

## **PRE COLONIAL HISTORY OF THE THAGICHU**

### **Auditor:**

Caroline Mucece Kithinji,  
PhD student and History lecturer,  
Department of arts and humanities,  
Chuka University,  
P.O Box 109 – 60400,  
Chuka-Kenya

Mobile number: +254 724 855 999,  
Email address: kithinjimc@gmail.com

### **Co - Auditors:**

1. Dr. David O. Okelo  
Director,  
Kenyatta University, Embu campus, and Lecturer  
Department of History, Archaeology and Political Studies  
Kenyatta University  
P.O Box 43844 – 00100  
Nairobi-Kenya

Mobile number: +254 723 529 910,  
Email address: okelo.david@ku.ac.ke

2. Professor Colomba Kaburi Muriungi`  
Associate professor of African Literature, and Dean  
Faculty of arts and humanities,  
Chuka University,  
P.O box 109 – 60400,  
Chuka-Kenya

Mobile number: +254 727 970 096,  
Email address: Colomba@yahoo.com

## ABSTRACT

This study is on pre colonial history of the Thagichu. The study examines the history of the Thagichu during the pre colonial period up to 1907. The study employed the *descriptive* research design. Data was collected from oral, archival and secondary sources. A total of 50 respondents were purposively sampled and interviewed. Data from oral sources was corroborated with data from archival and secondary sources. The major findings of this research are that the Thagichu originated from Mbwa and finally settled in their present day homeland in Meru County. The social, political and economic organization of the Thagichu is also explored. This study has contributed to the Thagichu historiography.

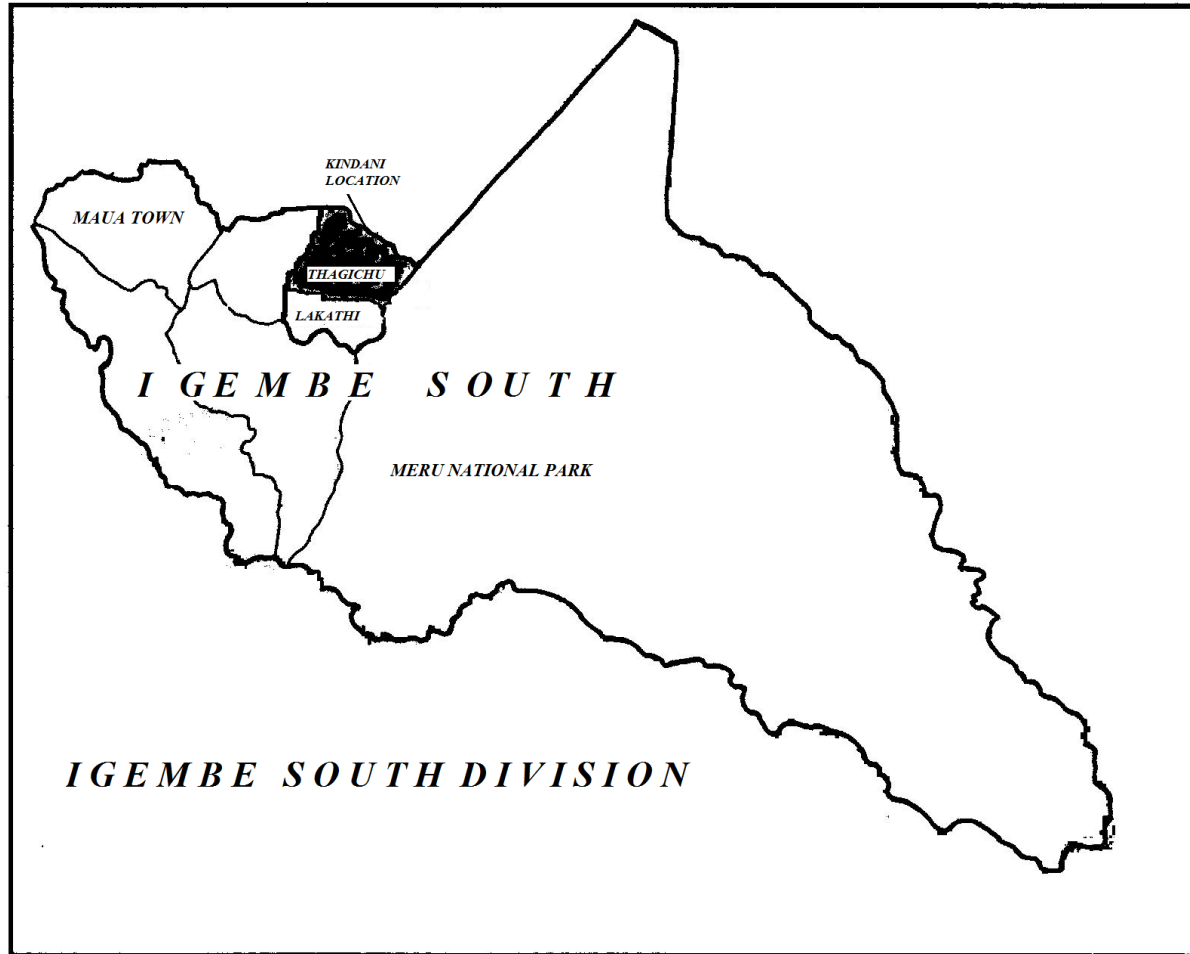
Key Words: pre colonial, colonial, Thagichu

## INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the pre colonial history of the Thagichu of Igembe Sub - County, Meru County in Kenya up to 1962. According to Mwaniki (2005) the Thagichu are a group of people inhabiting the lower section of Igembe South Sub County of Meru County. Originally this group lived among the Tharaka who presently live in Tharaka Nithi County but in 1907 new colonial boundaries moved them from their original location. According to Fadiman in Ogot (1976) the Tharaka were divided into two, namely; Thagichu and the Murutu. The creation of the colonial boundaries saw the Thagichu separated so that some remained in Tharaka while others were moved to Igembe and Ukambani. The Thagichu of Tharaka refers to the contemporary Tharaka peoples south of River Tana. Mwaniki (2005) adds that another group of the Thagichu was relocated to Ivuvori in Mbeere. The Meru County Thagichu group is found in lower Igembe. The origin of the Thagichu is however not clear. An account by Kirimi (2010) states that the Thagichu group that is found in Meru County is believed to have settled in their present day homeland before the Igembe and Tigania communities. During migration and settlement of the Eastern Bantus, this group was left behind and settled in lower Igembe as their kinsmen proceeded to their present day settlements. This is evidenced by the names they use for their villages thus Kiguma, Mukurimba, Tumutumu, Kianda, Iruma and Kiolu. These names refer to places elsewhere in Kenya; this implies that the Thagichu have relations with people living in places with similar names as their villages. In addition this points to a conglomeration of different cultures. For example, Tumutumu and Kianda in Gikuyu land implying there could be a relation of the Thagichu in Kikuyu land. This study ascertained that the Thagichu of Igembe South Sub- County settled in their present day homeland directly from their original homeland Mbwa. (Kirimi, 2010) argues that though they are believed to be part of the Igembe community, they stand out as a distinct ethnic group and their numbers are less compared to the other Igembe population. They also live in the marginalised area of Igembe. Their language has extensive Kamba, Kikuyu and Kiambu borrowings. The area is also generally underdeveloped. It is against this background that a historical inquiry into the pre-colonial a history of the Thagichu was made.

It is against this background that a historical inquiry into the pre-colonial a history of the Thagichu was made.

Figure 1 shows the location of the Thagichu.



Source: *Igembe District Development Plan 2008- 2012*

**Figure 1:** Igembe South Sub – County Administrative Boundaries.

### Research method

The study employed the descriptive research design. Kothari (1985) noted that descriptive survey design is concerned with describing, recording, analyzing and reporting conditions that exist or existed. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) also said that descriptive research is a process of collecting data in order to answer questions concerning the current status of the problem of the subjects in the study and that it determines and reports the study findings as they are. Kerlinger (1973) also noted that descriptive surveys are widely used to obtain data useful in evaluating present practices and in providing basis for decisions. For Kathuri and Pals (1993), descriptive research design is a means of ensuring that that the process is systematic and scientific and the results obtained are valid and reliable. Descriptive research design was used in this study as the researcher collected, described, recorded, analysed, reported and recorded pre colonial history of the Thagichu. The study also fitted within the provisions of descriptive research design because the researcher collected data and reported the way things were without manipulating any variables.

## **9 Data Analysis Procedures and Presentation**

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis was done. Qualitative data obtained from open ended questions was organized into themes, categories and patterns pertinent to the study. Qualitative data provided rich descriptions and explanations (Gray, 2004).

### **3.10 Logistics and Ethical Considerations**

An introduction letter was availed to respondents before commencement of the interview. Permission to conduct research was sought from the National Council for Science and Technology and Innovations (NCOSTI). The researcher booked appointments with interviewees prior to the interview. Guided by Israel & Hay (2006) the following ethical principles were observed:

- i) Voluntary participation – the respondents were allowed to freely choose whether to participate in the interview or not.
- ii) Informed consent - The purpose of research was fully explained to the respondents and their consent was sought before they are engaged in the research.
- iii) Confidentiality – the respondents were assured of confidentiality especially where they divulged sensitive information
- iv) Anonymity - where respondents sought to remain anonymous, the researcher respected their stand.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

### **The Pre-Colonial History of the Thagichu**

#### **Introduction**

This section discusses the history of the Thagichu in terms of their Linguistic orientation, origin migration and settlement, their relation with other ethnic groups, political, social and economic organization.

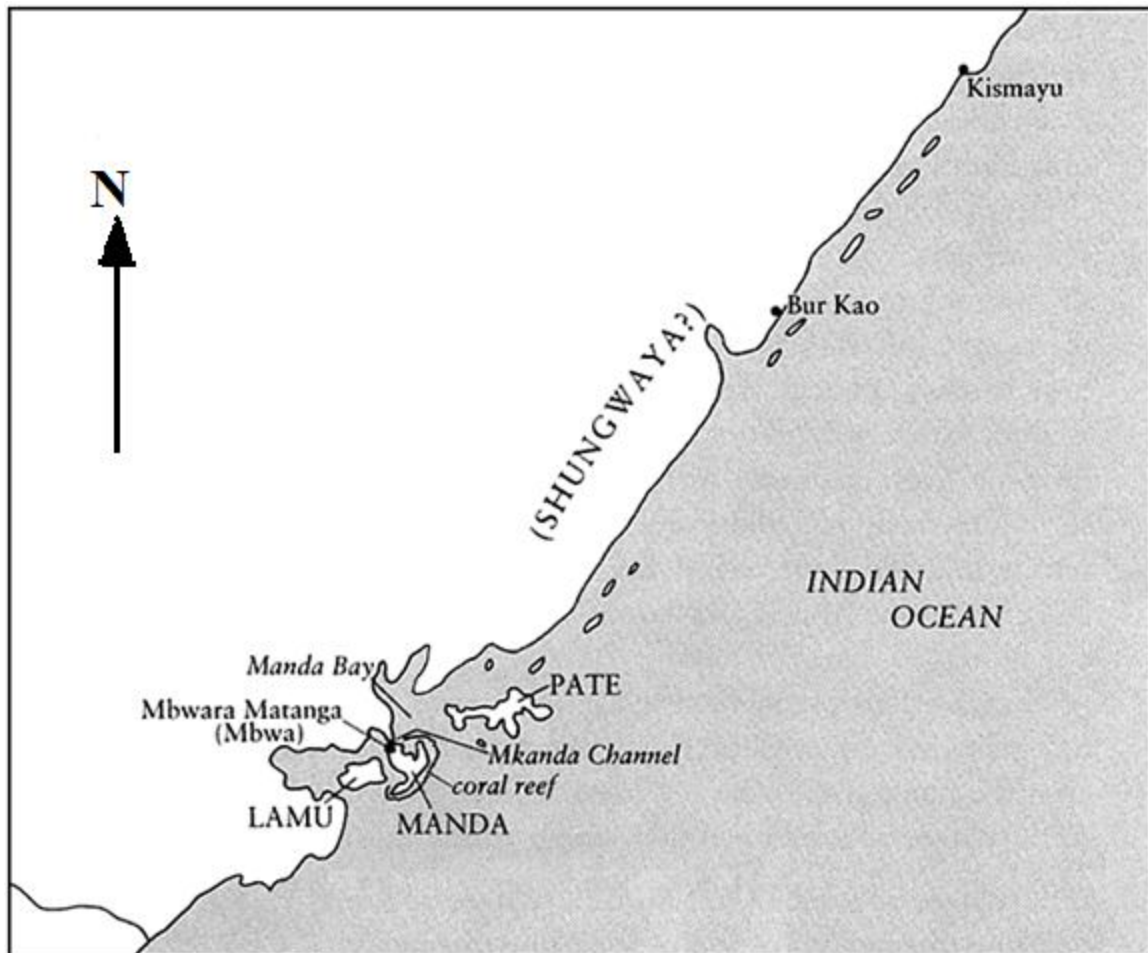
#### **Linguistic Orientation of the Thagichu**

According to the oral interviews the Thagichu is a multi-lingual community speaking a language called Kithaicu. Kithaicu is a conglomeration of Kikamba, Kitharaka, Kiigembe, Kimbeere, Kiambu, Kikuyu, Kiturkana and Kimaasai Languages.

According to oral information by Abraham Mwereria, Kithaicu is the mother language of the Eastern Bantus. Differences in dialects have occurred due to the long period of separation where the different Thaicu speakers have adopted different dialects. The oral respondents argued that these different dialects could also have sprung up as the process of migrations coupled with intermarriage with non-Thagichu speakers like the Maasai took place and as communities got assimilated. They claimed to be the original Thagichu and appeared happy that they have managed to retain the original Kithaicu.

## Origin, Migration and Settlement of the Thagichu

According to oral respondents, the original homeland of the Thagichu was Mbwa. Mbwa as noted by one of the respondents (ninety six year old Alice Njali), was a place in Mombasa. The researcher got interested to know why they left Mbwa. The oral respondents reported that they were running away from the *Mzungu/Muchunku* or Whiteman. This information agrees with a research conducted by Fadiman (1993) which noted that the origin of the Ameru was Mbwa, though none of them could remember the actual location. One oral respondent in Fadiman (1993) was reported having said “we began in Mbwa, a place where the waters would go to eat grass....” The argument also agrees with a research by Nyaga (1997) who reported that long time ago, the ancestors of the Ameru lived in captivity near a large body of water which they had to cross on their way to freedom. He further noted that Muthururi (a Meru prophet) struck the water with his mystic rod, and it parted. Some water flowed to one side and the rest to the other side, forming a wide path in the middle along which the people went across. From this the researcher concluded that the large water body could have been the Indian Ocean. The map in figure 4 gives the location of Mbwa which was also referred to as Mbwara Matanga near Lamu Archipelago and Manda Islands



Source: Were G.S. (1968)

Figure 2: The Origin of the Thagichu – Mbwa

Other respondents however argued that the original homeland of the Thagichu could have been Shungwaya near Bur Gao. Whatever the argument the two places, that is, Mbwa and Shungwaya are near a large water body and therefore any of the two could have been correct. Lambert (1949) suggests Shungwaya origin for the Gikuyu, Embu, Mbeere, Tharaka, Thagichu, Chuka, Meru and Kamba. This probably explains why the Thagichu claim that all Eastern Bantus originally spoke one language called Kithaicu.

The researcher inquired on areas of dispersal and settlement and though the oral respondents could not remember many of the dispersal points, they pointed out that these migrations took centuries before the Thagichu finally settled in their present day homeland. They further added that during that period, many of them were pastoralists, so they kept moving and grazing their animals until they settled where they are today. Migrations were therefore a slow process contrary to the impression given by Europeans that Africans were always on the move (Mbiti, 1998)

The oral respondents contended that migrations continued until the arrival of the British in the land. This made the researcher to conclude that present day settlements, of many ethnic groups and not just that of the Thagichu were accidental, probably implying that if the white man never arrived in Kenya at that point in history, communities would have continued migrating and probably none would be where they are settled today. The oral respondents recalled that after a long period of migration, their major dispersal area was Kiorimba hill/mountain which is found near Meru National Park. They moved from Kiorimba and finally settled in Karimba hill which is present day Thagichu area. Looking at the pattern of migration and settlement of the Thagichu, they always preferred settling on hills and mountain tops. This was a characteristic of pastoral communities to keep an eye in case of raids and also for their own security.

As stated earlier, all the Eastern Bantus were initially Thagichu. They moved from Mbwa as Thagichu and came and settled in present day Igembe South. Though they moved as different sub-groups- they shared an ancestry. In the Thagichu area of Igembe sub-county, evidence shows that most of the Eastern Bantu communities lived in Thagichu area for a long period before dispersing. These communities were Kiguma, Mukurimba, Tumu Tumu, Kianda, Iruma, Kamanda and Kiolu. The oral respondents noted that when the eastern Bantus arrived in this settlement area, they made what the Ameru referred to as Ngwato-(declaring land ownership over a given area and then settle there). Some members of these communities however moved to their present day settlements leaving behind a remnant. The researcher observed for example that the Thagichu living in Tumu Tumu and Kianda villages speak the kikuyu language while those of Kiguma speak the Embu language. From this the researcher deduced that the areas had been occupied by the Kikuyu and Embu communities.

### **Thagichu Relations with Eastern Bantu Speakers and other Communities**

According to Ntomacita Mbiko, a respondent, all Eastern Bantus were originally referred to as Thagichu. His position is supported by Maxon (1986) who argues that the origin of the Thagichu dates back to the early second Millennium A.D. The researcher attributed the different dialects of the Thagichu speakers to long periods of separation and assimilation as they migrated from their original homeland. Maxon (1986) also says that the proto Thagichu speakers eventually differentiated into four divisions, three of which came to inhabit the region around Mount Kenya thus the Western Thagichu made up of Kikuyu, Chuka, and Embu/Mbeere, the Central Thagichu is made up of Meru and Tharaka and the Eastern Thagichu that comprises the Kamba.

According to the oral respondents in this research, notably ninety two year old Julia Ngoroi, these Thagichu divisions originally lived together in the Thagichu area of Igembe where they settled and found the Turkana having already settled there. This, she said can be confirmed by their seven villages which she argued had been settled by Eastern Bantus currently living in different parts of Kenya, though a few have remained there. The movement she said was caused by occasional droughts, famine and diseases. Since the Eastern Bantus were mixed farmers, the informants argued that they moved in search of pastures and for their animals.

Further inquiry revealed that the Turkana moved from Thagichu area of Igembe South sub county because they were pastoralists and had to look for pastureland. All the respondents also agreed that all the Turkana moved to their present day settlements because men and women refused to undergo circumcision as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood which is the practice of the Thagichu. All accounts noted that this may help to explain why the Turkana to date refer to the Thagichu as *Mtani* meaning brother as they once shared the same geographical region. The Thagichu also claim that they found the Samburu and the Maasai in the region near Kirima – Kieru which is their present day settlement. The Thagichu, the Samburu and the Maasai lived together in the Thagichu Kirima – Kieru area. Due to the transhumance of the Samburu and the Maasai, they moved to their present day settlements. The Maasai moved to present day Kajiado, Narok, Nyandarua and Laikipia Counties while the Samburu moved to present day Isiolo and Samburu Counties. The oral respondents however noted that relations with the two communities have remained intact as the Samburu and Maasai still visit the Thagichu to fetch circumcision instruments and herbs for example a type of instrument known as “Mathiri” and a type of herb called “Mwatha” for anesthesia.

The Thagichu people have a relationship with the Kamba and Tharaka. The oral respondents specifically Joseph Kobia (eighty four year old) reported that the Thagichu of Kamba are also original Thagichu. A section of the Thagichu was left in Kiorimba hills during the Thagichu migration from Mbwa, forming the Kamba Thagichu. The Thagichu of the Tharaka are however outcasts of the Thagichu. A story was narrated by eighty six year old Janet Kangai on how they became outcasts. She said that “the Thagichu of Tharaka are referred to as Mbugi. Mbugi is one of the sub-clans of the Thagichu with whom an oath referred to as *Gichiaro* was taken leading to blood brotherhood. This *Gichiaro* came from ‘*Mwana o Mwari*’ meaning child of an unmarried woman. Three men from one family went herding animals. One of the three men was the child of the sister of the other two, that is, a nephew of the two. The two are said to have mistreated the nephew. They mistreated him by slaughtering a cow and then sewing him up in cow skin alive. They left him in the bush, went home and reported that he had died. When somebody was out hunting, he discovered somebody groaning and rolling in cow skin. The skin was removed but their former unity was dissolved. The mistreated man moved and settled in Tharaka, got married, and founded the Thagichu clan of Tharaka known as Mbugi. To prevent such an incidence from ever occurring, a goat was slaughtered, rituals were performed and oathing was done. The terms of this oath was that the Thagichu of Igembe and those of Mbugi (Tharaka) can never marry or fight. Though cleansing rituals were performed the mistreated man left a curse that led to *Gichiaro* between the Thagichu of Igembe and those of Tharaka”. All accounts noted that a *Gichiaro* relationship was usually initiated by two individuals and established through ritual blood exchange. A blood brother was like a clansman and one could not take a wife from his family or shed his blood under any circumstances. They were expected to assist each other in times of need.

The researcher got interested to know what would happen in case, accidentally or unknowingly a young man or woman of Thagichu married from Mbugi. Ninety two year old Samuel Mucheke said that they are not allowed to marry. He however reported that in case of a marriage, though rare, the man marrying from either side is asked for a goat. The goat and the man are tied together and while in this state, the man and the goat are beaten seriously. After the beating the man gives another goat which is slaughtered in a cleansing ceremony. The woman is asked to give a gourd of traditional porridge; the two are then released and can go ahead with their marriage.

All accounts agreed that there was occasional conflict and fighting between the Thagichu, Igembe and Tharaka because of border conflicts. Warfare was however seasonal and was limited to raids for acquisition of cattle, boundary disputes and over grazing land. At times women and young children were taken hostage to be recaptured during another raid. The researcher inquired on what happens between the Thagichu and Mbugi and oral respondents said that they do not fight with the Mbugi and in case of conflict, they usually call upon the government to come and rescue them by solving the conflict. The Gichiario oath means that if any of the two sheds the blood of the other, then a curse befalls them.

Apart from Mbugi, the oral respondents gave other *agichiario* Thagichu as Kiuna, Antu betwe and Mwai clans of Igembe. The Thagichu of Ukamba has no *bagichiario* relationship with the Igembe Thagichu. Informants noted that the two simply separated during migration and settlement.

According to oral respondents, the Thagichu of Igembe have relations with ethnic groups elsewhere like the Kikuyu, Embu-Mbeere, and Ukambani. This is explained further in the next sub-section.

### **The Political Organization of the Thagichu**

Data adduced from the field points to the fact that the Thagichu system of government was centralized. The system of government was also matrilineal up to 1950. Power was in the hands of a woman called Ciabaitugua. She had the responsibility of organizing community functions like circumcision, offering of sacrifices and conflict resolutions. She was assisted by a council of elders known as Kiama Gia Nkomango. When asked why the council was referred to as Kiama Gia Nkomango, the old men could not respond as they claimed to have taken an oath when giving it that name. Further inquiry revealed that it was so called as it was a Secret defense Council especially against the white man. The council of elders was drawn from the five clans of the Thagichu namely Antubaciu, Antubuligi, Athimba, Ngulu and Mbau.

Each clan produced a Mugambi (Spokesperson). The spokesmen formed a council of elders whose duty was to assist Ciabaitugua by informing her of the needs of the people. For example in case of a disagreement between men and women, the council of elders would inform Ciabaitugua who would then call a meeting of all women to tell them the complaints of men. This way the society lived a harmonious life.

In traditional societies, it was quite unusual to find women leadership. The researcher inquired on why the Thagichu chose on the woman leader and they said the women leaders were chosen because they had special leadership characteristics. The woman had to be a wealthy person so that in case of material need, she could assist. The institution of the Chief never existed. A succession of women leaders were given as follows: Ciabaitugua, Mbandi and then Baithiri. Women



leadership in this region survived up to 1950. In 1951 the first Chief was chosen though he was not from this area.

According to the informants, there existed a well defined legal system before the 1950s. There was a council of elders, known as *kiama gia nkomango*. The *Njuri Ncheke* which was the supreme council of elders in Meru existed. It comprised of the highest council of elders in Meru but had representation from all the Meru sub-groups. With time other local *Njuris* sprung up in all the Meru sub groups and that of the *Thagichu* became known as *Kiama gia Nkomango*. These *Njuris* were charged with the administration of justice.

Serious crimes among the *Thagichu* included livestock theft, witchcraft, and theft of food products, pre-marital sex and stealing honey from a bee hive. Tampering with boundaries or encroachment was also termed as crime. All these crimes had a standard fine of thirty shillings (*mirongo ithatu*). The oral informants specifically Ninety two year old Samuel Mucheke however reported that incase of causing bodily harm to a person the penalty differed as follows and was prescribed by the council of elders:

Injury on an ear was compensated for with a bull  
Injury for an eye and a tooth was also compensated for with a bull  
Injury for an Earlobe compensated for with a ewe  
Injury for a thumb compensated for with a heifer and a ewe  
Injury for a ring finger was not compensated for  
Injury for a scar on nose or legs compensated for with a ram

In some instances, the elders were presented a ram and offered beer by the offenders. According to the oral respondents, the *Njuri* was also charged with the responsibility of handling boundary disputes. Boundary disputes existed and still exist between the *Thagichu* and the *Tharaka*. Oral respondents were quick to report that these boundary disputes get so bad that the local police must be engaged. In case of a boundary conflict, the two conflicting parties sent representative to swear an oath. Oaths were administered by a senior member of the *Njuri*. After oathing was done the respondents added that verdict was not passed immediately. The researcher was interested in finding out why the verdict could not be passed immediately and how long it took for the verdict to be passed. The oral respondents contended that it took one calendar year, that is, two planting seasons for the verdict to be passed. John Nkiria who at the time of interview was seventy two years old reported that it took such a long time because the verdict depended on the number of people who died after oathing was done. The idea was each of those involved in the dispute took an oath swearing that their boundary was the right one. The oath was taken with a *ndenge* (he goat).

### **The Social Organization of the Thagichu**

The basic social unit of the *Thagichu* was the clan. There are five clans namely: *Antubaciu*, *Antubaligi*, *Athimba*, *Ngula* and *Mbau*. The main duty of the clan was to solve disputes involving groups, individual or even the family. In cases where the disputes were beyond the ability of the clan, the *Agambi* (spokesmen) who represented the community at the highest Council of elders (*Njuri Ncheke*) was called upon to assist.

There also existed the notion of a centre which was in actual sense a house where the young initiates met and spend their nights. This house was referred to as *Gaaru*. Several such centres were found among the Thagichu at Ciiri, Osaria, Kabulele, Miriira, Gandaru and Baraimu hills. According to oral history the young initiates were living in the Gaaru in case of an invasion by *maitha* (enemies). All accounts contended that, such a house is comparable to modern day police barracks in Kenya. The men who stayed in the *Gaaru* were actually warriors and stayed in a central place in case of an attack. The existence of the *Gaaru* was also necessitated by the frequent cattle raids by neighbouring communities since the Thagichu were also pastoralists. For example the Tharaka were cited as one of the communities that kept raiding the Thagichu. In fact, this is why the Thagichu preferred to live on the hills.

The Thagichu circumcised their boys at the age of thirteen. When the boys matured, they were separated from their mothers. A house was built for them. Separation was done to guard against any misbehavior or disrespect of the boys to their mothers. Many boys were circumcised at the same time and a house (*Gaaru*) was built for them. During the seclusion period, education was given especially on how to guard the community and how to be good husbands. Those circumcised at the same time formed an age set. Each age set assumed a formal name which members would retain throughout their lives.

Girls were also circumcised from the age of thirteen. Piercing of ears was first done and after circumcision they were secluded in their mothers' houses until they were married. Women, just like men had age sets. The oral respondents noted that after females were circumcised they automatically became members of a particular age set. An example of such an age set for women was the *Ncurubi* age set that was comprised of women who were circumcised at the same time and their first born sons and daughters had just married.

Marriage among the Thagichu was polygamous and also endogamous. Further inquiry revealed that marriage among the Thagichu is still endogamous as they still encourage intermarriage within their community. The Researcher concluded that, that is why the Thagichu have maintained ethnic purity as they do not encourage marriage from outside their ethnic group. According to the oral respondents, marriage among the Thagichu before the arrival of the colonialists was an expensive undertaking. The groom would perform hard labour for one year (that is taking care of millet) and build a *Ikumbi* (store) for the grain. They gave thirty to eighty goats as dowry and this was accompanied by a lot of beer drinking.

According to the oral respondents, there was a clear division of labour among the Thagichu. The duties of women were outlined as grinding porridge, catering for domestic animals, cooking, and farming. Men on the other hand had the duties of building houses as women gathered for them grass for roofing. They also milked animals although the women also did the milking. Children were charged with the duty of herding animals that is for boys while girls would fetch firewood.

Oral tradition also attests to the fact that they wore skins as their clothing as late as the 1930s. The skins were well polished with *Mbariki* (Castor oil) which they also used to smear their bodies to guard themselves against harsh weather. Asked whether they bathed, they said this could be done occasionally.

Before the advent of Christianity, the Thagichu paid reverence to a supernatural being. The name given to their god was ngai. Religious leaders existed and one renowned one was remembered as

Baituru. These religious leaders were chosen because they were without blemish, rich, and no physical scars and from a reputable lineage. There were also families that produced priests and they called them “*Mujii jwa Athinji*” (family of priests). Such families produced a *Muthinji wa mucii* (family priest), who would perform the religious rituals not only in their family but among the whole Thagichu Community when there was need. They were also entrusted with the duty of offering sacrifices. The Thagichu believed in supernatural beings that also operated through ancestral spirits. They believed in good and bad spirits. The good spirits looked after the society by protecting the people from health hazards like storms and epidemics. The bad spirits when annoyed by the improper conduct of the people, administered punishments which came in the form of droughts and famine, disease and death. In case of punishment, the gods could only be appeased through blood sacrifice. Here a fat goat was slaughtered, blood poured on the selected shrines and a chant conducted by a religious specialist was chanted. The meat was used for burnt sacrifice. There was a belief that if the smoke from a burnt sacrifice went straight to the skies, then the offering had been accepted. If on the other hand the smoke went zig zag the sacrifice was not acceptable in which case a diviner was consulted and the whole process repeated. Sacrifice could also be made as an act of ordinary prayer and thanksgiving to the gods. One of the oral respondents 105 years old Julia Ngoroi said that they also planted a particular plant, *Mwariki* (castor oil plant), which was used to appease the spirits in addition to pouring libations of beer on the gravesides of the dead. According to Mbiko, an oral respondent, this beer is made by mixing water and honey and fermenting it with herbs called *Mirigi*. Pouring of libations was done when an evil spirits invaded and brought with them bad omen. Julia Ngoroi recounted a 1951 incident and said that during that year, the gods were angered and sent them rats that would come, take food and babies from the people of Thagichu. She said that they consulted a diviner who instructed them to slaughter a sheep, put a rat in the intestines and throw it away. This they said was the end of the menace. Other respondents said that the evil spirits would come in the form of rats, snakes, spiders or any earthly creature and cause havoc. Religious specialists would be consulted and lead the community in a ritual to appease the evil spirits by calling for god’s help. One of the oral respondents recounted the utterances that accompanied such rituals as follows:

*Baba ntethia*  
*Nkoma jia ba juju*  
*Nkoma jia Muntu wetu*  
*Nkoma jia biu juju*  
*Ntethia.*

Meaning:

God help me  
 Spirits of the grandparents  
 Spirits of the uncles  
 Spirits of the great grandparents  
 Help me.

Oral history among the Thagichu has it that the dwelling place of the spirits was in sacred places like swamps, forests, mountains and literary everywhere. They for example argued that when a container was placed somewhere, insects would collect there; meaning that they had been put there by gods. They also argued that gods could be found in heaven which they believed was somewhere

in the skies. The sacred place of prayer of the Thagichu was Kirimakieru where they offered sacrifices. Such sacrifices would be in case of drought and famine to ask for rain and in case of wrong doing. In case of wrongdoing, the wrongdoer who was identified by a witch doctor would provide a he goat or a sheep that was white, healthy, young and fat. The animal was slaughtered and certain parts were eaten by the celebrants and congregation. Some specific parts of the meat would be kept aside for the gods, such as; liver, heart and fatty meat for burning/roasting. The ceremony involved stylish singing and dancing to appease the gods.

There also existed other specialist called Aaga (medicine men), who could also heal diseases caused by witchcraft by undoing what the witches had done. These were the traditional medicine men/healers. They would treat conditions like barrenness using medicinal herbs. This was done using a combination of herbs from specific trees.

Further enquiry revealed that the Thagichu believed in witchcraft. Both men and women practiced witchcraft. In his book Fadiman (1993) has given an account of the kind of witchcraft that existed among the Ameru which he concedes by saying such witchcraft is not known anywhere else among the Mount Kenya peoples. Witchcraft was practiced by witches who were either men or women known as Murogi (singular) or Arogi (plural). Traditional medicine men or doctors also existed referred to as Mugo (singular) or Aaga (plural), or even Muraguri (singular) or Araguri (plural)

There was a general view from all respondents that certain animals were associated with death or that their presence was seen as bad omen. Those included the Hyena, owl and a fox whose noise near people's homesteads would be a warning against impending death. The hyena for example is dreaded by the Thagichu as it fed on dead bodies of human beings. The oral history of the Thagichu noted that before the coming of the Europeans, the dead would be thrown away and eaten by hyenas but this practice changed and they now bury their dead. Certain cleansing rituals were performed following death and those included ritual sex and shaving of the hair. Oral information noted that ritual sex was performed by immediate family members as well as the extended family. There existed the belief that the dead must be reborn for the continuity of the family. Shaving of the hair according to oral respondents signified that the concerned family was now free of *rukuu* (death) and people could now associate with them without fear. Cleansing was also done by slaughtering an animal. Like other rituals the animal was expected to be without blemish, of one colour preferably white which the Thagichu believed stood for purity. The Thagichu believed in life after death. That is why they buried their dead with their belongings. Because of the same belief they named their children after the dead. The Thagichu claimed that their dead were buried facing Kirimakieru which was their sacred place.

Certain rites of passage are observed by the Thagichu. These include; birth, circumcision, marriage, elder hood and finally death. All accounts reported that the birth of a child in this community was accompanied a lot of celebration. The birth of a boy was accompanied by four ululations while that of a girl was accompanied by three ululations. Every married woman had a separate hut. This meant that she had to abstain from any sexual contact with her husband until she was ready to take care of another child. The mother of a child was therefore only allowed to conceive another child after the older child could fetch water and upon delivery of food to the father. This was followed by shaving of the child and feasting with other children in the neighborhood.

The informants noted that music and dance formed an integral part of Thagichu life. This was for entertainment, to ask for gifts from relatives and friends, for leisure and to alert the community that the women had been insulted by someone.

**Economic organization of the Thagichu**

The Thagichu were mixed farmers. They grew crops such as maize, millet, sorghum and cowpeas. Their staple food was referred to as *Kithanda* which was mixture of green maize, green vegetables and maize – flour. The maize flour was made using well shaped stones for the purpose. Another staple food was the traditional *ucuu*, that is, gruel which would also be ground manually using the stones.

The animals kept included goats and sheep. They also had sacred animals that were used for sacrifice, that is, the sheep of one colour that is either pure black or white.

The crafts of the Thagichu included curving spoons and ladles, out of wood, and making plate out of gourds called *tujuga* (calabashes). They also made pots and baskets, and mats for sleeping on. Informants noted that the Thagichu was also a hunter/gatherer community. They hunted animals such as *Ndia* (deers), *Nkurungu* (dik dik) and gazelles. They gathered honey, and traditional fruits such as *Ndoroma*, *Ndakuye* and *Matoo*. There existed an organization known as the *Aathi* who lived by purely hunting and gathering. With the arrival of the British in Meru hunting was banned and the *Aathi* organization was banned. The banning of hunting according to informants explains why the Thagichu were the greatest opponents of colonial rule as this group was denied the means of their livelihood.

Land inheritance was from the deceased to the brother and later the son of the original owner if the brother died.

---

**REFERENCES**

- Fadiman, J. A. (1993). *When we Began. There Were Witchmen; An Oral History From Mount Kenya*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gray, D. E. (2004). *Doing Research in the Real World*. London: Routledge.
- Israel, M. & Hay, I. (2006). *Research Ethics for Social Scientists*. London : Sage Publications.
- Kathuri, N.J., and Pals D.A. (1993). *An Introduction to Educational Research*. Njoro Egerton University.
- Kirimi, J. (2010). *The Ameru*. University of Nairobi. Unpublished Research Project.
- GoK. (2008). Igembe District Development Plan. Nairobi: Government Printers.
- Karlinger, F. (1975). *Foundations of Behavioral Research; Education and Psychology*. New York: OUP.
- Kothari, C. (1985). *Research Methodology; Methods and Techniques*. New Delhi: Eastern Ltd.
- Mbiti, J.S. (1998) *African Religions and Philosophy*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Mugenda, O. M., and Mugenda A. G. (1999). *Research Methods in Education Qualitative and Quantitative Research*. Nairobi: Acts Press.
- Mwaniki, H. S. K. (2005). *Chuka Historical Texts*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau.
- Nyaga, D. (1997) *Customs and Traditions of the Ameru*. Nairobi: East African Educational publishers.