to understand thahu, various colonials spoke to elders, mission-converts, healers and sorcerers; in typically colonial fashion they attempted to compile comprehensive, exhaustive lists of what “caused” it. But such was the extensiveness and slipperiness of its power, thahu defied being contained in a straightforward definition. Thahu was a “psycho-somatic ailment”; it materialised in all manner of afflictions including madness, skin eruptions, weariness, emaciation, unstoppable lactation, diarrhoea, constipation and could be fatal if not removed. Yet they also knew that thahu was not exclusive to human bodies – that land could also become thahu drying-up and going barren; that livestock could become thahu and perish; that homesteads could become thahu and contaminate the things that lived in them. Thahu leaked out of the bodies of afflicted persons, it was in their breath, skin, hair, and bodily fluids, and was highly contagious. Thahu was not, however, straightforwardly a “disease”: it was also, as a number of definitions put it, “ceremonial uncleanness,” a state of moral defilement. It could be caused by all manner of circumstances ranging from misbehaviour to ill-luck to curses to ancestral displeasure.108

Charles Hobley, an early provincial commissioner of Kikuyu Province, compiled sixty-two scenarios that were thahu.109 They included the following. If a woman who had assisted at a birth cohabited with a man before the end of the umbilical cord of the newly born child had shrivelled up and come away, and before she had ceremonially bathed herself, the new-born would become thahu.110 If a man killed someone and then ate with a family in their hut, the people with whom he had eaten would become thahu and the skin on which he slept would be thahu and could infect anyone else sleeping on it.111 If a person touched menstrual blood they were thahu.112 If a goat came up to a group of people and tried to suckle a women’s breast, the woman would be thahu.113 If the side pole of a bedstead broke, the person lying on it would be thahu.114 If domestic animals were attacked and stung by bees, the animals were thahu.115 If a woman was carrying a gourd on her back and it fell and broke, she would be thahu.116 If a cow licked a stool upon which a woman had been

109 Hobley, “British East Africa.”
110 *ibid*. 430.
111 *ibid*. 431.
112 *ibid*. 433.
113 *ibid*. 434.
114 *ibid*. 435.
115 *ibid*. 436.
116 *ibid*. 434.
sitting, the woman’s husband would become thahu and all the other people in the village would become thahu.\textsuperscript{117} If the droppings of a bird fall on a person, the person would be thahu.\textsuperscript{118} A person could make a whole village thahu by breaking a cooking pot on the ground and uttering the curse urokiwo uwe “Die like this.”\textsuperscript{119} Fathers could make their sons thahu by cursing them with the expression “may you be eaten by my anus.”\textsuperscript{120} Corpses were thahu.\textsuperscript{121} Touching a dead-body could make a person thahu but so could simply being proximate to one or sitting in a place where a person had died. Because hyenas fed on human remains, their dung was thahu and if a hyena defecated in a homestead, the homestead would become thahu.\textsuperscript{122}

Colonials generally interpreted the scenarios which brought about thahu as moments when a “tribal code” was violated, or when a “taboo” was broken; hence their representations of Gikuyu society as a society governed by all sorts of rules and codes and proscriptions. But what colonials took for fixed “codes” and eternal “rules” appear to have been, rather, the multiple and diverse strategies by which persons in Gikuyuland sought to manage the power of nature which, being fundamentally excessive and Other, could never be totally contained. Thahu was not a stable, predictable, punishment issued to persons upon their breaking of a known rule. It did not function according to stable rules or codes. A person could become thahu without knowing it, for instance by behaviour of a relative. And thahu could take on radically different forms, sometimes coming on suddenly, other times lying “dormant” in a person for a long period of time, perhaps even never showing itself.

The procedures to remove thahu were costly, complex, and corporeal.\textsuperscript{123} Typically, they involved the exchange of gifts (goats, sheep, gourds of porridge, milk, honey, beer) between contaminated persons, their relatives, the healers, and local elders; and the sacrificial slaughtering of sometimes several goats or other livestock.\textsuperscript{124} All of these literal and metaphorical lubricants appear to have “unlocked” the affliction, easing the potency of thahu redeeming relations between persons. Most forms of thahu however, were further and finally ridded by a purgative ceremony performed by a m"undo m"iko (literally: “magic person.” More commonly: “medicine man,” pl and"u ago). Like the elders in the kiama courts, the work of and"u ago was less that of mastering and

\textsuperscript{117} ibid. 434.
\textsuperscript{118} ibid. 436.
\textsuperscript{119} ibid. 435.
\textsuperscript{120} ibid. 436.
\textsuperscript{121} ibid. 430.
\textsuperscript{122} ibid. 434.
\textsuperscript{123} Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, 290-296; Leakey, Southern Kikuyu, 1232-1280; Hobley, “British East Africa,” 441-442.
\textsuperscript{124} KED, 115.
commanding but rather that of speculatively engaging with the uncertain power of nature, attempting to manage it by harnessing, directing and channeling its force.

A purging ceremony to rid thahu aimed to restore the balance of an afflicted body. These ndahikio (vomiting) ceremonies invoked and relied upon open “porous” bodies comprised of hot/cold essences. A person with thahu was hot. By rubbing a substance comprised primarily of tatha (the undigested contents of a sacrificed ruminant’s stomach) onto the contaminated person(s) face, lips, and tongue, the mĩgo induced heavy vomiting. It is understood that tatha was used because ruminants fed mainly on leaves which were understood as coolants. The mĩgo also doused the contaminated persons with white-coloured cooling powders such as the ira and ndago used in the ceremony after child-birth referred to earlier. Like the mother who had given birth and the candidates after initiation, a purged person had their head shaved by the mũgo and bathed in a river before being declared clean. Not all forms of thahu were removed in such a way. For instance, thahu contracted by coming into contact with menstrual blood could be treated by the person themselves, by plastering onto the part of their body that the blood had touched the same “hot” red ochreous earth that aanake smeared on their bodies – fighting fire with fire as it were. The ceremony that removed thahu from a woman whose husband had died involved her having full sexual intercourse with another man. Notably, Kenyatta in his description of a “typical” purging ceremony sets it within a homestead. After making the person vomit, the mũgo similarly sprinkles tatha on the courtyard (the belly of the homestead, as it were) before theatrically sweeping it out of the entrance.

Thahu and its attendant practices was just one aspect of a precarious lived world in which fortune, fertility, and fatness were never fully secured and could at any moment unexpectedly and inexplicably evaporate. Indeed, against the glamorised portrayal of such figures as the mwanake and the muthuri, Gikuyu folklore provided a host of counter-images of bodily ruin, sometimes with implicit warnings about the importance of upright behaviour: the warrior Gĩthĩngĩra (lit. “big-as-a-man’s-house”) who finds himself cold and weak and loses his ability to jump, run and throw after having sex with a Maasai woman stolen in a raid; the skilled but boastful hunter Ngucungucu whose skin turns to an oily, gluey, substance after being cursed for killing a protected

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126 Leakey, Southern Kikuyu, 1175-1180.
128 Leakey, Southern Kikuyu, 943-953.
129 Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, 294.
deer, the adventurous child who innocently gets lost in the bush only to then find their bodily appendages begin to crumble apart and their body disintegrate.

The wealth, abundance, and cultivation that some managed to generate, was generated against the ever-present threats of famine, plagues, and pestilence – threats that could strike randomly and that could be just as deleterious for the rich and powerful as for the poor and weak even if they did hit the latter harder. Locust infestations, cattle-plagues, and epidemics that hit periodically during the 1800s intensified during the final decade of the century, due to disruptions caused by colonial intrusion. The prevalent diseases manifest themselves in ways that were visceral and shocking. Mũtũngu, mũcari and mangu (smallpox, yaws, and leprosy respectively) were conditions that left victims permanently disfigured, resulting in blistered, ulcerated, or rotting skin, blindness and the loss of appendages and limbs. Others – gatema (dysentery), mahindi (rheumatism), gonorrhoea, bilharzia – emptied persons from the inside out, bringing on unstoppable bodily flows, chilling persons to the core, causing wastage, emaciation and infertility.

This highly charged, potent, uncertain lived-world in which bodies might at any moment “become wilderness” seems to have been generative of a social order which demanded of persons an unceasing vigilance in relation to the substances of their bodies. There was, by all accounts a wide-ranging and detailed set of rules and proscriptions when it came to self-care, in particular the management of bodily effluvia. According to the ethnographic literature mucus, faeces, urine, semen, blood, menstrual blood, were regarded as filthy fluids that had to be handled carefully or set apart from daily life: no initiated adult could ever urinate or defecate within the boundaries of their homestead, nor blow their nose in a way that left mucus on their bodies; such evacuations had to take place quickly, cleanly, privately, and in dense forest areas away from human life. The courtyards of the homesteads were, apparently, swept regularly and thoroughly; those who could afford to do so would plant sweet-smelling flowers in their yards. We are told that rivers near settlements were strictly segmented into areas for collecting water for cooking and areas for bathing; and that menstruating women were forbidden from entering. There were, seemingly

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131 Holding, “Death, Death Rituals, Spirits and Ngai.”
134 Leakey, Southern Kikuyu, 894-895.
135 Leakey, Southern Kikuyu, 895.
136 ibid. 389, 390, 391.
strong anxieties around semen; while it was a life-generating, blood-like, substance which could strengthen unborn children, it also had destructive potential; an uncontrolled emission substantially weakened a man; semen spilt on an ox-hide mat during intercourse could make both partners thabu.  

If the foregoing rules and codes of conduct concerned bodily flows, a whole other set governed skin surfaces and bodily borders. Apparently, a person with dry, dirty skin, body hair and facial hair was regarded with caution for this was a sign that they may have incurred thabu, or that they might by their lack of self-regard incur it.  

And, likewise, the ethnographic record speaks of how unwashed odorous bodies were regarded with disgust; it is purported that nobody kept close company with a person who sweated freely and did not bathe.  

We are told of the great efforts to which people went to have skin that was ūkuhe (polished), that they made it smooth and shiny by regularly applying castor oil or rendered mutton fat; that hard skin on the soles of the feet was scraped off with rough stones. We are told of the special nguri tweezers old men used to pluck out facial hair; that men and women “shaved” their chests, armpits, legs, and arms by applying thick coatings of wet mud to the skin, allowing it to dry, and scraping it off with a sharp knife.  

The potent threat of the wilderness further seems to have given rise to a social order that placed great emphasis on male power and on bodies that were fat, muscular, durable, and capable of generating wealth out of the wilderness. When John Lonsdale alerted us to this in his classic essay on “Wealth, Poverty and Civic Virtue” in Gikuyu political thought, he did so by pointing out the strong linkages in Gikuyu idiom between physical strength, capacity to labour and moral virtue. Indeed, Gikuyu vocabulary is striking in this regard and a number of examples can be added to those given by Lonsdale. The stock word for man, or husband, for instance, was mũrũme, rooted in the word – ūrũme “quality of being male, masculinity, virility, bravery, valour, daring, fearlessness.”  

Woman, by contrast, was mutumia “one whose lips are sealed” or muthoni “one
who is bashful and polite.” Elders – the ṭhunuĩ – were atongoria (sing. mìtongoria) which meant “fat ones,” and anene (sing. mìnene) “big men.” A mìrìngarì was “a well-built person” and a “righteous person”; its root verb -rũng meaunt “straighten, put straight, make upright.” Ûthingu, which meant “honesty,” or “blameless conduct, honour, purity,” connoted physical “uprightness.”

Conversely, there was a strong linkage between physically weak persons and poor, failed, unreliable persons: as if being the former necessarily condemned a person to being the latter. A gìtharara was a “lanky, weedy, person” but it also meant “lean, scraggy, ram which fails to fatten” and an unstable “person of weak character.” An njara mboko which literally meant “somebody with a permanent crook in the arm,” could also mean simply “a lazy person.” Mìthoka and mìthoro terms that connoted a weak, thin, emaciated persons of poor physique could also be used to refer to persons who were impoverished or unproductive. A gìthayo primarily meant “lazy person” but it could equally be used to refer to a person born with a physical defect. It meant “freak offspring” or “monstrosity.” It was rooted in the word -thayo which had two meanings: “lazy, indolent” and “barren, sterile.”

Proverbs scorned indolence: “Those who say ‘I will do’, become people who do nothing.” “Oxen are not found through laziness,” “Goats are not bananas (which are given for free).” Urutago mwìruti went another – “help comes to he who helps himself,” or “help comes to the person who works for it.” Indeed, the principal villains of normative Gikuyu society appear to have been those who lacked the desire or ability to help themselves, those who were unwilling or incapable of working the wilderness, or those whose physical condition prevented them from doing so. A mìbùthia, for example, a slack, careless, negligent person; someone who was supine, indolent, easy-going – the root verb of which, bùtha meant to “be light in weight, be thin […] be weak in body; be poor, penurious.” The terminology for those who were blind seems strikingly callous; indeed as one elder told Louis Leakey, “a blind person is practically a dead person, he can

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150 Kershaw, Mau Mau From Below, 68.
151 KED, 420.
152 KED, 514; Kinoti, African Ethics, 60-71, 110, 144.
154 KED, 495-496.
155 KED, 14.
156 KED, 524, 526, 525.
157 KED, 498.
159 KED, 20.
160 KED, 180.
no longer walk about, work, fight, or see people and things.”  

Idiom connected their physical condition to their liability in the wilderness. A blind person was a *morori* which meant a “straggler, a stray animal,” “couch grass,” “a kind of low, creeping plant apparently with no beginning or end.” Or they were a *miitorori* which meant “vagabond” or one who wanders aimlessly. There was an equally disparaging vocabulary for old, infirm, bodies, especially those of old women: a *kigigita* was a very old woman, a person who is heavy and ungraceful in movement; “*kiheti*” could be used to refer to a woman past child-bearing age or “a very old, shrivelled up cow.”

Whether real, imagined or invented, it seems the threat of the uncertain power of the wilderness was generative of a set of normative ideas about what “good” conduct was, and what a “civilised” body looked like. These ideas and practices played upon a particular conception of the human body in terms of its integrity as a whole, enclosed “container” and in terms of its capacities to accumulate hold and retain power and substance, and the propensity of its substances to flow and to dry-up. This is a point to which I will return in the final chapter of this thesis, when such imagery was drawn on heavily by a generation of mission-educated Gikuyu as they began to imagine their nascent ethnic nation as a body politic. For the present purposes it suffices to note that in the social order of nineteenth-century Gikuyuland, there was a particular pathologisation of those whose corporeal state threatened to let wilderness into civilisation and who, as such, threatened civilisation with their own wilderness. Bodies that threatened to leak or become unruly, on account of their weakened or ruptured skin-surfaces or unruly orifices were regarded with caution. Persons who could not control their bodily flows and those whose bodies lacked substantial volume were stigmatised.

**Wiathi**

By the turn of the century a particular social order had emerged in Gikuyuland. This social order was one with strong normative conceptions of the ideal body, strong normative conceptions about social rank, roles, gender and generation, and strong normative conceptions about who did and who did not qualify as a respectable, upright person. Within this social order it seems that the highest ideal, or highest state-of-being, was *wiathi*. *Wiathi*, as the authors of the *Kikuyu-English Dictionary* defined it, was “self-will,” “independence, self-determination, freedom, self-government.” Thus the noun *mwiiathi* connoted “a self-willed person” or a “free, independent

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162 *KED*, 525.
163 *KED*, 464.
164 *KED*, 525.
166 *KED*, 194.
person; one not subject to the orders of another.” Its root word, -atha meant “to command, order, rule, discipline, control,” the reflexive verb was ãtha to “be one’s own master, rule or control oneself; go one’s own way, be wilful, be wayward, be free.”

ĩatha connoted self-discipline and self-flourishing. A group of Gikuyu men in the inter-war period defined it as “doing one’s work without someone lording over him,” and “doing according to his [own] wishes.” It was famously invoked by Mau Mau, during the anti-colonial struggles of the 1950s, whose slogan ithubaka na wĩathi was commonly rendered “land and freedom.” Analysis of the term forms a central part of John Lonsdale’s work on Gikuyu moral economies. Lonsdale has convincingly demonstrated that the term is best understood as “moral agency” or “self-mastery.” A person who was wĩathi was a person who was free to act as they decided. In this sense, wĩathi could be said to connote full personhood – or complete, or whole, personhood – within the normative schema of turn-of-the-century Gikuyuland.

It is not at all clear whether wĩathi was a virtue open to women, nor whether, if so, it was something that women could achieve independently of men. Conventional accounts present wĩathi as a masculine achievement which was dependent on getting married, acquiring land, and having children who were initiated; it is presented as the final destination of a the good, upright man’s journey through life – as something that was achieved or arrived at in old age, through the accumulation of people and things and while overcoming certain hurdles along the way, especially the hurdle of initiation. Following John Lonsdale’s work, it could be said that, in terms of moral and political thought among turn-of-the-century Gikuyu, there were, principally, two main competing ideal conceptions of how a man might become wĩathi. On the one hand, there was the view that wĩathi was secured steadily and over time through patience, obedience, and hard work. In this view wĩathi was a good thing that came to those who waited. A young person could work towards achieving it by constantly and vigilantly behaving and managing their self and their body in a way that was upright, by fulfilling the purported duties that were applicable to their life-stage, and by being deferential to their seniors. On the other hand, there was the “frontier” mentality which championed speculative investment, risky migration, and – if necessary – disobedience and dissent. If its rival argument championed the hard, sustained, labour of the pioneers who first set about taming the wilderness, this ideal conception championed their initial flight, and their willingness to seek to make opportunities out of danger. In this view, achieving wĩathi meant the same upright behaviour and careful management of the body and its substances but it also meant breaking away from one’s kin and challenging one’s seniors. The first ideal rooted progress in

166 KED, 18.
continuity and encouraged a theory of time that was linear. The later by contrast championed the productive capacity of ruptures and breaks, and saw virtue in radical discontinuity. Both conceptions, but especially the latter, were to become important dynamics in informing the movement of Gikuyu to mission stations during the colonial period.

Seemingly premised upon a strong conception of the person (if indeed only the male person) as an individual autonomous agent and, furthermore, appearing to exalt the self-flourishing of the individual as a moral, social and political good, the concept of ḳiathí apparently stands in direct contradiction to the claim made by Kenyatta at the start of this chapter that, prior to the arrival of Gikuyuland’s colonisers, Gikuyu neither valued nor even recognised individuality. Indeed, ḳiathí productively complicates conventional narratives of modernity and globalisation which purport that individualised modes of personhood, embodiment and subjectivity are exclusive to modern, industrial “Western” societies. It is a useful corrective to the simplistic contention that “individualism” is the exclusive preserve and essence of modern Western societies, and “communalism” is the exclusive preserve and essence of societies in the pre-industrial “Rest.” Nevertheless, while it is not the case that Gikuyu had no conception of individuality prior to colonialism, there seems to have been much about ḳiathí that indexes some of the important and distinctive ways in which Gikuyu perceived of individuals, and their place in the wider social order.

There was, it seems, no straightforward or automatic route to securing ḳiathí and moreover, that even once “secured” ḳiathí could be quickly lost. Attaining ḳiathí was like the inverse of avoiding ṭhahu: it appears to have had as much to do with the fortuitous constellation of circumstances as it did the individual’s conscious and deliberate upright behaviour. As Lonsdale’s work (and, subsequently, Derek Peterson’s) attests, it is perhaps better to see the above-mentioned two conceptions of the route to ḳiathí less as pure, eternal, exclusive opposites, and more as potential strategies that might be pursued by a given person during their life-course depending on their situation and circumstances at the time. Kenyatta’s statement should not be dismissed too readily. For achieving ḳiathí in practice seems in fact to have relied on a de-centring of the individual and the recognition of their precarious place in a world that was potent and unpredictable.

The two purported routes to ḳiathí speak to the twin but opposing virtues of Gikuyu moral thought and corporeal practice of enclosure and rupture, retention and release, accumulation and speculative investment. On the one hand there was the virtue of the sealed-off homestead, the enclosed body, and the individual accumulator: these all seem to have been recognised as necessary for being and becoming ḳiathí but not sufficient. A well-thatched hut within a well-fenced homestead, like a body with a well-maintained skin-wall and disciplined orifices, seems to have
been regarded as the foundation of self-flourishing. Gikuyu vocabulary is indicative of this. The word *gita* could be used as an adjective to refer to that which was bushy, dense, closely packed, closed up or a person who guarded their privacy and was “self-contained.” The verb *kĩgita* – “to thatch,” “roof-in,” “fix top of a structure,” “cover-up” – was also “be prosperous,” and “become self-satisfied.” The word *thunga* similarly linked enclosed dwellings with upright bodies and inner virtue. It meant “fasten, tie up well, tighten, make strong, strengthen,” and it meant “be compact, closed, complete, be fat sleek, well-rounded, without wrinkles.” Its adjectival form *thungĩru* meant “strong, purposeful, well-rounded, full-bodied, flourishing, prosperous.” The noun *ũthungĩru* meant “integrity, purposefulness, honesty.”

Like the individual person in relation to their body, it was the duty of the householder to keep the insides of their container clean, and to judiciously manage the flow of what came in and what came out. Whether in terms of human bodies or homesteads, ensuring that the boundaries between outsides and insides were secure and the entry/exit points guarded was recognised as a condition for survival and for accumulation in the forest wilderness. In both respects, the aim appears to have been to keep the potentially excessive and unruly power of nature at bay while providing the tiny openings that would allow for its force to be channelled and tapped for human growth and flourishing. But knowing when to open and when to close, what to let in and what to let out was – to borrow Blunt’s imagery from earlier – a speculative gamble in which participants aimed to manage and channel forces that were, ultimately, recognised to be beyond the complete mastery of humans. The connection between the body-enclosure and the homestead-enclosure was more than symbolic and analogous. The health and vitality of the former depended on the integrity of the latter. During the epidemics of the end of the nineteenth century, the spread of diseases was checked as healthy homesteads closed their entrance-points to outsiders whose bodily flows were known to pose a threat. As Leakey’s diagrams referred to above show, the ideal homestead of normative Gikuyu thought and practice was one that swelled up over time from within. It provided the conditions for its inhabitants to produce and reproduce; like a well-managed body it brimmed with life, grew fat and threatened to burst at the seams.

Of course such fatness could not be secured by implementing a completely defensive posture to the outer wilderness; being totally sealed-off from it was neither possible nor desirable. Such a strategy would entail blocking persons off from vital, life-supporting, energies, threatening withering and starvation. At the same time if individual accumulation and private growth through

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168 KED, 112; on *gita* see: Derek Peterson “Be Like Firm Soldiers,” 73.
169 KED, 530.
enclosure and labour was recognised as a route to \textit{wĩathi}, excessive accumulation and retention seems to have been regarded as a moral and social evil and a potential route to losing self-mastery. The individual accumulator occupied a virtuous, vital place in the social order but was also a threat to it. To borrow imagery harnessed by Lonsdale, they were like the fig tree of Gikuyu fable which appeared in two forms, as a majestic, life-source and as a parasite, which grew fat and strong by suffocating the smaller trees that first gave it life.\textsuperscript{171} It was the civic duty of those who were wealthy, fat and healthy, to humbly acknowledge the fragility of their amassed fortune and, furthermore, to provide entry-points back into the economic order to those whose stock had emptied but were willing to work to restore it. As we catch sight of in Kenyatta’s statement on the individual, the status and authority of the “self-made man” was constantly checked and balanced by the moral requirement for them to share. In any case, distributing their wealth was a means by which they incorporated others into their body, built social relations and reproduced their status and authority; like the “dividual” defined by Marriott, in order to sustain \textit{wĩathi} the person was required to both absorb others and “give out” from themselves.

Some called it “\textit{tha}” – which loosely translates as the showing of kindness or generosity.\textsuperscript{172} In its most concrete form it found expression in the household head giving land rights to those categorised as \textit{aboi} (“strangers,” “wanderers,” “supplicants”; sing. \textit{miũhio}).\textsuperscript{173} Through such action a man and perhaps his dependents who found themselves landless, impoverished, or expelled from their own kin could hope to be reborn into a new household. Under new patronage the tenant and his family could, under some circumstances, even acquire the status of a “son.” It was at least an avenue through which he might himself become \textit{wĩathi}. Some such \textit{aboi} may well have come from wealthy households where the rate of productivity and accumulation had created so great a swelling within the borders of the family land that they stood to inherit little land. The other option facing such men was to break out of the homestead in which they had grown up and seek new, unbroken, unclaimed land elsewhere establishing themselves as a household head in the process. For such men the dilemma, it seems, was to stay or to leave – to remain within the family or undergo the risky and potentially painful process of separation in order to avoid growing stale, being constrained, suffocated or starved. As one Gikuyu proverb put it “staying in the castor oil tree causes the pigeon to grow hungry.”\textsuperscript{174} Like the swollen body purged and re-born through initiation, such separation and flight held out the possibility for personal progress and renewal.

\textsuperscript{171} G.W. Gachoka, “A parable,” \textit{Muigwithania} 1:11 (April 1929); \textit{KLCE}: 153-4; \\
\textsuperscript{172} Kershaw, \textit{Mau Mau from Below}, 37. \\
\textsuperscript{173} For \textit{aboi} see: \textit{KED}, 161; Kenyatta \textit{Facing Mount Kenya}, 30-37. \\
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued for a way in between competing conceptions of “communality” and “individuality” which have underpinned myths of Gikuyu identity, as well as the interrelated dichotomy of “civilization” and “chaos” which has underpinned historical understanding of Gikuyu political and social systems. This middle-way rests on a nuanced understanding of mastery, not as achieving complete isolation from the external world and exercising complete control over wilderness, but as successful management of the wild’s powerful and potentially dangerous flow of energies. Whereas existing scholarship has focused on ideas and political and moral thought, I have focused on social practice, particularly bodily practice. I have paid special attention to the apparently stringent and influential moral, physical and hygienic codes which surrounded persons and their bodies with expectations about uprightness and civility. I have argued that Gikuyu individuals, as they passed through life, underwent periodic moments of purging, transformation and renewal – moments which were potentially fraught and painful but which re-made them and secured their status as persons.

Methodologically, I have attempted to ask new questions of familiar sources, attempting to re-read colonial-era ethnographic material in order to make informed speculations about the understandings of the body and the person in Gikuyuland around the turn of the century, on the eve of the colonial period, when the missionaries of the Church of Scotland began their work. The source material is problematic: it presents Gikuyuland as a homogenous, hermetically-sealed location; it reproduces an image of Gikuyu society as static and unchanging; and the lens it provides onto the Gikuyu past is heavily tainted by the perspective of the male elders who wielded power and influence. Nevertheless I hope to have shown in this chapter that when handled carefully there is a richness to the source material that can be exploited to yield some significant, if provisional, insights into the lived world of Gikuyuland around 1900.

My aim has been to document and describe some of the principal rites, practices, and ideas about persons and their bodies that were to become central points of contest in the encounter with the missionaries of the CSM: in particular, those surrounding birth, *irua* (or, initiation), and *thahu*. But, more than that, I have sought to go beyond simply describing and detailing specific rites and practices and offer, in addition, broader, provisional, claims about the nature of bodies and persons in Gikuyuland and their apparent place in the region’s wider social order. It was not simply with respect to their “body practices” and their “expectations” about what constituted a civilised body that Gikuyu would come into conflict with the missionaries of the CSM. Porous, changing in substance over time and sheltering multiple persons, the body itself was understood,
lived-in and inhabited in ways that were profoundly different to the western, biomedical, atomised bodies belonging to the incoming colonisers.

I began this chapter with a quotation from Jomo Kenyatta who argued that prior to the colonial period Gikuyu did not exist as embodied individuals. The aspects of late-nineteenth century Gikuyu social and physical culture that I have explored in this chapter explain why it was possible for Kenyatta to make such a claim. Simultaneously, they at times also testify to pronounced conceptions of individuality. I have drawn particular attention to the apparently stringent and influential moral, physical and hygienic codes which surrounded persons and their bodies with expectations about uprightness and civility. I have argued that Gikuyu individuals, as they passed through life, underwent periodic moments of purging, transformation and renewal – moments which were potentially fraught and painful but which re-made them and secured their status as persons.
3. Gikuyu Through Missionary Eyes

Representations of Gikuyuland and Gikuyu bodies recur throughout the CSM archive. They are particularly prevalent in the CSM’s own print journal, *Kikuyu News* – which, authored by the missionaries in Gikuyuland for Scottish audiences, in part to solicit donations, comprised chiefly of monthly reports as well as anecdotes from “the field” (Figure 1). CSM representations of Gikuyuland, particularly those in *Kikuyu News* constitute the main primary sources of this chapter, which is about the ways in which the missionaries of the CSM viewed, and made visible, the people they sought to convert. The chapter is not only concerned with exploring and unpacking CSM attitudes towards Gikuyu and Gikuyu physical culture, but also with considering the ways in which the missionaries made legible, and comprehensible, the people, bodies, and landscapes of the Gikuyu highlands.

Focussing on initial encounters between CSM missionaries and Gikuyu, during the early periods of CSM work in the Gikuyu highlands, the chapter offers a cultural history of the extension of missionary activity into a part of colonial Africa that was, from a European perspective, “unknown” and “unfamiliar.” The chapter is about how missionaries dealt with this lack of knowledge and un-familiarity and how they sought to overcome it. I use *Kikuyu News* articles that describe the surveying of new lands for a mission station, tours of the country, visits to villages and homesteads. I describe how the missionaries sought to gain knowledge about the customs, habits, and beliefs of the people they sought to convert. I am less concerned with a specific time period, and more interested in the multiple occasions when the CSM extended its reach into Gikuyuland; new “encounters” and “first impressions” were recurring, repetitive features of missionary work and happened continuously throughout the period in question.

My aim in this chapter is not to provide a social history of the establishment of the CSM in Gikuyuland, but to explore and interrogate the idioms of CSM thought and practice – to show the ways in which the missionaries of the CSM conceptualised their work, their surroundings, and, in particular, Gikuyu people. The sources examined in this chapter show that if other colonisers

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1 *Kikuyu News* ran from 1908 to 1958. Complete collections of the journal can be consulted at EUL and PCEA.
3 Horace Philp, “First Impressions of Kikuyu,” KN, 19 (May 1910); Mary Mure, “Impressions,” KN, 38, (October 1912); George Grieve “First Impressions,” KN, 76 (May 1911); Evelyn Arthur, “First Impressions,” KN, 80 (June 1922).
in early twentieth-century Kenya were content to leave in the dark that domain of existence colonial discourse termed “native life” — to govern it through force and sovereign power — missionaries were not. A primary aspect of this colonial mission was the continuous bid to “open up” and “gain access to” the inner worlds of the colonised population. Through textual descriptions and through material processes, missionaries of the CSM strove to extend visibility over the Gikuyu highlands, into the forests and homesteads and into the souls of the individuals of the population.

Figure 13. An example of Kikuyu News. Front cover of June 1909 issue.

The Conquest State

Unlike the nineteenth-century missionaries whom they heroized the CSM operated in a context where the colonial state was near its most elaborate. In Gikuyuland, as elsewhere in Africa, the colonial state began as a “conquest state” and conquest remained part of its character throughout the colonial period. “Conquest states,” in John Lonsdale’s famous formulation, “wielded force outside daily life rather than persuasive power within.” An indication of weakness more than strength, and a signal of its slender resources, the conquest state ruled through overt displays of authority, through domination and submission. Curbing the growth of civil society, they lacked political constraints and as a result lacked “social purchase.” Conquest states, Lonsdale writes, did “not enjoy moral mastery.”

Coercively imposed from without, the initial purpose of the conquest state was to gain a monopoly on trade between the Indian Ocean and the kingdom of Uganda. Motivated by extracting wealth from the conquered land and linking colony to metropole, the state’s presence was spatially concentrated at nodal points and along arterial trade networks: the ports of Mombasa and Kisumu, the trading and administrative station along the Mombasa-Uganda railway. The conquest state wielded sovereign, almost medieval, power, threatening death rather than promising to enhance life. Its authority was exercised through episodic displays of brute force.

The first official British presence in Gikuyuland were the soldiers of the King’s African Rifles who, at the start of the twentieth century, along with Maasai auxiliaries, ventured northwards from the fortified stations established by the raiding parties of the Imperial British East Africa Company in the 1890s (along the Uganda Railway line, and at Fort Hall). They aimed not to civilise but to subdue. In February 1904, a skirmish near Nyeri saw British forces kill, officially, 400 Gikuyu but it is possible the figure was as high as 1,500. In March 1904 there were incursions in Embu, on the eastern slopes of Mount Kenya, which resulted in more deaths and over 1,000 casualties.
In the same region in June that year, the British killed 407 “enemies” and confiscated 10,000 livestock.\textsuperscript{10} In what would become Meru District, “pacification” violence and stock-thieving continued on a large scale up to 1910: there are records of three separate incidents in 1909, and two the year later in which it is noted that “several” were killed by British parties.\textsuperscript{11}

The conquest state in Gikuyuland emerged out of alliances between government officials and local “big men” who increasingly came to personify and embody its power in the interior. Of inauspicious origins these men had risen to prominence during the 1880s and early 1890s as brokers of Swahili trade, generating wealth which protected them from the ravages of the great famine of 1899-1900. Made “chiefs” by the British (an office hitherto unknown in the region) they were increasingly looked upon less as allies and more as subservient agents of the state, charged with using their own men to maintain order and recruit labour in their areas.\textsuperscript{12}

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the colonial state was not marked by a particular interest in making its subject populations visible and legible – it lacked a “will to know.”\textsuperscript{13} “Native life” was not a component of its governance, it was something to be left alone and dealt with (and typically through violence) only when it was an obstruction to profit. The conquest state was not (\textit{à la} Foucault) interested in producing individual and self-regulating subjectivities nor maximising and nurturing the bodily life of its citizens.

**In search of populations: the establishment of Kikuyu, Tumutumu and Chogoria**

As the colonial state was being established in Gikuyuland, missionaries of various denominations travelled through the country in search of potential converts. In 1898 at Kikuyu, ten miles west of what would become Nairobi, the Scottish missionaries established the first mission station in the highland interior of the Protectorate. In 1908, they extended their crusade sixty miles north, to Tumutumu. Fourteen years’ later, in 1922, they opened their third mission station at Chogoria in the administrative district of Chuka-Mwimbi.

As far as the missionaries of the CSM saw it, colonisation provided an opportunity to win souls for Christ. A seemingly paradoxical position, the colonial-evangelical project of the CSM was conceived by the missionaries as one that would harness the denial of political sovereignty

\textsuperscript{11} W. Allen, Assistant District Commissioner for Chuka, “Particulars of Chuka Sub-District,” (6 March 1918), KNA VQ 1/29/12.
enforced by colonial rule to “liberate” colonised Africans spiritually. Though the emerging system of government and labour had its flaws, it also provided the stability and order that would facilitate the extension of civilisation and Christianity. On the one hand, they would protect “the natives” from the extreme end of settler exploitation. On the other, they would work within, and to an extent “use,” the colonial system as a means of delivering the Good News, turning African heathens into modern enlightened Christians.

What stimulated them above all, as they moved into and then around Gikuyuland during the first decades of the twentieth century was the prospect of taking civilization and Christianity to thousands and thousands of supposedly “raw” and “untouched” African people. Each of their three mission stations was established with the hope of tapping into a “densely populated” region where they would be in contact with “unspoilt” people. The missionaries of the CSM sustained and perpetuated older, Victorian, imperial images of themselves as quaint yet adventurous pioneers who were taking the beacon of civilisation and progress to a dark corner of the world that had hitherto been shut out of History.

As they explored the country and probed their surroundings, seeking out more and more prehistoric people to whom they might bring into the light of their eternal, universal message, they repeatedly re-presented themselves in the loftiest of terms as agents of change, heralds of modernity, initiators and bringers of progress. The distinctively futuristic, improving, developmental narrative of salvation and uplift that they propagated made the missionaries of the CSM distinctive among colonisers in this part of Africa, where colonialism primarily meant submission, limitation, and brutality. At the same time, however, it was an imagery that relied upon and reinforced racist images of Africa and Africans that emphasised their inadequacy, deficiency, and backwardness.

When Doctor Arthur and Marion Stevenson arrived in Gikuyuland, in early 1907, plans were being made by the missionaries at Kikuyu station to expand their work northwards. The head of the mission, the muscular mystic David Clement Scott, had been receiving prophetic visions that the Kikuyu base marked the first link in a great chain of mission stations reaching all the way into Abyssinia.  
The dreams intensified as Clement Scott approached his death, from complications associated with deep vein thrombosis, in October 1907.  
The Kikuyu mission station was a vast estate, surrounded by European farms. In the midst of the land-rush in Kiambu in the early 1900s David Clement Scott dramatically expanded the CSM’s plot of 66 acres to 3,000 acres. He purchased the land not from the four or five hundreds

16 “Memorandum: Church of Scotland Mission Estate at Kikuyu” (19 October 1926), EUL AP Gen762.
of people living on it, but directly from the colonial government, under the new provisions of the Crown Lands Ordinance.\textsuperscript{17} Overnight the Gikuyu residents became tenants of the CSM. Intending to marry Christianity with commerce through a plantation economy – as he had at Blantyre, in Nyasaland – Clement Scott’s seizure of the land was also a bid to ensure that, with the sudden increase of capitalists in this area proximate to Nairobi, the CSM would retain a prominent presence and influence. But by 1907, when there had still not been any baptisms, the missionaries felt themselves to be cramped by their position at Kikuyu and problematically encircled by European settlers. There was a feeling in the mission that Clement Scott’s commercial programme at Kikuyu had set the wrong tone, that as well as ruining the mission financially it had inadvertently tarnished its reputation and ethos. The missionaries looked northwards and conceptualised the land between them and Mount Kenya as a new, untapped, frontier.

Clement Scott’s premonitions are illustrative of how the missionaries brought to bear upon Gikuyuland and its inhabitants a forward-looking, future-oriented, gaze that conceptualised spaces, bodies, and souls in terms of what they the missionaries would like to do to them. There was a temporal direction to terms like “untouched” and “raw,” and the recurring use of terms like “improve” and “uplift” are indicative of a way of seeing that was aspirational and intentional.\textsuperscript{18} This discursive construction of Gikuyuland and Gikuyu people was particularly pronounced with the extension to Tumutumu, or “Kenia” as it was known until 1918.

In 1908 the colonial government brought its “pacification” raids north of the Tana river to an end and declared the region to the south of Mount Kenya “open” to missionaries and traders. To the missionaries at Kikuyu station in southern Gikuyuland, this meant a whole new sphere of evangelism was made accessible. They had notion of what they might expect to find there: fertile land and lots of people. James Reid, Clement Scott’s temporary replacement, had been allowed by the government to reconnaissance the area in early 1907, on a tour with the soldiers of the King’s African Rifles. Returning to Kikuyu station he informed his brethren they would be “surprised by the denseness of the population – nearly 1,000,000 people.”\textsuperscript{19} A wildly exaggerated estimation, Reid’s comments, however factually-inaccurate, are significant for the way they betray a colonial project totally oriented around and fixated not on land or profit, but on people and populations.

In negotiations with their Protestant allies of the American African Inland Mission (AIM) and the English Church Missionary Society (CMS) they had on paper marked off an area about ten miles’ east of the government fort at Nyeri as a sphere for the CSM: “Kenia” (Figure 3). “To many it means a mountain which stands right below the Equator, to others Kenia means the great Kenia forest” wrote Scott in *Kikuyu News*, “But our interest is not in the mountain or in the forest. To us Kenia means a huge population living in a sphere allocated to us by other missions.”

What excited them in particular was their notion that the people here were still in a “primitive condition,” absolutely “uninfluenced, as [those] are nearer to Nairobi, by contact with Europeans, Indians, and coast natives.” For Arthur, the people were “virgin soil, uncontaminated by the evils of civilization […] waiting to be cultivated by the servants of Christ.” For Scott:

> Throughout the whole of this district there is not a white man resident, and owing to its having been a closed district, only government officials have been allowed to pass through. If our application for land is granted, we shall be the first Europeans to settle in Trans-Tana country […] What an immense advantage it will be to us in our work if we gain entrance to this mass of 50,000 people before any other influences from the outside begin to exert themselves. We shall be absolutely first on the field, and shall have a free hand to carry on a vigorous mission work.

To state that the missionaries were “excited” by the prospects at Kenia is to understate it. Their writings disclose the sense that they thought themselves to be on the cusp of a major spiritual victory. Tumutumu offered not simply the prospect of a fresh start but a momentous evangelical breakthrough. This is how Arthur rendered the journey north, in his account for *Kikuyu News*:

> As we walked on and got nearer, our hearts beat faster and our minds began to think into the future. At last we reached the banks of the Tana […] Here at last we were about to cross the “Jordan” and enter “the Promised Land” […] As we crossed the stream and set foot on this till now unentered land, we instinctively, as the first missionaries of the Cross, bowed our hearts and silently claimed it for Christ and His Kingdom.

Deploying Old Testament imagery that was commonplace among CSM representations of Gikuyuland, Arthur’s vision was both past and future. Like almost all colonial journeys, the journey north of the Tana river, further into the interior, was a journey into the past – a biblical, storybook, past. Denying “co-evalness” with the people they came to convert, Arthur framed himself and Scott as visitors from the future, as bringers of the modern present. Such was their commanding

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vantage point, they were in a position to read their surroundings in terms of what was to come, letting their minds' eyes look into Kenia’s future.

Significantly, in Arthur's narrating of the journey, his and Scott’s first human encounter was with real-life embodiments of old and new:

The first inhabitants to welcome us were two very old men, relics of the age fast slipping away; not long after them came two strapping chaps, dressed in the usual spare clothing of the Kikuyu, which, however, admirably set off their fine athletic frames. What fine [rugby] forwards they would have made! […] it seemed as if they were the representatives of the new generation, not yet touched, but to be touched and quickened into life by the working of the Spirit of God. 28

Figure 2. “The Expedition to Kenia.” 1908. The original photograph (left, John Arthur Photos, EUL) was made into a postcard (right, PCEA photos) available for purchase by subscribers to Kikuyu News.

The eyes of the Muscular Christian Arthur took in the “untouched,” “untrained,” bodies of the young African men and looked at them in terms of what they might become. The subtle homoeroticism of Arthur’s words, his admiration for the “fine athletics frames” that he is able to glimpse though clothing he would otherwise condemn for its sparsity, indexes a kind of sexual desire — though not in any straightforward way. Arthur, who elsewhere openly championed himself as a “lover of boys,” was not, in either instance, expressing a sexual preference for men of course. Rather this is an example of how the missionaries were imbricated in, and contributed to, imperial, racial, narratives that were themselves sexualised. The yearning embedded in Arthur’s description was made possible and permissible by a repetitive and historically durable imageries explored in

Chapter 1 that feminised Africa and Africans, representing people and land as pliant and available for masculine conquest.

After the encounter with the young men Arthur told of how he and Scott climbed Tumutumu hill, “the most prominent mark on the landscape.”

We climbed to its top, and there what a glorious view opened before our eyes! A fairer country I have never seen […] Our elevated position gave us a commanding view of this lovely country […] In one little angle I counted over fifty villages, and wherever we looked one could see them in great numbers.

A classic trope in imperial discourse, the panoramic perspective is a recurring theme in CSM descriptions of the Gikuyu highlands. Arthur’s almost bird’s-eye view from what would become Tumutumu station functions as a form of epistemological colonisation, providing him and his readers in Kikuyu News with a commanding, conquering perspective and a measure of cognitive control over an otherwise unfamiliar land. It was the high point of a tour that was all about making-visible a new land and a new people, and which was full of instances of looking and hoping, and projecting their plans for the future onto the present. Typifying this ethos of laying claim to the yet-to-be-realised is the image that accompanied Arthur’s article, a photograph of “Kenia” superimposed onto which is a fat white cross: “X marks the new mission site” the caption reads (Figure 4).

Figure 4. “Service at Rukang’a’s (X Marks the new Mission site).” KN, 6 (September 1908).

The mission station was founded some months later, in September 1908, when Petro Muga and Danieli Wachira, two catechumens from the Kikuyu station considered to be the most promising and brilliant scholars by the CSM, journeyed up to the new site. In June 1909, they were joined by Arthur Barlow, the CSM’s linguistic expert, who became superintendent of the station.

One of the senses in which the missionaries of the CSM were “colonial evangelists” is that their Christian mission involved territorialising strategies of measuring and marking out land, sighting and surveying the country, and counting and claiming populations. With strong similarities to the European nation states’ carving up of Africa during the geo-political “Scramble for Africa,” the various missions in Gikuyuland negotiated their own “spheres of influence.” As a strategy to help them stymie the spread of Catholicism, the protestant missions – the AIM, CMS, and United Methodist Mission (UMM) – agreed to work together and divided up between them Gikuyuland’s administrative districts: Dagoretti and Kikuyu, and Nyeri going to the CSM; Thika and Maasailand going to the AIM; Fort Hall and Embu to the CMS; Meru to the UMM. They agreed not to poach potential converts from one another’s districts. They were supported by the colonial government who were increasingly uneasy about the presence of the French and Italian catholic missionaries in the British colony.

The CSM’s spatial imagination – their way of looking at, and conceptualising, their surroundings – was fixated on population figures within the respective spheres. By 1913, Doctor Arthur estimated that the CSM’s sphere at Kikuyu contained “about 20,000 souls” and their sphere at Tumutumu contained “about 80,000” (Figure 3). With all of Gikuyuland nominally “claimed” by the missions, Arthur expressed anxiety that the CSM were “in danger of having no real outlet for extension.” In particular, the bulk of the area between Nyeri and Nairobi was feeling “cramped.”

The area to the east, however, had only partially been intruded upon by its notional claimants, the CMS and UMM. This part of Gikuyuland, which covered the administrative districts of Embu and Meru, was in 1913 by far the most populous and least known to Europeans. And thus, when in 1913 the CMS offered the Scots a slice of its territory – at Chuka-Mwimbi – the CSM seized it. Writing in Kikuyu News, it was in numerical terms that Arthur emphasised what a boon this new site would be to the mission. “The country marked ‘Chuka’ in the map” he wrote

34 ibid.
(referring to the image in Figure 3) “is very thickly populated in certain places. They number about 15,000. The Mwimbi people, on the other hand, have a long, narrow strip of country [...] its population is calculated at about 25,000. The two tribes together thus number close on 40,000 people.”

Figure 5. Agreement of “spheres” of influence between the protestant missions in the Gikuyu highlands, 1908. For the present purposes significant points on the map are: Kikuyu station, the southernmost mission station in “Gikuyuland”; the CSM’s “sphere” in Kiambu, to the north of Kikuyu station, in southern Gikuyuland; and the CSM’s “sphere” in South Nyeri District, north of Nyeri and Fort Hall. Mount Kenya (“Kenia”) is marked in the top-right corner. PCEA Maps, No. N/3.

35 ibid.
Whatever the utility of these numbers as “social facts” or as demographic data for early-twentieth-century Gikuyuland, what is more significant is that they are indicative of how, when the missionaries of the CSM looked at their African surroundings, they frequently saw it in terms of people – and more specifically – in terms of countable populations. The missionaries’ recurring invocation of population figures alerts us to the competitive, accumulative, nature of colonial evangelism, their hunger to claim more and more people, and a mental geography that as it imaginatively seized hold of, carved up, and demarcated land, enumerated the possible numbers of converts therein. Just like the “X” marked on the photograph of the prospective mission site, and the imaginative gaze of Arthur as he took in the bodies of the “untouched” men he met on the banks of the Tana, Arthur’s population estimates – hopeful, ambitious, optimistic – saw Gikuyuland and its people in terms of their futures.

In October 1913, Doctor Arthur and William Tait set out on foot from Tumutumu to Chuka-Mwimbi, “to survey pastures new” and claim “fresh lands for the occupation of the King of Kings.”36 Once again silently bowing their heads in prayer as they crossed the river (the river Thũchi) that marked the boundary of their new sphere, Arthur and Tait then spent eight days’ hiking around and camping in Chuka-Mwimbi in search of a site for their station.37 Arthur described the land and people in this new area in terms of their urgent need for missionary intervention. The lower parts of Mwimbi, he and Tait felt, were being ruined by unscrupulous, exploitative labour recruitment practices which were increasingly encroaching on the region at large: “We have given them labour recruiters; how long will it be before we give them the pure and uplifting forces of the teaching of Jesus?”

More harrowingly, there had been an out-break of cerebro-spinal meningitis. In a “closing scene” that gave a “sad picture,” Arthur provided an image of Africa as a helpless, inert, docile place in desperate need of the uplifting, saving, involvement of the missionaries. Locating their neediness not in terms of the political and economic disruptions of colonialism, but in terms of the absence of Christianity Arthur wrote:

We are camped in lower Mwimbi, a little child is brought to me: it is worn, thin, and utterly filthy: its little neck bent back and stiffened by that fell disease […] it is but one of hundreds who are suffering in this bonny land from this and other diseases for want of someone to care for them and to treat them […] They are dying in their thousands. […] Let us put forth our hands unto them, to rescue them, to tell them of the Saviour Who died for them, and Who waits to give them a new and eternal life.38

36 ibid.
37 ibid. See also: Stanley Jones, “Chuka and Mwimbi,” KN, 58 (Jan-Feb 1916). For papers relating to the establishment of Chogoria station: PCEA I/B/2 and NLS IP/12801/1.
38 ibid.
The outbreak of the First World War, and the devastation of famine and smallpox that followed in its wake, meant that it was not until December 1922 that the mission established its station in Chuka-Mwimbi district, at Chogoria.\(^{39}\) The missionary charged with leading the “uplift” at Chogoria was Doctor Archibald Clive Irvine.\(^{40}\) Upon taking up residence at Chogoria station, where he would remain until his retirement over four decades later, Irvine emphatically remarked “What a privilege! It sometimes seems almost too great to be true, to be allowed – more, chosen – to carry the unsearchable riches of Christ to people in utter darkness. God’s chosen emissary to a whole tribe!”\(^{41}\)

**Going in, Making visible**

On “a lovely April Day” in 1909 the CSM’s Ronald Lean was “busy penning a letter home” from Kikuyu station when he was disturbed by fellow missionary Marion Stevenson who alerted him that something was afoot.

I was […] at my desk by an open window which commands a wide and extensive view of the Kikuyu Highlands [when] Miss Stevenson informed me that a native dance was being held on a plateau some distance off from our mission station. I at once secured my field-glasses, and by their aid could see distinctly the figures of dancers surrounded by a large crowd […] not having witnessed a native dance, I was eager to get some knowledge from the evidence of my eyes.\(^{42}\)

Armed with his field glasses Lean eventually arrived at the place of the dance. For his readers Lean provided a detailed description of what he saw.

[There] were thirty men, strong of limb, resolute in expression, and most fantastically dressed […] the lower parts of their bodies were painted with yellow and red ochre in all sorts of lines, straight and curved. Round the ankles were circlets of feathers. Their broad chests were adorned by means of strings and beads and shells, while their heads were covered by large ostrich feathers, shaped somewhat like a fan, which bobbed backwards and forwards in a most laughable fashion as the warriors went through the figures of the dance […] Almost all were provided with large spears and swords, which they flourished in the most dextrous manner.

Continuing, Lean evoked a chaotic scene describing the noise, the jumping and bending bodies of the dancers, and other “amusements” and “queer capers.” He showed his readers the “individual warriors, their bodies grotesquely smeared with red ochre and sheep’s fat” as they careered around the ring. He showed them the women, with ochre and castor oil “thickly applied” to their skin and “pretty coils of bright copper steel wire round their legs just below the knee.” And he showed

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\(^{40}\) Archibald Irvine, “A Trip to Chuka,” KN, 79 (February 1922).

\(^{41}\) Archibald Irvine, “Circular Letter No.7,” KN, 86 (December 1923). Irvine later made two feature-length motion-picture promotional films which told the story of the establishment of Chogoria. “Chogoria” (1931) and “Chogoria Missionary Centre” (1933) are held at the British Film Institute archive, ID numbers: 10981 and 540654.

\(^{42}\) Ronald Lean “A Native Dance,” KN, 14 (October 1909).
them the faces of the dancers: “bright smiles and beautiful teeth […] gave them a rather pleasing expression which would otherwise be wanting as their features are not prepossessing […] most of the old women are hideous, and many of the old men no better.”

Joining Lean at the scene was Arthur Barlow, who explained that what they were witnessing was a kibata dance, “a dance quite distinct from those which occur in the villages at night, and which, unfortunately, are attended by evil associations [and] lewd songs.” An elderly man who was spectating the dance, a friend of Barlow’s called Mukubu, came forward and, smiling, shook their hands. “With his linguistic facility,” Lean noted, Barlow talked away with Mukubu who declared to the missionaries “that the dances of his day were far more impressive and had more ‘go’ about them.”

The colonial evangelists of the CSM aimed to bring all manner of aspects of Gikuyu life under their surveillance and observation and to know it thoroughly. Nothing could remain in the darkness, outside the light of their mission. Nothing could remain unseen, or unknown – especially if it was something that on the surface seemed strange or unfamiliar or a “hindrance” to Christian conversion. Everything had to be made-visible, physically and epistemologically – brought into view literally and then detailed, described, recorded, and rationalised in texts and images. Lean did not just describe a time when he brought an aspect of Gikuyu life under CSM surveillance and observation, the text itself made it visible, laying out the dance, clarifying its movements, comprehending the bodies.

Comprehending, organising, and understanding the world they wanted to change and the people they wanted to transform was a means by which the missionaries domesticated it and made it familiar to them. Then, in textual descriptions and photographs, they sometimes re-rendered and re-presented the vernacular spaces and local bodies they had made legible as “strange” and “different.” Only in these re-presentations the strangeness was safer, more manageable, more stable and controllable (Figure 6).

This kind of intimate knowledge and familiarity required a degree of closeness and proximity to, and amicability with Gikuyu people. It meant learning the language, shaking hands, and sharing jokes – kinds of mixing across a racial frontier that were not common in early-twentieth-century Kenya. It is to these issues that I now want to turn, examining first the ways in which the CSM’s attempts to open up, reach into, gain knowledge of and embed themselves within the communities that surrounded their mission stations before turning more explicitly to the ways in which they represented Gikuyu bodies.
The natural and built environment of the Gikuyu highlands presented itself to the missionary consciousness in terms of barely-penetrable exteriors and shadowy interiors that needed to be opened up and made visible. Unlike the southern African frontier where their hero Livingstone had laboured, Gikuyuland was not a country of “open savannahs,” “expansive plains” and “virgin-scapes” but a forested and mountainous country. Aside from the rare occasions when they could take in a hill-top view, when missionaries took in Gikuyuland they saw it and experienced it in terms of its dark, dense woodlands, its deep gorges, and narrow ravines. The way CSM missionaries wrote about the land consistently emphasised their difficulty to get a handle on it. It was, from the missionary’s perspective, a physically and cognitively demanding environment: not only hard to journey through but one where they felt their vision was always partial.

To the missionaries Gikuyuland was an environment of “impenetrable forests and thickly-growing bamboo brakes” and of “unsightly wastes of bush.” They wrote of the “nervousness”

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44 Arthur Barlow, “Report Year 1912” (January 1913), EUL BP Gen1786/2.
that came with living in and moving around “dense jungle” and “gloomy forest.” They described how their unease was amplified by what they could not see, how they heard “blood-curdling” sounds and how “the dense jungle” was “infested with wild animals” and haunted by hyenas, leopards, wild game, sometimes rhino and buffalo. Repeatedly describing their setting in terms of an absence of light, or an inability to see, missionaries in their writings reinforced the sense that they were working in a darkness that was at once literal and metaphorical and spiritual.

Establishing a mission station in a densely-populated district in this country was one thing. Getting in and among the people to build the intimate, empathetic relationships that would facilitate the long-term sustained interactions necessary for conversion to Christianity quite another. The mission stations at Kikuyu, Tumutumu, and Chogoria were the primary loci for the CSM’s intensive work of bodily and spiritual transformation. But these spatial enclosures could only be fruitful if they were, in some ways, open to and rooted in the surrounding communities. To this end, what the missionaries termed “village work” and “itinerations” (the latter referring to preaching tours in the surrounding country) were essential.

There was a particular (if not unique) dimension to this in Gikuyuland that reinforced the missionaries’ sense that they were moving in an obscure darkness. The people were living in communities that appeared to the missionaries dispersed, scattered, fiercely parochial, and intensely local. As Keith Sorrenson noted, there was no Kabaka, as in Uganda – no Kikuyu Constantine – and therefore no possibility of “conversion from the top.” The missionaries had to operate on a much smaller scale, going in at ground-level, as it were, and seeking out individual patrons (local chiefs, their headmen, and household heads) in the hope of accessing pools of potential converts. The labyrinthine social structure they felt themselves to be confronted with was, moreover, compounded by vernacular architectural styles that emphasised privacy: through missionary eyes Gikuyuland was a warren of secretive councils, hidden pathways and passages, walled-off villages, fenced homesteads, dingy stockades, and sealed-up huts.

When the missionaries wrote about these services and itinerations in Kikuyu News, they foregrounded their importance in “lighting up the darkness.” But they also conveyed the limits of their transformative mission, the unease and discomfort they often felt while wandering through areas that were to them unfamiliar, and the sometimes-uncomfortably tactile and corporeal nature of their encounters.

46 Arthur Barlow to Father (Sunday 17 July 1905); Barlow, “Some Early Memories.”
Figure 7. Photographs of the “Kenia forest” north of Tumutumu taken by John Arthur while on an expedition with Arthur Barlow, 1913. Dozens of the photographs in this collection are simply of dense forest scenes. John Arthur Photos, EUL.
In those early years, as Marion Stevenson explained in a 1910 article entitled “Village Work,” it was difficult to gather even a small crowd to listen to the Word. At a tour of chief Ngware’s and chief Muhori’s locations, where the CSM would later establish feeder schools for their central station, few listened to Stevenson. Telling her that “No, they did not know God’s Word” and no, “they had never heard of Jesus,” they asked her “When the Kikuyu know about these things, would we English go home, and would there be no more hut tax?” Some jeered her with the name “Nyamachaki.” She took it mean the “thin one,” but it could be more cruelly translated as “skinny animal.” One “very unpleasant old woman” sent her on a wrong path, and she had to dodge the advances of a “drunk old man [who] wished to be affable.” Some women who seemed friendly invited Stevenson to see them dance. But “it was so revolting, the postures and gestures and the loathsome look on their faces that I stopped them at once, saying I did not like Kikuyu dances.” Village work, Stevenson concluded “is spade-work only, the digging up of ground where by and by the seed will be sown.”

Figure 8. “Miss Stevenson in her Mission Work,” KN, 19 (May 1910).

49 ibid.
50 Marion Stevenson, “Village Work (Continued),” KN, 17 (March 1910).
51 ibid.
A camping trip three hours’ hike from Kikuyu station some months later yielded only a little more success. Partly this was because on this occasion Stevenson, the four teachers, and twelve carriers who went with her, took a small organ with them. Chief Kuria’s location proved “somewhat unfriendly”: no-one would give the campers firewood or milk, and they pretended not to understand a word of the missionaries’ Kikuyu. Children fled and parents accused the missionaries of coming to count their offspring and take them away, just as the colonial veterinary officer had done with their cattle in his bid to combat East Coast fever some years previously. But at Chief Kang’au’s they managed a number of services they deemed successful. “A stream of people” came to hear the organ and to see the lantern show. And one night, when the teacher Petro Mugo preached, people listened attentively causing Stevenson to remark on how “the flickering firelight [lit] up the listening faces circled round.”

Figure 9. “Negotiating with a chief” (c.1908). John Arthur (left) and Henry Scott (centre-right) undertaking negotiations upon the establishment of Tumutumu. The chief in the centre is not identified by Arthur but he is possibly Chief Kariuki. John Arthur Photos, EUL.

52 Marion Stevenson, “Camping,” KN, 19 (May 1910).
Figure 10. Diagrams of a “Native Hut” (top - “Nyumba ya Agikuyu”; bottom - “Native Hut”) by Arthur Barlow. Barlow opens up the hut on the page, making its interior visible and cognisable.

EUL BP Gen1785/6.
Ridiculed by Stevenson, local suspicion that the missionaries had come to take the children away was not unreasonable: the object of these safari's (journeys) was, as Mrs Philp put it in relation to a 1912 tour undertaken by her and Horace Philp, “to make known the Gospel of Love” to the people and to influence the children in the outlying districts to come to the mission school. On that occasion the Philps, having secured a deal with Chief Kariuki that he would send his eight-year-old son to Tumutumu school, returned from their itineration with the boy among their party. Accompanied by the teacher Solomon Ndambi and two of Philp’s hospital apprentices, Muteithia Gathu and Jonathan Nganga, on that tour the missionaries found that football was more of a crowd-pleaser than the picture-rolls and lantern slide shows. They undertook medical work at Chief Muruthi’s, a location deliberately chosen since Muruthi was a known mondo mugo (medicine man) and the missionaries wanted to undermine belief in him.

In the early days at each of their stations, missionaries found that the darkness of night could in some ways prove more useful for their evangelism than the light of the day. An unannounced nocturnal visit meant that the missionaries increased their chances of finding people in their villages. At Kikuyu and Tumutumu they had weekly night-time village services. Armed with bugles, acetylene lanterns and slides, or else with picture rolls and images, perhaps, also, with writing implements such as slates and sticks of chalk, and sometimes with musical instruments, they would set out into the night. Arthur Barlow described his stealthy approach to night services around Tumutumu thus:

We do not sally forth until half-past six. About half an hour before the time a hand-bell is rung at the Mission, and the boys and young men, all who live on the station, are to be seen gathering and falling into line. The roll is then called, after which the boys number off in threes or fours […] My usual plan is to keep the bugle silent until we are in the village itself, in case its sound should remind unwilling ones that we are on the way.

In their accounts of village work, “the native hut” is a recurring object of missionary fascination (Figure 1 and Figure 10). It deserves and demands inverted commas because of the density of missionary discourses that surrounded it. Often rendered singular (“the hut”) by the missionaries, Gikuyu abodes were turned into something beyond themselves. They were fetishized by the missionaries, made important for what they stood for (a “darkness,” “dinginess,” “dimness,” and “dirtiness” that was moral as much as physical) as much as what they were. The missionaries perceived one of their main challenges as that of getting Gikuyu out of their huts – a process that had metaphorical and literal significance for the missionaries’ transformative project. But it was

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also something of a prize if the missionaries could themselves get on the inside of one. Almost every missionary of the CSM made the moment they accessed a “native hut” into a literary event. Once in the interior they “lit it up” with their words. Entering, wrote the CSM’s Mary Mure after her first itineration, was “not plain sailing.”

You stoop down and scramble through a very small opening, tumble over a hen, or a goat, or a child, crawl along with your head as low as you possibly can, otherwise you are suffocated with the smoke and finally squat down beside the fire on a low Kikuyu stool, and blink and wink till your eyes stop smarting and you begin to see something in the darkness. The something turns out to be a pair of gleaming brown eyes, then you make out a face, then one or two more, and you smile and try to look pleasant, because you can’t say anything yet, and can only listen to others talking in this strange new language, and wonder when you too will be able to speak as fluently.57

Gikuyu bodies through missionary eyes

In a speech at the CSM’s annual general meeting of 1929, which was later reprinted in Kikuyu News, Arthur Barlow called upon the members to recall what things looked like two decades prior:

The Kikuyu could then be described truly as a “primitive people”; they were very ignorant, to a large extent debased, and quite unaspiring. Their horizons, both physical and mental, were limited; they had little conception of anything beyond their own tribe and tradition, and their knowledge of the outer world was confined to what they saw on their raids against neighbouring tribes.

“Their condition,” said Barlow,
was well typified by the figure of the Kikuyu mwanake, or young warrior, standing leaning on his spear, scantily clad in a bit of goatskin, his head and shoulders anointed with a mixture of red ochre and oil, whistling to his goats as he herded them in the “bush”; his thoughts and aspirations going no farther than the goats before him, his next meal, or the tribal dance in the evening.58

In making Gikuyuland visible, it was often the case that the missionaries of the CSM conceptualised and re-presented Gikuyu persons in terms of their unusual exterior surfaces and (like the huts in which they dwelt) their dimly-lit shadowy interiors. As we will see in the chapters that follow, it was by acting on the former that the missionaries hoped to transform, enlighten, and awaken the latter. This “uplifting,” “liberating,” project was a challenge to the racial order in Kenya Colony. Nevertheless, by constantly and repetitively describing and drawing attention to external differences and somatic features while simultaneously calling into question the extent of inner consciousness, one of the paradoxes of the liberal-humanist colonial project of the CSM was

58 “Annual Meeting of Subscribers,” KN, 112 (June 1930).
that as it held out the universalist promise of equality in the future it reproduced and reinforced the notion of African inferiority in the present.

As the missionaries of the CSM toured and made visible the interior of the Gikuyu highlands that surrounded them, their eyes frequently came to rest upon the native body. Or at least, that is the narrative arc they provided in their own travel accounts and *Kikuyu News* articles. Contrary to this projected order of things it is more accurate and productive to see “the native body” not as a static, inert, object that the missionaries “encountered” – something that existed externally from, and prior to, the missionary’s eye – but rather as something that was in part discursively constructed by the missionaries themselves. Their discourses and practices worked to make “the native body” an object of colonial power – a category that could be known, seen, analysed, and acted upon. Surrounding the persons they met with a battery of discourses and descriptions that foregrounded their physical being, the missionaries made their corporeal essence fixed, firm, and stable and marked it out as the terrain on which they would conduct their transformative project.

“The native” of CSM discourse was invariably gendered as male. The body of the “young warrior” – the *mwana*ke – held a particular fascination for the missionaries. As they interpreted and re-presented the *mwana*ke’s body, the missionaries of the CSM were guided by and re-produced two seemingly opposing sets of images of Africa: the “savage” and the “noble.” To the missionaries of the CSM the *mwana*ke’s body could be ugly and grotesque one moment and worthy of their admiration the next. Though often their representations fell into one set of images or the other, sometimes both tropes were contained in a single discourse (as, for example, in Lean’s description of the dance above).

Savage images emphasized unruliness, unrefinement, and ugliness. Irvine, in his caption to the photograph in Figure 11, of two *aanake* playing a traditional Meru board game, for example, wrote: “This is the raw material playing *kin’thi*. Uncontrolled, usually indolent, indulging in the immoral pleasures of the dance, yet very decent fellows […] they are eminently good material to work with.” Elsewhere he described male dances and physical culture as “chaotic,” “furious,” and “unscientific.” For Barlow, as he put it in a short essay on “The Kikuyu People” which was published in the CSM’s twenty-fifth anniversary pamphlet, Gikuyu dances “did not command the graceful ‘poetry of movement’ practised by white and other races.” Missionaries wrote of “jerky”

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60 “Chogoria – Church of Scotland Mission” (1933), KNA ARA/7/1.


movements, of dancers and athletes “hoist[ing] their bodies about,” and of “horrid spectacle[s].”  

If it was not stated explicitly, missionary descriptions of dances implied licentiousness and sexual deviancy.

But dancing, and what the missionaries termed “native games,” also gave rise to descriptions of male bodies that were characterised by admiration verging on desire. Barlow, in the same essay cited above, wrote:

Many a Kikuyu man might form a worthy model for the sculptor on account of the beautiful proportions of his body, his free gracefulness of carriage, his straightness of limb, and velvet roundess of muscle [...] For straightness of back and of neck and for well-proportioned development of chest the native East African is to be envied by us Europeans.

Figure 11. This photograph, by Archibald Irvine, appeared in a 1933 brochure titled “Chogoria – Church of Scotland Mission,” published by the CSM. It was titled “the raw material.” KNA ARA/7/1.

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65 ibid. 11-13.
Similarly, Doctor Arthur – who had something of a habit of seeing Gikuyu men in terms of their sporting potential – favourably compared one *mwanake* to a celebrated Scottish rugby player as he commented on his “Darky Sievright physique.”\(^{66}\) “What wonderful possibilities there are in young manhood” Arthur wrote elsewhere:

In their chocolate-brown colouring, they are so often pictures of the utmost physical grace! In their games they have wonderful ease of movement, great speed, coupled with beautiful rhythmic control; they have great courage and fearlessness.\(^{67}\) It was common for the missionaries of the CSM to indulge in such descriptions, making the young Gikuyu man’s body visible in terms of its poised physique, “chocolate skin,” and raw potential. Isabelle Scott, for example, presented to Scottish audiences at home the following spectacular scene of the “native games” section of a missionary sports day in 1927:

To watch these magnificently developed men – some of them over six feet in height, with spears to correspond – the ripple of muscle under the brown skin, the play with the spear, the final poise of the lithe body ready for the throw, would content a sculptor’s eyes.\(^{68}\) A contradictory way of seeing Africa that was centuries old and certainly not unique to the CSM, what the two images of savagery and nobility shared was their implicit call for the missionaries’ uplifting intervention: they conveyed contorted bodies and irregular movements that needed to be straightened out and rhythmically re-patterned or else beckoned for the missionary’s disciplining, refining, and “sculpting” touch. Whichever imagery they drew on the missionaries often emphasized a male body that was raw and uncontained, and contrasted it with an imagined white, European body that was whole and hygienic to emphasize African incompleteness. Even ostensibly “positive” texts that praised and adulated conveyed the general sense that Gikuyu were still in need of proper moulding if they were to be fully-developed, domesticated and suitably civilized.\(^{69}\)

At times in missionary descriptions “the native body” emerges less as a discrete, discernible, and obviously-gendered object (statuesque or otherwise) and more as an open, unbounded, indeterminate entity that exceeded its limits in troubling ways. For example, Horace Philp’s lengthy description of the “insanitary conditions” of Gikuyu life in his first article for *Kikuyu News* in 1910.\(^{70}\) Because death could never enter a dwelling, Philp began, “the sick were carried out into the bush” and “left alone to be torn to pieces at nightfall by packs of hyenas with which the district swarmed.” New-borns were “welcomed into the world by a dirty old woman who,” wrote Philp, “after taking a mouthful of gruel from a filthy calabash into her mouth, squirted

\(^{67}\) John Arthur, “All Saints Nairobi” (12 August 1928), EUL AP Gen762.
it into the child’s mouth.” Children were “unkempt and uncared for.” Conjunctivitis passed from “child to child” while intestinal parasites and external parasites (such as jiggers and lice) “claimed hundreds as their hosts.” Ulcers, “often of the most ghastly character,” and abrasions were uncovered and unbandaged. Philp painted a vivid, horrific, description of wounds being feasted on by swarms of “flies that bred in the refuse and dung that surrounded each homestead, and that, more often than not, had just come from a filthy yaws ulcer, carrying with them the germs of that dreadful disease.” There was the “degrading” practice of female circumcision which caused suffering, “disease and mutilation.” There was “the revolting practice” by which living infants were put out to the bush to die with the corpse of their dead mothers.

Figure 12. A photograph by Arthur Barlow. On the reverse of the photograph Barlow wrote “A Mwimbi dance, taken by flashlight while we were at Chogoria – note the drummer!” EUL BP Gen1786/1.

Philp’s account purposefully portrayed the world that the missionaries were setting out to transform. In part, Philp, a medical doctor, was bringing to bear a “clinical gaze” upon Gikuyu and expressing the need for the introduction of clean, healthy, hygienic spaces and properly regulated bodies. His description betrays the modernist, “civilising” impulse of the CSM’s colonial
project that sought to turn persons into contained, embodied subjects – people with bodies that had clearly defined and identifiable borders.

To the missionary way of seeing the Gikuyu body appeared uncivilized, pre-modern, grotesque – a body that was insufficiently bounded off from the natural world and from the bodies of other persons. As such it sometimes defied their full-comprehension. Robert Macpherson conveyed the sense of his eyes searching to define the borders of native bodies as he described the interior of the native hut as “a filthy thing, full of smoke, fowls, goats, and people all mixed up indiscriminately.”\textsuperscript{71} Isobel Scott’s portrayal of Marion Stevenson’s village-school pupils, meanwhile was suggestive of formless and fragmented bodies that were (implicitly) in need of being brought to order: they appeared to her as “a form tightly packed with dusky little pot bellied and very unwashed humanity – their thin legs and jiggery toes dangling far from the ground – [did] not seem to offer very promising material.”\textsuperscript{72} One missionary described a village market in terms of bodies leaking noises and odours: one “continuous high-pitched babble from thousands of voices raised in argument, in raillery, or anger. Pervading them is a smell which is indescribable, but which for the most part is compounded of goats, the castor-oil besmeared garments of [...] the women, and of perspiring humanity.”\textsuperscript{73} Missionary descriptions of animal skin clothes and greased skin worked to convey an image of nature infiltrating the borders of human bodies. Barlow’s reference to how otherwise brightly-coloured blankets “soon acquired a muddy hue [...] a dark-brown mud-colour approximating to the colour of the wearers’ own bodies” suggested ill-defined bodily borders.\textsuperscript{74}

**Missionary conceptions of Gikuyu self-hood**

One of the strongest, most resilient of the missionary discourses on Gikuyu persons during the period in question was that Gikuyu had shallow, unrefined, interior lives. As the missionaries of the CSM saw it, unruly Gikuyu bodies were occupied by under-developed selves. It was this way of seeing that underscored the missionaries’ attempts to educate Gikuyu into feelings of guilt, shame and sinfulness on the one hand and of joy, empathy love and righteousness on the other. These capacities were, as the paternalistic, liberal-humanist, missionaries of the CSM saw it, underdeveloped and not-yet-realised in Africans. Through missionary eyes, this state of affairs

\textsuperscript{71} Robert Macpherson, “Annual Meeting of Subscribers,” KN, 108 (June 1929).

\textsuperscript{72} Scott, *Saint in Kenya*, 109. I have reproduced the sentence exactly how it appears. Whether or not Scott was deliberately deploying grammatically chaotic prose is unclear.


\textsuperscript{74} Barlow, “Kikuyu People,” 15.
indexed not simply a different or alternative ontology but a lower and inferior “stage of development.”

There was a theological and a secular, or “social,” dimension to this way of seeing. As they deepened their knowledge of Gikuyu cosmology, customs and history, missionaries working in Kenya’s Gikuyu highlands were relieved to find that there was a vernacular term for “God,” *Ncai*, and that, moreover, *Ncai* appeared to be a singular, indivisible, supreme being with no superior authority. This, as far as the likes of the CSM were concerned, at least provided a basis upon which Christian monotheism could be built. But the problem, as Arthur Barlow put it in his 1909 briefing document to all new CSM missionaries titled “Notes on Points of Comparison and Contrast Between Kikuyu Religious Beliefs and Customs and Christianity,” was that *Ncai* was not like the Christian God. *Ncai* was aloof from human affairs rather than present in people’s souls – “the object more of awe than of love and reverence.” Furthermore, in daily life and everyday practice, the ancestral spirits could “take a more prominent place than God.” Neither the spirits nor *Ncai* moreover were concerned with person’s inner selves. Gikuyu, Barlow wrote, had an “inadequate idea of sin,” lacking “a sense of being answerable to God for sins committed.” As he put it elsewhere: “With the Kikuyu, God does not seem to fill the place of Judge, and they do not feel responsible to Him for their actions. He seems to be regarded only as a vague source from which the rain comes, and wealth and children.”

In this view, Gikuyu lived, almost exclusively, a superficial, material, bodily existence with little spiritual, moral, or emotional depth. As Henry Scott put it in an article on Kikuyu “Belief in Spirits”:

> With us a falsehood is sinful because of our relation to God rather than to man; but the native never thinks of God in the matter of falsehood. It is simply a matter between man and man. Adultery [for example] is not sinful in the eyes of the native, but it is an injury done to the owner of the woman which can be fully remedied by the payment of so many sheep. Its relation to God is not considered.

> A native would pray for health and wealth, but would never dream of asking God to make him good or honest or pure in heart […] God is hardly anything but a name, and when he [“the native”] does pray it is only for his bodily wants he asks, and never for those of his heart.

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On these grounds, the missionaries of the CSM doubted whether Gikuyu even had moral consciences.⁷⁹ It was not, in their view, so much that Gikuyu were living in sin as without sin. The term the missionaries of the CSM used to describe the character of Gikuyu morality and religion was “formalism.” They compared it to Judaism, finding parallels with Old Testament theology.⁸⁰ There were the routines, the sacrifices, incantations, superstitions, body practices of initiation ceremonies, and codes that surrounded cleanliness and pollution, but there was little that looked to them like the Christian call to “self-denial” or “heart-righteousness.” “A Kikuyu when urged to repent might well ask, ‘Of what am I to repent? What have I done?’” wrote Barlow, “For he might, according to native standards, be living a blameless life.” The Good Man, wrote Barlow (and the gendered ascription, if subconscious is not incidental), abstains from certain acts because it is “bad” or “unlucky,” or because “he is afraid of being found out,” “but not because he feels mortally accountable to God.”⁸¹


⁸⁰ Lonsdale, “Kikuyu Christianities”; Peterson, Creative Writing.
The comparisons between Gikuyu and the world of the Old Testament are indicative of how for the missionaries, Gikuyu occupied a lower, less-advanced and less-civilised stage of history than Europeans like them. The missionaries’ constant invocation of Old Testament references solidified among them a sense that they were working in an ancient, Biblical, landscape. “It was a prehistoric peep into the days of Noah,” wrote Isabelle Scott describing an encounter with a group of athuri (elders) during one of her village tours with Marion Stevenson. The “hoary” athuri, with “furrowed brows and dimmed eyes,” with “long slit ears, pendulous and empty of the gay ornaments of warrior days,” “clad in blankets worn toga-wise,” were Scott surmised, living just as their fathers had and their fathers before them: “with the same primitive wants and satisfactions – children of Ham back to the flood.”

Missionaries viewed Gikuyu through the modernist lens of post-enlightenment imperialist Europe and judged them to be lacking in individual agency and a desire for progress. “Their standard of living is very low, and little urge to better themselves is apparent” wrote Irvine of his first impressions of the people around Chogoria station. “As regards future life, the native has very shadowy ideas of what it might consist of,” wrote Henry Scott. “It appears to him a repetition of what exists now […] The only joy a native can think of is his sheep, his wives and his beer.”

The African, through missionary eyes, was driven not (yet) by inner reason and rational foresight, but by almost bestial reflexes of survival. As Arthur Barlow put it: “their horizon is bounded almost entirely by their immediate animal needs.”

In a lecture series delivered to trainee-missionaries in Scotland in the 1930s, Barlow stated that Gikuyu occupied a “dim spirit world,” and were in “bondage to blind, ignorant custom.” The cycles of life-stages and age-grades demanded that persons “slavishly adhered to custom and tradition.” It led to communal identities, discouraging “individual development” and smothering “individual enterprise.” Through missionary eyes, Gikuyu physical culture, social life, and existing belief systems militated against the development of individuals; and they identified the absence of individuality as the chief block on progress.

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85 Arthur Barlow, “The Native Question” (1922), EUL BP Gen1786/1.
86 Barlow, “Notes on Points of Comparison” (1909), EUL BP Gen1786/1.
87 Arthur Barlow, “Conditions of Life and Religion in Which the Missionary Works in Africa To-Day” (1935/6), EUL BP Gen1786/2
Beneath the surface

During her initial years at Kikuyu station, Marion Stevenson spent a number of evenings patrolling the mission’s estate making sure there was no dancing. As she saw it, “the determined effort made to have dancing” on the estate was one of the “chief difficulties” facing the missionaries at Kikuyu station. “These dances are evil, evil, and are forbidden on our estate” she stated, in characteristically forthright fashion. In one letter of October 1908 she told of one particularly eventful evening. Disturbed and irked by a noisy, nearby dance, she and fellow missionary Mr Cook “went down to stop it.”

The dancers were so excited that in the darkness we got right up to them unobserved […] It was a weird sight […], the twenty warriors, or so, all but naked, painted, adorned with feathers and beads; opposite them an equal number of girls similarly adorned and painted, but without the feathers, all jumping and chanting, with an occasional shrill cry and clapping of hands […] we dispersed them. 88

Marion Stevenson did not simply stop the dancing. Realising that a number of the dancers were scholars at the CSM’s fledgling boarding school, she rounded them up and guided them away. As she did so she “asked them very sorrowfully, you may be sure, why they had done this, and they said most penitently, ‘We will never do it again, we will leave it for always’. I was glad they knew it was wrong and were ashamed.” 89

This is an example of the kind of modern power exercised by the missionaries which was at once disciplinary and pastoral: regulating the bodies of the people they aimed to transform they simultaneously aspired to reach inside them to something less tangible, and to nurture their individual subjectivities. 90 Stevenson’s closing detail is a classic feature of CSM missionaries’ contributions to Kikuyu News and their writings more generally. Frequently and explicitly, the missionaries drew attention to their attempts to penetrate and probe, nurture and develop the consciences – or, as they sometimes termed it, the “inner persons” – of their Gikuyu charges. A further instance of the missionaries’ attempt to “go-in” and “make-visible,” albeit this time at the level of the individual person, they conceptualised their evangelical work as that of getting inside the very being of their coverts – of shining the “light” of modern Christianity into the person’s self and soul, and encouraging them to do the same to themselves, so that they might grow into self-aware, self-regulating, self-disciplining persons. As Stevenson appealed in another Kikuyu News

88 Marion Stevenson, “Letter No. 4,” KN, 7 (October 1908). Italics are Stevenson’s.
89 Marion Stevenson, “Letter No. 4,” KN, 7 (October 1908).
article, “Let us pray, that something of the wonder of our Message may enter in, even to minds so darkened and deadened by drudgery and superstition and sin.”

When countenancing what at first struck them as “strange” scenes and “weird” bodies the missionary’s instinct was to search for the inner, individual Christian subject they believed lay dormant within Gikuyu persons awaiting their uplifting touch. In the first issue of Kikuyu News, Doctor Arthur put it thus: “The first feelings when you come to Kikuyu are those of repulsion, not “love at first sight.” But as the days go on, you see through the dirt and the paint and the uncouthness to the heart beneath the black skin. And after a time, you find that they are not so different from you after all.” The articles from Kikuyu News considered in this chapter, and the archive of the CSM more generally, testify to a tension at the heart of this colonial-evangelical mission as this universalizing message of uplift, sameness, and equality met with and sometimes even relied upon the reproduction of strong and durable colonial discourses on the difference and inferiority of subject races.

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91 Marion Stevenson, “Firewood Cutters,” KN, 38 (October 1912).
4. The CSM and the “Able-Bodied Male”

There is nothing inherently objectionable in demanding that each able-bodied man do his fair day’s work for the benefit of the community as a whole. Provided that such labour be properly paid, adequately safeguarded and clearly defined, it will be not only for the good of the body politic, but of the individual who does the work. Under proper conditions the Alliance would favour a well thought out scheme of compulsory labour.

John Arthur, “Policy of the Alliance,” 1919

This chapter is about the intensive and notoriously abusive colonial labour system in Gikuyuland, and the significant, seemingly-contradictory, role the missionaries of the CSM played in it as both critics of its abuses and agents in its maintenance and perpetuation. In what follows I discuss the challenges the political economy of settler-colonial capitalism posed to the CSM’s “Muscular Christian” colonial-evangelism; and how, in pursuit of their self-proclaimed “civilising mission,” the CSM sought not to reject it outright, but to try to tame it and harness its apparent capacity for the “uplift” and “improvement” of Gikuyu.

Labour is a topic which has received an enormous amount of attention from Gikuyuland’s historians. Yet the relation between missionaries and labour remains markedly under-examined. Existing accounts of the CSM’s role in Gikuyuland’s labour system have been brief and contradictory: they have been presented either as critics of the labour system, or in terms of their (qualified) support of it. Not far beneath the surface of these kinds of interpretations are normative claims about the extent to which different aspects of the missionary programme were “good” or “bad.” For the likes of A.J. Temu and Renison Githige, writing a generation ago, the CSM flip-flopped between the two incompatible positions according to different historical circumstances over time. Needless to say neither in this chapter nor in the thesis generally am I concerned with assessing the extent to which missionaries or particular missionary policies should be commended or condemned. Moreover, it would be a mistake to see the CSM’s position as inconsistent.

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1 Alliance of Protestant Missions, “Policy of the Alliance” (1919), EUL AP Gen763.
Underpinning both their criticisms of the methods used by white colonisers to recruit, maintain and incite African labour, and their active participation in this system, as producers and suppliers of skilled labour, was their “Muscular Christian” aspiration to turn Gikuyu into modern, Christian subjects, with appropriately civilised bodies.

By documenting the largely overlooked role of the CSM in colonial Gikuyuland’s labour system this chapter engages with bigger, broader, questions about the multiple registers through which colonial power was manifest and exercised in this part of the world. In particular I am interested in exploring labour as a venue for the emergence and exercise of distinctive forms of colonial “biopower,” and the role the missionaries played in this.

Michel Foucault’s clearest enunciation of “biopower” is found in the final part of the first volume of The History of Sexuality (1978), where he elaborated his now-famous historical argument that in Europe during the period recognised as “modernity”—that is, from the seventeenth century onwards—there was a profound rupture in the way in which power was organised. Modernity, Foucault argued, entailed the emergence of an entirely new kind of power, “a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them.” Old, “deductive” mechanisms of power—power based on the seizure of things, on killing, maiming and harming—were supplanted by hidden, sometimes apparently “gentle” mechanisms which worked “to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organise the forces under it.” Put briefly, Foucault’s claim was that: “the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life.” The power to foster life, he termed “biopower.”

Biopower “applies directly to bodies and what they do.” Foucault argued that biopower evolved in two complementary but distinct basic forms: “discipline” and “biopolitics.” “Discipline” refers to the techniques which centre on individuals and their bodies and are carried out within those state and non-state institutions that have proliferated during the modern era (hospitals, schools, asylums, military training camps, prisons). Disciplinary power, in Foucault’s formulation, operates at a micro-level, and incorporates such tactics as the training, nurturing,
bringing-under-surveillance of persons and bodies – tactics which aim to optimise bodily capacities while simultaneously increasing the person’s “docility.” “Biopolitics” meanwhile, refers to regulatory controls carried out on populations. It operates at the “macro” level, “above” disciplinary power. It connotes those techniques which have become increasingly embedded in the operations of modern states to keep track of the population, to measure, record, and quantify. It refers to large-scale initiatives aimed at promoting the health, vitality, and reproduction of populations, and efforts to appraise and monitor such initiatives.

Crucially, Foucault’s major claim was that discipline and biopolitics do not simply “operate on” bodies and populations, they “materialise them.” In staking a claim over biological life, by counting, demarcating, monitoring, classifying and training, modern power produces “the body” and “the population,” making them objects of public and private power. Of course, neither disciplinary power nor biopolitics present themselves as “power” in the conventional, narrow sense of the term. The systemic, “capillary,” almost-invisible form they take mean they cannot be “resisted” in the conventional ways. Moreover they are, by conventional measures, apparently “benevolent” and, as such, can be exercised affectionately and experienced “positively.”

Rooted in the history of labour in Gikuyuland and labour, and the CSM’s role in it, a broad claim of this chapter is that in colonial Gikuyuland, as in other twentieth-century colonial settings, “biopower” emerged only haphazardly and inconsistently. It materialised awkwardly and uncomfortably in a context where deductive mechanisms predominated. Its application was sporadic and spatially contained. And it did not “replace” “the ancient right to take life.” Power based upon coercion and violence was even, in fact, often integral in the application of new, “productive” initiatives. “Healing and harming,” as Nancy Rose Hunt has put it recently, are “a salient pair in Africa’s histories”; they certainly were in colonial Gikuyuland.

I have opened with the quotation from Doctor Arthur because his statement is a quintessential expression of the CSM’s aspiration to convert modalities of colonial power based on domination into integrative, uplifting, forms of biopower. Arthur not only voiced missionary support for compulsory labour for all “able-bodied” native men in Kenya Colony. He did so on the grounds that, if it was “adequately safeguarded,” it would be “good” both at the level of “individual” and at the level of the “body politic” at large. As we will see, the CSM was only very partially successful in this bid. This chapter is comprised of three parts. Part one describes and

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analyses the labour system in colonial Gikuyuland, with a primary focus on the colonial state. Such is the significance of this to the claims made in this thesis overall, this section is deliberately extensive, though of course not exhaustive. Part two turns to the CSM’s “biopolitical” endeavours, focusing on the CSM’s work to introduce a range of state-level colony-wide measures aimed at securing, monitoring, and promoting the welfare of the colony’s labourers in particular and the colonised “population” in general. In part three, I focus on “disciplinary power”, discussing work within the mission station and CSM’s state-funded apprenticeship schemes in skilled work, the aim of which was to turn Gikuyu men into “able-bodied” and “morally-upright” workers.

Biopower, the colonial state, and the recruitment and maintenance of labour.

This section provides an outline of the context in which the CSM’s “muscular Christian” civilising mission was situated by describing and explaining aspects of the emergence of a particular kind of colonial biopower in Gikuyuland and its relation to the labour system. Two themes are particularly significant. First the power relations that had typified the period of conquest endured: coercion, violence, and exploitation remained pronounced features of colonial power in general and the labour system in particular. Second, the new kinds of colonial power and the colonial labour system placed particular, gendered demands upon men and making those who fell into the category of the “able-bodied male native” the most visible and tightly governed subjects of the state. That the colonial labour system re-formulated old notions of masculinity and self-mastery is also apparent, and will be an issue taken up in later chapters.

On the face of it, perhaps the most striking aspect of colonial power in Gikuyuland is the apparent absence of anything that looks much like the intimately-oriented and health-and-welfare conscious modality of governance that is “biopower.” John Lonsdale has described the embryonic colonial state of the period between 1895 and 1905 as a “conquest state” which, wielding sovereign power, threatening death, not seeking moral mastery, lacking a will-to-know, showed little interest in producing individual and self-regulating subjectivities or maximising and nurturing the bodily life of its citizens. From a certain perspective it looks like the military raids, mass-killings, the seizing of livestock and the burning of villages which characterised the conquest state gave way to something equally unsettling: a rapacious, unregulated farming frontier in which capitalists, men-on-the-spot, private labour recruiters, and local big men scrambled for labour, arbitrarily exercising force and violence while, in turn, young men rendered landless, kinless, and sometimes limbless.

by the great famine of 1900 and the disease epidemics which followed in its wake, scrambled for employment or patronage in the new economy.\textsuperscript{14}

That is not, however, the full-picture. For in amongst this apparently lawless, hollowed-out political economy was a colonial state which could, in fact, in certain times and in certain places, exercise remarkable presence and power.\textsuperscript{15} From 1905, when responsibilities for East Africa Protectorate were transferred from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office and the colonial government declared their conquest (or “pacification”) of the new territory to be over, government did begin to stake a claim over “native life”: it began to deploy measures aimed at securing and controlling the population. A “Native Affairs Department” was established in 1905 and from that year officials increasingly emphasised the need to shore-up district boundaries. From the late 1910s: medicine, maternity work, sanitation, hygiene, and the policing and surveillance of the native reserves increasingly became aspects of colonial statecraft.

Driving the colonial state’s emergent concern with the physical being of the people over whom it now claimed sovereignty was labour, and the real and imagined threat of a “labour shortage.” And it is not too much of a stretch to state that in Gikuyuland, if not the colony at large, as far as Gikuyu people were concerned, the colonial state was, effectively and exclusively, a mechanism for the extraction, maintenance, and reproduction of their labour.\textsuperscript{16} When government made itself present in the native reserves it was often there to compel and incite subjugated peoples into labour and the wage economy. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, many of the laws and measures introduced which related to everyday life in the native reserves were aimed at recruiting labour, keeping workers at work, regulating efficiency while at work, or keeping a check on workers’ activities while they were not at work. On the rare occasions government undertook to check the advance of diseases, and avert famine and pestilence, its principal and often explicitly-verbalised aim was to nurture the growth of a more productive workforce.

The political economy of settler-colonialism gave the colonial state in Gikuyuland distinctive qualities. Gikuyuland was, simultaneously and contradictorily, conceptualised by government as both a labour reserve from which colonials sought to extract manpower for labour on the neighbouring white farms and a location targeted by government for the development of

\textsuperscript{14} Berman and Lonsdale, “Coping with the Contradictions,” 88-90.


native commodity production. This became known as the “dual policy” and in essence it entailed an attempt to combine both “South African”, and Rhodesian, styles of migrant labour with “West African,” and Tanganyikan, forms of indirect rule. Such dual policy was deemed applicable in Gikuyuland for two reasons. First, it was a relatively densely-populated region which lay directly adjacent to the lands given to the white capitalists whom the government had made such enormous efforts to lure to the colony and who demanded labour; second, it was itself a fertile, productive region, most parts of which had been settled for at least a century and people were already cultivating, trading and accumulating. In practice the dual policy was impossible to implement.

And, for much of the period prior to 1938, and especially during the period before 1918, the government was, in more ways than one, much more inclined to “go settler” than it was to “go native.”

The colonial government was under immediate pressure to generate revenue and make this newly acquired, and supposedly immensely fertile, territory productive. Regarding the people over whom they now claimed total authority as a mass of almost indistinguishable tribesfolk – a “prehistoric people,” living in a “bestial existence” with “animal placidity” and no material wants – it was taken as given among officials that coercion and compulsion would be needed to solicit labour. Historically deep, if intellectually shallow, white discourses on native laziness justified such measures, implicitly or explicitly. Foremost among them were discourses on the young man and especially his body. In contrast to “the white man” who “cannot rest from a perpetual, irritating, exhausting urge to meddle with things and make them somehow better than they were before, the black man in his natural state has no such urges,” mused settler writer Elspeth Huxley for example. For the likes of Huxley and many others, masculine inertia had allowed an entire race to be “halted in the stone age” having hardly “evolved from Palaeolithic beginnings.” Huxley rooted her explanation for this in biological constitution pointing to “the malarial protozoa that wriggle in his blood; the hookworms that grip onto his intestines; the trypanosomes of sleeping sickness that sap his energies and then his life.”

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17 G.V. Maxwell, Chief Native Commissioner to all Administrative Officers, “Dual Policy of Development,” Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Native Affairs Department, Circular No.4 (20 January 1927), KNA AG/7/3.
As with almost all colonial representations of all Africans generally, in Gikuyuland colonial discourses on the African male body coalesced around notions of physical power, shrunken interior refinement, and less-sentient bodies with hardened exterior skin-surfaces. Granville St John Orde-Browne, who served as district officer in Chuka-Mwimbe between 1909 and 1916, like many others, marvelled at what appeared to him to be the “natural” athletic prowess, remarkable strength, and the exceptionally high pain threshold of the men in his district. The evidence on which he based the latter of these assertions was a test he carried out on a sample of people from the district in which he stuck a compass point into their finger-tips and shoulder blades. Their stoic response he attributed “not to Spartan endurance but to positive indifference,” ascribing to his research subjects both less-sensitive outers and under-developed inners, something he further attempted to substantiate through analysing skull shapes.22

Colonials like Huxley, the settler, and Orde-Browne, the official, made the inhabitants of this part of the world visible in terms of colonial labour demands. Overlooking the intricacies of the moral-economy that had been forged in Gikuyuland through centuries of forest-clearing, the gaze of the settlers and the officials of the early colonial state was modulated by imperial and industrial conceptions of “clock-time” and so they viewed the seasonal rhythm of vernacular work and the task-specific labour that it entailed as backward and basic.23 Nevertheless, Gikuyuland was considered, specifically, and positively, as a place with no strong militaristic tradition – as peaceful and contented. With this, the racist imaginary of Africans in general was moderated by a particular stereotype of Gikuyu people as being potentially, at least, more industrious, more entrepreneurial, and more willing to do business with outsiders than others.24

The coercion of labour took multiple forms: for the state, for private employers, on small-scale-community projects to large-scale colonial works, directly and officially through legislation, indirectly and officially through taxation, and privately and informally through private and unofficial labour recruiters.25 Under the vaguely-defined system termed “communal labour,”

introduced in Kenya in 1895, government could call out a group of men, locally, to work for them, unpaid, as porters, or in such infrastructural works as the laying out of a government station, path-cutting, bush-clearing, trench-digging. Chiefs and/or their headmen were instructed to produce the men and few questions were asked of their methods. This system of compulsory labour was formalised in the 1912 Native Authority Ordinance which stated that any “able-bodied male native” could be called upon to give six days labour per quarter (thus 24 days per year) on government works and community projects extending to jobs such as road-building, construction of water-works, irrigation schemes, and dam-building. The 1919 amendment to this ordinance made the demands more exacting: any “able-bodied male native” who had not been in waged employment for at least three of the previous twelve months could be called upon to undertake compulsory (but paid) labour for the state for up to 60 days per year. This was on top of the 24 days of unpaid community work stipulated in the first ordinance. During the 1920s and early 1930s around 15,000 men in the colony were turned out, annually, for unpaid communal labour. Roughly the same number were ordered out each year under the Native Authority Ordinance. For most of these men this involved working on projects away from their home areas on railways, docks, and road-building projects.

Government sought to use the threat of compulsory government labour to guide Gikuyu men into what was termed “voluntary” employment, with private employers. The political clout of white capital, and the emphasis the colonial government placed on it for the economic development of the country, gave labour in colonial Gikuyuland a particular character. Fundamentally hostile to and extremely anxious about the settlers’ clamouring to gain independence from Britain and establish a Rhodesian-style white minority rule in Kenya, the colonial government, generally speaking, routinely set out to placate settlers by publicly encouraging the flow of labour to their estates, farms, factories and mines, and by granting employers the privacy and low-levels of state interference with their labour practices they so desired. Save for one brief moment in 1919, the colonial government never officially directly supplied private capital with native labour; on that occasion Governor Northey’s infamous attempt to turn his district officers into recruiters of labour for settlers was stymied by the furious and

27 Clayton and Savage, Government and Labour, 44.
29 Clayton and Savage, Government and Labour, 139.
31 Berman, Control & Crisis, 128-198.
embarrassed Colonial Office in London. It has, however, been claimed that the Native Affairs Department, tellingly dubbed the “labour bureau”, helped supply European farms with hundreds of men from the Gikuyu reserve especially during the first decade of the twentieth century when it was subject to little scrutiny.

The big capitalists who owned the vast tracts of land in the Rift Valley (11,000 square miles all told) and who ran the coffee, tea, sisal and black-wattle plantations there, and in Kiambu and down at the coast, employed private recruiters who, in turn, worked with chiefs and their men to seek out labour in the Kikuyu reserve. Loathed by the more liberal colonial administrators, one of whom caricatured them as “ex-convicts, defaulting debtors, dipsomaniacs, or men of straw”, labour recruiters had a reputation for being unscrupulous and exploitative. Yet little was done to check their practices, which could be uneven and spasmodic – sometimes entailing the forcible rounding up of the tallest and strongest men in a location and transporting them to their new place of work against their will, sometimes picking on the most vulnerable, including women, children, the elderly, the infirm.

It was in such a context that the bodies of young Gikuyu men emerged as such crucial objects of colonial power. The colonial system created the demand for their labour. In the process the “able-bodied native” emerged as a category of thought and action. The colonial labour system materialised “the body” of the young man, making it visible, reifying it as an object through the tactics and techniques of counting, categorising and segregating; and measuring, weighing, and examining. White settlers, government, Gikuyu seniors, elders and parents, and, of course, missionaries competed with one another over the vitality of the aanake each, in their own very different ways, seeking to stake a claim over, and to corral, control, and direct their masculine, muscular energies for their own purposes. The body of the aanake was “brought to the surface,” as it were, by the colonial search for tractable manpower and Gikuyu responses to it.

Indeed many thousands of young men brought themselves, and their bodies, “to the surface” – willingly seeking out paid work or the patronage of colonial big men. Old routes to self-mastery were being blocked or re-directed; new avenues had to be found. Opportunities for accumulating livestock and dependents through raiding and cattle rustling were limited by the

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33 Clayton and Savage, Government and Labour, 34.


imposition of the so-called “pax Britannica.” The fixing of district boundaries and the enclosing of the Kikuyu reserve, meanwhile, placed a new limit on the time-honoured practice of pioneering expansion through which young men would strike out from the walled-in homestead of their clan and into a new frontier, breaking, and clearing, and settling new land and establishing their own *mbar.* With pressures on land, sons came to realise that they stood to inherit increasingly small portions of their fathers’ sub-divided plots and that their own offspring would inherit less still from them still. In the 30s, a literate generation of Gikuyu men would come to describe these changes as both emasculating and detrimental to the body politic; but we will come to that in Chapter 7.

The scholars who have done the heavy-lifting in terms of colonial Kenya’s early economic history have estimated that as early as 1910 – before the government had even cut its first road in Gikuyuland – a third of adult men in the region were out at work at any given time, with perhaps half of them in government employment and half in private employment. By 1927, only a generation or so after the country had become a British protectorate, about 50% of those categorised as “able-bodied male natives” in Gikuyuland were in registered employment; in the southern parts of the country, closer to Nairobi, this figure was as high as 72%. These figures place Gikuyuland alongside Belgian Congo and the labour-producing territories of Southern Africa, in terms of the proportion of adult male population at work. Leaving aside the 100,000 or so Gikuyu – men, women and children – who had left the reserves more or less permanently to take up land as resident labourers (or “squatters”) on white estates in the Rift Valley, and as well as the small number of semi-skilled artisans, or clerks, working in the urbanising area of Nairobi or in the towns of Fort Hall, Nyeri, Embu and Meru, the vast majority of registered workers were unskilled single men who worked on temporary contracts away from the reserves as agricultural labourers, domestic servants, railway construction, or in government departments.

Colonisers of different kinds, whether they were frontier capitalists or paternalistic administrators, clung to the notion that with such levels of employment the capitalist settler-labour system might itself, if left alone from government interference, have an automatic improving effect on the physical condition of the native population. Waged manual labour, so the argument went,

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was not only a peaceful and healthy substitute for the inter-tribal warfare and raiding that preceded colonial control that would help the native menfolk to “keep themselves physically tuned up”; it would also stimulate “wants” and desires for improved living conditions.  

But abuse was infamously widespread. There were doubtless exceptions to the rule but generally speaking “frontier justice” prevailed on settler farms. With colonial police unlikely to ever visit a settler’s farm unless invited, power-relations akin to those that had typified the period of European conquest remained pronounced in the privacy of these settings. Perpetually on the verge of bankruptcy, unable (and indeed often unwilling) to rely on the state for support, white settlers deployed the *kiboko* whip liberally as “a sovereign remedy” (to borrow Huxley’s apposite phrase). What added to this was an anxiety rooted in an awareness of the precariousness of their sometimes-lavish existence on remote estates. Decades before “Mau Mau” in the 1950s, whites lived in fear of their domestic workers turning against them. And when confronted with minor domestic indiscretions, their nervousness could quickly turn into unrestrained rage.

In 1920 Langley Hawkins tortured his Gikuyu employees because he (wrongly) suspected them of theft; in 1923 Jasper Abrahams, son of the Bishop of Derby, killed his Gikuyu farm labourer for riding the estate horse “stupidly.”

Undergirding the spectacularly horrific episodes was the routine mistreatment of African labour. The 1912-13 Native Labour Commission, in which CSM missionaries gave important testimonies and about which I will say more below, lifted the veil on abuses in workplaces throughout the colony. The commission heard evidence of workers being herded into overcrowded and locked-up labour transit trains like cattle, being starved into skeletons by employers who withheld food, and being beaten so thoroughly their “flesh was hanging in ribbons.” Medical Officer Norman Leys gave evidence of the shocking physiological deterioration of migrant Gikuyu workers at the coast, and the appalling conditions in which they were expected to work. The death

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rate at work among Gikuyu in one factory in Mombasa was 14%, the injury and illness rate much higher. Their housing and treatment was, Leys claimed “inferior to what was provided for slave labour a generation ago.”\(^{50}\) Examples of such labour abuses can be found throughout the interwar period and they were not limited to private employment. There was a case in the early 1920s when several starving young girls were found working on a project to build a water tank at the office of a district official; they had been sleeping in a draughty out-house without blankets.\(^{51}\) Railway construction, technically “government work” but managed by private contractors, was especially treacherous; in 1922 over 700 of the 14,000 employees died while working for Norton-Griffiths on the massive extension of the Uasin-Gishu railway extension, a rate of 52 per 1,000.\(^{52}\)

If such legislation as the Native Authority Ordinance empowered the state to find and recruit able-bodied males for labour, a somewhat elaborate legal apparatus and penal framework helped the government control them, keep them in work, and track their movements. State coercion to mobilise labour overlapped with state coercion to impose control. Masters and Servants’ legislation, for instance, long considered draconian in Britain where it was discarded in 1875, was introduced in 1906 “in order to obtain reasonable service from the natives who are unused to the benefits and obligations of continuous labour.”\(^{53}\) In theory it regulated relations between employers and employees. Yet the latter, categorised as a servant, did not enjoy the rights of a “worker” and balance was in the favour of their master. Under its provisions, employers could take their workers to court for labour offences such as ill-discipline, failure to work, intoxication, damage to property, or desertion. Employees had no right to legal redress, and if found guilty by the court for any one of the listed offences they could be penalised with a fine, imprisonment, hard labour, or – under the Penal Code borrowed from colonial India – flogging.\(^{54}\)

In contrast to metropolitan states, colonial states generally lacked both the means and often the aspiration to make their subjects visible and bring them under their surveillance.\(^{55}\) In large parts of colonial Africa vast swathes of colonised people remained out of the state’s sight –

\(^{50}\) Written evidence of Norman Leys, Appendix I, letter IX, NLC.
\(^{51}\) Clayton and Savage, Government and Labour, 119.
\(^{54}\) Anderson, “Master and Servant,” 461-463.
“off the colonial grid”, as it were. Not so in Gikuyuland. Or, more accurately, not so for those whom government categorised as male, able-bodied, and aged between 15 and 40. The Registration of Natives Ordinance (RNO) became law in 1920.\textsuperscript{56} Introducing a system of South-African style labour passes, the RNO provided a means by which the colonial state brought a section of the governed population – its labourers – into its view and under its surveillance. The Ordinance required every native male over 15 and below 40 years of age to register before his local administrative officer.\textsuperscript{57} There they would be issued with a certificate on which was recorded their unique registration number, their name, their district and location of residence, their father’s name, their tribe, their clan, and their approximate age and district of birth. Space was provided to record their current employment details and employment history: the name of their employer(s), the date(s) and nature of their employment(s), the rate of wages they were paid in each job and if they were supplied posho (food), and their employer(s)’s signature(s). At the foot of the document there was a space for their left thumb print. The administrative officer would keep a copy of the record together with a copy of all ten fingerprints, which was sent to the Chief Registrar of Natives in Nairobi.

Registered men were legally required to carry their documents whenever they were at work, on their journey to or from work, or indeed anywhere outside their stated home location. Upon registering, each man was provided with a cylindrical metal tin – a kipande (the Swahili word for container, which came to refer to the passes generally) – embossed with his unique registration number in which to store the certificate. Typically it was worn around the neck, fastened with a piece of string. If he was found by an administrator, the police, a chief or headman, outside the reserve, in a town or in a non-native area, and was unable to produce his kipande or if his kipande had not been signed off he was technically a deserter and was liable to arrest and prosecution on a criminal charge.\textsuperscript{58} The kipande was one of the most hated and contested “everyday” aspects of colonialism in Gikuyuland and elsewhere in the colony. The most common charge against it was that it was degrading and dehumanising, since it treated labourers like cattle, chained with cattle-bells.\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{57} Berman and Lonsdale, “Crisis of Accumulation,” 107, 112-3.
\bibitem{58} Clayton and Savage, \textit{Government and Labour}, 131-133.
\end{thebibliography}
A million kipande had been issued by 1921, and 2 million been distributed by 1931 – which must have covered a majority of the eligible population. One contemporary claimed that in the year after the registration pass system was introduced, the colonial police were able to track down 2,364 of 2,790 reported desertions from work. It is perhaps only a slight exaggeration, for another source for the same year put the figure at 2,768 of 3,595 deserters traced. Furthermore, the state’s capacity to control and punish was also remarkably more pronounced here than elsewhere in colonial Africa. Each year between 1922 and 1939 there were between 1,082 and 2,434 convictions under the Masters and Servants legislation and between 2,277 and 5,293 convictions under the RNO. Corresponding statistics for other British colonies were significantly lower. For instance in 1929 there were 2,105 charges under Masters and Servants legislation in Kenya and 1,492 convictions. In Nyasaland, under similar legislation, there were 771 charges and 755 convictions; in Tanganyika 666 charges and 500 convictions; and in Gold Coast 7 charges and 4 convictions.

Yet the colonial state in Gikuyuland, as in Kenya Colony generally and elsewhere in the world, was “Janus-faced.” Rigorous in its measures to recruit, register, record and punish labour, its knowledge of local worlds remained superficial. Potent when it came to man-handling labourers, its capacity to access and penetrate the inner lives of its subjects (able-bodied males or otherwise) was extremely limited. The Kenya colonial administration had no modern statistical services. And though several of the district administrators were talented ethnographers and linguists, the Kenya colonial government did not undertake a single systematic ethnographic study of the people it ruled. When it intervened in vernacular life, the colonial state remained on exteriors. Like the “conquest state” out of which it formed the colonial state in Gikuyuland operated at the level of the material, targeting bodily surfaces (the backs it ordered to be flogged, the digits it inked) rather than seeking to change interior states.

In and amongst the measures examined in the foregoing, there were instances of state-sponsored interventions in which the colonised subject was met, and made-visible, by the state as a bodily, biological, living being and dealt with as such. For instance, the 1914 government publication, “A Scheme for Securing a Better Labour Supply and Keeping in Good Health the

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61 McGregor Ross, *Kenya from Within*, xi.
65 Berman, *Control & Crisis*, 3.
66 *ibid.* 93.
67 *ibid.* 93.
Labourers Supplied.” It comprised of ten pages of procedural recommendations to private employers regarding their employees’ welfare and working conditions and included proposals for new government practices relating to the recruitment and handling of labourers. The document advised the formalisation and better-maintenance of the nascent system of “departure camps” to which labourers recruited in the reserves were taken and held before they were transported to their places of employment. These camps were to be provided with cemented floors, cooking places, water tanks, and “proper latrines.” In the camps government officials were to undertake rigorous medical examinations “specially directed to the existence of swollen glands, hernias, heart and lung afflictions,” smallpox and venereal disease. In turn, employers were instructed to ensure that, on arrival, their workers were provided with “adequate housing” with cooking areas and washing areas, and access to drinking water; they were to drain any swampy patches on their estates and kerosene any undrainable water. They were instructed to weigh each man upon the start of their contract, and then each month subsequently, to keep written records of the weigh-ins. A weekly inspection for sores, jiggers, and bad eyes was further advised, and on the basis of it employers were to submit “a monthly report of the state of health of the labourers […] to the Government Chief Sanitary Officer.” The techniques endorsed in such a document were aimed at making colonised men legible to the state in terms their bodies and their suitability for labour. The practices advised in the scheme would have generated a colonial knowledge that pertained not to interior states, modes of thought, or consciousness, but to anatomical, medicalised bodies.

Some of the more limited recommendations in this document were made legal requirements by the 1919 amendment to the Masters and Servants ordinance which, among other things, stipulated that employers were obliged to provide their labourers with rations and at least one woollen blanket. More significantly, the amendment established a small labour inspectorate as a branch of the Native Affairs Department. In 1921 the head of this inspectorate – the famously liberal administrator Oscar Watkins – issued a circular titled “Instructions for the Care of Labour” which introduced a set of more stringent controls than the 1914 scheme and the 1919 amendment. A forthright document, in the circular we glimpse the kinds of malpractice the labour inspectorate was encountering through Watkins’ advice which condemned the “popular fallacy that the native likes the sun to work in” and the “common misapprehension […] that coarse mealie porridge is all he requires.” The circular instructed that no employee could be made to lift

68 “A Scheme for Securing a Better Labour Supply and Keeping in Good Health the Labourers Supplied” (1914), KN4 AG/7/6.
71 “Instructions for the Care of Labour by Government Departments,” Kenya Official Gazette (2 March 1921), 184-186; Clayton and Savage, Government and Labour, 135-136. Further examples of such measures could
or carry a load of more than 50lb, and it set the maximum working day at 8 hours. The decrepitude of this inspectorate’s hardware, however, severely hampered its ability to implement such regulations.

Such measures, which saw the state begin to concern itself with the labourer while at work, developed in the wake of WWI which was a watershed moment in colonial biopolitics in Africa generally. They channelled ideals surrounding Imperial trusteeship which reminded colonial states that they had a paternalistic duty to develop as much as a political right to extract. More locally, the recruitment of Gikuyu men to porterage roles for the war effort in German East Africa had revealed shocking levels of “unfitness” among men in the reserves, something which was compounded by the famine and disease epidemics which hit the region in 1918 and 1919 (about which I will say more below). They were accompanied by a spate of state biomedical initiatives conducted within the reserves. Sparse, utilitarian, and deliberately impersonal, these measures were aimed at improving the physical health of the population chiefly that they might become more productive. The government opened four native hospitals in Gikuyuland in 1920 (previously they had just one, in Nairobi): the stated benefit, to quote J.L. Gilks, the Principal Medical Officer, was to limit the risk of epidemic diseases spreading beyond the reserves into European areas and to “increase the supply of African labour.” It also conducted a series of “campaign”-style medical crusades in the reserve including mass-vaccination projects, mass medical inspections, and expansive surveys on nutrition and dental conditions.

In the decade between 1920 and 1930, less than a generation after the military raids and killings of conquest, British colonial officials swept through Gikuyuland “combing” the reserves administering injections, opening mouths to inspect teeth and gums, subjecting people to stethoscopes and tape measures and examining persons for heart defects and intestinal

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Like labour recruitment, such campaigns relied on chiefs and their headmen to round up the “patients” for the government medical officer. The campaigns could be oppositional, coercive, and militaristic. With an emphasis on curative programmes rather than the more costly, time-consuming and interventionist preventative schemes, the colonial government’s medical campaigns of the interwar period were indicative of a mode of power that was not “continuous,” “capillary,” or “evenly” spread, but spasmodic and concentrated in time and space.

This was the context in which the CSM’s “Muscular Christianity” was uncomfortably situated. In the first decades of the twentieth century, a colonial biopower of sorts emerged in Gikuyuland in the way the colonial state dealt with labour. However, implemented arbitrarily, haphazardly, and often coercively, and by actual embodied actors at that – district officials, chiefs and their headmen, people, that is, who had names, faces and signatures –, and pursued with highly utilitarian ends in mind (in the name of “productivity” or “security”), the colonial biopower that emerged in the Kenya colonial government was distinct from the agentless, hegemonic, capillary form it often took in colonial metropoles. And it was distinct from the soft, integrative, individualising form of biopower which the CSM were carrying out in their mission stations and which the missionaries hoped to extend over the colony at large.

Horace Philp, the CSM and biopolitics

As they undertook to convert Gikuyu into modern, Christian subjects, with appropriately civilised healthy bodies, it increasingly became apparent to the missionaries that their programme was not merely a campaign conducted against “the village” and the moral and physical evils they purported inhered in “custom” and “tradition”; it was also under threat from the “modernity” and “civilisation” that was emerging in the colony under the political economy of settler capitalism. How did the CSM attempt to make their “Muscular Christianity” work within a context that apparently militated against its promise to emancipate, liberate and uplift? That is the question which propels the final half of this chapter, which is split into two parts.

The CSM were steadfast in their support for the legal mechanisms the government introduced to compel African men into work. An “industrial mission” in origin they were convinced in the uplifting, Christianising, power of work, especially skilled wage-work, especially for men.77 They supported such measures as the Native Authority Ordinance and the Registration

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of Natives Ordinance. Moreover, and against the wishes of the Church in Scotland, they backed Governor Northey, publicly and privately, in his rogue attempt to turn his field administration into recruiters for private employers. It is even possible that the introduction of the loathed *kipande* cannisters was down to CSM missionary Arthur Barlow. Wonderfully illustrative of the contradictory place the CSM came to occupy in the colonial labour system generally, Barlow suggested the idea of tin containers in a letter to his District Commissioner in 1914, arguing that were a labour pass system to be introduced, such a measure would be both sensible and fair to the workers since it would reduce punishments for lost or damaged documents.

Key agents in maintaining Gikuyuland’s colonial labour system, the missionaries of the CSM were also among its most vocal critics. This section considers this point in relation to the biopolitical efforts of one CSM missionary, the medical doctor Horace Philp, to encourage the colonial government to bring into its orbit the life and well-being of the native “population.” Specifically I want to consider four texts authored by Philp between 1913 and 1919. Each source corresponded to an occasion the missionary doctor involved himself in colonial labour policy. In each instance Philp brought a missionary and biomedical gaze to bear upon Gikuyu people. They are significant because of the way Philp conceptualises Gikuyu as a living “population” for whom he petitioned the government to take responsibility for as such. Describing the hands-on ways in which he produced medical knowledge about the health of Gikuyu people (able-bodied, male, or otherwise) and calling for the government to take an interest in the welfare of its workers and introduce more rigorous measures to monitor and record the vital statistics of the governed masses at large, in these texts we catch more than a glimpse of the concerted effort made by the CSM to effectively convert a conquest colonial state into a biopolitical one.

First: the testimony Horace Philp gave to the Native Labour Commission of 1912-1913. Philp, witness 226, was arguably the most condemnatory of all who spoke before the commission. His scathing criticism, of government and private employers alike, focussed not however on compulsory labour *per se* (a matter on which Philp declared his general indifference) but on the deleterious effects of *unregulated* labour. His contention was that colonisers ought to

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81 Arthur Barlow to DC Dagoretti (20 November 1914), PCEA I/A/17.
82 Witness No. 226 Dr H.R.A. Philp, NLC.
start providing for the welfare of the native population generally, and the able-bodied male in particular. Based on “knowledge obtained and observations made” during his three years at Tumutumu hospital, during which time he reckoned he had treated well over 1,000 cases, Philp stated that, in his opinion, 40% of adult men in northern Gikuyuland were “incapacitated by disease.” These diseases ranged from scabies and phthisis to deadly conditions such as yaws, dysentery and malaria. Malaria was new to the region and had been introduced through migrant labour, Philp argued, claiming that it was contracted at work sites in the low-lying regions at the coast and in the labour transit camps along the swampy, mosquito-infected Fort Hall Road which cut through the middle of Gikuyuland. He gave a graphic description of a six-week spell in May 1912 when, within a two-mile radius of Tumutumu, hundreds of men who had recently returned from work suddenly came down with malaria. Sixty of them died. Because of taboos surrounding such a sickness, and because it was normal practice for the dead or dying to be left out in the forest to die, Philp and the other missionaries around Tumutumu kept encountering unconscious, dying, men and corpses in the woods around the mission station. He lambasted the government for not heeding his advice to undertake the simple task of draining and kerosening malarial swamps at places of work and in the vicinity of labour camps. Yaws, by contrast, he believed was an old disease endemic to the region. But like malaria, he argued it would be straightforward to stamp out through a programme of systematic vaccinations. Further, he expressed his desire to know why “in these days of surgical achievement,” the only steriliser in the whole of Gikuyuland was the one in his hospital at Tumutumu which the CSM had purchased themselves.

Because the deaths he described were “absolutely preventable,” Philp described the neglect pervasive in Gikuyuland’s labour system as amounting to “murder.” The maltreatment of native labour, Philp argued, was not only morally wrong, but also made little sense economically. He reasoned that if the government could stamp out yaws it would be an “enormous gain to the labour market”; and that if employers supplied their labourers with more food they would be fitter, stronger, less susceptible to sickness, and more productive. Before it became government policy, he petitioned the government to make private employers responsible for the health of their workers, to introduce medical examinations for all workers, for the introduction of rations for migrant workers, and for the compulsory dousing with quinine of all migrant labourers in the transit camps on the Fort Hall road. He closed his testimony with a call for government to invest in the ongoing educative efforts of missionaries in the region, for the “discipline” instilled in such institutions, Philp argued, made Gikuyu “easier to handle by Europeans and […] much readier to see the reason for taking quinine, etc, which the average raw native did not.”
Philp would find himself making similar calls some four years later, in an article titled “The Labour Problem” – the second of his four interventions I want to consider. Written on 7th February 1917, it was published in the colonial government’s annual report for 1916-1917. At the start of 1917 Philp was seconded from the CSM to the colonial government, as Chief Medical Officer for Kenya Province. It was war-time in East Africa and the colonial government was redoubling its attempts to conscript able-bodied men to the ranks of the “carrier corps.” During 1916 the Military Labour Bureau had recruited 40,000 to carry equipment for the soldiers in Tanganyika. At the start of 1917, plans were afoot to boost conscription and order out all able-bodied native males without exception. At the same time, settlers were becoming increasingly vocal in their concern that conscription would drain the labour supply to their farms. Part of Philp’s brief was to gauge the extent of manpower in Kenya Province so that the government could channel its human resources appropriately. But the overwhelming scale of this task struck Philp when he took up his new government role.

“Is there anyone in the country who can give an adequate estimate of the amount of labour required in this country?” he asked, rhetorically, adding: “In Europe, every effort is made to check the mortality from disease and to maintain a fit population. In this country the efforts in this direction are so meagre, as far as the native population is concerned, as to be almost negligible.” The colonial government’s failure to “publish regularly the statistics of populations as far as available,” he wrote, was a failure to uphold its “duty” to its “citizens.”

Philp warned of the apparently careless rush to recruit all and any available labour without giving thought to nurturing and maintaining the labour pool. He repeated accusations he had made before the labour commission in 1913, lambasting what he saw as widespread extractive, exploitative, and murderous approach to native labour by Kenyan’s colonisers: “It is a common thing to hear a person say that ‘there are millions of Akikuyu in the country: what does it matter if some of them are killed off?’.” As in 1913, Philp’s arguments were political and economic as much as they were moral. It was both “criminal of Government” and economically unsound “to attract settlers here and give them land and not see [to it] that there is an adequate supply of labour for their needs.” The system, he argued, only worked if there was a careful, planned, deliberate attempt by government to nurture and maintain its workers. Could nobody see that “the lack of a healthy

labour supply will resort in inevitable financial failure of the firms that have large sums of British capital invested in them”?

Having made these remarks, Philp provided some of the basic facts at his disposal. By his estimate the total population of Kenya Province in the year ending December 1916 was 867,152. From this he gathered that there would be 86,715 men aged between 18 and 30. Based on the 15,000 or so cases he calculated had treated since taking up medical work at Tumutumu he supposed about half of this adult male population were “incapacitated from diseases”; especially yaws and heart disease. The “finest and fittest” meanwhile were being extracted from the Province and taken to war. Diarrhoeal diseases were endemic and the cause of high mortality among children. On top of this, carrier corps returning to the reserves were bringing back dysentery which was killing, Philp estimated, about 600 people a month in the province. The benefit of the war was that it had enabled him to undertake medical examinations on “thousands of raw natives,” but his results were “anything but reassuring. The general physique of the natives of the Province is anything but good, and is lower than that of other African tribes, while from certain districts the number of men fit enough for energetic work of any kind is alarmingly small.”

Demanding that government radically reform its approach to native labour, Philp set out six proposals for government. First, to form a system for obtaining accurate records and statistics. Second, not to sell land to any settler who could not prove they were a good employer. Third, to clamp down on human porterage by fining employers if their workers were found carrying loads of over 30lbs or unloading a weight from a cart that was in excess of 60lbs. Fourth, to enhance its medical department. He called for government to undertake a series of yaws campaigns “systematically injecting” the entire native population; increase the number of medical officers; appoint a medical officer whose sole duty was to inspect labour conditions; and increase supplies of medicine to mission hospitals. Fifth, to start taking an interest in population growth by making interventions aimed at decreasing infant mortality. He called for a clamp down on prostitution to limit the spread of gonorrhoea; the public encouragement of marriage; and for migrant workers to be allowed and encouraged to take their families with them to their place of work. Finally, Philp called for government to give more support to those missions, such as the CSM, who were working to improve not only the moral, but also the physical, material, conditions of the native population. As he put it:

“every encouragement should be given to all wise methods of evangelising and educating the natives as only by being given something better than his heathen superstitions will he be induced to leave them and put his trust in the scientific method of modern medical treatment, etc and so save physically himself and his race.

The third moment I want to consider came some nine months after the publication of “The Labour Problem.” It is the time when, during three days in the middle of September 1917,
in the depths of the war effort, in a wire-fenced labour holding pen in South Nyeri District, Philp oversaw the mass medical examinations of thousands of men from the district. He recounted the episode in an article titled “The Wire Cage” published in the CSM’s pamphlet, *Kikuyu News*.86

The broader context to the event is important. In May 1917, the government had intensified its drive for labour, attempting to recruit (colony-wide) 16,000 men per month for the carrier corps.87 In Kenya’s native reserves, all the machinery of the colonial state was turned to the task of reaching into and plundering villages in order to identify and round-up all remaining “able-bodied native males.” Those deemed to be the fittest were to be directed to the military; those deemed less fit were to be sent to work on settler farms. The mechanism to distinguish the physically sound from the physically unsound was the medical examination. Tasked to identify the able-bodied men, exclude the “unfit” (the diseased, disabled), and remove any elderly persons, or any women or children who had been recruited, the job of these medical examiner was to classify, measure and categorise by bringing a biomedical gaze to bear upon the gathered masses.88

When Philp arrived at his pen, early on a Thursday morning, he was instructed to “pack off all fit men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five to serve with the military.”89 During the week previously the thirteen chiefs of the district, together with their retainers, entered and searched every known village in their location; tribal police guarded pathways and borders. One chief managed to provide 1,000 of the 1,114 men supposedly residing in his location; another produced 892 out of an estimated 942. In all about 9,000 men were seized and corralled into a five-stranded barbed-wire cage built to hold 5,000.

Native police secured the entrance and patrolled the borders of the fencing. Inside, the assembled men were made to sit in rows on the ground. Police marched along the lines of men and removed the visibly disabled. Those with bad ulcers were taken to have them dressed by Philp’s hospital assistants from Tumutumu. The rest were bundled, one-by-one, into the grass shed which was serving as Philp’s examining room. There, Philp described with notable nonchalance, “their blankets were thrown to the side” and “they were compelled to submit to examination.” When anyone tried to escape they were “suddenly pounced on” by the guards. “It was fatiguing work,” Philp wrote “and at times the pressure of the stethoscope in one’s ears got beyond endurance.” By sundown on Saturday, Philp and his assistants had inspected 7,112 men. Philp reflected:

87 Savage and Forbes Munro, “Carrier Corps,” 330.
89 Philp, “The Wire Cage.”
The scientific value of such a thorough examination of the district was useful to one’s self. One got a complete resume of the health of the population, their congenital deformities, their prevalent diseases, the amount of disease to the total population, &c., that could not have been got any other way. The results shocked him, and he wanted them to shock his readers. Of the 7,112 examined, only 2,283 were passed for the Carrier Corps. 2,000 were deemed strong enough for farm work. Over 3,000 were rejected as “totally unfit for work of any kind.”

The fourth, and final, instance I want to consider is Philp’s annual medical report for Kenya Province for 1918-1919. Philp gave a graphic, harrowing, account of the extreme famine conditions which gripped Gikuyuland upon the cessation of the war. In February 1919, when Philp wrote the report, the official estimate was that 26,193 of the 201,431 military labourers recruited from Kenya since 1916 had died, with a further 14,000 were missing, presumed dead. The doctor Norman Leys estimated that only 366 had been killed in combat; the rest perished through disease, exhaustion, and over-work. Thousands returned to their villages in dreadful physical condition – with gaunt bodies, protruding ribs, sunken eyes and unshaved heads. Many died on the roads leading home.

In “The Labour Problem,” Philp had warned that so weakened and exhausted was Gikuyuland’s population that were a famine or epidemic to hit the reserve, “there will be an end of the Labour Problem because all the labour will be wiped out.” In November 1917 the rains failed and from December Kenya’s central highlands were hit by conditions that resembled those of the Great Famine of 1899.

Philp’s 1919 report stated bleakly:

The conditions of that time all over the Reserve were pitiful in the extreme. Thousands of men, women and children were living skeletons, and the mortality was great. Children and others were so hungry that where food was issued raw they ate it and so developed diarrhoea, and many died of this.

By February, he wrote, “gardens, grassland and bush in the Reserve were like a desert.” By the end of March there were no cereals, grains, or vegetables left in the village and people began eating roots and grass. Such was the value of sheep and goats that Philp noted with horror that even starving people were reluctant to kill them for food. People were tapping their livestock for milk and blood in a bid gain sustenance from them while keeping their stock alive. As the famine intensified, Philp reported that thousands of sheep, goats and cows were slaughtered, but for

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91 Clayton and Savage, Government and Labour, 88.
92 Leys, Kenya, 179-180.
93 Clayton and Savage, Government and Labour, 90.
ceremonial purposes, to propitiate Ngai for rain. Northern Gikuyuland, including around Tumutumu, conditions were especially harsh, wrote Philp. This was because the labour demands had made them almost entirely dependent on imported (rather than home-grown) maize, and this had to be transported to them by ox-carts from Nairobi, 60 miles or so to the south. The fodder for the oxen expired, and then so did the oxen. People in northern Gikuyuland, especially the poorest, had no choice but to leave their homes, starving and emaciated, and walk 50 miles to Fort Hall to collect maize supplies. Philp described how corpses were strewn all along the road and were feasted on by carrion. As if conditions could not get any worse, there was a virulent outbreak of smallpox. And then, in July, Spanish influenza reached Nyeri from Nairobi, via Fort Hall. Philp’s colleagues at Tumutumu wrote evocatively of how the air around the station “was foul with the unburied corpses of the village people.”

In his report, Philp estimated that there was a 10% mortality rate in the reserves in 1918: that over 100,000 Gikuyu died.

While these four sources can be read on a factual level, for the rich and important empirical information they contain, or on a policy level, in terms of the explicit arguments that Philp makes, they are also significant for what is going on discursively within them. In particular, they are important for the biomedical, biopolitical, and affective, lens Philp brings to bear upon Gikuyuland’s colonised Others and his attempt to urge the colonial state to do the same. At a time when the racialised structures of official colonial rule were productive of draconian, or else neglectful and hollowed-out power relations, when the bulk of the colonised population lived largely beyond the purview of a state which had little interest in them save in their potential productive capacity as workers, these sources are examples of how the CSM sought to go against the dominant trends of colonial power in their bid to fashion integrative modes of governance.

The sources are indicative of how the CSM as an institution was an active contributor to the very labour system its publicly criticised. Indeed if Philp and the CSM sought to alter the colony’s labour regime – making it more caring and benevolent – they also sought to make it even more rigorous and invasive. Clearly, these sources are not evidence that the missionaries were colonial critics in any absolute sense. Rather here, as elsewhere, the CSM advocated for a different kind of colonial order. A core aspect of Philp’s criticisms of the labour system essentially articulated the question Foucault contended encapsulated the logic of biopower: “why would society eliminate a life and a body that it could appropriate?”

The sources were much more than simply calls for better forms of government. In these texts Philp sought to introduce biopolitics into Gikuyuland, by bringing the governed masses into

96 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 109.
view as a living population and attempting to force the very biological bodiliness of “the native” into the calculus of colonial governance. Through anecdotal evidence, statistics, and data gathered from personal investigations and examinations, Philp strived to bring the health and well-being (or lack thereof) to the attention of the colonial government. In so doing he was, in effect, attempting to force the entry of “the body” and “the population” into the tactics, discourses, and practices of colonial power. Thus, taken together, the sources were aimed at forcing a potentially major historical rupture – targeting the radical reformulation colonial power in Gikuyuland from sovereign power to biopower.

Making the Able-Bodied Male: the CSM’s apprenticeship scheme.
Spokespersons such as Doctors John Arthur and Horace Philp routinely expressed the CSM’s desire for a colonial labour system which, as it cajoled African men out of a “tribal” state of inertia into modernised forms of wage-labour, took responsibility for their moral and physical welfare. The missionaries of the CSM were colonial evangelists whose aim it was to extend the reach of the Kingdom of the British Empire and the Kingdom of Christ over spaces they conceptualised as superstitious, dark and diseased. They were desirous for Empire and Christ to reach deep into “village life” and into the persons living there – making them visible and knowable by counting, measuring, surveying, and examining them while at the same time seeking to integrate and incorporate them into both the body politic of the empire and the body of Christ. With this universalising logic they believed that when it came to compelling labour, “negative” mechanisms alone were insufficient and counter-productive: colonials ought not simply to harry and bully and punish, they ought also to try to cultivate “industriousness” and a willingness to work. Further, the CSM’s position was that if Gikuyu were to become full citizens their men could not remain mere labourers; they needed to be given the opportunities to become skilled in specialised work.

As they publicly campaigned for colony-wide legislation to regulate and rationalise labour, inside their mission stations the missionaries of the CSM undertook to work intimately with Gikuyu men aiming to build their “characters” and train their bodies in new techniques. Philp described the scene that greeted him upon his arrival at Tumutumu station thus:

Inside the mission grounds […] you find not only the Gospel of the Grace of God being taught morning and night of each day, but also on six days of the week the Gospel of Work, which is as needful as the other. You see men and boys learning to use the plough […] to plant a vegetable garden […] to fell trees, and quarry stones, and build […] It seems to me that it is just this kind of work which has given the mission the grip which one feels it has, and which some missions lack through being confined to evangelistic and medical work only.97

The “Gospel of Work” was a central part of the CSM’s civilising mission and “Muscular Christianity” during the period before 1938. The mission sought to both work-the-man and produce working men, both deploying work as a means to an end as part of their holistic programme of bodily training and character formation, while simultaneously carrying out an official project funded by and on behalf of the government to train skilled workers.

The CSM’s deployment of training in skilled work was a form of “disciplinary power”: the missionaries imagined that through regular, repetitive, exercise they could extract, uplift and emancipate individual Gikuyu men from the squalid, primitive “communal” frame of “tradition”; training and nurturing, they set out to completely reshape bodies and selves; its discourse was one of development and enhancement not punishment and deduction; proceeding through “meticulous, often minute techniques” it was intimate and pastoral, aiming to incite and motivate rather than threaten and coerce. As such it sat awkwardly in a colonial context shaped by racial hierarchies, violence, and punishment. In 1920 Arthur declared “We believe every native ought to work, and that work is a necessary part of Christian character. To Christianise natives, to educate them, to make them work are surely not conflicting but complementary principles.” 98 That he felt the need to make such a statement is indicative of the tensions – we might say contradictions – inherent in their project.

The CSM actively promoted itself as a modernising, civilising, and capitalistic force within a setting the missionaries regarded as pre-industrial, traditional, dark and backward. 99 The missionaries mocked old ways of counting time as primitive and imprecise. 100 They wrote about the seasonal rhythm of the local agricultural cycle, and the feasting, ceremonies, and sacrifices that attended it, describing it as irregular and irrational, and therefore as a block on material progress; they represented it as diametrically opposed to their own labour model of steady, continuous, systematic, regularised work to a mechanistic schedule. 101 They ridiculed the tools typically deployed to break up land, plant, clear forest land and harvest crops – the *rohio* knife and the *mujange* digging stick – on the grounds that they were inefficient, unspecialised and unsophisticated. 102 They wrote enthusiastically about their desire to elevate an infantile economic system in which currency was livestock, people and things, to one based on money and a wage-

98 John Arthur, “Native Education” (May 1920), EUL AP Gen762.
100 Marion Stevenson, “A Round of the Clock,” *KN*, 49 (June-July 1914).
economy; they expressed their desire to disenchant cattle by, for example, eliminating what they perceived to be the ritual superstitions that surrounded milk, and by encouraging people to use cattle “for slaughter, for skins, for manure, [and] for manual labour.”

They did not entirely overlook the notions of autonomously accumulated wealth which had been a central and pronounced aspect of the moral economies of Gikuyuland for at least a century before the arrival of white-skinned colonisers, but they often represented this in simplistic terms: when they were not describing Gikuyu men as “loafers” to whom constant and carefully routinised work did not – yet – come naturally, they described them as “grasping,” “greedy,” “thieving,” and “materialistic.”

Within this the CSM enunciated a particularly gendered discourse on work in relation to men and manliness. They were convinced of the capacity of work to make boys into men; and, framing the “native” as a “boy” regardless of biological age, they applied the same to Gikuyu. As far as the missionaries were concerned, so educative and enriching was “work with the hands” it was as relevant and useful in Christian schools in Scotland as it was in such a labour producing region of colonial Africa as Gikuyuland. As Tumutumu artisan George Dennis liked to put it (in Scots dialect) “Laddies are laddies a’ the warld ower, and the African is no exception.”

As an educative tool, the muscular Christians of the CSM made a place for manual work in their timetable because, just like sport and games, demanding physical application and mental “grit” it was simultaneously ennobling and humbling. They championed it because it disciplined as it uplifted.

Further, they saw their work-programme in the mission station as laying a foundation for the bourgeois Christian gendered order they hoped to establish in the country at large. Their aim was to restructure the gendered order by turning aanaake into men who, whether as public-faring wage-earners or small-scale independent commercial farmers, would have the means and responsibility to marry and provide for their dependents.

Inaugurated in 1909 under the then-head of the mission, Henry Scott, and remaining more or less unchanged until the system was overhauled in 1934, the programme of technical apprenticeships run by the CSM was, explicitly and officially, an exercise in collaboration between the mission and the colonial government (Figure 1). Through the scheme the missionaries of the CSM became, in effect, agents of the colonial state. The government gave the mission funds; in

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105 George Dennis, “The Tea,” KN, 47 (Feb-March 1914).

106 George Dennis, “‘The Day’s Work’ at Tumutumu,” KN, 35 (May 1912).
return, the mission skilled-up young Gikuyu men, preparing them “for their future life’s work as useful citizens of the colony.” At its Kikuyu and (from 1911) Tumutumu stations, the CSM provided apprenticeships in carpentry, masonry, and agriculture, giving three-year courses of formal instruction in each. The government’s Public Works Department and Agricultural Department set the syllabus, managed the annual examinations of the apprentices and conducted inspections of the mission’s technical schools. The apprentices were indentured to the mission, under the provisions of the Master and Servants ordinance (Figure 2). They were not paid but they were admitted into the missionary dormitory and received food and clothing. The system of indenture, wrote Philp gave

a certain assurance that six months ahead, perhaps in a specifically busy time, [...] these boys won’t suddenly say, as the majority of natives working for Europeans say at sometime or other, “I want a rest,” and off they go, just as they are beginning to learn things, for an indefinite holiday. For each apprentice indentured, the mission received from government £2 per year, for their tools and outfit, and a further £5 per each apprentice who successfully completed the annual examination.

Until the government established its own Native Industrial Training Depot at Kabete in 1925, the sphere of technical training in colonial Gikuyuland was one in which missions had an almost complete monopoly. Through their apprenticeship schemes, the CSM emerged as one of the most renowned producers and suppliers of skilled labour in the whole of colonial Kenya. They were not the only mission to undertake this partnership with government. Most notably, their Protestant allies in the Church Missionary Society entered into the same arrangement and offered similar programmes at their stations at Maseno and Butere in Western Kenya, Freretown at the coast, and at Kahuhia in Fort Hall. But CSM Kikuyu and CSM Tumutumu took on more technical apprentices than any other mission in Gikuyuland. Accordingly, they received more government funds than any other mission in this part of the colony.

From a certain perspective, the CSM’s apprenticeship scheme was, in many ways, decidedly underwhelming, failing to live up to the immense pronouncements the missionaries were given to making of it. Certainly it was not, by most measures, numerically significant. During the period between 1919 and 1934, each station was turning out between twenty and sixty apprentices annually. Before the war the figures were significantly lower. By December 1919 Kikuyu station had produced only twenty-two qualified carpenters, fifteen qualified masons, and twenty-three

110 “Grants to Missions, Summary of Payments 1924” (10 March 1925), PCEA I/AA/3.
qualified agriculturalists; Tumutumu produced even fewer. Its significance lies, rather, in the nature of the project and the kind of colonial power it indexed.

Figure 1. Two images taken from Kikuyu News. Top: “One of the assistants at the building of Tumutumu Mission House,” KN, 17 (March 1910); Bottom: “Kikuyu Training Institution: Laying of the Foundation Stone,” KN, 23 (November 1910). Note the Union Flag.

112 Ibid.
Figure 2. Example of a deed of apprenticeship. This is the apprenticeship deed for a stone-mason, Kamanja wa Githigi, indentured to the CSM on a three-year apprenticeship on 1 August 1921. TT archive.
At its core the apprenticeship scheme concerned the imparting of new techniques which, however simple, required the candidates to use and inhabit their bodies in novel ways: how to plane a piece of wood, how to cut a stone, how to plough a field.\textsuperscript{113} Significantly, the missionaries configured this acquisition of bodily skill in terms of teleological discourses of racial progress. The missionaries perceived their technical and agricultural training as forcing a momentous rupture in the history of Gikuyu people at large; by imparting in their apprentices a new mastery of the body and a new bodily awareness they were enabling, one-by-one, an entire people to become “transformers of their environment” rather than subjects to it.\textsuperscript{114} They made grand claims about the civilising process that came when their apprentices learned, for instance, to operate a bandsaw, handle a chisel, prune a coffee plant, or milk a cow.

Within such a context “accuracy” in general, and the “straight” line in particular, became qualities with significance beyond themselves. The missionaries of the CSM shared the colonial fetishization of straight lines and rectangles, exactitude in measurement and precision in time. The staple work of carpenter apprentices was learning to saw and plane “pieces of wood perfectly straight, square, and to given sizes, which they should be able to measure and mark out for themselves \textit{accurately}”; for masons meanwhile it was cutting lumps of stone into rectangular blocks and building walls that ran in straight courses (Figure 3); agricultural apprentices had to measure out land.\textsuperscript{115} For the colonial-evangelists of the CSM, accomplishment of such tasks indexed not simply the candidate’s attainment of a new skill but their entry into civilisation. Thus in 1913 George Dennis, the artisan instructor at Tumutumu station, described the “pleasant flourishing” of his one-time “raw” and “wild” mason apprentices like this:

Arriving at the quarry, one can hear the merry click-click of the hammers, but what is happier still, see those chocolate-coloured boys, who a short time ago were little more than decorated savages, pegging in and turning out dressed stones which would do credit to any mason apprentices at home.\textsuperscript{116}

Any movement, style or technique that struck the missionaries as irregular, imprecise or inefficient was a problem on which the missionaries fixated. Especially in the early days of the scheme, missionary technical instructors, obsessed over the apparently unorthodox ways in which their “raw” apprentices undertook apparently simple tasks such as digging, lifting, carrying, and cutting. In 1909, the agricultural instructor Alexander Allen, for example, wrote of how although he wanted to “bring into use more effective means of tilling, such as the plough,” crops were dug out of the earth “in a very primitive fashion, the workers […] simply scraping them out with their

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\textsuperscript{114} Philp, \textit{A New Day in Kenya}, 76.
\textsuperscript{115} Director of Public Works to Director of Education (21 February 1912), PCEA I/EA/5; Alexander Allan “Shamba,” \textit{KN}, 30 (September 1911).
\textsuperscript{116} George Dennis, “A Visit to Tumutumu Quarry,” \textit{KN}, 40 (January 1913).
\end{flushleft}
The following year, carpentry instructor William Tait reported how while his apprentices could “push a plane fairly well” were “very poor hands with a saw” and carried sand from the quarry “in a style of their own.”

Figure 3. Top: “Mr Tait and His Masons”. Bottom: “Coffee Planting.” John Arthur Photos, EUL.

By the 1920s open expressions of frustration with their inability to coax their charges out of time-honoured ways of being-in-the-body became less common and the missionaries were actively promoting themselves as advanced and efficient producers of modern, able-bodied, skilled workers. By that time, the mission stations were more technologically advanced. The fast flowing rivers at each of their stations provided electric power and lighting. And at each station there was a wide range of specialised equipment: not only more, and better quality, ploughs, anvils, sewing-machines, ox-drawn carts and band-saws (which they had since the early 1910s) but also brick-making kilns, tractors, and maize-grinding mills. In *Kikuyu News*, meanwhile, the missionaries increasingly drew attention to their apprenticeship schemes. They underlined the transformative impact of their work by displaying and describing the clean, civilized, and “able” bodies of their once “raw” recruits in photographs (Figure 4) and written accounts: “The outward change was obvious,” one such article declared, of Robert Macpherson’s apprentices at Tumutumu in 1929, “the boys came to him clad in a blanket, dirty in body and simple in mind; they left clothed, bright and knowledgeable.”

In missionary accounts of apprentices at work there was a constant slippage between their use of “raw material” to refer to the matter with which the apprentices worked and to refer to the apprentices themselves. Descriptions of smooth, straight tables, neatly chiselled gravestones, or immaculately laid-out flower beds merged with missionary descriptions of clean and disciplined bodies. This was more than a coincidental feature of missionary discourse for the missionaries also explicitly stated their view that the regular, repetitive undertaking of careful work allowed for the gradual “acquiring habits of discipline and diligence.”

In correspondence with the government’s Director of Education J.R. Orr, John Arthur expressed his agreement with Orr’s notion that:

> in teaching a boy to make a box neatly and accurately, we teach him the qualities of perseverance, cleanliness, accuracy, neatness etc, and we give him a pride in his handwork which is usually infectious and will be extended to his clothing and his conduct.

If the concerted effort to train, and in the process totally-change, bodies was one pronounced aspect of the apprenticeship scheme, another was the mission’s bid to fundamentally transform internal dispositions. As Protestant capitalists of the kind famously described by Max Weber, the missionaries of the CSM set out to “develop,” as they saw it, within each of their individual apprentices: a willingness to work; a consciousness and appreciation of their own skills and capabilities; a range of sensibilities, tastes, and “wants,” that would continuously motivate and

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120 “Annual Meeting of Subscribers,” *KN*, 108 (June 1929).


122 J.R. Orr (Director of Education) to Alliance of Protestant Missions (August 1919), PCEA I/EA/5.
stimulate them for material improvement; and, acting as a check on the latter, a sense of restraint, inner discipline, thrift and prudence.\(^{123}\) Thus it was with pleasure, and not a complaint, that William Tait the carpentry instructor at Kikuyu reported that the apprentices in his 1911 cohort “feel quite proud when they finish a piece of work, and look at their neighbours with a superior air.”\(^{124}\) Their aim, as one missionary put it was “to form the habit […] of voluntarily and individually taking up and carrying through some definite piece of work.”\(^{125}\)

The highest praise went to those whom the missionaries regarded had “internalised” the work ethic which all of the clocks, bells, and verbal orders at the mission station were aimed at instilling.\(^{126}\) Those who worked without being compelled to do so, and who did so diligently, even if they were not being examined or supervised, were perceived by the missionaries to have acquired the initiative and individual autonomy they believed was the necessary, crucial precursor for Christian conversion and civilised existence. Missionary discourse framed such persons as completely different to the supposedly inert, docile, men of precolonial times whose labour was determined by accidental factors, the climate, seasons, or customary proscriptions. Thus, John Arthur wrote, of the apprentices who were completing their qualifications at Kikuyu station in 1925,

> [They] will turn out quite useful citizens. At least they are a totally different type from what they were when they started here some two and a half years ago. They realise more or less the dignity of labour; and the ability to do things for themselves. This, coupled with regular hours, diet, work &c has added confidence to their bearing. By the time they [finish] […] they will be quite able to take their place in the world.\(^{127}\)

As to what their apprentice’s role in the world would be – that was very much an open question. The CSM aspired to turn out able-bodied men who were somehow at-once independently-minded and acquiescent; they aspired for their scheme, and the men it produced, to simultaneously contribute to the modernisation and Christianisation of the “native reserve” and power settler capitalism.


\(^{125}\) “Annual Report for 1924,” *KN*, 92 (June 1925).


Figure 4. Top: “The Carpentry Department – Kikuyu” (c.1910) EUL John Arthur’s Photos; Bottom: The caption reads: “Mr Rankine giving instruction to a class of mason apprentices in building with rough blocks of stone,” KN, 123 (March 1933).
They envisaged the individual apprentices as being leaven for wider, community change, taking back to their villages skills and knowledge – in agricultural methods, house-construction, and irrigation, for example – that would raise sanitation and hygienic standards in the reserves, and their commercial potential. They looked upon their agricultural apprentices as future foremen on European plantations, or as employees in the Government’s Veterinary or Forestry Departments. But they also saw them as independent homesteaders who, armed with “scientific” methods and an understanding of the business of small-scale farming, would be equipped to grow their cash crops (potatoes, beans, coffee) for their own profit. Their carpenters and masons, meanwhile, were lined up for futures under European employment, or in the government’s Public Works Department, or in railway construction; but at the same time the main aspect of their training comprised of how to “provide better homes.” The missionaries’ dual imperatives to make-industrious and to make-healthy converged as they promoted the construction of rectangular houses made of stone, brick, or wood, with concrete floors, doors, windows, and corrugated iron roofs instead of the typical grass thatching.

Yet at the same time, the CSM were never averse to playing the role of the producers and suppliers of settler labour; they saw it as a civic, secular, duty and happily broadcast this aspect of their work. “The missionary can help the settler,” they pledged, publicly, in 1919, aiming to remind their fellow colonials that, after war and famine and disease, they were ready to do their bit for development; the settler could tell the missionary “what type of workman is in request” and the missionary, who had “in their hands, the moulding of the mind and of the conscience while still in the plastic stage,” would know which “boy can be most safely recommended” and “do much towards meeting his [the settler’s] demand.”

During the 1920s, they held increasingly grand exhibitions at their mission stations, aimed at showcasing their work and their workers-at-work to administrators, chiefs, settlers and other notables. In agricultural shows and “Native Industry” fairs, staged in the emerging centres of Nairobi and Nyeri, their apprentices competed against other trainee- artisans in the colony. Public occasions for making a spectacle of the fast-paced, accurate, dextrous native body-at-work, at these

129 Alex Allan, “Shamba,” KN, 30 (September 1911).
131 Archibald Irvine, “Huts and Houses,” KN, 106 (December 1928); Mr Rankine, KN, 124 (June 1933); Marion Stevenson “An Amateur Parish Sister,” KN, 106 (December 1928).
132 “Policy of the Alliance” (1919), EUL AP Gen763.
events CSM apprentices exhibited ornamental woodwork, decorative stone-cutting, and farm produce, and performed skilled work before audiences of officials, dignitaries and potential employers (Figure 5). Such events were reported in colonial newspapers and the missionaries of the CSM were delighted when their apprentices and their workmanship attracted official and settler praise. They welcomed written requests for workers from potential employers, they hosted settlers at their mission stations- giving them guided tours of their workshops and sights of their apprentices -, and they boasted in Kikuyu News that their “boys” were the most sought-after in the whole of the colony.

The CSM was an active participant in a labour regime structured around European masters and African servants. With the introduction of the kipande the CSM began issuing “testimonials” which could then be used by their apprentices to find work (Figure 6). Bureaucratic, almost biometric, documents, they contained such details as the apprentice’s name, registration number, location, course of study, date of completion; remarks by their instructor about their physique, character and capabilities; and grades for their “standard of work,” “punctuality,” “conduct” and “cleanliness.” The testimonial of one carpenter instructor who had finished at Tumutumu in 1924, for example, read: “He is willing & obliging, but not brilliant & in his work he requires a certain amount of guidance and supervision. He will make a useful jobbing carpenter on a farm under European direction especially if finely finished work is not expected of him.” Addressed to the employer, these documents ostensibly revealed inner traits as well as drawing attention to outer appearances. One endorsed the bearer because he was “very strong physically and is quite a good athlete.” Others cautioned of the bearer’s “hot temper” and “laziness.” The testimonial of one apprentice warned that the he was “not of a strong physique & has a somewhat unfortunate nervous manner,” another reassured the prospective employer that the bearer’s “eye condition is not infective,” another gave notice that the bearer had “a rather unfortunate manner which is irritating at times to the average European.” Those with the highest recommendations were not

134 “Report for 1927,” KN, 104 (June 1928); “Report for 1928,” KN, 108 (June 1929); Simmonds, DC South Nyeri, to the Superintendent CSM, “Coronation of Their Majesties The King and Queen Commemorative Tree Planting” (25 February 1938), PCEA I/AB/7.
136 “Letters Received Jan-June 1914,” PCEA I/A/17; Hugh Aitkin, “Visitors,” KN, 114 (December 1930).
137 “Testimonials – Tumutumu, 1913-1929,” PCEA I/M/3.
necessarily those who were the fastest, most accurate workers, they certainly were not those who showed the most autonomy and “initiative,” but those who were deferential, “trustworthy,” “reliable,” and “willing.”

Figure 5. Workers and work on display. Top: From the “semi-jubilee” celebrations at Kikuyu station. The caption reads “Boy spinning,” KN, 87 (March 1924). Bottom: Boys from Tumutumu display their work at a Native Industrial Show (n.d.) Photographic collection of CSM missionary Horace Philp (in the custody of Kibacia Gatu, Karen).
Figure 6. Example of a testimonial. This one is for a stone-mason, Justufu Maceraat Tumutumu (14 June 1919), PCEA I/M/3.
Their pledge, that they were giving “the African a new conception of the dignity of labour […] which is the basis of all human existence” was routinely undermined by the exploitation, coercion, violence, and subordination that inhered in the very system in which they played a central part.\textsuperscript{142} The tension was not lost on the missionaries. There were the occasional private expressions of unease with their role; Barlow, for instance, suggested to Arthur in 1924 that the CSM dispense with the apprenticeship scheme and continue the teaching handicrafts only for its “educative” value and for the development of the reserves.\textsuperscript{143} Some voiced their nervousness at what they felt was the potentially polluting encroachment of settler capitalism on their mission sphere – such as when after the War several hundred new farmers took up land in North Nyeri, near Tumutumu station, under Northey’s ex-soldier re-settlement scheme, or when later, in 1924 when the Nairobi-Thika railway line was extended to Nyeri, reducing the journey time from Tumutumu to the emerging commercial centre of Nairobi from one day (on foot) to eight hours.\textsuperscript{144} The missionaries were worried at the advance of any capitalist “civilisation” that was devoid of Christian morality and unchecked by government regulation; they were concerned that the power of commercial interests to compel labour together with the allure of wages would erode their mission.\textsuperscript{145} Indeed, if their apprenticeship scheme began as framed in opposition to “the village” it soon found its main challenge coming from “the town” and the farms. By the 1920s, they regarded the chief benefit of the indenture system to be that it kept their apprentices not from regressing to the heathen ways of tradition but from eloping for higher wages elsewhere.\textsuperscript{146}

As Horace Philp made explicit in his criticisms of its abuses, the missionaries of the CSM ultimately believed in the potentially uplifting power of settler-colonialism, but only if it operated in a particular way. They were content to supply white capital’s demand for black labourers who were, above all else, obedient, subservient and able-bodied. But in return they demanded from white employers bourgeois respectability in their own conduct and paternalistic guidance in their dealing with Africans. Alongside the biomedical provisions they demanded of government, they also called upon settlers to “act as fathers” of the Christian boys in their employment; to “give all reasonable facilities to his employees to attend Sunday services”; to help young converts “straight” by their word and example; to pray with their workers and for them; and to generally strive to induct their employees into “the beauty and charm of Christian family life.”\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{143} Barlow to Arthur (20 June 1924), PCEA I/EC/1.
\textsuperscript{145} George Grieve, “First Impressions,” \textit{KN}, 76 (May 1921).
\textsuperscript{146} Horace Philp to Director of Education (25 August 1924), PCEA I/ED/1.
\textsuperscript{147} “The Policy of the Alliance” (1919), paragraph 58, EUL AP Gen763.
Just like their bid to convert the conquest colonial state into a governmentalized state which made its subjects visible and took an interest in their health and well-being, their petitioning of settlers to exercise pastoral responsibility rather than straightforward sovereign power was an attempt to harness modernising possibilities of colonialism in order to uplift Gikuyu through a kind of colonialism which integrated rather than divided and suppressed. Both in theory and in practice, however, their paternalistic approach reinforced and perpetuated an assumed hierarchy which positioned white colonisers above and in command of the colonised Africans. As such the extent to which the CSM’s labour programmes could ever deliver on the promise to emancipate, empower, and liberate was perpetually and severely compromised.

Conclusion
This chapter represents the first substantive study of the role missionaries played in Gikuyuland’s colonial labour system. Using “the body” as the primary lens of analysis, I have shown that the missionaries played an important, if ambivalent, role in this system as both critics of its propensity to abuse, debase, and exploit, and as producers and suppliers of skilled workers. I have shown that, for the missionaries at least, there was consistency in this position. As colonial-evangelists, their aim was to reform the political economy of settler capitalism and use it to further their civilising mission. In this chapter, I have drawn explicitly on the conceptual framework of Michel Foucault. The chief value of the concept of biopower (or “the power to foster life”) is that it enables us to transcend and go beyond the stale and futile debate about whether missionaries were “good” or “bad.” The concept of biopower helps to historicise the CSM’s bid to gain mastery over, train-up, and protect native bodies; it also has a certain explanatory force as a framework for understanding the distinctiveness of the power-relations within colonial mission stations compared to what lay beyond. The first part of this chapter was dedicated to describing and analysing the colonial labour system in Gikuyuland and the demands that it placed upon young Gikuyu men. This will be important for the chapters which follow. Aiming to be expansive, rather than exhaustive, my aim was to marry empirical intricacies with broad claims: what is especially important is the apparent paradox of a colonial state which was immensely potent and invasive in terms of its mechanisms to control and punish its subjects and seek out labour, while at the same time strikingly ignorant about and absent from life on the ground. Apparently acknowledging that the colonial state had “dominance without hegemony,” the missionaries of the CSM seem to have made it their purpose to fill the gap between colonial command and native life – and to attempt to forge integrative kinds
of colonial rule. Their apprenticeship schemes are an example of this. In them we are presented with one further example of the CSM’s Muscular Christianity – that is, their modernist ambition to “uplift” Gikuyu by inculcating new, individual, conceptions of the self through radically transforming local physical culture in general, and the body in particular. At the same time however, seeking to convert young Gikuyu men into Christian, imperial subjects, who were modern, self-governing, able-bodied, the CSM also sought to convert the colonial conquest state into a state which was omnipresent, benevolent, disciplinary and biopolitical.

5. An “All-Round” Education

I. Disciplinary power comes to colonial Gikuyuland.

“How I do wish we had a proper school started,” wrote Doctor John Arthur to his mother in February 1907, just weeks after he arrived at the CSM’s Kikuyu station: “Then we might have these boys always with us. We could then fill up their day and develop them on every side.”1 Pining not just for a school but for a controlled space that could serve as a location for the confinement of, and continuous, concentrated, work upon Gikuyu boys – “developing” them, not merely intellectually, but “on every side” – Arthur in 1907 was expressing his longing to introduce into the CSM’s evangelical project a very specific kind of institution that was both new within the mission and new to this part of colonial Kenya generally. While there were plenty of equivalent institutions in the British metropole and elsewhere in the British empire, at this point, in 1907, no formal boarding school, no borstal or reformatory, had been established in Gikuyuland. The

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1 John Arthur to Mother (22 Feb 1907), EUL AP Gen762.
following year, Doctor Arthur’s ambitions were partially realised. Formal, classroom-based, schooling started at Kikuyu mission station and, adjacent to the classrooms, was the new “boys’ dormitory” – a capacious stone building, large enough to accommodate sixty. It meant that the mission could keep the scholars on site. In 1909, when the CSM purchased the plot at Tumutumu, the first permanent building Arthur Barlow and his assistants constructed was the same kind of boys’ dormitory. Barlow opened the boarding school – or “central school” as it became known – at Tumutumu the following year. By 1922, when Doctor Clive Irvine did the same upon the establishment of Chogoria station, the boys’ dormitories at Kikuyu and Tumutumu station were at maximum capacity, with 120 scholars at each. By 1934, when Irvine produced the pamphlet pictured above (Figure 1), there were 30 scholars at the central school at Chogoria.

The significance of these schools, which were but one aspect of the CSM’s wider schooling operation, lies not in the attendance figures, of course. Nor are they worthy of historical attention simply because of the “elite,” literary, education they offered (which went far beyond what most of Kenya’s colonisers were prepared to provide at this time) – though that is an important part of the story. Rather it is the contention of this chapter that these schools are important for the specific kind of colonial power they entailed. For while, as we know, confining colonised subjects in order to punish them was a well-established practice and principle of colonial governance in Gikuyuland, attempts to confine and control in order to improve, uplift, and develop “on every side” were far less common; they were, in many ways, even more fraught with colonial anxiety than attempts to penalise, and their history is considerably less well-known.

The CSM’s boys boarding schools were sites where the missionaries aimed to develop in their scholars the interior, individual, sense of self they believed was lacking among Gikuyu, preventing them from being capable of having a personal relationship with God and preventing them from entering an enlightened, civilised stage of history. For all that book-learning and literacy was an integral part of the curriculum in these schools, the missionaries intended for them to be much more than spaces where they imparted information; they called the latter education in the “narrow sense of the word,” contrasting it to “education of the higher order.”7 “The aim of Christian education among a primitive people must always be to develop mind and character rather than to impart information” wrote CSM educationalist George Grieve in 1923.8 An “all-round” education, wrote Irvine thirteen years later, entailed not “simply the amassing of information”: it meant “the acquiring of a new way of looking at things, a new attitude, a new vision.”9 The aim – as they put it – was “the enrichment of personality and the giving to men of more abundant life […] the school cannot accept anything less.”10

When the missionaries of the CSM wrote about their boys’ boarding schools they wrote not about “schooling” per se but “training.”11 The term captured their Muscular Christian, “on-every-side” – body-and-soul – approach to education. As the principal of Tumutumu school would put it, in 1922, a CSM schooling meant “the application of strength to weakness”; it was, he said a kind of schooling particularly appropriate “in the foreign field, for the natives were but children, and they were being given this strength.”12 To elicit the “inner person” they believed lay dormant within each of their scholars, and to direct the growth of this “inner person” (or “character,” as they called it), in a way they deemed desirable, the missionaries brought to bear upon their scholars’ a battery of discourses, techniques and practices: prayer, exercise regimes, ablution routines, a carefully modulated time-table, sports days, festivals, and a specific, reforming, approach to corporal punishment. These mechanisms were aimed at bringing to the surface the individual person they believed was submerged by the “darkness,” “filth,” “superstition” and “communality” of vernacular life. They were also, though not always consciously, aimed at transforming the ways in which Gikuyu inhabited their bodies – reinforcing in their scholars a sense of the self as located within a bounded, individuated, body.

CSM representations of the ideal product of their “all-round” education looked nothing

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7 *Kikuyu: 1898-1923*, 57.
8 Ibid. 57.
like the anonymous, timeless, “raw native” they produced in their photographic and written representations of “village life.” Rather – like (Bernard) Mate in Irvine’s 1934 brochure (Figure 1) – he was a fully-legible individual human person, self-contained and self-possessing, with an individual body that had identifiable borders, with a name, a past and a future.

The CSM’s schools have been widely recognised as significant institutions in the political history of Gikuyuland for the role they played in the formation of Gikuyuland’s social and political elite, and the role they played in (unintentionally) priming the first generation of anti-colonial political nationalists.13 But in existing accounts there is a residual sense that because they were “religious” institutions they somehow occupied a location outside of the field of colonial power. On occasion, because of their ostensibly “benevolent” intentions, their provision of education, their will to train and improve, they have even been framed as, exceptions to colonial power. But to view the schools in this way would be to occlude the close (if not always harmonious) relationship between the CSM and the colonial government, and the CSM’s self-conscious, deliberate attempt to make their boarding schools nodal points of British imperial rule. It would, moreover, fail to acknowledge the important ways in which such a “liberal,” “emancipatory” programme of “uplift” relied upon, perpetuated, and therefore legitimised, a discourse on colonised peoples as being backward, helpless, and inferior – even if it did in certain respects represent a partial challenge to some of the more pernicious versions of this discourse. Such a framing of CSM schools, furthermore, ignores the multiple forms through which power operates.

The modality of power within CSM’s boys boarding schools closely corresponds to what Foucault famously described as “disciplinary power.”14 In contrast to more brutal, violent,  

“sovereign” modalities of power, disciplinary power operates not by denying or oppressing individuals but by producing them. It is a form of power that “applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him [sic] by his own individuality, attaches to him his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him.”

It does this through the deployment of tactics that make persons visible to power and to themselves – both physically and through knowledge – through distributing them in material space, washing and training their bodies, through keeping them under surveillance so that they feel like they are being watched, through inspections, record-keeping, through systems to rank, classify, hierarchize. It works – as I said in the last chapter – through “a political anatomy of detail,” deploying a micro-focus on the person and their body.

Although disciplinary institutions, such as schools, penitentiaries, asylums, rely upon a “carceral” logic of separation and confinement and are, accordingly, often sites for coercion, bullying, violence, and austerity, disciplinary power is not merely a form of power which commands and punishes. It is exercised by “knowing the insides of people’s minds,” “exploring their souls,” “making them reveal their innermost secrets.” “It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it.”

For all its coercion, disciplinary power is therefore, often also “pastoral” in nature and exercised through kindness, gentility and intimacy. For ultimately, disciplinary power seeks to promote the emergence of forms of self-regulation; it encourages persons to discipline themselves in accordance with pre-supposed norms and expectations regarding their “correct” behaviour and their role in society. It is a “positive” form of power since it places on offer modes of personhood that can be pleasurable and immensely appealing. It is in this sense a “subjectifying” form of power, constituting individuals who are subjects in the double-sense of the term: both self-possessing, agents (as distinct from “objects”) and subjugated, or subjected-to someone or something else.

The CSM’s central schools were certainly not the only settings in Gikuyuland that deployed techniques of enclosure, separation and bodily training to inculcate specific kinds of habits and behaviour and create particular kinds of bodies and persons. But in few, if any, other venues in Gikuyuland was the attempt to “discipline” (in the individualising, “subjectifying,” Foucauldian sense) as pronounced as in the CSM’s boarding schools. Of course, as I showed in Chapter 2, there was a centuries-deep history of such practices in Gikuyuland, that long predates the colonial


15 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 781.
17 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 783.
period: the preparation and recovery of candidates before and after their initiation, for instance, is a good example of this. But the disciplinary agenda embedded in a CSM schooling was distinct from such vernacular practices in its universalising assumptions and ambitions. As modern Christian missionaries, the agents of the CSM believed in the essential universality of the human condition – a universality that derived from each person being a creation of God. Their ambition in Gikuyuland was to work towards the full-realisation (or “liberation”) of the universal Christian subject they held was latent in Gikuyu persons. Thus Arthur Barlow described a CSM schooling: “the power of the Gospel, together with training of mind and body, [will] uplift them in thought and conduct, and [...] call forth God-given abilities which have lain buried in ignorance during unknown centuries.”

Believing that Gikuyu modes of personhood and embodiment were not “different” but essentially the “same,” yet less-developed and not-yet-realised, their project was one of attempting to “lift” Gikuyu up onto the modern, enlightened, Christian plane of existence that they (the missionaries) regarded themselves as already occupying; they did not recognise their conceptions of the human person, the individual subject, and the body as “provincial” and historically-conditioned. In this sense, their project was quintessentially an exercise in modern, disciplinary power in the Foucauldian sense for it relied upon and invoked a notion of the world as a universal “panopticon” – a pre-ordained, objective, abstract spatial and temporal structure that was presumed to pre-exist, and stand “above” and apart from, all individuals across the globe and throughout history, such that every person could be “read,” “known,” “made visible,” and “understood” in terms of where they were located in space and time and “ordered,” “ranked,” “hierarchised,” and “measured” according to what “stage” they were at in their “development.”

Aspiring to make them portals through which Gikuyu could enter into a new, enlightened, stage of development, the CSM’s central schools became nodal points for a very distinctive kind of colonial operation. In few other settings in colonial Gikuyuland, if any, was the attempt to undo and eradicate local ways-of-being as concerted and thorough as it was in CSM central schools. In few other settings in colonial Gikuyuland, if any, was the will to separate, individualise and “civilise” as pronounced as it was in CSM central schools. In few other settings in colonial Gikuyuland, if any, was the rhetorical commitment to “emancipate,” “uplift,” and “liberate” as manifest as it was in CSM central schools.

The “central school” and the civilising mission

Arthur’s 1907 appeal for a boarding school was a signal of his view that the CSM at Kikuyu needed a new approach to evangelism. For six years, under the leadership of David Clement Scott, the

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CSM’s approach had been to evangelise through labour and commerce.¹⁹ In Clement Scott’s view, hard, regular, remunerated work (that is not “educative,” “character-building” work like that which the CSM would come to pursue in their apprenticeship schemes, but actual work – work-as-labour, for profit) together with constant prayer and feverous evangelism, would develop the “wants” of male household heads who would then seek improvement for themselves and their families through Christianity and labour. “School” consisted of Clement Scott preaching to the men working on the plantation during intervals from work. Some were paid extra to remain at the station after work for instruction in reading the Swahili bible. Minnie Watson (otherwise known as Bibi wa Ngambi, “the wife of the camp”) gave lessons in the alphabet and elementary mathematics on the veranda of the manse to anyone from the mission estate willing to sit with her.²⁰

Among the pupils in Watson’s makeshift school were the boys whom Arthur hoped to “develop on every side.” Although Arthur revered Clement Scott for his legendary work in Nyasaland, he thought that Scott’s scheme was outdated. He and the younger generation of missionaries who started filling the ranks of the CSM– such as Arthur Barlow, Marion Stevenson, and Horace Philp – believed that schools rather than commercial plantations were the most productive mechanisms for evangelism. Following Scott’s death in October 1907, Arthur engineered a shift in policy from “commerce” to “classrooms.” From that point schooling emerged as the most important aspect of their whole mission – more important, that is, than direct proselytization through preaching and more important than their medical work. For the present purposes there are three significant aspects of the CSM’s decision to evangelise through the school.

First, it was indicative of a deliberate decision to target their evangelism at children and young people rather than at adults. This was based on the then-prevalent (and indeed still dominant) modernist discursive configuration of the child as a “blank slate” – or, at least, a blanker slate than the adult. Less saturated in history, culture, and tradition the child, according to this view, was more malleable, impressionable, and therefore more transformable than the adult. As Marion Stevenson put it: “children” having “not to so great a degree mixed with village life,” were like “plastic.” When they “come together and live for certain periods of time in a purely Christian atmosphere,” she argued, they “absorb unhindered, Christian ideals” which become “unconsciously part of their healthy natural everyday life.”²¹

²¹ Marion Stevenson, “Scheme for ‘Higher Education’” (29 May 1918), PCEA I/EA/5.
Second, the new approach saw the CSM place special emphasis not just on schooling per se but on the boarding school in particular and the associated techniques of separation and confinement. The move to the school marked the beginning of a “carceral” logic within the CSM’s evangelical project; indeed the CSM would begin referring to their scholars as “inmates.”22 Under Clement Scott the come-and-go nature of work on the plantation had been seen as advantageous for spreading Christianity. The new wave of CSM missionaries, however, championed the boarding school for precisely the opposite reason: because potential converts could not simply move freely between the mission and their homes. Repeatedly and explicitly the missionaries of the CSM stated their view that the boarding school was an ideal location for evangelism because it provided a closed, contained setting that allowed for the detachment of the potential scholar from their kin and their intensive training and moulding. Thus Archibald Irvine asked, rhetorically, “could there be a finer evangelistic opportunity than work which involves intimate personal touch day by day with some sixty boys and thirty girls, chosen for their promise at a particularly formative age?”23

Third, the move away from the plantation to the school signalled the new intolerance towards local customs within the mission and the CSM’s embrace of a “civilising mission.” Under Clement Scott, the CSM had taken a less antagonistic stance towards local ontologies and cosmologies. Steeped in a different, older, nineteenth-century Scottish missionary tradition, that conceptualised Africans as people whose customs and beliefs were intricate, Clement Scott saw some utility in “adapting” the message and working through pre-existing beliefs. As well as being a commercial capitalist he was also a romantic and a mystic who was even known to participate in rain-making ceremonies.24 This was very different to Arthur’s generation of missionaries who, as we have seen, held that there was little in local life that was interesting or valuable. They saw the physical and moral environment of Gikuyuland’s as primitive, child-like, and under-developed at best, corrupting, evil, and debasing at worst.

The central school was the clearest expression of, and principal tool, in the CSM’s “civilising” mission. They wanted to make a sanitised, laboratory-like space where, having taken the child out of the village they could begin taking the village out of the child (Figure 4). Believing that before they could be Christianised, Gikuyu had to first be “civilised,” the CSM used their boarding schools as locations for the carrying out all of the “civilising” work they believed was necessary (if not sufficient) in order to prepare bodies and souls for conversion to Christianity. By “opening minds,” “building characters,” and training, cleaning, washing, bodies, they aimed to use

23 Kenya: 1898-1948, 42.
24 John Arthur to Mother (4 June 1907), EUL AP Gen762.
the school to fashion the embodied subjectivities that would allow Gikuyu to receive and absorb their Christianity.

Thus, when explaining why they, unlike other more conservatively-inclined evangelical missions such as the Africa Inland Mission, dedicated so much energy to providing a wide-ranging, even at times “secular,” literary education, Horace Philp wrote: “the Word of God is so startlingly new and wonderful that the mind closed by ignorance must be opened up to receive new ideas, and this cannot be done without education.”²⁵ By the same token George Grieve (as referenced in the introduction) explained why the CSM believed that even book-learning had to be supplemented by an altogether more corporeal – more muscular - approach:

The purpose of a Mission is:
The evangelisation of the people. This was the sole object of the Missions in Kenya at the outset, and is still the only object of many of them at the present day.

Why has this purpose been departed from?
Because a knowledge of reading is necessary if the Bible is to be placed in the hands of the people. Because, there being no socialising or educative agency in the field at the time [before the missionaries arrived], it was necessary to broaden the basis so as to include other essential things, e.g. Better homes; cleaner bodies.²⁶

In addition to the boys’ boarding school, which is described below, each of the three mission stations were home to other schools: a girls’ dormitory, elementary and primary day schools, evening reading classes for the elderly and a kindergarten.²⁷ These schools at the central stations were linked to and supported by a network of “village” schools – sometimes referred to as “bush-schools” – and “out-stations.”²⁸ The village schools were seen by the missionaries as a way of extending their reach into the communities around the mission station. The missionaries regularly conceptualised these venues as being purposefully more “African” than their central school – they adopted vernacular architectural styles, Gikuyu was the language of instruction, and they were primarily ran and staffed by the mission’s Gikuyu paid agents whom the missionaries referred to as their “native teachers.” Numerically, the village and out-schools became much more significant than the central schools. In September 1929, on the eve of the “circumcision crisis” (chapter 7) the CSM between their three mission stations were running 93 village schools and employing 294 “native teachers”; they claimed that the total number of students in their village schools was just shy of 8,000.²⁹

²⁶ George Grieve to Special Committee of the Kenya Missionary Council (2 April 1929), PCEA I/DB/8.
²⁹ John Arthur, “The Origin and Development of the Education of the Kikuyu” (June 1930), PCEA I/EC/1.
But it was their boys’ boarding schools that took pride of place as far as the missionaries were concerned. Arthur, who liked to refer to out-school work as “the natural hand maid of the central school,” described the central school as “the most vital part of our Mission work”:

The whole life [of the Mission] centres round it. An efficient school means efficient teachers, hospital assistants, carpenters, masons, and last but not least, evangelists […] As that educational work is permeated with the Spirit of Christ, so will all its work in and out be. It is a magnificent ideal, it demands the highest and the best, it is the making of history it is the development of a people.30

The other Christian missions operative in colonial Gikuyuland did not share the CSM’s wholehearted commitment to a “civilising mission”, nor did they all see formal schooling as the primary route to conversion, and no other mission placed so much importance on having a site like the CSM’s central mission station.31 While the CSM’s outlook was broadly similar to their British protestant allies in the Church Missionary Society (CMS), and the much smaller, predominantly Presbyterian, American, Gospel Missionary Society (GMS), both of whom also emphasised schooling, these missions aimed to work through smaller mission stations and outstations. The Africa Inland Mission (AIM) were much more ambivalent about educational work, preferring to work through direct preaching and bible-reading. The Italian Consolata Fathers who established a boarding school in Nyeri, near Tumutumu, at the start of the twentieth century, and the predominantly French missionaries of the catholic Holy Ghost mission, placed a greater emphasis on “adapting” the gospel and working with and through local customs.32

All the missions, including the CSM, operated within a discursive framework that conceptualised Africans as “backward,” closer to “nature” than to “culture,” and naturally more “communalistic” in body, mind and soul. Further they all shared in the wider early-to-mid-twentieth century colonial view that there was such a thing as an organic, “tribal order” that was maintained by “tradition” and that this afforded a degree of “security.” Because of this while almost all of Gikuyuland’s missions appear to have been, to varying degrees, negative in their

31 For the CSM’s decision to focus their efforts on the central station: William McLachlan to John Arthur (5 March 1914), PCEA I/A/17.
appraisal of “custom,” there was a prevailing opinion that any attempt to intervene in and disrupt the local order had to be careful. From the evidence that I have seen it seems that there was no mission in Gikuyuland that dedicated the same effort and resources to totally and suddenly transforming local life than the CSM under Doctor Arthur.

It is, however, important not to overstate the difference between the Christian missions. At a deep, fundamental, level, the kind of colonial power relations that I am arguing were integral to the CSM’s colonial-evangelical project – the universalism, the paternalism, the premise of the equality of human persons under the eyes of God, the ostensibly “benevolent” endeavour to “emancipate” Gikuyu from “sinfulness,” “darkness,” and “drudgery” – were also integral to the projects of the other Christian missions operative in Gikuyuland too. The bigger point is not that the CSM were the only colonisers who exercised affective, intimate, welfare-oriented forms of power in Gikuyuland; rather it is that in Gikuyuland it was missions that sought to craft these kinds of integrative, hegemonic, relationships and not the colonial government.

A colonial project

Arthur strove to make the CSM’s schools not only sites for evangelism, but also sites for the embedding and entrenching of British colonial rule. He wanted the mission stations to be venues that displayed British imperial prestige, that extended the British empire’s presence into the “darkened,” “untouched” corners of the country, and that – most importantly – provided avenues for hitherto “raw,” “unenlightened” Gikuyu to enter into the paternal embrace of the empire as equal citizens under the British crown. He envisioned the CSM’s schools as places that would create a link between the colonial government and the colonised population – where the missions would act as agents of the colonial state, undertaking on behalf of government the intimate, integrative, moral and affective work that would enable the colonised population to buy-in to the British empire. He endeavoured to encourage the government to see the CSM’s schools as a vital mechanism in the colonisation of the country for the role they played in making the subject population want to be loyal and obedient. The Anglicans in the CMS, and (though to a lesser extent) the GMS, broadly shared this ambition. They were part of the Alliance of Protestant Missions of which Arthur was the chairman. In their 1919 founding statement they could not have been more explicit about their colonial aspirations:

If the missions […] need the help of the Government, scarcely less, though in a different way, does the Government need the help of the missions. It is always unsafe to take for granted the instinctive loyalty of a subject population […] It is equally clear that there are large regions of the native life, and those that are the deepest and most potent for good and evil, into which the Government, as Government, can never enter. It is precisely with these regions that the missions have to do. They have in their hands the moulding of the
mind and of the conscience while still in the plastic stage. The missionary lives at far closer quarters with the native than is possible to the official. It is his business to learn his language and study his customs, to enter into his inner life, as no one else can. […] The Government is dependent, more perhaps than is commonly realized, on the missions. […] For the loyalty which is based not on fear but on a sense of Christian duty, it must depend on the development of a Christian conscience. And for an adequate motive for moral conduct – which all demand and so few labour to produce – it depends almost entirely on Christian teaching.33

In the text, Arthur and the Alliance proceeded to explicitly propose a division of labour between the official government and the missionaries, with the former taking care of policing, security, law, and order, and the latter taking responsibility for the “educational, industrial, medical and social work,” “the erection of public conscience on all social and moral questions,” and “the uplift of the people.”

Arthur’s and the Alliance’s vision of a division of labour was, in some respects, realised in practice. Education was not a priority for the Kenya colonial government during this period. In 1924 (for example) the Kenya colonial government dedicated but £37,000 to “native education” in comparison to £170,351 to its military, £114,408 to its police, and £44,825 to prisons.34 While colonial states generally were notorious for their lack of educational provisions, the discrepancy between funding dedicated to security and funding dedicated to education was extreme in Kenya. The 1919 Report of the Education Commission of the East Africa Protectorate, for example, showed that in the year 1917-1918 the Kenya colonial government spent £10,345 on education, 0.69% of its total annual expenditure. This placed it below Nyasaland (0.79%), Sierra Leone (2.8%), Ceylon (4.2%), Southern Rhodesia (9.9%), Basutoland (10.3%), and New Zealand (13%) (Figure 13).35

The meagre funds the government dedicated to “native education” went to missions through a “grants-in-aid” system.36 The scholars in the CSM’s boys’ boarding schools during the period in question were on government-approved apprenticeships. As well as the technical apprenticeships examined in the last chapter, these included apprenticeships in hospital work and teaching. For each scholar enrolled the CSM received from the government £2 plus a further £5 for each apprentice who passed the final examination.37 Unlike the technical apprentices, the

33 “Policy of the Alliance” (1919), EUL AP Gen763.
37 Department of Education, “Regulations for the Education of Native Missions in the East Africa Protectorate” (1912), PCEA I/EA/5.
teacher and hospital apprentices were not indentured to the mission and the CSM regarded their schooling as being of a “higher order.” The CSM envisioned their teacher apprentices as proceeding from the schooling into three possible lines of employment. Some would work in administrative roles that would be “important to the general life of the colony” – as “clerks, interpreters, [and book-keepers] etc,” for the government, in the telegraph department, the post office, for the railways or in private employment. Another cohort would return to their homes in the rural areas of the native reserve and set up Christian schools where they would not merely be teachers but leaders of “the spiritual and moral advancement of their community.” A third contingent would become leading figures within the church as professional, waged-clergymen: first as evangelists, then as preachers, and ultimately, as ordained ministers. With the introduction of Local Native Councils in 1925 (which, offering a modicum of localised, district-by-district power were paternalistic initiatives to “train” educated Africans into “respectable” political behaviour) the CSM further hoped that their teacher apprentices might become junior political leaders. Of all the scholars it was intended that the CSM schooling would “enable them, physically, morally and spiritually, to take their place in the general uplifting of the tribe.”

In 1923 there were 109 in the boys dormitory at Kikuyu station: 31 on teaching apprenticeships, 48 on technical apprenticeships, 11 on hospital apprenticeships, and 19 in evangelists training; the numbers at Tumutumu were similar. This made the CSM, numerically, the largest provider of this level of education in Gikuyuland at that time. In 1924 the schools at Kikuyu and Tumutumu were the second and third highest-funded schools in the whole of Kenya colony, taking £2,373 and £2,123 in government grants-in-aid respectively – 37% of the colonial government’s total grants-in-aid expenditure (Figure 14).

The grants-in-aid system suited both parties. Making the mission schools that subscribed to the system effectively nodal points of the colonial state, the system allowed the CSM to occupy the place within the formal apparatus of colonial rule that missionaries like Arthur so desired. At the same time they gave government some control over the schools: the government’s education department set the curriculum, organised the examinations, and conducted inspections. Although,

38 Kikuyu Vocational School: Calendar for 1924, PCEA I/EZ/1.
40 Kikuyu Vocational School: Calendar for 1924, 5, PCEA I/EZ/1.
41 John Arthur, “Evangelist’s Training” (February 1930), PCEA I/CG/7.
44 Jones, Education in East Africa, 125-129.
with a staff that for much of the early twentieth century consisted of just one (the director himself) its capacity to do this was always limited.\textsuperscript{46}

The government’s near absence from the hands-on delivery of education was both pragmatic and ideological.\textsuperscript{47} Pragmatic, because with missionary agencies like the CSM and CMS eager to fill the gap, the cash-strapped government was happy to allow them to do so and direct funding and personnel elsewhere. But underpinning, and at times contradicting, this \textit{laissez faire} approach was the notion that “native life” was not a domain with which the colonial state should interfere with too much. With the obvious exception of the drastically coercive measures they believed were necessary for the extraction of men for labour, the government aspired to maintain “tranquillity” in the native reserves and regarded the preservation of custom, tradition, and elderly authority as the best way of achieving this.\textsuperscript{48}

There was much the colonial government admired in the CSM’s curriculum but officials were also wary of the pace of change the missionaries were trying to affect. Although it desired and required a literate, loyal, African workforce to support its administration as clerks and translators there was great anxiety around the allegedly disruptive, “detrivalising,” effects of education on Africans. Indeed, while some administrators personally shared with the missionaries of the CSM the same, paternalistic, liberal-conservative, conception of imperialism as a vehicle for the emancipation of Africans, the colonial state was structurally organised in such a way as to block, delay, and mitigate any programme of transformative “uplift” that appeared too dramatic, too sudden or potentially disruptive.\textsuperscript{49} Obsessed with security, paranoid about the safety of its white capitalist settlers, the government was decidedly wary of any practice that blurred the line between that which was “European” and that which was “native” and did much to keep the two domains absolutely different and separate.\textsuperscript{50} It was one of the central, ironic, tensions within the CSM’s colonial education programme that they were much more ambitious in their imperial endeavour than the official colonial government.


II. Training Bodies, Opening Minds, Building Characters

Entering the school

The procedures that marked a new scholar’s entry to the CSM boarding school were geared at extracting persons from the supposedly filthy, insanitary, superstitious and communal frame of customary life on the one hand and inducting them into a new physical and material culture of discipline and hygiene on the other. For, as Arthur put it, “new wine cannot be poured into old bottles.”

Describing new arrivals to the central school, missionaries represented them as persons with unclear bodily borders: they were “very varied material, for the most part very crude and unformed”; they arrived with “bodies grotesquely smeared with ochre and sheep’s fat,” belching and spiting.

In Marion Stevenson’s eyes they were “very attractive and lovable, yet rough and ignorant, quite undisciplined, real little savages.”

“Open” and “fluid,” their bodies were — to extend Arthur’s analogy — unsuitably “leaky” vessels for the new knowledge and spirituality they intended to pour into them. The CSM required that their converts and scholars had bodies with clearly defined limits — exteriors that were suitably durable to hold interior depth of character and personality and withstand the intrusion of the outer world of nature.

Upon being admitted to the dormitory a new scholar was issued with a bar of soap and his new uniform and sent to wash and dress. In the early days, the scholars washed themselves at a stream; later, when bathing blocks were constructed on the grounds of the station, they washed indoors.

The CSM aimed to cleanse the new scholars’ bodies of all the residues and objects that identified them as “raw natives.” Each new scholar had to wash their entire skin-surface head to toe with soap and water, wiping away any grease, animal fats, castor oils, or body paints — substances which embedded a person within a community, indicating their gender, age-grade, locality, and status. They had to remove and dispose of their animal skins, as well as any ornaments, charms, bracelets, copper coils, bangles and earrings. Many boys and men, being annake, arrived at the station with long hair, which was styled ornately. This was cut off (typically by a more senior boarder but sometimes by a missionary) and his head was then shaved. Many arrived with ears

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53 Scott, Saint in Kenya, 161.

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which – pierced and elongated, according to custom – appeared to the missionaries as “dangling and unsightly.” The ear ornament was removed and the distended lobe stitched-up or surgically amputated by the mission doctor or one of the hospital apprentices. Arthur wrote of “sewing up and trying to beautify ears torn and made ugly by Kikuyu custom.” Irvine liked to think the operation made “their separation from the old ways more entire.”

The routines at the threshold worked to make the individual bodies of their new pupils visible to the missionaries; they established the body as the site upon which the work of Christian conversion and imperial uplift would take place. They were, further, intended to make visible to the scholars themselves, their own individual bodies over which they would henceforth be expected to exercise mastery. The missionaries saw this as a process of “unshackling” the

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individual subject hitherto blocked and stifled by the dark, crowded, greasy, cramped, diseased conditions of “native existence.” It was regarded as the first step in making possible the coming-to-the-surface of the scholar's unique, individual personality – their “character.” This component of the CSM’s “all-round” education was paradoxical – the very processes by which missionaries encouraged their scholar-converts to shut-down, discipline, and deny “the body” worked in fact to invest it with a new power and significance. They were corporealizing tactics that worked to materialise “the body” as an object, making it a knowable, containable, manageable, improvable object – for which they, as modern Christians, had the responsibility to subject, tame, train and maintain.⁵⁹

**Space and rank**
Inducting their scholars into life at the central school was for the missionaries, in effect, a two-fold process of “liberating” the individual from customary proscriptions and communal bonds of heathen life on the one hand, and introducing them into a new set of customs, traditions, and hierarchical structure connected to the church and the British empire on the other. After all, their aspiration for the boys in their dormitories was not unbridled individual liberation, but the cultivation of specific kinds of (masculine) persons who would occupy a place within a particular hierarchical order, and would have a specific set of attributes that conformed to the missionary model of gendered respectability. Within the spectrum of appropriate traits, among the most heralded attributes were those they termed self-reliance, self-control, restraint, stoicism, grit, wit, empathy, gentility, determination, resilience, alertness.

The built space of the mission station in general, and the dormitory system in particular, was designed in such a way as to purposefully encourage new, individual, imperial, Christian subjectivities (Figures 3 and 4). Unlike other reformatory institutions in colonial Kenya at this time, such as the borstal at Kabete – and in stark contrast to other similarly carceral colonial “contact zones” in the country, such as the dungeon-like prisons, the slovenly and crowded asylums, and the spartan labour transit camps – the CSM’s mission stations strove to reproduce and recreate a space that was bright, open, healthy, hygienic, and self-consciously modern.⁶⁰ Constructed according to carefully-designed ground-plans – where there was a demarcated space for every


activity – the mission station was aimed at literally bringing Gikuyu out of the darkness and into
the light, at maximising the visibility of the scholars and controlling their movements.61

The missionaries liked to describe their central schools as spaces that allowed for total and
continuous surveillance: “learning, work, and play is all under the supervision of members of staff”;
in the mission boarding school, he [the dormitory boy] comes under regular discipline covering
all his activities within and without the class-room.”62 As far as the missionaries were concerned
one of the principle benefits of their geometric ground-plans and capacious constructions was that
they worked to foster within each individual scholar-convert a new awareness of their embodied
self. The premise was that, under the weight of the constant watchful eye of a superior authority
(whether the person of the missionary, or, as the scholar-converts were perpetually encouraged to
think, a paternalistic God), the individuals being trained and disciplined would come to interiorise
the rules, regulations, and expectations that surrounded them, governing, disciplining and
controlling themselves.63 This, certainly, is one feature of some of the missionaries’
representations of school-life. For instance, Barlow’s account of the new school buildings at
Kikuyu station in 1909:

In exteriors much is altered. Instead of a huddled group of buildings we see the station
being laid out so as to occupy a spacious area [...] But perhaps the most striking change
of all, certainly the one to be most thankful for, is that which has taken place amongst the
young men and boys who all along have been in contact with the Mission [...] How
encouraging it is to see daily the boarders in their neat garments moving about the station
on their various duties, needing now no inducement to attend school, and to note how
very much in earnest the older lads are in their work on the station, at village schools, or
in helping in evangelistic services in the villages.64

Becoming a boarder meant taking up a place in an order that was at once physical and symbolic,
for being admitted to the central school was both to take-up a bed in the dormitory and to assume
a position in a system of rules, ranks, roles and responsibilities. From when the CSM first set up
their dormitory schools it was standard practice to issue all new scholars with their own shirt,
shorts, blanket, and vest which it was their duty to maintain and repair during their time in the
school, something the missionaries believed would nurture a sense of self through ownership of

61 Arthur Barlow, “Rough Plan of Tumutumu Station” (1910), EUL BP Gen1786/3.
62 John Arthur to J.R. Orr, Director of Education (11 September 1912), PCEA I/EA/5; R.G.M.
63 cf. Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 231.
private property. Arthur articulated the mission’s view on the improving, subjectifying, qualities of clean clothing thus:

one’s first endeavour is to set into his mind that he must wear clothes. This is the first step to self-respect. The next step in teaching him self-respect, is to get him to keep himself and his clothes clean […] Education with strict discipline as to cleanliness and respect for you will teach him respect for himself.

Later this rule was extended and further to their uniform, scholars were issued with an enamel cup, a knife, fork, and plate. By 1923, after the renovation of the dormitory buildings at Kikuyu station, each boarder became responsible for their dormitory’s garden plot which contained not only staple vegetables for the mission station kitchen but also decorative flowers.

The dormitory system instituted at Kikuyu station in 1923 was regarded by the missionaries a major improvement on the stone building that had initially accommodated the scholars. The earlier builds had originally been championed by the missionaries who believed that the airy, sleeping spaces they provided had an awakening, transformative, effect upon boys who were used to sleeping in dimly-lit, ill-ventilated, jigger-infested huts. But by the 1920s they were decrepit and with the swelling of school numbers (see next chapter) they too were becoming cramped.

The new dormitories comprised of ten identical rectangular buildings, each accommodating twelve boarders. Each measured 30 feet long by 15 feet broad and was divided into two rooms: a bedroom, with bunk-beds, and a sitting-room. Each scholar had his own bed something that the missionaries had wanted to achieve since opening the dormitories but lacked the means. The buildings were laid out in two rows of five, separated by short hedges, and connected by a wide, open pathway. In Arthur’s eyes the arrangement had “an appearance of cleanliness, neatness and order.”

The dormitories were organised in a conscious effort to cultivate “esprit de corps.” The sitting-rooms of the dormitories were furnished with ornamental chairs and tables made in the

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65 Arthur Barlow, “Tumutumu Notes,” KN, 22 (September 1910); Isabelle Scott, “Kikuyu Garments,” KN, 74 (October 1920).
67 Marion Stevenson, “Scheme for Higher Education” (29 May 1918), PCEA I/EA/5.
68 Kikuyu Vocational School: Calendar for 1924, PCEA I/EZ/1.
70 Kikuyu Vocational School: Calendar for 1924, PCEA I/EZ/1.
71 Kikuyu 1898-1923, 74.
workshop by the carpentry apprentices. This was intended to instil “a sense of comfort and homeness” – something Arthur claimed was “one of the main objects of dormitory life generally.” Each dormitory represented a “house” which was then used as the basis for evening team games at the mission station. One scholar in each dormitory was appointed by the missionaries’ as house-master and another assistant house-master. Together these two were responsible for ensuring that their fellow boarders kept the dorm clean. It was their duty to report any offences to the overall dormitory house master – the senior native teacher – who would administer punishment. If the case was serious, such as liquor drinking or sexual indiscretion, the senior native teacher was required to report it to the European missionaries on the station.

Figure 16. Arthur Barlow, “Rough Plan of Tumutumu Station” (c.1910), EUL BP Gen1786/3.

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72 ibid. 74.
Figure 17. Top: “Boys’ Dormitories, Tumutumu, 1925.” Bottom: “Tumutumu School Assembly Hall, 1925.” PCEA Photographs.
The boarders were surrounded by practices aimed at nurturing their physical health and equipping them with modern, “civilised” bodies. It was compulsory for boarders to bathe fully once a week.73 There were daily inspections of feet and hands and regular medical examinations where the scholars were measured and weighed.74 They were provided with three daily meals which, from 1923, were planned according to a diet schedule laid out by the medical missionaries.75 Students were given lessons in how to “eat like Europeans, with forks, tablecloths etc” and instructed in how to use handkerchiefs.76 They were provided guidance in the “manners and customs of civilised people.”77 Clive Irvine’s booklet bearing this title may have been published in the 1950s but he was imparting the lessons therein to the boarders at Chogoria from the moment he started mission work there in 1922: “Don’t yawn […] it is kind of an insult,” “don’t snuffle […] it is an ugly and depressing noise,” “it is not polite to scratch yourself in public,” “don’t spit. No harm comes from swallowing saliva in your throat” the doctor advised.78 Just as with the management of phlegm and saliva, in polite conversation Irvine’s guidance was the same: contain! hold in! close up! – “Don’t talk about any organs of your body in the abdomen, e.g. stomach, intestines, bladder […] subjects such as pregnancy [and] the passing of urine and such like should not be mentioned by you in conversation.”79

**The personal touch**
The missionaries believed that they themselves had an important, agentive, role in the broader attempt to shape and direct the dispositions of their scholars. As much as the surveilled, space of the mission station might have resembled a Benthamite “panopticon” in which reformation, self-realisation and self-disciplining were automatic by-products of the spatial order, and as much as the missionaries envisaged the scheduled time-table and activity-packed programme of instruction as automatically exerting an improving, uplifting and disciplinary effect on the scholars, they believed their work was futile without their own, personal interventions. As George Grieve put it, “without

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75 Kikuyu Vocational School: Calendar for 1924, PCEA I/EZ/1.
78 *ibid.* 5.
79 *ibid.* 8.
definite personal Christian work amongst individual Africans, the European missionary would fail." **80**


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**80** Scott, *Saint in Kenya*, 234.
They sought close, even affectionate, relations with their scholars. They referred to this as the “personal touch” and they presented it as central to their programme of uplift. Instructed to be “friendly” but not “familiar” (to use a distinction from their 1928 code of conduct), missionaries were required to observe certain social boundaries while at the same time building rapport. They had to exercise “great care in their attitude and habits in relation to their household staff.” They were ordered to maintain a smart appearance and be punctual, to abstain from alcohol, smoking, card-playing and doing business on the Sabbath. At the same time they were instructed to “endeavour in leisure time to meet with those working under us, in a friendly capacity, in their sports, and in their dormitories […] to encourage confidence in us and frankness.”

The missionaries participated in games of football with the boys at the station. And though it perhaps tested the limit of what was acceptable, it was no secret that John Arthur on occasion even slept in the boys’ dormitory. The personal touch could be intimate and tactile. For instance, it was said of Marion Stevenson, that in the classroom she would lean over her pupils “guiding their grubby little hands and slate-pencils”; “by the end of the day her white blouse was a sight to see.” While she oversaw the explosive growth of schooling around Tumutumu in the 1920s, Stevenson’s colleagues made great play of the fact she “visited each out-station and its out-schools three times a year, examined each pupil individually, kept records of their progress, character, homes; and withal contrived to keep a human, personal touch on the individual, that was truly amazing.”

**The Boys’ Brigade**

All dormitory boys were automatically enrolled into the reserve section of the Boys Brigade and expected to work towards achieving full-membership. Branches of the all-male Presbyterian youth group, were established by Arthur and Barlow at Kikuyu and Tumutumu stations in 1910 and 1911 respectively. Being in the B.B. meant, for the full-members, donning the ornate cap, sash and belt every school-day evening during term time for signalling practice, band practice, or team games (Figure 6). On Saturdays they performed a parade march which on special occasions

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81 *Kenya, 1898-1948*, 42
83 E.g. John Arthur to Mother (22 April 1907), EUL AP Gen762; Arthur Barlow, “Circular Letter No. 2” (28 February 1911), EUL BP Gen1782/2.
85 *ibid.*, 109-110.
86 *ibid.*, 228.
87 John Arthur, “The 1st Kikuyu Company of the Boys’ Brigade” (3 August 1933), and Andrew Shaw, “The Boys’ Brigade in East Africa” (3 August 1933), both in: PCEA II/DL/1.
involved hoisting and saluting the Union Flag. They sang “God Save the King” in Gikuyu. The senior boys of the Boys Brigade, equipped with their bugles and lanterns, were responsible for leading the evening village preaching tours; they were also responsible for leading the physical training of their juniors.

The Boys’ Brigade was an institution for the making of seniority and rank at the station. A principal aim was to foster among the recruits a sense of when it was their duty to command and when it was their duty to obey. At each station one of the white male missionaries assumed the role of captain of the B.B., another deputised as lieutenant. The dormitory boys, meanwhile, occupied the lower ranks of the non-commissioned officers, the most junior of which was the lance corporal, the most senior was the staff-sergeant. It was a rule that only boarders who were full-members of the B.B. were permitted to wear full-length trousers while on the station grounds; day-scholars and junior members of the B.B. had to display their junior status by wearing shorts. No scholar, incidentally, was permitted to wear a hat or headgear on the station; that was a privilege reserved only to the white missionaries.

The rhetoric and practice of the B.B. was supposed to encourage their scholars to feel like members in a wider community. It was part of Arthur and the CSM’s imperialistic ambition to incorporate their scholars into a wider, imperial and global Christian order and make them feel like individuals who occupied a place within a grander hierarchical structure. The B.B., Arthur reasoned, provided for “the fundamental needs of Boy-nature, wherever they were in the world.”

A major object of the B.B. was imparting to the recruits a notion of their place and role within the Empire. “[You are all members of] the British Empire,” they were told by the Colonial Governor, Grigg, who came to visit and inspect them at Kikuyu station on Empire day in 1926 (Figure 7). Presenting them with a union jack flag and a Scottish saltire that had been sent from Glasgow, Grigg said to the boys: “you are called to give loyalty to your King and Country” before instructing them, to “think [not] of yourselves, but of your race and how you can help that race.”

The Boys’ Brigade epitomised the CSM’s ambition to produce a modern, fully-civilized, male elite, who were

89 This information has been compiled from: John Arthur, “Inspections of 1st and 2nd Kenya Companies,” KN, 45 (November 1913); Arthur Barlow, “The 1st Kikuyu Company,” KN, 63 (May-July 1917); L.W. Walker, “An Evening With the Boys Brigade,” KN, 79 (February 1922); A.C. Johnson, “1st Kikuyu Company Boys’ Brigade,” KN, 116 (June 1931).
91 “CSM Kikuyu Staff Meeting” (26-29 November 1915), PCEA I/CG/1.
92 John Arthur, “The Boys Brigade and the Church Overseas” (1934), PCEA II/DL/1.
selfpossessing, responsible, diligent, and independent, yet simultaneously deferential, dutiful, and capable of camaraderie, fellowship and teamwork.

Figure 19. “Kikuyu Boys Brigade - January 1912,” John Arthur Photos, EUL. Many thanks to John Lonsdale for pointing out to me that a young Jomo Kenyatta (at that time, Kamau wa Ngengi) can be spotted in the photograph, fourth from right.

Figure 20. “The Governor’s Visit,” KN, 106 (December 1928).
From the parade ground to the classroom

For the dormitory boys, every school day began with a bugle call followed by twenty-five minutes of drilling. Arranged in straight lines and rows the scholars undertook a set sequence of choreographed physical exercises, completed on command of an instructor (see Figure 8). As the missionaries saw it, drill was beneficial because it encouraged precision and regularity of movement, and developed fine motor control over the limbs: it contributed to the development of the new kinds of vessels the CSM deemed necessary for their new, Christian message. It was “systematic” and it encouraged “neatness, punctuality, and prompt obedience.” Starting a school day with it was, in Arthur’s opinion, “a great benefit” because it instilled a sense of “regime,” imprinting on the scholars an orderliness that they then carried with them through the school day. Missionaries delighted when they watched performances of the drill in which “every movement was characterised by smartness and precision.” From the parade ground the dormitory boys proceeded to morning prayers, from prayers to breakfast, and from breakfast to the classroom.

Under the arrangements of the 1911-1934 apprenticeship scheme all the dormitory boys, whatever their apprenticeship – whether they were training to be carpenters, masons, farm-workers, hospital assistants, teachers or clerks – undertook three to five hours of classroom education five days per week. They all received a “literary” education. English was the language of instruction and the emphasis of the classroom lessons was on reading and writing in English (for English was, as Arthur explained the “business and commercial language” of the colony). The curriculum also included reading and writing in Gikuyu and Swahili, arithmetic, geography, and history. The teacher apprentices undertook further classroom lessons in teaching methods, with an emphasis on black-board-writing. In the afternoons all the dormitory boys proceeded to their vocational training in the workshop, at the quarry, on the farm, in the hospital. For the teacher apprentices their vocational training consisted of teaching in the elementary school on the station grounds or beyond the boundaries of the mission station, in the surrounding out-schools.

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95 Berkeley Robertson, “A Visit to Kikuyu,” KN, 17 (March 1910).
97 James Youngson, “What I Have Seen at Kikuyu,” KN, 30 (September 1911).
98 Department of Education, “Regulations for the Education of Native Missions in the East Africa Protectorate” (1912), PCEA I/EA/5.
99 Kikuyu 1898-1923, 57.
100 “Regulations for the Education of Natives at Missions in the East Africa Protectorate” (1919), PCEA I/EA/5.
The first permanent school building at Kikuyu station was a “modern […] commodious stone structure” divided into three equal-sized classrooms.101 Each of the three classrooms was arranged identically: two rows of benches and desks directed to the chalkboard at the front of the room. The absence of an external wall ensured – to paraphrase Arthur – the building was well-lit, well-ventilated and, as such, “hygienic.”102 Like a doll’s house, the building also meant that while the scholars at work in each of the classrooms could not see one another, all three of the lessons could be observed by a missionary supervisor standing at a distance from the building block (Figure 9). Later, in 1924, the CSM’s endeavour to teach in classrooms that were clean, capacious, and modern drew praise by the government inspector of schools, the appropriately named R.H. Wisdom. His report indicates the attention that was paid to the micro-details of the scholars’ body in the classroom. Visiting the new school building at Tumutumu (Figure 4) he applauded the way the “subdued lighting” ensured there was “no strain on the eyes of the pupils”, the way the desks and benches ensured upright posture, and the ventilation which allowed for a “constant passage of fresh air at all times.”103

For all the cerebral work that went on inside them, classrooms were also locations for the disciplining and training of the body. For a start, the scholars received formal lessons in hygiene where they were encouraged to recognise themselves as inhabiting, biological, anatomical bodies. They were taught “better and more disciplined ways of living,” having to provide written answers to questions such as: “why should we keep our teeth clean” and “why should we wash our bodies and our clothes”?104 Beneath the verbal instruction, the practice of schooling further invoked and incited the scholars’ physical selves; akin to the morning drill, the scholars were required to occupy a fixed position, in straight rows, and taught according to a teaching method that was deliberately repetitive: “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little” as Marion Stevenson put it.105 Classroom lessons began with hand-writing drills – “penmanship” lessons, in which the scholars had to transcribe lines from the blackboard.106 Much to the frustration of the government Director of Education, CSM scholars were taught the cursive script as opposed to print script which officials regarded as more legible and better-suited to the training of clerks.107 Drawing and copying exercises meanwhile were aimed at developing “neatness, accuracy, and control of

102 ibid.
103 “Report on Scotch Mission, Tumutumu” (April 1924), PCEA I/ED/1.
106 “Report on Scotch Mission, Tumutumu” (April 1924), PCEA I/ED/1.
fingers.” Spoken-English lessons consisted of “continual practice” pronouncing letters that Gikuyu speakers often had difficulty differentiating: f&v; l&r; sh, ch,&j; p&b. The scholars’ faces and mouths came under scrutiny in such exercises as missionaries studied and wrote about “the broad grins on these black faces as they try to pronounce those funny English words!” The missionaries were given to explaining the applicability of the call-and-repeat method, dictation work, and lessons in which the same exercise was undertaken over and over again, in racial terms; as Irvine reasoned: “the African does not begin to consider things till they are well rammed in.”

**Opening Minds**

While CSM discourse on “the native body” drew upon metaphors relating its apparent need to be shored-up, contained and bounded, their discourse on “the native mind” configured it as something that needed to be opened-up. In this regard the missionaries shared in and perpetuated a wider colonial stereotype that constructed “the native mind” as a dark, unknown, territory that – like the interior of the impenetrable native hut – was believed to harbour contents that were possibly malformed and potentially unsettling. But whereas the weight of colonial opinion was to leave this territory unexplored and undisturbed, the CSM believed it was their Christian, imperial duty to break in to it and expose it to light. Education was “simply the process of opening the darkened mind to light.” It was a process of “widening horizons.” In a *Kikuyu News* article of that title, Marion Stevenson described how, when Arthur Barlow established the school at Tumutumu, one of the classroom exercises he liked to do with new boys admitted to the dormitory was present them with a map of East Africa Protectorate and point out their location in relation to the territory. We do not know how the first scholars actually responded to this exercise. But according to Stevenson, it triggered wide-eyed amazement among the boys who apparently remarked “we have known only a very small world until now.”

Postcolonial critics, among them the CSM-educated Gikuyu novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, have called for the need to “provincialize” and “historicise” the knowledge modernist formal education systems (like that of the CSM) entail and the European and post-enlightenment

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115 ibid.
assumptions upon which they are based. Acquainting scholars with the new imperial geography and their spatial location within the colony, Barlow’s exercise was explicitly and deliberately part of the CSM’s self-consciously colonial project to create upstanding colonial citizens. But it was simultaneously a form of “colonial” power in a way that was at once more subtle and more profound insofar as it relied upon, and worked to elicit, a kind of subjective awareness in the scholars that was radically new. This deeper transformation registered with Barlow and Stevenson, of course (hence Stevenson’s article), but they saw it as separate to and distinct from their “colonial” ambition. Stevenson reported the moment because she wanted to emphasise not the colonial lesson per se but because of the “break” she believed such a lesson affected within the scholars (the “widening of their horizons”) on the deeper level which for her and the missionaries was not a form of colonial power or colonisation but rather a “liberation.” Thus although they regarded the lesson as being in its own small way somewhat momentous, they did not regard it so much as a “break” or a “rupture” but in more teleological terms which assumed continuity: it was as a linear progression for the scholars, they were being “educated”, they were being “developed.” But, of course, this was because the missionaries presumed that Gikuyu ways of being-in-the-world and experiencing and measuring time and space were less-developed than, and inferior to, their own modern, European, post-Enlightenment understanding of the world.

Asserting an abstract external, objective reality – a pre-ordained, objective, and universally-valid body of knowledge – that stood-apart from, existed prior to, and independently from the individual, subjective learner, the modern formal classroom education the missionaries brought was radically different to local ontologies. Although of course people in Gikuyuland had for centuries learnt about their social and natural environment, thought about and contested their place in the world and the cosmos, produced and shared knowledge, and passed on skills, crafts, and practical techniques, there was no claim to universality nor a notion that there existed, above and external to persons, a standard, abstract order, as in the incoming European model of schooling brought by missionaries. “Liberating” and “emancipatory” insofar as it provided entry to a universal world-order and insofar as it was premised upon the notion of a universal, equal, human-kind, the CSM’s bid to “open minds” was at the same time part of a colonising process, undermining, subjugating and dismantling older ontologies and simultaneously working to inculcate radically new forms of subjective awareness.

117 cf. Timothy Mitchell, Colonising Egypt.
Figure 22. Top: The first classrooms at Kikuyu station, 1909, John Arthur Photos, EUL. Bottom: “School at Kikuyu station” (n.d. c.1911-c.1920), William McGregor Ross, RHL RP.
The CSM aspired to provide all their male boarders with an education that was not limited to Bible instruction and that went beyond merely imparting technical and agricultural skills. They hoped to provide a complete, elite, education that would, if not at first then eventually one-day, be similar to that which boys in Scotland would receive, and wrote of their scholars’ intelligence, their “brains”, their “capacity for taking responsibility,” and their “limitless potential.”\(^{118}\) Regarding themselves as leading an epochal transformation, they envisioned their scholars as a vanguard who would usher in a new age of Christian modernity in this part of colonial Africa; Arthur forecast a time when traditional “customs” would “give way to the enlightenment of Christian education” and “new moral Christian laws” would replace the old code of “tribal discipline.”\(^{119}\)

In the school, the missionaries sought to cultivate a historical awareness among the students which they believed was absent. “A native has no interest in the past” Barlow wrote, in 1911,\(^{120}\) “the Kikuyu as a whole are much too absorbed in the utilitarian interest of the present to devote their minds to the things of the past,” he wrote in 1943.\(^{121}\) Just as they strove to encourage their scholars to recognise their place in the world geographically, they endeavoured to get them to identify as historical subjects who occupied a particular place on the stage of history.\(^{122}\) Because they believed they were imparting this deeper historical sensibility in their scholars, history lessons – like Barlow’s geography exercise – were regarded as more than just history lessons: they were seen by the missionaries as part of a grander, more momentous, process of bringing the scholars into enlightened Christian modernity.

Biographies were important texts for the missionaries in their bid to develop among the dormitory boys a conception of history and a notion of individual life as an achievement-oriented trajectory through time. The school libraries at Kikuyu and Tumutumu contained English-language biographies of the likes of the missionary David Hill in China, King Khama of South Africa, the Anglican bishop James Hannington, and the Ghanaian educationalist Doctor James Aggrey, and Swahili-language biographies of David Livingstone, explorer Richard Burton, and Afro-American educationalist Booker T. Washington.\(^{123}\) As students progressed into the higher levels of a CSM schooling they were asked to undertake writing autobiographical essays about aspects of their own lives and childhoods. In part a means by which the missionaries hoped to

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\(^{118}\) John Arthur, “Hospital Notes,” KN, 46 (Jan 1914); “Policy of the Alliance” (1919), paragraph 38; Kikuyu 1898-1923, 28-9.

\(^{119}\) John Arthur to J.R. Orr, Director of Education, (29 March, 1912), PCEA I/EA/5.

\(^{120}\) John Arthur, “The Coming of the Kikuyu,” KN, 30 (September 1911).

\(^{121}\) Arthur Barlow to W.B. Stevenson (3 April 1943), UN BP BAR/1/2/7.


accumulate information about Gikuyu customs and traditions, this was also firmly part of the CSM’s bid to carve out and deepen the scholar’s interior sense of themselves as a person with a past, present and future.

In terms of the content of the lessons, a CSM schooling was “modernising” and “liberating” only in a limited sense: its reference points were specific, imperial landmarks, events and individuals; it was masculine – emphasising “great men” – and moralising, providing normative guidance in what constituted upright behaviour. Further, as Arthur made clear, in a letter to the Director of Education who had expressed his concerns that the CSM’s programme of instruction led to inflated egos and “swollen-heads,” the broad, comprehensive and general schooling the CSM provided disciplined and chastened as it emancipated and uplifted: “We endeavour to teach our natives the littleness of their knowledge to stimulate them to learn and to attain. We teach the sinfulness of all men and the need of a common Saviour […] The more we can teach them the more they ought to realise their own great smallness and the paucity of their knowledge.”

Figure 23. The Henry Scott Church at Tumutumu, 1921, from *Kikuyu 1898-1923*, 50.

124 John Arthur to J.R. Orr, Director of Education (29 April 1912), PCEA I/EA/5.
Holding that “an African with education but without God is a […] menace to the world,” it was a rule that, if they had not already been baptised into the Church, new scholars would be enrolled into the catechumenate where they would join a wider community of CSM adherents on a “fairly thorough” course of instruction “in the main facts and doctrines of our faith.” The moment the missionaries hoped for during this course was the moment when the individual scholar would recognise the Gospel as the Good News and Christ as their personal saviour and decide they were ready for baptism. A candidate was required to make a public profession of faith and to “prove the sincerity of his decision by giving up the evil customs prevalent among his people” (for the vow, see chapter 7). And, if after being interviewed, the Kirk Session “was satisfied as to his knowledge of the Gospel facts, his ability to read, and above all the sincerity of his life,” he would be approved for baptism.

**Punishment**

Punishment in the mission station was conceptualised by the missionaries as productive, generative, work that contributed towards “character building.” Their representations of school life describe a corrective regime that was harsh, even potentially callous, yet also careful, considered, and certainly distinct from the often excessive violence that we know characterised colonial punishment in Gikuyuland, Kenya Colony, and Africa more generally. Stevenson called punishment in the mission station a “gentle art.” According to her biographer, Scott, Stevenson liked to reprimand not through beatings but through inquisitive conversations and strategies aimed at inculcating shame and encouraging repentance. Describing Stevenson’s approach to discipline, Isabelle Scott wrote: “How trivial this is to chronicle, yet it was by such little lessons that they had to learn the virtue of obedience.” For example, Scott’s account of her disciplining of the boy who ran away from school. Finding him hiding in his home village, Stevenson set about trying to coax him back to the station not by force but by “squatt[ing] down beside him,” and talking to him “about his village, asking him questions about native life, and sympathising with him in his evident enjoyment of it.” Or, for example, her treatment of the group of scholars who, after the lunch hour, failed to report to the classroom on time for lessons; or the boy she found wearing his shirt-tails outside his shorts. The former, for three consecutive days during the lunch hour, she

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126 *Kikuyu 1898-1923*, 51-52; “Native Church Laws” (1922), PCEA I/G/2.
129 *ibid.* 114.
130 *ibid.* 110-111.
made stand atop the dining hall table in full view; the latter she made, for the remainder of the day, go without his shirt entirely.\textsuperscript{131}

However, contrary to the claims of one colonial education inspector who marvelled that at Tumutumu “corporal punishment is \textit{never} resorted to and it is a significant fact that the greatest punishment a pupil can receive is to be barred from the School room for a day or two,” the missionaries did not hide the fact that they sometimes deployed the cane.\textsuperscript{132} Stevenson would on occasion find there was “nothing for it but a whipping” and would punish her scholars by thrashing them with a “good pair of tawse.”\textsuperscript{133} Offences deemed “serious,” such as drinking intoxicating liquor, or “directly or indirectly supplying another person with intoxicating liquor,” were dealt with through a public telling-off, but if repeated then the offender would be caned.\textsuperscript{134} Nevertheless, as one CSM missionary was keen to point out, the cane was deployed strategically: “of course there are boys and girls who need to be punished for misdeeds […] even the punishment work is done systematically, and supervised, so that it must be done well.”\textsuperscript{135} At Kikuyu station, for instance, Doctor Arthur had a selection of canes, with varying degrees of firmness, so that he could modulate the punishment deciding on the size and age of the boy and the severity of the crime.\textsuperscript{136} Punishments at the CSM’s school, did seek to penalise, but they were also intended as lessons that would shape the inner person and tailor their behaviour.\textsuperscript{137}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{“Tumutumu School: Mr Dickson interviews a delinquent,” KN, 123 (March, 1933).}
\end{figure}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{131} \textit{Ibid.} 110-111.
\item \textsuperscript{132} “Report on Scotch Mission, Tumutumu” (April 1924), PCEA I/ED/1.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Scott, \textit{Saint in Kenya}, 115.
\item \textsuperscript{134} “CSM Kikuyu Staff Meeting” (26-29 November 1915), PCEA I/CG/1,
\item \textsuperscript{135} Jennie Fraser, “First Impressions,” KN, 61 (October-December 1916).
\item \textsuperscript{136} Interview, Steven Kamutu wa Charles Chung’u (born 1918), interview conducted near Kikuyu, 2/12/14.
\item \textsuperscript{137} cf. Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, 104-131.
\end{itemize}
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Sport

Sport, of course, occupied a central place in the all-round education.\textsuperscript{138} As Philp put it, in 1911, “to speak of sports as a missionary event may seem to some of you as rather incongruous, yet to us it has a real place in our work.”\textsuperscript{139} As William Blaikie, the teacher in charge of physical education at Kikuyu station in the 1930s wrote, in a two-part essay on “physical education” in \textit{Kikuyu News}:

It has been a tradition of the [Church of Scotland] Mission in Kenya to develop the whole man, believing that the old aim is still a worthy one – ‘A sound mind in a sound body’. Consequently […] drill, games, and sports of all kinds play an important part of the training of boys.\textsuperscript{140}

When the boys’ dormitory at Kikuyu station opened in 1908, among the educational paraphernalia stored in the otherwise Spartan school building were, “30 pairs of dumb-bells, Indian clubs, and bar-bells,” sacks of footballs, a parallel bar, and a “vaulting horse with a spring board.”\textsuperscript{141}

Most school days ended with at least one hour of organised recreation and team games. Most frequently this was football, but sometimes it was gymnastics, athletics, tennis, badminton, rounders, and tennikoits.\textsuperscript{142} That these games were based upon clock-time, fixed measurements and codified rules was particularly important for the missionaries. Based on “scientific principles” they felt that their physical education embodied a level of order, control, and predictability of movement that was absent in Gikuyu physical culture, frequently and explicitly contrasting mission-station sport with “native dances” which, they argued, were “degrading” and “demoralising.”\textsuperscript{143} They regarded their models of training and recreation as more advanced than, and morally superior to, vernacular forms of movement culture. And they saw their modern sport and physical exercise regimes as undoing locally inscribed ways of being-in the body. As Arthur Barlow reflected after leading a drill session one evening: “it takes a great deal of patient training to produce smartness and quickness of response from a body of Kikuyu boys: their whole upbringings and natural tendencies are against it.”\textsuperscript{144}


\textsuperscript{139} Horace Philp, “Kikuyu,” \textit{KN}, 32 (December 1911).


\textsuperscript{143} Horace Philp, “Kikuyu,” \textit{KN}, 32 (December 1911).

However, whatever value the missionaries believed physical education, organised competitions, and recreational games, had in the training of bodies, the chief reason missionaries endorsed sport was for what they believed this training of bodies did to their scholars “on the inside.” Thus when he first arrived in Kenya, in 1907, Arthur described how playing rugby with the scholars in the evening was a means of “getting into the hearts of my boys.” As Blaikie put it: “We firmly believe that all this physical training, with its emphasis on fitness and clean living, is of real value from the point of view of character building, and our confident hope is that our boys may grow up to be stronger, keener, and better disciplined Christians because of it.” CSM missionaries exalted sport for the “hardness that it inculcated,” for the way it “wrought wonders in teaching unselfishness and teamwork,” and for how it encouraged new forms of masculine behaviour, teaching the “boys that they can be manly and yet pure and strong and gentle.” Because they viewed their sport as more than simply a bodily affair, even if precision, skill, and graceful movement were found wanting on the playing-field or the athletics track, the missionaries found solace if they thought their boys were playing with “honour,” “enthusiasm,” “spirit.” By extension, while competitive spirit and winning was important, so was losing graciously.

The CSM organised “sports days” and regional, inter-mission, and inter-school, sports competitions. Aimed at enriching personalities as much as bodily exercise, these events were purposefully created as occasions for both contest and celebration. The sports day that took place on Empire Day at Tumutumu in 1911 is a good example of the dual emphasis on individual achievement and corporate camaraderie. As well as high-jump, football and running races, there were other, less-serious, events such as tug-of-war, pole-climbing, and obstacle race. The missionaries were pleased that “though their first attempt at many of the events, the competitors made a very good display.” The day culminated with two of the boarders – Kahuho and Muriuki – being singled out by the missionaries and praised for their individual performances. But what Barlow claimed delighted the mission most of all was the way the dormitory boys generally “joined heart and soul in the spirit of the thing.”

Sports days grew in grandeur and aspiration. The missionaries opened up their mission stations, inviting large crowds including a wide cast of characters from colonial dignitaries to chiefs and “raw natives” living in the surrounding areas. Combining frivolity, physical competition,

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145 John Arthur to Mother (30 August 1907), EUL AP Gen762.
150 Arthur Barlow, “Empire Day,” KN, 30 (September 1911).
pomp, ceremony, feasting and prayer they were actively deployed by the missionaries in a bid to evangelise and “civilise.” The missionaries saw them as exercises in performing and displaying bourgeois sensibilities, Christian virtue and British imperial power. The “peace-day” sports days upon the cessation of WWI are a good example of this. At Kikuyu station the event lasted three days. Sports events included running races, a football tournament, a potato-and-spoon race, and a pillow fight. Hundreds came to spectate including chiefs and their headmen whom Arthur specifically invited. On the evening of the final day there was a communion service followed by a torch-lit march around the station, a bonfire, singing and a great feast of meat, rice and sweet tea. Arthur described it as “a very restful, soul-satisfying service with the Spirit of God brooding upon us.” He rejoiced that the dormitory boys “entered into the fun of the thing with great gusto.” He believed the event provided “pleasing evidence of the new coming over the life of the school and of early formation of an esprit de corps which is hard to form in any new school, not least in Africa.”

The CSM established district and regional sports competitions such as the Arthur Cup (a football tournament for all the schools in Dagoretti District) and the Maxwell Cup (for all the schools in Kiambu), and colony-wide tournaments such as the Kenya African Olympics, and the first inter-territorial athletics and football contests between Kenya and Uganda. Distinct from the carnivalesque sports days, these events were intended as serious, high-level, competitions. CSM scholars featured prominently in them, with some scholars’ representing the colony. There was for example, Evanson Wacira one of the best middle-distance runners in the country, who was awarded the “Victor Laudanum” by the colonial governor after the 1935 Kenya African Olympics in which he set the colony record for the mile (4 minutes 26 seconds); and there was Kamunyu who set the East Africa record for the half-mile (1 min 57 seconds) (Figure 12). There was a teacher called Danieli who at one annual sports event (long-) jumped 21 feet 2 inches (6.45 metres) and another CSM scholar who won the national games with a (high-)jump of 5 feet 10 inches (1.78 metres). These contests were a means by which the CSM sought to extend British imperial traditions over Gikuyuland and incorporate Gikuyu young men into the traditions of empire. Every aspect of them was geared towards encouraging the individual scholar-athlete to recognise their place within the imperial order. Their organisational structure was envisaged as a replication and extension of sporting competitions in Britain and in other British colonies. Competing in the

same events, measured according to the same standard, as boys and men throughout the empire scholar-athletes were encouraged to regard their selves and their bodies as integrated within the British imperial sporting network.

III. The tensions of empire and the “individualised native”

One of the most striking aspects of CSM schooling is that, for all that the CSM regarded it as a struggle against Gikuyu custom in the name of British imperialism, some of their strongest critics were their fellow colonisers. Many were much more comfortable with the CSM’s endeavour to supply the colony with “able-bodied natives” (Chapter 4) than they were with the CSM’s attempt to produce individual, self-governing, imperial citizens. Among settlers criticism of missionary schooling was long-standing: “A good sound system of compulsory labour would do more to raise the nigger in five years than all the millions sunk into missionary efforts for the last fifty,” Ewart Grogan – one of the colony’s most notorious land-owners, had written in 1900. From settler critics the missionaries of the CSM had to constantly defend themselves against the charge that their schooling inflated the egos of colonised subjects and “pampered,” and therefore “spoiled,” men who were needed for labour – something that perhaps partly explains why the missionaries were so eager to emphasise the regimental character of their educative programme when writing in such public promotional literature like *Kikuyu News*.

The “literary” aspect of the CSM’s programme drew particular criticism. The prevailing view among those settlers who supported “native education” (many did not), and government officials, was that the emphasis should be on technical training. To such critics, schemes that focused on “book-learning,” like the teacher apprenticeships, were depriving the colony of men who should be labouring on European farms, or labouring for themselves and their kin in the native reserve. This view was echoed by a number of witnesses called before the Government’s Education Commission in 1919. Veteran colonial administrator Charles Hobley called upon the government to ensure that schools in the colony provided a specifically “native” education: “It is undesirable”, he said, “that any teaching should cause them to look down on manual labour. The bed-rock of what the great majority of the natives should learn is agriculture, it must be agriculture, the African must not be divorced from the soil.” Likewise, an officer at the Forestry Department announced unapologetically he objected “to natives being taught in English except in the higher standards. Natives should be taught trades with the minimum amount of book education.”

Orr, the Director of Education from 1911 to 1928, favoured an education system that would help build up the African areas, creating a semi-skilled rural peasantry. Not a critic of literary

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154 Ewart Grogan and Arthur Sharp, *From the Cape to Cairo* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1900), 360.
156 *Evidence of the Education Commission of the East Africa Protectorate*, (Nairobi: Swift Press, 1919). A copy can be found at PCEA I/EZ/3.
157 *ibid*. 41-43.
158 *ibid*. 45.
education *per se* he believed it should be limited, tightly controlled, offered to only a few, select, Africans and always vocational in orientation – to provide a pathway into low-level administrative work. He was wary of the CSM’s talk of a wider enlightenment and their ambition to advance the spread of literacy and sought to direct missions towards prioritising technical training. As he stated in a 1919 memorandum circulated around Gikuyuland’s protestant missions:

> any system of education which will draw the majority of the population from agriculture or industries and teach them to despise work with the hands is fundamentally wrong. Let us be quite clear on that point. [...] What on earth is the use of teaching him poetry and patriotism when he does not know where his next meal is going to come from and has no means of making himself a productive citizen useful to Society? He becomes, as you know, a parasite, swelling the ranks of the unemployed and often the unemployable.\textsuperscript{159}

When, following WWI, in the spirit of the League of Nations, the government pledged its commitment to colonial “development” and began to moderately increase its investment in native education, it was rural, skills-based education on which they focussed. Holding that “the African mind, in its present stage of development, is more dependent upon the practical rather than the literary arts,” the model of “native education” endorsed by the government was one that focussed on “the improvement of the home, the improvement of health, the development of industrial skill, and the use of wholesome recreation.”\textsuperscript{160} The principal initiative was the support government lent to the Jeanes school which opened in Kabete in 1925. Based on schemes for African-Americans in the southern states of the US, the Jeanes school provided a “rural” education “adapted” to the supposed needs and aptitudes of Africans.\textsuperscript{161} T.G. Benson, who was principal of the school in 1931, held that in an “ideal” world, the “advanced and backward races” would have little contact, remaining “unmixed, each preserving its character.” But since contact had already happened, the next best solution was to manage the pace of progress. Thus, of Kenya’s African population Benson argued: “They must have the whole of civilised heritage, not in one gulp, but gradually as they are able to digest it. It may take years and years but so long as they are able to put their hands on it, it does not matter.”\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{159} J.R. Orr, Director of Education, to Canon Leakey and John Arthur (18 August 1919), PCEA I/EA/5.
The CSM closely co-operated with the Jeanes school, believing that there was a role for such an institution in the colony, but they were strongly critical of the notion that such a programme on its own was sufficient. As Arthur wrote, with typically supercilious rhetoric:

Africans, in my opinion have been definitely held back in their development by this one-sided view of education, namely the necessity for technical training. Fuller education can open up for them, and for the other races of the world, the ways of mental and spiritual advancement, through which they will be able to express the genius of the African race in terms of service to mankind.\(^{163}\)

The unease colonials expressed towards the CSM’s education policy indexed deeper anxieties surrounding their civilising project altogether and the kinds of imperial subjectivities the CSM were aspiring to inculcate. It was, above all, the allegedly “individualising” nature of the CSM’s programme that attracted the most concern. Orr put it starkly in a letter to Arthur in 1912:

I cannot but feel that Missionaries are so taken up with the development of individualism in the native […] In South Africa, in West Africa, in America the negro or negroid is being taught to put himself on a par with the white man. Religiously, perhaps, all men are brethren; politically, the negro will for centuries be a child, and any attempt at pretending that within twenty or even fifty years he can attain the state of development reached by the white race in 3000 years […] can only be fraught with the greatest danger.\(^{164}\)

Gikuyuland’s colonisers believed in “discipline” in the general sense, but they were considerably more ambivalent about “discipline” in the (subjectifying) Foucauldian sense. Colonial institutions in Gikuyuland, as elsewhere in colonial Africa, were not interested in nurturing individual, self-regulating subjectivities. The CSM shared in the widespread colonial view that African’s lacked a fully-developed sense of self; but they departed from other colonisers who claimed that, as such, Africans were inherently irreformable and fundamentally incapable of ever being self-aware subjects. So entrenched was this view that it was even possible for such a supposedly liberal administrator as Hubert la Fontaine to remark, upon proposing the building of a new borstal in Nairobi in the 1930s: “critics say with some plausibility, that the African mentality is too low, his moral horizon too limited, for him to respond to improving influences.”\(^{165}\)

Endeavours such as the CSM’s were regarded as not merely futile but hazardous. A powerful strand of colonial thought presupposed the essentially “communal” nature of Africans, and warned that any bid to disrupt this collective identity presented a potentially grave threat to colonial security.\(^{166}\) Indeed, during the interwar period the principal spectre that haunted the colonial imagination was less that of the “raw native” of the past but the “semi-educated,”

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164 J.R Orr, Director of Education, to Bishops Allgeyer, Peel, Perlo and Willis, John Arthur, Rev. Father Brandsma, and Rev. Charles Hulbert (25 March 1912), PCEA I/EA/5
165 Sydney Hubert La Fontaine, “Report on the applicability to Kenya of methods pursued in borstal and other reformatory schools in England” (1932). A copy can be found at PCEA.
“trouser-wearing,” “detribalised native” of the present. For settler-writer Elspeth Huxley, for example, the African was but an “unreasoning cell in a corporate organism, the tribe” who had not yet reached the stage of civilisation where he regarded himself “as an individual.” She wrote of how, in hastily and artificially forcing this development missionaries, and colonising processes more generally, had created conditions for trouble.¹⁶⁷ White anxiety in Kenya about the supposed mental volatility of Christianised, educated Africans was heightened in 1915 with news of the rebellion in Nyasaland led by the Scots-mission educated John Chilembwe.¹⁶⁸ It became pronounced when one-time Gospel Missionary Society scholar Harry Thuku threatened similar in Kenya in 1922, preaching in Nairobi and touring the Gikuyu reserve promising the abolition of the kipande labour pass and declaring himself to be a Moses figure who would lead Gikuyu out of slavery.¹⁶⁹ The tensions that inhered in the CSM’s civilising mission in general and their imperial, “all-round” education in particular, became especially acute during the “circumcision crisis” of 1929, which will be examined in chapter 7.

Conclusion

The CSM’s approach to education was reflective of, and a constitutive element in, their distinctive kind of colonialism. Aiming to induct Gikuyu into a supposed “enlightened,” “civilised” plane of existence as self-mastering individuals, it was liberal, fraternal, gentle, and optimistic yet simultaneously, conservative, elitist, conformist, patriarchal and patronising. The education they offered the boys in their dormitories is an example of Arthur and the CSM’s preparedness – which far exceeded that of perhaps any other colonial group in Gikuyuland at this time – to engage with, antagonise, dismantle, and transform local ontologies and vernacular orthodoxies; at the same time and by the same token it is also an example of perhaps the most systematic and organised attempt in this region during this period, to “uplift” and “develop.” Few colonials considered the latter to be necessary and desirable. Many wondered if it were even possible. Some thought it was positively perilous.


¹⁶⁸ George Shepperson and Thomas Price, Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Nyasaland Rising of 1915 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1958); Church of Scotland, “Memorandum Prepared by the Kikuyu Mission Council on Female Circumcision” (1 December 1931), copies of the “Memorandum” are held at: EUL AP Gen763; PCEA I/GZ/1; and BNA CO 533/418/2.

What the CSM’s “liberal” colonial project did not do was question the colonial assumption that Africans were less-developed than, and therefore to a certain extent inferior and subordinate to, Europeans. Indeed this was the very premise upon which their “emancipatory” and “uplifting” project was based. That it was possible for some of their contemporaries to construe the CSM’s stance that Africans were “improvable” (and not therefore inherently inferior), as subversive and troublesome is a sign of the depth and pugnacity of racism in Kenya at the time.

The history of CSM’s central schools has significance beyond the history of schooling in Gikuyuland. It provides evidence of a style – or “modality” – of colonial power that ran counter to those prevalent in the region at this time. “Colonial power in Kenya alternated between extreme brutality and minimalist control,” Lynn Thomas and others have argued. While not denying that such a claim holds in general, this chapter has shown that CSM schools are an important counter-example. Pursuing a transformative project which was intimate, close, subtle and palpable; which was liberal yet colonial, emancipatory yet paternalistic, non-violent yet imperial and ethnocentric, a CSM schooling represents a kind of affective, integrative, power in a broader context which relied upon violence, brutality, and the assertion of racial difference.

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6. Going to School in Colonial Gikuyuland

In God’s Name they came, the call conceived,
And in God’s Name they were received;
Humankind, to convert and transform
The Torch of the Gospel in the hearts to search,
Hands, Heads and Hearts eventually to reform,
Making individuals capable of becoming reformers!

“They Came, Died and Yet They Live” (1991).
By John Gatu (1925-2017),
Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (1979-1985),
about the missionaries of the Church of Scotland.
Published in the preface to Hewn From The Quarry,
a book that commemorated the centenary of the
Presbyterian Church in Kenya.¹

This chapter is about those on the receiving end of Church of Scotland Mission (hereafter CSM) schooling, with a focus on the Gikuyu men who – by their own accounts – embraced the “all-round education” being offered by the mission. In the last chapter I showed that central to the CSM’s educational model and “civilising” project was the notion that they were separating and extracting persons from the supposedly “dark”, “backward”, and “communal” frame of “traditional life”, and inducting them into an enlightened modernity as self-governing, self-mastering beings who each had a personal relationship with God. I showed that this project was a deeply corporeal enterprise that proceeded from the “outside in”, as it were: the missionaries of the CSM sought to transform Gikuyu by first transforming their physical state - exercising, manipulating and training physical bodies in a bid to sever their scholars’ attachment to the traditions of old and heighten their awareness of their individual selves so that they might become active agents of history.

I showed that the transformative project pursued by the CSM was conceived of in liberal and emancipatory terms and that, as such, it occupied a curious position within the culture and politics of colonialism in Kenya Colony. In seeking to “civilise” and “uplift” the CSM took a highly antagonistic stance towards Gikuyu traditions, practices, and ways-of-being. They attempted to go much further than any of Kenya’s other colonisers in changing local lives and customs. At the same time, however, their bid to “develop” and “improve” contradicted the established and prevailing trends of the colonial order which relied upon the assertion of racial boundaries,

¹ Isiah Wahome Muita, Hewn From the Quarry: Presbyterian Church of East Africa 100 Years and Beyond (Presbyterian Church of East Africa: Nairobi, 2003), 179-190.
subordination, and the enforcing of power and authority through violence, brutality, and oppression.

This chapter looks at what Gikuyu made of this. Two arguments are threaded through the narrative that follows. The first is that the humanist, liberal, and emancipatory project of the CSM was actively seized upon by some Gikuyu men and that among them there were many for whom a CSM education was generative of new ways of thinking about and “being in” the body, and of new senses of the self, of time, of history and of progress. The second is that underpinning these dramatic changes were important continuities: informing the embrace of the CSM’s civilising mission by some Gikuyu were historically deep local understandings of masculine individual advancement, and improvement.

Gatu’s poem, which directly invokes both the transformative and individualising aspects of the CSM’s evangelism and indicates the ways in which the CSM’s project was oriented toward the body (“hands, heads, and hearts”), is apposite. I open with it because this chapter also touches on the place of the CSM in the social and cultural landscape of central Kenya in the more recent past. Drawing on autobiographical writings of prominent, one-time CSM-schooled Gikuyu men as well as oral history interviews which I conducted in former CSM heartlands of Kikuyu, Tumutumu, and Chogoria between 2013 and 2016, I use the subject matter of this chapter to reflect on some of the ways which mission-educated Gikuyu Christians have written about and narrated their experiences of going to school, and some of the ways in which the CSM and their scholars have been remembered.

**The athomi in Gikuyu history**

Between ca.1900 and ca.1938, but particularly after the end of the First World War in 1918 (in the wake of the great famine, smallpox, and influenza epidemic of that year and the year after) thousands and thousands of young Gikuyu men and women left their homes in search of schooling. Because missionaries had a near monopoly on education at this time, for most Gikuyu going to school meant coming into contact with Christianity. They – those who went to school – became known as the “athomi.” The term connoted all-at-once, their literacy, Christianity and their embrace of the modern: a niithomi (the singular) was “a reader, scholar; church adherent; one who has given up traditional ways.” It was not always used favourably.

The CSM were engulfed by this sudden mass craze for schooling. There were 400 scholars studying at Tumutumu station or its out-schools in 1918. This tripled to just over 1,200 in 1919. 

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2 KED, 524.
3 “Report for 1919,” KN, 73 (July 1920).
4 ibid.
The next year it doubled to over 2,100. By the end of the decade it had doubled again, to nearly 4,500. At Kikuyu station, things were similar: 600 students in 1918; 3,300 in 1929. Overall the situation looked like this. In 1918 the CSM had two mission stations (Kikuyu station and Tumutumu station) each with central schools and was running a further 21 “village-schools.” Across these institutions the CSM was training and employing 43 native teachers, and providing schooling to an estimated 894 scholars. At the close of 1929, the CSM had three mission stations (Chogoria was established in 1922), 93 village schools, 294 native teachers, and the annual average attendance across all the schools was 8,005 scholars: a near ten-fold increase in just over one decade.

The sudden uptake of literacy caught Gikuyuland’s white missionaries off guard. The grandiose terminology they used to explain it was general and abstract, suggesting the missionaries could not fully comprehend what was going on: they explained it as the “awakening” of a collective “Kikuyu mind”, for example, or as an “enlightenment.” Horace Philp, who was superintendent at Tumutumu station in 1919, proclaimed the missionaries to be living in “the early days of a mass movement of a great tribe toward education.” Four years later Arthur stated “the desire for education is so widespread that the staff of the Mission are finding it impossible to keep pace with the demand [...] it is like a surging rising tide.” The missionaries’ joy was not completely unalloyed: in 1930 Arthur remarked that “the very rapid expansion of the Mission’s activities in every department of its work” was placing “a great strain on the physical, mental, and spiritual capacities” of the European staff. In the late 1930s and 40s missionaries looked back on the 20s and 30s as a period marked by the “endless stream of enquirers” coming to the mission. “The feature of the post-war period” wrote Isabelle Scott (of the years after 1918), “was the great desire on the part of the people to learn the Things of God. Requests for evangelists began to pour in from the outlying districts.”

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5 “Report for 1920,” KN, 77 (July 1921).
8 John Arthur, “The Origin and Development of the Education of the Kikuyu” (June 1930), PCEA I/EC/1.
11 Kikuyu: 1898-1923, 86.
The deep and rapid extension of schooling and literacy that occurred in Gikuyuland during the interwar period has been acknowledged as one of the most significant aspects in the region’s history. It saw the creation of a new social elite and produced a new generation of political leaders, not least among them the first President of the country Jomo Kenyatta. The historical moment of the generational surge towards schooling is etched into the physical and material landscape of Gikuyuland. Though Scottish missionaries have long-gone from Kikuyu, Tumutumu, and Chogoria, their stone buildings still stand (see Figures 8 and 9 at the foot of this chapter). Most are marked with plaques bearing the names of individual missionaries and their dates in Kenya (Figure 1). Though some of the buildings have fallen into various states of ruin, many have been carefully preserved and maintained in nearly-immaculate conditions. For a sizeable number of Gikuyu people, particularly those who are members of the CSM’s successor institution, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), the missionaries of the CSM deserve to be remembered fondly and their impact on the country and its people is something to be celebrated.

Figure 1. Plaque on the interior of the Church of the Torch, Kikuyu. It reads “To the Glory of God and in happy memory of his servant the Reverend John William Arthur, OBE, DD, FRGS, MD ‘Rigitari’ Missionary to the Kikuyu People 1906-1937. A Faithful and beloved doctor and friend, evangelist and administrator.” Photo by Tom Cunningham.

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Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s seminal novel of 1965, *The River Between* suggests a more ambivalent stance. *The River Between* can be considered the first critical history of the colonial encounter between the Church of Scotland Mission and Gikuyu. For decades now a set-text for all Kenyan school children, it is certainly the most widely-read account of this encounter. A coming-of-age story about schooling, masculinity, tradition and modernity in colonial Gikuyuland, the core narrative of *The River Between* concerns the life of Waiyaki who strategically engages with the missionary schooling offered by Reverend Doctor Livingstone - a puritanical Scotsman and Eurocentric philistine. This is pivotal in Waiyaki’s trajectory towards becoming a saviour of his people (“The Gikuyu”). Despite, or indeed because of his missionary education, Waiyaki is equipped to become the leader and defender of Gikuyu tradition. His personal journey from boyhood to manhood is marked by a constant tension between his commitment to his home, his family, his departed relatives, and his traditions on the one hand, and his exploration of modernity – its skills and styles – on the other. Paradoxically, as Waiyaki sees it and feels it, the latter is essential if he is to maintain the former, but only if it is used with caution. Indeed, that is what his prophetic father Cege (a wise-seer, and “the embodiment of the true Gikuyu”) instructs him: To save, defend, and ensure the reproduction of his people in these changing and uncertain times, Waiyaki must go to school to acquire the new power of literacy but he must not lose his tradition.

A deep and fast-flowing river forges a valley that separates two ridges. The communities atop the respective hillsides have a history of interaction (of both rivalry and co-operation) that long predates the coming of the colonials. But the establishment of a Scottish mission station forces a further and profound rupture. The ridge opposite to Waiyaki’s becomes Christian under the leadership of the *munene* (big man) Joshua whose new name is indicative of his wholehearted embrace of the civilising project of the missionaries. Joshua adopts the new material practices of mission Christianity. He wears khaki and cotton clothing and preaches against dancing, beer drinking and generally – as Waiyaki’s father Cege puts it – “against all which was good and beautiful in the tribe.” Joshua prohibits his daughters, Muthoni and Nyambura, from undergoing their initiation and genital cutting. Kabyoni, the *munene* of Waiyaki’s ridge, meanwhile gives his fulsome backing to the preservation of all that was old and traditional.

In Ngũgĩ’s novel, the river marks the separation between two deeply divided communities: Joshua and Christianity on the one side, Kabyoni and tradition on the other. Kabyoni and Joshua

are diametrically (indeed, dialectically) opposed. Both are forthright and head-strong and narrow-minded. Neither of them has the grace, wisdom or judgement of their senior Cege or their junior Waiyaki. It is clear that the challenge before Waiyaki and his generation, is to heal this seemingly irreparable split. Cutting across the division between the old ways of life and the new ways is a further division between the elders and the young generation: building schools in his home town causes Waiyaki to be scorned by Kabyoni who sees him as a young upstart; because Waiyaki’s schools teach Gikuyu tradition and not mission-Christianity, they are despised by Joshua. As the plot unfolds, a reconciliation of sorts is achieved but only through a major sacrifice.

This chapter is about the “Joshuas” of Gikuyuland, to borrow Ngũgĩ’s caricatures. It is about the athomi who embraced mission Christianity. In the following, final, chapters we will look at those who bear a closer resemblance to the characters of Kabyoni, Cege, and Waiyaki. How should the athomi who embraced CSM Christianity be interpreted? In the early historiography on Gikuyuland they were often presented in shallow terms. Through liberal, imperial eyes they looked like enlightened forerunners whose breaking away from and abandoning of a set of backward “traditions” was part of the inevitable advance of a benevolent modernizing process. Through the eyes of Gikuyu ethnic nationalists they looked at best like unwitting, passive, victims of European cultural imperialism, at worst conscious traitors to their tribe, family, and tradition. There was (and is) much consensus underlying these seemingly different stances: whatever else they were, the athomi who took up Christian names, and embraced a new material culture of cotton clothing, soaped skin, and stone houses were not “real Gikuyu.”

Thanks in no small part to the work of John Lonsdale, historians no longer see things this way. Lonsdale’s work scrutinized the dichotomy between “tribe” and “modernity”, exposing how they were dependent and mutually constitutive categories. Lonsdale showed that the notion of “tribe” as a single, fixed, unchanging, timeless, agreed-upon community with a set of equally timeless traditions was a product of the colonial period: it was created - in part accidentally, through the structural-functionalist lens of the colonial administration as they attempted to enforce control, in part through the active work of Gikuyu ethnic nationalists who mobilised it in their bid to unite a community to fight against the colonial order. Crucially, for the purposes of this chapter, Lonsdale showed how what had often been taken for “Gikuyu tradition” was but a veneer of a significantly deeper, richer, historically-produced set of values and social practices which were

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complex and contested. Showing that Gikuyu culture cannot be reduced to a set of essential traditions, Lonsdale provided a means by which scholars could see going to school and becoming Christian not as a “betrayal” of Gikuyu tradition but, conversely, as the enacting of classically Gikuyu strategies in modern times.

Much of the evidence presented below concerns a generation of boys and men whose going to school entailed disobeying the authority of their parents and elders and, in some cases, subsequently making a name for themselves. Following the broad interpretive framework provided by Lonsdale, these stories are most usefully understood not simply in terms of Eurocentric, modernist, liberal narratives of progress, but also against the backdrop of a centuries-old vernacular moral economy which, forged through the historical experience of the laborious clearing of the highland forests from the sixteenth through to the nineteenth centuries, made a virtue out of hard-work, encouraged initiative, and valorised individual enterprise. Deference, obedience, and consensus were celebrated within this local hegemonic order, but these were matched by a rival and equally rich stock of traditions which championed speculative, risky, social and physical migrations and dissent: as the CSM’s Marion Stevenson noted in 1926, the proverb ǔriũ ǔriya kĩbingo (misfortune lies beyond the bush) was matched by another which stated kumagara nĩ kũũhĩga (to leave one’s village is to become wise). Thus, the concept of wĩathi (self-mastery) is relevant for understanding the shift towards the school. I have been unable to establish the extent to which schooling provided men with a quick route to land-ownership, the typical means by which young men secured the status of free adults and moral agents. But in what follows it is clear that a sizeable number of men seized upon schooling as a means of accruing social and economic capital in a way that closely resembles the ways in which, in older times, “pioneering” agriculturalists prospectively adventured into unknown forest wildernesses in search of land and wealth. The mission station offers an almost archetypal example of modern Foucauldian power, developing and individualising persons as it governed and disciplined them; but it was situated in a context with strong pre-existing vernacular hegemonic traditions of discipline and self-fashioning.

The concepts of riika (age-set) and itũika (generational handovers of power) are relevant too, for the stories of schooling-for-wĩathi were situated within a broader dynamic which was

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20 Marion Stevenson, “Specimens of Kikuyu Proverbs” (18 October 1926), UN BAR 1/1/9.
21 However, see: Parmenas Mockerie in *Kenya Land Commission: Evidence and Memoranda*, Volume I (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1934), 441.
corporate and communal, by which young people per se were attracted to education and its accompanying modern styles, with many revolting against their parents in the process. Derek Peterson’s innovative, commanding, adaptation of Lonsdale’s arguments with specific relation to the athomi at Tumutumu station is eminently relevant and inspirational here. What follows complements and adds texture to Peterson’s contention that the sudden move toward school in the 1920s can be understood in terms of Gikuyuland’s deep history of generational dissent. The central concept of itiĩka was that every generation, junior male elders would actively seize power from their seniors, cleansing the land, clearing debts, and renewing the social order in the process. The move of hordes of young people to mission schools resembles an itiĩka moment: in the wake of war, famine and death, mission schooling was seized upon by youth as a form of moral and material cleansing that represented a direct challenge to the authority of their elders.

**Mambere**

Ask almost anyone living in and around the Presbyterian heartlands of Thogoto, Tumutumu, and Chogoria today about the Scottish missionaries’ schools and they will tell you that those schools and the people who went to them are known as “mambere.” Mambere, you might be told, comes from the Gikuyu word mbere - meaning “first”, or “forerunner.” Barlow and Benson’s Kikuyu-English Dictionary defined mbere as “place beyond, place in front; strip of land in front of each member of a line of workers breaking up soil as they advance up a hill.”

Indicating the linkage between pioneering agricultural labour and schooling, the term is one of praise and admiration and confers upon the athomi a degree of fame. Louise Gathogo, who was born in the late 1930 and worked as a cook at Tumutumu mission station in the 1960s, explained it to me like this: “Those who went to school were called the “Mambere.” It means “to go ahead.” Those people were seen to be ahead of those who did not go to school, so we called them “mambere.”

Gathogo then added, however: “They were insulted those mambere […] they were insulted by those who were not going to school. Because the others were illiterate, they were telling those mambere that they were boastful and proud.” For Gathogo, mambere was an ambivalent term, referring to forerunners who were also outcasts. This is compounded by the word’s deeper history. Certainly not of the missionaries’ making, the term appears to have been coined by the CSM’s first athomi. The missionaries started hearing it in 1908, when the first dormitory school opened at

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23 *KED*, 271-272.
24 Interview, Loise Wanjiru Gathogo (born c.1933), interviews conducted near Tumutumu, 19/11/14 and 22/11/14.
Kikuyu station. It came to them not as a legible, printed word, but as a partially-audible sound that they, as newcomers to the language, could not understand: “Bambel,” “Bambele,” and “Mambele.”25 When Doctor Arthur asked Petro Mugo, one of the CSM’s most trusted scholars, what it meant, Mugo told him there had been a Bible lesson on the Tower of Babel “and that owing to the babel [italics added] inside the boys’ house at night it was promptly dubbed “Bambele.””26

That is how Arthur related it in Kikuyu News. Accordingly, some will tell you that the word Mambere originates from the babbling racket that used to come from the boys’ dormitory.27 But according to Arthur, Mugo spoke not of a babble inside the boys’ house but a babel, explicitly linking his explanation to the story in Genesis 11:1-9. The possibility of a typographic error in Arthur’s account leaves room for further ambiguity, “babel” (as opposed to “babble”) suggests not merely excited noise but a people confused, divided, and broken by their own hubris, unable to communicate with one another and destined for destruction.

Outcasts/Forerunners

Like other protestant missions in the Gikuyu highlands, many of the boys and men drawn to the CSM were boys and men whose prospects of acquiring land and wealth, and self-mastery, were limited.28 They were orphans, or else motherless or fatherless. Or they were the youngest in their families who, as such, stood to inherit the least. Or they were smallest, or the weakest. Some were physically or mentally disabled. Others were sick, injured or emaciated when they arrived at the mission station. Some were outcasts or people who had been rejected by their societies for one reason or another.

Among the first athomi at Kikuyu station in 1908, for instance, were boys and men the missionaries termed “children of the famine.”29 These included Waititu (later baptised Stefano), Kienja (later baptised Gideon), Kahehia (later baptised Paulo), and Gitau (later baptised Samweli) (Figure 2). These “boys” (Arthur reckoned them to be about fifteen years old in 1908), had each

26 ibid.
lost at least one parent to starvation and smallpox during the dark days of 1898-1900 and had ended up in the Watson’s household as domestic servants.  

Jomo Kenyatta (who at that time went by the name Kamau wa Ngengi) enrolled in the dormitory at Kikuyu station in November 1909 having lost both parents during his childhood. Inherited first by his uncle – a harsh man who worked him hard, forcing him to undertake work that was customarily reserved for women, such as grinding millet – he ran away to his grandfather before he absconded again to the Kikuyu mission. Whether or not the rumour that the young Kenyatta was once nearly seized and taken off to the coast by Swahili slave traders is true, it at least speaks to the precariousness of Kamau wa Ngengi’s fugitive youth.  

His migration to Kikuyu station seems to have been in part influenced by Musa Gitau (Figure 8), an older boy from his grandfather’s village who had, some years earlier, taken himself off to Kikuyu station. When the

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young Kenyatta arrived at Kikuyu station one of his dormitory mates was Mungai whose leg Doctor Arthur had amputated because of yaws. In the decades that followed, the leg-less and the leg-lame sought out, or else were sent to, the CSM by government doctors or their relatives in the knowledge that the mission station provided a degree of security and refuge.\textsuperscript{32}

The first cohort of scholars admitted at Barlow’s school at Tumutumu in 1910 included Kahuho (later baptised Paulo) who had not yet been initiated because he did not have the means, and Mageria (later baptised Danieli) who because of his illegitimate birth had been told by his relatives that he would not inherit any land.\textsuperscript{33} In that year a very small boy named Theuri, who the missionaries thought to be about five years old and who they suspected had been abandoned to die by his relatives, “toddled up to the Mission and settled down with us as our youngest boarder.”\textsuperscript{34} Ndambi (baptised Solomon), who entered Tumutumu school in 1911, was a stigmatised sixteen-year-old whose father who had been exiled from his community for committing what the missionaries referred to as an abhorrent “act of immorality that exceeded even the immoral licence allowed by the code of heathenism.”\textsuperscript{35} Magothe (later baptised Onesimus) who grew up nearby Tumutumu station during the 1910s and was finally admitted into the dormitory in 1921 was almost blind.\textsuperscript{36}

Not all of the CSM’s students were impoverished or of low status. At Tumutumu the land-rich elders who had sold the CSM the land for their station considered the missionaries to be their tenants (or \textit{ahoi}). Six of the fourteen children enrolled in Barlow’s catechumen class were boys from the wealthy \textit{Mbari ya Njora} clan who had given the missionaries the plot.\textsuperscript{37} It appears their parents saw schooling as a service their white occupiers were offering in return for land rights.\textsuperscript{38} The missionaries at Tumutumu also persuaded Chief Murigu to agree to send his eldest son and his younger brother to their central school and (as we have seen) they made a similar deal with Chief Kariuki.\textsuperscript{39} At Kikuyu station there was Githeiya (later baptised Benjamin), the son of the murdered chief Waiyaki wa Hinga; Karinde (later baptised Tiras), the son of Waiyaki’s eldest son

\textsuperscript{32} AC Kirby, ADC Labour Office to Dr John Arthur, CSM (1 May 1914), PCEA I/A/17; Mrs Arthur, “Boys’ Clothing,” \textit{KN}, 95 (March 1926); Archibald Irvine, \textit{KN}, 113 (Sept 1930).

\textsuperscript{33} Peterson, “Writing Gikuyu,” 80.

\textsuperscript{34} Horace Philp, “The First Funeral at Tumutumu,” \textit{KN}, 29 (June 1911).


\textsuperscript{37} Peterson, “Writing Gikuyu,” 79.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{ibid.} 25-131.

\textsuperscript{39} Marion Stevenson, “Our Evangelists Problems,” \textit{KN} 70, October 1919; Mrs Philp, “Notes on Itinerating,” \textit{KN} 40, Jan 1913.
Munyua; and Githang’a (baptised Daudi), the eldest son of Paramount Chief Kinyanjui. Nevertheless, Githeiya, who in 1926 was among the first Gikuyu ordained as Presbyterian ministers, was the youngest of Waiyaki’s sons. And Karinde, who became Kenya Colony’s first African police chief inspector, was low-down the family pecking order, being the son of Munyua’s fifth wife. Similarly, while the CSM regarded it something of a coup to claim Kinyanjui’s first-born among their athomi it is likely that the Paramount Chief, who had refused to send any of his dozens of other children to the mission, did not hold Githang’a in high regard.

CSM schools had to play by the rules of local cultures of masculinity and ageing. Before the 1920s in particular many of the men who voluntarily sought out their schools were initiated men whose mwanake status freed them from the sovereignty of their parents. That some were in their thirties and already married was a great frustration for the missionaries who as modernist, masculinist, British protestants, festishised childhood in general and boyhood in particular. This, in their eyes was a life-stage of potential and vigour and the optimum age for learning. As we have seen, their Muscular Christian model of education and conversion revolved around the construct of the boy (or “lad”) as a malleable, untouched and trainable entity. But as far as most Gikuyu were concerned boys of this age (the tūbī - that is, boys who were “big”, but not yet circumcised) were agentless family labourers and the property of their parent owners who had – at least in theory – complete control over their mobility.

By the same token, however, for the orphans, rejects, and run-aways who made up most of the young uninitiated boys in the CSM dormitories in the early twentieth century being an athomi could provide not only novel freedoms but quick, if unorthodox, routes into adulthood. In 1909 the CSM introduced modified initiation rites for male athomi. This entailed circumcision by a trained hospital assistant using surgical methods, sterilised implements and chloroform. For some young men without money, livestock, or family connections, like (perhaps) Kenyatta who was initiated at Kikuyu station in 1914, this was an opportunity to achieve manhood by alternative means.

43 Dr Arthur, “Letter No. 6,” KN, 4 (June 1908); Marion Stevenson to Education Commission, Evidence of the Education Commission of the East Africa Protectorate (Nairobi: Swift Press, 1919), 84-87.
44 John Arthur, “Hospital Notes,” KN, 46 (January 1914); Murray-Brown, Kenyatta, 50-52.
Polluted and Protected

One of the first, and subsequently one of the most famous, athomi at CSM Kikuyu was the hospital assistant and Kenyatta’s circumciser Samsoni Njoroge (see Figure 3). These days, around the Thogoto-Kikuyu area and beyond, legend has it that Njoroge was the first Gikuyu person to willingly break the customary proscriptions of thahu and handle a corpse. Undoubtedly plausible, what is more interesting is that this mythology was popularised by the missionaries too who, right from Njoroge’s earliest days at Kikuyu hospital, worked hard to broadcast his cadaver-touching medical work as the kind of fearless, pioneering, enlightened behaviour that was emblematic of the progress being wrought by Christianity in Gikuyuland.45

Figure 3. Samsoni Njoroge (centre) with two other athomi, c.1910. John Arthur Photos, EUL.

Njoroge arrived at Kikuyu mission station around 1907, according to his late son, the Reverend Edward Njoroge (Figure 4), after hearing David Clement Scott preaching in his village.46 Arthur, who took Njoroge in to his home as a domestic servant, later recalled “I remember him

46 Interview, Reverend Edward Njoroge Samson (born 4 January 1918), interviews conducted near Kikuyu station, 9/12/14, 24/6/15.
as a young man dressed in paint and feathers with very painful eyes. I was able to relieve him, and
as a result, because I was attracted to him, I invited him to be my houseboy.”  
Remarks such as
this underline the argument that missionary work was paternalistic, pastoral, and intimate. I shall
return to some of the implications of this at the end of this chapter.

Figure 4. Reverend Edward Njoroge Samson, 24 June 2015. Photo by Tom Cunningham.

At the time Njoroge arrived at Kikuyu station, the mission was relying on the European
staff, or else Masai mercenaries, for the undertaking of the heavier, messier, aspects of medical
work. Gikuyu refused to engage with medical work for fear of thahu. Under Arthur’s instruction
Njoroge became Christian and was baptised in 1909. “After a long serious talk” (Arthur’s words –
which give some sense of Njoroge’s internal dilemma) he was apprenticed as a hospital
assistant.  
He was the keenest of the medical scholars and by 1914 he was cleaning the wards,
boiling the utensils and medical gloves, sterilising Arthur’s operating table, taking temperatures,
giving medicines, administering chloroform to surgical patients, performing male circumcisions,

stitching ear-lobes, applying poultices, and giving enemas. He accompanied Arthur on medical tours outside the station publicly pulling teeth, injecting stimulants hypodermically, doing spinal punctures for sufferers of cerebro-spinal meningitis, and delivering babies.\footnote{John Arthur, “Hospital Notes,” KN, 46 (January 1914).}

This kind of behaviour violated most of the customary warnings around \textit{thahu}. And while missionaries might have viewed their “medical work” as a distinct, discrete, domain of their labour, people living around the mission station had no reason to see it in this way. Rather, Samsoni Njoroge’s activities were, by all accounts, widely understood by most Gikuyu onlookers as part of the general bodily and moral chaos at the mission station. Through many people’s eyes CSM’s mission stations, their schools, and the people known to be associated with the CSM, were filthy, dangerous and polluted. In the dormitory at the mission station, uninitiated boys lived at close quarters with initiated men; those who by local standards were sick, debilitated, and defiled lived side-by-side with those who seemed to be strong, fully-grown and healthy; boys and men came into close contact with their married (white) women teachers, and girls with adult white men.\footnote{Interview, Helena Wairimu (born 1931), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 28/7/15.} \textit{Athomi} were known to defecate indoors, instead of in the bush; and instead of spitting their phlegm and snot safely away, they were seen carrying their soiled handkerchiefs on their persons.\footnote{Henry Scott, “Letter No 29,” KN, 26 (March 1911).}

It was not just CSM hospital assistants who handled the dead moreover. In early 1911, much to the joy of Henry Edwin Scott and to the repugnance of the people living on Kikuyu estate, Arthur Ng’ong’o, one of the CSM’s junior teachers who had been baptised just months earlier, took it upon himself to arrange the burial of his deceased father Ngini, who was a tenant on the CSM’s estate. Under normal circumstances Ngini would not have received a burial, and would instead have been taken out to the forest to die. Ngo’ong’o persuaded eight fellow \textit{athomi} to help him and together “they went off to the village, dug the grave, rolled the body in a blanket, and buried it.”\footnote{Horace Philp, “The First Funeral at Tumutumu,” KN, 29 (June 1911). See also: Derek Peterson, “Preface” to \textit{Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri}, xiv –xx; E.N. Wanyoike, \textit{An African Pastor: The Life and Work of the Rev. W. Kamawe, 1888-1970} (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1974), 84-85.} In the years and decades that followed, there were multiple similar episodes in which \textit{athomi} publicly invited \textit{thahu}, taking it upon themselves to intern their deceased friends and relatives even if this was contrary to the wishes of their communities.\footnote{Interview, Helena Wairimu (born 1931), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 28/7/15.} With their stitched-up ears, shaved heads, soaped skin and cotton clothing, \textit{athomi} were not just visibly distinct from their kin – they also acted in ways that suggested to onlookers that they were resilient to the normal rules of cleanliness and defilement.
For those who were inclined to see them as such, the notion that the *athomi* were protected from pollution may well have been reinforced by the war in 1918. 1,750 *athomi*, drawn from across Gikuyuland’s protestant missions, went to German East Africa together as part of the “Kikuyu Mission Volunteers” a special non-combat battalion. 54 Doctor Arthur was the captain. Samson Njoroge was the Chief of Hospital Staff. 55 Like most of the thousands of Gikuyu conscripted to the war effort, their role was that of porters, carrying equipment for the soldiers. However, unlike most of the young men recruited to the effort from central Kenya who, if they did not die or go missing in Tanganyika, returned emaciated or diseased, because of Arthur’s and Njoroge’s medical diligence every one of the *athomi* in the KMV returned alive.

The power of literacy

During the second, third, and fourth decades of the twentieth century debility, deprivation, and desperation continued to drive Gikuyu men, and indeed women, to mission stations. But increasingly *athomi* were young people from all backgrounds who sought out schooling because they wanted to learn the skill of literacy. Mission schools continued to function as refuges and safe-havens but, offering training in the new techniques of reading and writing, they were now also seized upon as portals of personal, economic, and social opportunity in an ever more bleak, brutal and racially divided colony.

Initially likened to magic, literacy seems to have first been seen as part of the fantastic, mystical, power of Gikuyuland’s white-skinned arrivals. 56 The whites’ first postal service consisted of porters who carried correspondence on foot, by hand, in leather canisters (or else attached to wooden sticks). Stories abound of the deep impressions made as wide-eyed witnesses watched in awe as recipients unfolded the paper and interpreted the black lines and dots. Kamawe wa Wanyoike, a student at the Gospel Missionary Society in the early 1900s, recalled how he “aspired to learn the ‘talking to paper’ skill which the missionaries were teaching to their mission workers.” 57 Through Gikuyu eyes, paper had affective potential: watching it exchange hands they noted how it often provoked a physical response or portended action (a labour call-up, or a colonial

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54 Extensive papers relating to the war, including Arthur’s war diary in EUL AP Gen762; EUL BP Gen1786/1.
55 Dr Arthur, “Hospital Apprentices: Apprentices from 1909-1920” (23 May 1919), PCEA I/EA/5.
intervention). Gikuyu vernacular connected literacy to material, bodily power: the term some Gikuyu used to refer to letters and cheques was “marũa” which previously connoted “marks tattooed upon the body”; the word used for writing, ndemwa, was rooted in the verb gutema to cut, as in to cut a body, person or tree.

It seems that what many found most fascinating about literacy was its relationship to the immense spiritual power about which itinerant evangelists were preaching. The principal envoys of the new skill were white missionaries and Gikuyu preachers who endorsed literacy as a craft intrinsically connected to a profound power. Reading and Christianity came hand in hand. For the first two decades of the twentieth century, and for much of the third, the only available vernacular reading material was translated portions of the Bible. Thousands were eager to read these works. An early, perhaps the first, indication of the mass craze for literacy was in 1916 – about a decade after the first baptisms in Gikuyuland – when sales of scripture portions boomed from 755 to over 10,000. When the Gikuyu New Testament was published in 1926 it sold 20,000 copies in two years.

The wonder of writing was married to the recognition that literacy paid. The post-1918 expansion of the settler economy, the extension of the colonial administration, and the growth of the urban centre of Nairobi, created demand for literate Africans who could work as clerks or intermediaries. New occupations, with decent wages, were opening to mission trained pupils, as officials, typists, and telegraphists. On settler farms, “boys” who could read and write commanded higher wages from white employers than those who could not. Literacy fed. In Ngũgĩ’s words, “schools were soon overflowing with children hungry for this thing.”

A CSM schooling was particularly sought-after because, unlike government, unlike the more conservative-evangelical missions such as the AIM and GMS, and unlike the Catholic missions, the CSM (like the Anglican CMS) offered a “literary education” that went beyond merely imparting technical or industrial skill and was not limited to Bible-reading. As one mzee near Tumutumu (who did not himself go to school) put it to me: Scottish missionaries offered *githomo kia marua* (“education of the letter”) while other missions offered merely *githomo kia mondo* (lit.

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59 *KED*, 291, 483.
63 Superintendent’s file, Tumutumu, 1922-1931, PCEA I/CG/11.
65 Ngũgĩ, *The River Between*, 68.
“education of the bag”, or “education to fit people to simply carry luggage”). Parmenas Mockereie, who taught at the CSM’s central school at Kikuyu mission station in the 1920s and studied at Makerere College in Uganda, Fircroft Working Men’s College in Birmingham, and Ruskin College Oxford in the 1930s, compared the literary education he received to the nourishing food good parents give to children to ensure their offspring did not grow up as weaklings.

Figure 5. Eliud Wambu Mathu.

66 Interview, Abraham Wanyua (born c.1914), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 29/11/15.
Biography, generational separation, and self-fashioning: Muhoro and Mathu’s stories

Contained in Ngũgĩ and Mockererie’s imagery of literacy being devoured by famished children is something of the memory of how missionary schooling was corporeally transformative in effect and generational in character. CSM athomi who have themselves narrated their own life stories have reinforced this imagery. Below, I will show this with regard to some of the people with whom I spoke in Kikuyu, Tumutumu, and Chogoria. First, I want to turn briefly to the life-stories of two of the CSM’s athomi, Charles Muhoro Kareri (Figure 7) and Eliud Wambu Mathu (Figure 5). Their biographies and own narratives add important texture to the themes of body, literacy, power, self-cultivation and generational division under discussion.

Muhoro, who in 1961 became the first African-born Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, and Mathu, who in 1944 became the first African to sit on Kenya Colony’s Legislative Council, were men who were made powerful through literacy. More significantly, that is how they presented themselves in their autobiographical works too: as poor, anonymous, herdsboys who became literate forerunners for their generation. In the 1930s each wrote short biographical pieces for Kikuyu News. Further to this, Muhoro wrote a more comprehensive autobiography in the late 1970s and Mathu actively participated in the production of his 1976 biography. The biographical format - seized upon by Muhoro and Mathu - lays implicit claim to the interior cultivation of the narrator. As we have seen missionaries used biographical writing exercises as techniques to foster and develop modern, Christian, subjectivities – they envisioned the format as a means by which they might deepen their students’ sense of their selves and their sense of history. Muhoro and Mathu appropriated the genre, bringing to bear upon it deeper vernacular traditions of self-fashioning.

Muhoro’s Story

“My parents were not educated people, nor were they Christians. At the time I was born, reading and writing had not yet arrived in this country” he states, in his opening paragraph. It is notable that his personal story often doubles up as a history of literacy more generally. Patterned by turning points, key dates, breaks, and moments, in his autobiography Muhoro presented himself as an active decision-making agent and a historic pioneer. His infancy, in what became Tetu district (where Tumutumu mission was established), was marked by famine conditions and the raiding of the colonial conquest state. When, around 1905, Europeans came to this part of the country “they

69 Muhoro, Life of Charles Muhoro; Roelker, Mathu of Kenya.
created confusion, beating people up and confiscating weapons, and also stealing goats and cows.\textsuperscript{70} His father, who was a mĩndo mũgo (medicine man), took his two wives and nine children into hiding so that they might not get caught up in the violence.\textsuperscript{71} Muhoro was not born into privilege. He was the youngest son of his father’s second wife, Muthoni wa Karinga. One of his two older brothers died in infancy; the other was to die during the First World War.

Growing up he was taught to know Tumutumumu station as a place humming with thahu: the missionaries and their converts ate defiled things such as game, people had died in the hospital and their corpses were known to have been buried on the grounds of the station.\textsuperscript{72} He presents his child-self as intrigued by the preachers who came to his village, but stresses that he was under strict orders from his parents not to venture away from the village alone. Specifically, he was instructed never to go anywhere near the place “where people drank water with “human skulls”-a reference to the enamel crockery used at the station.\textsuperscript{73} On one occasion, when he did, he was severely beaten by his father.

Muhoro claims he resolved to break his fathers’ orders and become a reader on 21 August 1913.\textsuperscript{74} That day, which he frames as a major turning-point in his life, was the day he became aware of literacy. While he was out herding, two CSM evangelists (one of whom was the aforementioned Paulo Kahuho) approached him and staged an astonishing performance. One walked to a hill where he was visible but out of earshot. The other, brandishing a piece of chalk and a slate, asked Muhoro to whisper something to him. As Muhoro “listed some names of people and things I knew the other person could not know”, the evangelist made marks on the slate. The other then came down from the hill and looked at the slate and told Muhoro exactly what he had whispered. It made Muhoro think “that miracles were happening.” And at that moment, “I decided to go to school and learn to read like them.”

By his own account, it was not just literacy that had captured Muhoro’s imagination. Some years before the evangelists’ performance, the CSM missionary Horace Philp had come to his village. People thought he was a spirit.\textsuperscript{75} Enthralled by his body Muhoro claims he and his friends gathered around Philp to touch and prod him: “We wondered whether he was a human being. He allowed us to touch his face, nose, and eyes to ascertain that truly he was a human being just like

\textsuperscript{70} Muhoro, \textit{Life of Charles Muhoro}, 1.
\textsuperscript{71} Muhoro, \textit{Life of Charles Muhoro}, 3. See also: “Annual meeting of the Kikuyu Mission,” KM, 43 (July–August 1913).
\textsuperscript{72} Muhoro, \textit{Life of Charles Muhoro}, 10, 12.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{ibid.} 19.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{ibid.} 20.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{ibid.} 10.
the rest of us.”\textsuperscript{76} Such was his interest in these seemingly different beings, Muhoro would creep down to Tumutumu station to get sight of the missionaries. Being at an age when he was especially interested in dancing, Muhoro describes his particular fascination with the singing and the games he witnessed going on at the mission, especially football.\textsuperscript{77}

Through Muhoro’s eyes a mission education would transform him from being a lowly shepherd boy into a powerful man who people would fear. His rationale for going to school was gendered. He aspired to be like an imperious government tax collector by the name of Cosmos. When Cosmos came to Muhoro’s village, “girls were forcefully arrested and brought to him to spend the night [with him]. Beer was also brought for him, and rams were slaughtered for him.”\textsuperscript{77} Such was Cosmos’s self-regard, “whenever he was travelling from one village to another, he was carried on a stretcher […] for he would not step on the ground.” Muhoro hoped that if he went to school “I might be treated in the same way.”\textsuperscript{78} Muhoro claimed he was attracted by the military marching that he saw the CSM’s Boys Brigade doing, and their strict rules; he presents himself as being especially admiring of the elaborate costumes the kid soldiers got to wear:

To be in the Boys’ Brigade was an astonishing sight, because one was in a shirt and shorts, on the top of that he had a bag, then he girded himself with a belt. On the head he wore a cap with white and black colours, therefore becoming a very beautiful soldier.\textsuperscript{79}

After his initial attempts to go to school Muhoro claims his parents kept close watch over him, guarding his movements with great care. One day, telling his mother he would be “back in a moment or two”, he ran away to school.

I can vividly remember the morning of the 4\textsuperscript{th} September 1913 when I left home, having decided to become a reader. I arrived at Tumutumu mission and was taken to Nyamacaki [Marion Stevenson]. When she was told I had come to be a Mambere reader, she was delighted. She called Meshak Matu (who later became a pastor) and asked him to take me to the Iraguma (a small stream to the east of the mission) to bathe. Nyamacaki gave me a new black checked shirt, a shuka [long cotton cloth] and a piece of soap. I went holding these clothes with my hands. I had worn a gathii (a piece of skin) that was infested with lice. When I got to Iraguma stream, I removed the gathii, took a bath and then put on the shirt and tied the shuka around my hips. Meshack showed me how to put on the shirt and tie the shuka around me. I came from Iraguma stream a foreigner wearing his clothes.\textsuperscript{80} I left my lice-infested gathii at Iraguma. After we returned from Iraguma stream, I was given a blanket and shown the house in which I would be sleeping. I started learning on September 5\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{76} cf. Horace Philp, “Reuben the Half-Baked,” KN, 121 (Sept 1932).
\textsuperscript{77} Muhoro, \textit{Life of Charles Muhro}, 21.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{ibid.} 21.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{ibid.} 21-22.
\textsuperscript{80} “foreigner” see \textit{comba} in KED 68.
\textsuperscript{81} Muhoro, \textit{Life of Charles Muhro}, 14-15.
Like the *Kikuyu News* contributions of the Scottish missionaries, Muhoro sermonised the quotidian moment of his entry into *mambere* as a border-crossing of momentous significance. He encouraged his readers to see his entry into the school as part of a bigger story by which a grimy past was discarded and washed away as he embarked upon a new life epitomised by a cleanliness that was both moral and physical. In framing his schooling as a wilful act of defiance against his parents in particular and tradition in general, as driven by a fascination with the power of literacy, and as productive of new bodily styles, Muhoro was far from unique among this generation of *athomi*.

*Mathu’s Story*

By the mid 1930s, Doctor Arthur was referring to men like Samsoni Njoroge as “the older type of men with no great literary education.”\(^82\) Implicitly, he was contrasting them to the likes of Muhoro, who at that time was studying for a Bachelors’ degree at Fort Hare University in South Africa.\(^83\) Another such *mũthomi* was Eliud Wambu Mathu who, though ten years Muhoro’s junior, preceded him at Fort Hare by five years. In 1939 Eliud Mathu matriculated at Baliol College Oxford. Arthur described him as “one of the most advanced young Kikuyu Africans.”\(^84\) By the time he was elected to the Kenya Legislative Council in the mid 1940s, Mathu was famous for his “command of English”, his “courteous manners (almost Victorian)”, and “his perfectly immaculate dress.”\(^85\)

Mathu was, by his own account, a keen student of biographies - “because that’s where one can see how he matches with those who have shown greatness.”\(^86\) In his own abridged autobiography for *Kikuyu News* in 1930, and later, in the 1970s, when he told his life story to Jack Roelker, Mathu narrated the story of his schooling and Christianity as a story of a personal struggle for self-mastery and generational separations. He left his biographer reflecting that Mathu’s “decision to attend school was wholly his own. It sprang from a yearning for self-improvement […] he had made some clear choices. He had decided, wholly on his own, to go to school.”\(^87\)

Son of a *mũndo mugo*, Mathu was born around 1910, at Riruta, near Kikuyu station. He was the fourth and youngest son of his father’s first wife. It is conceivable that his twin sibling, who died at birth, was suffocated in the customary way. In his *Kikuyu News* entry Mathu drew attention to his physique describing how though he was of diminutive stature he was an excellent dancer,

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84 John Arthur, *KN*, 122 (December 1932). Mathu studied at Fort Hare from 1931 to 1934.
85 "Report on Eliud Mathu’s Scottish Visit" (18 April 1938), PCEA I/EE/8.
87 *ibid.* 8, 13.
“able to lead and guide ngucu, mumburo and even nguru which is the dance of the [young] men.”\textsuperscript{88} Typical of this generation of athomi, Mathu styled his youth idealistically and in terms that were at-once Gikuyu and Presbyterian: “during my boyhood, I did not pass any day in idleness.”\textsuperscript{89} He described how he always eagerly and willingly tended to his fathers’ herds.

Mathu presented his bid to go to school as an escape. He wrote of how he sneaked off to the CSM’s village school at Riruta aged just six, without his family’s knowledge, because he wanted to read and write. When they found out, “everyone at home was against me”, and he was roundly beaten.\textsuperscript{90} According to Mathu, he responded to this by extracting himself from the family rituals, an action that threatened to make them invalid and pollute his home: He claims to have said to his family

I am ready to do everything else as to the tending of sheep and cultivation of the garden, but I will never join you in things concerning ngoma (departed spirits) or any other things disagreeing with the Christian religion […] I made it strictly known to my people that even if they forbade me to go to school, I would never from this time, take part in family sacrifices and ceremonies of any description.\textsuperscript{91}

\textit{The body of the mûthomi: the interviews}

Many of the Gikuyu Presbyterians who went to CSM schools in the inter-war period who I spoke with remember their schooling as a physically intensive experience that entailed rigorous work upon their bodies. They remember CSM schooling in terms of its strict regime, the disciplined time-table, and the way it led to them developing new habits, tastes, and styles. This was particularly the case with first-generation Christians who, like Charles Muhoro, not only compared and contrasted the material space and physical experience of the school with their home, or “traditional” life, but actively championed the former over the latter. And it was particularly the case with the late Peterson Muchangi with whom I spoke multiple times between 2014 and 2015.\textsuperscript{92}

Peterson Muchangi was born around 1925 on the land immediately adjacent to the Tumutumu mission, to parents who were not Christian. He worked as a government clerk in the 1950s through to the 1980s, rising through the ranks in the civil service in the Ministries of Health, Education, and Home Affairs. Before his death in 2016, he was a well-known figure in the Presbyterian Church in East Africa. When Muchangi described a “typical day” at Tumutumu central school, where he was a day scholar in the 1930s, he foregrounded the timetable and paid

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{88} “Kikuyu Autobiographies – Eliud Wambu,” KN, 114 (Dec 1930).}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{89} ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{90} ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{91} ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{92} Interview, Peterson Muchangi, (1925-2016), interviews conducted near Tumutumu, 21/11/14, 26/11/14.}
\end{footnotes}
particular attention to physical exercise. He reflected on the temporal rhythm of the day and – like other respondents - was sure to emphasize that there was a time and a place for everything.\footnote{Interview, Julius Ndubi (born c.1927), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 16/7/15.}

The trumpet would go a few minutes before eight […] When the trumpet went, when it was blown to say “now come”, I would run from my home and in about three minutes I would be lining up with the other students. By eight sharp you must be lining up ready to go to the prayers, into the church. Then - I don’t remember how many minutes - we prayed, then to classrooms […]

We had a morning session of lessons. I think we had about 3 to 4 periods in the morning. Then we break for lunch, then in the afternoon, we have another two periods. And those periods were either 40 or 30 minutes, I don’t quite remember now […]

There was a time and a place for exercise […] we did that kind of drilling: ‘turn right!,’ ‘about turn!,’ and so on and so on - like soldiers […] That is the time when you would run and about-turn - about ‘whatever’ - jumping, you know, holding your arms like that [he gestured] and bowing up and down […] I remember there was a period for that. You would combine it, perhaps with some other game, you know, perhaps handball or something like that.\footnote{Interview, Peterson Muchangi, (1925-2016), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 21/11/14.}

Pointing out that he could not recall the duration of the lesson, or how many minutes he prayed for each morning, only served to underline the fact that there was an exact duration for each exercise in the first place. Muchangi’s account of going to school was remarkably similar to that of Charles Muhoron Kareri’s. Muhoron, in his account (cited above) of the day he entered Tumutumu school, about two decades before Muchangi, wrote: “The first thing I learned was to do everything according to the timetable. Nyamachaki [Marion Stevenson] was very strict on observing time and I as her student I inherited this trait from her. Everything, including eating, sleeping, studying, even playing, was on a schedule.”\footnote{Muhoro, Life of Charles Muhro, 14-15.} Men like Muhoron and Muchangi expressed their memory of schooling in terms of being subjected to a new spatial and temporal order – to a rhythm and routine that was abstract and external to them, and that was brought to bear upon them.

A significant element of Peterson Muchangi’s biography is that his father was Kiguta: a renowned local big-man and a staunch and leading opponent of Christianity in the vicinity of Tumutumu. Such was the impression Kiguta made upon the missionaries at Tumutumu, that missionary Horace Philp even wrote a twenty-five-page “character sketch” of him. Philp wrote of how Kiguta terrified the staff, referring to his “devilish” face, his love of “indul[ing] in every heathen orgy, including evil dances with girls young enough to be his daughters”, his bullying, and his sheep stealing – a characterisation of Kiguta that continues to be popularised in the area around
Tumutumu today, albeit rather jovially. As the last-born of one of the most junior of Kiguta’s many wives, Muchangi did not remember his early years very fondly: “[There] were between 20 to 30 [children] in the home. I was more or less at the bottom.” Telling me about his “hard, very difficult” childhood, Muchangi described the spatial layout of his home, implicitly contrasting it with both the mission station, with its segmented, rectangular, arranged spaces, and the spotless and neatly-ordered house in which he currently lived (and where the interview was taking place):

In the house there were goats and sheep, and the house was a circular thing. The diameter was – well - it would hardly be big [he gestured with his hands to indicate a space smaller than his living room]. [...] There was a place for my mother’s bed. There was the store for the house and that was all: those were the only two isolated places. The rest of the house was open. So that the goats would sleep there at night. I would sleep together with the goats, and sometimes, as you sleep, the goats step on you, you wake up in the morning you find, if a goat was diarrhearing, you are carrying all the mess. You see! That kind of life, I remember, I experienced that.

For Muchangi, Muhoro, and many other athomi of this generation, a CSM schooling entailed entering into a novel space with a novel regime that was different to that with which they were familiar at home and which reoriented their sense of themselves and their sense of their bodies. In interviews at Kikuyu, Tumutumu, and Chogoria, as graduates of CSM schools relayed their memories to me, they frequently foregrounded their recollection of the geometric area of the mission station, the chill of the light and airy classrooms, and the firmness of the wooden benches beneath their backsides. Underscoring the vernacular linkage between literacy and bodily skill, my respondents spoke of writing as being as much a material practice as a cerebral activity: some remembered the slates which were, in the words of one můthomi “divided into ruled and squared spaces – one for writing, the other for doing calculations.” Others recalled the blackboard call-and-repeat, recitation lessons. For Edward Njoroge (Samson Njoroge’s son), who was taught by Minnie Watson at Kikuyu station central school in the mid-1920s, handwriting drills were one of his strongest memories of school. He told me that these included not only writing with sticks of chalk and slate pencils, but also with their index fingers in the soil, in the courtyard of the school.

For many, going to school meant learning to use and be-in their bodies in ways that were novel and different. Clothing appears to have been significant in this regard. Missionaries observed that their pupils, “accustomed to skin garments”, took a while to “get used to” the khaki shorts and cotton shirts that comprised their school uniforms but that, eventually, their scholars came

96 Horace Philp, God and the African in Kenya, 121-144.
97 Interview, Peterson Muchangi, (1925-2016), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 21/11/14.
98 Interview, Kahariri Buri (born c.1928), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 27/11/14.
99 Interview, Miriam Mathenge (born c.1921), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 27/11/14.
100 Interview, Edward Njoroge Samson (born 1918), interviews conducted near Kikuyu, 9/12/14, 24/6/15.
“to appreciate the softness, lightness, and cleanliness” of their new attire. In my interviews with them, athomi often pre-empted my line of questioning and raised the topic of clothing before I got to it. They not only indicated its symbolic importance as a signifier of their athomi status, they also alerted me to its materiality. They told me of how, at first, they found this clothing difficult to put on. Trousers and shorts, with their separate holes for each leg and a front and rear, were especially difficult to master in comparison to the single sheets of cotton or animal skin with which they were familiar. From the first decade of the twentieth century, athomi dubbed “European” clothing, “matonyo” a term which is still used today. Rooted in the verb -tonyo “to enter”, it neatly captures the double sense in which “getting into” this new attire meant crossing a border and entering a new territory.

It was common for athomi, when they returned to their villages, to get back into their skins or sheets, either leaving their uniform behind at the mission station or carrying it with them separately. Partly to keep their precious school clothing clean this could also be a useful way of indicating deference to unlettered kin and senior elders. On some occasions it was a strategy of self-defence: for instance in 1938, when one CSM pupil was badly beaten by an age-mate in his home village “because he shaved his head and washed”, the missionaries at Tumutumu noticed that many of their day-scholars stopped washing altogether and started “attending the schools in a dirty condition.” The practice of changing garments reinforced a distinction between the space of the mission station and the home setting. Muchangi put it thus: “When I am going to school, I have a short and a shirt. After school, I put them away then put on the cloth, just a piece of cloth, just enough to cover my body.” Like other athomi of this era, he recalled diligently taking care to keep his uniform clean when he was at home, much to the bemusement of his older siblings who did not go to school.

Athomi described the CSM school as a site where they were introduced to a new hygienic code, radically different from the old order. Muchangi, about an hour after he offered the above description of the typical school day, remembered that although the day started with prayers, “we would first of all line up outside the school building”:

101 Kikuyu: 1898-1923, 73-84, 78.
102 Interview, Anneh Gathoni Kimunyu (born 1933), interviews conducted near Tumutumu, 19/11/14, 25/7/15.
104 KW Simmons, D.C. South Nyeri, to W. Scott Dickson, Principal, Tumutumu (16 February 1938), PCEA I/AB/7; Jeffrey Fadiman, When We Began There Were Witchmen (Berkeley; Oxford: University of California Press, 1994), 243-245.
105 Interview, Peterson Muchangi, (1925-2016), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 21/11/14.
The teacher would inspect the cleanliness of the pupil- inspect the heads, because we had a lot of, you know, those small animals in the head [nits]. And the jiggers which attacked the fingers and the toes - they also inspected for that, and that saved a lot of us pupils from getting them. But outside [the mission station] people really suffered. Oh yes. People really suffered from jiggers.106

Recollections of close-up bodily examinations were a common theme of my interviews with this generation of *athomi*. The rumours that circulate around former CSM heartlands, of (for example) individual male missionaries with unsettling penchants for inspecting the hair of the female boarders and examining male *athomi* for venereal disease, may well be true, but regardless of their basis in actual facts they testify to an enduring memory of how missionary schooling entailed close-bodily contact that could be both intimate and unwelcome. Generally, when recounting their stories of the hygienic examination to me, *athomi* recalled them positively and light-heartedly. An exchange with Julius Ndubi who, born around 1927, was a boarder at Chogoria central school in 1942 and worked as a hospital assistant at Chogoria Hospital thereafter, went like this:107

Ndubi: He [Doctor Irvine] was inspecting cleanliness everywhere in the school
Me: He was inspecting you, personally?
Ndubi: Yes. We used to queue and be inspected.
Me: What would he look for?
Ndubi: He inspected everywhere.
Me: Your fingernails?
Ndubi: Yes, and your teeth.
Me: Your teeth! Really?
Ndubi: Yes, whether you have brushed your teeth.
Me: And your ears?
Ndubi: These [gesturing]? Yes, even these. Whether you have washed them and kept them clean. [laughing] Not rough like mine right now! [pause, as if remembering] We were always very clean while at school but it wasn’t the same when we went on vacation. When the time came to go to school we would tidy ourselves up.

As Ndubi proceeded to describe his experience of Chogoria school he, like Peterson Muchangi in his description of his home, conveyed how those who joined the mission (including himself) developed new intolerances around smell and odour and new ideas about decency and respectability:

there was no proper or decent dressing before the missionaries came. When they came, they even gave out clothes freely and even salt and sugar. Those who went to church and to school were given these incentives for free […] The missionaries also gave out soap […]

106 cf. interview, Mary Wangai (1896-2016): “Ndutu were really bad and especially painful when being removed […] the missionaries brought “light” and jiggers were gone. They introduced hygiene. They helped remove the jiggers. They even brought medicine that would be applied on the feet to prevent jiggers […] They showed people how to remove them and even removed jiggers from infected feet.” Interview conducted near Tumutumu, 22/11/14.

107 Interview, Julius Ndubi Maligi (born c.1927), interview conducted near Chogoria, 16/07/15. See also: Interview, Anneh Gathoni Kimunyu (born 1933), interviews conducted near Tumutumu, 19/11/14, 25/7/15.
They used to tell us to take their sweet-smelling soaps and bathe using them so that our bodies would have that scent. Everybody likes having a sweet scent so that’s why we quickly accepted and joined Christianity.  

A number of former athomi told me that going to school meant acquiring a new attitude to the body, hygiene and self-care. For example, Francis Muruja, a senior colleague of Ndubi’s at Chogoria Hospital, who attended Chogoria school in the early 1930s, spoke of the prevalence of yaws, giving me a graphic description of its affect upon people, saying that growing up he saw ulcers and wounds “so big you could see the bones.” “In those days”, said Muruja, referring to the 1920s, “they did not mind to touch ulcers, they could even put dung on it. They did not care. It is not like today when you are fearing to touch it.”

**Gũtũrĩ Mũthũŋũ na Mũbĩa**

In 1970, five years after the publication of *The River Between*, the PCEA invited Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o to address its annual general assembly. Given that Ngũgĩ was an avowed Marxist and atheist, this was a remarkable decision. It was in no small part due to Reverend John Gatu (Figure 6), with whose words this chapter opened. A friend of Ngũgĩ’s, Gatu was at that time Secretary General of the PCEA. In his address at St Andrews Church Nairobi, Ngũgĩ made explicit the arguments that were central to his 1965 novel. He declared that the Church of Scotland Mission, with its “highly strict puritan tradition”,

could not separate the strictly Christian dogma or doctrine from the European scale of values and from European customs. The evidence that you were saved was not whether you were a believer in and a follower of Christ and accepted all men as equal […] it was whether you dressed as Europeans did, whether you had acquired good European manners, liked European hymns and tunes, and of course whether you had refused to have your daughter circumcised.

Gũtũrĩ Mũthũŋũ na Mũbĩa, Ngũgĩ quipped - “there is no difference between the European [settler] and the priest [missionary]” – and he likened Doctor Arthur to Cecil Rhodes. The congregation were astonished, and some were appalled. Apparently one elderly man, “visibly choking with anger […] leapt to the floor […] shaking his walking stick menacingly to the front [and] warned the speaker to seek immediate repentance in prayer.”

The first I heard of Ngũgĩ’s address was when I came across a copy of it as part of a project to restore and preserve the endangered archive of the PCEA. I was struck by how starkly Ngũgĩ’s

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108 Interview, Julius Ndubi Maligi (born c.1927), interview conducted near Chogoria, 16/07/15.
109 Interview, Francis Muruja (1922-2016), interview conducted near Chogoria, 15/7/15.
111 Ime Ikiddeh, “Foreword” to Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo’o, *Homecoming*, xi-xiv.
quip contrasted with what I had been told by one-time *athomi* in central Kenya. Almost everyone I interviewed made a point of telling me about a particular white missionary, often describing their personality and physical appearance, and often giving an anecdote that reflected the individual missionary’s personal commitment to them, individually. Ndubi, for instance, spoke at length about Doctor Irvine - not just the cleanliness inspections but also how “he would invite us – a few of us, say 2 or 4 - to eat together with him […] in his house”, how although he was “very strict” he was also “very good and kind [and] […] would even refer to you as ‘my friend.’” Others recalled Irvine’s love of hiking, this militaristic adherence to good-time keeping, and his legendary olive-green Land Rover. Around Tumutumu today the names of Arthur Barlow (“Baaru”) and Marion Stevenson (“Nyamachaki”) are well-known. Indeed, many are themselves called “Baaru”, “Marion” or “Stevenson”, just as there are many “Evans’s” (after Irvine) in Chogoria and “Johnsons” (after John Arthur) in Kikuyu.

When I put the names Stevenson and Barlow to Ephantus Mukenya, who schooled at Tumutumu in the 1920s, I was met with a typically enthusiastic, unhesitatingly positive response:

* (Of Stevenson): Oh yes Nyamachecki was – Aye! Aye! Aye! – Miss Stevenson. She was the one who spread Christianity in our area and she was very famous. Miss Stevenson, Miss Stevenson. She was very famous. She used to go by foot, visiting people, seeking the people in their homes – seeking their souls – speaking to them, teaching them, converting them to Christianity. And very, very many people she changed.

* (Of Barlow): That man used to go interior places. Preaching, teaching, changing people. He was speaking Gikuyu like any other Gikuyu [person]. He was liked very much.

It is notable that personalised reminiscences such as these are also a feature of Muhoro’s and Mathu’s autobiographical reminiscences. What can we make of them? They are, I think, testimony to the pastoral nature of power and authority within colonial evangelism. I would argue that this feature of *athomi* narratives of schooling speaks to the significance of mission stations as sites where a distinctive kind of colonial power operated: it suggests that as well as being highly authoritarian and disciplinarian in character, and positively racist in many of its assumptions, the transformative colonial project of the CSM was also intimate, integrative, and affective in ways that most other colonial projects in Kenya at this time generally were not.

112 Interview, Julius Ndubi Maligi (born c.1927), interview conducted near Chogoria, 16/07/15.
113 Interview, Reverend Elias Kabĩĩ (born c.1933), interview conducted near Chogoria, 7/6/15.
114 The principal PCEA church in Nyeri is called “Nyamachaki” and as far as the Laikipia plains people who may or may not know the roots of the name refer to schooling *per se* as *Githomo* kia Nyamachaki.
115 Interview, Ephantus Machira Mukenya (born c.1922), interview conducted near Nairobi, 31/10/14.
Figure 6. Reverend John Gatu, 8 April 2016. I was struck by how when I asked Gatu for a photograph, he assumed a pose that highlighted his literacy and, as such, closely resembled a widely-circulated photograph of Charles Muhororo Kareri (see below). Photo by Tom Cunningham.

Figure 7. Charles Muhororo Kareri. PCEA Photos.
Peterson Muchangi conveyed this to me quite explicitly, as he told me about the headmaster at Tumutumu school, William Scott Dickson. But first he began with an almost macabre memory of being severely thrashed by Dickson after misbehaving in a mathematics lesson. Describing to me Dickson’s “special whip”, which was “not really the ordinary hard whip, but a whip that was soft but painful”, Muchangi described lying down in Dickson’s office and being lashed on the backside repeatedly. He then, however, went on to say, “it was Scottish discipline and we liked it […], it made a lot of difference, it really changed the character.” The story bled into a narrative of progress in which missionaries in general, but Dickson in particular, was accorded a central role as the benevolent agent of positive change not only in Muchangi’s life personally but in the Gikuyu highlands more generally:

If a principal, like Mr Dickson, who has a masters’ degree, who has an education degree, who is an ordained minister, would come and live in Tumutumu, with all the backgrounds of the area, the hardships of the area, and the country, just to improve me, I really must be very very grateful […] Tom – if you knew what an African was, and what he is today, and how he got up to where he is today, you cannot but help saying to the white man “thank you.”

In making this point, Muchangi made an argument with which I had become increasingly familiar, he did the inverse of Ngũgĩ - he contrasted missionaries with other kinds of colonisers:

The white man came and settled in the highlands, you know, where he can have a ten-thousand-acre land and keep thousands and thousands of cows and goats to enrich himself. So you can see the difference, someone who has come to enrich himself and someone who has come to lift us up. So this is the missionary; and that is the difference.\textsuperscript{117}

I had heard this argument multiple times. For most of my respondents, the CSM’s attempt to transform persons fully – “hands, heads, and hearts” (to borrow the words from Gatu’s poem) – distinguished them positively from other colonisers who were merely self-interested. As Gatu himself put it to me: “the mzungu was only interested in the African being his labourer on the farm. The missionary, on the other hand, was interested in bringing the African up.”\textsuperscript{118} By this logic, the “civilising” aspect of the CSM’s colonial project, far from being the aspect of the mission deserving of the strongest condemnation, is deserving of the highest praise - and Kenya’s other colonisers are condemned for not doing enough “civilising.”

This chapter has attempted to “read” the missionary school “from below”, or at least on the terms of some of those on its receiving end. In providing a social and cultural history of CSM schooling in Gikuyuland this chapter has added some historical depth and texture to the last chapter which

\textsuperscript{116} Interview, Peterson Muchangi, (1925-2016), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 21/11/14.

\textsuperscript{117} ibid.

\textsuperscript{118} Interview, Reverend John Gatu, (1925-2017), interview conducted near Karen, 2/6/15.
focused, in a more abstract and theoretical way, on the aims and aspirations of the missionaries with regard to their educational programme. Given the recent, troubling, resurgence in Britain and elsewhere of the trope of the “white saviour”,¹¹⁹ and the concomitant attempts by some Western academics to redevelop an “ethics of empire”,¹²⁰ I feel it is, unfortunately, incumbent upon me to make it explicit that my aim in documenting this history is – emphatically not to set out the “positive case” for colonialism, nor for that matter colonial evangelism. Rather my aim here, as in this thesis generally, has been to tap into an alternative history of colonialism in Kenya which complicates any straightforward narrative of violence, oppression and horror. By exploring how the liberal emancipatory project of the CSM was seized upon and made use of by a generation of Gikuyu men, and by attending to how it was informed by pre-existing values and social practices, the chapter has used fresh empirical material in conjunction with the broader insights of previous scholarship to excavate a hugely significant yet widely overlooked aspect in the historiography of colonial Kenya: the important, if inadvertent, role played by Christian missions in the cultivation of a new social and political order in this part of the world. The next and final chapter of this thesis pushes this approach further by turning to the final topic highlighted by Ngũgĩ: the CSM’s attempt to abolish the custom of “female circumcision.”

Figure 8. Musa Gitau Primary School, Kikuyu mission station, 24 June 2015. Photo by Tom Cunningham.

Figure 9. Chogoria mission station, former dormitories, 8 July 2015. Photo by Tom Cunningham.
7. The “Circumcision Crisis” and the Gikuyu Body Politic

The European sees, though he may not understand, that African life is changing with alarming rapidity, that there is disruption and discontent in the body politic…

Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, 1938

I. The CSM and the question of the circumcised body

Arguably, the “circumcision crisis” started on 10 August 1929. On that day, in a public letter, published in the East African Standard (EAS), Doctor Arthur called upon the colonial government to amend the law in order to “bring about the abolition of the major operation at least.” “Major operation” was by that point well-known shorthand among colonial officials. It referred to “any operation of female circumcision which involves the removal of the labia majora and labia minora or [both] of them,” and was distinguished from the “simple operation” which involved the excision of the clitoris only. For over twenty years Arthur, his fellow missionaries in the CSM and their senior Gikuyu church elders had been attempting to halt the practice of female circumcision among members of the church. In his letter in August 1929 Doctor Arthur stated his ambition to extend this ambition over the colony at large. He called for the government to act just like they

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4 KNA VQ 1/28/27; VQ 1/28/28.
had done in relation to sati – the ancient Hindu practice which required the widow to immolate herself upon the death of her husband – “which was abolished by the strong hand of the law.”

Two things prompted Arthur’s letter to the E.A.S. First, in April 1929 a female scholar of the Gospel Missionary Society (GMS) had been seized and “circumcised” against her will by her relatives. In the subsequent court hearing the accused relatives escaped prison, the judge citing a clause in the Indian Penal Code that allowed for certain acts of “grievous hurt” provided that they were carried out “in good faith.” Second, that very penal code was undergoing a major overhaul. Arthur saw this as his chance to force a historic change in the law. At this point Doctor Arthur was not only the head of the CSM. He also wielded secular, civic power, as a “Representative for Native Interests” in the colony’s legislative chamber and in the governor’s executive council.

To the events that ensued following the publication of Arthur’s letter we will return. First, in this section, I want to provide a broad set of answers to the question: “why were the missionaries of the CSM against ‘female circumcision’?” By the time of the “circumcision crisis” of 1929-1931, several, overlapping but distinct, arguments against irua in general and female genital cutting in particular can be identified. A number of them were laid out in the CSM’s 1931 memorandum on “Female Circumcision.” These arguments had developed out of the missionaries’ longer-term, twenty-year struggle against the custom during which time several of them had witnessed ceremonies and during which time their maternity work, and their domestic training programme for women and girls, expanded.

First, Gikuyu irua ceremonies generally – whether for women or for men – presented a major challenge to the CSM’s ambition to transform Gikuyu into modern, imperial, individual subjects with suitably civilised bodies. From the moment the likes of Arthur, Stevenson, Barlow, and Philp arrived in Gikuyuland they deemed irua as a principal obstacle to their campaign of “emancipation” and “uplift.” They did little to disguise the fact that they regarded the whole rite – not just the genital cutting – as utterly repulsive. Stevenson, for instance, wrote of the “indescribable vuleness” of the ceremonies and the how they entailed “bodily mutilation and degradation.” The rubbing of goat-fat offerings into the earth, the spitting of beer and honey onto the bodies of the candidates, the drinking of liquor by elders deeply unsettled them. The

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8 Arthur was appointed to the Legislative Council in 1924 and to the Executive Council in 1928. EUL AP Gen762.
9 See footnote 2.
sexual guidance contained in *irua* dance-songs struck them as lurid, debasing, and even “evil.”

There was the practical issue too: the ceremonies interrupted the calculated temporal rhythms of the mission station, disrupting missionaries’ endeavour to confine their *athomi* on-site, under constant observation. During each harvest season, they had to countenance the sudden exodus of students from their out-schools who, either as candidates or as relatives of candidates, were required to participate in the *irua* ceremonies. They worried that such students would not come back to the school, and that those who did would return forever changed.

The missionaries regarded *irua* as the rotten core of a social and material culture that was restricting Gikuyu from their rightful Christian inheritance. They identified *irua* ceremonies as the root of the “communal” bonds that held the whole “tribal” system together and prevented Gikuyu from coming to recognise themselves as individual rational subjects capable of having a personal relationship with God. In chapter 2, I suggested that *irua* was part of a cosmological and physiological order in which the “individual” was de-centred; as such it would be misleading to describe it as something that Gikuyu “believed in”, as if it were an abstract code. Rather it was an earthed, pragmatic practice which, among other things, was understood to have a cleansing and renewing effect upon persons and communities, making them whole – and, indeed, more fertile – as part of a deeper ambition to keep the wilderness out of civilisation. Through missionary eyes *irua* was, for these reasons, the epitome of a pre-modern “formalist” theology that was blocking Gikuyu from salvation through Christ.

The missionaries of the CSM described *irua* as “judaistic.” This was Arthur Barlow’s assessment of *irua*, which he laid out in his 1909 document that provided guidance to new missionaries in the field, and which he continued to re-state into the 1930s. *Ir*ua*, Barlow wrote, demanded unthinking acceptance and “slavish adherence,” and allowed no space for “heart-righteousness.” *Ir*ua*, he conceded, could contribute to the creation of social order and hierarchy, but it did so, he argued, through “superstition and fear” rather than through moral conscience. *Ir*ua* was the primary aspect of a traditional culture that reinforced the notion that a person’s “chief end in life was to fit in with tribal society.” Contributing to the “smothering” of “individual

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14 ibid.
15 Arthur Barlow, “Conditions of Life and Religion in Which the Missionary Works in Africa To-day” (1935/6), EUL BP Gen1786/2.
development” and the “subordination of the individual to the group”, he stated that it created a society and culture that was conservative and resistant to change.\footnote{ibid.}

These arguments were tightly entwined with the missionaries’ assumed, modernist, conception of the body as a biomedical, anatomical unit which was the seat of the person’s individual, contained, self. Prior to colonial contact, Gikuyu did not inhabit their bodies in this way. The profound gulf that separated Gikuyu ontologies from those of the modernist missionaries made it possible for many Gikuyu to conceptualise 
\textit{irua} and genital cutting as essential and renewing, and the missionaries to see it as “unhygienic”, “mutilating” and, as such, dispensable. 
\textit{Irua} ceremonies powerfully violated the missionaries’ sanctification of the enclosed, individual, hygienic and biomedical body. The missionaries were disgusted by the way the rite relied upon open, porous bodies which they regarded as dangerously insanitary. CSM missionaries who wrote eye-witness descriptions of the ceremonies fixated on the spitting, the sharing of blood, the sweating and the swabbing. Thus, Robert Gillan, a CSM doctor at Tumutumu, in an account of a ceremony in 1929, detailed how it “reek[ed] with the peculiar heavy odour associated with Kikuyu assemblies” and how after genital cutting “the bleeding surface is mopped at frequent intervals with a swab of leaves or with the bare palms.”\footnote{Robert Gillan, “Notes on the Custom of Female Circumcision” (10 September 1929), PCEA I/J/6.} They found the genital cutting aspect of 
\textit{irua} especially distressing. The missionaries expressed their aversion to the pain it inflicted. They believed that genital cutting without anaesthetic, on an adolescent who was fully conscious, had psychologically and physiologically deleterious effects, deadening their interior development, making them resistant to inner improvement. As they stated in their 1931 Memorandum on circumcision: “uncircumcised boys and girls have a rapidity of comprehension and vivacity of expression which are sometimes remarkable, but show a decrease in these qualities after circumcision.”\footnote{“Memorandum,” 3-4.}

They regarded female genital cutting as much worse than male genital cutting. A principal contention was that physiologically the two procedures were not comparable. The clitoris and surrounding tissue, they argued, was more integral to the female body than the foreskin was to the male body. From a medical point of view, it contained more nerve-endings making its excision significantly more painful. It was for this reason that, in 1929, the missionaries of the CSM declared they would refrain from referring to the women’s operation as “circumcision.”\footnote{“Memorandum,” 1. See also: John Arthur, “Annual Report, 1929,” KN, 112 (June 1930).} During the apex of their campaign the missionaries placed particular emphasis on what they claimed was the uniquely savage nature of female cutting, writing journal articles, newspaper pieces and making
public statements that were unsparing in providing grisly detail on what it entailed. In the *Kenya Medical Journal*, Horace Philp wrote of native circumcisers “slicing off the whole external genital parts” and gouging “out as much of the lining membrane of the vagina as [they] can get hold of.”20 In an article in the *E.A.S* he claimed to “have witnessed cases in which the old woman [circumciser] deliberately prolonged the agony […] the girls were crying piteously for mercy and deliverance from the appalling torture.”21

*Irua* was an affront to the missionaries’ own culturally-specific, modern, British, Presbyterian, bourgeois ideas about femininity. *Irua* “crush[ed] and harden[ed] all womanliness”, they argued.22 Within their mission stations when their “muscular Christian” regime was applied to female *aithomi* it was done so principally to make them into suitable wives and mothers through lessons in domestic hygiene, cooking, cleaning and child-rearing.23 They regarded this as the most complete, most ideal, form of womanhood. As such, their campaign against *irua* if it was (as they often described it) aimed at “liberating” individual women from their “enslavement” to the “debasing” custom, was also about subjecting Gikuyu women to a different, yet also highly constraining, set of expectations about their bodies, their moral conduct and their role in society.24 Although they petitioned for “female circumcision” to be referred to as “sexual mutilation”, their notion that genital cutting was sexually limiting was only a minor, muted aspect of their campaign. The clitoris was not, they argued in their Memorandum of 1931 “the main seat of sexual gratification [but] it certainly contributes to this, which makes its unnecessary excision all the more indefensible.”25 It was not “clitoridectomy” with which they were principally concerned (the existing literature on the CSM’s campaign has misleadingly over-used this term) but the more extensive form of the cutting and the impact they alleged it had on Gikuyu women’s reproductive roles.

The CSM’s principal argument against genital cutting was the risks they alleged it posed to the lives of pregnant women and their unborn child. The hard band of scar tissue that formed after the removal of the *labia* was a greater concern to them than the cut clitoris. It led to medical complications, in particular the retention of urine and menstrual blood in the vaginal reservoir that

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25 “Memorandum,” Appendix 1.
in some cases led to poisoning, infertility, and death. This was something the CSM became increasingly aware of as their maternity work expanded during the 1920s. The CSMs doctors and nurses claimed that due to the tightness of their birth canal, circumcised women could be in labour for up to seven days and that major incisions had to be made in order to deliver the babies of first-time mothers. This obstetric cutting, Philp claimed, was so extreme it “would be absolutely unjustifiable were it not done to save the infants.” He told of an infant’s skull that cracked as he tried to deliver it. He speculated on the negative effects this had on the “constitution” of babies born to circumcised mothers. Doctor Gillam estimated that 10% of maternity cases were “seriously interfered with” by the “complete closure” of the vagina as a result of scarring from genital cutting.

The missionaries of the CSM sought to elevate the question of circumcision from a localised, private concern into a matter for the attention of the state. The “major operation” should be made a felony because it was a form of “murder”, argued Philp in his letter to the E.A.S. With a logic that closely paralleled their earlier condemnations of the effects of the colonial labour system on native men, the missionaries’ argument was one that relied upon their conceptualisation of Gikuyu not as “natives” but as a distinct “population” comprised of living, countable, biological subjects. The missionaries called upon the colonial and metropolitan governments to intervene in regulating circumcision because the practice threatened population growth and colonial (re)productivity. As they did so the missionaries of the CSM created a link between the practice of circumcision and the Gikuyu people as a whole. It was a practice that was “disastrous”, they argued “not only to the birth rate but also to the physique and vitality of the tribe.” They argued that if the Gikuyu “tribe” was to “develop” then they had to dispense with the “major operation” which was an “impediment to progress.”

**The law**

In July 1916 the CSM introduced amendments to their church laws prohibiting their church members from practicing or supporting female circumcision in any form. These laws stipulated that “a girl who has been baptised and has made public profession or who is a mission boarder or

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26 Horace Philp, “Fistula Complicating Labour.”
28 Philp, “Atresia in Kikuyu Women.”
29 Gillan “Notes on the Custom of Female Circumcision.”
30 Philp, “Medical Missionary’s Condemnation.”
31 “Memorandum,” 1.
32 Gillan, “Notes on the Custom of Female Circumcision.”
is the child of Christian parents or is the protégé [of Christian parents] may not be circumcised.” Further the amendment specified that “Christian catechumens, hearers, and others [should] be taught that the circumcision of girls is unnecessary, and that it is contrary to the principles of Christianity.” The punishment for any church member contravening these rules was suspension from communion for six months, redeemable by a confession and apology made before the Kirk Session.

The penalties that were applicable in relation to the practice of female circumcision were also applicable to any male member who was “circumcised in a village, according to custom.” The CSM did not, however, seek to prohibit male circumcision outright. As they saw it, male circumcision not only had Biblical precedent, it could be a “commendable” thing: if done “hygienically” it could reduce the risk of infections, and it checked masturbation. It would, during the 1920s, become protocol in CSM hospitals to circumcise male babies born to Christian parents at birth. From the introduction of the new church laws in 1916 uninitiated adult male church members had two options. They could undergo a medicalised version of the rite, under chloroform in the mission hospital. Or they could be initiated in their home village, provided that the rite did not involve any of the “obscene accompaniments” and provided it was supervised by two CSM Gikuyu church elders. Up to 1916 the latter of these two options was also open to female athomi. The law was changed in part following an experiment by Horace Philp in 1915 when, following the pleas of three female boarders to be allowed to be initiated, he decided to allow a “native circumciser” to undertake the operation under “sterilised conditions” in Tumutumu hospital, under his surveillance. As he later publicised widely, he was deeply traumatised by what he witnessed.

The laws of 1916 were, as the missionaries also later publicised widely, the initiative of their Gikuyu church elders. The missionaries were delighted, if sometimes also perturbed, by the zeal with which these men (they were all male) embraced their teachings and the eagerness with which these men were willing to display their rejection of vernacular practices. In 1920 at a conference of “native Christians” the CSM’s church elders again re-stated their heartfelt desire for

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33 “Memorandum,” 11. See also: “Kikuyu Staff Minutes” (31 July 1916), PCEA I/CG/1.
34 “Native Church Laws” (1922), PCEA I/G/2; Horace Philp, “Statement to the Committee for the Protection of Coloured Women in the Crown Colonies [CPCWCC]” (10 April 1930), copies can be found at PCEA I/G/2 and ULA RP XVI.2.1.
35 “Native Church Laws,” 1915, TT.
36 Arthur Barlow, “Notes on Points of Comparison and Contrast”; “Memorandum,” Appendix I.
37 “Memorandum,” Appendix I.
38 “Memorandum,” 9-10.
39 John Arthur, “Hospital Notes,” KN, 46 (January 1914).
the absolute prohibition of the custom within the church and their support for “the imposition of discipline on those members who might infringe church laws.”

At Kikuyu station the likes of Samweli Gitau, Musa Gitau, Andrea Wainaina, and Samson Njoroge (to whom I referred in the last chapter) were notoriously stringent in their application of church discipline in the Kirk sessions. Supported by such elders, when the missionaries systematically revised the Church Laws in 1922 they stipulated that Christian parents in the church were obliged to “oppose actively the circumcision of any female under [their] charge.” From 1928 the foregoing of female circumcision was written into CSM baptism rite which contained the vow to “eschew all things not agreeable to the Word of God, such as things pertaining to departed spirits, witchcraft, divination, sexual immorality, intoxicating liquor, evil songs, and female circumcision.”

No institution in Gikuyuland or Kenya Colony at this time surpassed the CSM in their enthusiasm for the abolition of female genital cutting. Though most of Kenya’s colonisers shared many of the CSM’s attitudes towards *irua* in general and female genital cutting in particular, few were as interested in the practice as the colonial-evangelists; the prevailing attitude among those who were, was that to try to eradicate it suddenly, and through penal mechanisms, was positively dangerous. Doctor Arthur’s letter of August 1929 was backed by the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) and the Gospel Missionary Society (GMS) who followed a similar approach to the CSM within their churches. The CSM did not, however, receive the full institutional backing of their usual allies in the Church Missionary Society (CMS). The CMS declined to adopt a single position and instead the matter was devolved to each of the many CMS mission stations: some supported the CSM, some did not. The French and Italian catholic missions did not. The predominant position of the government was that “to interfere with it would be an extremely rash act.” Colonial officials expressed their concern that the CSM’s internal policy created confusion among Gikuyu between what was church law and what was civil law.

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41 “Memorandum,” 12.
43 “Native Church Laws” (1915) TT; “Native Church Laws” (1922), PCEA I/G/2.
44 “African Church Laws – Classes Preparatory to Baptism” (1928), PCEA I/CB/1.
46 “Memorandum,” 66.
47 “Catholic Position in Regard to Memorandum” (24 March 1930), PCEA I/CG/11.
49 MRR Vidal, District Commissioner Kiambu, to Provincial Commissioner Kikuyu Province (31 Dec 1928), KNA VQ 1/28/27.
CSM mission stations were known to Gikuyu living in the surrounding areas as sites where female circumcision was prohibited. Some uninitiated Gikuyu women actively sought them out for this very reason, using them as refuges to avoid undergoing the rite.\textsuperscript{50} It seems that before 1929 at least, however, such cases were uncommon. The voiced frustrations of CSM missionaries in their literature strongly suggests that the majority of their female adherents sought out CSM schooling for reasons other than avoiding circumcision and that, when the time came for their initiation, they would abscond so that they could undergo the rite.\textsuperscript{51}

The CSM’s bid to prevent female adherents from undergoing initiation drew significant opposition to their whole project from Gikuyu living in the areas around their mission stations. Women (and sometimes men) who chose to forgo the rite faced extreme stigmatism and were subjected to misery and abuse: they were cursed, threatened with death, beaten, and sometimes forcibly mutilated.\textsuperscript{52} This was because of widespread and deeply-rooted beliefs about the uninitiated person and their body. The dominant view in the villages appears to have been that a person who grew-up without being initiated was an abject, incomplete, person who posed a physical threat to the wealth and vitality of their homestead. Foregoing initiation was regarded as a major contravention of hegemonic Gikuyu understandings of the body, the person and the social order. This was especially so for women. Having eschewed the rigours of the rite of \textit{irua} her body was understood to be lacking in the resilience and maturity to have a safe birth. More significantly, having missed the cleansing and purifying aspect of the ceremony she was and would remain \textit{tabu}, a condition that would be passed on to any future offspring and immediate kin. This had economic implications. Women who had not been reborn through \textit{irua} were denied a fully-sanctioned marriage. As such, the parents of an uninitiated daughter would not receive the goat-payments customarily granted to them by their daughter’s prospective husband upon marriage. This furthermore, would limit parents in their own future “rebirths” into the later stages of adult, elderly life. When faced with such a prospect mothers and fathers whose daughters had fled to the mission station against their will of ten chose to pronounce their daughters “dead” even going so far as to


\textsuperscript{52} For forced “circumcisions” of CSM female \textit{athomi}: “Memorandum,” 60-61; Dr A.R. Esler, Medical Officer Fort Hall to DC Nyeri (2 February 1930), KNA VQ 1/28/27; DC South Nyeri to PC Kikuyu, “Female Circumcision in Kikuyu” (27 January 1932), KNA VQ 1/28/28. Two interview respondents spoke of the derision to which men who had hospital circumcisions were subjected: Interview, Francis Muruja (1922-2016), interview conducted near Chogoria, 15/7/15; interview, Abraham Wanyua, (born c.1922), interview conducted near Tumutumu, 29/9/15.
perform the funerary rites that would have attended their actual death.53 These kinds of localised, highly personal, sometimes violent, struggles between the mission and neighbouring communities continued for a long time into the mid twentieth-century.

Two things were new and remarkable about the rebellions that followed Arthur’s letter to the E.A.S on 10 August 1929. First, the claim that started being levelled at the missionaries was not that they were jeopardising the health or fertility of daughters and preventing them from becoming whole, but that they were in fact attacking an “immemorial custom” and national “tradition.” Their attack on female circumcision was labelled as an attack on what it was to “be Gikuyu.” In 1929 adherents who forewent initiation started being condemned on the grounds that they were not “pure Gikuyu.” Second, this opposition was coming not from those parents and elders who had long-standing hostility to Christianity and missionaries. It was coming from young, modern-looking, mission-educated, Christian men.

Figure 1. CSM staff. Taken at a council meeting to discuss circumcision, Tumutumu, 1929. Back row (left to right): Doctor Archibald Irvine, Doctor Robert Gillan, William Blaikie, Arthur Barlow. Middle row (left to right): Doctor Horace Philp, E.A. Cormack, R.G.M. Calderwood, Minnie Watson. Lower row (left to right): Doctor Maclay, Elizabeth McMurtrie, Marion Stevenson, Doctor John Arthur. NLS IP Acc/12016/7. Compare with Figure 1 in Chapter 1 in which many of the same missionaries appear.

2. If a member of the Young Communicants’ Class be circumcised in a village, according to native custom, instead of at the Mission [hospital], he or she shall, on public confession having been made and a subsequent adequate period of probation having elapsed, be admitted to Communion, but shall not exercise a vote in matters relating to the government of the Church until the completion of at least three years subsequent to the making of public confession.

3. If a member of the Catechumenate be circumcised in a village, according to native custom, instead of at the Mission [hospital], he or she shall cease to be regarded as a member until public confession have been made and a subsequent adequate period of probation have elapsed.

4. If a member of the Hearers’ Class be circumcised in a village, according to native custom, instead of at the Mission [hospital], he or she shall not be admitted to the Catechumenate until public confession have been made and a subsequent adequate period of probation have elapsed.

5. A Mission boarder of at least one year’s standing, who has made no public profession, and who leaves the Mission to be circumcised in a village, according to native custom, shall not be admitted to the Catechumenate until at least eighteen months after his return to the Mission.
II. The nation-builders and the question of the national body.

One common explanation for why Arthur’s letter to the EAS triggered a rebellion was because it “was seen by the Kikuyu as an attack on traditional life.” Indeed, this explanation – that the mission’s attempt to constrain and abolish the practice of female circumcision prompted resistance “because they were attacking a tradition” – was the view of the government Native Affairs Department. In the middle of the crisis, in December 1929, the N.A.D. reported that “the trouble arose as a result of the action taken by the leaders of the Church of Scotland Mission, Kikuyu, in connection with the rite of clitoridectomy, which is an immemorial custom among the Kikuyu tribe.”

On its own this is an insufficient, even misleading, explanation. The circumcision crisis of 1929 is not in any straightforward way reducible to a two sided conflict between “Christian modernity” and “Gikuyu tradition.” The quotations do not help us to understand why it was young, mission-educated, Christian men in particular who opposed the CSM and made the argument that the missionaries were attacking “tradition.” Further, they overlook the fact that many Gikuyu did not regard female circumcision as an essential, ethnic-national, ritual practice.

So, why was it that in 1929 the CSM’s longstanding campaign against “female circumcision” suddenly elicited concerted and bitter opposition to their whole “civilising project” from men who had themselves once deliberately and enthusiastically abandoned “traditions” to embrace the mission’s Christian modernity? And where did their historically innovative and locally contested argument, that the attack on “female circumcision” was an attack on the integrity of the Gikuyu nation, come from? To answer these questions it is useful to turn to the group allegedly at the heart of the crisis – the Kikuyu Central Association – and their newspaper, Muigwithania.

The nation-builders

From the moment it was established, the KCA was recognised as a new and potentially unsettling force in Gikuyuland’s politics. With their soaped-skin, stitched-up ears, and business suits, its leaders and members cut strikingly different figures to the elderly chiefs and local Gikuyu leaders with whom colonial officials were used to dealing. The KCA’s leading personalities were, in many ways, exactly the kind of men the colonial evangelists had promised to produce. They had used their schooling to become economically self-sufficient; they identified as “citizens of the British


Empire.”56 The Association’s founding members were men who had served in the carrier corps in WWI, government clerks, evangelists, traders and entrepreneurs. Joseph Kang’ethe, the first president of the Association, was decorated for his war-time service in Tanganyika. James Beuttah, Kang’ethe’s de facto co-leader, was a senior clerk in the post office, a role which took him to Mombasa and Uganda. Job Muchuchu, a one-time CMS muthomi at Kahuhia, owned a hotel in Nairobi and had tea shops in Fort Hall. Henry Mwangi, also of the CMS, was an interpreter for the colonial administration and founder of the first African bus service in the Kikuyu reserve. Petro Kigondo, early stalwart of the KCA’s Fort Hall branch, was one of the first Anglican ministers in Gikuyuland, senior interpreter for the DC in Fort Hall, and chairman of the Fort Hall cart-owners association. The founders of the KCA’s branch in Nyeri, Hezekiah Mundia and Johnana Kunyiha, owned and ran a maize mill and a tea shop respectively; both had been stone masonry apprentices at CSM Tumutumu.57

Yet the KCA was also exactly the kind of political association the colonial evangelists hoped they would not produce. It had grown out of Harry Thuku’s banned East Africa Association (EAA). Its founders had campaigned alongside Thuku in the uprisings of 1922. The KCA was founded to continue Thuku’s political ambitions to abolish the kipande labour pass system, to regain lands from whites that had been taken unfairly, and to secure from the colonial government land title deeds for Gikuyu land-owners to protect against any further encroaching white settlement. They campaigned for the release of Thuku from prison. They called for the abolition of the district boundaries within Kikuyu province, denouncing them as a sham to divide Gikuyu people so as better to rule and exploit them. They promised a young revolution of sorts, pushing for the overhaul of the administrative structure and its reliance on generally older, generally non-literate chiefs and headmen, proposing to merge the five districts of Kikuyu province into a single administrative unit ruled by a single council, headed by a single chief – a position they ear-marked for the liberated Thuku.58

The missionaries of the CSM loathed the KCA. They saw the KCA’s policies as ill-thought out. They regarded the KCA’s agenda as one that was disrespectful to both the elderly authority of the chiefs and regarded them as disloyal, and disobedient to the British colonial government. They wrote and spoke of the men of the KCA in patronising terms as deluded, partially-educated “native” men who did not recognise that they were not-yet-ready to take on the responsibilities

58 Kikuyu Central Association, “Petition to Secretary of State for the Colonies” (14 February 1929), BNA CO 533/395/6.
that would come with their policies. Horace Philp had expelled Mundia and Kunyiha from Tumutumu because of their involvement with Thuku. The KCA attracted other men who had similarly left or been banished from their missions. “Jomo” (then Johnstone) Kenyatta, joined the KCA in 1928 and became its general secretary. Though baptised and circumcised at CSM Kikuyu, Kenyatta had refused to be indentured as a carpentry apprentice, finding work in Nairobi instead.

At the time he joined the KCA Kenyatta was an employee of Nairobi municipal water works; he also was under suspension from communion with the CSM on account of drinking and womanising.

Yet, before Arthur’s letter to the EAS in August 1929, the KCA was not an especially “anti-missionary” party. Still less was it particularly hostile to what they would later term “Westernisation.” Moreover, defending the custom of “female circumcision” – and defending it as a custom – was not a priority for the association. What the KCA were engaged in, though, was the task of nation-building. On the eve of the crisis, the KCA were four years in to their political and cultural project to turn the disparate communities of Kenya Colony’s central highlands into a self-conscious Gikuyu nation – a nation that they hoped would be self-reliant and, perhaps one day in the future, self-governing (though self-governing under the British crown, within the British Empire – full political independence was not one of their stated objectives).

Envisaging “Kikuyu Province” – a historically recent, colonial artifice – as the spatial container of their imagined community, it was their ambition to make all the people in this region, whether they hailed from Kiambu in the south or Meru in the North, whether they were old or young, whether they wore animal skins or cotton cloth, feel “Gikuyu.” In this respect, the KCA waged, to use Lonsdale’s useful metaphor, an “internal” campaign among Gikuyu as they pursued their “external” campaign against the hard edge of settler capitalism. Their internal bid to build and lead a Gikuyu nation was, as they well-recognised, audacious. It was a direct assault upon gerontocratic logics of power and deeply rooted traditions of local authority. In any case, who

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60 Horace Philp to DC, Nyeri, (17 November 1926), PCEA I/CG/11.
64 G.H.H. Kagika, “Unity in the Common Ancestor,” Munyithania, 1: 3 (July 1928).
66 ibid.
were they – as young, Christianised men who had abandoned their kin and customs – to lead such a drastic programme of social and political change?67

*Muigwithania* (“The Reconciler” or “The Unifier”), the KCA’s vernacular newspaper which was launched in 1928 under the editorship of Kenyatta provides a window into the KCA’s “internal” nation-building endeavour.68 Harnessing their mastery of literacy, the men of the KCA used *Muigwithania* as an instrument in their bid to build a community wider than that based on face-to-face contact and blood relations. Comprising mainly of letters to the editor from KCA members from throughout Gikuyuland, contributions ranged from inconclusive musings to purposeful invectives. The articles published in *Muigwithania* were written for an audience of like-minded *athomi* men but, knowing that the journal would be read aloud (in homes, village courtyards, and tea rooms), writers also bore in mind that they were speaking to a non-literate, aural, audience and sought to co-opt them too into their schemes for the nation. Owing to the government’s concerns, the Criminal Investigation Department was ordered to search for the best Gikuyu linguist among Gikuyuland’s Europeans to procure and translate *Muigwithania* for them; commissioned to the role was the CSM’s Arthur Barlow.69 The only known surviving issues of *Muigwithania* (twelve issues all of which were published between 1928 and December 1929) are the result of this surveillance operation.70

**The question of the national body**

The question that concerned most contributors to *Muigwithania* was, to paraphrase the title of one article, “How can we bring on the country?”71 Channelling older ideals of masculine civic virtue and echoing the oral tradition of the pioneers who settled the forest highlands during the seventeenth century, the question itself was not new. What was radically innovative, however, was that “the country” writers to *Muigwithania* referred to was not simply a portion of land, a *githaka* (garden) or an *mbari* (sub-clan) holding, but “*bururi wa Gikuyu*” – “the country of Gikuyu.” Furthermore, writers to the journal spoke of, and sometimes directly to, “*andu na bururi wa Gikuyu*” – “people of the country of Gikuyu” – people whom they hoped to make into fellow patriots, yet whom they had never physically met, and probably never would.

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70 KNA DC/MKS 10B/13/1.
Figure 3. Cover page of *Muigwithania* (“Unifier”, “Reconciler”, “Bringer of Harmony”). Note the motto “Hoyai Ngaina Murute Wire” (Pray and Work) and the name of the editor, Johnstone Kenyatta. The expression “wa andu na bururi wa Gikuyu” or “people of the territory of Gikuyu” speaks to the nation-building aspiration of the journal. Finally, note the stamp of the Criminal Investigation Department in the top right hand corner: this is one of the issues translated for the C.I.D. by CSM missionary Arthur Barlow.

*Muigwithania* is significant for the way it evidences how, in the late 1920s, the men of the KCA were beginning to envision and forge not just a “Gikuyu nation” but a nation that they configured in profoundly modern terms: as a living population of subjects whose selves were rooted in their bodies and whose bodies were placed to serve the nation.\(^2\) As writers to the journal

\(^2\) A point that is implicit in John Lonsdale’s magisterial “The Moral Economy of Mau Mau.” The following section is heavily indebted to Lonsdale’s illuminating analysis of *Muigwithania*. For “national bodies” and “national subjects” see: Gyan Prakash, “Body Politic in Colonial India,” in *Questions of Modernity*, edited by
proposed answers to the question of how national progress might be achieved, their solutions almost invariably concerned the habits, livelihoods, health and well-being of the *andu na bururi wa Gikuyu*: their discourses on the nation almost invariably became discourses on the bodies of Gikuyuland’s purported national subjects. Though often articulated through idioms and rhetorical styles that appeared old, this strategic linking of the body-as-self and the body-as-nation was new. Furthermore it was in certain key respects, strikingly similar to the conceptions of the body, the person and the nation that were the basis of the programme of individual and social reform of colonial-evangelists such as the CSM. Ultimately, this strategic linking of the body and the nation would give rise to the later argument that the continued practice of female circumcision was essential to the integrity of the Gikuyu nation. Yet, it was powerfully informed by the bodily regimes of training, discipline, and “biopower” in colonial mission stations in which the men of the KCA had in their youth actively participated.

Take, for example, this contribution from Kenyatta, published in the May 1929 issue. Managing to sound at once like a missionary agricultural instructor and a Gikuyu household head of old, Kenyatta summoned his reader-listeners thus:

Brothers and sisters with whom I was born and brought up […] Take the wax out of your ears and hear. Open your eyes and remove the mucus from them and see. […] Rise up, for we are asleep through failing to see the signs of the times […] Let us cultivate large and adequate fields and gardens […] Do not rely upon there being anything else that will make men of us, or make a people of us, but the field and digging our hands down into the soil. […] Rouse yourselves, stir yourselves, very quickly. […] Children of Kikuyu, gather yourselves together […] do not break up into sections, for if you break up, your affairs will go to pieces. […] You who are scattered in other countries: […] earnestly return into Kikuyu country so that we may swell our numbers, for a little company lifts the heavy log.73

In his use of bodily metaphors to describe the nation, in his appeal to demographic concerns, in his instructing of his readers on the management of their physical selves, and in his masculine conceptualisation of nation-building as a project that would involve digging, heavy lifting, and would, in the end, “make men of us,” Kenyatta’s letter exquisitely encapsulates a number of the core established discursive themes of contributions to *Muigwithania*. Illustrative of the Muscular character of Gikuyuland’s early ethnic-nationalism, it is also helpful as a “way-in” to understanding why it was that *athomi* men like Kenyatta came to argue that female circumcision was a national symbol that required defending against the attacks on it from colonial-evangelists of the CSM.


Metaphors of national drowsiness or worse, of national deterioration, were commonplace among writers to the journal. The Gikuyu body politic was regularly presented as a sleeping man in need of rousing lest he remain in a perpetual state of slumber.\textsuperscript{74} For Henry Gichuiri, writing in the November 1928 issue, the Gikuyu nation was a body brimming with the accumulated filth of \textit{thabu} – desperately “enfeebled” – and in critical need of purging.\textsuperscript{75} For another, Gideon Mugo Kagika, a KCA member in Fort Hall and CMS adherent, writing in the same issue, the nation was like a terminally ill old man ready to be led out to the forest by his dutiful sons so that he might die cleanly without infecting the home with \textit{thabu}.\textsuperscript{76} These grim images were not merely metaphors. Writers forecasted actual, imminent, population decline. “My friends, what are we to do?” wrote Gichuiri, “For our race, the Kikuyu, is coming to an end.”

The notion that the Gikuyu nation was, metaphorically and literally, suffocating, polluted, growing weak, and approaching death indexed the gendered, generational, anxieties of Gikuyuland’s young, mission-educated, men at this time, on the eve of the circumcision crisis. Even if they were biologically adult, these men carried the stigma of being socially adolescent – both in the eyes of the colonials who called them “boys” and in the eyes their chiefs and elders. Though many \textit{athomi} – especially those who joined the KCA (membership of which was conditional upon being married) – had become cash-rich, they lacked the traditional markers of masculine maturity: their own plot of land, large herds, and multiple wives.\textsuperscript{77} That many had undergone modified, missionised, initiations further undermined their claims to manliness and adulthood in the local sphere. Infantilised by their seniors and non-Christian age-mates at home as youth they were also feminised, referred to as “\textit{maraya}” (“one who migrates for work”, or, more bluntly, a “prostitute”).\textsuperscript{78}

As they undertook to convert themselves from community outcasts into national leaders, writers to \textit{Muigwithania} conveyed, and sometimes explicitly articulated, their frustrations that the colonial preference for elderly authority together with the fixing of colonial land boundaries was restricting them from growing into adulthood and becoming men. The imagery indicated the impact a generation of settler capitalism had had on the country. Their mission schooling had promised them full maturity through imperial citizenship. But the promise was not being fulfilled


\textsuperscript{75} H.M. Gichuiri, “The Enfeebling (or Deteriorating) of the Gikuyu,” \textit{Muigwithania}, 1: 7 (November 1928); \textit{KED}, 487 entry for “\textit{guthabithia}.”

\textsuperscript{76} Gideon Kagika, “Hold Firmly to the Tribal (or clan) Names,” \textit{Muigwithania}, 1: 7 (November 1928).

\textsuperscript{77} John Lonsdale, “Listen While I Read,” 571.

\textsuperscript{78} Kigondu, “How We Can Bring on the Country.”
by the “elder state” which structurally conspired against their growth.\textsuperscript{79} The boundary that enclosed the Kikuyu native reserve had led to overcrowding and had placed severe limits on their capacity to realise the old virtue of expanding into new areas and establishing their own plot of land. Politically, they felt stifled by their illiterate, non-Christian, seniors whom they regarded as old-fashioned and parochial. Though their faculties were waning these seniors were clinging onto power in the local courts and they were being kept in office by the colonial government who granted chiefs and elders automatic places in the Local Native Councils. \textit{Athomi} such as the men of the KCA felt “hemmed-in”, as the KCA representative and CSM teacher Parmenas Mockerie would later tell the 1933 Carter Land Commission; it was like they had been “castrated.”\textsuperscript{80}

Transposing their sense of their own entrapment, enfeebling, and emasculation onto the national whole, the image of the nation that emerged in the pages of \textit{Muigwithania} was one that bore a close resemblance to the festering body of an uninitiated adult who, though fully-grown in body, had yet to undergo the cutting and cleansing that made them complete.

When they were not comparing it to a body on the brink of death, the young Christian Gikuyu men who wrote in to \textit{Muigwithania} used images of under-development, disintegration and dismemberment. Kenyatta likened the Gikuyu nation to a boy who could not navigate the tracks in the forest, and slipped, because he had never been guided by his parents.\textsuperscript{81} He likened it to a feeble warrior would be easily defeated, with one blow, because he lacked the correct training.\textsuperscript{82} He, and others, likened the nation to a band of warriors who, having become dispersed and disunited, were vulnerable and exposed to annihilation.\textsuperscript{83} In his editorial to the November 1928 issue, Kenyatta described the nation as a bodily whole that had been split into pieces.\textsuperscript{84}

In deploying these images Kenyatta and other contributors to \textit{Muigwithania} were expressing their existential concerns with the perceived divisions that inhered among the purported Gikuyu nation. These included the artificial, tightly policed, district boundaries which restricted their mobility and the dehumanising \textit{kipande} labour pass system which separated the individual worker from their land and from owning their own labour. But the separation that caused them the most angst – the one that they framed as the principle obstacle to national unity and national progress

\textsuperscript{81} Johnstone Kenyatta, “Let Us Agree Among Ourselves and Exalt the Kikuyu,” \textit{Muigwithania}, 1: 7 (November 1928).
\textsuperscript{82} Johnstone Kenyatta, Editorial, \textit{Muigwithania}, 1: 9 (February-March 1929).
\textsuperscript{84} Kenyatta, “Let Us Agree Among Ourselves.”
— was the one that they claimed had come to inhere between non-literate, non-Christian parents (especially fathers) and their literate, Christian children (especially sons): “A father will not speak to his child, or a child address his father” lamented Charles Ngundo a former CSM technical apprentice.  

Sometimes subtly, sometimes purposefully, contributors conveyed their own sense of alienation as men who had become detached and divorced from their kin and their customs: “We have become orphans as though our fathers were dead […] We buy our water with money, and our firewood is sold to us” wrote Kenyatta. They wrote of how the cash economy and a mission schooling had led them to become atomised, individualised, and selfish: “Among the ‘Mambere’ [mambere – “forerunner”, see Chapter 6] no one is willing to serve the other”; they were “like goats without a shepherd, each taking his own road.” They expressed their disenchantment with their lot as mission-educated men.

Casting themselves and their Christian reader-listeners as “prodigal sons” who had heedlessly cut ties with their homes, they beseeched the athoni to begin to heal the body politic by reacquainting themselves with their non-Christian relatives. By the same token they, implored the older generation to welcome them back, forgive them, and recognise their capacity for leadership. Calling for unity and reconciliation Kagika, the aforementioned CMS adherent invoked St Paul as he wrote, in the June 1929 issue,

Who would hate a limb of his own body? Never has there been the person who hates his limb, but, on the contrary, he gives its members food that they may be sufficed and become fat and able to do good work to help others without envy.

The call for unity was inherently, if sometimes implicitly, a criticism of elders and chiefs and a challenge to their authority. Contributors chided, sometimes forcefully, their elders, accusing them of neglecting their offspring, for not being alert when the colonials came and for effectively overseeing the waning of the national body politic. The pages of Muigwithania strongly suggest that there was a palpable sense among literate, Christian Gikuyu men that their time had come to take the initiative and decisively assert their authority as adult men lest they and the country at large wither away. The time had arrived, some contributors suggested, for the staging of an ituika

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91 Gachoka, “A Parable.”
– a generational handover of power that was understood to cleanse the land and renew social relations.  

“Rise up, for we are asleep through failing to see the signs of the times,” Kenyatta wrote, in the letter quoted above, as he urged athomi to take the wax out of their ears and the mucus from their eyes, to rouse themselves, stir themselves, and gather themselves together. The challenges facing the nation – like the task of lifting the heavy log – required the collective pooling of energies, he wrote and the leadership of youth. He then shifted from metaphor to a literal instruction: return to Gikuyuland so that we might swell our numbers. His imagery of fatness, enclosure, compactness, and growth, was longstanding in Gikuyu cultural thought but here Kenyatta married it with a new, modern, notion of the tribal unit comprising of living, countable subjects each of whom carried the nation in their embodied selves.

That the nation they sought to rally was, in fact, a discrete population that, as such, had the propensity to both grow and shrink, was a recurring aspect of contributions to Muigwithania. A number of contributors forecast demographic deterioration as a terrible and very-possible spectre as they sought to rally supporters. In an article in the November 1928 issue titled “Sending people to Europe” Kenyatta expressed his alarm at the increasing number of Gikuyu living outside the region he and the KCA increasingly framed as national territory. Printing the figures district by district, like the annual reports published by the colonial government, Kenyatta calculated that there were “693,307” Gikuyu “currently residing in Gikuyu country.” As in colonial reports, the precision of the total number and its unspoken appeal to objective accuracy worked to fashion a boundary around the people counted, implicitly staking the new nation’s claim over each and every one of them. Vernacularizing colonial biopolitics, this intellectual move linked individual persons and their bodies to the national whole, thus providing a basis upon which the nation-building men of the KCA began to make the bodies of their purported compatriots sites in their proposed project of national renewal. Kenyatta called for those who laboured and copulated out of the country to return, accusing them of wastefully “scattering” “Kikuyu seed” in foreign lands.

In Muigwithania we glimpse an emerging, biological, conception of ethnic-national purity among Gikuyuland’s athomi nation-builders and a creeping sense that “Europeanisation” could be deleterious to the strength of the Gikuyu nation. “It appears to me that in the year 1999 we shall ourselves be like foreigners unless we straighten up all our affairs and put them in order” wrote

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94 Kenyatta, “Sending People to Europe.”
95 Kenyatta, “Let Us Agree Among Ourselves.”
Kagika, as he deployed the image of the nation as a dying elder. He denounced such things as sexual mixing with “foreigners” and migrant labour arguing that they led to a loss of cultural identity and demographically weakened the body politic. Similarly Muchuchu, one of the aforementioned co-founders of the KCA, wrote an article describing a past, pre-colonial golden age when “we Kikuyu used not to have so many diseases as we have now.” He catalogued a long series of afflictions he believed had been brought about through the mobility and mixing facilitated by modernity: jiggers, plague, boils, and crop-ruining insects. Both Muchuchu and Kagika suggested that the loss of traditional principles had led to the waning of the nation and its population. Kagika suggested that recovering the traditional system of naming could have a restorative, revitalising effect on the body politic.

Yet, at this point, in 1929, the KCA’s nation-building project was also proudly Christian and modern: they sought to achieve national strengthening by harnessing modern techniques and practices while recovering and honouring the customs of old. The motto emblazoned across the cover of *Muigwithania* (in English) was “Pray and Work” (Figure 3). The KCA advocated the government make burials compulsory, lobbied for the destruction and re-building of any native dwelling found insanitary by medical officers, and campaigned for legislative restrictions on the sale of liquor to Africans on the grounds that it weakened and corrupted. In one editorial in *Muigwithania* Kenyatta called upon readers to build rectangular, stone houses with concrete floors and iron roofs; he declared that soap and clean-living would bring a “gleam of light” to the country. In another he pleaded for Gikuyu to embrace formal schooling in so that they might become an enlightened “powerful nation.” He even reported approvingly on a football tournament organised by Doctor Arthur.

Kenyatta and other contributors to *Muigwithania* asserted their status as modern, educated men as they insisted to their fellow Gikuyu that if the nation was to progress and avoid extinction its citizens would have to start rigorously managing their personal affairs and ruthlessly disciplining themselves. In the process they elevated a wide range of ostensibly private habits and bodily practices to matters of national importance. Good manners, clean clothes, maintaining a hygienic home, and working hard (whether one was a herder or a shopkeeper) were praised by a number

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96 Kagika, “Hold Firmly to the Tribal Names.”
100 Kenyatta, “Let Us Agree Among Ourselves.”
of writers to the journal, not simply as personal affairs but as civic duties. Conversely, laziness, disregard to personal health and, promiscuity, were scorned as threats to the vitality of the body politic.

This generation of literate, Christian Gikuyu men had special anxieties about the increasing freedoms of Gikuyu women. The increasing number of women who were, independently of their kin, entering the wage-economy and accumulating their own personal wealth, were regarded by them as a national problem. The routine denouncing of women who traded in Nairobi as “prostitutes,” speaks to how these men saw these women as threats to gendered respectability. They wrote scornfully of how neglectful fathers had “dropped” their daughters by the “roadside, like millet-stalks.” They announced their ambition to usher in a new, modern age in which women were under the paternal control of men. Framing this in global, imperial terms, Kenyatta called for Gikuyu fathers to “lift their eyes” to the “powerful nations” who kept their women in order. It was in this context that one of the few direct references to female circumcision emerged. It came from a one S.C. Kuria who, writing in the March 1929 issue, referred to how the practice made women disciplined and reproductive: “since the girl children left the control of their fathers they began to become bad and enter the path of immorality […] we do not see their offspring or their seed. When they were in the hands of their mother and father we used to see their offspring,” he wrote before quoting St Paul: “they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh.”

In their mission schools the men of the KCA had been encouraged to think of their place within a wider, global, imperial geography. During the late 1920s, as they began to envisage “the Gikuyu” as a nation, they did so in terms of its place in the world. To gain prestige globally, they argued, Gikuyu ought to re-discover lost traditions and promote themselves by displaying them. Fascinated with the way the British mobilised tradition through ceremonial display and performance to aggrandise their power, the nation-building men of the KCA called for Gikuyu to do the same. *Muigwithania* published lists of known Gikuyu proverbs and pieces on such topics

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104 Kenyatta, “Let Us Agree Among Ourselves.”
107 Lonsdale, “Ornamental Constitutionalism.”
as Gikuyu methods of counting time, Gikuyu names and Gikuyu songs.\textsuperscript{108} Willed-on by the journal’s editors, contributors wrote articles offering their knowledge about Gikuyu customs and urged readers and listeners to do the same. One contributor, Karimu, itemised objects that were “blessed by the ancestors” and contained the essence of the Gikuyu nation but had been shunned by athomi and disrespected by colonisers. The objects he sought to re-sanctify included “the digging-pole,” “the bush-clearing knife,” “the gruel gourd,” “the contents of the sheep’s stomach,” and the “circumciser’s razor”: “It is these we ought to discuss lest they be forgotten,” he contended.\textsuperscript{109}

III. An “ancient custom”, a “national symbol.”

The next stage in the unfolding of the circumcision crisis was when, in response to Doctor Arthur’s letter to the \textit{E.A.S}, Joseph Kang’ethe wrote a number of public letters of his own in his capacity as president of the KCA. Kang’ethe and the mission-educated male elite of the KCA swung into action, as it were, seeking to capitalise on the moment to mobilise support for their nationalist project. Downplaying their earlier project of Christian modernity, their efforts turned to focus upon the purported sanctity of the circumcised female body and its material and symbolic importance as a stand-in for the integrity of the national whole.

Thus Kang’ethe wrote, in his letter to the senior commissioner of Kikuyu Province (published in the \textit{E.A.S} on 29 August 1929):

\begin{quote}
The Association is unable to understand what has happened in the minds of Dr. Arthur and his fellow missionaries […] We view with much fear such propaganda, since we feel it is an attempt to demolish an ancient custom, and thus lead into an avenue of general demoralisation of the ancestral tribal custom […] Missionaries have tried on many occasions to interfere with the tribal customs, and the question is asked whether circumcision being the custom of the Kikuyu Christian, he is to be a heathen simply because he is a Kikuyu.
\end{quote}

Though it was an appeal to an old and ancient past, the argument was new. Elevating the practice of \textit{irua} to the status of a “custom of the Kikuyu” and defending it purely on these grounds, Kang’ethe was “inventing tradition.”\textsuperscript{110} Kang’ethe was defending circumcision \textit{as a tradition} – not for anything the practice \textit{did} per se, but for what it \textit{stood for}. It stood for being Gikuyu. Accusing the missionaries of creating a situation in which it was impossible to be both Christian and Gikuyu,

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the premise of Kang'ethe’s complaint was that female circumcision was an essential marker of cultural belonging and national identity; ultimately his contention was that the undoing of female circumcision would lead to the undoing of the national whole. The gendered pronoun in the final sentence is further instructive: the abandoning of female circumcision would call into question the “Kikuyu-ness” of the country’s male subjects.

The argument was, in part, a strategic attempt to win the support of government. As Kang’ethe surely knew, his appeal to the virtue of tribal tradition was one that would appeal to the British rulers whose reverence of custom and use of it as a cost-efficient means of ensuring security in African areas was well-known. Kang’ethe fed this by making an implicit appeal to the material, social and political benefits of the custom. His argument had nothing to do with vernacular conceptions of health, maturity, fertility and cleanliness. Rather, deploying the phrase “general demoralisation,” he played on the government’s fear of what they called “tribal breakdown.” That is, he suggested the rite was important for how it bound together the tribal body politic, securing order, stability and masculine authority. His point was made more emphatically in a private letter he sent to Doctor Arthur the same day. “[If] this custom is to be abolished among the Kikuyu, it would be best, first of all, before you do away with it, to remove the things we see taking place in Nairobi,” he wrote, alluding to prostitution, suggesting that were it not for the sexual discipline enforced upon women by the rite, things would be even worse.

The government, by and large, were sympathetic to Kang’ethe’s reasoning if hostile to the KCA generally. They feared, as the District Commissioner for Meru put it in a letter of September 1929, that any endeavour to put a stop to female circumcision would lead to the “break down” of “deep-rooted native customs” generally and incite chaos through the reserves.

The missionaries of the CSM, however, challenged this argument. They argued:

prior to 1929 the abandonment of the “circumcision” of women by individuals in different areas [in Gikuyuland] was not a cause of unrest. Except for the championship of the rite as a national symbol by the Kikuyu Central Association, it probably would by now have been widely abandoned.

The notion that female circumcision was a marker of cultural belonging and a “national symbol” was new and it was made possible to a large extent by the earlier intellectual and cultural nation-building work of the KCA. It solidified and gained support during the months following Kang’ethe’s letter. It did so largely in response to the actions of the CSM: the CSM were the foil against which the new notion of national traditions was formed.

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111 ibid.
113 DC Meru to PC Nyeri (25 Sep 1929), KNA VQ 1/28/27.
114 “Memorandum,” 7. See also: Philp, “Statement to the CPCWCC.”
The CSM’s use of the public pledge as a central tactic in their campaign was a key factor in the escalation of events into a “crisis.” Attempting to counter Kang’ethe’s public letters, from the start of September 1929 the missionaries of the CSM pursued a range of initiatives aimed at galvanising support from the membership against the KCA and against female circumcision. At each of the three mission stations, teachers, hospital assistants, church elders, and ordinary members were entreated to put their signatures to petitions that announced loyalty to the CSM. At Chogoria and Kikuyu stations they were further required to publicly denounce female circumcision and renounce any ties with the KCA. The use of pledging appears to have been Doctor Arthur’s initiative who saw it as a means of “purifying” the church. Some CSM missionaries seem to have regarded it as an unnecessarily divisive, inflammatory, tactic but it seems Arthur had the full-encouragement of some of the senior male elders at Kikuyu station such as Samweli Gitau and Samson Njoroge.

Pledging at Kikuyu station proved an especially decisive moment. At the start of October, the station’s 53 paid-agents (evangelists, teachers, and hospital assistants), all of whom were male, were required to put their thumb-print to a document declaring their non-membership of the KCA, their loyalty to the CSM, and their promise not to support the circumcision of their daughters. 13 refused to sign, leaving the mission and terminating their employment in the process. Then, the 50 African church elders, all of whom were male, were required to make a verbal declaration of loyalty to the mission and promise not to support the circumcision of their daughters. 18 dissented and left the church. On 1 November 1929 the same was asked of the church membership at Kikuyu en masse. Within one week the communion roll at Kikuyu station plummeted from 2,500 to 250. Attendance figures at Kikuyu station’s out-schools, meanwhile, dropped from over 3,300 in September 1929 to 1,000 by December 1929. In the boys’ dormitory at the Kikuyu station, 134 of the 136 refused to take the vow.

115 “Memorandum,” 45.
117 John Arthur to Arthur Barlow (21 June 1931), PCEA I/CG/11.
119 John Arthur to H.S. Scott, Director of Education, “Dismissed Teachers from Kikuyu School” (5 November 1929), PCEA I/EC/1; Memorandum,” 47; Arthur to Scott (11 May 1931), PCEA I/CG/11.
120 “Memorandum,” 44-49.
121 ibid.
122 John Arthur to Horace Philp (7 November 1929), TT.
123 John Arthur, “The Origin and Development of the Education of the Kikuyu” (June 1930), PCEA I/EC/1.
According to Arthur one of the 18 dissenting elders at Kikuyu declared: “I shall remain a Kikuyu, I shall continue to circumcise!”¹²⁵ Literate, mission-educated Christian Gikuyu men who had hitherto embraced the “civilising mission” of the CSM started vociferously rejecting it by making the rhetorical claim that the missionaries were attacking heritage and tradition – that they were attacking what it meant to be Gikuyu. Energised by the pledges in CSM churches, a new notion of Gikuyu ethnic-national purity – a notion of ethnic-national purity that was rooted in the rejection of “Westernisation” on the one hand and the resuscitation of allegedly ancient traditions on the other – began to crystallise.

The KCA, their active supporters, and opponents to the CSM embraced and started to rally around the concept of Agikuyu karing’a. Karing’a meaning “true”, “indigenous”, “pure”, “thoroughbred”, “unadulterated”; Agikuyu karing’a meant “pure Gikuyu.”¹²⁶ Those who called themselves karing’a did so as a way of explicitly defining themselves against the “modern”, “Western” ways-of-being the colonial missions and their so-called “loyalist” Gikuyu adherents endorsed and embodied. In turn, they advanced their own notion of what constituted a fully authentic, “pure”, Gikuyu body. This included a range of body practices but the most extreme conception of karing’a placed special emphasis upon the practice of female circumcision as something that secured and guaranteed a person’s status as completely Gikuyu.

At the start of October the DC for South Nyeri reported that “the more progressive and educated elements of the community […] the Christian members, those of the Kikuyu Central Association” had started to actively campaign for the preservation of female circumcision.¹²⁷ When interrogated by colonial authorities, KCA representatives denied they did this, but it is clear that they benefitted in on-the-ground support by being associated with this cause. Between mid-1929 and the end of 1930, as CSM churches emptied, KCA membership nearly tripled, increasing to 10,000.¹²⁸ Most of this support came from Gikuyu men who were young and literate. The concept of karing’a and its associated notions of self-reliance and completeness appears to have had special appeal to thousands of young literate mission educated men who, having once abandoned their families in return for promises of renewal, wealth, salvation and imperial citizenship were, by 1929 feeling neither cleansed nor empowered but emasculated and trapped in a perilously prolonged state of youth. Those who remained in the missions were derided by the karing’a with the gendered

¹²⁶ KED, 399; Arthur Barlow to Duchess of Atholl (6 June 1930), EUL BP Gen1786/2. It seems the first use of the term karing’a in this way was by Gideon Kagika in Muigwithania, 1: 4 (September 1928). See: Rosberg and Nottingham, 100.
¹²⁷ DC South Nyeri to PC Kikuyu (5 October 1929), KNA VQ 1/28/27.
and generational assignation “akiron.” Literally, it meant those who signed or pledged; metaphorically it was an emasculating term connected to the thumb-print that went on to the degrading labour pass, or a signature given to sell-off land to Europeans.²⁹

As soon as it began to emerge, the contention that practicing circumcision was an essential part of being Gikuyu was strongly contested by other Gikuyu individuals and groups. One such group was the Progressive Kikuyu Party (PKP) who were based at CSM Tumutumu. A small party, claiming at its height 200 members, the PKP was founded in 1928 by CSM athomi who were of the same generation as the KCA.¹³⁰ The men of the PKP joined the missionaries in calling for the government to introduce an outright ban on female circumcision. Moreover they did so by directly engaging with the KCA’s nationalist rhetoric, advancing a future-oriented, globally-conscious, biopolitical argument. In a public reply to Kang’ethe, which was published in the EAS on 11 September 1929, they announced their fulsome support of Doctor Arthur declaring:

> We who have left those old barbarous customs, think that it will not destroy our Nation to leave this custom of female circumcision, and, if possible, we ask the Government that this custom, which kills the first children of Kikuyu girls and the Kikuyu Nation, be ended altogether as the English Government in India entered the custom of burning widows with their husbands’ bodies.¹³¹

Denouncing Kang’ethe’s letters they called for female circumcision to be abolished so that “our Country may become strong, and go forward much more than is desired by the Kikuyu Central Association.” They compared female circumcision to “other customs” that had been easily abandoned such as “piercing ears”, “filing the teeth”, and “strangling twins.” They wrote that they wanted the Gikuyu nation to be known and trusted as “a full grown Nation with clean customs.”

The PKP advanced their own, gendered, paternalistic, nationalist claim over Gikuyu women linking them and their bodily integrity to the integrity of the Gikuyu “nation” they were constructing. Writing of their desire that Gikuyu women remain “whole in body” they stated: “we see that the beginning of civilisation is in the honouring of women, because the strength and power of a people come from its women. The Nations which belittle women, we know that they do not go forward.” Offering a competing version of what constituted a whole, complete Gikuyu body

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²⁹ “Memorandum,” 45; KED, 225.
¹³¹ Progressive Kikuyu Party to the Editor, <i>East African Standard</i> (7 September 1929), KNA VQ 1/28/27. A copy is reprinted in “Memorandum,” Appendix IV.
politic to that of the karing'a, the PKP's statement, gives us reason to write of ethnic-nationalisms in inter-war Gikuyuland.

Yet, for all their differences, similarly drilled in the Muscular Christianity of colonial-evangelism, the PKP argued in similar terms as their opponents in the KCA. To the older generation, the nationalism that was being voiced by athomi – whether of the KCA-karing’a or the PKP – was novel, alien and suspect. The notion that the uninitiated female body belonged to the nation does not seem to have been shared by fathers and male elders who, rather, continued to conceive of their children as their property. For the most part it seems the reason Gikuyu fathers (especially those who were senior village elders, with roles in the local kiama courts) opposed the missionary attempt to halt circumcision was because they considered such action as outside interference in the affairs of the households over which they as fathers, and they alone, claimed sovereignty. Their daughters belonged not to the missionaries, nor to the “nation”, but to them. Their reasoning was rooted in Gikuyuland’s historically-deep conception of the virtue of enclosures and local autonomy. It was the logic of the “householder”, encapsulated by the old Gikuyu proverb “nobody else can close the door of another man’s hut” – a proverb that perhaps became all the more apposite for these men, owing to the close association between the hut and the women’s body.132

Thus, one of the principal arguments fathers and senior male elders levelled at missionaries was not that the missionaries were debarring their daughters from initiation per se, but that they had no right to do so.133 When irate village elders turned up at the DC’s office in Chuka the day after the pledge had been put to the membership at CSM Chogoria, their chief complaint was that their “sons and daughters had been given no opportunity of first conferring with their parents and elders.”134 As another elder put it in a letter to Doctor Arthur a month later: “such a matter should be first tackled by the elderly and trusted ones before it is handed over to the young.”135 These men sought to resist the totalising, modernising, ambitions of both over-reaching colonial evangelists and presumptuous nation-building literate juniors. Their conservative appeals to local autonomy, male authority, and gerontocratic hierarchy are illustrative of how for them, 1929 was a “crisis” because while they were used to jealously guarding their property from the over-bearing

133 “Minutes of a Meeting of Nyeri District Council” (9 June 1921), TT.
135 Ezrom Kamade to Doctor Arthur (8 November 1929), PCEA I/A/40. See also Peterson, “Writing Kikuyu,” 195.
demands of colonial evangelists, their wealth, power and substance was now coming under attack from aspirant Gikuyu juniors too.

Leaving room for manoeuvre, the dynastic, householder logic was deployed by the increasing number of Gikuyu Christian men who were sympathetic to the missionaries: they argued that in not allowing their daughters to be circumcised they were not blindly following the colonial evangelists but instead exercising their authority as independent Gikuyu household heads. This was, in essence, what underpinned the contribution to the debate of the pro-missionary, chiefs of the Kikuyu Association (KA). The group had been established in the early 1920s under the encouragement of Doctor Arthur and Harry Leakey; Arthur Barlow was their typist. The KA, who decided to change their name to the “Loyal Kikuyu Patriots” to avoid being confused with the KCA, was comprised of senior headmen from Kiambu, in southern Gikuyuland. They were led by Koinange wa Mbiyu who though not baptised was a close associate of the Church Missionary Society and had in his childhood been a cook for Doctor Arthur at Kikuyu. Another member was Philip Karanja James, the first Gikuyu person baptised by the CSM. The KA’s stance, which they later outlined in a letter published in the EAS in December 1930, was that “if one likes to circumcise his daughter, or if he fails to do so, it is no matter, it depends on what one desires to do with his own family.” But they went further than this appearing to defend Doctor Arthur, on the basis that he too was a wise, authoritative senior elder: “Doctor Arthur is a great teacher and a teacher has [the] right to tell people all things […] When [a person] is old then [he or she] can speak about female circumcision.”

IV. The escalation of the crisis: revolting against the missionary body.

It is significant that what has been called “the most important political crisis before Mau Mau” was triggered by the civilising project of the CSM. That it was possible for their bid to transform the Gikuyu body to spark a major rebellion speaks to the power and influence the missionaries had come to wield in Gikuyuland by the 1920s. In this regard it is further significant that when anti-missionary, anti-colonial activism intensified, violence often took the form of acts which deliberately targeted, and sometimes appropriated, the symbols, mechanisms and routines of colonial-evangelism; and that, in their rhetoric, style, and gestures the attacks against the

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138 For the baptism of Philip Karanja James: John Arthur, “Circular Letter” (14 October 1907), EUL AP Gen762.
139 Koinange, Njonjo, Waruhiu, Karanja to East African Standard (17 Dec 1930), in “Memorandum,” Appendix IV.
missionaries often took the form of attempts to seize-hold-of, reclaim and/or subvert the colonial-evangelical campaign to civilise the Gikuyu body.

The most intense period of the crisis were the months between the start of October 1929 and the end of January 1930. CSM missionaries, their allies in the campaign from the GMS and AIM, and other known-supporters of these missions – including Gikuyuland’s Christian chiefs – received anonymous letters threatening them with eviction, assault, and death; mission adherents were assaulted and out-schools vandalised.141 School gardens were dug up, crops were uprooted or weeds were planted in them.142 Philp reported of one case when a “hostile” man “arrived at the school in a drunken condition, removed his clothes and lay naked on the ground” singing songs against the missionaries.143

What caused most alarm to colonials were the rallies, allegedly organised by the KCA, that were held in the immediate vicinity of mission stations and out-schools in Kiambu. Some attracted hundreds. Over 2,000 were said to have turned up to one at one of the CSM’s Kikuyu out-schools in late October 1929.144 According to a police report they were mostly “boys and girls”; some were armed with spears and knives. They chanted about overthrowing the chiefs and hurled vitriolic abuse at CSM elders Philp Karanja James and Reverend Musa Gitau who tried to break them up.145 Officials were uneasy at the “quasi-religious” tenor of the rallies.146 At one event near Kikuyu station protestors were quoting Galatians 3:10-12 “All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse […] ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”147 What distressed colonials in particular about these events was not just the content of the speeches (which became increasingly threatening) but the youthfulness and smart appearance of the activists.148 To the missionaries of the CSM it looked like the un-doing of their civilising mission; to the paranoid, security-conscious, government it looked like civilisation gone awry. Often deploying a biological imagery of distorted growth they spoke of “semi-educated” natives who were partially-developed, “unfinished”, and “swollen-headed.”149

The escalation of the crisis drew criticism of the CSM’s civilising project generally. The commissioner of the Kenya police issued a report blaming the trouble on the haste and vigour

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141 For “letters”: Anon to Doctor Arthur (5 November 1929), PCEA I/ED/1; Philip Karanja James to Arthur (22 October 1931), PCEA 1/A/43. For vandalism: DC Kiambu to PC Kikuyu, “Interim Report on Political Situation Kiambu Reserve” (1 May 1931), KNA VQ 1/1/8.
142 “Memorandum,” 54-55.
143 “Memorandum,” 57.
144 C.I.D. Report, “Re: Female Circumcision” (27 October 1929), BNA CO 533/392/1.
145 ibid.
146 DC Kiambu to PC Kikuyu (24 December 1929), KNA VQ 1/1/8.
147 ibid.
149 DC Fort Hall to PC Kikuyu (29 January 1930), KNA VQ 1/1/8.
with which the missionaries had pursued their educative work arguing that formal learning, and “familiarity with European customs and living” had a destabilising effect upon African minds and bodies and increased propensity for crime.  

From early October government officials stopped dismissing the protests as merely expressions of “schoolboy” fantasy and frustration. They realised that this was not just a matter contained within the churches and became concerned that the crisis would lead to a “major conflict between the races.” They abandoned their *laissez faire* approach of “masterly inactivity.”

Indicative of the kind of paranoia that was common among colonisers in settler-colonies, and with strikingly similar language to that which later became prevalent during the Mau Mau emergency, administrators, missionaries and the colonial police traded reports packed with references to “insecurity”, “agitation”, “panic” and their feeling of “nervousness.” It was alleged that at the 2,000 strong-rally at Kikuyu, a KCA leader bellowed that: “Gikuyu should gather in “bands of twenty” and “surround out-lying farms and murder the occupants.” In December there was a spate of small acts of violence which missionaries interpreted as signs portending terror: a pet dog of the GMS missionaries at their Kambui station was found speared and skinned; at CSM Kikuyu a cat was soaked in petrol and set alight. On 3 January 1930, white anxiety that the colony was on the brink of rebellion was heightened when a gang of intruders broke into the AIM station at Kijabe and murdered American missionary, Hulda Stumpf, genitally mutilating her in the process. There were concerns that Arthur’s wife and daughter were under threat, and police guards were called in to keep watch at CSM’s Kikuyu station.

The element of the rallies which solicited the most anxiety were the infamous *mithirigî* dance-songs. The government banned all forms of the dance in January 1930, after the murder of Stumpf, making its performance a criminal offence punishable by fine or imprisonment.

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155 Governor to Colonial Office (21 March 1930), BNA CO 533/398; Philp, “Statement to the CPCWCC.”

156 For the coroner’s report: BNA CO 533/394/11.

157 William McGregor Ross to Lord Passfield (2 February 1930); Lord Passfield to William McGregor Ross (17 February 1930), BNA CO 533/394/10; “Memorandum,” 62.

boisterous physicality was almost certainly a deliberate attempt to offend colonial sensibilities; the missionaries were unnerved by their militaristic movements and what they took to be their sexualised gestures. Historically a form of dance that was performed by junior warriors before an impending battle, the mũthirighũ dances were also a threat to Gikuyu chiefs and elders.\(^{159}\) In 1929 performers added and improvised lyrics. They sang of the kirĩgũ (the “big, uncut girl”) of her stink, her filth, her pollution, how she would “give birth to dogs”, and of missionaries’ sexual appetite for uninitiated Gikuyu girls.\(^{160}\) One widely-cited version of the song jeered: “All uncircumcised girls shall be circumcised! And then Doctor Arthur, With whom will you have connection?”\(^{161}\) They prophesised the ascendancy of the KCA, championing Johnstone Kenyatta as “Governor of all Kikuyu”, “stronger than the Governor of Kenya.” Singers called out chiefs by name, threatening not just the overthrow of them but to humiliate them by turning them into women: they would be made to wear dresses and cook Kenyatta’s food.\(^{162}\) The police were alarmed with how suddenly “the young Kikuyus are now against the old Kikuyus.”\(^{163}\) In mid-January they arrested Kang’ethe and sentenced him to two months rigorous imprisonment for conspiring against his chiefs.\(^{164}\)

One performance of the mũthirighũ was especially distressing for the missionaries and Gikuyu evangelists at CSM Kikuyu for not only was it held on Christmas Day, on the sacred football fields adjacent to their mission station, but the leader of the dance was their former head dormitory boy and Boys’ Brigade staff-sergeant, Zefania Wainaina.\(^{165}\)

Wainaina was one of a number of former CSM teachers who left the mission during the crisis and became part of what was perhaps the most significant social change affected by 1929: the establishment of a network of independent, Gikuyu-run, schools.\(^{166}\) The crisis saw the birth of two schools movements: one was called the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (KISA) the other made its claim to national purity explicit, branding itself the Kikuyu Karing’a Education

\(^{159}\) Ngige-Nguo, “The Role of Music Amongst the Gikuyu,” 357-368.

\(^{160}\) DC Fort Hall to PC Kikuyu Province, “Political Situation” (29 January 1930), KNA VQ 1/1/8; Peterson, “Writing Gikuyu,” 196; Interview, Samuel Kanyari Ndanyu (b.1923), interview conducted near Othaya, 30/7/15.

\(^{161}\) Governor of Kenya to Secretary of State for the Colonies (21 January 1930), BNA CO 533/394/10; “Memorandum,” Appendix V.

\(^{162}\) ibid.

\(^{163}\) C.I.D. Report, “Re: Female Circumcision” (27 October 1929), BNA CO 533/392/1.

\(^{164}\) DC Fort Hall to PC Nyeri (29 January 1930), KNA VQ 1/1/8.


Association (KKEA). These schools indicate that a central part of Gikuyu ethnic-nationalist programmes was the ambition to seize hold of, and repurpose, the institutions, apparatus and techniques of colonial power. Emerging out of and indeed in opposition to the civilising projects of colonial-evangelists such as the CSM, the new generation of Gikuyu ethnic-nationalists sought not to reject these schemes outright but to “nationalise” them. Their aim was, in effect, to take from missionary control the levers of “disciplinary power” in the reserves in a bid to generate “fully-Gikuyu” persons, with “fully-Gikuyu” bodies.

Figure 4. The Independent School compared with warriorhood. From Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 208.

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Karing'a schools promised to “safeguard the homogeneity and interests of the Kikuyu nation,” but at the same time, to advance higher education and literacy at a faster rate than the missionaries were doing. To this end they harnessed but vernacularized the material and physical culture of modern schooling: their scholars wore distinctive uniforms, and drilling, “traditional dancing” and games were integral elements of the curriculum. Their supporters compared the schooling and training they offered as akin to that undertaken by the junior age-sets of old (Figure 4). They were immensely popular institutions; by 1937 there were 54 registered KISA and KKEA schools in Gikuyuland with a combined total of over 7,000 scholars.

V. The CSM and Jomo

The morphing of a Christianising, modernising project led by young, suited, soaped men into one which strove to envisage, create, and glorify a Gikuyu body that was “fully traditional”, finds its clearest expression in the trajectory of the KCA’s general secretary, Johnstone Kenyatta who within a decade of the crisis was going by the purposefully more African name, “Jomo.”

As far as the missionaries of the CSM were concerned they had a close, if fraught, relationship with Kenyatta. It is unclear whether he felt the same way towards them. Kenyatta appears to have loomed large in the mind of Doctor Arthur in particular who, from as early as 1919, long before Kenyatta engaged in politics, was obsessing over Kenyatta’s charisma and forecasting his future prominence. Kenyatta was in Britain (and, briefly, the Soviet Union) when the crisis was at its apogee. He was there between February 1929 and October 1930, trying to win support for the KCA. He had taken the same liner from Mombasa to Southampton as Arthur Barlow, who for his part was returning to the metropole for a period of leave. The two met on a number of occasions over the following months in part because the latter was seeking assistance with the compilation of his Kikuyu dictionary.

Kenyatta’s first contacts in Britain stemmed from his connection with the CSM. He was particularly close with the former colonial official turned-colonial critic William McGregor Ross who organised Kenyatta’s lodgings. Much had changed during the two decades since McGregor

169 ibid. 59.  
172 “Annual Meeting of Subscribers,” KN, 112 (June 1930).  
174 For specifics, see: Berman and Lonsdale, “Labors of ‘Muigwithania.’”  
175 Diaries of William McGregor Ross, RHL MSS. Afr. s2305.
Ross had been referee at Doctor Arthur’s “great football match” at Kabete station referred to at the start of this thesis. At that time, Kenyatta was “Kamau wa Ngengi.” Not yet enrolled at Kikuyu station, still in goat-skin, grinding millet for his uncle.

Kenyatta carried with him to London a petition he hoped to deliver directly to the secretary of state for the colonies. The tactic of circumventing the creaking and confining political bureaucracy of Gikuyuland’s elder-dominated state was a classic KCA move; so was Kenyatta’s rhetorical decision to promote himself not just as representative of the KCA but as representative of “the Kikuyu people.” His trip had not been authorised by the governor of Kenya who advised the British government not to entertain Kenyatta because he was but a “semi-educated” member of the “younger generation” of Gikuyu who wielded no constitutional power. The petition Kenyatta carried called for the abolition of the kipande pass, the introduction of land title deeds for Gikuyu land owners and the extension of higher education facilities in Kenya. Further, it called for “the Kikuyu tribe to be formed into one compact whole, not divided into separate districts,” under the rule of a paramount chief “elected by the Kikuyu people” who would “rule over them in accordance with their tribal customs.” It made no reference to female circumcision.

Kenyatta had not anticipated the crisis nor, it seems, his party’s role in it. As events in Gikuyuland became topical among the politicians and humanitarians whose support Kenyatta was seeking to enlist, he was called upon to explain his and the KCA’s position on the matter. In December 1929 he told the Committee for the Protection of Coloured Women in the Crown Colonies, that as he was “doing his best to turn his people from the custom.” He was critical of the CSM’s attempt to change it through legislation, stating instead his belief that what was needed was a concerted government public health campaign in the reserves led by a “good medical officer.” He put the same argument to Doctor Shiels, the under-secretary of state for the colonies when he managed to steal an unofficial meeting with him for tea at the House of Commons. In May 1930, he travelled to Edinburgh, with Arthur Barlow. Before the Church of Scotland Foreign Missions Committee he said that “the KCA did not support female circumcision at all.” He said “a long process of education must go on and that, gradually, of their own accord, the people would turn from the custom.” When Kang’ethe’s letter to the senior commissioner of
Kikuyu Province was read out to him, Kenyatta stated that he “did not favour that view.” He diplomatically reminded his interrogators that “the members of the KCA are Christians” adding that a “great many” belong to the CSM.

Kenyatta was under suspension from communion at CSM Kikuyu, still, but though he had, like a wayward adolescent, turned his back on the missionaries there was still hope for him: he might turn himself around and reconcile himself with the missionaries at Kikuyu station. That was the hope Barlow and Arthur shared in their correspondence at this time. Their letters are revealing of the stifling paternalism that was central to their programme of Muscular Christian uplift. Barlow wrote glowing reports of Kenyatta, writing with surprised approval and admiration for the way their former mũthomi had turned out: he exhibited impeccable manners and knew how to conduct himself at the dinner table, just like a gentleman; he looked physically impressive in his three-piece tweed-suits and plus-fours, as if it was completely natural for him; his spoken English was “almost entirely lacking in an African accent.” Their discourse displayed Kenyatta and his body in classically missionary terms as an almost complete product, praising him while simultaneously positioning him as still in under-development. Arthur believed there was still a chance that upon his upcoming return to Gikuyuland, Kenyatta might seek his forgiveness and be readmitted to communion at Kikuyu. “There lies a great future before him if he will become first of all a good man and be reconciled to his church.”

Seeing Kenyatta’s potential repentance as a means of allaying the crisis and restoring the CSM’s reputation, Doctor Arthur hosted Kenyatta for tea and tennis at Kikuyu station on the afternoon Kenyatta returned from Britain. Returning five days later, on 3 November 1930, for a formal meeting with Arthur and the church elders, Musa Gitau, Benjamin Githeiya and Samson Njoroge, Kenyatta was subjected to a rigorous interrogation about what he knew about the KCA during the crisis. He received a severe reprimanding from Arthur who ordered him to “go and tell your people to obey those who rule over them: the government, the European officers, the Kikuyu chiefs, and the missions.” We only have Arthur’s record of Kenyatta’s response. It suggests that Kenyatta rejected Arthur’s criticisms of the KCA during the crisis, defended the Association and that the meeting concluded without a resolution. Two weeks later, in December 1930, Kenyatta,

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182 “Report of Interview of Johnstone Kenyatta with the […] Church of Scotland Foreign Mission Committee” (30 May 1930), PCEA I/G/2.
183 Arthur Barlow, “Johnstone Kenyatta’s Interview with Members of the FMC” (30 May 1930), PCEA I/G/2.
184 Arthur Barlow to John Arthur (4 August 1930), PCEA I/G/2. See also Murray-Brown, Kenyatta.
187 “Interview Between the Church at Kikuyu and its member Johnstone Kenyatta” (3 November 1930), PCEA I/G/2.
seeking compromise, went to Arthur to suggest that CSM out-schools should employ at least one self-declared “karing’a” teacher who could work alongside the mission-approved teaching staff to offer the students a balanced schooling. Arthur flatly rejected the idea and at this point it was clear the two would not become reconciled. In January 1931 Kenyatta removed his ten year old son, Peter Mugai, from the dormitory at CSM Kikuyu and transferred him to a karing’a school. On 15 October 1931 Kenyatta was formally excommunicated from the CSM (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Baptismal Register, “Thogoto, Kikuyu station, 1907-1968,” PCEA I/GZ/4. Top: full-page view. Bottom: close-up. Kenyatta (“Johnstone Kamau”) was the 80th person baptised into the church by the CSM. The top photo shows the date of his baptism as August 1914 (fifth column). He was excommunicated on 15 October 1931 (red ink, second column).

188 John Arthur to H.E. Scott, Director of Education, (23 December 1930) PCEA I/EC/1.
189 Murray-Brown, Kenyatta, 148.
The circumcision crisis was a turning point in Kenyatta’s ethnic-nationalism. He broke with colonial-evangelism, rejected Christian modernity and embraced the new karing’a movement. This was made clear, and given intellectual clout, in 1938 with the publication of his historical-ethnographic treatise, *Facing Mount Kenya.*\(^{190}\) It had taken him three years to write, under the supervision of the celebrated Bronislaw Malinowski at the London School of Economics.\(^{191}\) My argument in this chapter has been that colonial-evangelism was generative of an ethnic-nationalism which, although it became increasingly anti-missionary in rhetoric and in practice, shared with modern colonial missionary work a pronounced concern with the body. *Facing Mount Kenya* is a fine example of this.

![Figure 6. The three Kenyattas. Left to right: Kamau wa Ngengi, CSM Kikuyu station, c1914; Johnstone Kenyatta, London, c1930s; Jomo Kenyatta, frontispiece for *Facing Mount Kenya,* 1938.](image)

Kenyatta turned his mastery of literacy against the missionaries, using the ostensibly objective, empirical, analytical framework of structural-functionalist anthropology to construct an image of the time “prior to the coming of the Europeans into the country” which was idyllic and glorious.\(^{192}\) He described a time when the Gikuyu nation was, through its laws, customs, and codes,

\(^{190}\) See footnote 1 for the edition from which I am citing.


“unified and solidified as one organic whole.”

It was a time when the nation infiltrated the bodies of its national subjects, when every cell and sinew of their being was turned to the service of the nation. It was a time when Gikuyu, because they were part of the tribal whole, were physically robust, reproductive, industrious, and healthy. The argument, in essence, was that a “pure”, “complete”, “whole” Gikuyu person was one who was completely “untouched” by the corrupting, deleterious force of “Western civilisation.”

The word karing’a is not one that Kenyatta actively deploys in the book (though he defines it, in the glossary, as “a pure-blooded Gikuyu, a nationalist”), but Facing Mount Kenya was at its core an attempt to sketch out an image of the ideal karing’a society and the ideal karing’a person. The latter emerges looking very much like Kenyatta himself on the book’s cover image: a male elder, who wore monkey-fur rather than trousers and was more comfortable handling a spear than a pen (Figure 6). The karing’a was, on the surface, almost identical to the “raw native” of colonial discourse. In Facing Mount Kenya Kenyatta seized hold of and attempted to reclaim and repurpose this caricature, turning the negative trope into a positive one: what looked to colonials like the karing’a’s “superstition” was in fact his deep wisdom and obedience to a highly complex set of laws, what looked like “docility” was in fact his peacefulness, which was rooted in a tradition of democracy and equality; his children were not “inert” they were “obedient”; he was not “lazy”, it was just that he laboured according to the more fulfilling rhythm of the seasons and his inner spirit rather than the abstract “movement of the clock.”

A pure Gikuyu – a real Gikuyu – according to the re-branded Kenyatta was absolutely nothing like the model person of colonial evangelism. Indeed, attempting to establish his credentials to his readers as a fully authentic Gikuyu who could, as he put it in his foreword, “speak from personal experience of the rites and ceremonies,” Kenyatta erased his own mission-schooling and modified circumcision, introducing himself as a fully initiated “member of the warrior class.” Where a decade previously Kenyatta had openly championed Christianity, missionary schooling, football, and stone houses, as means by which Gikuyu national subjects might make themselves and their ethnic-nation complete, in Facing Mount Kenya he cast European missionaries and Christianity as major threats to the integrity and fullness of the karing’a.

The damage wrought by “missionaries” and their cultural imperialist ambitions is a constant theme of the book: “They set out to uproot the African,” he wrote, “body and soul, from...

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193 ibid. 116.
194 ibid. 308.
195 ibid. 321.
196 ibid. 190.
197 ibid. 60.
198 ibid. xix.
his old customs and beliefs, put him in a class by himself, with all his tribal traditions shattered and his institutions trampled upon.”

“Missionaries” was essentially a stand-in for the CSM. They were the only mission Kenyatta mentioned by name (twice). He was especially critical of missionary schooling. In *Muigwithania* Kenyatta had implored his compatriots to seek out mission schools because, “opening up a man’s head”, they were liberating and emancipatory. But in *Facing Mount Kenya* the very same schooling he denounced as atomising and alienating. The Gikuyu child of the past knew how to navigate the forest pathways, identify birds, was highly skilled with a digging stick and was firmly rooted in the tribal order having “naturally learn[ed] their tribal traditions and moral values from their parents and grandparents.” The Gikuyu child under colonialism was being “handicapped by attending school and listening to formal instruction […] unrelated to his needs and interests.” The “individualism” of missionary schooling had eviscerated the wholesomeness of old, giving rise to a “younger generation” who were ignorant and “selfish.”

The influence of the circumcision crisis on the production of *Facing Mount Kenya* and the particular image of Gikuyu society it provides, becomes clear in the chapter on the “initiation of boys and girls.” Kenyatta used that chapter to denounce the CSM and their attempt to eradicate female circumcision by “force of law,” labelling them “religious fanatics” who neither knew nor cared about the “psychological importance attached to this custom by the Gikuyu.” Though he restated his view that the practice could be phased out through education, he did so mutedly, in passing. Instead he devoted his efforts to showing why it was not merely a “‘horrible’ and ‘painful’ practice, suitable only to barbarians.” Here Kenyatta explicitly advanced the argument that the KCA had been accused of making during the crisis: female circumcision was important chiefly because “it symbolises the unification of the whole tribal organisation.” As a national tradition, the logic of his argument was, female circumcision demanded reverence and respect. Elevating the local, pragmatic, historical practice to the status of a fixed, national tradition he made female circumcision into a national, civic, duty. “Clitoridectomy”, he wrote, “is regarded as the *conditio sine qua non* of the whole teaching of tribal law, religion, and morality”; “No proper Gikuyu would

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199 ibid. 269-270.
200 ibid. 130, 273.
203 ibid. 105.
204 ibid. 119, 251.
206 ibid. 134.
207 ibid. 134.
dream of marrying a girl who has not been circumcised, and vice versa.”

Having linked the initiated female body in general, and the cut clitoris in particular, to the integrity of the nation at large, Kenyatta was thus able to speculate that any sudden abolition of female circumcision would “disintegrate the social order and thereby hasten Europeanisation.”

In any case, he argued, the circumciser operated “with the dexterity of a Harley Street surgeon” and the herbs and fluids applied to the wound had “antiseptic” qualities which “reduce[d] the pain” and “check[ed] bleeding.”

This is indicative one of the most significant aspects of Facing Mount Kenya: although Kenyatta was providing empirical details about Gikuyu society on the eve of colonialism, he was recalibrating them in new, modern, national terms in the process creating a totally new concept of the purely Gikuyu ethnic-national body. Indeed, although the pure, karing’A Gikuyu body politic that is presented in Facing Mount Kenya is defined in opposition to “Western civilisation” it is not completely Other. Rather his vision of the past Gikuyu nation is one that appears very much like a modern nation. He described the precolonial social and political order thus: The councils, the “government” of the country, issued laws and rules aimed at training and disciplining the population into strong, productive citizens. Irua ceremonies, meanwhile, inaugurated a life of civic responsibility, for initiated persons promised to “deport themselves like adults and take all responsibilities in the welfare of the community”; no initiated adult would dare lag “behind when called upon to perform any service or duty in the protection and advancement of the tribe as a whole.”

The ancestral spirits, were like a national police force: they kept watch on the public and “private lives” of individuals and communities – the mere awareness of their surveilling gaze ensuring that persons were well behaved. The aanake age-set, meanwhile, was the national standing army; councils reminded parents “it was necessary for every family to have a number of male children who would be called up for military service.”

Kenyatta’s conception of the karing’A body and the pure, Gikuyu body-politic was, the evidence in this chapter and this thesis suggests, made possible by his mission schooling and was energised by the circumcision crisis of 1929. Indeed, certain aspects of the society Kenyatta described bear a close resemblance to the organisation and repertoires of colonial mission stations, in tone and form at least if not always in content. The songs and stories children listened to in

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208 ibid. 133, 132.
209 ibid. 135.
210 ibid. 148.
211 ibid. 188-189.
212 ibid. 141.
213 ibid. 213.
214 ibid. 189.
their childhood were aimed at making them “become industrious in their future activities in life”; their instruction in the proscriptions of *thahu* was part of their “instruction in health and bodily hygiene.” In his chapter on “systems of education” Kenyatta wrote that every effort was taken to ensure the holistic development of the child. “Growing boys and girls learn that they have one thing to learn which sums up all the others, and that is the manners and deportment proper to their station in the community.” Carrying echoes of a Doctor Arthur contribution to *Kikuyu News* he described how: “through both work and play both sexes get their physical training […] the boys have their games of wrestling, jumping, sparring with sticks and shields, lifting weights and stones and club throwing […] the girls have their share in housework, nursing the babies, cutting and gathering firewood and fetching water.”

**VI. The conclusion of the crisis**

On 26 May 1930 Kenya Colony’s new penal code made the “major operation” a felony, whether performed with or without consent. Anyone found guilty of undertaking or abetting the undertaking of such procedure could be punished by imprisonment for up to seven years. “Simple clitoridectomy,” however, was held to be within the law. Though it fell short of the CSM’s overall ambition to see the abolition of all forms of female circumcision, the new law reflected the demands laid out by Arthur in his letter to the EAS which had triggered the crisis. However, in the short term, at least, there was little sense of victory among the missionaries.

The “circumcision crisis” was effectively brought to an end the following year, on 4 May 1931, with a circular issued by the Native Affairs Department which stated “it is recognised that the abolition of this rite can only be gradual and Government has decided that no general attempt shall be made to abolish immediately the milder forms of the practice.” Officials knew that despite the new penal code, even the “major operation” would continue; after all, as William McGregor Ross put it, was the Kenya Government really ever going to pursue “the wholesale examination of the sexual organs of Kikuyu young women”?

The inconclusive solution to the crisis was a disappointment not only to Arthur and the CSM, but also for the metropolitan government and some humanitarian campaigners in Britain.

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215 ibid. 81.
216 ibid. 105.
217 ibid. 106.
218 ibid. 104.
220 Native Affairs Department Circular No 16, “Female Circumcision” (4 May 1931), KNA VQ 1/28/28.
The government’s ruling was indicative of the Kenya colonial state’s broader laissez-faire approach to the governance of native life; it underlined the colonial state’s general unwillingness and indeed limited capacity to exert social and moral power in the native reserves; it spoke to the colonial state’s preference to remain on the outer edges of native life, extracting, controlling and punishing if necessary but not transforming; it is evidence of their conviction in the order and stability afforded by ruling through elders, tradition and “immemorial customs.”

Up to 1929 the “civilising mission” of British imperialism had been left to the missions. Many of Kenya’s missions and missionaries sought to distance themselves from the government, but this was not the case for the CSM in general and Arthur in particular for whom uniting Bible and Flag was a central ambition. For more than two decades Arthur had strained to acquire for the CSM an official place within the institutional apparatus of colonial rule in the reserves. He wanted the mission to be the hands and face of the affective side of British colonial power on the ground in Gikuyuland. Up to 1929 Arthur and the CSM had, on the whole, managed to convince a generally sceptical government of the uplifting and disciplinary benefits of their evangelical projects.

The circumcision crisis was a major blow to this. It saw the CSM’s civilising mission severely undermined from above, as well as from below. Under immense pressure from colonial officials, in November 1929 Arthur resigned from his position as Representative for Native Interests in the Executive Council. Accepting his resignation, the Governor Edward Grigg remarked that the problem had arisen because of the very fact that Arthur had taken the Church too close to the State. “You were generally regarded as an emissary of the Government in pursuing the vigorous action against the practice of female circumcision,” he wrote. “A clear differentiation between the policy of the Government and the action of your Church was imperative” but it had not been forthcoming.222 The following month the Native Affairs Department end-of-year report issued a scathing attack on the CSM: thanks to their actions relations “between natives and Missions and natives and Europeans generally” were “deplorable”; they had created “an embarrassing situation for the Administration.”223 The 1931 circular that ended the crisis was a message to Arthur that though a concerted project of radical “uplift” might be manageable within the controlled confined environment of a mission station, it was beyond the disciplinary capacities of the colonial state for such a “civilising project” to be extended over the colony at large.

Mission colleagues and colonial officials regarded the situation as a “personal disaster” for Arthur. For his part, Arthur, who had received an O.B.E. for his service during the First World War, would for the rest of his life harbour the belief that his actions had cost him a knighthood. The crisis had certainly cost him friends and allies in the Church Missionary Society. What Arthur would lament above all was that the crisis had jeopardised his personal ambition to establish inter-denominational allegiances across the protestant missions and build a United African Church in Kenya, a prospect he acknowledged in 1931 was “a remoter one than during any time in the history of the movement.”

He did not, however, regret his actions. He believed the crisis was in part “an endeavour on the part of the evil one to ruin the Church of Christ”, in part something that God “allowed to come for the purifying of his church.” He stood by his actions, and condemned the Native Affairs Department for issuing “half-truths, insinuations […] with a view to damning Missions in the eyes of the public and myself in particular.”

The CSM recovered from the crisis. By the close of 1931 church and school attendance figures were returning to the pre-September 1929 levels. By the mid 1930s they far exceeded them. The church continued to grow, almost exponentially, over the following decades. The KISA and Karing’a schools networks, meanwhile, continued to grow too, claiming between them a purported 90,000 students in 1952, on the eve of the Mau Mau emergency, when they were charged with subversion and shut down by the government. In the long-term the CSM’s stance on “female circumcision” has come to be celebrated – in Gikuyuland and its Presbyterian churches at least, if less so in the United Kingdom. Moreover, the “civilising” rhetoric of their campaign, along with its aggressively colonial vocabulary of “cleanliness” versus “repugnance”, “progress” versus “backwardness”, “civilisation” versus “barbarism”, “good” versus “evil”, has shown remarkable endurance in shaping the tenor of debates around the practice of female circumcision.

The CSM lost some of their stalwart missionaries during the crisis. Marion Stevenson died unexpectedly, of a brain haemorrhage, in 1930. A month later Horace Philp retired and took up

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225 Interview, David Arthur (son of John Arthur, b.1935), interview conducted in Helensburgh, Scotland, 18/4/14.
226 John Arthur to Bishop Heywood (June 1931), PCEA I/CG/11.
227 John Arthur to Arthur Barlow (21 June 1931), PCEA I/CG/11.
228 John Arthur, “The Turning Tide” (19 August 1930), PCEA I/G/2.
229 Natsoulas, “The Rise and Fall of the Kikuyu Karing’a,” 229.
231 Horace Philp, “Marion Scott Stevenson,” KN, 112 (June 1930); John Arthur to William McLachlan (31 January 1930 and 1 February 1930), PCEA I/AA/1.
a role as minister in Newcastle. The following year, Minnie Watson retired and returned to Britain after over three decades in Gikuyuland. Arthur Barlow and Doctor Irvine remained in Gikuyuland, the former until 1942, the latter until his death in 1974; both were buried in Gikuyuland, at CSM Kikuyu station and CSM Chogoria station respectively.

By the time Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya* was published, Arthur was himself retired from mission work having left Kenya Colony in 1937, earlier than he had anticipated. He continued to feel a special level of resentment towards the former carpentry apprentice. Exhibiting the deeply paternalistic character of the “civilising mission” of the CSM he expressed in private, personal correspondence his feelings towards Kenyatta and *Facing Mount Kenya*. Arthur wrote:

I am not very fond of J.K. I dislike his politics. I dislike his continuous malice against the British Government […] my objection to his book is that he gives a glorified picture of Kikuyu life, before the British came there, and of its so-called “culture” […] What I remember is the Kikuyu filth, physical and moral, which produced smallpox, and terribly yaws-sore bodies, periods of famine, a people bound by fear of evil spirits, degraded with polygamy and all that means in village life […] There is no appreciation of what Missions did for him, and for his fellows; and none of peaceful rule, and innumerable things that have come from British rule. […] All that Europeans have taught them, their English and English ways, knowledge of agriculture, machinery etc. Their attitude to women, and especially their cruel customs of female circumcision, which receives praise and no condemnation from this man, who has been allowed to live in England. If Kikuyu is such a wonderful country, why doesn’t he return to it? […] His life and his writings [are an attempt to bring] down Christian missions, not least the one who brought him up and gave him his foundations.

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232 “Testimonial to Dr Philp,” *KN*, 112 (June 1930).
Conclusions

On Saturday 8 February 1930, one week after the muthirigü dance-song had been banned in the Kikuyu native reserve and a month after the murder of Hulda Stumpf, Doctor Arthur took a team of eight scholars from CSM Kikuyu station to Nairobi to compete in the Colony’s “African Olympic Sports.” Since he helped to establish it, in 1925, the event had become an annual fixture in the colonial calendar and drew a crowd of European spectators. The contest was open to teams representative of each of Kenya’s districts plus teams from the Kenya police and the King’s African Rifles. The prize on offer was the District Shield. The eight scholars from Kikuyu station were part of the eleven-strong team representing Kiambu district. Arthur was their captain. They were the reigning champions. “The lads,” Arthur wrote “were in really fine fettle.” “It has been fine to see their real keenness this year, and their willingness to stand the hard training necessary.” They put up a good performance. Their dependable competitor Evanson Wachira (chapter 5) comfortably won the mile. Kiambu athletes won the 100 yards, 200 yards, and relay and finished second in the spear-throwing and half-mile. They claimed all the podium positions in the 7 mile foot-race with the winner setting a new colony record. His time, an impressive 35 minutes 30 seconds, compared “very favourably with home times,” Arthur pointed out in his report. It was not enough, however, to win the overall event. The District Shield went to the Nairobi police team who dominated the throwing and jumping events. Arthur found some solace in the fact that the police’s star performer had been a CSM scholar.

“And what of the spiritual significance of all this, it may be asked?” wrote Arthur, in a bid to win back the attention of any Kikuyu News reader who was not as interested as he in the finer details of the sporting contest:

It seems to me that this and our football have, outside of the spiritual forces, been the two things that have kept our dormitory boys going through the crisis without many losses. The call to their human nature that true sport through these years of accumulated training has made, has, in my opinion, been a fine thing for them. Especially just now in this time of trial. The long weeks of steady training for the track races, demanding as it does always great self-discipline, patience, and sacrifice, have done much for our lads and, under God, all help to make for solid Christian character, and preparation for their life’s fight with sin and the pull that comes to them of the old life, which would seek to hinder them as true followers of Jesus Christ.

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2 Possibly Tiras Karinde who joined the police in 1927 and, later, became the first African police chief inspector. For his sporting ability and proposed appointment to the police see: John Arthur to Commissioner of Police, “Re: Tiras Karkinl” (25 January 1926), PCEA I/AA/1. See also: Man Man’s Daughter: The Life History of Wambui Waiyaki Otieno, edited by Cora Ann Presley (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 20-21.
For all the changes since he first arrived in East Africa Protectorate at the close of 1906, Arthur and the CSM’s muscular approach to evangelism and imperial uplift underwent little transformation. Changes there had been. When Arthur first came to the region, which in this thesis I have referred to as “Gikuyuland,” there were 500 European settlers in the Colony, there was no formal schooling, and the only hospital was the small clinic at Kikuyu mission station. Between them the various Christian missions operative in the region claimed a few dozen early converts; the CSM in 1906 had not baptised a single soul. In 1906 it would still be some five years before the incoming colonisers cut their first “road” into the region – a wide ox-cart track that connected Nairobi to Nyeri via Fort Hall.4 By the time Arthur retired, in 1937, the country was marked by the infrastructure of colonial rule. 20,000 European settlers were residing in the colony at large; claiming between them hundreds of thousands of acres of land.5 The 1927 extension of the Uganda Railway connected Nairobi to Nanyuki, north of Tumutumu, making a journey that would have taken weeks on foot at the start of the century achievable in one day.6 By that year there were over 1,000 miles of graded roads in Gikuyuland, and 52 African-owned motor vehicles.7 Over 125,000 patients received treatment in the government-run, predominantly African-staffed, hospitals in each of Gikuyuland’s five districts in 1937; a further 70,000 patients were treated at one of the CSM’s three hospitals at Kikuyu, Tumutumu, and Chogoria.8 Thousands of Gikuyu people were going to school; a handful were overseas pursuing their first, second, university degree. The CSM alone had 12,000 students on their school roll and 100 or so in each of their dormitories.9 They reckoned they had 7,000 practicing communicants; they had baptised over 12,000.10 Perhaps the same number, or more, meanwhile, were incarcerated in one of the prisons or detention camps in the region: there were 40,000 detainees in Kenya Colony in 1937 a relative prison population that far out-striped that of any other British colony.11

In this thesis I have provided a history of the Church of Scotland Mission in Kenya. In providing this history I have focussed on critiquing the mission as a “civilising mission” and on situating this civilising mission within its colonial context. I have documented and critically examined the CSM’s bid to “uplift,” “emancipate,” and “develop” Gikuyu with a specific focus

6 “A Short History of Kikuyu Province”; Annual Meeting of Subscribers, KN, 112 (June 1930)
7 “A Short History of Kikuyu Province.”
9 “Annual Report for 1936,” KN, 140 (June 1937); “Annual Reports for 1937,” KN, 114 (June 1938).
on how they sought to do this by inculcating new, individual, conceptions of the self through the radical transformation of Gikuyu physical culture in general, and Gikuyu bodies in particular. With a focus on the male actors in the history, the thesis has been a study of the application of “Muscular Christianity” in one particular colonial context. Imperialistic Christians who believed deeply in the moral and physical importance of games and exercise in the training and development of boys and men, the missionaries of the CSM were Muscular Christians in the typical sense of the term. But they were also Muscular Christians in the broader way in which I have been using the term throughout this thesis, as they set about attempting to re-make Gikuyu persons totally turning them into modern, imperial, Christian subjects with appropriately “civilised” bodies. I have explored how this corporeal, colonial project challenged and connected with pre-colonial Gikuyu modes of embodiment, improvement, and self-mastery. And I have examined its contested place among a number of competing colonial projects in the region at this time. A number of conclusions can be drawn from the evidence presented.

Under Doctor Arthur, the CSM came to occupy a place within the formal apparatus of colonial rule in Gikuyuland. The mission acted like, and sometimes on behalf of, the British government on the ground in the Kikuyu native reserve. Doctor Arthur occupied an official role in colonial governance, as representative of “native interests” in the legislative council and as a commissioner on a number of government commissions of inquiry. The CSM supplied the colonial government with medical expertise and personnel. CSM doctors – most prominently Horace Philp – sought out formal secondments into the colonial medical department. They endeavoured to support and assist the colonial government, using their knowledge of the vernacular language and customs to assist with security operations, such as the work Arthur Barlow did for the C.I.D. translating *Muirwthania*. CSM schools were exercises in collaboration with the government, quasi-state institutions reliant upon government funds and subject to government inspections. The CSM aspired to provide an education that would turn out men who – with their able-bodies and mastery of literacy – would power colonial development on settler farms and in the African reserves. Much more so than was ever officially asked of them by the government, the CSM aspired to embed and entrench colonial rule in the Kikuyu reserves by creating loyal, obedient imperial citizens. I have shown that the missionaries of the CSM were, and envisioned themselves as, the hands and face of British imperialism in Gikuyuland – or at least within the grounds of their three mission stations and the immediate, surrounding areas. They endeavoured to “fill the gap”, as it were, between the colonial government and the governed population; to forge integrative relations that would create a link between colonisers and colonised.
The colonialism of the CSM’s “civilising mission” was not limited to their formal relationship with the colonial government, nor did it simply exist at the level of policy and high-politics. In this thesis I have aimed to critically appraise a whole range of “everyday” techniques and practices deployed by the mission in their bid to “civilise” Gikuyu. These included techniques that were overtly imperial, such as the flag-waving, anthem-singing and sports days that epitomised the Boys’ Brigade training. But they also included such things as ablution codes and clothing rules. I have sought to take seriously and problematise such ostensibly banal things like football and athletics, and such seemingly insignificant – “micro” – techniques like the training of masons to cut blocks of stone into perfectly square rectangles and repetitive classroom handwriting drills. I have endeavoured to locate these practices in the history of colonialism showing that for the missionaries of the CSM it was precisely through these ordinary tactics that they conducted their work of uplift, civilisation, and conversion. I have shown that they were not merely anecdotal details nor simply “things that were going on” while the country was being colonised, but rather, they were themselves forms of colonialism.

The CSM’s “civilising mission” disrupted local ontologies, introducing new and fundamentally different modes of embodiment and personhood to Gikuyuland, often in ways in which the missionaries were not fully aware. As modern, Christian missionaries, the evangelists of the CSM held normative ideas about what constituted a good, upright, morally responsible person. These relied upon a taken-for-granted, universal conception of the person and the body. As they arrived into Gikuyuland at the start of the twentieth century and began travelling through the country in search of converts, these taken-for-granted ideas of the body and the person, together with their pre-formed conceptions of Africa and Africans, informed their impression of Gikuyu as people who were less than complete and under-developed in their persons and in their bodies (chapters 1 and 3). The missionaries perceived Gikuyu as people with “open”, “porous” bodies and “dim”, “closed” minds. In written and visual representations of what they called “village life” they strove to locate the individuated bodies and inner persons they believed existed “beneath” a material and physical culture that struck them as one characterised by darkness, smokiness, crowdedness, and greasiness. They endeavoured to make their mission stations laboratory-like, sanitised locations that would allow for them to extract the “raw native” from the communal, customary frame of local life and induct them into a new, enlightened, individual mode of existence that the missionaries believed was higher and more complete (chapter 5). The mission stations were locations in which they made bodies and persons visible and legible; they were venues for the carrying out of work that would bring to the surface their scholars’ inner traits and cultivate the bodily boundedness they deemed necessary for Christian conversion.
Famously, in the Pacific Island of New Caledonia in the 1920s, indigenous people told the European missionaries that, after two decades of evangelical work on the island what the missionaries had brought them was not “the spirit” but “the body.” Kenyatta, in Facing Mount Kenya, intimated similar, allegating that Gikuyu were, prior to colonial contact “biologically” communal (chapter 2). He claimed that missionaries in general, the CSM in particular, and colonising processes more broadly had introduced into Gikuyuland the concept of the person as the “isolated individual.” His statement alerts us to the ways in which the devices of colonial rule and the techniques of colonial evangelism were productive of new forms of embodiment and personhood. In chapter 2 I presented ethnographic evidence which suggests modalities of personhood and embodiment that were configured very differently to those of Kenya’s colonisers. The evidence suggests that personhood was experienced and understood as being extended across multiple bodies, such that a person “was” their kin, their age-mate, their land, their wealth, their cattle. “The body” meanwhile was not lived-in as an anatomical unit, but as a composite of diverse substances, with the propensity to transform radically over time, requiring periodic episodes of purging and renewal, containing as it did elements of an external wilderness. The evidence presented supported the claims of scholars such as John Lonsdale, Greer Kershaw, Robert Blunt and Derek Peterson that the social and physical culture of Gikuyuland on the eve of colonial conquest was marked by a tension between wilderness and civilisation. The evidence suggested that this tension played out at the level of the body and the person, that hegemonic expectations about uprightness required persons to master the physical substances of their bodies, as a means of civilising the unpredictable energies of the wilderness. These old notions of self-mastery, cleanliness, order and decency endured, but by the 1920s new, modern, conceptions of the body as an anatomical unit and location of the self, and the notion of the community as a living population of biological subjects, were picked up and deployed by the first generation of mission-educated Gikuyu whose nation-building project was based upon these assumptions.

The colonialism of CSM evangelism was noticed and felt by Gikuyu people, almost all of whom – whether they actively sought it out or actively sought to avoid it – recognised even the most “everyday” elements of the missionary project as a form of power. It is neither coincidental nor surprising that the first to set out in writing a critical appraisal of the CSM’s endeavour to uplift, and the quotidian means by which they sought to uplift, were Gikuyu men who were subjected to and participated in the missionary’s muscular Christian regime. Writers to Muigwithania hinted at the ways in which the corporeal techniques and practices of colonial rule and colonial

evangelism were alienating as much as they were empowering. For Kenyatta and, a generation later, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o in *The River Between* (1965), the CSM’s transformation project with its emphasis on literacy, soaped-skin, cotton clothing, exercise drills, and the abstention from customary practices, was the essence of the colonial experience in Gikuyuland. Before either of them had expressed the argument in this way, others on the ground had formulated the aphorism *gātirĩ mūthūngū na mūbta* “there’s no difference between the settler and the missionary” (chapter 6).

But a difference there was. While the aphorism helpfully identifies the importance of mission stations as locations for the subjecting of Gikuyu to colonial power, it fails to capture the fraught, fissured, contradictory character of colonialism in this part of the world. The thesis has shown that it would be a mistake to represent colonialism in Kenya as a unified, hegemonic, process. I have argued that the colonial project undertaken by the missionaries of the CSM was a very specific kind of colonial project and one that did not sit easily with other colonisers, including the colonial government.

Throughout the thesis I have endeavoured to draw attention to the centrality of notions of “liberation,” “emancipation,” and “uplift” to the CSM as they undertook their work. I have, furthermore, aimed to document the range of measures the missionaries pursued which included but were not limited to initiatives that even secular, liberal, modernisers and many contemporary readers would regard as “good” and benevolent. I have shown that the missionaries pursued such aims against prevailing modes of governance in Gikuyuland. Few other colonials shared the missionaries’ enthusiasm for spreading literacy, for building hospitals and dispensaries. Few institutions were as committed to pursuing the regulation of labour recruitment and improving working conditions. No organisations were as committed as the CSM to the eradication of female genital cutting.

Two points are relevant here. The first is that these initiatives cannot be understood as outside of the field of colonial power relations. Still less can they be understood as exceptions to formal colonial rule. Almost invariably, as I have shown, the missionaries deployed schooling and pursued biomedical initiatives with the express aim of strengthening the empire and bolstering and securing British imperial power. The CSM aspired to bring to Kenya Colony forms of colonial statecraft that, in treating the governed masses as a “population” of living, biological subjects, were equivalent to metropolitan styles of governance and were more advanced and sophisticated than the colonial state was able and willing to implement (chapter 4). The CSM critiqued the abuses of settler capitalism. They did not, however, criticise either colonial rule or settler capitalism *per se*. Rather they called for a more complete, more welfare-oriented style of colonial rule. Their initiatives should also be understood as part of colonial power relations to the extent that they
relied upon, reinforced and perpetuated conceptions of Africans in general as backward, under-developed, helpless, and inferior to Europeans. Their civilising mission was deliberately and purposefully aimed at overriding, un-doing, destroying and subjugating historic ways of being in the world, and being in the body. I have aimed to document the vigour and thoroughness with which the missionaries of the CSM aimed to transform Gikuyu modes of life. I have argued few colonisers could match the CSM’s ambition, especially under Doctor Arthur, to eradicate historic forms of personhood and embodiment and replace them with something new and different.

The second important point in relation to the CSM’s “civilising mission” and their rhetorical and material commitment to improvement and uplift, was that their initiatives were premised upon a conception of Africans as fundamentally the same and essentially equal. Indeed, although in their more heated moments the missionaries often expressed their work as entailing the “destruction” of the “old” and the ushering-in of the “new,” their project was one that, principally, assumed linearity and continuity. They saw the ruptures and breaks they were instigating, as moves which liberated, and allowed for the full-realisation of, the universal, equal, individual Christian subject they supposed lay dormant in the “raw native.” Thus they wrote of their work in terms of “awakening,” “developing,” “training,” and “uplifting.” Presuming the sameness, and equality of all human subjects, they regarded their civilising project as one that consisted of delivering Gikuyu their rightful inheritance as children of God and subjects of the British crown.

In pursuing their civilising mission the CSM endeavoured to foster a hegemonic, integrative, form of colonial rule in Gikuyuland. The thesis has documented the challenges the missionaries faced in trying to do this in a colonial context that was as brutal and punitive as Kenya’s Gikuyu highlands. I have shown that their project was met with apathy, ambivalence, or outright hostility from other colonisers many of whom regarded the colonised African population as fundamentally different and essentially inferior. I have shown that the CSM’s endeavour to create imperial Christian subjects ran counter to the colonial will to rule through customary traditions – that their “civilising” project was met with anxiety, condemned for the “detribalising,” and therefore “destabilising,” effects it was purported to have upon the colonised population (chapter 5). These criticisms, I showed, became acute during the “circumcision crisis” of 1929.

The CSM’s Muscular Christian programme of uplift, and their liberal, modern, promise of enlightenment and equality as citizens of the empire, proved highly attractive for huge numbers of Gikuyu. In chapter 6, I showed that after WWI, in the wake of the devastating famine and influenza epidemic, thousands of young Gikuyu actively sought out schooling. The evidence presented supported John Lonsdale’s and Derek Peterson’s work on the generational dynamic on the “move
to the school.” Acquiring the new skill of literacy was a major motivation. But so too was the prospect of entering into the bodily regimes of the mission-station schooling. In their autobiographies and in their interviews with me, one-time CSM *athomi* and their descendants spoke fondly and enthusiastically of aspects of a CSM schooling such as the Boys’ Brigade, the football, the uniforms, the distinctive methods of discipline, and the novel hygienic codes. *Athomi* could surprise even the missionaries with the enthusiasm with which they broke with their familial pasts and the willingness with which they were prepared to display their new, modern, Christian status. The generational move to the school was also informed by a whole set of beliefs and practices that had little to do with the mission’s modernising promise. They were conditioned by historically-deep traditions of generational dissent; the notion that self-mastery could be achieved through breaking-away from one’s kin in pursuit of risky, speculative migrations was long-standing. Radical separations, moments of rupture and renewal were, as I showed in chapter 2, a means by which full personhood was secured and maturity gained. In 1929 the first generation of *athomi* came to reckon with their separations. As they harnessed the new skill of literacy and embraced a new conception of the body as a site for nation-building the men of the KCA simultaneously drew on old notions of blockage and constraint and the requirement for renewal and purging in pursuit of maturity as they articulated their conception of the Gikuyu nation as a body politic.
### Abbreviations

#### Frequently cited primary Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>KN</td>
<td><em>Kikuyu News</em></td>
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#### Committees, Organisations, Personnel, Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIM</td>
<td>Africa Inland Mission</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Church Missionary Society</td>
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<td>CSM</td>
<td>Church of Scotland Mission</td>
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<td>CPWCC</td>
<td>Committee for the Protection of Coloured Women in the Crown Colonies</td>
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<td>DC</td>
<td>District Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>DoMSS</td>
<td>Director of Medical and Sanitary Services</td>
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<td>FMC</td>
<td>Foreign Missions Committee</td>
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<td>GMS</td>
<td>Gospel Missionary Society</td>
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<td>KCA</td>
<td>Kikuyu Central Association</td>
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<td>PC</td>
<td>Provincial Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>PKP</td>
<td>Progressive Kikuyu Party</td>
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<td>UMM</td>
<td>United Methodist Mission</td>
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   CO Colonial Office

EUL University of Edinburgh Library, Centre for Research Collections. Edinburgh, United
   Kingdom.
   EUL AP Papers of John Arthur
   EUL BP Papers of Arthur Barlow
   EUL GP Papers of George Grieve


NLS National Library of Scotland. Edinburgh, United Kingdom.
   NLS IP Papers of Archibald Clive Irvine

PCEA Archive of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. St Andrews Church, Nairobi, Kenya.

RHL Rhodes House Library (now part of the Bodleian’s Commonwealth and African
   Collections). Oxford, United Kingdom.
   RHL RP Papers of William McGregor Ross.

SOAS/CBMS Conference of British Missionary Societies, School of Oriental and African
   Studies. London, United Kingdom.

TT Tumutumu Parish Archive. Tumutumu, Nyeri, Kenya.

ULA University of Liverpool Archives. Liverpool, United Kingdom.
   ULA RP Papers of Elanor Rathbone

UN University of Nairobi Archives. Nairobi, Kenya.
   UN BP Papers of Arthur Barlow.

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The colonial archive as material remains: Reflections on an “Endangered Archives Project”

Between January and April 2016, I was part of a British Library-funded project to restore, preserve, and digitize the archive of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA). The archive is held in a small room in the bell tower of St. Andrews church, Nairobi. The collection consists of the records of the colonial-era Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) and its successor institution, the PCEA, which was formed in 1956 when the African church became independent from the Scottish mission. When I first accessed it, it was being used by the church as a place to store and dump all sorts of miscellaneous and unneeded objects. As well as the heaps of papers, it contained an old lectern, posters, brochures, parish leaflets, and general rubbish. Depending on one’s perspective it could have been seen as not much of an “archive”, or much more than one.

The three-month project saw us rid this room of the debris and dramatically transform it from a dusty attic storeroom into something that resembles an “archive” in the conventional sense. Endangered archives projects of this kind are being undertaken throughout Africa, and elsewhere in the world. It is easy to frame the processes they entail - of ordering, cleansing, and renovating - triumphantly as an important and necessary activity. But this was not an unproblematic process. And that is the point of this paper.

It was my PhD research, on the colonial encounter between the missionaries of the CSM and Gikuyu during the first half of the twentieth century, that took me to the PCEA archive. In my research, I use the documents in the PCEA archive, as well as archival material in the University of Edinburgh Archives, the National...
Library of Scotland, and the Kenya National Archives, together with oral history interviews undertaken in former mission heartlands in the rural highland interior of central Kenya, with elderly Gikuyu men and women who had been schooled by the missionaries, to examine the mission’s role in colonising processes in this part of the world. I am interested in how the CSM attempted to totally transform Gikuyu notions of personhood, and the consequences (intended and otherwise) of this process.

When I was granted access to the archive, at the start of my fieldwork, I was dismayed to find it in a state of ruin. I considered its dilapidated state as an obstacle between me and the past I wanted to investigate. With hindsight, this was not dissimilar to the naïve way in which I bemoaned what I took to be distorted, flattened, or untruthful narratives of the past given to me by my oral-history interview respondents. I was more interested in recovering a “pure” past than the question of how that past is stored, managed, produced and reproduced. This was a question that became acute during the endangered archives project, and what I want to reflect on here.

Archives are not only important as repositories of information about the past. As sites where the “material remains” of the past are stowed and administrated, archives are dynamic places where history is invented and re-invented, where past and present are governed and controlled. As they are places that tell us about the present as much as they do the past.

Some context: the CSM

From humble beginnings at the start of the twentieth century, the CSM became the largest and most politically-influential of all the Christian missions that operated in colonial-era “Gikuyuland” (the name for the region, about 8,000 square miles that lies between Nairobi and Mount-Kenya, in the highland interior of Kenya). Established in 1898, at Thogoto (near Nairobi), it was not until 1908 that the CSM celebrated their first African baptism. By 1948 however, with two further mission stations further north, and a network of dozens of further out-stations throughout Gikuyuland, the CSM had baptised nearly 12,000 Gikuyu men, women, and children; in that year their three hospitals had treated nearly 8,000 in patients and there were over 20,000 pupils in their schools. The thousands more who had passed through a CSM schooling in the 1910s, 20s and 30s, were among the first literate Gikuyu.

The missionaries of the CSM saw themselves as carrying out a “civilising mission” that sought to transform Gikuyu from the outside, in. In the CSM’s schema, exterior “bodywork” (strict hygienic codes, exercise programmes, corporal punishment) would facilitate interior mental and spiritual transformation and development: “civilisation” preceded and made possible “Christianisation”. Whether evidenced in its medicine, school sports days, or the “European” architectural styles of its mission stations, the CSM brought to bear upon

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2 This term is taken from Ally, Shireen, *‘Material Remains: Artifice versus Artefact(s) in the Archive of Bantustan Rule’, Journal of Southern African Studies, 41* (2015), 969–89. Ally’s insights have been instrumental in my thinking on the PCEA archive. I am grateful to Joost Fontein for directing me to this text and for our many discussions about the archive.

Gikuyu a physical and material culture that was self-consciously modern and novel in a bid to turn “raw natives” into modern Christian subjects.

The CSM is well-known for spearheading the ill-fated 1929 campaign against the Gikuyu custom of “female circumcision”, which they dubbed the “sexual mutilation of women”. The mission’s uncompromising approach to the initiation rite saw their mission stations emerge as sites for the formation of a Gikuyu political culture. In the late 1920s former CSM scholar Johnstone “Jomo” Kenyatta (who would of course become the first president of Independent Kenya) was instrumental in establishing the Kikuyu Central Association, an ethnic-nationalist movement which sought to build a pan-Gikuyu identity based upon shared “traditions”.

The archive as “material remains”
Sifting through the material of the PCEA archive it became clear that it was not just the case that the heaps and heaps of paper in the archive contained and conveyed information about the Church of Scotland Mission’s colonial project. These papers were themselves instruments in that history: they were artefacts. Paper was part of the material culture of the CSM’s colonial-evangelical operations. And it was a potent and contested object in mission-Gikuyu encounters.

As some of the first Europeans to work in the highland interior of East Africa, paperwork was essential to the establishment and maintenance of the mission. Hand-drawn maps, sketches of village life, ethnographic notes, vocabulary books, travel accounts, and photographs: these were tools for the missionaries, technologies deployed to make legible their unfamiliar natural environment and help them comprehend the people they sought to convert.
The CSM was in many ways a “bureaucratic” mission: its evangelical enterprise would not have been possible without paperwork. Minute books, school registers, hospital records, and baptism rolls: these documents provide information to help us answer basic historical questions; but they are, at the same time, instructive as to the nature and practice of the mission itself. They would not be the same if they were simply transcribed into a (for example) Microsoft Word document. The meticulous handwriting, the neatly tabulated pages, the carefully drawn columns, and the “avalanche of printed numbers” testify to a mission that sought order, regulation and control through the conventions of record-keeping, protocol and administrative procedure. Timetables, syllabi, schemes, show a mission steadfast in its conviction that designing, planning, and arranging provided the means of orderly progress.

Paper was a key component in many day-to-day colonial encounters. Contracts of agreement and deeds of indenture were used to formalise relationships between mission land-owners and Gikuyu tenants, and between missionary “masters” and Gikuyu “servants”\(^4\). Certificates, qualifications, and typewritten testimonials, meanwhile, issued by the mission could be used by recipients to find employment after graduation. Some are signed by hand, others simply with a blue-ink thumb-print: alerting us to how paper was incorporated into the tactile coercive politics of everyday life in colonial Kenya.

For early Gikuyu converts, working with paper was a distinctive part of what it meant to be a modern Christian. Some worked as messengers carrying missionary correspondence

between mission stations: we found in the archive a leather postage canister used for this purpose. Others as interpreters and translators. Some wrote for the mission detailed descriptions of their family life and tradition. Among Gikuyu, as elsewhere in Africa, the word for mission adherent – *athomi* – literally translates as “reader.” It was an offence, punishable under the law, for a Gikuyu man to travel outside his home location without his registration document (*kipande*).

In colonial Kenya, paper exchanged hands and could change fortunes. It was received and incorporated into local moral economies in various ways. It is said that some Gikuyu upon witnessing whites communicating though paper wondered “what was the secret of its power?” A line that was common among many of my respondents was that they (or their parents) went to school in order to acquire the “magic” of writing. At other moments paper was met with suspicion and contempt. In 1929, the CSM’s African teachers while happy to make a verbal oath that they denounced the practice of female circumcision, refused to put their thumb prints on the mission’s declaration against the practice of female “circumcision”, associating the thumb-print signature with the labour-pass system.

The archive contains the records of inter-war native political associations, the “progressive Kikuyu Party” and the “Loyal Kikuyu Patriots” – parties that formed in opposition to Kenyatta’s Kikuyu Central Association by mission “loyalists” who sought “to organise the

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progressive elements of the Kikuyu in order to obtain a greater rate of progress and to eliminate retrogressive elements”.
These documents, written in Gikuyu and English, are evidence of how a new generation of mission-educated Gikuyu men embraced the administrative conventions of colonial governance and bureaucracy. The Loyal Kikuyu Patriots (headed up by a chairman, a secretary and a treasurer located near the CSM’s Tumutumu mission station) used typewritten manifestos and printed pamphlets to communicate their message to a new community of Gikuyu readers and, in the process, bring them together.

**Gaining Access**
When I first accessed the archive, I found the material remains of this colonial encounter steadily decomposing, abandoned, and in a state of ruin. There were stacks of cardboard boxes, some so crammed with documents they had burst, others so empty they had collapsed. Some damp, others torn. There was litter in the room—a chewed maize cob, sweet wrappers, an empty glass soda bottle—rodent droppings, and silverfish insects. Old fragile paper was strewn across the floor. The one-time order imposed on the documents (suggested by the carefully written codes on some of the boxes and files) had fallen apart. Documents once characterised by an aesthetics of neatness and discipline were now yellowed and decaying. Some had been partially eaten by mice or mites. The ill-ventilated room was full of dust. It felt hazardous to be in there without a face mask.

This was in October 2014. I had been in the country for one month and I had spent a lot of that time politely but persistently trying to convince the PCEA, who had given me clearance to undertake research in their parishes, to let me access their archive. John Lonsdale and David Anderson - Kenya
History’s British “elders” - had advised me to do research in the archive, though they suspected it may have been abandoned. Church leaders, administrators, and the caretakers at St. Andrews told me not to trouble myself with the archive: “There are already books and pamphlets that condense the history for you”. I was warned it would be uncomfortable and arduous to work up there in the attic.

It was in no small part due to the support of the late Rev Dr John Gatu that I was granted access to the bell tower room. Mzee Gatu, a former Moderator of the PCEA, whom I had interviewed in the first week of fieldwork, still wielded significant influence within the church. He was glad to see that somebody was undertaking a history of the Scottish mission. I was given an old dust jacket by the secretary at St Andrews and the groundsman appeared, handing me a face mask. We started up the stone staircase. My growing concern that I would not be able to do the months of research I had planned in the PCEA archive was quickly confirmed when we opened the creaking door.

With the help of Gatu, his son Kibacia Gatu, and Thomas Molony (my PhD supervisor in Edinburgh) I put together an application for a British Library Endangered Archives grant: we asked for a little over £10,000 for a three-month project to sort and re-organise the archive. It was proposed as a “pilot” project that would, primarily, to establish the contents of the archive. The British Library sees digitisation as the cheapest, safest, and most ethical, form of preservation. They are less interested in the physical work of restoration, and they are emphatically opposed to moving archival material from the country of origin. A condition of the funding was that in the process of cleaning and sorting, we undertake some digitising work, and that the British Library would make this material available online.

### An Endangered Archives Project

The three-month project began in January 2016, almost 18 months after I had first visited the site. It involved a range of tasks: from cleaning and rearranging the material, to reading and sorting the papers, and producing a comprehensive catalogue. The day to day work in the room was undertaken by four of us: myself, Paul Mwangi (the parish social worker) and David Kinya and Kevin Tongi - two recent graduates in Archive and Records Management. We were supported by consultant Margaret Karanja and by the British Institute in Eastern Africa. The budget allowed for us to pay agreeable wage to the local staff on the project.

Our main aims was to establish the extent of the collection. In order to do this, we needed to physically re-arrange the boxes so they were accessible for rudimentary analysis. We took all the boxes off the collapsing, splintering shelving and arranged them, in piles, on the ground and on tables in the room. About two days into this we found copies of a typewritten inventory of the whole collection, stashed away in an unmarked cardboard carton. We used this inventory to arrange the boxes in and audit the material. As we sorted, we found that it was often the case that the files inside a particular box did not correspond to the code on the box, or the documents in a file did not correspond to the file name. Nevertheless, after reorganising the material, we established that most of it was present.

About four weeks into the project, we took all the boxes out of the room, piling them neatly, in order, on the staircase. With the room thus emptied, we were able to give it a thorough clean, removing a disused tank full of stagnant water in the process. We fitted ventilation and new shelving.
While the new storage was being installed, we carried the boxes up the stairs, onto the roof of the church. On the roof – where there is a strong breeze - we set up tables, and systematically went through each box, one at a time, using soft brushes to remove the dust. The dusted documents were then returned to the bell-tower room.

Going through the documents in this way, I gradually gleaned a good sense of the contents of the collection. On top of this, I had been granted unrestricted access to the archive by the church, and provided with a key to the archive and office, so I was able to arrive early and work until late on my own, going through particular parts of the collection that were relevant to my research. After six weeks, I had ascertained a sense of which parts of the collection would be suitable for digitising. During the second half of the project, using an SLR camera and lighting equipment, we digitized a small sample of material: three boxes (13 files, about 1,000 individual documents).

Dr Arthur Must Fall?
In 1970, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa made the remarkable decision to invite writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o, a Marxist and an avowed atheist, to address the annual general assembly. The moderator of the PCEA at the time was Reverend Gatu, the man who had helped me to access the archive. Gatu was a close friend of Ngugi’s. Like Gatu, Ngugi (despite his atheism) believed that Christianity should be unmoored from “European” values. In his address at St Andrews Church he rehearsed arguments central to his 1965 novel *The River Between*. Ngugi declared to the congregation that the Church of Scotland Mission, with its “highly strict puritan tradition”:

- could not separate the strictly Christian dogma or doctrine from the European scale of values and from European
customs. The evidence that you were saved was not whether you were a believer in and a follower of Christ, and accepted all men as equal [...] it was whether you dressed as Europeans did, whether you had acquired European good manners, liked European hymns and tunes, and of course whether you had refused to have your daughter circumcised.

Gutiri Muthungu na Mubia, Ngugi quipped: “there is no difference between the European [settler] and the missionary priest”. He likened Dr Arthur, the head of the CSM between 1911 and 1937, to Cecil Rhodes.

The first I had known of Ngugi’s address was when I read a transcript of it, in the archive, amidst grime and chaos, when we were going through the boxes. It resonated because, of course, the point had not been lost on me that as we were dusting-down, tidying-up, and restoring, the material remains of Dr Arthur’s Church of Scotland Mission, elsewhere in Africa and Britain, statues of Rhodes were (I thought, rightly) being taken down. It caused a degree of discomfort.

A key insight from recent critical scholarship on archives has encouraged us to see them as themselves “artefacts of history”. The point of much of this literature has been to puncture and problematize the status of the archive. It has emphasised the way archives, in conferring upon the documents they contain the status of “incontrovertible evidence”, function in maintaining regimes of truth and credibility. The archive has been described as “a panopticon whose claim to total knowledge is matched by its capacity for

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8 A copy of the address is printed in Ngugi wa Thiong’o. Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics. London: Heinemann, 1972, under the title “Church, Culture and Politics”, 31-36.

total surveillance”.

Engaging with this literature while I was undertaking the project, I was stuck by the ways in which our work in the bell tower was almost a reversal of this: locked away to decay in a darkened room the PCEA had little authority when we found it in October 2014. Our project was bringing it back to life.

Of course, when we put the application to the British Library together I was keenly aware of the ethical questions surrounding digitisation, and its uneasy parallels to colonial practices: British funders; “mining” the raw material; processing it to make it available to online audience that would be comprised mostly of British or western consumers. I also had a sense of the ways (as Shireen Ally and Liam Buckley have noted in greater detail) the project came dangerously close to reproducing and repeating imperial linguistic tropes and practices: a moment of “discovery”; an intrepid white researcher with “local” assistants; an exploration of a dark, dangerous space; a taming and ordering of chaos.

But I was less sensitive to how resurrecting this colonial archive meant actively interrupting an on-going process of ruination. How, us saving from destruction what we considered to be material of immense historical significance might entail a disruption of local historical memory. If our intrusion into the PCEA’s treasure chest, our exhuming, cleaning, re-arranging, and ordering of the heaps and piles of matter once potent, meant re-configuring the role of the past in the present, then on what grounds can we justify and legitimise the restoration and preservation of all this “stuff”?

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Why Preserve?

Though a handful of individuals within the church were keenly interested in the archive’s preservation, generally our project to restore the archive was met with little enthusiasm and a lack of interest. The employees at St Andrews and the parishioners sometimes seemed bewildered as to why we would want to spend our time in this way. Our project was supported by the PCEA - who allowed us to work without impediment - but, nevertheless, the impetus and funding for it came from the outside: what really drove the project was my personal (and professional) interest in the collection.

I was forcefully reminded of this one weekend, about half way into the project, when I left the work in the bell tower to undertake some follow-up oral history interviews in PCEA parishes around the town of Nyeri, about 60 miles north of Nairobi. I had arranged with the secretary for the archive to be swept and mopped while I was away. Returning the following Monday, I was alarmed to find that a wooden box, together with its contents (various bits of paper that had been strewn on the ground underneath the old shelving) had been taken out of the room by the cleaner who had thrown it onto the fire at the back of the church’s premises and burned it along with the church’s general waste.\(^{12}\) When I informed the secretary she looked up from her desk and shook her head saying - “eh! These people, they do not know about archives” – before returning to her work.

It was an attitude with which I had become familiar. Ironically, it was something the secretary herself (as the gatekeeper to the bell tower room) had been accused of. Indeed, a number of

\(^{12}\) I do not think there was anything “important” in the wooden box that was burned. Mostly it consisted of multiple copies of glossy brochures advertising the luxury apartments built by the PCEA in 2015. Shoved into the corner of the room, it certainly would have looked like rubbish.
people– academic historians and laypersons alike – had implicitly or explicitly contended that the archive had been left to decay because of incompetence and indifference. Not far beneath the surface of this explanation was a stereotyped view of Africans as a people without history and a people with a disregard for history. A tempered version of this argument was presented to me one day by one gentleman in the church cafeteria: “You,” he said, “you have your archives, us we have oral stories passed on by our grandparents.” I was told by church members that there was no interest in the archive because writing and record-keeping does not come naturally to Africans. Thinking of Ngugi and the sheer volume of material written by those early Gikuyu political actors lying in the boxes up in archive I was left unconvinced by this argument.

Indeed lack of resources, incompetence, disregard for history, and an aversion to written documents are inadequate as explanations for the condition in which the archive was found in 2014. The PCEA lacks neither the means nor the expertise to maintain its archive. St Andrews church in particular oozes wealth and power. The congregation is comprised of doctors, lawyers, bankers, politicians, and teachers. It costs 100 Kenyan Shillings per hour to park in the car park, if you can get a space among the large cars and 4x4s. The courtyard is kept spotless, the flowerbeds resplendent. Polished shoes, ironed shirts, and “good manners” might have been lampooned by Ngugi but they are taken very seriously at St Andrews church.

If the presence of the messy decaying archive seems incongruous with this place – where the upkeep of things matters – this is all the more puzzling when we take into account that this is a church that exercises a strong rhetorical commitment to its “History”. There are toxic histories of colonialism in central Kenya (not least among them,
the horrors of the violent conflict known as “Mau Mau”) but for the members of the PCEA the story of the missionaries, Christianity, and Gikuyu is empathically not one of them. Its churches are littered with plaques, monuments and memorials to the Scottish missionaries. Indeed I was amused but not surprised when I discovered Ngugi’s address was interrupted by a member of the congregation, “a wiry old man visibly choking with anger” who “lept to the floor […] shaking his walking stick menacingly towards the front [and] warned the speaker to seek immediate repentance in prayer.”13 History is a recurring motif of Sunday sermons as preachers present to the congregation narratives of past progress — of civilisation achieved through discipline, obedience, and industry — and possible futures of decline if the order of the olden days is not maintained, if children stop obeying their parents and wives stop obeying their husbands. These patterns of thought, practice, and speech, I am inclined to think, are just as compelling examples of “imperial debris” as the paper in the bell tower.

When I was advised not to trouble myself with the archive that lurked above the organised, pristine space of the church, it was never clear whether the warning referred to the hazardous physical condition of the room or, as implied by the statement that there were already pamphlets that condensed the history for me, the demanding intellectual task of working through complex information. But whichever way the archive in the bell tower room embodied a history less comfortable than that accessible in church sermons or published pamphlets.

In defence of the project, then, I suggest that the archive had been left to deteriorate because it was deemed neither useful nor relevant to the leaders who have the power and authority to restore it. The PCEA archive forces an engagement with an ambiguous, entangled history of collaboration, exchange, connection, convergence, conflict and disagreement; a contingent history that actually allows us to think about different, possible futures. It reveals an open history that is irreplaceable to straightforward, coherent messages- different people will interpret it differently. With this, the unglamorous, tedious, painstaking work of restoring a colonial archive can become a useful, even perhaps subversive action, a productive activity that can facilitate challenging entrenched views of the past and situations in the present.

“These Our Games” – Sport and the Church of Scotland Mission to Kenya, c. 1907–1937

Tom Cunningham

Abstract: In this article I use oral and documentary evidence gathered during recent fieldwork and archival research in the UK and Kenya to explore the ways in which the Church of Scotland Mission to Kenya attempted to use sport to “civilize” and “discipline” the people of Central Kenya. I make a case for the important contributions the topic of sport can make to the study of African and colonial history, and offer a comprehensive critique of the only book-length work which explores the history of sport in colonial Kenya, John Bale and Joe Sang’s Kenyan Running (1996).


Tom Cunningham is a PhD candidate in African Studies at the University of Edinburgh. His thesis is provisionally titled “Muscular Christianity: A Corporeal History of the Church of Scotland Mission to Kenya c.1907–1937.” His MSc thesis, upon which this article is in part based, was awarded the 2013 George “Sam” Shepperson Prize for the best University of Edinburgh Masters dissertation in African Studies or Africa and International Development dealing with a historical topic. E-mail: tom.cunningham@ed.ac.uk

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Introduction: A Great Football Match

On Monday 5 October 1909 Dr. Arthur of the Church of Scotland Mission to Kenya (CSM) took a team of boys from his mission station at Thogoto to Kabete for game of football against the Church Missionary Society. It was, Arthur later reported in the CSM’s bulletin for home parishes Kikuyu News, “A Great Football Match.” The respective mission schools proclaimed a “general holiday (…) in honour of the momentous occasion.” Accompanying Arthur and “his boys” were “a goodly following of supporters” including two female CSM missionaries, Mrs. Scott and Miss Stevenson, who “added much to the beauty if not the playing strength of the team.” The Director of Public Works for East Africa Protectorate, William MacGregor Ross, travelled up from Nairobi, to referee the game. Before the match, tea was served to the “ladies,” the team captains (Arthur and Leakey), and the referee.

The match itself receives scant attention in Arthur’s report; the result (Kabete 3 – Kikuyu 2) is mentioned only once. The match was “great” not for anything that happened on the pitch within ninety minutes of play, but because it contributed to no less than the advance of Christian civilization in this part of East Africa. “It was the first time they had ever seen a game of football,” Arthur wrote of the spectators; among them were “quite a number highly painted warriors, relics of a day fast giving place (…) to the playing fields of sport, in which manliness, courage, and unselfishness shall add their quota to the formation of true Christian character.” Arthur concludes his report thus:

1 This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council grant number ES/J500136/1. Early drafts were presented at the Graduate Interdisciplinary Network in European Studies (GRAINES) Summer School Menton, France in June 2013 and the Inter-Disciplinary.net 3rd Global Sport Conference at Mansfield College, Oxford in August 2014. I would like to thank Alfred Anangwe, Michael Cunningham, Felicity Cunningham, Matthew Carotenuto, Stephen Conway, Madeleine Grieve, John Lonsdale, Tom Molony, Paul Nugent, Brian Stanley, Bernhard Struck, and Michelle Sikes for their support and suggestions.

2 J(ohn) W. Arthur, “The Great Football Match,” Kikuyu News 9 (January 1909). Kikuyu News was a small journal/magazine produced by the CSM periodically. It ran from 1908 to 1958. The articles in Kikuyu News were authored by missionaries in Kenya for “home” (i.e. Scottish) audiences, they consist mainly of monthly and annual reports as well as anecdotes from “the field.” A primary function of the journal/magazine was to solicit funds from home parishes. A complete collection of Kikuyu News, in the form of eight, leather bound volumes (formerly owned by John Arthur himself) is now held at the University of Edinburgh’s Centre for Research Collections, located in the University of Edinburgh Library. To my knowledge this is the only publicly accessible complete collection of Kikuyu News. It has not been digitized.

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In closing let me say that it is our hope in these our games to stiffen the backbone of these our boys by teaching them manliness, good temper, and unselfishness – qualities amongst many others which have done so much to make many a Britisher, and which we hope to instil into our boys in such a way as to make them strong men indeed. Our belief is that our games may be, when properly controlled, a mighty channel through which God can work to the uplifting of this race. They need to be strengthened in the realm of their physical nature, where Satan so strongly reigns, and how better than by the substitution of their own evil dances by such a game as football, inherent in which are magnificent uplifting qualities.

Sport was an integral component of the CSM’s evangelistic enterprise. This was particularly so between 1907–1937, when John Arthur (Figure 1) was part of the mission. As a medical student Arthur broke the University of Glasgow record for 440 yards and captains the rugby team; while studying Tropical Medicine in London he had trials for the Scotland rugby team. During his three decades in East Africa he attempted to climb Mount Kenya eight times. John Arthur, who led the CSM from 1911, was undoubtedly the mission’s most renowned (and quotable) proponent of sport, but he was far from unique in his belief that sport could radically remake individuals and societies. Frequently and explicitly – in personal correspondence and in public reports, in home-made fundraising motion picture films and in private reminiscences – CSM missionaries expressed an unshakable confidence in the “uplifting” qualities of activities as seemingly frivolous as hitting balls with bats and running in circles. Nearly every edition of *Kikuyu News* contains updates on mission sports, often whole articles dedicated to particular initiatives or specific events. Sport was a regular feature of CSM life, pursued with intensity and invested with importance.

**Kenyan Running – A Critical Review**

In this article I explore the ways in which missionaries of the CSM used sport in their mission to the people of Central Kenya. In some ways, there is little that is remarkable about the CSM’s sporting evangelism: as

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J.A. Mangan has shown, many missionaries, educationalists, and administrators, elsewhere in Africa and the rest of the world at this time shared Arthur’s and the CSM’s commitment to sport. However, this research has had a surprisingly limited impact on historians of Africa. There are only a handful of studies which have explored how colonial sports programs operated on the ground, in specific settings at particular times, and how they were received and adapted according to the needs, actions, and circumstances.

and beliefs of local actors. With the notable exceptions of Stephan Miescher’s *Making Men in Ghana* and Markku Hokkanen’s study of the “games ethic” in Malawi, missionary sport initiatives in colonial Africa, in particular, have received scant scholarly attention. With a few notable exceptions, moreover, historical studies of sport in Africa have remained confined to “sports studies” or “sports history” where their capacity to have a broader influence on African and/or colonial history is restricted. My aim in this article, then, is not simply to explore the rich sporting history of the CSM but to make a case for the important contributions the topic of sport can make to understandings of the history of colonialism in Africa.

Throughout this article, I draw upon and critique John Bale and Joe Sang’s *Kenyan Running*. Published twenty years ago it remains the only book-length scholarly work in which the history of sport in Kenya is explored in any detail. Winner of the British Society of Sports History’s annual prize for “the best book in sports history on a British topic or by a British author,” *Kenyan Running* is a landmark text in sports history and continues to be widely read and widely cited. Upon publication it was hailed by leading luminary in the field John Nauright as “an excellent example of the virtues of a multidisciplinary approach to the social and cultural study of sport (...) one of the few detailed and sophisticated studies


of sport and society in Africa.”

Chris Jenkins, in *African Affairs*, called it “an excellent monograph” which “will be of interest to a wide readership including (...) specialists in African Studies.” However, the impact *Kenyan Running* has had on historians of Kenya can only be said to be slight and the work has failed to ignite a body of scholarship on the history of sport in Kenya. This article represents the first attempt to systematically and explicitly scrutinize Bale and Sang’s arguments.

*Kenyan Running* carries a bold claim: “When athletes from countries like Kenya reject their indigenous body cultures in favour of those of Europe or America they have, in a sense, been collaborating with imperialism.” Bale and Sang’s chief aim is to problematize the global success of Kenya’s distance runners, a phenomenon typically received uncritically by the mainstream media and sports fans. The authors do this by historicizing sport in Kenya. For Bale and Sang, sport, by which they mean “modern sport” or “achievement sport,” is “an essentially Western phenomenon:” it developed in a late-nineteenth century industrializing, imperializing, “European core” before “radiating outwards (...) to the rest of the world.” Modern sport is based on a “centimetre-gram-second model” and characterized by competition, standardization, and regulation. Its development in Kenya has seen “the relatively unrestricted and free movement of the pre-colonial period (...) replaced by the corset of running as racing with its starting and finishing lines and its geometrically arranged lane markings.”

Bale and Sang argue that “traditional Kenyan movement culture (...) has been exterminated; it has been the victim of cultural genocide.” In their analysis of “traditional Kenyan movement culture,” the authors acknowledge that in the wrestling, spear-throwing, and high-jump contests which were a part of initiation ceremonies “pre-modern Kenya did possess many forms of movement culture which were physical and competitive (italics added).” They also point out that “for some physical games measurements were made and victory given considerable significance” and that in some cases “prizes were awarded, high performances were demanded, and, to an extent, planned, physical training was required.” However, prior to colonization it was a “sensuous African body culture” which prevailed: physical contests took place in “open spaces,” used natural features such as trees or rivers to mark boundaries

16 Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 49.
17 Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 49.
or finish lines, and occurred spontaneously or were part of the rhythms of life-cycles or seasons. This Arcadian freedom was crushed when Europeans arrived in Kenya and began to use sport “as a form of social control.”

In the longest chapter of the book, indicatively titled, “Between Folk Games and Modern Sport,” Bale and Sang consider the period between 1900 and 1950. For them, this is the key phase in the transition “from the traditions of tribal folk activities to those of globalised modern sport.” It was “a liminal period (…) neither here nor there, betwixt and between” as initially folk games and modern sport co-exist; but ultimately the latter “replaced” the former. Bale and Sang’s emphasis is on the colonization of Kenya, in particular, the authoritarian and disciplinarian sports programs of the colonial administration, the military, and the police. They show that the colonial administration used sport “as an alternative to tribal dancing which was deemed sexually explicit, lascivious and hence undesirable” and as a means of creating “a fit workforce.” Bale and Sang draw particular attention to the use of “drill” in the training of the police and infantrymen; drill, they claim emphasized “the straight body in straight lines with no room for individual expression” and exemplified a “hygienist mode of body culture which contrasted with the more sensuous and fluid movement culture of the indigenous people.”

For Bale and Sang the history of sport in Kenya is about European dominance over Africa. It is a domination that continues today: “Political independence for Kenya did not involve a decolonisation of the body and little has been done to revive the nation’s traditional folk-games.” The “success” of Kenya’s distance-runners, for Bale and Sang, is little more than “a classic example of cultural imperialism.” Herein lie both the strengths and weaknesses of Kenyan Running. The chief value of Kenyan Running is its claim sport is a historically particular phenomenon: a “body culture” that is neither natural nor necessary but has been produced out of concrete circumstances. The authors invite us to see sport – too often conceptualized as politically-neutral and value-free – as a highly problematic cultural activity, intimately connected to the circulation of power. The story of global sport, they rightly claim, cannot be separated from the history of colonialism. However, Bale and Sang conceptualize historical change in colonial Africa in a way which most historians would

18 Bale and Sang, Kenyan Running, 97, 101.
19 Bale and Sang, Kenyan Running, 76.
20 Bale and Sang, Kenyan Running, 47.
22 Bale and Sang, Kenyan Running, 76.
23 Bale and Sang, Kenyan Running, 72.
24 Bale and Sang, Kenyan Running, 63.
25 Bale and Sang, Kenyan Running, 64.
contest: all power and agency is located in a monolithic “Europe” and an
undifferentiated mass of Europeans effortlessly spread their fully-formed
and universally agreed-upon culture to a docile “Rest-of-the-world.” There are
no contests, struggles, or disagreements. Indeed, at one point Bale and Sang
explicitly state: “The passive reaction of the recipient culture” meant “early
twentieth century proselytisers quite straightforwardly imposed athletics.”26
Not without irony, Bale and Sang are in full agreement with imperialists
like John Arthur that games like football and athletics are “our games;” by
playing them, Kenyans automatically become “Britishers.”

Bale and Sang present history schematically. Events unfold with an in-
everitable teleology, becoming more rational, more secular, and more
“European” over time. In their narrative there is no room for contradiction
or ambiguity. It is perhaps for this reason that missionaries receive very
little attention in *Kenyan Running*—there is no evidence in the footnotes or
bibliography to suggest that the authors consulted any of the extensive mis-
sionary archives in Nairobi, Edinburgh, Birmingham, or London. The
three pages dedicated to missionary sport is justified on the basis that “mis-
sionaries were not always interested in teaching athletics.”27 Bale and Sang
find the school drill at mission stations interesting because it “aided and
abetted (…) the maintenance of imperial rule.”28 Less useful to their
argument are missionaries’ carnivalesque sports days and the “culture
of laughter” which pervaded them, and the missionary emphasis on
sport for “welfare” rather than for competition. These are mentioned
but not explored; the implication is that they are mere “anomalies” in
the overall movement from folk-games to modern sport.

The problems with *Kenyan Running* are in no small part attributable to
the authors’ method. The bulk of their evidence is published material
authored by European colonizers. There is a smattering of archival mate-
rial, but most of their argument has been made from books that can be
accessed from most major British libraries.

Moreover, with the exception of Jomo Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya
and some works by Ngugi wa Thiongo, they do not use texts authored
by Kenyan people. Nor do they use oral testimonies as evidence in their
historically-oriented chapters. Bale and Sang are convinced the history of
modern sport in Kenya can only be told from what they call a “global” per-
pective. This is a valid premise but in attempting to locate their story in
a global narrative, they elevate their analysis above the level of the local and
everyday. This prevents them from penetrating the contests, struggles,
emotions, and actions of real people.

The result is an abstract and overly theoretical account in which all
Europeans, by virtue of being European, have undiluted power; and all

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27 Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 75.
28 Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 72–75.
Africans, by virtue of being African, can only ever be victims, collaborators, or at best “resisters.”

These weaknesses are especially problematic given the subject matter is sport: an intensely subjective and experiential activity. One problem facing any scholar who approaches the topic of sport is the challenge of producing an account which both meets the theoretical and empirical sophistication required by an academic audience and goes some way, at the very least, to take into account the highly subjective experiences of athletes and fans. A question which Bale and Sang cannot answer is “why do people play sport?” Indeed, it is a question with which they do not even engage: Bale and Sang make little attempt to understand sport from the perspective of its primary actors, expressing little empathy with them, even on occasion outright hostility. Thus they ask, as they draw their argument to a close: “Can racing around a standardised 400m synthetic track 25 times, routinely metronomised in a concrete stadium, be regarded as progress? (…) what sense is there in striving oneself to run in circles faster than any other?”

Sport at the Station

The example that follows is based on the notion that global history need not necessarily entail such a sweeping, macro, approach. I address broader issues of sport and colonialism by scaling down the analysis to specific sites of activity, to particular times, and to specific actors. I explore, in detail, the history of the CSM’s attempt to use sport to “civilize” and “discipline” the bodies and minds of the people of Central Kenya. In addition to some of the published texts cited by Bale and Sang, I draw upon recent fieldwork and archival research in and around Edinburgh, London, Nairobi, and the three former centers of CSM mission work in Central Kenya: Thogoto, Tumutumu, and Chogoria. Broadly speaking I make three arguments. First, Bale and Sang are mistaken to marginalize the importance of missionaries in the history of sport; of all of the colonizers it was missionaries who sought the most far reaching changes for indigenous body cultures and made the most thoroughgoing attempts to spread new forms of recreation. Second, sport is an important topic for historians of colonial Africa not simply because it was a means by which colonizers

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29 Bale and Sang, Kenyan Running, 170.
31 Interviews were conducted during four weeks of research in Nairobi and Chogoria between June and July 2013 and twelve weeks of research in Nairobi and Nyeri between September 2014 and December 2014. Audio copies are available upon request.
sought control, but because it was a site of contest, struggle, and exchange. With particular attention on the chaotic and irrational aspects of missionary sport, I question the rigidity of Bale and Sang’s chronology of the diffusion of sport. Third, and most importantly, I argue that the topic of sport in general, and missionary sport in particular, can deepen our understanding of modalities of colonial power. At mission stations sport was undoubtedly used as a form of social control but at the same time, it was frequently experienced as individually empowering and enjoyable.

The foundation of the mission enterprise was the mission station. The CSM had three stations – Thogoto (founded in 1898), Tumutumu (founded in 1909), and Chogoria (founded in 1918) – each with satellite churches, out-schools, and dispensaries. The stations were large both in terms of acreage and population. Thogoto, by far the largest, was 3,000 acres and included vast coffee and potato plantations. In 1925 Thogoto station had 150 boys in permanent residence, 716 attending the “central school” located on the site and 1,281 church members; there were 3,456 athomi (mission scholars [literally “readers’]) attending out-schools of Tumutumu; Chogoria had 200 people attending the central mission school. On each site there were hospitals, schools, dormitories, industrial workshops, farms, and – of course – playing fields.

The stations were deliberately set apart from white settlements, located in the African reserves. Situated on hilltops with large stone buildings, mission stations were deliberately intended to radically interrupt the indigenous landscape. “On entering the mission estate one is struck at once with the contrast to what one sees outside its boundaries” said Horace Philp in 1910. The CSM characterized the space beyond the station as dark, unknown, chaotic, even dangerous; inside meanwhile was bright, spacious, knowable, and rational.


33 University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, GEN 762.137, “Church of Scotland Mission Estate at Kikuyu & Sale Thereof” (19 October 1926).


According to the missionaries, village life was “heathen” but not diabolic; the people lived not so much in sin but without sin; in a dimly perceived spirit world with little sense of moral responsibility and little ability to recognize the self, a necessary precursor to having a personal relationship with God.\textsuperscript{37} The task of Christian mission, as the CSM saw it, was to awaken (or, we might say, manufacture) the individual subject which, it was believed, lay dormant within each Gikuyu villager: “The power of the Gospel, together with training of mind and body (…) [will] uplift them in thought and conduct, and (…) call forth God-given abilities which have lain buried in ignorance during unknown centuries,” reasoned Arthur Barlow.\textsuperscript{38} The mission station (see Figure 2) facilitated the CSM’s attempt at subject formation: with meticulously planned daily timetables and tightly managed, highly visible spaces the CSM hoped “to fill up their day and develop them on every side.”\textsuperscript{39} Sport was a key component in this enterprise.

It is possible to discern three different forms of sport at the station: drill, games, and sports days. Here, Peterson Muchangi, who attended Tumutumu school in the 1920s describes the drill:

Now, the trumpet would go a few minutes before eight. By eight sharp you must be lining up ready to go to the prayers, into the church. Then, I don’t remember how many minutes, we prayed, then to class rooms (…) There was a time and a place for exercise (…) we did that kind of drilling: “turn right,” “about turn,” and so and so on like soldiers (…) ha ha you see (…) and that is part of physical training (…) that is the time when you learn “about turn,” “about whatever,” jumping, you know, holding your arms like that and bowing – “up,” “down,” – that’s what really we called the “P.E.” [physical exercise].\textsuperscript{40}

The drill was an important feature of the school timetable, often the first activity of the day. It remains an abiding memory of most who attended CSM mission schools: many of my respondents began speaking about it before they knew of my interest in sport. Most described it in a similar way to Muchangi, relating it to a specific time, comparing it with military


\textsuperscript{39} University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, GEN 762.7, John Arthur to his Mother (22 February 1907).

\textsuperscript{40} Peterson Muchangi (interview 21 November 2014).
training, and either demonstrating to me the sequence of maneuvers or adopting a different tone of voice to declare “right, left, up, down, turn.” Two films which detail everyday life at Chogoria station made in 1931 and 1933 by CSM missionary A.C. Irvine wonderfully illustrate the importance of drill for the CSM. These silent black-and-white films, which together run over ninety minutes, contain extended footage of mission-children attempting to follow their instructor’s sequence of exercises. The two silent black and white films, “Chogoria” (1931) and “Chogoria Missionary Centre” (1933), are held at the British Film Institute archive, Stephen Street, London ID numbers 10981 and 540654. See: http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/228 and http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/413 (accessed December 2014).
initiatives at the mission, drill was the most utilitarian. Nevertheless its purpose was not simply to improve physical fitness; as one missionary explained, the point of the drill was “to teach neatness, punctuality, and prompt obedience.”

“The simple education given will enable them to read the scriptures and equip them for a better, healthier, happier life, for it embraces, besides the three R’s, hygiene, drill, and football.” While drill often opened the school day, games often closed it. Games – as we saw in Arthur’s match report – were thought of in loftier terms than drill, as a form of moral instruction that worked “wonders in teaching unselfishness and team work.” They could be competitive and some of the football tournaments and athletics meetings John Arthur organized must be considered among some of the earliest organized sports competitions in Kenya. (For an early CSM photograph of a game of football in play see Figure 3, below). While drill was a routine and anonymized form of physical exercise, games brought the characteristics of individuals to the fore. In serious competitions, missionaries could be ebullient in their praise of certain individuals: after the Empire Day sports of 1911 Barlow said: “The competitors made a very good display. The heroes of the day were Kahuho, our oldest boarder, as a runner, and Muriuki at the high jump.”

As well as being part of the curriculum and taking the form of organized competitions, games were also encouraged simply as a form of recreation. Gikuyu “had to be reached and turned from (…) the lazy, somewhat sensuous lives in which they passed their days (…) new methods of recreation had to be inculcated,” said Arthur.

It pleased the missionaries to see their scholars break out into an impromptu game of football as they considered it a proper way to release energy which might otherwise be expended in activities deemed nefarious. Marion Stevenson’s biographer writes of an occasion when, upon witnessing a ball game, Stevenson rejoiced “that they had this healthy outlet for their energies (…) [an] outlet in great contrast to the evils of village life which all too soon sullied their young minds.”

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47 Scott, A Saint in Kenya, 209.
Likewise Horace Philp celebrated his boys’ decision to play football and other “games of skill” instead of “their native forms of amusement” which are “associated with the vilest songs and viler deeds of which we cannot even speak.”

Sometimes missionaries played sport with their Gikuyu charges. Instances of this are rare, and appear to be a feature of earlier, rather than later, mission work; not one of my respondents, most of whom were born in the 1920s and 1930s, recalled a missionary ever playing games with them. A few examples can be found in John Arthur’s letters to his mother during his first year of missionary work in 1907. In one letter about his houseboys Wamgata and Gobe, for example, Arthur claimed to, “always play games with them from about 4 to 5.30. We have been having drill, shots at goal and through-the-mill. The latter takes on tremendously and is an excellent introduction for rugby.” In another he writes of having played “a game of soccer with the native workers, about 8 a side. We had a pretty hot game and as I had already done my twelve miles, I was quite glad when it was over.” Arthur Barlow, also played sport with athomi. At the 1910 Christmas celebrations at Kikuyu, for example, Barlow “played but having marched the 26 miles from Tumutumu the same day did not feel very vigorous.” Barlow gives us a glimpse of the fact that mixed games may have provided a chance to invert the existing racial power structures: commenting on “the old African method of showing no mercy whatsoever to the defeated,” Barlow, who was on the losing team, wrote: “I was pained (...) by the treatment the Kikuyu spectators gave us, ‘slanging’ us rather badly: special derision was directed at myself, particularly by the senior teachers.”

CSM sport rarely conformed to the “centimetre-gram-second” model integral to Bale and Sang’s argument; and it rarely (if ever) took place on “carefully prepared running track[s].” “Modern sports” like football and athletics were accompanied by a host of other less orthodox activities such as tennikoits, tug-of-war (see Figure 4), obstacle racing, and a high jump contest in which the contestants, with a running jump, had to clear a rope held up at each end by two people. The clearest expression of the fact that missionary sport rarely conformed to Bale and Sang’s disciplinarian model were sports days (see Figures 4 and 5). These, moreover,

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49 University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, GEN762.17, John Arthur to his mother (22 April 1907).
50 University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, GEN762.20, John Arthur to his mother (21 May 1907).
51 University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Barlow Papers, GEN 1786/2, Arthur Barlow, “Circular Letter No. 2” (28 February 1911).
52 Bale and Sang, Kenyan Running, 63 and 98.
53 A tennikoit or tenniquoit is a small rubber ring. Though many different games were played with the rubber ring, it seems that the most common form
were by far the most spectacular display of missionary sport, took up the most time, and drew the largest crowds. Contrary to the implication of Bale and Sang’s teleology, which sees sport becoming increasingly serious and secular over time, the size and significance of these occasions did not diminish between 1907 and 1937. If anything they got bigger and more spectacular with each year.54

“The usual sports took place on Boxing Day and were a great success,” reported A.C. Irvine, superintendent of Chogoria station, in his annual report of 1933:

> We sent round invitations to all the chiefs, and seventeen, that is all but two, came, many being accompanied by retainers in full war-paint, feathered head-dresses, eyes ringed with blue, red and white, carrying shields, spears and swords. There were over 2,000 people present. Events began at 10.30. At 1 p.m. the chiefs were treated to gramophone records and tea.55

Sports days took place on the major days in the colonial missionary’s calendar: Christmas, New Year, Easter, Empire Day, and St. Andrews’ Day. Their tone was celebratory; their aim was to showcase, or “invent,” the traditions of both Europe and Africa.56 Native dress was encouraged and “native sports” occupied an important place on the schedule. “The native events in the sports were the most popular,” it was said after the 1927 Christmas games at Tumutumu, “the men were pleased to show their skill in shooting with bow and arrow or throwing the knob-kerry and casting the spear.”57

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57 Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 263. A knobkerry is a form of club used traditionally as a weapon, primarily for hunting animals.
Sports days verged on the bizarre. A 1910 event included a race which required competitors to go “through a box, then over a trestle covered in brushwood, under the tennis net lengthways, through two suspended barrels, and lastly under one of the school floor mats, pegged down, and with a liberal coating of flour.” Typical sports included pillow fighting, pole climbing, and banana eating competitions. Eclectic events were matched by eclectic prizes: sheep, pieces of soap, handkerchiefs, spoonfuls of salt.

The Struggle for Sport

The “Third Annual Sports [Day]” which took place on New Years’ Day 1909 were, apparently, “the best of all three.” The original plan was to start at 12.30, but “as usual the people were rather slow at gathering.” Among the guests was Chief Kinanjui who brought with him 150 followers, who “watched the sports to the end.” The main event was the obstacle race. They were “under the control of a European and an older boy” but their attention lapsed, giving rise to an “infinitely funny” episode. It is recalled here by Belle Scott:

- We suddenly saw a wild rush without any apparent objective round the track of Kenanjui’s young maidens. Dr Scott at once suggested to draw the tape and make it a race. This they successfully did, but to their horror and to my great amusement they were in a moment swamped by unsuccessful candidates gripping their arms and clothes as desirous of recognition.

Because the women’s bodies were coated in the customary red ochre, Dr. Scott “emerged from the mob as if they had been dipped in a paint pot.” Kenanjui, we are told, laughed at “us and our strange ways.”

It is not true that “early twentieth century proselytisers quite straightforwardly imposed athletics.” Even in situations in which they seemingly occupied positions of control, the missionaries’ power to enforce sport was not absolute: the guests were late; the “maiden” initiated the race; the missionaries were laughed at. Bale and Sang argue that owing to its rule-bound nature, sport is a counter example to Robert Young’s dictum that

59 Captured in the Irvine films – see note 41.
60 Scott, A Saint in Kenya, 136.
64 Mrs. (I.G.) Scott, “Kenanjui.”
65 Bale and Sang, Kenyan Running, 168.
“a culture never repeats itself perfectly away from home;” “the cultural landscape of sport does, of necessity.”

But missionaries frequently found, to their dismay, that this was not the case. When, for example, George Grieve’s Kikuyu School team were eliminated from the Arthur Cup, he wrote a scathing match report complaining “Reuben Kinanjui played a good game but for fighting was suspended (…) James Waithaka is young and a good player, but he must learn to play “clean” he was responsible for his team’s defeat.” The CSM were acutely aware of the fact that the meanings they wanted to instill through sport were not automatic, but had to be


worked out, asserted, and enforced: “they must learn to play ‘cleaner’ football than they do,” Grieve ended his match report, “‘dirty’ football never pays and gives the team a bad name.” The problem of explaining the rules was of course compounded when the missionary instructor concerned could not speak the local language. “The boys have not been awfully keen on the drill lately,” reflected Arthur in one letter, “there have been a number of reasons for this, among which may be mentioned the difficulty of learning the drill under English terms.”

Linus RuKenya Kubai who was born near the CSM’s Chogoria station in 1925 but did not become a Christian told me that though the station was seen as “separate” from the village, there was little the missionaries could do to enforce this and there was much movement between the two. Even “followers of Irvine” (as he called them) continued to participate in village dances:
So here now you see there are two groups. The one that followed and the other group (...) Even those with Irvine (...) they will learn from there to come and entertain. So they are not fully there. They belonged to two groups, eh? Maybe in the morning (...) some are here, others are there. But when it comes to go to the dance (...) they go back to the song, to the tradition (...) maybe until the following day or so. And at the same time the same people who are there, in the tradition, some would also move from them to join the (...) other party of Clive Irvine (...) So they also exchange. Some from there to here (...) others from here to there.69

Mission-educated African teachers were more responsible for the spread of sport and games in Kenya than white European missionaries. Between 1907 and 1937 the number of Scottish missionaries at each of the three CSM stations rarely exceeded ten. As John Lonsdale has pointed out, “many black Christians scarcely met a white missionary, and were increasingly less likely to do so [during the twentieth century].”70 It was Africans who taught Waruhiu Itote (Mau Mau “General China”) at his CSM out-school at Kiangurue; and it was a Gikuyu man called “Kamau” who had been educated by the CSM who “introduced soccer to Stoton,” the Rift Valley Primary School to which Mugo Gatheru went.71

The methods of out-school teachers did not always please the CSM missionaries. In 1928 an inspector of a Tumutumu out-school reported: “There is still an uncomfortable lack of discipline in the place. Instead of real football they punt a ball about; dormitory discipline seems lax: I saw male teachers joining in the girls’ games.”72 On a visit to an outstation at Muthambe in 1934, Irvine was alarmed to discover “the games side had been neglected (...) Jonathan had not realised that to leave football outside of the day’s program would be very unwise.”73 As the number of out-schools increased, supervision became increasingly difficult for the CSM: at a teachers’ meeting in 1936 W. Scott Dickson, superintendent at Tumutumu, was shocked when it was reported back to him that many of his out-schools “had no facilities for football.”74

69 Linus RuKenya Kubai (interview 10 July 2013).
70 Lonsdale, “Kikuyu Christianities,” 158.
72 Kenya National Archives, AV/7/7/7, “Supervisor of Technical Education to E.E. Biss.”
74 Tumutumu Parish Archive, Tumutumu, “W. Scott Dickson to District Commissioner of Nyeri – Re: Space for Playing fields (5 September 1936).”
Sport and Colonialism

Few Europeans in colonial Kenya shared the missionaries’ enthusiasm for spreading sport among the African population. For most whites Kenya represented not “an ideal place for the propagation of the Gospel of Christ among the African people,” but a “White Man’s Country:” “a tabula rasa, an almost untouched and sparsely inhabited country, where we can do as we will.”75 Most expatriate settlers lived geographically and socially apart from the indigenous population, in white townships and white reserves. There they created for themselves a most lively sport and leisure scene: there were “more farmers’ associations, cricket clubs, golf clubs, women’s institutes, gardening societies, masonic lodges, dining clubs per head of the white population in Kenya than in any other community in the world.”76 The impulse behind these clubs and societies was of course not to alter indigenous life, but to create and affirm social bonds between whites.77 Membership and participation was racially exclusive, they worked to assert rather than disrupt divisions between Europeans and Africans. For most whites, sport was important but only among their own community. Nairobi’s marquee sporting events, the bi-annual “Race Weeks,” were for settlers and officials only.78 Planters and farmers who had relocated to Kenya in search of profit, felt little need to promote sport for Africans. On some farms in the Rift Valley sport was even banned for African workers on the grounds that it wasted energy needed for labor.79

Bale and Sang grossly overestimate the extent to which Kenya’s colonizers were unified by a desire to transform indigenous “body cultures.” Many whites were, in fact, actively hostile to the idea. A strong strand of white opinion held “that African society should be kept separate from European society and should be encouraged to follow a separate plan.”80 This attitude gained traction during the inter-war years when fears of social disintegration caused by so-called “detribalized natives” became acute; Eric Dutton, private secretary to the Governor between 1925 and 1930, spoke

79 Gatheru, Child of Two Worlds, 10.
for many administrators and settlers at this time when he expressed his belief that “the native was a better man as a man before we touched him.”

In this politically fraught climate, criticism was frequently directed at missionaries who were accused of threatening the stability of the colony. On the one hand, the advance of Christianity, literacy, and other so-called “European” cultural forms was said to inflate the confidence of an indigenous population who should be subservient. As early as 1910, trader John Boyes had expressed his belief that “the primary mistake, from which most trouble springs (…) is the assumption, to which all missionaries seem to be officially compelled to subscribe, that the African is, or can be made by education, the moral and intellectual equal of the white man.”

Lord Cranworth likewise wrote: “[I]t has been my sad experience (…) to find (…) that as soon as a native is ‘converted’ (…) he frequently becomes an exceedingly idle and troublesome fellow.” The missionaries’ forthright and uncompromising commitment to restructuring even the slightest details indigenous life, meanwhile, was considered unnecessarily confrontational and was criticized for inviting unneeded political turbulence.

For this reason, when missionaries called for the colonial government to legislate against the Gikuyu custom of female circumcision in 1927, they met the trenchant opposition of not only sections of Gikuyu society but Europeans as well.

The colonial administration was far from the unified and coherent force portrayed by Bale and Sang. Caught between the conflicting desire to, on the one hand, transform the rural population into a modernized, productive, and industrious workforce and, on the other, maintain social order by preserving “traditional” “tribal” structures, and all the while lacking capital and personnel, the colonial administration did not pursue the spread of sport with anything like the same degree of


intensity as the missionaries. Indeed, outside of mission stations it was not until the third decade of the twentieth century that there were any significant attempts to promote sport among the masses. Many will agree with Matthew Carotenuto’s observation that “prior to the 1920s, organized African sporting opportunities of any kind were limited. It was not until the establishment of the Arab and African Sports Association (AASA) in the mid 1920s that organized sport took off.”

Before the Second World War the colonial government had neither the resources nor the inclination to encourage sport among the civilian population to any significant degree. Sport was, however, a key feature of the training of the military and the police. It is these sports programs upon which Bale and Sang base most of their claims. They were of a remarkably different character to missionary sports programs: disciplinarian and authoritarian, their chief aim was to produce an obedient and healthy workforce. Contrary to what we have seen of sport at the mission station, Timothy Parsons writes “there was nothing particularly complex about the training of infantrymen.” Games, sports days, and competitions – major elements of the missionary enterprise – were not common in police and military training until the late 1930s. Until then, the primary emphasis was on drill. Police Officer C.I. Semphill explained in 1928 why this was the “best” form of physical exercise:

The basic feature of the course is drill (…) it is undoubtedly the ground work which makes so much possible (…) it is through the drill that the recruit is first taught alertness, how his muscles and mind are keyed up to concert pitch, and learns how best to concentrate. He would present a far greater problem to train without drill, little as it may have to do with Police work proper. It is also the best medium for inculcating discipline.

In government schools a similar attitude to physical education seems to have prevailed. For example, in a letter to the Director of Education in which he advocated a “standardised form” of drill for all government schools

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based upon the training of the Kings African Rifles, G.W.B. Huntingford, Principal of Nandi Industrial School, expressed his opinion that while “football and other games are of the greatest value as training and should not be neglected. The finest disciplinary training, however, is on the parade ground.”

The 1922 Education Commission Report, meanwhile, asserted that “the primary object of Education should be to develop physical and mental energy and efficiency.”

For the CSM, by contrast, physical transformation through sport was only a means to an end. The CSM spoke not only of muscle and concentration, but of spirit and character too; they sought to create neither athletes nor healthy workers but self-possessing, self-disciplining, self-knowing Christians. “We firmly believe,” said William Blakie, physical education instructor at the CSM Kikuyu Boys school, “that all this physical training with its emphasis on fitness and clean-living is of real importance from the point of view of character building, and our confident hope is that our boys may grow up to be stronger, keener and better disciplined Christians because of it.”

Megan Vaughan notes that in colonial discourse “there was a strong strand of thinking which held that Africans were hardly capable of being individuals at all.” An exception, Vaughan shows, were Christian missionaries who were “deeply concerned” with the creation of new, individualized, identities. Her observations readily apply to sport in colonial Kenya. While the physical exercise programs in the military and the police force were specifically designed to inculcate the communal identity said to be “natural” to the African, the missionaries emphasized the cultivation of “character.” There was a powerful individualizing ethos to the CSM’s sports programs. Talented and successful school athletes were singled out for praise, rewarded with prizes on school speech days, and had their photograph, short biography, and sporting triumph, featured in Kikuyu News.

The mission encouraged sporting ability as a “source of the self:” something an individual possessed, should feel a degree of pride about, and should nurture through practice and hard work.

91 Kenya National Archives, AV 1/250, “Physical Training.”
95 Vaughan, Curing Their Ills, 23–24. See also 55–76.
97 See for example: Blaikie, “Physical Training – Part II.”
It is notable that attempts by the CSM to coerce athomi into organized games of sport, while frequently thwarted by minor acts of insubordination, never met any serious resistance. In this respect sport is remarkably different from other components of the mission’s enterprise. Not only did the mission’s politically spectacular campaign against female circumcision incite rebellion and cost some of the CSM’s parishes their entire congregations, so too, as Kenneth King and Derek Peterson have shown, did their seemingly banal school gardens scheme face substantial opposition. Here, the mission’s attempt to teach their athomi thrift, planning, and organization by providing them with each with a small plot of land faced the protests of students and their families who interpreted it as little more than a means of soliciting their labor for free. As I scoured the missionary archive and pressed my respondents, I was left with the impression that sport was the least controversial component of the CSM’s work. In fact, it was often cited as the most enjoyable. Certainly this was the case for Charles Muhoro Kareri, the first African Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), who was a CSM student in the 1910s and 1920s:

The final thing that attracted me [to the CSM] was the playing of football (…) There was a time that our team went to play against whites from the plantations and the government (…) The whites put on shoes in order to defeat our team, while our people played barefoot. But our team still won.

A chief aim of the CSM’s sport was to give individuals a sense of personal achievement and empowerment. It was undoubtedly intended to serve as a form of social control but, with the cultivation of self-disciplined Christian individuals as its goal, and based on intimacy and affection, this mode of social control was not a simple form of “domination.” Missionary sport was at times overtly disciplinarian and authoritarian but more often it was, or at least missionaries intended it to be, enjoyable.

In their attempt to produce particular kinds of Christian subjects, missionaries sought to affect deeper, more enduring, changes in Kenya’s


indigenous population than the country’s other colonizers. Paradoxically, this is a point on which both critics and defenders of colonial missionaries often agree. For Thomas Beidelman, for example, colonial missionaries were:

the most (...) thoroughgoing facet of colonial life (...) Missionaries invariably aimed at overall changes in the beliefs and actions of native peoples, at colonization of heart and mind as well as body. Pursuing this sustained policy of change, missionaries demonstrated a more radical and morally intense commitment to rule than political administrators or business men.101

For most of my Presbyterian respondents in Thogoto, Tumutumu, and Chogoria, meanwhile, the CSM’s attempt to win hearts and minds as well as bodies distinguished the benevolent missionary from the self-interested colonizer. For the Very Reverend John Gatu, former Moderator of the PCEA, “the mzungu [white person] was only interested in the African being his laborer on the farm, the missionary on the other hand was interested in bringing up the African.”102 Likewise for Bedilego M’ribu M’muthaera and Julius Ndubi Maligi, two members of Chogoria parish, “missionaries were near the people, they tried to become friends with us but (...) the government’s interest was to rule only.”103

More interesting and important than the rather stale question about whether colonial missionaries and their sports programs were “good” or “bad” is the way in which missionary sport indicates the multiplicity of ways in which colonial power functioned in Kenya. For it has been comprehensively shown that in colonial Africa in general, and in the “racially-charged, settler dominated landscape” of colonial Kenya in particular, there were few colonial “contact zones”105 which had any chance of providing enjoyment or a sense of personal empowerment. As Florence Bernault puts it: “In Africa, the endurance of white rule depended on asserting social

102 John Gatu (interview 15 October, 2014).
103 Bedilego M’ribu M’muthaera and Julius Ndubi Maligi (interview 9 July 2014).
104 Carotenuto, “Grappling With the Past,” 1891.
105 Borrowed from Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (London: Routledge, 2008), esp. 7–9. Pratt defines “contact zones” as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination,” 7.
and political divides between colonisers and Africans rather than crafting integrative ruling strategies." And as Lynn Thomas has demonstrated: "Colonial power in Kenya alternated between extreme brutality and minimalist control." What happened on missionary football pitches and on sports days constitutes a rare example of a colonial attempt to produce disciplined bodies and minds that was not simply authoritarian and oppressive.

**Conclusion**

Bale and Sang wrote *Kenyan Running* at a time when it was commonly felt among scholars of sport that “sports history” – which typically dealt with biographies of sporting icons and histories of great sporting events – was approaching its end; “atheoretical,” even “anti-intellectual,” it could not provide the same insights as the interdisciplinary “sports studies” which drew from political theory, sociology, and cultural studies. Through a critical reading of archival material, by closely attending to a specific time and place, and taking seriously the lived experiences, struggles and uncertainties, of historical actors, in this article, I hope to have demonstrated that historians can still make important contributions to the study of sport. At the same time, I hope to have shown that the topic of sport in general and the topic of missionary sport in particular, can make significant contributions to historical study of colonial Africa. They promise fertile areas of research for Africanists: a variety of colonial projects used sport in a variety of ways, frequently investing it with importance, frequently pursuing it with intense commitment; references to sport in colonial archives, colonial films, and published books are ubiquitous in colonial archives; and experiences of sport are often some of the most prominent and frequently recalled memories of everyday life in colonial Africa.

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