

**THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF COUNCILS OF ELDERS TO THE RESILIENCE OF
AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION: A CASE OF *NJURI NCHEKE* IN MERU
COUNTY, KENYA.**

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**A thesis submitted to the graduate school in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies of Egerton University.**

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DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATION

Declaration

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any university.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late brother, Mutuaru Gitonga for sacrificing his career to fund my early education. You denied yourself so that I could have and you kept encouraging me to move on and achieve that which you did not achieve. Words alone cannot explain how much I treasure what you did for me. May the good God richly bless your family.

To my beloved husband Wilfred Orina whose sacrifice, inspiration, patience, encouragement and professional advice were instrumental to the completion of this work.

To our children Pavine Bosibori, Linda Muthoni and Elvis Nyambati who on many occasions missed motherly love and presence during the course of my postgraduate studies.

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ABSTRACT

Among the peoples of Kenya, there has been a cultural and religious revival and all means are being sought to propagate it. In certain circles, there is even a revival of ethnic rites, religious rituals and customs, and there are national efforts to preserve and take pride in ethnic cultures. Councils of elders are being treated with respect and honour as custodians of these cultures and religious beliefs. Generally, there has been a resilience of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and traditional religious institutions and practices in Kenya in the embodiment of councils of elders as seen in the case of *Njuri Ncheke* of the Ameru. *Njuri Ncheke* has been resilient in the face of modernization, even in the context of a dynamic society with a modern judicial system, new constitutional laws and new religious structures. In spite of this apparent resilience of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County, there has not been any systematic investigation to unearth the phenomenon. The broad objective of this study, therefore, was to investigate the contributions of councils of elders to the resilience of African Traditional Religion in Kenya and in particular, the *Njuri Ncheke* of Meru County. The specific objectives were to identify the resilient practices and activities of *Njuri Ncheke* in relation to (ATR) in Meru County, to examine the sources of the influence and authority of the council in contemporary Meru community, to analyse the nature of the relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and Christianity in the County and to assess the relevance of *Njuri Ncheke* in the context of a modern dynamic society. The study was informed by functionalism theory of religion as understood by Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton. This was a qualitative study that sought to describe and analyse the resilience of traditional religious institutions in Kenya with *Njuri Ncheke* as a case study. The study involved a sample size of 200 respondents who were purposively selected. These were mainly *Njuri Ncheke* elders, clergy and religious leaders, and ordinary people. Data was collected using semi structured questions and structured interviews. The collected data was analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis in line with social sciences. The findings of the study are significant in making an important contribution to better understanding of councils of elders in Kenya and their role in ATR, understanding the role of religious and indigenous institutions in devolved system of governance, the basis of their influence and authority and their rightful place in a modern dynamic society.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMNS

ATR: African Traditional Religion

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

MCK: Methodist Church of Kenya

OI: Oral Interview

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

African traditional religion and culture in Meru County has been able to exert a force and contribute in creating new standards, morals and ethics suitable for the changing society. African traditional religion (ATR) has continued to exert its presence and influence through councils of elders and traditional rulers in Africa (Mbiti, 1969). *Njuri Ncheke* is one council of elders that has been fully involved in politics and social activities at the local level, and occasionally at the national level. All these do not make the council less religious since to an African, there is no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, (Adeyemo, 1979). A new sort of society is emerging in Meru County, partly out of the old society, and partly in response to new changes in the contemporary society.

Elders, in the context of African Traditional Religion are categorized among religious specialists and can therefore play mediatory roles between the living and the living dead in the invisible spiritual world. As their title suggests, these people are elderly in the society and have acquired immense experience having passed through the various stages of life (Gichaga, 2007). They are supposed to be credible and morally upright people. They must have families with grown up children. According to Gichaga, they are heads of families and perform religious functions. Most of their experience is gained through having associated with other people who are more experienced than them. Among other responsibilities, councils of elders in various communities are endowed with the responsibilities of promoting law and order. The role of elders is very important in Kenya and they even receive recognition from the government. They continue to settle family and land disputes and are still the custodians of societal morals and traditions. *Njuri Ncheke* is one such council of elders. Their popularity and influence in contemporary society became the concern of this study.

The Meru community in the eastern part of Kenya has an indigenous religious institution known as *Njuri Ncheke*. Oral traditions and literature are collaborative in pointing out that *Njuri Ncheke* was initially formed when the Ameru arrived in their present homeland from Mbwa, on the eastern coast of Kenya. According to Ishinda et al (2008), the chief architect or founder of *Njuri Ncheke* was Kauro-o-Bechau, (Kaura, son of Bechau). Before he died, Kauro-o-Bechau made a vow, a binding curse that *Njuri* shall never die or cease to exist in Meru community. Generally in many traditional communities, breaking such a curse is considered a bad omen and this explains why the *Njuri Ncheke* continue to thrive so as to avoid a curse from God or the wrath of the ancestors. The name of *Njuri Ncheke* was derived

from the ritual oath that was taken by all the members of the traditional council. However, only the elders of the council know this sacred oath, Rimita (1988).

The council has three ranks: the lowest being *Njuri* (comprised of general elders); the second rank is the *Njuri Ncheke* (the ruling committee); while the third is the *Njuri mpingere* (the supreme authority). However, the current *Njuri Ncheke* appears to combine the roles of the second and the third ranks such that it serves as the ruling committee and the supreme authority at the same time. According to M'Imanyara (1992), it was an institution whose responsibility was to make laws, issue orders as well as decrees affecting the entire Meru society. *Njuri Ncheke* also acted as the judiciary and also enforced rules and regulations aimed at conserving the environment. The council continues to operate in Meru community with a remarkable resurgence in its roles such as conflict resolution and maintenance of peace not only in Meru County but also with its neighbours. On this latter account, for example, the standard news paper (27/4/2009) reported that *Njuri Ncheke* was trying to reach out to their colleagues from other communities to unite president Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga. The two political rivals had been persuaded to form the grand coalition government after the 2007/08 ethnic clashes in Kenya. The *Njuri Ncheke* and Luo council of elders were reported to be consulting to facilitate the national elders meeting to discuss the crisis in the grand coalition government.

Councils of elders in Kenya are alive, not merely as an art form, but a system of government from whom people seek and expect help. This was strongly apparent during the recent general election campaigns where the media were awash with clips of political leaders from various ethnic groups in Kenya seeking blessings from their community elders. The traditional solidarity in which the individual says I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am that had constantly been smashed and undermined by individualism resulting from western education and western influence is slowly getting revived (Mbiti, 1969). More and more educated Kenyans are realizing that modernity has alienated them from their cultural roots without giving them a satisfactory substitute. This realization has produced an increasing search for African culture from tribal solidarity but attempting to bring it to the picture of the modern world. In reacting to the above situation, many churches and Christian leaders are tempted to adopt uncritically indigenous customs and practices that border on syncretism. In Meru County, many churches have integrated African traditional religion (ATR) in their worship with several church members being *Njuri Ncheke* elders as revealed in an earlier study carried out by Mukindia and Onyantha (2013).

The Meru people are a community living on the fertile agricultural north and eastern slopes of Mount Kenya, in the former Eastern Province of Kenya. As for many years, there was only one geo-political district for Meru people that originated from the colonial land unit. This changed in 1992, when the district was divided into three namely Meru, Nyambene and Tharaka Nithi. (Jeffrey 1993). Currently the region has two counties namely Meru County and Tharaka Nithi County. Meru County currently has nine sub-counties namely Buuri, Igembe central, Igembe south, Igembe north, Central Imenti, North Imenti, South Imenti, Tigania West and Tigania East. Meru region consists of approximately 13000 km² stretching from Thuci in the south that is the traditional boundary between the Meru and Embu people to Isiolo district in the north. However, the Northern border is not as clearly defined as the southern border according to Jeffrey. The Kenyan Ameru are unrelated to the Meru people in northern Tanzania other than that they are both Bantu speaking peoples. The Meru are primarily mixed farmers with pastoralism and ranching dominating the northern part of the region. Their home life and culture is similar to other highland Bantus. The Tharaka live in the dry area, a much harsh life than most Meru. Meru people are divided into seven sub tribes namely the Igoji, Imenti, Tigania, Miutine, Igembe, Mwimbi and Muthambi, Chuka and Tharaka (Bernadi, 1959).

Njuri Ncheke was formed through a gradual process as *kiama* of *kiamas*. It was called *Njuri*, a term that carries connotations of 'thinning out' (Jeffrey, 1993). The corresponding English word is 'Committee of the few' The second word *Ncheke* refers to the *Ncheke* plain which lies roughly equidistant between the Nyambene forests of Igembe and those of North Imenti, thus near the more thickly settled sections of the Tigania. The field within that plain where *Njuri* met was called *Nchiru*, and to date it has remained the council's holy traditional shrine. The functions of the council remain to this day and have indeed grown complex with time. People in the region take land disputes and issues of inheritance to the council before reporting to the police and other authorities. Only cases that cannot be resolved locally and those that involve non-Meru are exempted. The council is still held in high esteem. However, some of that respect is mixed with fear because of the severe punishments the council gives. Entry into *Njuri Ncheke* was restricted to elders already accepted as spokes persons for some larger group. Every lineage was well represented and a balance was maintained. Large numbers of livestock were required to join, provided as gifts to form the basis of each candidates initiation feast. Entry was therefore restricted to the wealthy men of the land. In Meru terms, this meant that prestigious elders needed equally successful warrior sons, capable raiders who could supply their fathers with the livestock required for *Njuri* fees.

Once achieved, however, membership was for life. A special walking stick served to identify its owner as a man of *Njuri* and thus one worthy of respect (Jeffrey, 1993). However, requirements for membership today have changed greatly and old age is no longer an important factor. Even the younger men from the region such as politicians and achievers in various other fields are initiated into the council and are well recognised as elders.

Custom dictated that a stranger who wants to become a member starts by taking on the role of a child, addressing the leading Meru elder as his father and asking for adoption as his son. (Consolata Fathers 1995). This adoption was accomplished by slashing the wrists of both men, then mingling drops of their blood. The result was to make the new comer into Meru person by bringing him into a specific place within the kinship web. Through becoming the 'son' of someone, he became grandson, nephew, brother or son to others. His relationship to every other adult within the clan and, by extension, the entire community was thereby defined. He thus symbolically abandoned his entire identity, assuming a Meru name, the obligations of a kin and eventually the raising of descendants to carry on the Meru line into which he had come. To assure their acceptance, even their non-Meru birth became one of its secrets, a fact protected by the oaths of every member who swore never to reveal the former stranger's origin. The colonial masters perceived *Njuri Ncheke* as more useless than harmful, little more than the gathering of old men to settle arguments and drink beer. For that reason, British administrators found themselves favourably inclined towards the *kiama* systems they found functioning within their respective administrative jurisdictions, seeing them as supplements to British law (Jeffrey, 1993).

Like other African peoples, the Ameru believe that man lives in a religious universe, so that natural phenomena and objects are intimately associated with God. This agrees with Mbiti (1969) that African man sees in the universe not only the imprint but also the reflection of God, and whether that image is marred or clearly focused and defined, it is nevertheless an image of God, the only image known in traditional African societies. Mbiti goes on to say that Christianity and Islam have made an astonishingly shallow penetration in converting the African man with all his historical cultural roots, social dimensions, self-consciousness and expectations. Mbiti's observation explains the persistence and revival of councils like *Njuri Ncheke*, *kiama* of the Gikuyu, the Luo and Mijikenda councils of elders among others.

Councils of elders in Kenya have in the recent past formed their organization called 'house of traditional elders of Kenya'. The organization was registered on 22 December 2009, with Kamlesh Pattni as chairman, Riaga Ogallo of the Luo council of elders as vice chairman, and Vincent Mwachiro of the Mijikenda as the treasurer. The councils of elders have been vibrant

and fully involved in current happenings not only in Kenya but also in Africa. In January 2011, over one hundred Kenyan elders made a trip to Libya courtesy of the late Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi, who wanted the elders grass root support in his vision to create a powerful, self- reliant United States of Africa. Concerning the important role of traditional elders, Sheikh Abdil Majid from Tanzania is quoted to have told BBC August 2008 that the people believe in their elders, chiefs and kings more than they believe in their modern governments.

With immense support from the government, the councils of elders have in the recent past been playing reconciliatory roles and arbitrating disputes. In an article in Daily nation 20 December 2013, *Njuri Ncheke* leaders from Meru, and Isiolo council of elders' leaders held a meeting at sportsman Arms hotel in Nanyuki which was meant to resolve a boundary row between Isiolo and Meru Counties. At the meeting, former interior cabinet secretary Joseph Ole Lenku who attended said the ministry would be spearheading all dialogues organized by the councils of elders to resolve disputes. Ole Lenku urged Counties experiencing conflicts to embrace services of councils of elders as mechanisms of resolving their problems. He said that traditional councils are our traditional framework of resolving our conflicts. He also said that although we have the modern legal systems, we also need to embrace our councils of elders. He urged leaders from other regions that are currently facing conflicts and boundary disputes to borrow a leaf from Meru and Isiolo Counties.

The councils of elders have been on the forefront in holding joint prayers for the country. In the recent past, elders from Meru, Kikuyu, Luo, Maasai and Mijikenda communities have been holding 'holy' expeditions according to a report in, The Standard 20th December 2013. One such event was held at Mt. Kenya where elders travelled to and around the mountain in vehicles marked with sky blue ribbons. The groups drove around the mountain anti-clockwise, making seven stops to pray. The organizers said that the forefathers of the communities living near Mt. Kenya believed God lived on the mountain. The groups asked Kenyans to value and preserve their cultures. The pilgrims prayed for peace in volatile areas within the country and for South Sudan and Somalia.

The councils of elders in Kenya have also been seeking official recognition of the elders' roles in the constitution as opposed to the common verbal mention of respect and recognition by the government authorities especially in public gatherings. They issued a statement while attending a cultural festival event organized by *Njuri Ncheke* elders at *Nchiru*, the council's traditional shrine. They said that they are still waiting for recognition of their roles by the constitution. The elders recalled that when President Kibaki hosted them in the year 2010, he

promised that their roles would be recognized through an act of parliament. ‘This is yet to happen,’ said Luo elders’ leader Riaga Ogallo.

Not many studies have been done on the activities of *Njuri Ncheke*, and more so, the resilience of their religious roles and traditional practices in Meru County. Most of the studies that have been done are by foreigners who cannot understand the ramifications and implications of the Ameru religious concepts and their studies are based on the historical perspective. For example Jeffrey (1993) has addressed the oral history of the Ameru. Bernard (1972) addresses Meru Agriculture in transition. Bernardi (1959) has studied the Mugwe: A failing prophet. Imanyara (1992) has done the Meru history. Nki (2001) has addressed traditional and Christian interpretation of healing among the Ameru. Carrier (2007) has done the social life of a stimulant (miraa). Goldsmith (1994) has done Symbiosis and Transformation in Kenya's Meru district. Rimita (1988) has studied the *Njuri Ncheke* history. Mukindia and Onyancha (2013) have studied Integration of African Traditional Religion and Culture in Christian Worship in Africa with Particular Reference to the Methodist Church of Kenya, Meru County. The purpose of this study was to investigate objectively the resurgence of the council in the County and the resilience of their roles, traditional religious practices and religious beliefs. The study also highlighted both strengths and weaknesses of the council in maintaining the cultural and religious traditions of the Meru community. Although this current study focused primarily on the resilient practices and activities of *Njuri Ncheke*, mention was made of the other functions they play in the region and the impact of the contemporary forces upon their activities. As the council cannot revive without peoples consent, it was pertinent to progress from peoples regard for the council to their response in regard to their activities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In Kenya today, there is a diminishing trend of traditional African religious institutions and a notable collapse of traditional forms of government. This can be attributed to the joint assaults of the lingering effects of colonialism, westernization, the cash economy and Christianity. Nonetheless, a crucial part of the old structure has survived and indeed seems to be greatly contributing to the resilience of African traditional Religion. This is the traditional form of government by selected elders called *Njuri Ncheke*. Its culture and tradition has not drowned in modernity and popular lifestyles and there has been a sense of balance between the modern and the traditional propagated by the council of elders. *Njuri Ncheke* is an undying religious and social institution whose influence has increased in the context of a

dynamic society. Despite the clear evidence of resilience of the council in Meru community, no academic study has focused this compounding phenomenon hence the need for the study.

1.3. Broad Objective

To investigate the contributions of councils of elders to the resilience of African Traditional Religion and in particular, the *Njuri Ncheke* of Meru County.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following specific objectives.

- i) To identify the resurgent roles, practices and activities of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County in relation to African Traditional Religion.
- ii) To examine the sources of the influence and authority of *Njuri Ncheke* in contemporary Meru community.
- iii) To analyse the nature of the relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and Christianity in Meru County.
- iv) To assess the relevance of *Njuri Ncheke* as a religious and social institution in the context of a dynamic society.

1.4 Research Questions

The study addressed the following questions.

- i) What are the resurgent roles, practices and activities of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County in relation to African Traditional Religion?
- ii) What is the source of the influence and authority of *Njuri Ncheke* in contemporary Meru society?
- iii) What is the nature of the relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and Christianity in Meru County?
- iv) What is the relevance of *Njuri Ncheke* as a religious and social institution in the context of a dynamic society?

1.5 Justification of the Study

The case of *Njuri Ncheke* was relevant to the study because there is no other council of elders in Kenya whose influence is widely seen as *Njuri Ncheke*. The council is an institution founded on religious values and roles and since this study falls under religious studies discipline, it was necessary to investigate the functions of the council in order to probe the effectiveness of religion in preserving institutions. The choice of Christianity versus *Njuri Ncheke* was influenced by information gathered from a preliminary visit to the area of study, that almost all *Njuri Ncheke* elders are affiliated to Christianity.

The choice of Meru County as the area of study, though wide in scope, was informed by the realization that the council is one but with elders representing each sub-county. Furthermore, the council officials serve the whole County and the traditional shrine at *Nchiru* not only serves but is also maintained by the entire County.

Existing literature on *Njuri Ncheke* council of elders has largely been considered from the historical perspective and not from the religious or social point of view. This is probably because their presence is assumed to be historical and their activities viewed as just normal duties performed by elders. Thus, this study intended to do an in-depth investigation of the resilience of their roles, practices and activities so as to help shed light on the importance of councils of elders in modern society.

The close relationship between the state and the council of elders in Kenya has been seen openly on many occasions. This is not only seen during election campaigns and when settling border disputes but also in relevant matters affecting the country. The council has locally been involved in making decisions affecting the County for instance their intervention in the recent *miraa* ban by the British government, their intervention in eliminating female genital

mutilation among others. The researcher's awareness of such renewed involvement of the council in current affairs motivated the study.

The value of this study to modern society was also a motivating factor. The findings will provide the basis of making recommendations and suggesting a longer term policy by the government to incorporate the roles of councils of elders in the country's constitution. Considering the high rate of insecurity and border disputes in the country, their role in arbitrating and reconciling warring communities come in as a boost to the modern legal systems. Furthermore, an in-depth knowledge of their activities and irreplaceable functions will lead to recognition and appreciation of councils of elders in Kenya. The findings will help *Njuri Ncheke* leadership to re-evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of some of their roles and activities in relation to modern dynamism.

Information concerning the popularity of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru region with membership including not only the old and experienced as it was in the past, but also politicians both young and old, and achievers in various fields, was of interest to the researcher. Currently in Meru region today, it is fashionable to be a member of the council and most of the well to do men in the region are *bonafide* members. Facts concerning such a relevant and popular institution in a county cannot be dismissed without investigation hence the need for the present study.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

Despite the fact that the influence of *Njuri Ncheke* is widely felt in the larger Meru region, the current study confined itself to Meru County, mainly because the County is the origin of the council with its headquarters and traditional shrine at *Nchiru*. The wide scope was influenced by the fact that there is basically one supreme council of elders serving the whole County, with representatives from every sub-county. Preliminary studies indicated that the education levels of most village elders from the County were low, a factor that would have made it difficult for them to respond to the semi structured questions. The problem was addressed by using interviews conducted in Kimeru which is a well understood language in the region, so as to facilitate effective communication. Equally *Njuri Ncheke* is on record for strict observance of Meru traditional culture and religion which bars elders from revealing some information to women. Reluctance and non-cooperation was therefore anticipated, a factor which necessitated the use of male assistants who have been members of the council for a reasonable period of time, at least ten years, so as to avoid suspicion. The researcher also did proper introduction and sought a written consent from the council of elders in

advance to be allowed to carry out a study in a male dominated institution. Similarly, some respondents were reluctant to give some information for fear of breaking taboos and revealing information protected by oaths. The researcher assured respondents of confidentiality, privacy of their identity and readiness to share findings with them so that they could agree to give requested information.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Aramati: A term used to refer to Agikuyu junior council of elders.

BuchPiny: The Luo Council of elders.

Church: A body of Christian believers professing the same creed and acknowledging the same ecclesiastical authority.

Culture: A people's way of life, for example, their religious practices, politics, economy and level of technology. It may also include all other products of human thought made by a particular group of people of a particular time.

Institution: A custom or system that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people.

Kiama: The Gikuyu council of elders.

Mbaine: Very old miraa trees from which come the best *miraa*.

Mithairo: Young *miraa* trees.

Mugwe: The traditional spiritual leader of the Ameru.

Njuri Ncheke: The Meru traditional council of elders that serves as the traditional government and the custodian of Meru traditional religious beliefs and practices.

Nthuki: Generic Kimeru term for age generations.

Practice: A way of doing something that is the usual or expected way in a particular organization or situation. A thing that is done regularly, a habit or a custom.

Religion: A particular system of belief, worship and behaviour. It includes practices, rituals and duties performed in reverence to the deity and the invisible spiritual world. In the African understanding, religion is an important component of culture.

Resilience: The ability of a substance to return to its original shape after it has been bent, stretched, or pressed. Also refers to people's ability to return to their original practices after they have accepted changes.

Ruoth: The Luo chief elder who leads the Luo council of elders.

Schism: Strong disagreement within an organization, especially a religious one that makes its members divide into separate groups.

Syncretism: It is the articulation of beliefs and practices of two or more religions

Zamani: The distant past. That period beyond which no one can remember

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

This Chapter covers the literature review and related works. It categorizes the review into two subsections: the historical background to the scholarship of councils of elders, and recent studies on the resurgence of religious institutions in Kenya. In addition, the chapter also discusses the theoretical framework that guided the study.

2.1.1 Historical Background to the Scholarship of Councils of Elders

Bernadi (1959), has studied the Ameru traditional leadership with *mugwe* (Prophet) at the top. He describes the reigning *mugwe* of the Ameru as the link between the community and the maker, interceding for people and worshipping the God of Mount *Kirimara*. The author links *mugwe* with *Njuri Ncheke*, the traditional council of elders and says that the prophet blesses all ceremonies of the council. Bernadi also notes that as society erodes societal values in Kenya, with formal education and the media weakening the values held dear by its more than forty tribes, the Ameru traditional leadership under *Njuri Ncheke* remains strong and could be part of the country's answer to rising moral decadence. His observation informed the present study.

Parrinder (1962), in his study of traditional systems of authority notes that many of the customs are changing. Parrinder mentions the growth of towns where traditional authority no longer runs, the coming of centralized government, the introduction of democratic elections, the rise of wealthy traders and capitalists, the use of European forms of justice all have shaken the old systems. According to the author, most tribes in Africa had important councils of elders and lesser chiefs who served greatly to limit the actual exercise of the chief's power. The author gives the example of Botswana where a chief was chief by the grace of the tribe and its council of elders. Parrinder says that only by the harmonious cooperation of chief and elders would the life of the people be happy. The author notes that most African chiefs were constitutional rulers as they were subject to the traditional law and any attempt to act independently of it would fail. If they injured any subject, they must make reparation and could even be arraigned and punished by their own council of elders. However, Parrinder did not address the issues of concern to the current study hence the need for the study.

Davidson (1964) says that the African past is an important contribution to the fuller understanding of Africa today and as a guide to Africa of yesterday and of long ago. The author goes on to say that the incoming expeditions from Europe came upon strong societies

and stable traditional governments whose importance to people cannot be ignored. Davidson argues that the roots of African nationalism lie in many fields but one of them is certainly religion and its symbolic religious institutions. The author cites a Christian missionary by the name Henry Morton Stanley, who was deeply impressed by the rule and order that prevailed in Buganda kingdom of the present day Uganda. The Christian missionary praised Africa's natural ability to govern itself in peace and prosperity through their social institutions founded on their religious beliefs and values. The author observes that the theme of unity is not in fact strange to African social development as it emphasizes repeatedly the inner unities that have underlain the great diversity of African life. Davidson says that it is this unity in diversity, continuity in variety that may reasonably justify the efforts to consider African history as a whole, and to show the records within their continental framework. Davidson's observations are general and cannot be confined to a specific region in Africa hence the need for this particular study in Meru County.

Adeyemo (1979), in his exposition of salvation in African tradition argues that cultural revival in Nigeria was out to liquidate the work of the Christian missionaries and their deception that made people throw away their precious heritage. The author says that new cultural revival is subtly teaching that traditional religion and its institutions can coexist with Christianity. According to Adeyemo, the impression young people are getting is that it is patriotic to be involved in cultural dance that come directly from traditional religions. Adeyemo notes that each first generation Christian in Africa is a true protestant in that he protests, or has a confrontation with and breaks away from tribal religion and cultural demands in order to accept Christianity. Today, according to the author, the second generation Christians in many nations in Africa are requested to go through the rites of passage in a contemporary cultural blend in which the ways of the world are a strong attraction. Adeyemo cites an incident when in 1975, thirteen pastors in Chad were shot dead on the order of the late president Tombalbaye for their refusal to embrace Pagan religious practices wrapped subtly in cultural garb. The president decreed that believers could remain Christians but they would have to bow to certain traditional and cultural beliefs. Cultural blend is a common thing in Meru County and it was the concern of this study to unearth the cultural demands and values that *Njuri Ncheke* hold so dear hence making it a strong, undying and authoritative institution.

Mutungi (1977), observes that traditional beliefs and institutions are part and parcel of African culture and he goes on to say that it would be a pity if simply because one learns how

to read and write one abandoned his or her cultural heritage. He says that no religion or system of education can easily convert a people from their culture and way of life. The author notes that there are deep-rooted reasons underlying the persistence of traditional beliefs and social institutions. Mutungi argues that some beliefs and social institutions are relevant only when there is social tension and hostilities. At present, the areas over which people disagree or hate one another are on the increase. As observed in many parts of Kenya today, current trend seems to be pushing not only for the official recognition of the role and place of traditional councils of elders like *Njuri Ncheke*, but also for the incorporation of the same in all aspects of life. Mutungi's arguments formed a strong base for this current study.

Rodney (1972), has done a detailed study of how Europe underdeveloped Africa. In his exposition, he understood tribalism in the African context to mean that Africans have a basic loyalty to tribe rather than nation and that each tribe retains a fundamental hostility towards its neighbouring tribes. Rodney describes the strong African unity before colonialism and says that members of a tribe were seldom all members of the same political unit, and very seldom indeed did they share a common social purpose in terms of activities such as trade and warfare. Pointing out the example of Kenya, Rodney observes that the communities which lay outside the immediate white settler sector were regulated along tribal lines. The author says that among the many other functions performed by elders in these tribal groupings was to give informal education to the youth. Rodney describes it as a type of education which grew out of the environment, the learning process being directly related to the pattern of work in the society.

Rodney describes the above form of education as being crucial in any type of society for the preservation of the lives of its members and the maintenance of the social structure. The author says that the most crucial aspect of pre-colonial African education was its relevance to Africans in sharp contrast with what was introduced by the colonialists. Rodney notes that through mainly informal means, pre-colonial African education matched the realities of pre-colonial African society and produced well rounded personalities to fit into that society. This is a role that councils of elders in many Kenyan communities have retained and Rodney's argument greatly informed the present study.

Hastings (1973), in his study of marriages in Africa indicates clearly that the traditional system as an integral whole is in the course of breaking down. This is partly because many of its presuppositions and sanctions have been removed and partly because new influences are producing new attitudes to life and to the business of marrying among young people. The

author says that formal education diminishes the power of custom and the authority of elders. Hastings notes that the functions of the extended family and the elders were not simply family functions in our sense, but were political, economic and religious, and the need of these functions dictated loyalty to the lineage. According to Hastings, these functions have to a larger extent passed to other bodies at the central and local government, cooperatives and the clergy hence the old machinery which previously carried them out is inevitably becoming less important. The author argues that political, religious and economic purposes are today to an even greater extent sought across relationships and social groupings other than those of lineage. Hastings argues that young people who move to the towns are far away from their elders, clan discussions and ceremonies simply cannot be carried out. The author finally notes that the situation today is so complex and so varied that the traditional pattern has very largely broken. However this has not been the case with Meru County where *Njuri Ncheke* has continued to grow stronger and stronger and the reasons for its survival were the concern of the present study.

Mugambi (1979) notes that cherished customs and beliefs are part of our African heritage, a rich heritage which we should study if we want to understand the past and how it will affect life today. The author says that African traditional cultures, social institutions, lifestyles and attitudes towards life were essentially religious and were believed to have come from God and as such cannot be dismissed. Mugambi examines the role of human spirits and the living dead as the forebearers of the community. The author observes that they upheld communal unity and cooperation just as God and the divinities sustained all social institutions. In this sense, Senghor (1950) is correct in calling the African community collective, for it went beyond the limits of the visible members of the community to include the ancestors and the living dead. Both Senghor and Mugambi agree that a number of political ideologies in Africa today are inspired by belief that socialism and democracy are rooted in the traditions of the African people. The two authors are convinced that the adoption of socialism and democracy as forms of government will be in line with the natural evolution of African communities. Mugambi says that socialism and democracy have always coexisted in African societies and it is important to note that the two always found their blending in religion. It is this nature of religious blending in *Njuri Ncheke* roles and activities that this present study sought to unearth.

In another book, Mugambi (1989), the author argues that every human culture manifests the historical self-understanding of the people who produce it. Moreover, the social institutions of a cultural group express the expectations of the present generation in that

particular group. Mugambi goes on to say that colonization and the modern Christian missionary enterprise jointly shook the foundations of African culture, religion and thought. Mugambi says that the shock waves of these two historical factors have forced Africans to review their own understanding of their place in history and make acceptance of an eschatological view of history that is alien to traditional thought. At the same time, Mugambi notes that modern empirical sciences promises to liberate African peoples from domination by natural forces. The ambiguity of science and technology makes it difficult for many Africans to accept those promises whole heartedly. Mugambi concedes that African peoples have to redefine their identity and their historical self-understanding. In the midst of competing religions, ideologies and technological options each of which claims to be the champions and guardians of peace, justice and truth, our social institutions and beliefs become relevant. The relevance of *Njuri Ncheke* in the context of modern dynamism is what this present study sought to investigate.

Nthamburi (1981) has explored the response of the Meru people to the introduction of Christianity. The author notes that the foreigners with their own way of life became a threat to the people. Their message was condemning anything traditional and this made the Meru people resentful. Nthamburi says that the missionaries preached the Trinity of God which is contrary to the Meru concept that God is one, with no wife or even children. The author says that the idea that God could be considered as having a son was repugnant to the Meru people who believed that it was not the nature of the deity to get a consort. To them, God was neither a father nor a mother, he was the great one, '*Gitiye*'. The author says that the idea of the Trinitarian was difficult to convey to the Meru people. All these contradictions from the foreigners made *Njuri Ncheke* elders feel that their religion which knit all the Meru people together was being eroded. The elders did not only feel threatened but feared to lose their culture through western civilization and as a result they responded harshly. Nthamburi notes that the hut accommodating the first school was set on fire after the door had been fastened from outside to prevent their escape. However Nthamburi's study only gives a picture of the relationship between the Meru people and Christianity at the onset of Christianity but does not explain the current situation where *Njuri Ncheke* elders are also baptised Christians and church leaders. It was the concern of this study to analyse the relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and Christianity, the dominant religion in Meru County.

Bulmann (1982) contends that beneath it all, there is the African's deeply religious pre-disposition. The author says that the African sense of God on whom he knows and is completely dependent is the light that guides him in his life. The writer observes that the

African does not simply believe in God and the spirits of his ancestors but he lives in the full sense of the term under the eyes of the creator, the hidden cause of all other causes. Bulmann notes that anyone denying this would not be considered normal in Africa. Bulmann's study, though making significant contribution towards understanding the concept of God and spirits, is not focused on the specific beliefs and practices that make Africans deeply religious. *Njuri Ncheke*, elders, being the custodians of the Ameru religious beliefs are very religious. Presently, their religious duties have significantly revived and the sacred functions of the traditional shrine at *Nchiru* are on resurgence. It was the concern of this study to investigate more of the religious duties of *Njuri Ncheke* that are resilient and have made a contribution to the resilience of ATR.

Bahemuka (1983), describes Christianity has having come to Africa with its rituals, its standards and values. According to Bahemuka, African societies too had their value systems which were central to the teachings of the society. The author says that although the Africans accepted Christianity, they retained their personality and at moments of crisis, they lean back to where their roots are. The author further argues that the type of Christianity that is emerging in Africa is enriched by the traditions that are to be found on the continent. Bahemuka observes that the African person is caught in a wave of change that has far reaching social, economic and political implications. The author argues that at the level of society, the communities are experiencing great difficulties in choosing what to adopt and what to reject. Bahemuka says that while the African is trying in a dynamic society to conquer the environment, but above all, he is moulded and enriched by his past. It is this past that is so present in Meru County in the leadership of *Njuri Ncheke* that this study sought to investigate.

Jeffrey (1993), has studied the history of the Ameru, and says that *Njuri Ncheke* was formed out of the need to form contacts between the elders' councils. The author notes that in the course of the Ameru migration to their present homeland, interclan and individual conflicts had been settled simply by calling spokesmen from each faction into council on a temporary basis. But as topography scattered the clans, Jeffrey says that the spokesmen concept took a more permanent form. Beginning in Tigania after the 1740's then spreading North to Igembe and more slowly thereafter into the Southern regions, leading members of every elder's council withdrew from the gatherings of few elders to form more exclusive associations of their own. In Tigania and later in adjoining regions, these more exclusive units came to be called '*Njuri*' (council of the few). According to Jeffrey, their initial purpose was also to act as living repositories for the 'secret' now required for their

community to survive. Dissemination of such knowledge which was always protected by an oath meant death.

Jeffrey further notes that at the time of its formation, the functions of *Njuri Ncheke* were to make and execute tribal laws, to listen to and settle disputes and to pass on tribal knowledge and rites across the generations in their role as the custodians of traditional culture. The author observes that the *Njuri Ncheke* still hold a good deal of these prerogatives. Jeffrey says that local disputes will invariably first be dealt with by the *Njuri Ncheke* and only when cases cannot be solved or concern matters involving non Meru people are they passed on to the modern Kenyan judicial system. Although Jeffrey deals more with the historical perspective of *Njuri Ncheke*, his dispositions were relevant to the study and provided a good basis for further investigation. It was the concern of this study to unearth more of the functions played by *Njuri Ncheke* that have led to its resurgence with its influence being felt widely.

Magesa (1999), says that African Christians have appropriated the gospel in their own ways, blending their traditional religiosity with new insights from the gospel enterprise. As a result, the African Christianity in its wide variety is distinct from its parent denominations abroad. Magesa notes that Christianity should be able to contribute actively to the solutions of life's problems by helping people to discover their own identity in the God of Jesus Christ. The author argues that there must be a deep understanding of Christianity and local cultures so that the faith can become relevant to the existing situation. However the author seems to have a general view on the blending of African culture and Christianity. The present study sought to analyse the relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and Christianity in Meru County and unearth the elements of blending therein.

2.1.2 Recent Studies on the Resilient Practices and Activities of Councils of Elders in Kenya.

Kabaji (2000), has studied the life and times of Jomo Kenyatta, the founding father of Kenya as a nation. The author says that Kenyatta was interested in finding a form of government similar to the traditional African systems of government. Kabaji quotes Kenyatta as having said in one of his lectures 'African culture is beautiful and the rest of the world should know about it'. Kenyatta's *harambee* slogan was itself founded on African ideas on socialism which encouraged the spirit of working together in unity, pulling together with each other for the common good. The present study was guided by such arguments.

Marete (2004) has studied the concept of God in the traditional faith of the Meru people. Marete says that the Ameru are very religious and God, whom they call *murungu* is

entrenched in all their cultural and traditional practices. The author cites *Njuri Ncheke* elders claim that God has been part of them and he is their creator, ' *muumbi wa nthi yonthe*'. According to marete, the Ameru knowledge of God is not through Christianity or any other foreign religion but it is inborn and intuitive. The author says that the Ameru worship practices which involved sacrifices and offerings only rekindled the knowledge of God that was already known subconsciously. According to the author, this concept connected various aspects together namely politics, kinship, religion, aesthetics, ethics, economic and social aspects. Marete points that *mugwe* was the king and prophet of the Ameru and he worked hand in hand with *Njuri Ncheke* elders. The author says that when the white people came and asked *Njuri Ncheke* elders whether they had a leader, they cheated that they had none, but in the real sense, *mugwe* was the king of the Meru country, '*mugongo jwa Ameru*'.

In his study, marete observed that the traditional moral system of countering crimes was broken down since it was anti-christian according to the missionaries hence resulting to moral breakdown and social decay. However, marete failed to observe a resurgence in *Njuri Ncheke* system of countering crimes and the current efforts by the elders to undo the moral mess. It was the concern of this present study to unearth the resilient practices by the council geared towards reviving the high moral standards of the Meru people.

Peatrik (2005), traces the origin of the rise to power of *Njuri Ncheke*. The author notes that the popularity and influence of the council had much to do with H.E, Lambert, District Commissioner of Meru in 1934-1935, and 1939-1942. The author argues that the commissioner gave this secretive and exclusive association more prominence than it perhaps originally had by regarding it as the 'council of elders', and insisting that all Meru men who wanted to be appointed at any level of the local administration had to belong to the *Njuri Ncheke*, thus increasing initiation. *Njuri* elders became the new local rulers, and through them Lambert operated a kind of indirect rule in Meru district. According to Peatrik, *Njuri Ncheke* appear to have filled a void left by earlier councils whose identity was disrupted by the imposition of British rule. However the author has not addressed the basis of the influence and popularity of the current *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County hence the need for this study.

Peatrik (2005), and Lamont (2005), have both studied the generation classes and age system among the Tigania and Igembe sub tribes of Meru County. They both agree that the classical age system consist of eight revolving classes called *nthuki* and are for men. They are: *Guantai, Gichunge, Kiramunya, Ithalie, Michubu, Ratanya, Lubetaa and Miriti*. The classes revolve over a fifteen year period, allowing one to speak of a certain era, for example, when the *miriti* were initiated this and that happened in Meru and so on. The two authors

agree that generation classes were mainly used by Meru people to date or to help recall important events. Peatrik further estimates the following dates for when initiation into one class closed and when the next began. *Guantai* closed in 1885, *Gichunge* closed in 1900, *Kiramana* closed in 1915, *Ithalie* closed 1930, *Michubu* 1945, *Ratanya* closed in 1960, *Lubetaa* closed in 1975, *Miriti* closed in 1990 and the cycle is repeated. The author notes that the generation system of the Tigania and Igembe was a multipurpose principle of organisation. As the framework of an integrated political system, it bore an expression of sovereignty although the polity was acephalous and the authority diffused, or more precisely, collective. According to the author, generation classes in Meru region organised kinship and affinity, the domestic cycle, the life course of men and of women alike. Peatrik notes that as a system, the generation classes no longer function but their ethos and certain linked rules, implicit or expressed, still persist. Initiation into the generation, according to the author still occurs and is regarded as important by most Tigania and Igembe. The transition gives the initiate a unique sense of identity in relation to younger boys, their peers and their parents.

Nyaga (1997), had earlier mentioned an older age group in Meru region called *mbaine* and *ntangi*. The author says that the two are reckoned the first *nthuki* to have undergone initiation into warriorhood and are linked to anything dating back to ancient times. Nyaga mentions the popular Meru saying '*kuuma ntangi na mbaine uu niu meru itwire*', meaning, from *ntangi* and *mbaine* things have always been so in Meru. The saying is popularly used to justify and explain traditions and customs especially to newcomers and outsiders. This explains, according to the author why old miraa trees are termed *mbaine*. It is because they are so old they must have been planted by the *mbaine* generation. Miraa from such trees is termed as '*asili*', meaning original. Nyaga is supported by Carrier (2005) who notes that *mbaine* miraa always fetches larger sums than miraa from young *mithairo* trees, one reason, according to carrier why farmers are so keen for their trees to possess this appellation. Both Nyaga and Peatrik concur that the age system remains significant, even though it has ceased to play a dominant role in structuring the Meru society. However the two authors have not studied the role of *Njuri Ncheke* as custodians of Meru customs in maintaining the age system. Consequently, the religious significance of the generation classes has not been discussed. This present study intended to unearth the *Njuri Ncheke* involvement in the maintenance of the age system and the religious connotations therein.

Carrier (2007), points out the emphasis placed on miraa's role in rites of passage. He says that when young people are ready for circumcision, they give miraa to *Njuri Ncheke* elders to request that the circumciser (*mutaani*) be called. If elders give the go-ahead, the next stage

would be to take miraa to the warriors who would then call the circumciser. When taking miraa along to elders to make the request, if one met any other elder along the way, they were obliged to offer up the bundle in their right hand so that they can take a stem or two. If one reached the elders with a still complete bundle, their request may be rejected on the grounds that they are not generous. Thus, if one failed to meet any other elders along the way, it is advisable to throw away a few stems to give the appearance of being suitably generous. The author observes this to be an effective way of imparting values. This present study sought to unearth other methods used by the council to impart values and virtues to the youth.

Carrier further explores the use of miraa by warriors. The author observes that once the new generation of young men are ready for circumcision, the present warriors are also expected to give miraa to *Njuri Ncheke* elders to request the change over of stages to be effected. Once this change over has taken place, former warriors are allowed to marry. The author also observes that at *Njuri* meetings, miraa is always on hand and miraa trees act as shade for *Njuri* members. Small groves of *mbaine* continue to serve as the meeting place for local *Njuri* especially among the Tigania and Igembe. The author notes that in dispute solving, miraa functions as both part of the elders fee for hearing cases, along with locally brewed beer and livestock, and as a balm for mollifying contesting parties. Carrier says that there was a general consensus amongst his Nyambene friends that whenever and wherever *Njuri* gather, miraa is provided in plenty. However carrier has not investigated the ceremonial uses of miraa among *Njuri Ncheke* elders and this is what this current study sought to investigate.

Carrier also mentions the drastic measures taken by *Njuri* elders when some farmers began to spray on miraa trees to smoke out insects that had started invading the leaves. The measures taken by the council were meant to protect consumers from infections through chewing contaminated stem. Carrier says that *Njuri Ncheke* decreed that no spray is to be used and punishment for those ignoring the decree is to have their trees uprooted. The author observes that *Njuri* elders are more in tune with current thinking. Their refusal to countenance spraying, according to the author, fits well with the organic movement popular in Europe and North America. This current study intended to investigate more of *Njuri Ncheke* involvement in issues affecting all sectors in the community.

Onyancha (2010), highlights some of the irreplaceable roles of elders in Kisii community. The author argues that if a particular malevolent behaviour stirred the fury of the community and the culprit remained hidden, the elders summoned an open meeting in which a ritual called *ogotureka chinkore* (turning drinking straws upside down) was performed. The

attendant elders held their straws upside down. The eldest elder present uttered certain words of the curse wishing the culprit ill-luck, including death. According to Onyancha, a curse of this kind was not something to be easily dismissed by anybody. The present study was interested in investigating such irreplaceable functions performed by *Njuri Ncheke* that have made the council remain relevant in the context of modern dynamism.

The Biblical emphasis on the role of elders cannot be ignored. When God called Moses to send him to Egypt to deliver Israelites from slavery, he directed him first to the elders of the Israelites. Exodus 3:16 says: ‘Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob appeared to me and said, I have watched what has been done to you in Egypt, and I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey’. God instructed Moses further that the elders of Israel will listen to him and will go with him to the King of Egypt to ask him to release the Israelites. In the New Testament, Luke 7:2-6 (Revised standard version), says that when a Roman centurion wanted his sick servant whom he valued highly to be healed by Jesus, he sent some elders of the Jews to him asking him to come and heal his servant. And when the elders came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him saying: ‘This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.’ (Luke 7:5). And Jesus went with the elders. Such mediatory roles have been played on several occasions by *Njuri Ncheke* and this is what the present study sought to verify.

Njuri Ncheke is not the only council of elders whose role seems to be contributing to the resilience of African Traditional Religion. The Gikuyu council of elders has been reviving too. Anderson (2011) in his book talks about resurrecting the *kiama*. The Gikuyu council of elders was known as *kiama*, *kapiyo* (2003). It was the highest council formed by several elders from lower councils that were called *aramati*. The *kiama* acted as the court of appeal and administrators of justice in the community. The council also presided over religious activities and other communal activities such as initiation ceremonies. Anderson confirms that the Kikuyu have been coming together in the recent past primarily to raise material support to help their displaced brothers and sisters especially in the Rift Valley. Anderson notes that there has been a debate during several Kikuyu community events on whether the community should re-establish and strengthen their council of elders. According to Anderson, many Kikuyu leaders feel that there is need to separate political representation from community leadership to avoid confused signals especially when the interest of the political class goes against those of the community. Such leaders argue that a council of elders will

enable the Kikuyu wield their twenty two percent stake in the country in a way political leaders cannot.

When trying to find solutions to problems that have afflicted the community or individuals belonging to the community, the Kikuyu elders have been coming together in line with the advice given by God to the first Kikuyu man, 'Gikuyu'. According to the Agikuyu myth of origin, Gichaga (2007), God advised Gikuyu before he parted with him that whenever he had any need he should make a sacrifice under the Mugumo tree and raise his hands towards mount Kirinyaga. God promised his continued assistance any time he called on him. A commitment to this advice was witnessed in Kenya when the international criminal court announced the date for the confirmation of charges hearings against six Kenyan citizens among who was a Kikuyu. The Kikuyu elders removed their shoes, dressed in their traditional attires, and together with the church leaders, they joined hands under a Mugumo tree at *Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga* shrine in Muranga. They beseeched God to grant their son victory as he prepared to face the international criminal court.

The Luo also have their council of elders called *buch piny*, which is made up of elders with a representative from each clan. Their chief elder is called *ruoth*. In the past the council had several responsibilities among them settling disputes, interclan conflicts, declaring war and punishing criminals such as murderers. The council always influenced social and political activities of the community. However according to an article posted by African Press International (No. 1, 2010), an investigative reporter in Kisumu says that cracks have emerged amongst Luo elders following the controversial replacement of embattled Luo council of elders former chairman Ker Meshack Riaga Ogallo by a host of Luo Nyanza members of parliament. Controversy pitying the Luo council of elders began when Riaga Ogallo reportedly made a trip to Libya allegedly without seeking the opinion of a section of its leaders. Some other council members were also unhappy with his decision to champion a campaign that saw a non-governmental organization push for male circumcision amongst the community that traditionally did not practice the cut. Such cracks have also been witnessed in *Njuri Ncheke* where sometimes elders differ in opinion and preferences and it is among the issues the present study seeks to verify.

It is reported that over one hundred Kenyan elders made a trip to Libya courtesy of the late president Muammar Gaddafi. At the meeting held at Libyan capital Tripoli, Gaddafi revealed his vision to create a powerful and self-reliant united states of Africa. The Libya's leader wanted the elders and traditional leaders to create a grassroots movement to press Africa's political leaders to sign up his vision. At the meeting, one hundred Kenyan elders led

by the chairperson, Kamlesh Pattni presented a shilling one hundred million petition to Gaddafi for the first phase of an initiative to boost the economic standings of their respective communities. The house of elders' national treasurer Vincent Mwachiro of Mijikenda is quoted to have said in agreement with Gaddafi's vision, 'had he been successful, hunger issues and water problems in Africa would eventually have become a thing of the past. Every African country would have brought something to the table. Some countries have water; others fuel, while others have gold and diamond. With our combined resources, borrowing from the west would have been a thing of the past. The western powers would lose control over African states'

Elders' councils are reported to have issued a joint statement urging political leaders to cease hate debates in public to avoid plunging the country into chaos similar to those experienced after the 2007 general elections. The Luo council of elders' chairman Riaga Ogallo is quoted to have said that lack of trust and strained tribal relations led to chaos. The elders were speaking at the supreme *Njuri Ncheke* council of elders' traditional shrine at *Nchiru* in Tigania West district during the cultural festival of the Meru elders. At the meeting, Kamlesh Pattni pledged to purchase a car for the *Njuri Ncheke* chairman to enable him traverse the country spreading the message of peace. The elders said that peace mediator Koffi Anan should not be the only one tasked with the responsibility of mediating for peace but elders too should be involved. They also called for transparency in the utilization of funds generated in the Kenyans for Kenya initiatives.

Njuri Ncheke has been on the forefront preaching peace and reconciliation with the neighbouring communities. The *Njuri Ncheke* and Embu council of elders have forged a joint venture to unite their communities. The two council leaders met at the Izaak Walton Inn in Embu where they declared the working relationship. Speaking during the meeting that was facilitated by Embu Senator Lenny Kivuti, the elders said that they united for political social, economic and cultural benefit. In his message, the Embu senator said that the two councils had been consulting and had come up with resolutions which will benefit their communities. The senator added that it is a venture that should continue and should be supported by members of both communities. *Njuri Ncheke* has also recently been involved in resolving a boundary dispute between Isiolo and Meru counties. This present study will be seeking to investigate more of the functions performed by *Njuri Ncheke* that have made the council so relevant in modern society.

A recent study by Mukindia and Onyancha (2013), mainly addressed the issue of integration of African religion and culture in Christian worship in the Methodist Church of

Kenya in Meru County. The study found membership to *Njuri Ncheke* fashionable even among the Christian converts despite the fact that Methodist Church doctrines do not allow baptized church members to join the council in any capacity. The study revealed a show of unity between the Church and *Njuri Ncheke* elders when handling issues affecting the Meru community. Mukindia and onyancha regarded this kind of unity as a case of syncretism where beliefs and practices of two religions are being articulated. This is because *Njuri Ncheke* elders are the custodians of ATR while the Church is the propagator of Christianity. However the study did not deal with the problem at the centre of the present study. It did not address the persisting role and influence of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County.

All the above studies do not address the issues of concern to the present study as confirmed in the literature already reviewed. No study has addressed the issue of resilience of religious practices of an undying institution whose functions are not being replaced by modern institutions like modern courts, modern religions and culture. From the above reviewed literature, it is clear that the question of the resilience of religious roles of councils of elders which have contributed to the resilience of African Traditional Religion in Kenya today has not been adequately covered, at least not in Meru County. It is thus clear that a gap exists in knowledge with regard to the social, political, economic, religious and cultural influence of councils of elders in Kenya today and this is what the present study sought to address.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: The Functionalism Theory

The present study will be informed by the functionalism theory of religion as understood by Emile Durkheim (1915), Talcott Parsons (1951) and Robert Merton (1968). Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917) was a great French sociologists whose writings form the basis for functionalist theory of religion. Theories of religion can be classified into substantive theories and functional theories. Substantive theories focus on the contents of religion and the meaning the content has for people. Functional theories focus on the social or psychological functions that religion has for a group or a person. The concern of this study is the social and psychological function of religion bearing in mind that councils of elders are not just social institutions but are religious institutions founded on religious values. Elders were traditionally categorized as religious specialists who performed religious duties and were a link between the living and the living dead, a role that *Njuri Ncheke*, zealously continues to play to date.

Functionalism theory focuses on relationships between religion and social institutions. Its guiding notion has been that religions shape the values that ground the major institutions of

societies and that, reciprocally, many practical circumstances in a society conditions its religious life. Functional theory has particularly emphasized long term effects of religion on other institutions including political, economic, education and cultural institutions. According to Durkheim (1915), each society has certain needs in that there are a number of activities that must be carried out for social life to survive and develop. He says that goods and services must be produced and distributed in order for people to survive, there must be some administration of justice, political system must exist and some family structure must operate so as to provide a means to reproduce the population and maintain social life on a daily basis. In the structural functional model, individuals carry out each of these tasks in various institutions and roles that are consistent with the structures and norms of the society.

Functionalist analysis looks on social systems as having certain needs and society as a system of social structures. If needs are being met, then it is the social structures that meet these needs. The structures are thus functional in the sense that they help society to operate. While most sociological approaches recognize the interdependence of the elements of a society, a functionalist approach tends to regard these elements of society as having particular functions to perform.

Parsons (1951), a great proponent of the functionalist theory argues that each individual occupies a status or position within a social structure. He actually viewed the whole world as a system of societies. Status and role tend to go together in what parsons calls the 'status – role bundle.' These are the ways in which individuals fill the structures of society. So long as roles are performed, the structures function smoothly and it is individuals carrying out their functions and roles within these structures that make the functions work. The functional approach tends to argue that there is consensus within the social system. Individual's behaviour is governed by social norms or rules that are generally accepted and agreed upon. These are like Durkheim's social facts or moral regulations, in that they govern behaviour, and while they are coercive, they are also generally agreed upon. These norms and values are consistent with the equilibrium state of society, or normal state of society, or normal state of affairs. There are aspects of these norms that return the society to a normal state of affairs in the case of a disturbance, for instance, sanctions, punishments, social approval and social disapproval. Councils of elders have since their inception been bestowed the responsibility to bring the society to normal state of affairs.

Durkheim saw religion as reflection of the concern for the society. He held the view that the function of religion is group cohesion often performed by collectively attended rituals.

He asserted that these group meetings provided a special kind of energy that made group members lose their individuality and to feel united with the gods and thus with the group. The functionalism emphasis on the organic unity of society leads functionalists to speculate about needs which must be met for social system to exists, as well as the ways in which social institutions satisfy those needs. A functionalist might argue for instance, that every society will have a religion because religious institutions have certain functions which contribute to the survival of the social system as a whole, just as the organs of the body have functions which are necessary for the body's survival.

Merton (1968), another prominent functionalist has proposed a number of important distinctions to avoid potential weaknesses and clarify ambiguities in the basic perspective. First, he distinguishes between manifest and latent functions. Respectively those which are recognized and intended by actors in the social system and hence may represent motives for their actions, and those which are unrecognized and thus unintended by the actors. Second, he distinguishes between consequences which are positively functional for a society and those which are dysfunctional for the society, and those which are neither. Thirdly, he distinguishes between levels of society, that is, the specific social units for which regularized patterns of behaviour are functional or dysfunctional.

Finally all the great functionalists, Durkheim, Parsons and Merton concur that the particular social structures which satisfy functional needs of society are indispensable, but that structural alternatives may exist which can also satisfy the same functional needs and therefore contribute to a society's survival. It is on the basis of this view that this study is pegged on Durkheim's functionalism theory.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology of this study. It is divided into subsections as follows: research design, area of study, target population, sampling procedure, research instruments, pilot study, data collection procedures, data analysis and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

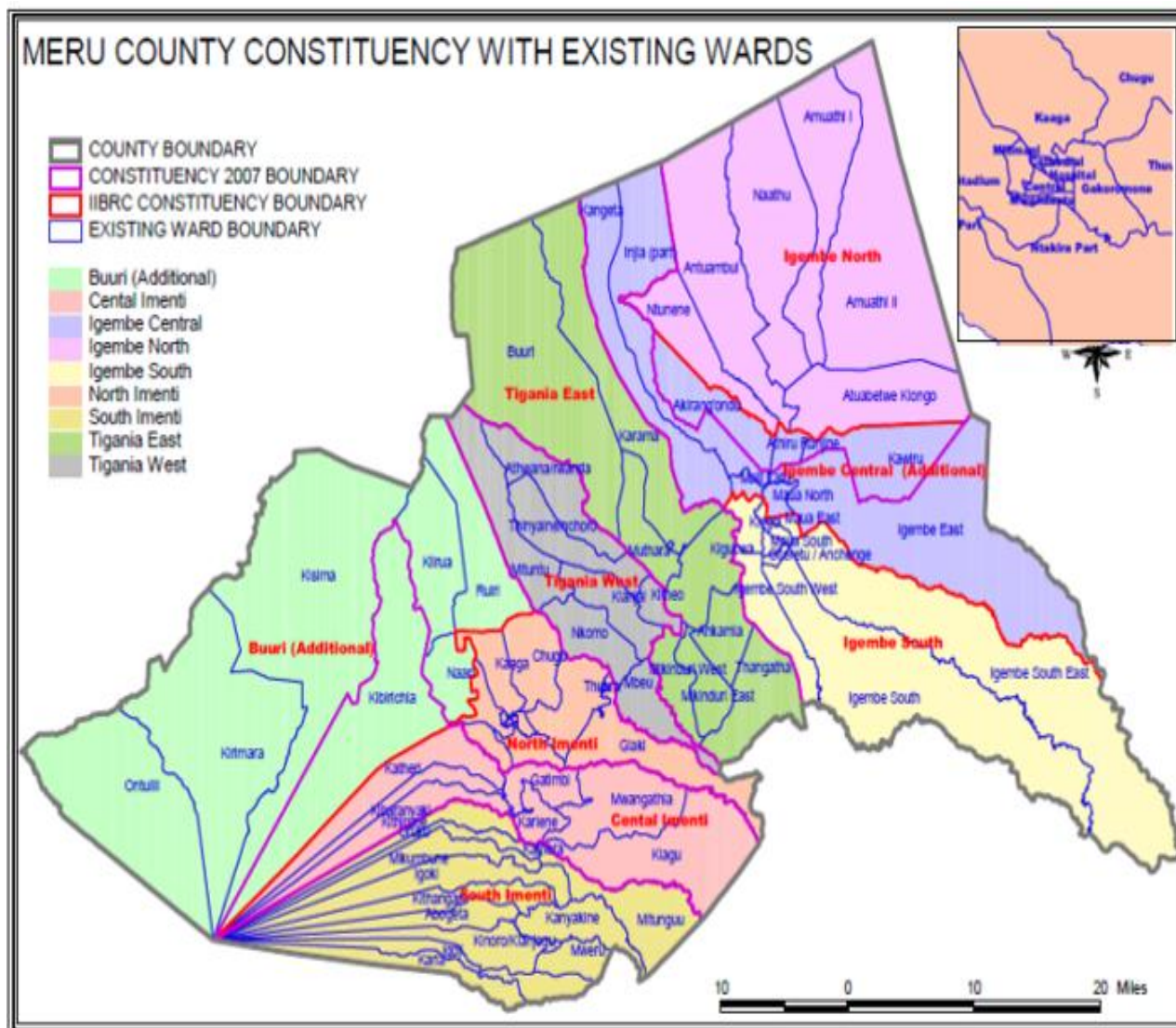
The study is qualitative and it employed a case study research design. This design was chosen with an aim to achieve an intensive descriptive and holistic analysis of the subject under investigation. According to Kombo and Delno (2006), the design facilitates a detailed assessment of a single instance which for this study is the contributions of councils of elders to the resilience of ATR in Kenya with *Njuri Ncheke* of Meru County as a case study. This study sought to find out the opinions and attitudes of *Njuri Ncheke* elders and the residents of Meru County in general on the resurgent roles and practices of the council that have contributed to the resilience of ATR. By using this design, it was possible to evaluate the unique aspects of the study topic in the study area. The study type allowed the respondents to give their opinions and attitudes freely as this is what a qualitative type of study is all about. The researcher opted to use this method as it incorporates an in depth analysis of the topic under study. The method was also advantageous because due to its flexibility, the method could use either qualitative or quantitative data or both, and this gave the researcher greater options in selecting the instruments for data gathering. The researcher used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained using structured questions and interviews while secondary data was obtained from books, journals and internet.

3.2 Area of study

The study was conducted in Meru County of Kenya. Meru County is one of the 47 Counties of Kenya located in the former Eastern Province. The County comprises nine (9) sub-counties namely, Buuri, Igembe Central, Igembe South, Igembe North, Central Imenti, North Imenti, South Imenti, Tigania West and Tigania East. The respondents were drawn from each sub-county. This is because there is only one supreme council that serves the County but with elders representing every sub-county. The members of the clergy and religious leaders together with the ordinary respondents were also carefully selected from each sub county. The County is located about 300 kilometres from Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. The 2009 national population census placed the number of occupants of this County

at 1.356 million (G.K. 2009). However the population of the County has increased in the recent past and is expected to increase even more in future following an influx of students and workers to the Kenya Methodist University (KEMU), and Meru University. The County is predominantly agricultural with *miraa* serving as the main cash

Crop in some of the sub-counties. The major economic activity of the inhabitants is agriculture. The major religion in the County is Christianity with the Methodist Church of Kenya being the dominant denomination. Below is a map of Meru County with its nine sub-



counties.

Plate 1: Map of Meru County

Source: Independent Boundaries and Electoral Commission (IEBC)

3.3 Target population

The target population was 200 respondents all drawn from Meru County. This figure was arrived at after consideration of several factors among them, sub-county representativeness,

denominational balance and the number of *Njuri Ncheke* elders in the County. There are currently approximately 2000 members of *Njuri Ncheke* with 100 belonging to the supreme council. To ensure a higher applicability of the research findings, the population size was diversified to include the elders of *Njuri Ncheke*, lay church leaders and the clergy and the ordinary people. Since *Njuri Ncheke* elders do not operate in isolation, the clergy from the denominations represented in the County, together with ordinary people were given an opportunity to give their opinions, which is the very essence of qualitative research. The choice of a diversified target population was based on the premise that the diversity will give a true picture of the situation in their environment in relation to the roles and activities of *Njuri Ncheke*. Since the activities of the elders spread across the whole County, the study was not confined to specific sub-counties, but selected respondents from across the County. The purpose of selecting ordinary people who are neither elders nor church leaders was basically to corroborate information given by both elders and the religious leaders. The researcher took into consideration facts such as age, status and the length of time in the council when selecting the respondents. Although sex composition did not matter much in the selection of respondents, it was obvious that all elders had to be male because *Njuri Ncheke* does not allow female membership. However, the study focused more on the elders who are *bonafide* members of *Njuri Ncheke*.

3.4 Sampling procedure

The sample size discussed above was purposively selected from Meru County. There was a total of 92 *Njuri Ncheke* elders purposively selected from a population of 100 members of the supreme council. Each of the nine sub-counties was fairly represented with 10 elders purposively selected from each sub-county. There were also 45 respondents from the church clergy and leadership with each sub-county well represented. The remaining 63 respondents were ordinary people with representatives, both men and women from each sub-county, while 2 elders were selected from *Nchiru*, the council headquarters. The study employed purposive sampling to identify the respondents, specifically snowball to enable the researcher identify specific kinds of cases. This enabled the researcher to select respondents who could relevantly be used in addressing the research questions and meeting the specific objectives. It also enabled an in-depth analysis of the issue under study. The sampling procedure adopted was informed by the fact that not every Meru man is an elder of *Njuri Ncheke* therefore snowball type of purposive sampling was necessary to enable the researcher identify the elders of the council.

When purposively selecting the study sample, some factors were taken into consideration such as education background, life experience and insight into the issue under investigation, religious background, occupation, gender and age. Each of the variables that were taken into account had their own relevance and importance in relation to the study. To help identify credible respondents, the researcher relied on local clan elders and religious leaders. Their close interaction with the people puts them at the advantage of knowing who is who in the community.

3.5 Research instruments.

In this present study, data was collected using two instruments mainly semi structured questions and structured interviews.

3.5.1 Semi Structured questions.

The semi structured questions were important tools used for data collection in this study. For reasons of the nature of this study, the questions were prepared in such a manner that it was possible to give respondents sufficient latitude to reveal in-depth information. Thus, the questions assumed three characteristics namely: structured, unstructured and matrix questions. Questions in the structured category had provisions for alternative answers from which the respondents could choose and a further space for own expressions. The unstructured questions were open ended to enable respondents to comment freely. Finally, the matrix questions required respondents to just indicate with a tick what he/she thought to be correct answer to the questions.

The structured questions also included background information about the respondents. There were three sets of semi structured questions, one for the elders who are members of *Njuri Ncheke*, the second one for the clergy and religious leaders, and third one for ordinary respondents who are not members of *Njuri Ncheke* and were not church leaders as well. Respondents were asked to fill the structured questions at their own time and the filled structured questions were later collected by the researcher and research assistants. However, the main limiting factor in the use of such questions is that they are useful only to the literate segment of the study population (Kinoti, 1998). It requires educated and cooperative respondents. This applied in Meru County and greatly limited the number of *Njuri Ncheke* elders who filled the semi structured questions due to their low literacy level.

3.5.2 Structured interviews

In this approach to interviewing, an interview guide was used. This is a list of questions that needed to be covered by the interview. Some of the questions were open-ended and conversational to facilitate the asking of probing questions in relation to the objectives of the study. Mugenda (1999) has argued that it is usually necessary to use probing questions in order to get in-depth information from respondents. Kombo and Delno (2006) agree with Mugenda that structured interviews help the informant to open up and the researcher to stimulate the informant to produce more information. Interview as a research instrument has also been attributed with qualities of flexibility, probability, facilitation of observation and high probation of frankness, Kinoti (1998). This approach was employed in this research. (See appendices D-F for interview guide questions). The recording of information during interviews was done mainly by note taking and tape recording, wherever it was possible and necessary, and upon consent from the respondent.

Although interview as an instrument of research has been described as both expensive and time consuming (Mugenda, 1999), but it is the most appropriate in extracting information from a population where some of the respondents are illiterate. This was practical in Meru County where some respondents, especially *Njuri Ncheke* elders were semi illiterate and others illiterate. But through interviews conducted in *Kimeru*, the language well understood by the elders, an enabling latitude was created which allowed *Njuri Ncheke* elders to narrate their experiences and freely give their opinions.

3.5.3 Validation and Reliability of Research Instruments.

To ensure reliability and validity of the research instruments, semi structured question drafts were first discussed with the supervisors and revisions were made based on their comments and recommendations. It was also achieved by holding a training session for the two research assistants who took part in actual field data collection exercise. This greatly helped in the standardization of data collection exercise.

3.6 Pilot study

The researcher conducted a pilot study prior to the administration of research instruments. The pilot study was for the purpose of enabling the researcher to refine the research instruments. This was made possible by making corrections based on the observations made, adding new items, deleting some items and estimating the time taken by respondents to respond to the semi structured questions. This ensured that the instruments were refined before their final administration and also tested the validity and reliability of the research

instruments. Ary (1972) argues that the adequacy of the research procedures and anticipated problems that are there may be solved at this stage, thereby saving the time and efforts and this is exactly what was done in this study. For the purpose of the pilot study, the researcher purposively selected twelve respondents. These were four members of *Njuri Ncheke*, four respondents from religious leadership, and four ordinary people who are not members of the council. The researcher administered the research instruments with assistance of the two research assistants and was keen to ensure maximum response and return of the structured questions.

3.7 Data collection

Data was collected using guided interviews and semi structured questions. The interest of the researcher was guided by the need to collect indepth data essential to qualitative research (Mugenda 1999). Interviews were made intensive as indicated in the interview schedule. The respondents were interviewed on their beliefs, practices and perceptions in relation to the roles and activities of *Njuri Ncheke* in the County. The interrogations were informed by the need to determine the basis of the resilience and influence of *Njuri Ncheke* in the County, and the attitudes of respondents to the council of elders in the light of their resurgent activities. Raw data was collected from the field by the researcher alongside two trained male assistants who were recruited from the locality of the research.

3.8 Data Analysis and Presentation

A large quantity of data was collected. The researcher analysed the data using qualitative methods of data analysis in line with social sciences. The collected raw data was subjected to thorough reading for familiarization. Field notes were edited and note cards were used to record needed information. There were also codes to relate the data collected to the theoretical framework that guided the study. The matrix design was employed to generate frequencies on which discussions and opinions were based, Kombo and Delno (2006). All the structured questions and interview schedule obtained from the field were assembled. Using study objectives and research questions as guidelines, all the data from the field was summarized to draw conclusions. The researcher then brought out meaningful observations made during the study. The findings of the study were critical in determining the resilience, sources of the influence, place and future of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County. On the basis of these findings, the researcher has made conclusions, suggestions and recommendations for future action and research.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The term ethics refers to the moral principles that define human behaviour as good or bad. Ethical behaviour is the morally accepted behaviour or conduct that is right according to the standards of the society. Unlike animals, human beings need to be concerned about one another and take seriously the principles of right and wrong, which calls for some degree of responsibility. All professions, research inclusive, have ethical guidelines which guide the way professionals operate in their efforts to achieve their objectives. For this reason, the researcher in this present study considered ethical issues that may arise while conducting the research and reporting findings. Given the sensitivity of the subject under study, there were challenges anticipated especially concerning the secrecy of *Njuri Ncheke* which is male dominated, and in this case, the researcher is a female. Penetrating the organization was expected to pose a challenge and this required proper introduction and great assurance of privacy and confidentiality. A prior visit to the top *Njuri Ncheke* leadership in the company of two male research assistants was very necessary so as to remove possible obstacles with regard to gender. It also helped break the ethical barrier even before the actual administration of the research instruments. In order to take risks and responsibilities involved, the researcher had to take some steps to minimize eventualities.

The researcher has acknowledged the ideas of other authors, those whose work is already reviewed, so as to avoid plagiarism. Permission was also sought from relevant authorities to carry out the study. An advance letter was sent by the researcher to sample respondents explaining the purpose of the study. Information was also given to the respondents regarding the voluntary nature of the study. The researcher also sought consent from the respondents regarding the use of camera and video tapes. The researcher also introduced herself to the council of elders and fully explained the purpose of the study in advance, making it clear that it is purely academic with no financial gain either to the researcher or the respondents. The benefits of the study and its contribution to the Meru community and the country at large were made clear to the respondents.

The researcher obtained informed consent from all subjects used in the study and there was openness and honesty in dealing with the respondents. All reasonable measures were taken to protect respondents physically and psychologically even at the cost of the study. The researcher maintained confidentiality all the time and assured respondents of privacy of their identity and any information revealed. The researcher has accepted individual responsibility for the conduct of the research, and, as far as foreseeable, the consequences of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study findings and their interpretations based on objectives. The first objective was to identify the resilient practices, roles and activities of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County. The second objective was to examine the sources of influence and authority of *Njuri Ncheke* in contemporary Meru community. The third objective was to analyze the nature of the relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and Christianity in Meru County and the fourth objective was to assess the relevance of *Njuri Ncheke* in the context of a dynamic society.

4.2 Demographic Information of the Respondents

The researcher sought demographic information of the respondents in order to establish if there was equal representation in the sampling and to find out the period of time the elders have been in the council. In this regard, the respondents' background which included the sex, age, academic and professional qualifications was sought. 92% of the sampled members responded. The analysis of their responses revealed that all the elders of *Njuri Ncheke* were male as earlier projected by the researcher. Concerning the other respondents, 80% of the members of the clergy were male, probably because the key religious leaders in the community especially from the mainline churches are male. Female respondents from the clergy formed only 20%. From the ordinary respondents, 62% were male while 48% were female. This indicated that most respondents were male. The information about the other variables was analyzed and presented in tables 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Table 1: Respondents' Age

Age	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Under 20		
Elders (TOTAL – 94)	Nil	0
Clergy (TOTAL – 45)	Nil	0
Ordinary respondents (TOTAL – 63)	20	22
21 – 40		
Elders	20	19
Clergy	12	33
Ordinary respondents	20	45
41 – 60		
Elders	44	42
Clergy	25	56
Ordinary respondents	20	22
Above 60		
Elders	30	38
Clergy	8	11
Ordinary respondents	3	9

The findings in Table 1 above revealed that there were no *Njuri Ncheke* elders below 20 years. This is because men of that age are too young to be initiated into the council. There were also no members of the clergy or religious leaders below the age of 20. However, a few ordinary respondents particularly the youth of below 20 years responded and their responses were imperative more especially in regard to the fourth objective that sought to establish the future and relevance of *Njuri Ncheke* in the context of a dynamic society. It was clear that most respondents were middle aged mostly above 40 years except for *Njuri Ncheke* elders where majority of the respondents were above 60 years.

Table 2: Academic and Professional Qualifications

Grade	No. of Respondents N = 200	Percentage (%)
University	20	10
Middle level colleges	54	27
Secondary school level	46	23
Primary school level	40	20
Illiterate	40	20

The results in Table 2 above showed that 10% of the respondents had acquired university education. However none of the *Njuri Ncheke* elders selected for this study had acquired university education although there are members of that calibre in the council. 27% of the respondents had acquired various skills in the middle level colleges. 23% of the respondents had reached secondary school level but did not proceed to any college, while 20 of the respondents, most of whom were elders, had only reached primary school level. Respondents in the last category of illiterates were majorly *Njuri Ncheke* elders of above 70 years who either rejected western education or did not have an opportunity to go to school at their early age. The findings clearly revealed that there were literate respondents with good academic and professional qualifications, and there were also illiterate respondents, majorly elders, with neither formal education, nor formal training. Their occupations are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Respondents Occupations

Occupation	No. of Respondents N = 200	Percentage (%)
Unemployed	44	22
Salaried employment	54	27
Self-employed	82	41
Others	20	10

The information presented in Table 3 above indicated that majority of the respondents were self employed, mainly farmers and business people in Meru County, an indication that most respondents were within reach for this study. Most of the *Njuri Ncheke* elders were in this category of self-employed. 26% are unemployed while another 26% are on salaried employment. 10% of the respondents earned a living through unspecified jobs. The

researcher sought to know the length of time the elders have been members of the council. The information is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Length of Time as Members of the Council (for Njuri Ncheke Elders only)

Length of Time	No. of Respondents N = 93	Percentage (%)
1 – 2 years	10	10
3 – 10 years	40	43
10 – 30 years	20	22
30 years and above	23	25

The information presented in Table 4 above revealed that more than half of the elders have joined the council within the last 10 years, an indication of resurgence in initiation into the council, 17% of the elders have been members for around 30 years while 22% have been members for over 30 years. This means that most of the *Njuri Ncheke* elders selected for this study were quite knowledgeable with regard to the affairs of the council.

4.3 Resilient Practices, Roles and Activities of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County

This section presents the research findings for the first objective of the study which was to identify the resilient practices, roles and activities of the council in Meru County. The research question for collecting relevant data was stated as follows:

“What are the resilient practices, roles and activities of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County?”

On the basis of this objective, the respondents mentioned several practices, roles and activities of *Njuri Ncheke* that have been revived out of necessity and their functional nature. The responses indicated that the resurgence has received overwhelming support from the entire community as the need for some practices and roles was echoed by the elders, the clergy and the ordinary respondents. Two methods of data collection were used here. These were structured interviews with questions that were open-ended and conversational, and there were also structured questions for literate respondents. The respondents were required to respond to an open-ended question that stated thus:

“Are there roles and practices that *Njuri Ncheke* has revived?” If your answer is yes, mention them.

The responses were as shown in the table below.

Table 5: Resilient Practices, Roles and Activities of Njuri Ncheke in Meru County

Practices and Roles	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
	N = 200	
Educating young initiates (seclusion)	90	45
Revival of elders moral duties	85	42
Religious and cultural duties	90	45
Decision making role	50	25
The role of settling disputes and arbitration	65	33

Note: Respondents gave more than one practice.

From Table 5 above, 98% of the respondents pointed out that the traditional role of educating newly initiated men who were graduating from childhood to adulthood has been revived in the name of seminar camps. 92% of the respondents agreed that the council has revived their role of making important decisions on behalf of the community, especially political decisions. 98% of the respondents were in agreement that religious practices of *Njuri Ncheke* especially the power to curse and bless is resurgent. 71% pointed out that the duty of the council to maintain moral standards through punitive disciplinary measures is resilient while 98% of the respondents said that *Njuri Ncheke* currently settles disputes and arbitrates on serious matters affecting the community.

4.3.1 Further Discussion on Table 5.

4.3.2 Education for Young Initiates Graduating from Childhood to Adulthood (Seclusion Period)

Seminar camps are a common feature and a recent development in Meru County. According to elder Batiri, the *Njuri Ncheke* Secretary from South Imenti component, (OI), seminar camps are a replacement of the traditional seclusion period that young initiates were subjected to in Meru community. The elder noted that initiation was a compulsory major stage in life when a Meru man moved from childhood to adulthood. The young initiates were separated from the rest of the community and were placed in seclusion for a period of one month. During this transition, the individual underwent some physical, social and emotional changes that necessitated guidance and instructions from elders. In their secluded huts called ‘*Gaaru*’, they received special education from their sponsors and the recognized elders who were men of *Njuri*. They were instructed on how to behave as adults, warriors, future

husbands and parents. They were also taught the secrets of their Meru community. After the seclusion, the young adults were brought back to the community and given full rights in their new status. Elder Batiri says that they became active participants in the Meru community, forming on age-set or age group. They acquired a new name and henceforth maintained a strong sense of brotherhood. This stage, according to the elder was compulsory and anyone who skipped for whatever reason remained an outcast. He was regarded as a child (*mwiji*), however old he was.

Rodney (1972) describes the above type of education as one which grew out of the environment, the learning process being directly related to the pattern of work and discipline in the society. Rodney describes this form of education as being crucial in any type of society for the preservation of the lives of its members and the maintenance of the social structure. The author says that the most crucial aspect of pre-colonial African education was its relevance to Africans in sharp contrast with what was introduced by the colonialists. Rodney notes that through mainly informal means, pre-colonial African education matched the realities of pre-colonial African society. Education offered at the community level by elders and sponsors matched the realities of pre-colonial African society and produced well rounded personalities to fit into that society. It is this kind of education that has been revived in Meru County by *Njuri Ncheke* elders. Most elders who were interviewed were in agreement that post-initiation education and instructions were a necessity if the issue of moral decay in Meru County is to be addressed. Elder M'Mucheke of Igembe Central component (OI), blamed lack of proper post-initiation instructions for the presence of rebellious children in many families, irresponsible parenthood, broken families, deviant behaviour and general indiscipline in the community.

Seminar camps were introduced around 2009 by the Methodist church with an aim of bringing together the young Christian initiates to socialize them and to impart Christian values. Reverend Jack Mawira of the Methodist church, (OI), clarified that the initial intention of the Methodist church was not to revive the seclusion period but to create an environment where their young Christian initiates could come together to receive Christian teachings and to get enlightened on important health issues and hygiene. However, with time, the church management found it necessary to incorporate *Njuri Ncheke* elders so as to equip the young Christian initiates with knowledge of their traditions and community expectations. This, according to elder M'Mukangu of North Imenti component, (OI) created an opportunity for *Njuri Ncheke* elders to revive their special instructions and education as it was done in the traditional seclusion hut. The Catholic Church later joined the Methodist church in the wave

of seminar camps and they also started teaching their young Christian initiates. An interview with Father Murianki, Father Micheni, and Father Kimathi of Nkubu Catholic Diocese, (OI) revealed a unified effort by the church and *Njuri Ncheke* elders to produce holistic young adults equipped with knowledge in all aspects of life so as to minimize indiscipline cases. Notably, the young boys who are ready for initiation are free to join any seminar camp irrespective of their denominational affiliations.

Seminar camps are usually organized during December holidays specifically for boys who have already done their Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination. Mr. Koome, a respondent who is a primary school headteacher, (OI) informed the researcher that no circumcised boy is allowed back to the primary school after the transition. Mr. Koome said that the kind of education they are exposed to, and their experiences at the seminar camps cannot allow them to fit in a primary school environment as they have already been made to feel that they are adults. The headteacher mentioned that the parents have been enlightened and advised to ensure that their sons are ready to join secondary school before handing them over to the camp organizers for initiation and subsequent seminar experience. *Njuri Ncheke* elders have taken advantage of this scenario to revive the common initiation season and this happens to be the month of December. Traditionally in the Meru community, there was always a circumcision period that was commonly known as '*mweri jwa ntaano*', meaning, 'the initiation month'.

Different sub-tribes had their own preferred seasons as determined by the smaller elder councils of those regions. However most sub-tribes had similar seasons. But as Christianity and western education came into the region, individualism cropped in and individual families slowly began to make their own arrangements for their sons' initiation. But following the introduction of seminar camps, *Njuri Ncheke* elders working closely with the primary school headteachers and church leaders have revived a common initiation season. Father Murianki and Father Micheni praised this initiative and said that it has created order and harmony in the County. However some ordinary respondents noted that the common season is sometimes a disadvantage to the young initiates who do not pass well in their Kenya Certificate of Primary Education as they are barred from repeating standard eight to resit the examination. Meru parents who work and live in urban centers far away from Meru land travel home during December holidays when their sons are ready for initiation to ensure that they are well socialized in the expectations of their community.

The climax of the seminar camps is the graduation day when family members come together to celebrate their sons' new status thus strengthening the bonds of kinship. The

ceremony is called “*Kuuma gwa ntaane*” meaning, ‘the passing out of the initiates’. According to elder M’Ncebere of Tigania East, (OI) seminar camps are an opportunity created by the gods of the land to allow initiates receive special instructions from elders, a role that had been swept away by the waves of Christianity, western education and western lifestyles. M’Ncebere, who comes from a lineage that traditionally produced priests who served at the shrines sees the sprouting of seminar camps as a result of intervention by the spirits of the patriarchs particularly Koomenjue and Kauro-o-Bechau whom he believes always intercede for the community. Like other African communities where ancestors are believed to communicate to the living through religious specialists, (Mbiti 1969), the Meru people believe that the patriarchs communicate their wishes through, among other specialists, *Njuri Ncheke* elders. Traditionally, initiation rite was a whole community affair and *Njuri Ncheke* elders decided the time and season for it. Such occasions were also meant to bring family members together and it was an opportunity for the young people to know the members of their extended families. This particular aspect of bringing people together is resilient as witnessed by the researcher during the data collection exercise which coincided with the initiation season. The researcher had a hard time choosing which family to celebrate with as many families, including those of some respondents, hosted parties to celebrate ‘*kuuma gwa ntaane*’.

The researcher sought views of parents whose sons had earlier on gone through the seminar camps. Susan Nkirote, (OI), whose son had successfully gone through the seminar camp was grateful to the church and *Njuri Ncheke* elders for helping the young initiates through their guidance and instructions. As a single mother, Susan admits that she would never have been able to give her son the kind of training and instructions he received at the camp. Susan proudly said that the son is now in form four, a disciplined boy who is always proud to be a Meru man. Zeverino M’Ariithi, (OI), a respondent has had two of his sons move to adulthood at the seminar camps. He said that they are very well disciplined as compared to his other three sons who did not have the opportunity and were instead confined at home after initiation. Purity Karambu, (OI), a respondent whose son had just graduated from equator seminar camp sponsored by the Catholic Church was full of expectations but was happy that her son looked so healthy, an indication that he was well fed at the camp.

The initiation of the young is one of the key moments in the rhythm of individual life, which is also the rhythm of the corporate group of which the individual is a part. It also involves the living dead and the spirit world. The initiation rite has many symbolic meanings in addition to the physical drama and impact as the youth are ritually introduced to the art of

communal living. This happens when they go through a period of withdrawal from the society and absence from home to live alone in the seminar camps. Corporate living is instilled into the thinking of the young people by making them live together in the seminar camps. The rejoicing and celebration by relatives and friends strengthen community solidarity and emphasizes the corporateness of the whole group.

The researcher sought to know from the young initiates (*Ntaane*) who had just graduated from the camps the kind of activities they were involved in and the nature of instructions they received. Unfortunately, none of the young initiates was ready to disclose their experiences at the camp more especially their interaction with *Njuri Ncheke* elders. A few mentioned the church leaders and other invited guests who addressed them and the issues they discussed but no one was ready to mention what *Njuri Ncheke* elders discussed with them. An interview with three elders who interacted with the young initiates at the equator camp revealed that all education and instruction given by the elders to initiates is religious and moral in its form and content. The elders, Kiraithe, M'Matiri and Mutuerandu, (OI), told the researcher that depending on the number of sessions they are allocated at the camp, they tell the young initiates' proverbs and instructive tales which vividly depict the direct consequences of violating certain taboos. Like it was in the past, character formation is the main aim of their education which seeks to teach the individual reverence for his duties to the family and community, and impart values of honesty, diligence and piety including reverence to one's elders and ancestor. Personal responsibility and individual creativity are also stressed. The bulk of the elders' role in the camps lies in their duty to impart knowledge on the Meru traditions and secrets of the Meru community whose details could not be revealed to the female researcher.

Njuri Ncheke elders agree with what Mugambi (1979) discussed earlier on the Chagga traditions where Chagga elders were entrusted with the same role. It is a revival of a duty that had been forgotten until the introduction of seminar camps, an evidence of resilience. Below is a photo taken in one of the seminar camps.



Plate 2: Young male initiates at a post-circumcision seminar at Nkubu MCK

Source: Reseacher

4.3.3 Revival of Elders' Moral Duties

It is common knowledge in Meru region and even beyond that the Meru people kept high moral and ethical standards before the western missionary era. Today, however, the moral standards of the Meru people have declined considerably, with many young people no longer conscious of the community norms. Many people, young and old alike, are either knowingly or unknowingly unable to meet the Meru community expectations in terms of behaviour and discipline. Respect, obedience, integrity, honesty and responsibility are no longer cherished values. This has prompted many people in the region to ask whether the advent of Christianity has anything to do with this decline. *Njuri Ncheke* elders seemed to blame Christianity for the moral mess and are all set to undo the moral mess by reviving the functional disciplinary measures.

The elders unanimously blamed Christianity for the breakdown of Meru traditional network which kept the people together and enhanced respect and honesty. Elder M'Mburugu, (OI), an old man in his late ninety's who occasionally officiates at *Nchiru* Shrine noted that the traditional moral system of countering crimes was broken down since it was condemned by Christian missionaries as primitive and satanic, and for some time, the African converts believed this to be the truth. This, according to the elder resulted to moral

breakdown and social decay. M'Mburugu was supported by elder M'Aburi, (OI), and another shrine attendant who said that criminals who are supposed to be disciplined by the council hide in the church and sometimes even move from one church to another. Elder M'Aburi said that with the revival of *Njuri Ncheke* disciplinary measures, the presence of community policing agents and cooperation of the church leaders in the County, they are able to flush out criminals even from the churches and make them pay for the crimes they have committed. Contrarily, Father Murianki, a Catholic clergy based at Nkubu Catholic Diocese criticized *Njuri Ncheke* elders of following offenders who are already in the church and have repented their sins. The Catholic clergy accused the council of lacking Christian ethics and failing to create room for forgiveness.

Pastor Gitonga of the deliverance church, (OI), was in support of the elders struggle to uphold moral standards in Meru community. The Pastor argued that even if God is thought to be the ultimate upholder of the moral order, he is not immediately involved in the keeping of it. Instead, God uses human beings to work for him and in this case, it is the elders who are the daily guardians or police of human morality in the Meru community. The Pastor argues that social regulations of a moral nature should be directed towards the immediate contact between individuals. Elder M'Muna of Igembe, (OI), concurs with Pastor Gitonga and says that God cannot leave his dwelling place to come and guard human morality. Elder Batiri concurs with them and says that God uses people to work for him and the elders are such people. Pastor Gitonga's sentiments, together with those of the elders agree with Mbiti (1969) who says that moral and social regulations are on the man to man level rather than God to man plane of morality. Mbiti says that in African communities where kinship ties makes a person intensely "naked", moral demands are uncomfortably scrutinized by everybody so that a person who fails to live up to them cannot escape notice. The author concludes that the essence of African morality is that it is more societal than spiritual, more of dynamic ethics rather than static. Mbiti says that the individual is confronted with moral demands throughout his life and this is seriously so in an environment where the individual is conscious of himself in terms of I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.

The elders lamented that accepting Christianity and western education made them loose in the first instance, that cultural power to act on wrong doers particularly those in Christianity. Moral uprightness in the community has been on the decline and respect is no longer a common value. But with the resilience of *Njuri Ncheke*, the situation is slowly getting arrested and the council has taken drastic measures to undo the moral mess. The seminar camps for young initiates discussed in the previous sub-topic are an initial step in reviving the

high moral standards in Meru community, through the vigorous moral instructions given to the initiates. Elder Batiri stressed his point by using the popular Meru saying “*Muti jukikagwa juri muniini*”, meaning “a tree is shaped when it is young”. The aim of the elders is to instill Meru traditions and moral expectations to the youth. Their efforts are in line with the Biblical scriptures in proverbs 22: 6 -7 “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it”. Proverbs 11: 14 “Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in abundance of counsellors there is safety”. This agrees with Idowu (1962) on the question of God and moral values among the Yoruba. Idowu says that for the Yoruba, moral values derive from the nature of God himself, whom they consider to be a pure and perfect king. The Yoruba believe that God is clothed in white, a sign of purity. The author says that character is the essence of Yoruba ethics and upon it depends even on the life of a person. The author quotes the Yoruba saying “Gentle character is it which enables the rope of life to stay unbroken in one’s hand”. According to Idowu, good character shows itself in the following ways: Chastity before marriage and faithfulness during marriage, hospitality, generosity, kindness, justice, trustfulness and honesty. These are the same core values that *Njuri Ncheke* endeavours to impart with every rising opportunity and this has led to a resilience of their duties as the custodians of the Ameru traditions and customs.

The current *Njuri Ncheke* feels that there could be general ignorance among the Meru people on what is required to make a morally upright community and this has necessitated a revival of the councils’ moral duties. Elder M’Arithi of Buuri sub-county component, (OI), blames broken families for the decline in moral standards. It is for this reason, he says, that *Njuri Ncheke* elders have been reconciling couples that are separated. Rebellious children are counseled and reconciled with their parents. In Igembe, M’Mutari, (OI), and other elders have been keenly following up young boys who drop out of school to get involved in miraa business. The elder says that being out of school creates room for immoral activities like stealing, raping, drunkenness, drug taking and drug trafficking among other evils. Among the ordinary respondents who were interviewed, there was a general consensus that the work of maintaining proper moral ethical standards should not only be left to *Njuri Ncheke* elders but the church should also put disciplinary measures in place for their errant members. The commitment of *Njuri Ncheke* elders to upholding moral standards of the Meru community is a sacred obligation, an evidence of resilience of their moral duties.

4.3.4 Religious and Cultural Duties

All the elders who were interviewed seemed to admit an inner need and recognition of God in all their dealings. Like other African ethnic groups, the Meru people were worshippers of their supreme being whose sanctuary was the mountains such as Mount Kenya, Mount Nyambene and other places like evergreen bushes, graves sites and under Mugumo trees. The Ameru are very religious. God, whom they call Murungu is entrenched in all their cultural and traditional practices. *Njuri Ncheke's* elders were unanimously categorical that the Ameru knowledge of God is not through Christianity or any other foreign religion, but it is socially learned and culturally inculcated. This agrees with Marete (2004) that the Ameru worship practices which involved sacrifices and offerings only rekindled their knowledge of God that was already known sub-consciously. Marete says that the Ameru concept of God connected various elements together namely politics, kinship, religion, aesthetics, economic and social life. The Ameru migration story as narrated by the elders agrees closely with that of the Biblical Israel and their deliverance from Egypt, the land of slavery. Elders narrated how their deliverer, who was called Koomenjue was God send and how he safely led them to their present homeland. The story of Koomenjue is closely likened to that of the Biblical Moses who was used by God to deliver Israelites from Egypt, the land of slavery to Canaan, the land of promise.

There has been a resilience of the Ameru religious beliefs and practices evident in current roles and activities of the elders. One of them is the common form of justice by *Njuri Ncheke* elders that is administered through the use of curses and the subsequent blessings that follow after the offender has remorsefully reconciled. Oaths (*Muuma*), taken under established religious circumstances are also believed to be binding with dire consequences if sworn falsely. The operative principle in the use of curses and blessings is that only a person of a higher status can effectively curse or bless one of a lower status but not vice versa. The basic principle here is that if a person is guilty, evil will befall him according to the words used in cursing him. The worst bit of the curse is that it may go beyond the individual suffering to affect his children and great grand children and this is what the Meru people fear most. It is normally understood that God confers the articulated blessings or curse through the elders, who, as mentioned earlier are in the lowest category of religious specialists and as such have a direct connection with the invisible spiritual world in the context of African religion. Blessings are usually accompanied with spitting or sprinkling water or other substances upon those who are being blessed. Blessings in the Meru context are understood to mean ”

Kutharima”, or if the blessing is coming after a curse, “*Kurumuka*” meaning to ‘uncurse’ and this happens after a fine of a bull has been paid to the elders.

Elder Batiri ascertained that since time immemorial, it has always been the duty of *Njuri Ncheke* elders to lead the community in religious rituals such as pouring of libations and offering sacrifices especially during times of crisis. However, following the advent of Christianity, Elder Batiri says that this particular duty had been watered down as the missionaries regarded such duties as satanic. But following the resurgence of *Njuri Ncheke* in the County, the elder said that worship activities had been reviving progressively at the shrine. Batiri said that *Njuri Ncheke* elders meet frequently at the shrine either to offer prayers, sacrifice, curse a stubborn offender perform cleansing rituals either for individuals or families. The elders confidently narrated with practical examples how prayer requests made by *Njuri Ncheke* elders to God are always answered, and how curses uttered by *Njuri* elders have brought misfortunes and dire consequences to the offenders and their families. When one renowned *Njuri Ncheke* elder recently had a case at the international criminal court, the entire supreme council offered sacrifices and prayers to “*Murungu*” for several days at the shrine. Elder M’Muna narrated how they poured their hearts before *Murungu* beseeching him to vindicate their fellow elder whom they believed was innocent. They believed that their prayers were answered when the case was thrown out leaving the said elder a free man. There was jubilation and prayers of thanksgiving accompanied with sacrifices were offered at the *Nchiru* shrine when the international criminal court declared that the affected elder was a free man. At the elder’s home, bulls were slaughtered and traditional gruel was provided in plenty as the elders celebrated the victory. The vindicated elder later went back to the *Nchiru* shrine with his family for an elaborate thanksgiving ritual.

To emphasize the power of curses uttered by *Njuri Ncheke*, elder M’Muna of Tigania narrated the misfortunes experienced by a *Njuri* elder who tried to cause divisions within the supreme council. The elders met at the shrine and unanimously cursed the troublesome elder (name withheld). A few days after that, the cursed elder, who is a senior government official started suffering setbacks including a threat on his job as an impending motion of no confidence was awaiting at the national assembly. The elder was so disturbed that he sought advice from *Njuri Ncheke* elders who demanded a fine of a bull and a sum of money that was not disclosed to the researcher. When the cursed elder obeyed and yielded to the demands of the supreme council and escorted a bull to the shrine, the elders did what M’Muna calls “*Kurumuka*” or “uncursing” and consequently the affected elders’ sufferings came to an end.

The vindicated elder later joyfully thanked *Njuri Ncheke* elders at a public function for praying for him and saving his career.

Cleansing rituals by elders that had long been forgotten following the advent of Christianity and the influence of western education are being revived as a way of averting misfortunes and evils on families. At the time of this research while the researcher was on a visit to Mutuatine village in Igembe Central, there was a rare occurrence that left the whole village in shock. A cow gave birth to a calf with abnormal features. The Sunday morning incident attracted hundreds of people who flocked Mr. Muriuki's home to see the animal. The calf's mouth and nose were joined while the face and belly resembled those of a human being. Mr Muriuki and his wife Kangondu who are Christians asked *Njuri Ncheke* elders to visit their home to conduct a cleansing ceremony to avert any misfortunes on the family. Muriuki's wife, Kangondu was convinced that someone evil was out to cause suffering to her family and the birth of an abnormal calf was only a beginning. But she had faith that the intervention of *Njuri* elders will set the family free from misfortunes. Such beliefs agree with Onyancha (2010) in his earlier study in Kisii community. Onyancha says that curses could not be easily dismissed by anybody but required the intervention of elders who uttered certain words. Such irreplaceable roles and functions of *Njuri Ncheke* have undoubtedly contributed to the resilience of their religious roles. Our respondents described this occurrence as one among several others that have made them hold the council of elders in deep reverence.

4.3.5 Resilience of *Njuri Ncheke* in Decision Making Role in Meru County.

Since its inception, *Njuri Ncheke* has always acted as a government in the Meru community, making major decisions affecting their families and the larger community. They also stipulated rules and regulations to be followed for the purposes of maintaining law and order. They even made decisions concerning seasons for rites of passage. According to elder M'Muna of Igembe, it was the work of *Njuri* elders to inform the circumciser '*Mutaani*' when the young boys and girls were ready for initiation. But before the elders fixed a date for the rite, they had to receive two bundles of miraa from young men who were ready for initiation formally requesting the elders to call the circumciser. Miraa, (specifically from *mbaine* trees) is considered by the Ameru to be very special gift given to people of a high calibre like that of *Njuri Ncheke* elders, especially when one is making a request. If the elders gave the go-ahead, the next stage would be to take miraa to the warriors who would then call the circumciser.

When taking miraa along to the elders to make the requests, if the young man met any other elder along the way, they were obliged to offer up the bundle in their right hand so that the elder can take a stem or two. If one reached the elders with a still complete bundle, their request may be rejected on the grounds that they are not generous. Thus, if one failed to meet any other elders along the way, it was advisable to throw away a few stems to give the impression of being suitably generous. This practice agrees with Mugambi (1979) that almost every aspect of learning and every stage of life provided opportunities for religious and moral instructions. The essence of giving some stems of miraa to elders on the way was to teach the young initiates generosity and respect for elders. Elder M'Muna's narration also agrees with the earlier observations made by Carrier (2007) on the role of miraa in rites of passage among the Tigania and Igembe. Although such formal requests to the elders by young initiates have ceased, and the traditional circumciser has been replaced by the modern doctor, *Njuri Ncheke* elders are still largely involved in the seminar camps for young initiates discussed earlier and through their interventions, the residents of Meru County have automatically made the month of December their initiation season.

An interview session with elder M'Mutiga, (OI), and an old man in his late ninety's revealed that not everything to do with the daily running of community affairs was decided by *Njuri Ncheke* elders as it is today. M'Mutiga narrated that in the traditional days, decisions about war and other matters were decided by two alternating political parties called "*Kiruka*" and "*Ntiba*". These two were not elected but consisted each of one half of the elders in the society, who would exchange power at periodic intervals, during which the next age-set of elders would be created. According to the elders, the exchange of power was necessary as it ensured that everyone had their period in power, assuming that they lived old enough to become elders. Apparently, the younger *Njuri Ncheke* elders did not seem to know much about *Kiruka* and *Ntiba* exchange of power, and did not even appear interested in the said political parties as they are almost non-existent unlike *Njuri Ncheke* that is resilient. In fact, most of the ordinary respondents like the youths heard about *Kiruka* and *Ntiba* from the researcher for the first time. All they know is the popular Meru saying, "*Kuuma kiruka na Ntiba, gutakara uju*", meaning, since *Kiruka* and *Ntiba* this has never happened, but they knew very little about the same. The saying is commonly used when one is expressing shock at a bad habit or an unacceptable element of behaviour. This created the impression that *Njuri Ncheke* is the only decision making institution in the community.

Currently, *Njuri Ncheke* closely monitors the production, marketing and sale of miraa both locally and internationally. Respondents from Igembe and Tigania sub-counties where miraa

serves as the main cash crop were in agreement that were it not for the involvement of *Njuri Ncheke*, miraa business would not be as good as it is today. This kind of involvement was also noted by earlier researchers in the region for example Sandberg (1969) who speaks of the situation in the late 1960's where Igembe middle-men were accused of exploiting farmers by *Njuri Ncheke*, agricultural assistants and educated Christians.

According to Sandberg, the able and tough middle-man between the farmer and the market was the one making the biggest profits. In another miraa dispute involving foreign exporters disappearing with miraa before paying miraa traders, the *Njuri Ncheke* solution suggested was that Meru farmers and brokers should only supply miraa when money is paid upfront.

In their current involvement in miraa production and sale, *Njuri Ncheke* is informed and at the same time threatened by the increase in cancer cases in the County that some medics are associating with miraa chewing. Most elders were reluctant to comment on the cancer report arguing that the medics' research on the cause of increase in cancer cases was still going on and therefore could not make a conclusive comment. In an earlier study by Carrier (2007), the author mentions the drastic measures taken by *Njuri Ncheke* when some farmers began to spray on miraa trees to smoke out insects that had started invading the leaves. The measures taken by the council were meant to protect consumers from infections through chewing contaminated stems. Carrier says that *Njuri* decreed that no spray is to be used and punishment for those ignoring the decree is to have their trees uprooted. The author concludes that the council is more in tune with current thinking. He notes that their refusal to countenance spraying fits well with the organic movement popular in Europe and North America. Recently when the sale of miraa was banned in some parts of Europe, *Njuri Ncheke* elders made a visit to Kenya's state house to request the president to intervene to salvage the traditional crop which is a source of income for the Tigania and Igembe sub-counties. The decision to end female genital mutilation in Meru community was *Njuri Ncheke's* brain-child. When the council realized that the girl child education was endangered and early marriages were on the increase, they undertook the initiative to force girls to join school so as end early marriages. They also outlined disciplinary measures against parents who forced their daughters to undergo the cut.

Though it is never said out loudly but *Njuri Ncheke* is well involved in making political decisions in the county and membership to the council gives one a good standing for political ambitions. There were divergent views concerning the role of the council in political decisions from different categories of respondents interviewed. The ordinary respondents from all the sub-counties said that *Njuri Ncheke* determines who vies for which position and

in which party in the general elections in Kenya. Dr. Jasper Mwiti, (OI), a respondent from South Imenti told the researcher that he dropped his political ambitions in the last general election because he had no time to move about the sub-county wooing *Njuri* elders to support him. Another political aspirant, Joanina Kanana, (OI), failed at the nomination stage in her ambition to be the County women representative. Kanana said that *Njuri Ncheke* could not support her because she is a single mother and the council believes a woman without a husband cannot be a good leader. However, *Njuri Ncheke* elders categorically denied their involvement in local politics. According to elder M'Mutiga, the role of elders is to bless those they deem able to lead the community in whichever capacity. In agreement with M'Mutiga, elder Batiri said that *Njuri* elders were not ignorant of the democratic rights entrenched in Kenya's constitution therefore they could not direct people on who to vote for. But their blessings, said the elder, follows their favourite candidates and makes them succeed. He reiterated in the popular *Njuri Ncheke* saying '*Gutiwe utharimagwa ni Njuri arega kubua*', meaning, no one is blessed by the council and fails to succeed.

4.3.6 The Role of Settling Disputes and Arbitration

The study found out that most residents of Meru County prefer to bring cases before *Njuri Ncheke* elders than to take it to the police. They argued that the police may either take too long to act, demand evidence, or may never act at all. According to Justus Munene, (OI), the threat and fear of being cursed by the elders of this institution makes the offenders sometimes surrender even before they face the council. Munene said that it is common for members of extended families to point out offenders among them because a curse upon one offender may affect the whole family for several generations unless a cleansing ceremony is done. Like other African communities, the Meru people had their own form of restitution and punishment for various offences, both legal and moral. For several decades following the advent of Christianity, *Njuri* disciplinary and restitution duties had been forgotten. Bishop Lawi Imathiu, the retired presiding Bishop of the Methodist church of Kenya was full of praises for *Njuri Ncheke* elders (OI). Bishop Imathiu says that he has witnessed *Njuri* elders flash out criminals who hide in the churches, an effort that the Bishop says has saved the community from moral decay. Bishop Imathiu who describes himself as a friend of the council has been on the forefront urging the church leaders to cooperate with *Njuri* elders and hand over to them criminals that they cannot handle at the church level. In an interview with the researcher, Bishop Imathiu was optimistic that the intervention and resilience of *Njuri Ncheke* on issues of discipline will among other things restore the communities moral

standards, eliminate rebellious children, reduce cases of separation and divorce hence stabilizing marriages and families.

Njuri Ncheke punishments range from death for some offences like murder to paying fines of miraa, he-goat, bull for minor offences like insulting, disobeying elders and parents, stealing miraa, allowing an animal to escape to a neighbour's field, slapping or beating a man (for women) among others. The elders were grateful to the government for introducing the community policing agents who have helped them a great deal especially in identifying the criminals. However, there are some cases that are handled by the police and the court system. *Njuri Ncheke* does not interfere with cases that have already been reported to the police. From most respondents who were interviewed, it is common knowledge in the county that cases are reported to *Njuri* elders first and the police are informed only after *Njuri* elders are deemed to have failed, and this a rare conclusion. Elder Mbijiwe of Igembe East, (OI), said that were it not for *Njuri* punishments that are feared by the people, miraa farming would be very difficult. Petty thieving of miraa is met with severe punishment and some repeat offenders face prospects of having their toes chopped off to bar them from climbing miraa trees and their hands are chopped off to bar them from picking. The social stigma that goes with such a punishment is enough to deter people from stealing miraa. In Tigania West sub-county, an ordinary respondent, Samson Kairanya, (OI), pointed to the researcher a home where two men lost their toes and hands for stealing miraa. Kairanya also pointed another home where all the miraa trees were uprooted because the owner, Mzee M'Mburugu was notorious for spraying miraa trees against *Njuri* warnings.

Since time immemorial, land cases in Meru County have always been handled by *Njuri Ncheke* elders, a duty that has been revived to the letter. An ordinary respondent who is also a lawyer based in Nairobi, John Mutegi, (OI), told the researcher that while in other parts of Kenya, he represents clients with land issues in courts, and such issues in Meru are minimal. The lawyer said that even those who go to him at the initial stages later withdraw to seek counsel and solutions from *Njuri Ncheke*, promising to return if the latter fails which rarely happens. Elder M'Muna of Tigania West could count the many land cases he has witnessed that have been handled amicably and the affected families are now living in peace. In Maua Town, land grabbing has been curbed. Thanks to the intervention of *Njuri Ncheke* elders. However, in big towns like Meru Town, according to elder M'Muna, some tycoons ignore *Njuri* elders' advice and in other cases, elders are scared away by the rich people leaving the victims to seek formal redress from modern courts.

Many elders were quick to point out the reason behind their success in handling land and other serious disputes in the County. It is the oathing system that is commonly known as “*Kuuria Muuma*”, and, “*Kuringa mburi*”. Most African traditional religious institutions, *Njuri Ncheke* Inclusive, have systems whereby they confirm or assert truths about their beliefs or actions by swearing. Oaths taken under established religious circumstances are believed to be binding with dire consequences if sworn falsely. The two elders explained to the researcher details of how the oathing was done. It began with a vow procession in which the elder responsible for judging who the rightful owner of the piece of land was or who was responsible for breaking a taboo told the victims to carry a live goat on the shoulder and later would cut parts of the goat one by one. Blood from the goat would pour on his body. Then the victims would swear, “*tiga, nkue ta mburi iji kethira muda juju ti jwakwa*, or, *kethira unii ndi murogi*, or, *kethira nini mamite na mwekuru wangania*”. Meaning, let me die like this goat if this land does not belong to me, or if I bewitched so and so, or if I am the one who slept with the wife of so and so. This vowing process takes place in the full presence of *Njuri Ncheke* elders and sometimes, mature family members of the victims. *Muuma* is greatly feared because the victims are known to die or suffer terrible disasters such as impotence, barrenness, strange diseases affecting families and even livestock of the victims and madness among others. Elder M’Mutiga strongly believed that rebellious and troublesome children in families are a consequence of disobeying elders of *Njuri Ncheke*. It is for this reason that Meru parents will go out of their way to pay any fine demanded by the council even if they are not sure of the victim’s guilt. The consequences may be experienced in the family generations unless the offender undergoes cleansing rituals by offering the prescribed sacrifice. However, Mbiti (1969) looks at oaths as a method of establishing and maintaining good human relationships. This is a resilient practice by *Njuri Ncheke* elders that has greatly contributed to harmonious living in the County. Below is a photo a typical *Njuri* elders’ court.



Plate 3: A Njuri Ncheke elders' court in session at Akirangondu sub-shrine in Igembe Central, Meru County.

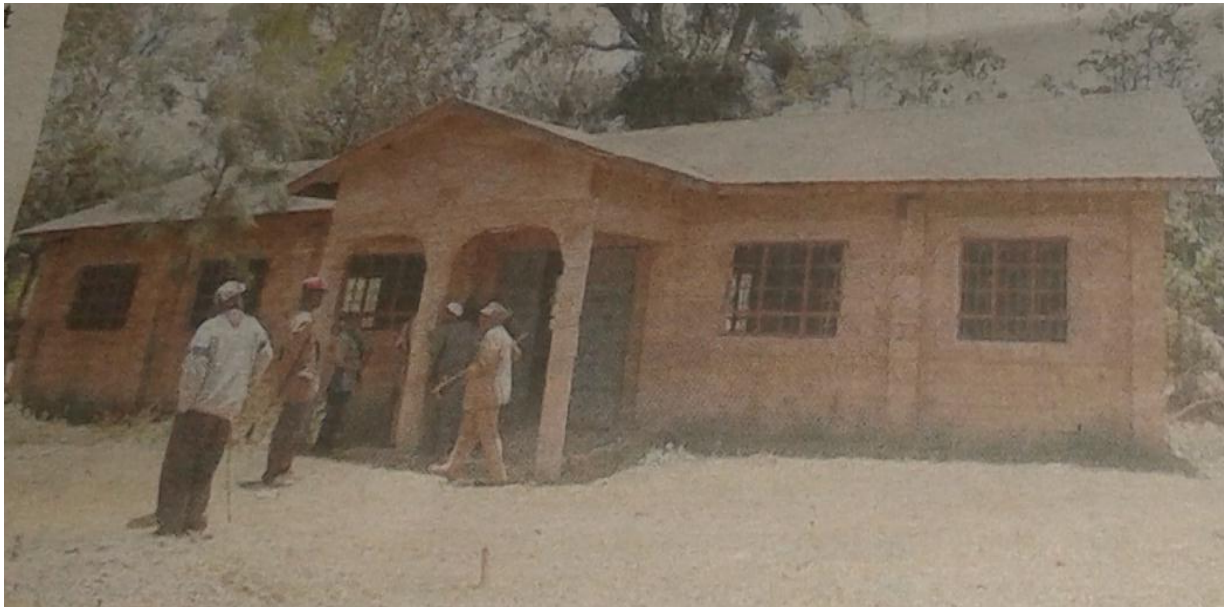
Source: Reseacher

Above are *Njuri Ncheke* elders and tens of people in search of justice gathered at Akirangondu traditional court that sits once every week. Among the cases being handled is one of James Gitonga from muringene village. Gitonga claims that he was swindled of sh 140,000 by a Garissa based miraa trader. Gitonga said that he had been sending the commodity to the trader who has refused to pay him despite several calls. He cannot go to a formal court because there is no written agreement. Another complainant says that he had leased a miraa farm only to learn that the owner had a similar deal with another trader. He had hoped to harvest twigs worth about sh.500, 000 and hopes elders will serve justice to him. Igembe central *Njuri Ncheke* chairman, elder salesio M'Ngencho, (OI) who was presiding over the sitting said that the court comprises of 14 members, seven of the elders are from the supreme council while the other seven are from the affected villages. Elder M'Ngencho said that the council also has a lower court that meets at the ward level but more serious matters are referred to the Supreme Court at *Nchiru*.

Igembe north *Njuri Ncheke* chairman M'Ciita M'Amwiri said the elders had resolved 190 cases within a period of one year. The strength and popularity of the court lies partly in the fact that the court is able to give assurance of justice even to complainants who had a mutual agreement without witnesses and documented evidence. This gives the residents of Meru County protection and security, a factor that has greatly contributed to the resurgence of the

council's role of settling disputes. M'Amwiri said that *Njuri* court has in several instances reversed unfair rulings made by the judicial court. He said that the elders' court has helped several people recover their land after the court has ruled in favour of their oppressors. Elder M'Amwiri recounted one instance when the judiciary ruled in favour of a man who had paid sh 1,000 only for a plot. The plot owner went to *Njuri* court and the accused admitted that he had not bought the plot. M'Amwiri cited several cases where they have reversed land grabbing deals mostly perpetrated by traders who lease miraa farms. The elders ensure families whose land has been sold off by irresponsible fathers is recovered by entering into a flesh agreement with the buyer.

Njuri Ncheke elders' court received backing and support in a recent judicial open day held in the neighbouring Tharaka-Nithi County. The open day was dubbed "bringing justice closer to the public". The Chuka high court judge Alfred Mabeya said that he was liaising with judicial training college to offer paralegal courses to *Njuri Ncheke* elders. While suggesting that the elders can help in reducing backlog of cases in courts, the judge rooted for alternative dispute resolution. In his article on recognizing and strengthening the role of *Njuri Ncheke* in devolved governance in Meru County, Kamwaria (2016) says that the success of devolution will not only depend on the relationship between national government and the devolved units but will also bank on involvement of other non-state actors such as indigenous institutions of social control, and *Njuri Ncheke* presents such an institution. The author says that with their wealth of indigenous knowledge, the council can play crucial role in the devolved government especially in regard to conflict resolution, environment conservation, education and development among others. Kamwaria concludes that even in the wake of modernization, indigenous knowledge systems can be used to compliment the modern institutions and technologies in solving the day to day problems. The author's observations concur with the findings of this study that *Njuri Ncheke* is a religious indigenous institution that continue to influence the community notwithstanding the changes in time.



*Plate 4: The Njuri Ncheke social hall which is under construction at Akirangondu sub-shrine.
Source: Reseacher*

4.4.1 Roles, Practice and Activities of Njuri Ncheke that People in Meru County do not like

The researcher further sought to know whether the community was comfortable with all the Practices, roles and activities that *Njuri Ncheke* is involved in. This paved way for further inquiry on the specific activities of the council that respondents did not like. In both the interview guide and the semi structured questions, the respondents were required to respond to an open-ended question stated as follows:

“Are there roles, practices or activities of *Njuri Ncheke* that you do not like? If your answer is yes, mention them. The data was analyzed and summarized in the table below.

Table 6: Roles, Practices and Activities of Njuri Ncheke that People do not like

Practice	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
	N = 108	
Animal sacrifices	72	67
Unethical and radical initiation process	60	55
Oathing	55	50
Punitive punishments	50	46
Discrimination based on gender	72	67
Political involvement and influence	80	74
Secrecy	82	80

Note: Respondents gave more than one practice

Table 6 above has analyzed responses mainly from the religious leaders and ordinary respondents. The table shows that 94% of the religious leaders and ordinary respondents dislike the animal sacrifices offered by *Njuri Ncheke* elders, 88% of the respondents who were not members of the council were against the unethical and radical initiation process that those joining the council are subjected to. 59% of the members were against the punitive punishments that sometimes leave the culprits with permanent injuries. 94% of the respondents who were non-members were against discrimination based on gender while the oath-taking process that is part of almost every ritual performed by the council was condemned by 74% of the respondents. 88% of the respondents did not like the elders' political involvement and influence which ends up influencing the voting patterns in the county during general elections. 94% of the respondents dislike their secrecy which makes it appear a secretive society hence making people suspicious about its dealings and activities.

4.4.2 Animal Sacrifices

The study established that offering of animal sacrifices is a common practice for *Njuri Ncheke* elders. Even the fact that almost all the elders are Christians affiliated to various Christian denominations has not altered the council's pattern of worship and restitution. Respondents both men and women, more especially the religious leaders resented the practice and pointed it out as one major reason why they would not wish to be members of the council. But for *Njuri Ncheke* elders, animal sacrifices are there to stay as the practice is entrenched in all their practices including worship, initiation into the council, arbitration, reconciliation, cleansing rituals and oath-taking.

Animal sacrifices are also commonly offered when rains delay or during times of drought. Elder Batiri was categorical that a practice instituted by the patriarchs cannot be eliminated. The elder said that the patriarchs, Koomenjue and his brother Kauro-o-Bechau sacrificed an animal at the onset of their migration journey from their original homeland, *Mbwaa*. Koomenjue, the leader of the group and one believed to have been Godsend for that mission then continued to sacrifice at various points in the migration journey and the practice has continued to date. Elder Batiri stressed that *Njuri* elders are custodians of the Meru traditions and therefore cannot eliminate such an important practice from their traditions and customs.

All the religious leaders interviewed were in agreement that Jesus Christ was the last sacrifice on the cross and therefore such pagan practices as found in *Njuri Ncheke* should be forgotten. Catholic church fathers Muriangi and Kimathi of Nkubu Catholic Diocese described the practice as primitive and said that they always advise their faithfuls not to take

part in such. Reverend Paul Arioto of the Methodist Church, (OI), said that Methodist doctrines have no room for animal sacrifices and it is partly the reason why the Methodist doctrines bar their faithfuls from joining the council. Pastors Stephen Mutonga, (OI), and David Nthiga, (OI), both from the Pentecostal churches were categorical that such practices are demonic and an evidence of the work of the devil, a reason why the two would never wish to be associated with the council. However, non-christians did not seem to have a problem with the animal sacrifices as long as it was in line with their customs and traditions.

4.4.3 Unethical and Radical Initiation Process into *Njuri Ncheke*

It is largely the radical initiation process that makes the council appear like a secretive and primitive organization. The council conducts its initiation ceremonies in the sacred shrine at *Nchiru*. The initiates must be vetted then later some rituals are performed at the shrine. They graduate in a mass ceremony after which they are given a walking stick as a mark of identity and henceforth one becomes a man of *Njuri*, a man worthy of respect. The details encompassed in the whole initiation process are a secret that is only known to the initiated members. Non-members who are known as '*Nkurumbu*' are not allowed to go near, leave alone entering the shrine and the building where initiation rituals are being performed as doing so attracts the fine of a bull. Bishop Lawi Imathiu, an authority in the Methodist church is a friend of the council and he is regularly invited to offer prayers and even air his views on matters affecting Meru community. The Bishop confirmed that as close as he has been to the council for several years, he has never been allowed to know what is entailed in the initiation process. At the time of the study, Bishop Imathiu's son was a few months old in the council. The Bishop appeared excited that his son was a man of *Njuri*. He said that as close as he was to his son, the son was unwilling to disclose the details of the initiation process. He mentioned the initiation fee he paid, the elders present at the ceremony and even demonstrated the walking stick given to him as a mark of identity as a man of *Njuri*, but could not reveal any other details. That shows just how secretive the initiation process is, so secretive that a son cannot review the details to his father.

Njuri Ncheke elders were reluctant to discuss issues to do with the initiation process and its sacredness. They only hinted that there were dire consequences for revealing secrets of the council. Father Kimathi of the Catholic Church strongly criticized this kind of secrecy and says that all knowledge concerning their activities should be brought to the open for purposes of checks and balances. Pastor Nthiga of the Kenya Assemblies of God associates the secrecy with Satanism and says that he always discourages his church members from joining the

council. Father Muriangi accuses the council of lacking transparency and meaningful ethics for incorporation and describes the entire initiation process as unethical, primitive and not in line with modern practices. Another respondent, Mercy Kagendo, (OI), a youth in her early twenties fears the council due to such secrecy. She has wild imaginations of what goes on in their secret initiation ceremonies and swore she will never get married to a man of *Njuri*.



Plate 5: A group of Njuri Ncheke elders holding their walking sticks which serve as mark of identity.

Source: *Njuri Ncheke Archives at Nchiru*

4.4.4 Oathing (*Muuma*)

All my informants who are not members of the council demonstrated a grip of fear at the mention of oathing, commonly called “*Kuuria Muuma*”. Although Mbiti (1969) looks at oaths as a method of establishing and maintaining good human relationships, the Meru people, particularly *Njuri Ncheke* elders look at oaths differently. To the council, oathing is a means of establishing truths and identifying culprits, and it also serves as a form of punishment. Words like may I die if I did this and that, may I go mad, or may lightning strike me are all very scaring and terrible disasters known to befall the culprits. Even more scaring is the oathing done incase of land dispute. The suspect takes a goat and covers all its openings. He carries it on his back and walks through the disputed land chanting. “May I die like this goat if I am trying to steal this land from my neighbour”. Sometimes the victim invites premature death on his family and the clan if he is on the wrong. It is the most feared aspect of *Njuri* style of judgement.

It is the fear of the consequences that makes criminals surrender to the elders before any action is taken, and the same fear acts as a deterrent to others. Worse still, the mention of *Murungu* in the swearing makes people believe that the punishment for swearing falsely is not only effected by the council but also the supreme God. *Njuri Ncheke* elders pointed out that there are a few families living under a curse brought upon them by a relative who may have failed to abide by his or her words. Bishop Lawi Imathiu treats positively the oathing done at the time of initiation into the council. The Bishop said that it is the fear of breaking the oath that makes the elders transparent, honest and fair in their administration of justice. There are, to put it differently, deep rooted reasons underlying the beliefs in traditional oaths and way of life. The consequence resultants from failure to abide by one's word as per the oath are very much tied up with the fears attached to the Fetish. The interaction between the fear and consequence of the oath amount to a type of syndrome, a vicious cycle in which, because one fears the oath, one is quick to attribute any misfortune that befalls oneself, family or livestock. The misfortune further serves to boost and reinforce the fears of the oath. But there is, according to the elders, a remedy for the consequences. The affected families should offer a sacrificial bull as atonement for their sins after which they would be blessed by the elders. *Njuri Ncheke* elders were not short of testimonies of the many families that have been set free from misfortunes arising from failure to honour oaths, thanks to their resilient purification and cleansing duties.

4.4.5 Punitive and Forceful Punishments by *Njuri Ncheke*

It is suffice to point out that there were mixed opinions among the respondents with regard to the way offenders are dealt with in the hands of *Njuri Ncheke* elders. To the elders and leaders of the community, proper punishment and penalties for law breakers must be put in place if the current lapse of morality has to be arrested. But for the ordinary respondents, such punitive measures are not the only means to instilling discipline and raising moral standards. One respondent, Mr. Zachary Maore, (OI), said that since corporal punishment was banned in schools and replaced with proper peer counseling for the youth, *Njuri Ncheke* elders also should embrace counseling for the same youths so as to be in line with contemporary demands and expectations. Bishop Imathiu recalled and narrated an experience when a young man in his village raped a woman. He was given such a thorough beating that left him paralysed for years. From that day, the Bishop said, no young man wanted to go near a woman in the dark hours lest he is tempted to rape and suffer the same embarrassment. Such

crude and severe beatings by the council that leaves culprits with injuries is the reason that many respondents felt it can be done in a better way and still serve the same purpose.

Reverend Arioto felt that it is the high time *Njuri Ncheke* elders started embracing the Biblical principle of forgiveness for the grace of God is sufficient for all. But Rev. Arioto's view was totally rejected by the elders who argued that each offence should be met with an equal punishment and none should go unpunished. This agrees with Kenyatta (1938) that penalty must be equivalent to the offence and the victim must be compensated. Almost all the respondents who are non-elders resented use of curses as a form of justice administration. The operative principle in the use of curses is that only a person of a higher status can effectively curse one of a lower status and not vice versa. The basic principle here is that if a person is guilty, evil will befall him according to the words used in cursing him. If one is not guilty, the curse does not function. Curses uttered by *Njuri* elders are known to affect individuals and families for generations until an atonement sacrifice is offered. A respondent, Damaris Kathambi, (OI), pointed out a case where her cousin abused a *Njuri* elder and the fine imposed on him was so high that the extended family had to meet to raise money for a bull, he-goat and a bundle of miraa. Maria Gatwiri, (OI), paid a he-goat and prepared traditional gruel for a group of elders as a punishment for slapping her husband who notoriously used to beat her up every time he came home drunk. Stories by the respondents represent many of such cases in the study who felt that the penalty was not equal to the offences. According to father Murianki, some punishments like chopping off hands and toes for miraa thieves, or uprooting miraa trees for those who spray the crop have economic implications. Father Murianki noted that some culprits are breadwinners and such punishments may hinder them from fending for themselves and their families.

4.4.5.1 Forms of *Njuri Ncheke* punishments

i) Cursing

Administration of justice through the use of curses is an old and common practice among elders of *Njuri Ncheke* that is meant to serve as punishment. The worst part of the curse that makes people fear it most is that the effect goes beyond the culprit to affect the children and goes on for several generations. There are various offences that call for curse from elders, among them, failure to pay a fine as instructed, dishonouring sacred places, abusing a *Njuri* elder, failure to honour an agreement reached upon in the presence of elders, revealing secrets of the elders and failure to take instructions from elders in the way of advice or warnings. Once cursing has been done by the elders, only the same elders can set the culprit free by

doing what is popularly known to Meru residents as ‘*kurumuka*’, meaning, uncursing, a process that involves cleansing rituals and a fine. There is a belief that unless uncursing is done by the elders, misfortunes will forever befall the family affecting not only human beings but also their animals and the farms. Respondents pointed out several families and individuals living under the curse of elders. Elder M’Ariithi, (OI) narrated an incident involving his neighbor called Kariunga who failed to honour a summon by *Njuri* elders for the hearing of a case where he picked miraa from another shamba without permission from the owner. To make the matters worse, Kariunga released fierce dogs on the elders who followed him up at his home and in the mayhem that ensued, some elders were injured. The elders later met at the shrine and cursed Kariunga. Few years later, Kariunga’s two wives went away and all the children dropped out school and became rebellious. Kariunga himself roams about in the village to date. At the time of this study, Kariunga’s relatives were holding meetings at his home to raise the required *Njuri* fee for the uncursing process that is commonly called ‘*kurumuka*’. Another case in point is that of a veteran politician (name withheld), who is currently living under a curse for notoriously disregarding the elders’ decisions. An interview with elder M’Amwiri (OI), who is also an attendant at Akirangondu sub shrine revealed that many families have been seeking cleansing rituals even for mere speculations that they could be living under the curses pronounced on their ancestors.

ii) Oathing.

Oathing as a form of punishment takes various forms. Elder M’Ngencho (OI) explained the various types of oaths as follow: The goat-oath (*muuma jwakuringa mburi*), the fire-oath (*muuma jwakugwata ikama*), and the pot-oath (*muuma jwa kithiri*). Elder M’Ngencho explained further the different circumstances under which the different oaths are taken. Goat oath is commonly used on major issues like those involving land, robbery, rape among others. It involves killing of a goat by the culprits who then walk around with it uttering words against themselves according to the accusations made. It is believed that the guilty one dies like the goat or suffer misfortunes for generations. The fire oath involves placing a hot piece of wood on the palm of the hand and whoever burns is the guilty one. This mostly happens when a case involves two people and none of them is ready to own up. Interestingly, the fire oath is well known even to the young children though in a less serious way. During my childhood in a typical Meru village environment, it was always easy to identify children who picked items that belonged to other people through the fire oath. The guilty child whose palm burned could be escorted home by the other children amidst shouts with songs meant to ridicule the victim. This served to deter others from stealing and to instil discipline among the

children. The pot-oath is commonly resorted to when the accused vehemently denies the accusations and the belief is that after sometime the guilty one suffers some misfortune. Elder M'Ngencho was not short of stories of families that suffered misfortunes for generations thanks to the intervention of *Njuri Ncheke* elders. The words uttered in all the forms of oathing are the ones that effect punishment not only to the culprit but also their families.

iii) Corporal punishment

This involves thorough beating with an intention of inflicting pain. This is applied to all culprits irrespective of age, sex or status. It is a form of punishment that is feared most as it sometimes leaves the victim with permanent injuries. Sometimes this form of punishment extends to cutting of toes or fingers for the notorious miraa thieves to deter them from climbing trees. According to elder M'Ariithi, (OI), this has been the most effective form of punishment especially among miraa growers. It creates fear and embarrassment on the victim hence a deterrent to others. Members of the clergy and the youth seriously opposed this kind of punishment arguing that it was not in line with the current trends that have seen the ban of corporal punishment in schools.

iv) Stoning to death

This was a common form of punishment in the past especially for the witches, sorcerers and murderers, but nowadays it is no longer administered by the elders. However there are incidences where *Njuri Ncheke* elders have been accused of supporting and sometimes initiating mob justice where some victims are stoned to death especially those accused of witchcraft and sorcery. Notorious miraa thieves have been known to disappear only to later be found dead in deserted places. Although many ordinary respondents linked *Njuri* elders to such deaths, elders M'Ariithi and M'Ngencho denied such allegations and asserted that protection of lives was their primary aim.

v) Paying of fines

Fines paid are usually determined by the crime committed but most crimes that call for fines are minor. Common fines include specified bundles of Miraa, domestic animals and money. Part of the fine is used as compensation especially in cases of theft, fighting where the victim may be injured and cases where an animal may cross over the neighbour's farm and destroys crops and the owner of the animal is asked to compensate the owner of the crops. According to elder Batiri, (OI), such fines have been helpful to the council as it is their main source of income.

vi) Undergoing cleansing rituals

Although cleansing rituals in Meru religious beliefs are a requirement for individuals or families experiencing misfortunes, there are incidences when cleansing is done as a way of punishing the culprit. This mostly happens when one has either broken a taboo, or has stepped into prohibited places. In most cases, cleansing is accompanied by animal sacrifices as a way of appeasing ancestral spirits and the gods of the land. It is partly for this reason, according to elder Batiri, that the elders have retained the practice of offering animal sacrifices in line with ATR, though greatly condemned by the Christian fraternity.

vii) Suspension

This is a common form of punishment administered by *Njuri Ncheke* elders to fellow elders who have deviated. The others dissociate themselves from the elder leaving him desolated for an unspecified period until such a time when the elder is in a position to make peace and undo the mess that may have contributed to the suspension. Subsequently, an elder who is on suspension is not allowed to perform any of the duties associated with his status. On the extreme, suspension maybe accompanied with a fine, cursing or cleansing rituals. At the time of this study, ten elders were under suspension according to elder Batiri, a member of the supreme council.

4.4.6 Discrimination by the Council Based on Gender

Gender equality is about laying a ground that is fair for both male and female. Women respondents specifically reported incidences when they have suffered discrimination in the hands of *Njuri Ncheke* elders. Women are not allowed to be members and this has made the council a male only institution. Most women respondents expressed their interest to be incorporated into the council especially those who are already leaders in various capacities in the community and those aspiring to get into positions of leadership. Purity Kirigia, (OI), who is aspiring a political post in the county, feels that being a member of such a decision making organ in the community would have been an added advantage. In her view, lack of women representation in the council is the main reason why there are very few women leaders from the Meru community. Purity pointed out that while there are several women in public service from the county, not many are in politics because of gender bias on the side of the council of elders. Women respondents cited unfairness on the council when handling marital problems. A case in point is that of Maria Gatwiri, (OI), mentioned earlier who paid a heavy fine for slapping her violent husband.

Njuri Ncheke elders were categorical that women are not and cannot be members of the council. Their main argument was that women are weak and cannot bear the vigorous

initiation process whose details the elders were not ready to reveal. The second argument was that women cannot be allowed to know and cannot be entrusted with the secrets of Meru community because they can easily leak the same to other communities in case of intermarriages. Elder Batiri, a member of the supreme council quoted the Biblical story of Delila, Samson's wife who revealed the secret behind her husband's strength to her people. When Delila's people got to know that Samson's secret was in his hair, they shaved him and since he could no longer fight, the Israelites lost in the battle. Elder Batiri also said that *Njuri* affairs are not openly discussed and they fear women may not be able to keep such secrets because many women, according to the elder, like gossiping. The high level of transparency and fairness in the council is also something that the elders were not sure women would cope up with as many accused women of envy and jealousy especially in polygamous families.

Bishop Imathiu supported women in their quest for representation in the council. The Bishop cited the clause on affirmative action in the constitution and criticized the council for not being in tune with the current demands and expectations as far as gender equality is concerned. Bishop Imathiu hopes to introduce the agenda for women representation to the council officials for discussion and he was optimistic that something will be done. The Bishop was ready and prepared to use the wealth of respect accorded to him by *Njuri Ncheke* elders in his capacity as a long term friend of the council to champion the women quest for participation in the council affairs. However, Imathiu was quick to commend the council of elders for their care and protection on women who are vulnerable in the community such as widows and barren women. Bishop Imathiu also refuted claims by women that the council discriminates against them when handling marital issues. The Bishop cited several cases where *Njuri* elders have intervened to either save a marriage that is almost breaking to the disadvantage of the woman, save a woman from a husband's brutality by even applying their disciplinary measures against the man, and on several occasions intervening to save a widow from losing property of her late husband to greedy relatives. Bishop Imathiu said that from his youthful days, he has always seen the council protect women from violent and irresponsible men. Imathiu said that it is actually a taboo for a Meru man to ignore calls for help from a woman who is experiencing pain, especially labour pains.

4.4.7 Political Involvement and Influence

Many ordinary respondents accused *Njuri Ncheke* elders of influencing the voting pattern in the County during general elections, an accusation that the elders totally denied. Elders who were interviewed said that their duty as a religious institution is to bless those they deem capable of leading the community, and those who have demonstrated that they have the welfare of the community at heart. According to elder M'Muna, their decision on who to bless is always informed by a person's past record, their participation in community affairs especially development projects and their ability to improve the community's economic status. The elder used several words to clarify the difference between blessing and imposing a leader to the community. In a nut-shell, elders were in agreement that it is their sacred duty to identify and bless the leaders of the community. Apparently the elders are not ignorant of the democratic rights entrenched in the country's constitution. Elder M'Muna concluded that as a council, they always leave it to the Meru people to elect leaders of their choice. Many ordinary respondents rejected the council's involvement in politics arguing that blessing a candidate deemed able by the council translates to indirectly identifying the right candidate. According to Zaverio Mutugi, (OI), it is common knowledge that the political party preferred by *Njuri Ncheke* always remains the popular party in Meru region and vying on a different party ticket is always an uphill task. Similarly, the candidate who receives the blessings of *Njuri Ncheke* becomes the popular candidate and consequently wins the election. Many respondents also accused some of the elders of receiving goodies from politicians seeking their support, an allegation *Njuri Ncheke* elders vehemently denied.

4.4.8 Secrecy in the Affairs of *Njuri Ncheke*

Respondents both men and women disliked the council's secret dealings which makes the council appear like a secretive society. Father Kimathi of the Catholic Church accused the council of making even that which is not secretive appear like a secret. *Nchiru* shrine itself is a protected area and visitors are not easily allowed in the heritage site which is under the care of the national museums of Kenya in the absence of a guide and shrine attendant. A majority of council elders themselves are tough talking men whose personality and appearance scares visitors especially non-Meru. Even those who were known in their villages to be soft spoken drastically change once they are initiated into the council. Father Kimathi said that such secrecy keeps researchers away yet, according to the catholic clergy, knowledge concerning the council is needed for checks and balances. However, a visit to the shrine by the researcher proved Father Kimathi's allegations partly wrong. The researcher in the company of two male assistants was well received and was able to access relevant information from the shrine

attendants. But as for the dome-shaped building where rituals, initiation rites and where serious disputes involving the Meru people are settled, no one enters, not even the researcher. Only the members of the council are allowed to enter the building. Non-members who are called “*Nkurumbu*” do not enter the building and doing so attracts a fine of a bull.

Njuri Ncheke secrecy extends to the control of Meru sacred sites (also called sanctuaries) which are used for religious rituals and initiation ceremonies for council membership. There are common stories among ordinary respondents of people who once disappeared into such forests while collecting firewood and have never resurfaced. Moreover, criminals are discouraged from hiding in such sanctuaries since they are protected by taboos. Sometimes, the devil is believed to be their security guard. The worst secrets are those that revolve around initiation into the council commonly called “*Kuritwa Njuri*”. To disclose such secrets to non-members be they from Meru or outside, even close relatives or friends, is a great sin against the ancestors, a serious abomination. Those who commit such sins are threatened with illness or death, cursed by anger of an ancestral spirit who is believed to hear every word spoken in the realm of the living. The language of *Njuri Ncheke* alone bears evidence of secrecy as they commonly use old words of wisdom, proverbs and sometimes support their points with stories whose lesson is left to the individual to deduce.

This first objective identified the resilient practices, roles and activities of *Njuri Ncheke* that have made the council popular in Meru County. The study established that seclusion period in which young initiates are guided has been revived in the name of seminar camps where young initiates interact with *Njuri Ncheke* elders. Elders have also revived their moral duties where the strict disciplinary measures are administered by the council meant to revive the moral standards that have been on the decline. Religious and cultural duties such as cleansing rituals, blessings and curses have been revived. The council’s decision making role where they made all major decisions affecting the community is on resurgent. Their role of settling disputes and arbitrating is resilient and this has made *Njuri Ncheke* court very popular. However there are roles, practices and activities of the council that many residents of the county do not like. The offering of animal sacrifices is considered by many as antichristian and primitive. Their unethical and radical initiation process is highly detested while many people dislike the oathing (*muuma*) and regard the rituals performed during oathing as ungodly. The punitive and forceful punishments by the council that sometimes leave culprits with permanent injuries are disliked. Many residents of the county were against the way the council appears to discriminate against women. Their political involvement and influence especially during general elections is something that many dislike. The secrecy in

their affairs is something that people wish could change as it makes it appear a secretive institution.

4.5.1 Sources of the Influence and Authority of *Njuri Ncheke* in Contemporary Meru Community

This section is a presentation of the research findings of the second objective which sought to examine the sources of the influence of *Njuri Ncheke* in contemporary Meru society. The research question for collecting the relevant data was stated as follows:

“What is the source of the influence and authority of *Njuri Ncheke* in contemporary Meru community”.

In regard to this objective, the researcher sought to establish the source of authority for *Njuri Ncheke* elders in Meru County.

Responses from the various categories of respondents were analyzed and presented in the table below.

Table 7: Responses from the Elders, Religious Leaders and Ordinary Respondent on the Njuri Ncheke source of Authority, Influence and Popularity in Meru County

Source	Number of Respondents N=200	Percentage (%)
Historical source of authority	150	75
The dysfunctional nature of Christianity	98	49
Failure of the modern court system	170	85
Nature of politics in Kenya	160	80
Sacred obligation	140	70

Note: Respondents gave more than one source of authority.

From Table 7 above, 98% of the respondents believed that the source of *Njuri Ncheke* authority and influenced is historical. 96% believed that the dysfunctional nature of Christianity has made the council remain authoritative. The failure of modern court system was suggested by 76%, while 65% said that their sacred obligation as religious leaders has made them strong. 98% of the respondents believed that the nature of Kenya’s politics where one must get support from elders of the community has made *Njuri Ncheke* authoritative, influential and popular.

4.5.2 Further Discussions on Table 7

4.5.3 Historical Source of Authority and Influence

Many respondents, both men and women were in agreement that *Njuri Ncheke* authority and influence is historical but has grown remarkably in recent years. From time immemorial, the elders noted, becoming a member of *Njuri Ncheke* was always the highest social rank a Meru man could aspire. They were the esteemed leaders of the community and their work necessitated great wisdom, personal discipline and knowledge of the traditions. Their noble functions have always been to make and execute tribal laws, to listen to, and settle disputes and to pass on tribal knowledge and rites across the generations in their role as the custodians of the Meru traditions and customs. The study revealed that the council still holds a good deal of these prerogatives and this is what has led to its resilience. The elders were in agreement that no modern institution can carry on with the functions of *Njuri Ncheke*, and even if there was one, it would lack the transparency, honesty, fairness and commitment that *Njuri Ncheke* elders generously possess. Elder Muriuki M'Arithi of North Imenti, (OI), said that no one has done or can do what *Njuri* is doing and has always done since its inception. The elder reiterated that the council is a traditional religious institution that has been passed down to the Meru people through centuries. It is their centre of leadership and spirituality. It is the pride of the Meru people.

The patriarchs, Koomenjue and Kauro-o-Bechau endowed *Njuri Ncheke* with the power and responsibility to be in charge of the community as the custodians of the Ameru religious beliefs and customs. Kauro-o-Bechau's words '*Njuri ikaura*' are a clear indication that *Njuri Ncheke*, as the sole mandated institution in the Meru community is expected to continue discharging its duties authoritatively as long as the gods of the land and the ancestral spirits have not spoken otherwise. Although there were two other institutions (*Kiruka* and *Ntiba* as discussed earlier) that in the past influenced community decisions especially in matters of war, these institutions were never mandated by the patriarchs. Conclusively then, it is suffice to say that *Njuri Ncheke* authority and influence is from the patriarchs of the community and the obligation to obey the same has greatly contributed to their resilience.

Stories from elders concerning the historical source of *Njuri* authority and influence seemed to agree with Peatrik (1999). The author says that the actual rise to power of *Njuri Ncheke* had to do with H.E. Lambert, District Commissioner of Meru in 1934-1935 and 1939-1942. Peatrik argues that Lambert gave the religious institution more prominence than it perhaps originally had by regarding it as "The council of elders". The District Commissioner also insisted that all elders who wanted to be appointed at any level of the

local administration had to belong to *Njuri Ncheke*, thus increasing initiation into the council. *Njuri Ncheke* elders became the new local rulers and through them, Lambert operated a kind of indirect rule in Meru District. But elder M'Muna adds that the increasing permanent nature of *Njuri Ncheke* was facilitated by steady expansion in the number of livestock available to Tigania and Igembe sub-tribes. This made *Njuri Ncheke* to be associated with Tigania and Igembe for several years. But following Lambert's declaration, men from other sub-tribes started joining the council so as to be appointed into administrative post in the colonial government. The seemingly close relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and the colonial government also made the council more attractive as they were consulted on all matters affecting the Meru community. The respect accorded to *Njuri Ncheke* by the government continued even after Kenya's independence and this automatically made the religious institution authoritative and influential and their decision is always final. The current increase in membership has boosted their influence and popularity as every well to do Meru man is seeking association with the council.

Another likely and less known historical source of *Njuri Ncheke* authority and influence is the patriarchal system. This same factor has also contributed to the male domination in the institution. It was common knowledge among the respondents, and with a greater emphasis from *Njuri Ncheke* elders that in Meru community, the descent is patriarchal and the community neither knew, nor recognized matriarchal lineage. This is because their God, *Murungu*, from whom they all descend is believed to be male. The patriarchs, Koomenjue and Kauro-o-Bechau are also male. It therefore follows automatically that the male possesses authority and influence and this explains the male dominance and authority of the institution.

4.5.4 The Dysfunctional Nature of Christianity in Meru County

Respondents thought unanimously that the failure of Christianity is to blame for the rise to power and current resilience of ATR as evident in the activities of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County. Their sentiments agree with Rhodes (2001), who, while discussing the causes of cults in the U.S, blames the church for, among other things, its failure to make a real moral difference in the lives of its members. Its failure to make a sense of belonging among its members, failure to meet people's deepest needs and failure to make church doctrines a high priority such that many Christian do not know the Bible. Rhodes sentiments apply to the church in Meru County in relation to the supremacy of *Njuri Ncheke* and the resilience of ATR. The church in Meru county lacks a clear stand on matters to do with morality and punishment of law breakers therefore *Njuri Ncheke* supersedes the church on matters of

morality and discipline. Owing to the mushrooming of Pentecostal churches in the County, wrong doers have a leeway to move from one church to another and easily get off. In explaining the emergence of African independent churches, Mbiti (1969) argued that missionary Christianity failed to penetrate sufficiently deep into African religiosity and this was and remains exactly the case in Meru County, a factor that has given *Njuri Ncheke* precedence.

The Meru people traditionally maintained very high moral standards following the keen monitoring by *Njuri Ncheke* elders before the coming of Christianity through the missionaries. Nevertheless, the traditional moral system of countering crimes was broken down since it was not in line with the teachings of the Christian missionaries. The result was moral breakdown and social decay. At the onset of Christianity, some early converts abandoned traditional practices just because they wanted to be free from the tough and strict traditional rules. The early converts were incorporated into the way of life of the Christian missionaries. Nthamburi (1981) in his interview with Kornelio Mukiira noted that those who accepted a new way of life had to cut themselves off from the rest of the society including their relatives and live at the mission station where they were protected from the influence of the traditional expectations. Many *Njuri Ncheke* elders lamented that teachings and preaching in the churches is too much but without proper grounding. *Njuri Ncheke* elders also accused the church leaders of being too lenient with their errant members because they fear losing them and consequently missing their financial contributions. However all the members of the clergy who were interviewed denied the elders' allegations that criminals hide in the churches. Rev Arioto clarified that every church has its own system of disciplining and the fact that the system of discipline appears different from *Njuri Ncheke* style does not make it lesser discipline. Elder Muriuki, who is in his late eighty's said that in their Kimeru traditions, they used to teach their people properly and that is why they were able to have control over them. People knew what was expected of them. The elder said that today, most people do not seem to know what they believe in and whom they believe. Elder Muriuki said that the diversity in Christian doctrines and teachings makes Christianity even more divided and lacking in its ability to control and monitor their faithfuls, a factor that has led to resilience of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County.

Christians emphasize on the principle of forgiveness and claim that the grace of God in which they live in is sufficient, a factor that the elders feel is giving criminals a leeway to misbehavior. It is for this reason, according to pastor Gitonga of the deliverance church, that even if a converted member testifies openly that he or she killed so and so, such a member

cannot be arrested by the pastor and tried for murder. This is because the person is already forgiven by God and is subsequently a new creation. Pastor Gitonga says that condemning such a person again amounts to a violation of the Holy Scriptures. Pastor Nthiga added that the Biblical principle of forgiveness demands that once a sinner has been forgiven, however big or small the sin may be, the past is forgotten because the forgiven sinner is a new creation. Many *Njuri* elders could not fathom the principle of forgiveness and all they know is that whether forgiven or not, a person must pay for the crimes committed. The elders say that nominalism has become too much in the County and needs to be curbed. The elders are challenging the churches to give their believers roots in their beliefs and at least tighten their systems of discipline. They should teach their adherents what they should hold and come up with proper mechanisms to instill discipline onto their errant members. They further challenge the church leaders to help fish out evil doers who are hiding in their church congregations. Following the failure of Christianity, the elders have already re-gathered themselves. They say they cannot keep quiet and watch their people going astray. To many *Njuri Ncheke* elders, there are crimes for which the culprit must either be punished or pay a fine whether forgiven or not, and as long as this has not been done, the elders consider the culprits errant members of the community.

The elders are optimistic that Meru moral standards will be restored. Their efforts to revive the Meru elders all over the county seem to bear fruits. Elder Batiri, a member of the supreme council confirmed that currently there are over five thousand initiated members of *Njuri Ncheke* three hundred of them in the supreme council. They have already identified their present *Mugwe*, a son of the lineage of the *Mugwe* called Baikiao. Unfortunately at the time of the research, Baikiao was far away from the county therefore it was not possible to seek his opinion as the *Mugwe* of the Ameru. It is this failure on the side of the church that has made the elders campaign for a revival of the disciplinary measures of *Njuri Ncheke* all over Meru County to bear fruits, hence forming a strong base for the resilience of *Njuri Ncheke* authority in the County.

4.5.5 Failure of the Modern Court System

By implication, human conflicts have always had both secular and supernatural significance in the Ameru concept of life. All violations of person or property were defined automatically as departures from ancestral traditions. The study revealed that in the Meru traditions, there is a dual concept of justice in which punishment is believed to not only be effected physically here on earth, but also from the ancestors in the invisible spiritual world.

There is also the belief that punishment does not only befall the individual offender, but extends to the family, clan and the community at large. In contrast with the Christian conceptions of an all seeing God of love, the Meru god was essentially indifferent to mankind. If angered especially through evil acts of human beings, he could withhold blessings. If placated by rituals, he could be beneficial to them all. It is for this reason that *Njuri Ncheke* has taken up the responsibility to punish, arbitrate, settle disputes and reconcile aggrieved parties. Elders, being in the lowest category of religious specialists in African Traditional Religion had the duty to ensure that there was harmony to ensure continued blessings for the community at large. The council has therefore remained the highest court of the land, a duty that was further reinforced by the British colonial masters who always respected the decisions of *Njuri Ncheke*.

The study found out that until the arrival of the British, the Meru judicial system was twofold. On a local level judgements were made by councils of elders (Kiama). On a national level, the *Njuri Ncheke* exercised this power. Like a grand jury, their decision was believed to be final. It is popularly said in the Meru language, “*Njuri yauga itiugukaga*”, meaning, whatever *Njuri* says is final. Dispute resolution occurs at three levels mainly family, clan and the council of elders, depending on the nature of the offence. The elders are responsible for the most serious conflicts such as murder, adultery, theft and land disputes. Notorious petty thieves, sex offences are also dealt with by the council. Disobeying the council called for such severe punishments like impotence, barrenness, madness and many other forms of curses. To date, this status quo has been maintained and where forces such as colonization and modern Christian missionary enterprise seem to have shaken such foundations, there is clear evidence of resilience as revealed in this study.

Nchiru, the community’s traditional shrine and the headquarters of *Njuri Ncheke* has remained an equivalent of Kenya’s supreme courts. The dome-shaped house within the shrine was built in the 1960’s and it is the elder’s symbol of authority. It is inside this building that serious disputes involving the Meru people are settled. No one enters the building, not even the researcher, except the “Men of *Njuri*”. One major cause of the current split in the supreme council is the decision by the aggrieved group to take a *Njuri Ncheke* dispute to a modern court. In a public meeting aired in a local television station, a *Njuri Ncheke* elder who is also a veteran politician in the region said that *Njuri Ncheke* is never taken to court because it is itself a court. He shunned the group that took a *Njuri* case to court as “fake elders” who are ignorant of the Meru traditions. He also criticized the invitation to meet in a classic hotel to deliberate *Njuri Ncheke* issues as suggested by leaders of the aggrieved rival group. The

veteran politician said that *Njuri* issues and cases can only be discussed and settled at their traditional shrine at *Nchiru*, the sacred point of the Meru community, not in a hotel.

Like many other African people's, the Meru people believe that God punishes in this life and holds that there must be compensation for the crimes committed. For this reason, *Njuri* punishment is immediate and the punishment must be equal to the crime committed. Punishment for miraa stealing is almost immediate to deter others from doing the same. It is for this reason that residents of Meru County detest the process of involving the police, attending to court cases and producing evidences. Since its inception by their forefather Kauro-o-Bechau, elder Batiri says that *Njuri* has always been known for its honesty and fairness in their dealings. Failure to show transparency and honesty would call for a curse on *Njuri* elders from the ancestors. Father Murianki says that modern courts should emulate the court transparency of *Njuri Ncheke* elders. The catholic clergy strongly commended the elders' court and wished that the findings of this study would be known to the Kenya judicial systems so that they can borrow a leaf from *Njuri* style of judgement.

Lying to *Njuri* elders is in itself a crime and the culprit is always expected to say the truth as the gods and spirits are believed to be aware and always watching. Bulmann (1982) says that beneath it all, there is the African's deeply religious predisposition. The author says that the African does not simply believe in God and the spirits of his ancestors but he lives in the full sense of the term under the eyes of the creator, the hidden cause of all other causes. It is this fear of the deity and the entire invisible spiritual world that leads to transparency and honesty not only from the officiating elders but the culprits as well. A respondent, Mr Koome noted that many a times, the elders do not struggle to fish out offenders from the villages but usually the culprits easily surrender out of the fear of the deity. In a village, Koome said, small differences and disputes are very common and the immediate intervention and judgements of *Njuri Ncheke*, alongside their rough disciplinary measures creates harmony and order in the villages. Onyancha (2010) notes that a village community is more often than not a theatre of jealousies, conflicts and hatreds often caused by myriad of factors. Foster (1967) had made a similar observation earlier when he described villagers as being frequently suspicious of each other, envious, ready to suspect the worst about their neighbours and distrustful in the extreme. The findings in Meru County from the present study confirmed observations made by Onyancha and Foster. The fact that *Njuri Ncheke* elders have immediate solutions to such and are able to create order in the midst of such conflicts makes them authoritative and influential.

Bishop Lawi Imathiu was full of praise for *Njuri Ncheke* court and commented that it is transparency and honesty that has greatly contributed to the resilience and popularity of *Njuri* elders' court in the County. Elder "M'Mukangu of Igembe sub-county, (OI), does not believe that there is justice in the modern court system. He recalled how his neighbour, Muchena, who is a staunch Christian took his miraa thieves to Meru law courts and they were released after two weeks for lack of evidence. Upon release, the two thieves gave Muchena a thorough beating in the evening when he was going home from a church fellowship. Two days later, five of Muchena's goats were stolen and the two released thieves were the main suspects. Muchena's wife, though also a staunch Christian got fed up and called *Njuri* elders who arrested the two suspects and took them to the shrine at *Nchiru*. They were given such a thorough beating that left one of them impotent and as a result his wife run to her home. According to elder M'Mukangu, the other suspect lost four of his front teeth and to date he has never married meaning that he could also have been rendered impotent. Since they had already sold Muchena's goats, their families compensated Muchena with other goats and paid money for the estimated amount of miraa that was stolen earlier, not forgetting a good fine for *Njuri Ncheke* elders' court. Elder M'Mukangu's narration represents many of such cases in the study. It is a pointer to the lack of confidence the people have in the police and the modern courts. There is a general feeling in Meru County that even if one tries the police, this is unlikely to result in much action. It is such incidences like that of Muchena that have made the Tigania and Igembe people especially ignore the modern law courts in favour of *Njuri Ncheke* court and this has remained a strong basis for their influence and resilience in Meru County.

4.5.6 Nature of Politics in Kenya

Current trends in Kenya seem to be pushing councils of elders into resilience, *Njuri Ncheke* inclusive. It is common knowledge in Kenya today that for one to succeed in politics, support from the elders is an unavoidable prelude. Currently, local members of parliament and prominent politicians in Meru County are all members of *Njuri Ncheke*. Though it is never said out loudly, *Njuri Ncheke* membership gives one a good standing for political ambitions. This has been the case since the colonial period, as discussed earlier, when the District Commissioner by the name H.E. Lambert insisted that all Meru elders who wanted to be appointed at any level of the local administration had to belong to *Njuri Ncheke*, thus increasing initiation into the council. To date, the Meru community holds that a man who leads the community in any capacity must first be a man of *Njuri*, a factor that has made even the staunch Christians to join the council. At the sametime, this belief has barred women

from political participation, except for the current position of women representative. As *Njuri* elders spread all over the county, some politicians use them for the purpose of soliciting votes. However, *Njuri* elders strongly refuted the claim that they are used to campaign for politicians. Elder M'Mukangu reiterated that the only thing they do as elders and therefore counsellors by the virtue of their status is to guard the community from electing bad leaders. This explains why *Njuri Ncheke* has become very popular among the rich and the elite who are aspiring political positions. The study found out that this is a factor that has greatly contributed to the resilience of *Njuri Ncheke*.

According to elder M'Mukangu, membership into *Njuri Ncheke* was the highest honour a man could receive. One commanded more influence and respect than a member of the ordinary council of elders. To be elected to the council, one had to be of outstanding character and wisdom, a man of firm principle, morality and authority. Though the major duties of the council were religious in nature, they greatly influenced political administration of the Ameru. They acted as prophets and had a lot of influence when it came to the political matters of the society. Father Muriangi noted that political involvement by *Njuri* elders is already affecting the institution's religious sacredness. The Catholic clergy wishes that *Njuri* elders would retain their religious duties and leave politics to politicians. Father Muriangi cited cases of *Njuri Ncheke* elders who have taken advantage of respect accorded to them by the community to campaign for their favourites in the political field, an accusation that elder Batiri, a member of the Supreme Council totally denied.

Respondents both men and women expressed their dissatisfaction with the current involvement of *Njuri Ncheke* in the political affairs of Meru community. Elder M'Mungania of North Imenti sub-county, (OI), lamented that many elders are getting initiated into the council for personal gain other than the desire to perform the duties associated with the religious institution. The elder said that the primary aim of initiation to many members is to gain a status that can work in their political favour. His sentiments were in agreement with those of elder M'Muna who said that many elders from the political class have no time for other duties like settling disputes, educating the youth and counseling members of the community who need such services. M'Muna lamented that elders who are politicians are only good at giving hefty contributions to support council activities but do not avail themselves physically.

It is therefore clear from the study that *Njuri Ncheke* influence in politics is a major source of their authority in Meru region, and a pointer to their resilience. An interview with a young member of the County assembly gave proof to this finding. Honourable Nick Muriithi, (OI),

was initiated into the council six months before the last general election while he was twenty six years old. Muriithi admitted that before he became a man of *Njuri*, he was very unpopular, only known to his pupils and colleagues in his local primary school where he was a teacher. But when he got initiated into *Njuri Ncheke* and got into the company of “Men of *Njuri*” who are known to be men of substance, word went round the villages that he was now a man to watch. And when he joined the political arena and contested for member of County assembly, he won by a land slide. It is this kind of political success that has attracted many to the council hence leading to its resilience.

4.5.7 Meru Traditional Religious Consciousness.

The elders’ commitment to the preservation of their Meru traditional religious beliefs, coupled with the sacred obligations *Njuri Ncheke* is associated with has remained a source of its strength and authority since its inception. The study revealed that even with the exposure to modern change, it is still the feeling of many in Meru community that attempts should be made to relate modern ideas to the religious values and sacredness of their *Zamani*, the very foundation of existence and security for the Meru community. Bishop Lawi Imathiu observed that unlike Christianity, traditional religions do not have scholarly champions or volunteers to advocate their case or modernize their content and expression, but the elders are the custodians of its beliefs, values and practices. *Njuri Ncheke* entity is in itself a representation of the invisible world. In African religion, elders are part and parcel of the invisible world. As mentioned earlier, they belong to the lowest category of religious specialists in the African understanding of the spiritual universe. *Njuri Ncheke* elders are closely linked to the ancestral dead, not only by bonds of kinship but also through constant rituals intended to keep the relationship alive. Just as it was traditionally, it is in the process of executing their religious and sacred duties that *Njuri Ncheke* is able to influence the political, economic and social affairs in the Meru community, a role that has clearly contributed to the resilience of ATR according to the findings of this current study.

It was common knowledge among the elders interviewed that a Meru clan consisted of the living and their ancestors (also called living dead). It lived therefore within not just the temporal world but an interrelated spiritual sphere as well. Reflecting this duality, *Njuri Ncheke* existed within both secular and supernatural religious contexts. On earth, they served as centres for conciliation, addressing conflicts of human interest as they arose. Because all decisions were ultimately based on ancestral precedent, however, their ultimate task was to determine whether quarrels had caused disharmony among their ancestors as well. A Meru child is taught that impotence, barrenness or drought might follow from a violation of taboos

and disrespect for elders, whereas one might be blessed with a large family and productive farm if he were respectful to these powers. It is such sacredness in the perceptions and duties that has made *Njuri Ncheke* return its strength, influence and authority as a religious institution.

Most respondents were in agreement that many elements of the Meru religious heritage have come from God, and as such, cannot be dismissed. Human life, which came from God through the spirits and ancestors was considered sacred and was held in great reverence. Elder Marete of North Imenti (OI), narrated the many rituals that surrounded human life all under the jurisdiction of *Njuri Ncheke*. Since life was of utmost importance, it had to be safeguarded very zealously with prayers, rituals, magic and protective charms. All these are irreplaceable roles of *Njuri Ncheke* that cannot be delegated to an individual or another institution hence explain why *Njuri Ncheke* has remained powerful and authoritative. Referring to a case discussed earlier where an entire family had to undergo cleansing rituals following the birth of an abnormal calf, elder Marete says that cleansing rituals can only be performed by *Njuri Ncheke* elders and not a priest or a pastor.

Curses can only be removed through words uttered by *Njuri Ncheke* elders at the sacred point at *Nchiru* in what is known to Meru people as '*Kurumuka*'. Such sacred obligations by the council are not transferable. It is logical on this basis that Karl Marx and Fredrick Angels (1957) developed the materialist school interpreting religion arguing that religion can only be overcome if the conditions that gave rise to it are transformed. The beliefs underlying the existence of *Njuri Ncheke* as a religious and social institution are mystical linking to the founder, Kauro-o-Bechau and cannot be reversed or transformed. Their roles and duties are irreplaceable meaning that the conditions that gave rise to the council cannot be transformed hence their resilience. Below is a photo of *Njuri* shrine and the sacred hut.



Plate 6: Njuri Ncheke shrine and the dome-shaped sacred hut.

Source: Reseacher

This objective examined the sources of authority and influence of *Njuri Ncheke*. One source that came out clearly is the historical source beginning from the patriarch, kauro-o-Bechau and later the decree by the colonial District Commissioner, Lambert, who called it the council of elders and gave its members priviledges that did not apply to others. The disfunctional nature of Christianity has made the council to retrieve its duties hence making it authoritative and influential. This is because the Christian church has failed, according to the elders, to instil proper and strict discipline to the faithfuls. The failure of the modern court system to give immediate judgements has made residents of Meru County to resort to *Njuri Ncheke* court hence boosting its authority. The nature of politics in Kenya where the blessings by the community elders can determine political destiny has also contributed to *Njuri Ncheke's* rise in power. The sacred obligations of the council with religious duties that are irreplaceable such as cleansing, blessing and cursing have greatly boosted their authority and influence.

4.6.1 Nature of the Relationship between Njuri Ncheke and Christianity in Meru County

Objective three of the study was to analyze the nature of the relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and Christianity in Meru County. Based on this objective, the researcher sought to first establish the relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and Christianity from the onset of

Christian missionary enterprise, up to the present day. The research question collecting the relevant data was stated as follows:

“What is the nature of the relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and Christianity in Meru County”.

Responses from the respondents were analyzed and presented in the table below:

Table 8: Responses from the Respondents on the Relationships between Njuri Ncheke and Christianity

	Good		Moderate		Bad	
	No. of Respondents (indicated below)	%	No. of Respondents (indicated below)	%	No. of Respondents (indicated below)	%
<i>Njuri Ncheke</i> elders	65	70	20	21	0	0
Church leaders	20	44	20	44	0	0
Ordinary respondents	35	68	18	28	0	0

The results in Table 7 above suggested that the relationship between Christianity and *Njuri Ncheke* is good as noted by 78% of the elders, 63% of the church leaders and 68% of the ordinary respondents. However, a few respondents described the relationship in their respective areas as moderate. These were mainly elders, church leaders and ordinary respondents from areas dominated by Pentecostal churches where faithfuls associate the council with ungodly practices that in their interpretation amount to Satanism. None of the respondents described the relationship between the church and the council as bad. Even the Pentecostal pastors who opposed *Njuri Ncheke* contended that the relationship is moderate. These observation concurred with Bahemuka (1983) who described Christianity as having come to Africa with its rituals, standards and values, and having found African societies too with their value systems which were central to the teachings of the society. The author observed that the type of Christianity that is emerging in Africa is enriched by the traditions that are to be found on the continent. Bahemuka says that while the African is trying in a dynamic society to deal with the wave of change and conquer the environment, above all, he is enriched by his past. It is this enriching past that has enhanced the relationship between

Njuri Ncheke and Christianity in Meru County and made it adorable hence the resilience of the council in the County.

4.6.2 Relationship between Christianity and Njuri Ncheke at the Onset of Christian Missionary Era

Nthamburi (1981) has explored the response of the Meru people to the introduction of Christianity. The author has noted that the arrival of the early Christian missionaries who brought Christianity to Meru County was received with suspicion by the *Njuri Ncheke* elders who were already custodians of the Meru traditional religion. The Methodist missionaries were the first to set their feet on the land followed closely by the consolata fathers. Nthamburi's findings concurred well with the responses from the old elders who were interviewed in this study. Elders M'Arithi and M'Ngondu, (OI), who are well advanced in age recalled the tricks that the elders used to keep the missionaries away from the region. When the Methodist missionaries requested to be given land where they could put up a church, they were given the land at Kaaga area that was known to be the land of witches. It was full of forests with big trees that no one dared to cut. The Kaaga forest was known to be the home of ghosts and the devil was believed to be the security guard.

There were several myths surrounding Kaaga forest that barred residents of the region from going near it. According to elder M'Ariithi, no one even dared to graze their animals near the forest and if an animal strayed and entered the forest, it was never followed up. It was believed that if anyone tried to cut a tree from that forest with an axe, the same axe would bounce back and cut the person instead. However, M'Ariithi says that these myths were proved to be false when the Christian missionaries came and were given the land to clear and build their mission centre. The name Kaaga was coined from "*Ka*" "*agaa*", which means, 'place of witches'. But the missionaries who could not pronounce it well called it Kaaga. Ignorant of the myths surrounding the land given to them, or perhaps because of their faith in God, the missionaries, together with the early African converts from the region cleared the forests. The residents were keenly waiting to see the ghosts deal with them but to their surprise it never happened and the old myths were proved false by the residents of the region. The Christian missionaries built a church and a school. To date, Kaaga is the main centre for the Methodist churches in Kenya with learning institutions like Kenya Methodist University, Kaaga School for the Deaf and several secondary schools sponsored by MCK among other institutions. The courage with which the missionaries and the early African converts cleared the forests attracted many residents to Christianity.

Elders M'Arithi and M'Muna recalled their experiences with the early Christian missionaries at Mikinduri. They gave them a sloppy portion of land full of stones. M'Ngundu recalled the many times young men hid themselves near the missionaries' houses at night. They threw stones and made funny scaring sounds meant to make the missionaries go away. They also stole their clothes and food especially rice and sugar. But the missionaries did not give up, neither did they keep grudges with local people despite their hostility. They preached to them and even welcomed them to their homes. And when they built schools, they beseeched the residents to take their children to school. Even those who were past the school going age like M'Muna who was already initiated into adulthood still joined school. M'Muna recalls that those who accepted formal education benefitted a great deal as they were able to get salaried jobs with the colonial government. This kind of generosity and Godly love from the side of Christian missionaries attracted many residents to Christianity. When *Njuri Ncheke* elders realized that the Meru people were benefitting from the presence of Christian missionaries, they slowly changed their attitude and began to work with them.

But before the change of attitude discussed above, the foreigners with their own way of life had become a threat to the people. Their message was condemning anything traditional and this made some people especially *Njuri Ncheke* elders resentful. The missionaries preached the trinity of God, which was contrary to the Meru concept of God. Although M'Arithi is a baptized Christian, he said that it took several years before he believed that the God of the missionaries was a universal God. The two elders admitted that the message of the trinity confused them a great deal. The traditional concept of God is that God is one; he has no wife or even children. This made them to question the God of the foreigners. The elders felt that the Meru God has no division. The findings in Meru County have been confirmed by previous studies done in the region. For example, Nthamburi (1981) corroborated this view when he says that the idea that God could be considered as having a son was repugnant to the Meru people. God could not have a son since it was not the nature of the deity to get a consort. God was neither a father, nor a mother, he is the great one, "*Gitiye*". Nthamburi says that the idea of the Trinitarian was difficult to convey to Meru people. All these contradictions from the foreigners made *Njuri* elders feel that their religion which knit all the people together was being eroded.

Njuri Ncheke elders who are the custodians of the traditions and religious beliefs of the Ameru not only felt threatened but feared to lose their culture through western civilization and religion. As a result, they responded harshly and did all they could to frustrate the missionaries, so that they could go back to their homeland. That is why Nthamburi notes that

the hut accommodating the first school was set on fire after the door had been fastened from outside to prevent their escape. This was supposed to serve as a deterrent to any one who dared question traditional authority and the accepted order. According to elder M'Arithi, the hostility towards the missionaries was worsened by the condemnation of some Meru cultural practices and the religious rituals performed by *Njuri Ncheke* as satanic. Elder M'Ngondu recalled how he backslid and left the church a few months after conversion and baptism. When asked the reason why he backslid, M'Ngondu said that the church leaders barred the converts from taking part in the traditional circumcision ceremonies. The elder lamented that he could not bear the thought of missing the traditional songs especially "*Kirarire*" where he was the main soloist. M'Ngondu went back to church after the circumcision season but had to undergo the disciplinary process in line with the church doctrines. The elders noted that although the opposition was too much, the missionaries did not give up. Their faith in God and determination to spread the gospel attracted many to Christianity and slowly the number of converts increased.

The elders' sentiments above agree with the observations made by Nthamburi who said that when the missionaries realized the opposition was too much, they began to keep the adherents separately to protect them from the traditional influence. To achieve this, they had to provide everything for the followers. They brought education, dispensaries and all social facilities. Those who followed them were regarded as the "*athomi*". Nthamburi, in his interview with Kornelio Mukiira noted that those who accepted a new way of life had to cut themselves off from the rest of the society, including their relatives and live at the mission station where they were protected from the influence of the traditional expectations. However this hostility and opposition gradually faded away and at the long run, *Njuri Ncheke* elders and the Christian missionaries were able to establish a workable relationship as discussed in the next chapter.

4.6.3 Introduction of "Njuri ya Mauku" and the Mass Initiation of Christians into the Council of Elders in the 1930s

Responses from the field indicated that a good relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and Christianity has been in existence since 1938, though taking different forms. Christian initiation into *Njuri Ncheke* was initiated by the then District Commissioner, Mr. McKeag, when he convened a general meeting for *Njuri Ncheke* elders at Meru Town in 1938. The meeting deliberated about *Njuri ya Mauku* for two days and the proposal was approved by the supreme council officials. That initiation was known as '*Njuri ya Mauku*', meaning, 'Njuri of the books'. It was a kind of initiation where Christian initiates were allowed to use the Bible

to take oaths instead of using the traditional goats. The *Njuri ya Mauku* is used today for initiating Christians and the academicians into the council. The original idea came from Senior African members of both colonial administration and *Njuri Ncheke* from the larger Meru region who felt that young men should be initiated into the council so as to improve their character which had deteriorated. Both McKeag and Lambert, the District Commissioners who were in-charge during that time had also agreed that *Njuri Ncheke* should be modernized in order to accommodate the Christians and the learned men of the region, who had rejected the council on grounds of primitivity and pagan practices. *Njuri ya Mauku* has been a catalyst to resilience of the council as it makes it appear modern and accommodative.

Documentary evidence from Nkubu Catholic Diocese clearly outlined the stand of the Christian initiation into *Njuri Ncheke*, (Consolata fathers, 1976). Father Murianki from the diocese revealed that at the initial stages, the Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian churches did not allow their members to be initiated. Even when the Methodist and Presbyterian churches were convinced by the District Commissioner, McKeag, and agreed to nominate their candidates on behalf of the church, the Catholic Church still remained reluctant. The Catholic Church cited Crude practices like initiates being made to remove their clothes and shoes and be received as children of *Njuri* in the “*Nyomba ya Kiama*” (initiates hut) at *Nchiru*. Secrets of the council were not also being revealed to Christian initiates. The stand off between the church and *Njuri Ncheke* forced colonial District Commissioners to seek counsel and intervention of Phillip M’Inoti, the first African ordained minister and a member of *Njuri Ncheke*. Rev. M’Inoti convinced the two protestant groups (Methodist and Presbyterian) while the District Commissioner, Lambert, convinced Father Guadoagnini, the education secretary for consolata mission. All the parties met at *Njuri Ncheke* headquarters at *Nchiru* where an agreement on Christian initiation was arrived at.

The Christian fraternity gave conditions to *Njuri* elders to ensure that Christian initiates were fully accommodated into the council some of which included that:

- i) Whenever a Christian enters *Njuri* hut for the initiation, the pagan symbols be covered or rendered invisible.
- ii) That every Christian oath be sworn by the Bible and not goats.
- iii) That secrets of *Njuri Ncheke* be revealed to Christians same as it was to non-Christians.
- iv) That nothing could be taught to *Njuri* initiates unless approved by Rev. M’Inoti who was a Christian minister and *Njuri* elder.

Following the outcome of the agreement between the Christian churches and the colonial government, Rev. M’Inoti became the chief mediator between *Njuri Ncheke* and the Christian fraternity. Rev. M’Inoti had special right to reword the teachings to render them to be consistent with Christian traditions. It was clear that no agreement could be reached without the mediation of Rev. M’Inoti. Following the new agreement, Jotham M’Murianki became the pioneer Christian initiate into *Njuri Ncheke*. Jotham pioneered a practice that has continued to date and is mostly preferred by Christians and learned elders.

According to Father Murianki, the above documentary evidence clearly laid a foundation for the harmonious relationship existing today between the Christian church and *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County. Bishop Lawi Imathiu, an experienced and retired Methodist clergy agreed with the above Catholic Documentary and said that the same was in the Methodist Church records. Bishop Imathiu noted that had *Njuri Ncheke* rejected the Christian condition for initiation into the council, then *Njuri Ncheke* would either be non-existent or a very weak institution as currently almost all elders are Christians. But the Pentecostal churches which came into the region many years after the agreement on initiation of Christians into the council had been finalized had a different take which, according to Bishop Imathiu was inconsequential. Responses from both the clergy and ordinary respondents from the Pentecostal churches indicated a totally different stand. Pastor Nthiga of P.A.G Church considers use of the Bible in swearing by the initiates as disrespect and misuse of the holy book. Pastor Nthiga says it is a violation of the third commandment in Exodus 20: 7 – 8, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain”. Pastor Gitonga of the Deliverance Church who admits his high regard for the council, wishes that the Bible could be left out of the whole initiation process, but considering the strength and popularity of the council in the County, the status quo remains.

The acceptance of *Njuri ya Mauku* created discontents among some elders especially those from Tigania and Igembe sub-counties. These discontents have slowly culminated into a silent split in the council manifested as “*Njuri proper*” and “*Njuri modern*”. Those who are initiated the traditional way call themselves the *Njuri proper* and they regard the *Njuri ya Mauku* as *Njuri modern*. *Njuri proper* proudly consider themselves the real council and they have been made to feel that way as many people in the County believe that they are the only ones who can perform cleansing rituals. While *Njuri Ncheke* elders are in the public meetings, the split may hardly be noticed but it is common knowledge in the County that *Njuri* elders are not the same. There were sentiments from the respondents like so and so is

Njuri proper, so and so is *Njuri* modern. However, *Njuri Ncheke* elders were not willing to discuss the split. It was one of the issues all the elders avoided, perhaps for the purposes of unity. All they could say was, “*Njuri ni Njuri*”, ya “*Mauku, na ya mburi*”, *yonthe ni Njuri*, meaning, whichever style of initiation, they were all *Njuri* elders. In support of this finding some learned Christian elders admitted that there are some duties that they leave to some specific elders to perform and these elders happen to be in the *Njuri* proper. This finding was corroborated by responses from the ordinary respondents who pointed out specific elders who they associate with sacred duties all of whom belong to *Njuri* proper. In essence, the study found out that “*Njuri* proper” is more respected than “*Njuri ya Mauku*”. This split still exists in the council and it has remained a major threat to the unity of the institution.

4.6.4 Syncretism among *Njuri Ncheke* elders in Meru County

Currently, syncretism elements are evident in the practices and beliefs of *Njuri Ncheke* elders, a fact that the elders are aware of. They may not have the exact word for it but they know that mixing of religious beliefs, worship and loyalty exists in Meru County. They say that the religious change that took place upon the Meru religious beliefs is just a marriage of traditional religious beliefs and Christianity. In a marriage, according to elder Batiri, the two become one and if anything, the elements of the two remain up to the end. The elders’ sentiments agree with Marete (2004) who says that Ameru traditional religious concepts and practices cannot accommodate themselves fully to the changing situation, neither does Christianity to which most people have been exposed accommodate itself fully to either the traditional African life or to the complexity of modern change whether in Meru or other parts of the world. But the elders blame the early Christian missionaries and the British colonial government for syncretism. This is because the two groups facilitated the initiation of *Njuri ya mauku* hence giving a leeway to the elders to articulate the two religious beliefs. But according to Bishop Imathiu, this was a blessing in disguise as *Njuri ya mauku* turned out to be a unifying agent for the two religious groups. They say that the missionaries who introduced Christianity are the same people who ended up accommodating Meru traditional religious beliefs within Christianity. Those who are born in this kind of system cannot claim total identification with either Christianity or Meru traditional religious beliefs.

Syncretism elements are evident in the worship practices in all denomination in Meru County. There is a double mixture in worship and loyalty to ATR and Christianity. Membership to the council of elders where almost all members are baptized Christians is one clear evidence of syncretism. Bishop Lawi Imathiu and Father Murianki contended that even though both the Methodist and Catholic Church doctrines do not allow baptized members of

their churches to join *Njuri Ncheke* in any capacity, their members have been joining the council as elders and openly taking part in the traditional oathing system and prayers organized by this traditional religious institution. An earlier study by Mukindia and Onyancha (2013) revealed a silent move by the churches in Meru County to integrate Meru religious beliefs in Christian worship so as to fully accommodate the faithfuls in their churches without changing church doctrines. The two authors identified several aspects of Ameru traditional religion that have been integrated in Christian worship in the Methodist Church, the dominant denomination in Meru County.

Respondents narrated an incident where there were mysterious killings in South Imenti sub-County and one of the victims happened to have been a leader in one of the local churches. In a show of unity, the ordained ministers and leaders of the churches worked hand in hand with the *Njuri* elders in issuing threats and punishing culprits. In a mass burial held for the victims, the two groups joined hands in cursing the killers. The respondents also cited another event when the Ameru Bible was launched at the Kenya Methodist University grounds on 12/02/2011.

The Ameru Church leaders and *Njuri Ncheke* elders received the Bible society of Kenya

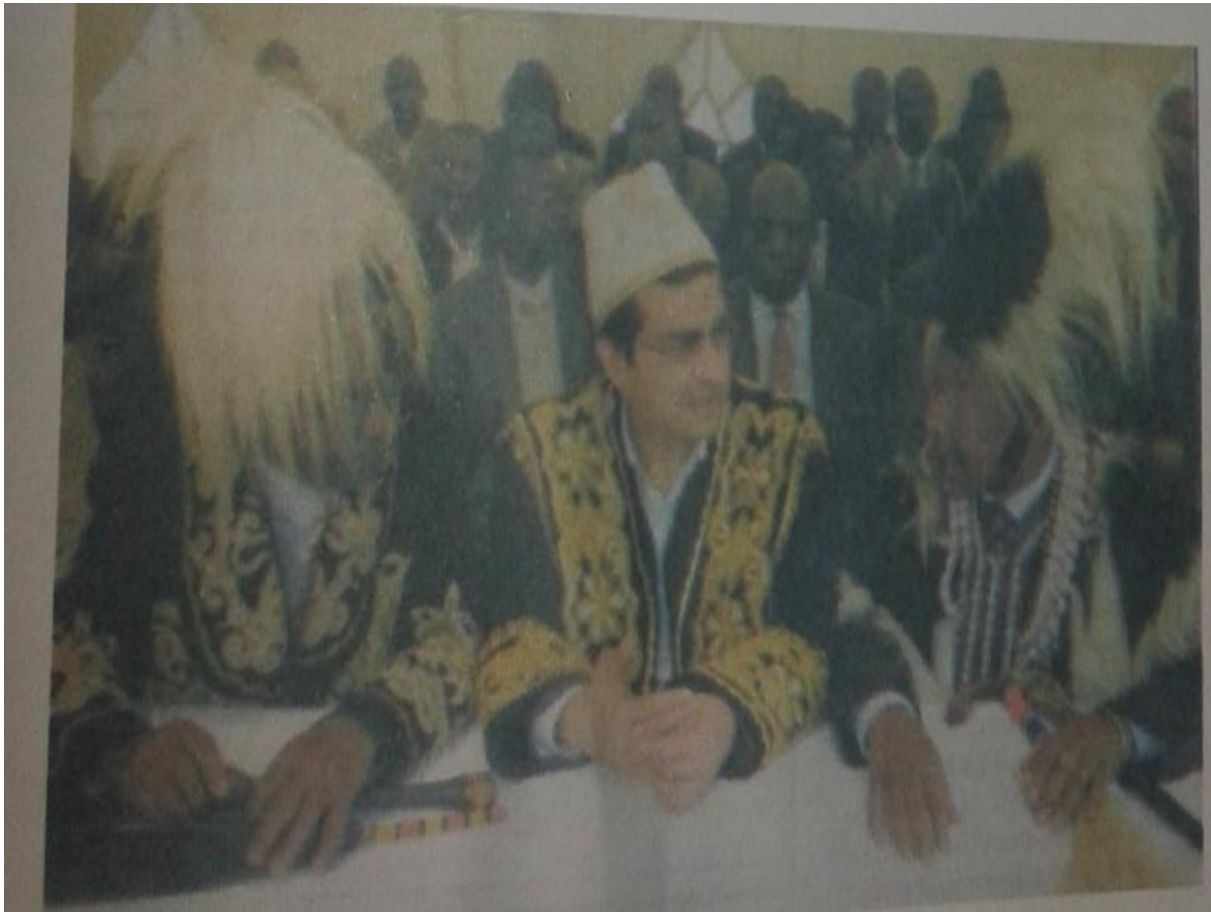


general secretary (see photo below).

Plate 7: Meru Church leaders and Njuri Ncheke elders receiving a new Kimeru Bible from the Bible society of Kenya general secretary.

Source: MCK Archives

Another show of unity between the church leaders and *Njuri Ncheke* elders which is a clear evidence of syncretism was witnessed during one of the Meru cultural festivals held at *Nchiru* grounds. Although the ceremony was organized by the council of elders, the main guest was a Christian leader and modern preacher, Kamlesh Pattni, together with several other leaders within the Christian fraternity (see photo below). It is fashionable today in Meru



County to be a member of *Njuri Ncheke*. Some of the church leaders who happen to be community leaders as well automatically find it necessary to be initiated into the council as is the current trend in Meru region. This is a clear evidence of syncretism as the council is the custodian of Ameru religious and cultural beliefs. It is a case of blending indigenous beliefs and Christianity with the Church representatives being the custodians of Christian beliefs.

Plate 8: Njuri Ncheke elders and Christian leaders at Ameru cultural festival held at Nchiru grounds

Source: *Njuri Ncheke Archives at Nchiru*

4.6.4.1 Testimony by elder M'muna Muguna.

Elder M'muna recalled the hostility and hatred that existed between Christian missionaries and *Njuri Ncheke* elders before the introduction of *Njuri ya Mauku* in the 1930's. But M'Muna says that the tide changed in the relationship and consequently created an amalgamation of the two religions, namely African Traditional Religion in the embodiment

of *Njuri Ncheke*, and Christianity represented by the Christian missionaries. The early African converts also took the side of the Christian missionaries. However some of the African converts like Rev. Phillip M’Inoti, according to M’Muna, were at a crossroads due to their close links with the two religious embodiments. Rev M’Inoti was the first ordained African clergy and he was also an initiated member of *Njuri Ncheke*. It is no wonder that Rev M’Inoti was on the forefront championing a workable relationship between the two groups. Elder M’Muna nostalgically and regrettably recalls the manner in which they treated Christian missionaries and their early African converts at Mikinduri. M’Muna, who is in his late ninety’s was barely twenty years old at that time. The elder says that they stole rice, sugar, soap and clothes from the houses of the Christian missionaries. They enjoyed miraa stolen from the plantations of early African converts, teasing them that they are supposed to forgive the thieves.

But following the introduction of *Njuri ya mauku*, M’Muna recalls that the relationship changed and became good, thanks to the then colonial District Commissioner, Lambert, and Rev. M’Inoti, the first African minister and elder of *Njuri Ncheke*. M’Muna says that this gave room for an amicable relationship between Christian missionaries and *Njuri Ncheke* elders. As a result, elders campaigned for formal education and took the initiative to fish out young people especially boys from their homes to join the missionary schools. Elder M’Muna was one of the beneficiaries. Though he had already been initiated into adulthood, he joined the missionary school at mikinduri. He later converted to Christianity and was baptized in the 1950’s. But his days at the missionary school were not without their share of frustrations. The elder says that the teachers were too rough and he did not like the caning especially because he had already been initiated into adulthood hence a grown up man in Meru terms. M’Muna will never forget the day when he was thoroughly caned by his teacher, the late Mr Kaungania for failing to pronounce an English noun. Worse still, he was caned in the presence of female classmates, among them, Ncurubi whom he had intentions of asking for a hand in marriage. When he later proposed to her, Ncurubi laughed her head off and called him a fool. M’Muna to date blames Mr Kaungania for his failure to win the beautiful Ncurubi’s hand in marriage. M’Muna was initiated into the council in the 1960’s through *Njuri ya mauku* and henceforth became a man of *Njuri*. His walking stick, which is the traditional mark of identity for a man of *Njuri* looked quite old, a clear evidence of the many years he has served as a man of *Njuri*.

Today, M’Muna is a respected man in his village, not only as a man of *Njuri* but also a staunch Catholic faithful. He has donated part of his land for the construction of a local

catholic church. All his children have acquired formal education from mission schools and they are role models in the village. M'Muna's testimony is a clear evidence of syncretism. A respected man of *Njuri* and a staunch catholic faithful who has donated part of his land to the church is an evidence of articulation of two religious beliefs and this is what syncretism is all about. M'Muna's testimony is not an isolated case. There were several other elders of *Njuri Ncheke* with a similar story from across the County.

In conclusion, the third objective analysed the relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and Christianity, the dominant religion in Meru County. From the responses, it was clear that the relationship has not been the same throughout. At the onset of Christian missionary enterprise, there was hostility and stiff opposition from the *Njuri Ncheke* elders who influenced the rest of the community to turn against the foreigners. But following the introduction of *Njuri ya Mauku* in 1938, the relationship changed and the two groups started working together amicably. This kind of tolerance and unity contributed to syncretism where residents of Meru County, *Njuri* elders inclusive, started articulating beliefs from the two religions. Currently syncretism elements are evident in the religious lives of the elders and other residents alike and both Christians and the elders seem to be comfortable with the status quo.

4.6.5 An Assessment of the Relevance of Njuri Ncheke in the Context of a Dynamic Society

This section is a presentation of the research findings of the fourth objective which sought to establish whether *Njuri Ncheke* has a place in the future of Meru community and the council's relevance in the context of a dynamic society. The research question for collecting relevant data was stated as follows:

‘What is the relevance of *Njuri Ncheke* in the context of a dynamic society?’

In regard to this objective, the researcher gathered views from *Njuri Ncheke* elders, church leaders and ordinary respondents on what they feel concerning the survival and relevance of the council and the underlying reasons. The semi structured question item for this purpose was stated thus:

“Do you think *Njuri Ncheke* will survive the changes that are taking place in modern society?” Give reasons for your answer.

The responses were analyzed and presented in a table below.

Table 9: Responses on the Future and Relevance of Njuri Ncheke in Meru County

	Will remain relevant		Will not be relevant	
	No. of Respondents	%	No. of Respondents	%
<i>Njuri Ncheke</i> elders (N = 93)	93	100	0	0
Clergy and lay church leaders (N = 45)	29	63	14	37
Ordinary respondents (N = 63)	33	55	26	45
TOTAL = 200				

From the table above, 100% of *Njuri Ncheke* elders believe that the council will remain relevant even in the context of a dynamic society. 63% of the church leaders believe that the council will remain relevant while 37% say that it will be irrelevant in future. Most of the church leaders who said the council will be irrelevant are from Pentecostal churches where many pastors have rejected the council and discourage their faithfuls from joining it. 55% of the ordinary respondents said that the council will remain relevant while 45% said that the council will be irrelevant. Most of the ordinary respondents who felt the council has no future were the youth who resent the disciplinary measures by the council while others are the youth who are immersed in the Pentecostal churches.

Responses from the field indicated that *Njuri Ncheke* as a social and religious institution is there to stay and its strength and popularity is on an upward track. Bishop Imathiu praised the institution’s willingness to accommodate modern changes and pointed this as a major reason for its survival and relevance in a dynamic society. To *Njuri Ncheke* elders, the words of the patriarch and founder of the institution, Kauro-o-Bechau are enough reason to believe that *Njuri Ncheke* will remain relevant and has a bright future despite the challenges that come with modern changes. Before he died, Kauro-o-Bechau made a vow, a binding curse that *Njuri Ncheke* shall never die or cease to exist in Meru. (Ishinda et al 2008). Kauro-o-Bechau said, “*Njuri Ikaura*”, meaning, “*Njuri* should never perish”. These magical words are recited in every *Njuri* gathering and the elders have a song to that effect that is repeatedly sang in each elders meeting ‘*Kauro-o-Bechau augire Njuri Ikaura...*, ee *Kauro-o-Bechau augire Njuri Ikaura*. *Njuri Ncheke* elders’ greetings are another evidence of its strength and prominence. When two *Njuri* elders meet and are exchanging greetings, one says, “*Kuuria*”, and the other responds, “*Njuri ni Kuurie*”, meaning, ‘grow’, and the response means, “Let

Njuri grow”. The greetings are commonly uttered in their public meetings as speakers give their speeches. Unlike the song whose origin is well known to be Kauro-o-Bechau, no elder seemed to know the exact origin of the greetings but they were all in agreement that the words in the greetings are as old as those of the song hence indicating a common origin. To a non-member though, the song and the greetings may not have a serious connection to its relevance, but to *Njuri Ncheke* elders, the magical words therein mean a lot. According to a senior politician from the region who is also a member of the council, failing to implement the words of the founder, Kauro-o-Bechau is like calling for a curse on the whole community. This explains why all *Njuri* elders consider it their sacred obligation to work for the survival of the institution.

The increase in membership is another evidence of *Njuri Ncheke* survival and continued relevance. Elder Batiri, a member of the supreme council informed the researcher that there are currently close to five thousand members and a good number is undergoing the vetting process. The elder said that they are now tightening their vetting process to ensure that the newly initiated members are morally upright. Furthermore, the membership is diversified to include not only the elderly men but also the middle aged and the young. The incorporation of young professionals in the council for example, brings a new element that helps the elders to solve some of the modern day problems. Many respondents were optimistic that *Njuri Ncheke* will remain strong and resilient irrespective of modern changes.

The councils’ effort to embrace modern forms of education as a valued goal for its community members has been an important recipe for their relevance. *Njuri Ncheke* has led from the front by donating 641 acres of community land in 1983 for the establishment of the present day Meru University of Science and Technology. The university is located next to the *Njuri Ncheke* headquarters at *Nchiru* in Meru County. Currently the top organ of the council has a professional group of elders’ wing which advises the others on matters concerning education and development as needs arise. Their advice helps the Meru people to bargain for economic space within the government and in the political arena. To ensure that every child in the community has access to education, the elders deal ruthlessly with parents who intentionally refuse to take their children to school. They also fish out from the villages children who roam about without going to school, especially young boys who are normally hired by miraa traders to pick twigs from tall trees.

Njuri Ncheke effort to embrace education for its members is comparable to other communities elsewhere in Africa. In ohafia community of Nigeria for example, children are encouraged to do well in school and their kin invest a large percentage of their scarce

financial resources to send a promising student to college abroad. People do not consider this enthusiasm for education to be an indication of westernization. On the contrary, it is considered to be evidence of a continuing ethic of achievements which is said to have characterized Ohafia people from the time immemorial. The traditional quality of the achievement is captured in the celebration given to men who return home having completed advanced degrees. They are received to a performance of music, dance and singing which is identical to that performed a century ago for warriors returning successfully from a battle. Thus the attainment of status signified by a university degree is made meaningful and characteristic of traditional values by being linked ceremonially and symbolically, to the achievement of ancestors long ago, (Oluwu and Erero 1995).

The council's efforts to eliminate negative social practices like female genital mutilation in line with government initiatives to eliminate female circumcision and protect the girl child makes the elders very relevant and in tune with current trends hence their relevance. Even when some female circumcisers hid themselves in Tigania and Igembe sub-counties and secretly continued with the female circumcision, *Njuri* elders worked hand in hand with the police to fish them out and finally eliminated female genital mutilation in the County. *Njuri Ncheke* popularity in the political arena is another recipe for their relevance. This is because politics is there to stay as it is part of life hence assuring the council continued relevance. The council's close workable relationship with the Christian church, to which the modern Meru community belong is another added advantage. The overwhelming support from the members of the clergy especially those of the mainline churches that dominate the County also makes the council relevant.

However, some young respondents had different opinions concerning the place of *Njuri Ncheke* in a contemporary dynamic society and according to such people, the future may be doomed unless some of their practices are reviewed. Some young respondents totally rejected the crude discipline measures employed by *Njuri Ncheke*. Nancy Nkirote, (OI), a youth in her late twenty's fears and hates some of the elders of the council. Nkirote said that she can never shake the hand of a *Njuri* elder and would not seek their counsel. Nkirote believes a punishment given to her cousin Mutuma when he stole a bicycle was very crude as it left him without toes on his left leg. Timothy Mutwiri, (OI), a young university graduate who has no intention of joining the council sees a doomed future for the institution. Mutwiri cites the crude disciplinary measures administered by the council as backward and not in line with the current trends. Mutwiri notes that with the ban of corporal punishment in schools, the young

people are now guided and counseled when they are involved in any form of indiscipline and therefore subjecting the same to crude discipline at home is an uphill task.

Carrier (2007), in his study on Miraa production in Meru County, made similar observations and says that not everyone in the County fears *Njuri Ncheke* punishments. Carrier cites the case of M'Mucheke's uncle, (M'Mucheke was carrier's research assistant) who once appeared before the *Njuri Ncheke* charged with assaulting a woman when drunk. He drunk heavily before the session and menaced the assembled elders with a panga, accusing them of doing little except feasting on bulls and rams wheeled out of others and even judging cases unfairly. The elders saw that he was not going to calm down and so they all fled. The defendant himself disappeared and it was left to his father to pay a fine in the form of a ram, he goat and a bull to the elders on behalf of his son, having been accused by them of bringing up his children badly. Going by the nature of information gathered, it was clear that many culprits of *Njuri* disciplinary measures leave it to their families to pay the fine. Out of the fear that a curse may befall the whole family for disobeying elders, family members are always very quick to pay. This raises the question of what will happen in future when family members, who may be influenced by the common spirit of individualism that is evident in modern life, may refuse to pay fines for kin culprits of *Njuri Ncheke* punishments. Perhaps it is also important to note on the outset that some religious beliefs in modern life have made the faithfuls prone to curses in the belief that they are covered by the blood of Jesus. This observation poses a challenge to *Njuri Ncheke* that is likely to force them to revise their disciplinary measures. In retrospect, many elders were categorical that their discipline is up to date and their future suffers no serious challenge. Many elders were quick to defend and justify their actions by saying that in their endeavours to uphold high moral standards in the entire community, such punishments were unavoidable.

The popularity of *Njuri Ncheke* court and the support it is currently receiving from the judiciary is a pointer to the councils' bright future. Top judiciary officials in Meru County have been quoted saying that there are plans to bring justice closer to the people by offering paralegal courses to *Njuri Ncheke* elders so that they can offer alternative dispute resolution. In his recent visit to Bungoma County law courts on 17th November 2016, Chief Justice David Maraga urged Kenyans to seek alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to reduce backlog of court cases. Maraga said that a high number of cases pending in various courts in the country could easily have been resolved using village elders and chiefs. The chief justice noted that this will help in reducing backlog and speed up the judicial process. Such support

for elders' courts from top officials in the judiciary gives the already popular *Njuri Ncheke* court a bright future.

Njuri Ncheke elders see a very bright future for the council. They anticipate challenges arising from modern dynamism expressed in western lifestyle, western education and new religions among other changes. But the council takes pride in the fact that they have always found solutions to many other problems facing the community for that is part of their calling, their sacred obligation. It is this sacredness that has made people in Meru County highly regard the council. This observation agrees with that of Paul Radin (1967) in his study of primitive religions who argues that beliefs emerge in the context of economic insecurity and subsequent feelings of powerlessness and helplessness both physically and psychologically. It is clear from the study that the Meru people feel insecure, powerless and helpless in the absence of *Njuri Ncheke*, the custodians and propagators of their traditional religious beliefs. Their roles are irreplaceable and this explains their resilience and gives assurance of a bright future.

The elders unanimously expressed their willingness to accept and accommodate any positive change that can make the council better, stronger and more relevant. Elder M'Muna cited the council's willingness to accommodate "*Njuri ya Mauku*" in 1938, as an indication that the institution is not too conservative and they are keen on catching up with current fruitful trends, an element that the elders say will make the council remain relevant.

Like other African social and religious institutions, *Njuri Ncheke* is caught up in a world revolution which is so dynamic that it can easily affect the future of the council. It is a revolution of human kind as a whole and therefore no tribe, people or County is spared by the new rhythms of human history. These observations concur with what Mbiti (1969) noted concerning revolutions and waves of change affecting human history. Mbiti observes that in Europe and North America, this revolution goes back three to five generations while Africa is in the first generation of the change. Mbiti says that a new and rapid rhythm is beating from the drums of science and technology, modern communication and mass media, modern religions, schools and universities, cities and towns. The author says that the man of African too must get up and dance for the better or for worse, on the arena of world drama. His image of himself and of the universe is disrupted and must make room for the changing universal and not simply tribal man. It is this same spirit and desire to create room for change that has made *Njuri Ncheke* embrace flexibility and rigidity as a strategy for resilience in the context of a dynamic society.

However, as *Njuri Ncheke* dares modern changes to forge ahead and remain relevant through the generations, there are challenges the council must reckon with, if it has to retain its place in the future of the Meru community. Some challenges are from within the council while others arise from forces beyond their control. The challenges threaten the future of the council as a religious institution despite its resilience. Below are some of the challenges which the study considered overarching to the council as they cut across all the areas of its operation.

4.6.5.1 Overarching Challenges

i) Lack of a steady source of finances.

Njuri Ncheke lacks a regular source of income to run their errands and activities throughout the County. They are forced to rely on their meagre collections from the fines paid to the *Njuri* court, initiation fee given by those joining the council and the little donations given by the visitors who frequent *Nchiru* traditional shrine. This has created a financial burden and consequently a leeway for the political class to pump in money to the council in exchange for favours. As a result, the council is forced to compromise their transparency, honesty and fairness. Unless this is curbed, the council may turn out to be an institution that serves only the rich in the County. South Imenti component chairman, elder Batiri (OI) lamented that travelling to *Nchiru*, the council headquarters, from his Nkubu office is not an easy thing because of the meagre financial resources. Yet, the elder said, he is required to give reports and even transfer some serious cases to the headquarters to be handled by the *Njuri Ncheke* Supreme Court. Elder Batiri said that on several occasions, the sub county office has been funded by the area member of parliament. Similar sentiments were aired by *Njuri Ncheke* leaders from other sub counties.

ii) Lack of Commitment from Some Elders

There is a serious lack of commitment from some sections of the elders to their sacred obligations and duties associated with their status. It was quite clear from the study that there are *Njuri Ncheke* elders who are initiated into the council but are not in touch with the actual duties of the elders as religious specialists and custodians of the Meru religious beliefs and traditions. Some elders are only seen during the council general meetings while others resurface when elections are around the corner. Elders who work far away from the County hardly make efforts to connect with those at home except on political matters. This poses a major challenge because the real sacred duties of the elders are only performed by few elders who reside in the rural areas, yet the overall membership is very high. In Buuri Sub County for example, elder M'Mburugu (OI) said that out of the one hundred bonafide members, only

twenty five elders are fully committed to their duties. In Tigania east, elder M'Muna, (OI) said that the elite elders are very rare in the rural areas. They are only seen during *Njuri Ncheke* general meetings and during campaign periods. Many elders, according to elder M'Muna (OI), are proud to be associated with the council but are less interested in performance of the duties associated with it.

iii) Political Interference.

This a serious challenge that emanates from the community power elites as they compete for influence of the community. According to elder M'Ngencho (OI), political ambition is the main reason behind the popularity of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County and this is what partly leads to lack of commitment in other duties as discussed above. Elder Batiri (OI) lamented that many politicians who are elders jeopardize the sanctity of the institution by giving money to specific influential elders for political gains. This goes against the council's mandate of serving and uniting the community. It also makes the council appear more political than religious on the outward.

iv) Discouragement from some state-based institutions.

These are institutions such as the judiciary and the police department who, especially in criminal cases, overrule the judgements and decisions or rulings by *Njuri Ncheke*. This happens because *Njuri Ncheke* currently lacks the legal mandate for its conflict resolution and peace promotion activities as the institution is not registered. The council therefore has no legal backing in resolving disputes and its resolutions are not enforceable. This mostly happens to cases involving senior influential people in the community. Elder M'Amwiri (OI) lamented over the many times they have delivered judgements at their *Njuri* courts and the losers end up having their way through the police department and the judiciary. Elder M'Amwiri said that it is quite discouraging to see a loser at their court level emerge winner at the higher legal courts.

v) Social and Cultural obstacles

The social and cultural attitudes of some *Njuri Ncheke* elders is another serious overarching challenge that may affect their roles and duties in future. Apart from some elders still being very conservative in their habits, they are not also very receptive as some of them still consider some church teachings to be foreign ideas. Some elders still hold onto some taboos and customs that discriminate the women folk. Elder Batiri (OI) for example was categorical that women cannot be part of the council, basing his arguments on the community customs, tradition and practices. From the elders' opinions, it was quite clear that *Njuri Ncheke* is not ready to embrace gender equality due to cultural reasons. Such socio-cultural

attitudes may not go well with the young people and women in a contemporary society that recognizes both sexes, a constitution that promotes affirmative action, and a society that gives freedom of choice to the young people. Furthermore, exclusion of women from policy and decision making means excluding about half the adult population in the affairs of the council.

vi) Illiteracy

Illiteracy among some elders of *Njuri Ncheke* especially those of Tigania and Igembe sub-counties is a serious challenge that may affect the operations of the council in a contemporary society. This kind of illiteracy combined with some level of ignorance makes them administer their discipline and counselling in such a crude way that some literate residents of Meru County are reluctant to seek their help. Reasoning with them, especially those who call themselves *Njuri* proper, is an uphill task. This has created a barrier between them and the young people who consider them primitive because of their ignorance. This scenario is likely to render *Njuri Ncheke* elders irrelevant to the future generation.

vii) Destruction of sacred places.

Disappearance of traditional shrines is another overarching challenge that may eventually leave the council with only the protected *Nchiru* shrine. Traditionally every clan, and even some families had their own shrines where they poured libations, performed religious rituals and offered sacrifices and prayers. Currently some sub-counties have no sacred places as those that have been there have either been possessed by the forestry department or have been grabbed by private developers. The only remaining active sub shrines are Akirangondu and Mutuatine. This has made *Nchiru* a hive of activities as some sub-counties' sacred rituals have been relocated to this protected shrine. Mitunguu sub shrine in south imenti for example was recently elevated to a museum and a cultural centre.

viii) Permissiveness

Permissiveness in the contemporary society is also posing a challenge that is likely to affect the future of *Njuri Ncheke* as a religious and social institution. There is a growing tendency today especially among the youth and women to be free from the demands of their traditions and customs. The popular contemporary talk of 'my life, my choice' has not spared the Meru community either. This has made many people to ignore the moral demands and advice from the elders. The liberal and divergent teachings from the mushrooming Pentecostal churches have worsened the situation as some faithfuls believe more in the guidance by the Holy Spirit and stick to the principles of their pastors hence giving a deaf ear to the council of elders. The ban of corporal punishment in Kenyan schools renders *Njuri* crude disciplinary measures

irrelevant. Timothy muriithi, (OI) cited permissiveness as one of the factors likely to determine the place of *Njuri Ncheke* in the context of a dynamic society.

ix) Schism within *Njuri Ncheke*

The presence of a schism in *Njuri Ncheke* is a serious overarching challenge that is likely to affect the future operations of the council. Though the division is silent and something that the elders would rather not talk about, it was clear from the study that there is *Njuri* proper and *Njuri* modern. *Njuri* proper is that which is initiated the traditional way where they are sworn in using goats, while *Njuri* modern is the product of *Njuri ya mauku* that is sworn in using the Bible. This kind of division in an institution that is supposed to speak with one voice is likely to affect the future of the council. However, Bishop Imathiu, (OI) predicted a situation where *Njuri* proper may slowly get eliminated as the number of elders who prefer traditional initiation into the council is reducing day by day. Many prefer to be initiated the modern way where they take oaths using the Bible as it is with *Njuri ya Mauku*, the so called *Njuri* Modern. The *Njuri* proper takes pride in the belief that they are the real owners of the council, while *Njuri* modern consider themselves learned and in tune with the demands of the current generation. It is left to the residents of Meru County to choose which elder to consult and when, depending on the nature of the problem, and depending on who is deemed closer to the spiritual world. At the time of this research, there were two sets of top council officials in operation and each was claiming legality. The political class is also divided and their preference is determined by the political gains anticipated.

In conclusion, the responses discussed above clearly indicate that *Njuri Ncheke* has a place in the future of Meru County. The increasing number of *Njuri Ncheke* elders with several awaiting vetting process before initiation is a clear indication of its growing popularity and consequently the resilience of ATR. Even more promising is the large number of young people joining the council and since the young people are the future leaders, then automatically the council remains authoritative and influential even to the future generations. The council's involvement in current happenings and their support for the contemporary society agenda is a clear indication of the council's will to dare the future. Their close working relationship with the Christians and the learned in the region makes it even more permanent. However, the council must reckon with the above overarching challenges to be assured of a bright future.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the study findings, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further study on the basis of the findings. The purpose of this study was to investigate and identify resilient practices, activities and roles of *Njuri Ncheke* that have consequently made the council authoritative and influential in contemporary Meru County. Specifically, the study sought to highlight the irreplaceable and upcoming roles of the council of elders as custodians of African traditional religion that have not been watered down even by modern government structures or modern religions. *Njuri Ncheke* has remained the conscience of the Meru community despite the complexity and challenges of modernity and changing lifestyles.

5.2 Summary of Research Findings

5.2.1 Resilient Practices, Roles and Activities of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County

Education for young initiates graduating from childhood to adulthood has been revived in the form of seminar camps. The camps have replaced the traditional seclusion period that the young initiates were subjected to. The saying, necessity is the mother of invention has become practical as the need to give young boys special education and moral guidance has been echoed following a serious moral decay especially among the youth. The young adults are also equipped with the knowledge of their traditions and community expectations. Like it was in the past, character formation, personal responsibility and individual creativity are stressed. A unified effort by the churches represented in the County and *Njuri Ncheke* elders has led to confinement of young initiates for a period of three weeks. The main aim is to produce holistic young adults equipped with knowledge in all aspects of life so as to minimize indiscipline cases in the County. Seminar camps are usually organized during December holidays specifically for boys who have already done their Kenya certificate of primary education. The agreement between primary school headteachers and parents is that no child goes back to primary school after initiation and this has been followed to the letter. This is an indication that the traditional common circumcision season has indirectly been revived. The elders use all means to impart values of honesty, diligence and piety including reverence to one's elders and ancestors. It is a revival of a duty that had been forgotten until the introduction of seminar camps, an evidence of resilience.

The considerable decline of moral standards among the Meru people has prompted the revival of the functional disciplinary measures administered by *Njuri Ncheke* elders. The feeling that Christian churches have been too lenient with criminals in the name of forgiveness and the grace of God has been expressed from all sections of the County. The argument behind the involvement of the elders is that even if God is thought to be the ultimate upholder of the moral order, he is not immediately involved in the keeping of it. Instead, it is the elders and the living dead who are the daily guardians or police of human morality. There was no specific period for moral instructions as such because every aspect of learning and every stage of life, including rites of passage provided opportunities for such. There was a general feeling among the elders that accepting Christianity made them loose the cultural power to act on wrong doers especially those in the church. It is for this reason that *Njuri Ncheke* has taken drastic measures to undo the moral mess. The seminar camps for young initiates discussed earlier are an initial step. The current motivation for the elders, most of whom are Christians, is derived from the Bible, Proverbs 22: 6 -7 “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it”.

The religious and cultural duties of *Njuri Ncheke* elders have been revived. All the elders who were interviewed seemed to admit an inner need and recognition of God in all their dealings. God, whom they call Murungu, is entrenched in all their cultural and traditional religious practices. Elders were categorical that the Ameru knowledge of God is not through Christianity or any other foreign religions but it is inborn and intuitive. There has been a revival of religious beliefs and practices evident in current activities of the elders, one of them is the common form of justice by the *Njuri* elders that is administered through the use of curses and the subsequent blessings that follow after the offender has been remorsefully reconciled. The operative principle in the use of curses and blessings is that only a person of a higher status can effectively curse or bless one of a lower status, but not vice versa. The basic principle here is that if a person is guilty, evil will befall him according to the words in the curse. The worst bit of the curse is that the impact may go beyond the individual suffering to affect his children and great grand children and this is what the Meru people fear most. Other religious duties of the elders that are resurgent include pouring of libations and performing cleansing rituals especially in families that have been experiencing misfortunes. Although these duties had been watered down following the coming of Christian missionaries who regarded them as satanic, necessity has dictated their resurgence hence reviving the popularity of the council, and consequently African Traditional Religion. Christian prayers have not been able to eliminate curses or cleanse families and individuals going through such

experiences that require cleansing seek help from the council. This has revived the belief in Meru County that there are religious roles performed by the elders that are irreplaceable.

Since its inception, *Njuri Ncheke* has always acted as a government in the community, making major decisions affecting the families and the community at large. Currently, *Njuri Ncheke* is fully involved in production, marketing and sale of miraa, both locally and internationally. The council makes decisions that sometimes impact negatively or positively on the miraa farmer and failure to adhere to their rules calls for discipline. In the late 1990s, *Njuri Ncheke* made a decision to support the government initiatives to end female genital mutilation and henceforth applied disciplinary measures on the families that did not comply. When traditional circumcision in the hands of a common circumciser using a common knife became unhygienic, the council made a decision to have all their boys circumcised in the modern hospitals and eliminated the traditional circumcisers and the sacred circumcision points. When parents from Igembe and Tigania sub-counties appeared reluctant to take their daughters to school in favour of early marriages, *Njuri Ncheke* elders worked hard in support of the girl child education and forced parents to take their daughters to school. Though *Njuri Ncheke* elders may not easily admit due to their awareness of democratic rights, but the council is well involved in making political decisions in the County and membership gives one a good standing for political ambition. As it was in the past, *Njuri Ncheke* currently identifies and blesses those they deem fit and able to lead the community.

Njuri Ncheke role of settling disputes and arbitrating is indisputable. Many people in the County believe that judgement made by *Njuri Ncheke* is better and fairer than that of the modern courts, save for the council's severe punishments. The threat and fear of being cursed by the elders of this institution makes the offenders surrender even before they face the council. The reason behind the success of the council in handling land and other serious disputes in the County is the oathing system that can also work against them should the outcome be unfair. This leaves the elders with no option but to be fair and transparent and this is what has led to their current popularity as a traditional court.

Not every resilient practice or activity of *Njuri Ncheke* has received support from the people. Many ordinary respondents and religious leaders resented the practice of offering animal sacrifices considering it outdated and anti-Christian. The councils' unethical and radical initiation process with vigorous vetting exercise and full of secrets has also barred several people from joining the council. The oathing system that is commonly used as a means of establishing truths and identifying culprits has such dire consequences that create fear rather than reverence for the council. Their punitive punishments and penalties for law

breakers such as chopping off toes for miraa thieves, cutting down miraa trees for farmers who spray irregularly are also considered a bit too crude and primitive. Very heavy fines for crimes such as abusing an elder or when a woman slaps her husband creates discontents among sections of the population in Meru County. The seemingly gender based discrimination which bars women from membership into the council hence denying them political support leaves men with higher chances of being elected into leadership positions. The council's political involvement and influence has also been received with mixed feelings as sections of population fear that this might compromise their transparency and credibility.

5.2.2 Sources of Influence and Authority of *Njuri Ncheke* in Contemporary Meru Community

The source of *Njuri Ncheke* authority and influence is historical, tracing back to the patriarchs, Koomenjue and Kauro-o-Bechau. But the actual rise in power of *Njuri* had to do with H.E Lambert, District Commissioner of Meru in 1934. Lambert gave the religious institution more prominence than it perhaps originally had by making a declaration that only *Njuri Ncheke* elders could be appointed into various levels of the local administration. This led to an immediate increase in the initiation into the council as obviously many men desired to be given a post in the local administration. The trend has continued to date. For any man to be elected to any political post in the County, he must be a "man of *Njuri*", and subsequently get the support of *Njuri Ncheke*. This factor has barred women from winning political posts, and this makes them feel discriminated against by the council. This has been enhanced by the fact that descent in Meru Community is patriarchal with no known cases of matriarchal lineage thus historically, the Meru man must be the leader. This has made *Njuri Ncheke*, a male dominated authoritative and influential institution in the community.

The dysfunctional nature of Christianity is another factor that has given *Njuri Ncheke* a leeway to authority and influence in Meru County. The seemingly failure by the Christian church to discipline their errant members, combined with the Christian emphasis on the principle of forgiveness has contributed to nominalism and a serious moral decay, which *Njuri Ncheke* elders have risen up to curb. The elders say that they cannot keep quiet and watch their people going astray. They are optimistic that the Meru standards of morality will be restored. They have risen up to teach the youth the right behaviour, instill discipline and fish out the evil doers who are hiding in the church congregations. It is the failure on the side of the church that has made a revival of the disciplinary measures of *Njuri Ncheke* all over Meru County to bear fruits hence forming a strong basis for *Njuri Ncheke* authority and influence in the County.

Failure of the modern court system has made *Njuri Ncheke* the court of choice in Meru County. Until the arrival of the British, the Meru judicial system was two fold. On a local level, judgements were made by smaller local councils of elders while on a national level, *Njuri Ncheke* exercised this power. Like a grand jury, their decision was always final. The council's court transparency and fairness is what the people in Meru County like most. The fear and reverence that revolves around the council court forces the culprits and witness to also be honest. Lying to *Njuri Ncheke* is in itself a crime and the culprit is always expected to say the truth as gods and spirits are also involved. *Njuri Ncheke* judgements are quick and in some cases, almost immediate. *Nchiru*, the community's traditional shrine and headquarters of *Njuri Ncheke* has remained an equivalent of Kenya's Supreme Court. Many people detest the lengthy process of the modern state courts which include involving the police, attending to endless court cases, producing evidence and the use of lawyers whom they describe as expensive and conny. Such complaints have made *Njuri Ncheke* court very popular and this has remained a strong basis for their influence and authority.

The nature of politics in Kenya where support from one's community is an important recipe for political victory has automatically made councils of elders, *Njuri Ncheke* inclusive very popular. Currently, in Meru County, local members of parliament and prominent politicians are members of *Njuri Ncheke*. To date, the Meru community holds that a man who leads others in any capacity must first be a man of *Njuri*, a factor that has made even the staunch Christians to join the council. However, this same factor has also barred women from political participation except for the current position of woman representative. There is a popular belief in the County that a man who qualifies to go through the vetting process of *Njuri Ncheke* is always a man of outstanding character and wisdom, a man of firm principle, morality and authority. However, there was a general feeling from the respondents that *Njuri Ncheke* elders are taking advantage of the respect accorded to them by the community to campaign for their favourites in the political field, an accusation that some members of the supreme council vehemently denied.

A silent but a crucial source of authority and influence of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County is its sacred obligation that seems not to go even with the exposure to modern change and religious dynamism. It is still the feeling of many in Meru County that attempts should be made to relate modern ideas to the religious values and sacredness of their *Zamani*, the very foundation of existence and security of the Meru Community. *Njuri Ncheke* elders are closely linked to the ancestral dead, not only by bonds of kinship but also constant rituals intended to keep the relationship alive. Many respondents were in agreement that many elements of Meru

religious heritage have come from God and as such, cannot be dismissed. Human life, which comes from God is considered sacred and of utmost importance thus must be safeguarded very zealously with prayers, rituals, sacrifices, magic and protective charms. Many families, including those of staunch Christians consult *Njuri Ncheke* elders whenever they suspect an evil hand against their family members or even their livestock. All these are irreplaceable religious roles of *Njuri Ncheke* that cannot be delegated to an individual or another institution, hence explains why the council has remained powerful and authoritative.

5.2.3 Nature of the Relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and Christianity in Meru County

The relationship between *Njuri Ncheke* and Christianity, the dominant religion in Meru County has not been the same all through. At the beginning of the Christian missionary era, there was strong opposition and hatred towards the Christian missionaries. Their religion was considered foreign and their message was condemning anything traditional irrespective of the significance of the traditional religious practices. It is for this reason that the elders denied them land to build their mission centres and when they were coerced by the colonial government to do so, they either gave them the land believed to be the home of witches and ghosts, or hilly stony areas believed to be uninhabitable. The elders sent young warriors to cause all manner of disturbance around the mission centers, steal from the missionaries and scare them in all ways, hoping that they would go back to their land. Their messages about God especially the trinity appeared contradictory to a community that knew God as one, the great one with no child. *Njuri Ncheke* elders who are also the custodians of Meru traditions and beliefs not only felt threatened but feared to lose their culture through western civilization and western religion. As a result, they responded harshly and did all they could to frustrate the missionaries so that they could go back to their homeland. However, the missionaries did not give up. Their faith in God and determination to spread the gospel attracted many to Christianity and slowly the number of converts increased.

The genesis of a good relationship between the elders and the council began in 1938 following the initiation of the *Njuri ya Mauku* (*Njuri* of the books) by the then colonial district commissioner McKeag. It was a kind of initiation where Christians who wanted to join *Njuri Ncheke* were allowed to use the Bible to take oaths instead of using the traditional goats. The original idea came from senior African members of both colonial administration and *Njuri Ncheke* from the larger Meru region who felt that young men should be initiated into the council so as to improve their character which had deteriorated. At the same time, both McKeag and Lambert, the district commissioners who were in-charge around that time

were of the opinion that *Njuri Ncheke* should be modernized in order to accommodate the Christians and the learned men of the region who had rejected the council on grounds of primitivity and pagan practices. An agreement to that effect was signed involving *Njuri Ncheke*, colonial government, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Reverend Phillip M’Inoti, who was a Christian and at the same time a *Njuri Ncheke* elder, had special right to reword the teachings to render them consistent with Christian traditions. Although the introduction of *Njuri ya Mauku* had the unfortunate consequence of splitting the council into *Njuri* proper and *Njuri* modern, it changed the relationship between the elders and Christians for the better. Above all, *Njuri ya Mauku* has become a catalyst to resilience of the council as it makes it appear modern and accommodative.

Currently, syncretism elements are evident in the practices and beliefs of *Njuri Ncheke* elders, a reality that the council is not ashamed of. They may not have the exact word for it but they know that mixing of religious beliefs, worship and loyalty exist in Meru County. They say that the religious change that took place upon the Meru religious beliefs is just a marriage of traditional religious beliefs and Christianity. In a marriage, the elders say that the two become one and if anything, the elements of the two remain up to the end. Currently over ninety percent of *Njuri Ncheke* elders are baptized Christians and committed members of the churches represented in the region. Even the members of the clergy who are not initiated into the council openly work hand in hand with *Njuri* elders and they call themselves friends of the council. In every major community event, elders and Christians are seen working together in unity.

5.2.4 An Assessment of the Relevance of *Njuri Ncheke* in the Context of a Dynamic Society

The study established that *Njuri Ncheke* has a place in the future of Meru community and its relevance in context of a dynamic society is indisputable. Echoes from *Njuri Ncheke* elders, religious leaders and ordinary respondents were a pointer towards a bright future for the council. The words of the patriarchs are enough reason for the elders to constantly work towards the survival of the council. Kauro-o-Bechau, the founder of *Njuri Ncheke* said “*Njuri Ikaura*”, meaning, “*Njuri* should never perish”, *Njuri Ncheke* elders say that allowing *Njuri* to perish is like disobeying the words of Kauro-o-Bechau and this would call for a curse on the whole community. Their common greetings “*Kuuria*”, meaning, grow, and the response “*Njuri ni Kuurie*”, meaning, let *Njuri* grow are a constant reminder of the elders commitment to the survival of the council. The popularity of the council in the County and the increase in membership is evidence of its relevance in a dynamic society. The pride and respect accorded

to men of *Njuri* is something that many Meru men will not want to lose. The functional nature of their roles, activities and practices that has not been replaced competitively by modern institutions is a clear evidence of a bright future. Their in-built pride and confidence that they are problem solvers has made them prone to any challenges that eminently seem to be facing the council. Their involvement in current happenings and their ability to accommodate fruitful changes is a recipe for their continued relevance. In the midst of competing religious ideologies and technological options, the Meru people seem to be redefining their identity and their historical self understanding in the embodiment of *Njuri Ncheke*, the face of the Meru Community.

5.3 Conclusions

Empirically, this study established that *Njuri Ncheke* is not just an institution of the past but it is a religious and social institution with all its modern implications. The roles, practices and activities of the council are resurgent in most, if not all their forms. There is no other religious institution, be it modern or traditional that people in Meru County passionately honour with all reverence and respect like *Njuri Ncheke*. They have owned it and made it theirs and it is the pride of every Meru man, Christian or non-Christian to be called a man of “*Njuri*”. The elders have revived their sacred duties as custodians of the Meru religious beliefs and traditions. However, there is a clear disconnect between the Christian teachings and the practices of *Njuri Ncheke* elders. While in theory the doctrines of all the churches represented in the county are against their adherents membership to the council, practically the same churches are quiet about such doctrines and work hand in hand with the elders with some church leaders being initiated members of *Njuri Ncheke*. As the Meru people continue to be converted to Christianity, hardly do they abandon their world view and related practices as some evangelists and pastors would wish. They have remained consciously and unconsciously attached to traditional values and beliefs while still professing Christian faith. The attachment of the Meru people to their traditional world view has created a conducive environment for resilience of religious practices and activities of *Njuri Ncheke* in the region. Despite the condemnation of their roles and practices by Christian missionaries who considered the council backward and primitive, the contemporary Christians in Meru County consider the council relevant and have silently allowed their members to join the institution, a factor that has facilitated resilience and subsequent popularity of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County.

Theoretically, the above disconnect can be attributed to the fact that church teachings and doctrines are dysfunctional while people in Meru County feel that their traditional religious beliefs and practices in the embodiment of *Njuri Ncheke* institution are functional and fulfilling. This agrees with Emile Durkheim's functionalism theory which guided this study that social and religious practices and beliefs that have no function cease to exist but those that have a function remain. It is clear that *Njuri Ncheke* elders as the custodians of the traditional religion are still very relevant. Their religious roles and practices are functional and fulfilling as far as residents of Meru County are concerned and this is what social and religious institutions are all about. In essence, the council has remained the conscience of Meru community. Their persisting roles and practices give solutions to some of their life's problems which Christianity and government institutions are not able to give. They provide answers to some of their life's questions that Christianity and modernity have not provided hence the resilience and popularity. Their religious practices satisfy needs which would not be satisfied elsewhere. These include their cleansing rituals which give assurance of security and protection from premature death. The Christian church has no immediate solution when Christians are victims of either witchcraft or sorcery but *Njuri Ncheke* elders have religious specialists among them who deal with such hence their resilience. People in Meru County find it difficult to continue nursing the Christian hope and salvation which is long coming and so they quickly turn to traditional means of dealing with diseases and other problems. Their measurement of religion and religious institutions is that they should be capable of providing real answers to questions arising from within their existence. As long as *Njuri Ncheke* outshines Christianity and modern institutions in doing this, it will remain functional to the people of Meru County.

Theologically, there is need to develop a theology that will accommodate African Christians the way they are. A theology done by African theologians themselves in an African background using African thought forms is what many African communities urgently need, Meru community inclusive. The clergy need to devise a new approach with a view to promoting an understanding between Christians and the Ameru Traditional religious inclinations, ideas, values and beliefs. The Bible does not disagree but enriches and fulfills traditional religious beliefs and practices and both the old and new testament give testimony to this. Just as the Jewish traditions prepared the Jews for Christianity, Ameru traditions provided enough background for conversion to Christianity. The word of God is meant to be effective in Christians lives today, and it is the task of modern preachers to make the hearers realize this fact. They should bring God's word to bear on the contemporary Meru

community, because all cultures need the gospel and are judged by it. The Meru people have retained their religious beliefs alongside Christian faith and this has led to syncretism. In Meru County, *Njuri Ncheke* elders and non-members alike are comfortably sailing in two religious worlds with notable commitments in both and no regrets or apologies over the status quo.

Christians in Meru County, *Njuri Ncheke* elders inclusive, have sifted both Christianity and Meru traditional religious beliefs and have accepted what is advantageous to them and left out what is of no advantage. As a result, the type of Christianity that has emerged in Meru County is one that is enriched by the traditions of the Meru people, a factor that has made *Njuri Ncheke* relevant and resurgent. It is a Christianity that is enriched by the traditional religious practices and beliefs in the embodiment of *Njuri Ncheke*, the resilient formidable institution, the indisputable conscience, voice and pride of the Meru people.

5.4 Recommendations on Resilience of Traditional Religious Institutions Kenya Evident in the Activities of Councils of Elders

The following recommendations are focused on addressing issues that are affecting councils of elders in Kenya. Elders are categorized as religious specialists in African traditional religion and as such, their duties are sacred and will remain relevant as long as African traditional religion remains alive and with us. The recommendations proposed here are aimed at making *Njuri Ncheke* and other councils of elders in Kenya relevant in the context of a modern dynamic society. These recommendations may also act as policy guidelines to the government and other stakeholders involved on the way forward in incorporating councils of elders in the government structures, especially devolved governance.

i) Initiating Gender Representativeness in Council of Elders

One of the areas that the study viewed as important and requires serious consideration is the issue of gender representativeness in councils of elders in Kenya. In the process of data collection in the field, the study observed the existence of gender bias in the way *Njuri Ncheke* operated. It is a male dominated religious institutions and women are categorically barred from membership. For councils of elders in Kenya to succeed and make a mark in a contemporary society that is geared towards affirmative action, they must recognize the importance of gender roles in institutions. *Njuri Ncheke* in specific should develop a policy that removes gender bias in its operations as much as possible so as to recognize the role of women, traditional barriers and misconceptions notwithstanding. Issues affecting specific groups should be addressed in a comprehensive manner without undue preference to make

dominance. In so doing, *Njuri Ncheke* will be able to address community concerns holistically without necessarily painting the picture of a male dominated institution.

ii) Cultivating an Open Decision Making Process

The study recommends that *Njuri Ncheke* process of decision making should be open and inclusive, and must endeavour to reflect the wishes of the majority. Sentiments echoed from the field pointed at a tendency by the council to make decisions and pursue issues that only benefit specific groups of people in the community, a complaint that puts their transparency and honesty to question. This kind of attitude is unexpected from a council that is supposed to serve and unite the entire community. For *Njuri Ncheke* to remain the traditional institution known for honesty, fairness, justice and transparency, the elders must embrace the sacred traditional values passed down to them from their patriarchs, among them Koomenjue and Kauro-o-Bechau. Their credibility should be based on the ability to portray and maintain transparency, honesty, moral uprightness and religious piety among other values.

iii) Intensification of Relevant Christian Evangelization in Kenyan Communities

To be more specific, the enculturation approach needs to be fully embraced in many Counties in Kenya. The church in Kenya is called upon to carefully study the entire cultural milieu in which it is evangelizing so that its message is not rendered irrelevant. The thought forms and world views of particular communities should be incorporated into Christianity so that Christianity can fulfill its mission of the development and fulfillment of human beings. Leaders of all Christian denominations should allow African culture and Christianity to blend one another so as to meet the needs of Christians and give solutions to their spiritual problems. This will enable Christianity to build itself up within existing viable human communities and forthwith become a people's religion. Although the influence of Pentecostalism in many parts of Kenya is great, enculturation is still achievable.

iv) Adoption of Programmes in Line with Contemporary Development Trends

The study also wishes to recommend further that *Njuri Ncheke* should identify programs that are in line with contemporary development trends. The council should aim at creating income generating projects for economic empowerment designed in a way to benefit all people, especially the many jobless young people. The council can easily achieve this by bringing on board their several wealthy members and other stake holders from the County to give the obviously required financial input. If *Njuri Ncheke* hopes to create more impact in economic empowerment, it should go an extra mile to come up with reliable and suitable policies on monitoring and evaluation to ascertain whether projects and programmes objectives have been achieved or not. They should evaluate the extent to which their

programmes are serving the intended beneficiaries, their cost effectiveness and the potential productive directions for the future. This will make *Njuri Ncheke* a more holistic institution.

v) Financing Councils of Elders

Concerning lack of financial resources, the study wishes to recommend that councils of elders, *Njuri Ncheke* inclusive, should source for internal and external funding so as to effectively finance their operations. In particular, the Kenyan government should be advised to finance councils of elders at least for the imperative role they play in silently maintaining order and justice at the local levels. Many *Njuri Ncheke* elders lamented that lack of a constant source of income has more often than not barred their movement from one part of the County to another. Reliance upon well-wishers, who in most cases are politicians, creates loopholes for compromise and in some instances, bribery, hence putting the elders' transparency and honesty to test. The Kenyan government can also incorporate active councils of elders like *Njuri Ncheke* in alternative dispensation of justice under judicial reforms in line with the constitution. In this this case, councils of elders will be entitled to some financial support through the judiciary.

vi) Cultivating a Close Relationship between Councils of Elders and the Government

The study recommends a close cooperation and workable relationship between the government and councils of elders in Kenya, political and religious affiliations notwithstanding. This will promote capacity building and empowerment, enhance respect, love, unity, promote order and justice, and above all, tighten the security that is most yearned for in Kenya today. It is the high time the government positively utilized the immense popularity and close contact that councils of elders have with people at the grassroots to influence the development and implementation of some of their policies. This will create among the people the will for development and an awareness of the possibilities for achieving it. If this initiative is followed up with proper advice and practical help in tackling specific problems of specific Kenyan communities, then Kenya will be a home of peace, love and unity.

vii) Recognition of *Njuri Ncheke* in devolved governance in Meru County.

The devolved system of governance in Kenya is meant to bring leadership closer to the people at the grassroot level. The Meru people, just like other Kenyans, hope that the devolved system of governance as enshrined in chapter eleven of the constitution fulfills the potential the country anticipated since independence. The success of devolution in Meru County depends on how the County government harnesses the strengths and opportunities of the *Njuri Ncheke* to run the affairs of the people. The fact that such an old religious and social

institution like *Njuri Ncheke* continues to exercise considerable influence today in the County is clear proof that indigenous knowledge systems can synergize with the modern ones to address the challenges that arise from devolved system of governance.

viii) Disengagement from Politics

Finally, and without contracting the above recommendations, the study wishes to recommend that councils of elders, *Njuri Ncheke* inclusive, should as much as possible disengage themselves from the politics of their communities. They should disentangle their decisions, arguments and ideas from political influence and embrace transparent involvement in political affairs of their communities without authoritarianism or coercion. As sacred religious institutions and custodians of African religious beliefs, elders should demonstrate love, competence, courage, transparency, justice and honesty in their endeavours to perform their God given duties. The pursuit of the common good must be protected, promoted and where necessary, reactivated as a central component of the basic motivations in the operations of councils of elders. This would ensure that councils of elders collectively strive for the common good of all and will not serve their own personal interest or interests of individual politicians. Many respondents in Meru County pointed out the current split in *Njuri Ncheke* top leadership as evidence of political interference, an element that many respondents said should be eliminated in *Njuri Ncheke* as it goes against the intentions of the founder, Kauro-o-Bechau.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Study

The study recommends further reading in the following areas:

- i) A similar study should be carried out among councils of elders in other Counties in Kenya to establish whether the study findings apply to other areas to enable generalization of the results of this study.
- ii) There is a dire need for a detailed study to investigate why some councils of elders in some Counties in Kenya seem to be diminishing and their relevance in contemporary life at stake while *Njuri Ncheke* of the Ameru is on a resurgent trend.
- iii) There is need for a detailed study on syncretism among the elders of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County. The reasons behind their accomodation of African traditional religion in Christianity, should be well understood.
- iv) The role of indigenous institutions in conflict resolution and promotion of sustainable peace need to be investigated with the view of strengthening them.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SEMI STRUCTURED QUESTIONS FOR NJURI NCHEKE ELDER

I am Hellen Kagwiria Orina, a student at Egerton University pursuing a doctorate degree in Religious Studies. You have been purposively selected to take part in a survey to investigate the resilience of *Njuri Ncheke* as a traditional religious institution in Meru County. The information you will provide will be useful to policy makers on the role and place of councils of elders in

Kenya. Your identity and responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. All the information will only be used for the purpose of this study. You are requested to respond to all the questions honestly and comprehensively. Your co-operation is highly appreciated.

Part One: Respondent Background

1. Name (optional)

2. Age..... years old

3. Sex (tick where applicable)

a) Female

b) Male

4. Marital status (Tick where applicable)

a) Married

b) Single

5. Residence

Sub

county.....

Division

.....

Location

.....

Sub-

Location.....

Village.....

.

6. Educational background (Tick where applicable)

a) Primary

b) Secondary

- c) College
- d) University

7. Occupation (Tick where applicable)

- a) Teacher
- b) Farmer
- c) Businessman
- d) Any other (Specify).....

8. Religion (Tick where necessary)

- a) Christianity
- b) Islam
- c) African traditional religion
- d) Any other (Specify).....

Part Two: Questions related to the resilience of *Njuri Ncheke* as a religious institution.

Njuri Ncheke is emerging to be a very strong and influential council of elders in the social, religious, economic, political and cultural life of the Meru people. What would be your comment regarding the activities and roles of *Njuri Ncheke* in Meru County? Kindly answers the following questions and indicate by ticking in the relevant spaces provided or write answers where applicable.

1. A) Are you a member of *Njuri Ncheke*?

- i) Yes
- ii) No

b) When were you initiated into the council (If your answer is yes?)

Year Date..... (Not mandatory)

c) How old were you at the time of initiation?.....

d) How did you acquire membership? (Tick where applicable)

- i) Inheritance
- ii) Purchase
- iii) Force
- iv) Own choice

2. A) Are you proud to be a member of *Njuri Ncheke*?

Yes No

Give reason (s) for your answer.

i).....

...

ii).....

.....

iii).....

.....

b) Mention the activitie (s) you are involved in as members of the council.

i).....

....

ii).....

...

iii).....

.

iv).....

..

3. A) What has been the influence of *Njuri Ncheke* in the following area (s).

a)Religious influence.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

b)Political

influence.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

c) Social influence.....

.....

.....

.....
.....
d)Economic influence.....

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

e)Cultural influence.....

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

4. a) Which religion do you belong to?

i) Christianity

ii) Islam

iii) Traditionalist

iv) Any other (specify).....

b) If Christianity, which denomination do you belong to?

.....

c) Does your church (or religion) have a problem with *Njuri Ncheke* membership?

Yes

No

e) Are your religious teachings in line with the activities and practices of *Njuri Ncheke*?

Yes

No

f) If the answer is no, what particular church orreligious teaching (s) oppose *Njuri Ncheke* membership?

i).....

.

ii).....

iii).....
.....

5 a) Do you think *Njuri Ncheke* will survive the changes that are taking place in modern society?

Yes No

Give reason (s) for your answer.

i).....

ii).....
.....

iii).....
.....

iv).....
.....

v).....
.....

b) As a member of *Njuri Ncheke*, what would you like the Kenyan government to do in regard to the place and role of councils of elders in Kenya?

i)

ii)

iii)

iv)

v).....

c) Have you ever had conflict (s) with Christians or any other religion because of your activities?

Yes No

If yes, give reason (s) for the conflict (s).

i).....
.

ii).....
.....

iii).....
.....

iv).....
.....

6a) Are there some development project (s) you have initiated in Meru County as a council.

Yes No

If yes, name them.

i).....

ii).....

iii).....

iv).....

7. As a traditional government, how do you respond to the following issues that are pertinent in modern life?

A) HIV and

Aids.....

.....
.....
.....

b) Gender

inequality.....

.....
.....
.....

c) Female Genital Mutilation

(FGM).....

.....
.....
.....

d)

Education.....

.....
.....
.....

e) Environmental

issues.....

.....

.....
.....
.....

8. What makes *Njuri Ncheke* so popular that most men in the County want to be associated with it?

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....
- v).....
- vi).....
- ...

9. What problem (s) do you face as a council of elders?

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....
- v).....
- vi).....

APPENDIX B

SEMI STRUCTURED QUESTIONS FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS / CLERGY

I am Hellen Kagwiria Orina, a student at Egerton University pursuing a doctorate degree in Religious Studies. You have been purposively selected to take part in a survey to establish the resilience of *Njuri Ncheke* as traditional religious institution in Meru County. The information you will provide will be useful to policy makers on the role and place of councils of elders in Kenya. Your identity and responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. All the information will only be used for the purpose of this study. You are requested to respond to all the questions honestly and comprehensively. Your co-operation is highly appreciated.

Part One: Respondent Background

1. Name (Optional).....

2. Age..... Years old

3. Sex (Tick where applicable)

a) Female

b) Male

4. Marital status (Tick where applicable)

a) Married

b) Single

5. Residence

Sub

county.....

Division

.....

Location

.....

Sub-

Location.....

Village.....

6. Educational background (Tick where applicable)

a) Primary

b) Secondary

c) College

d) University

7. Occupation (Tick where applicable)

- a) Teacher
- b) Farmer
- c) Businessman
- d) Any other specify

8. Religion (Tick where necessary)

- a) Christianity
- b) Islam
- c) African traditional religion
- d) Any other (specify).....

9. a) Which denomination do you belong to?

.....

b) What is your status in church? (Tick where applicable)

- i) Bishop
- ii) Reverend
- iii) Pastor
- iv) Priest/father/sister
- v) Church elder
- vi) Church leader (e.g. Chairperson, Secretary, Group leader)

c) Does your church allow members to join *Njuri Ncheke* as elders?

Yes

No

Give reason (s) for your answer above.

i).....

...

ii).....

iii).....

.....

iv).....

d) Are your religious doctrines in line with the activities and practices of *Njuri Ncheke*?

Yes

No

Give reason (s) for your answer above

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....

e) How is the relationship between your religion and *Njuri Ncheke*?

.....

.....

.....

f) Has *Njuri Ncheke* influenced worship and other religious practices in any way?

Yes

No

g) Has your religion ever had open conflict (s) with *Njuri Ncheke* elders?

Yes

No

If yes, what was the cause (s) of conflict (s)?

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....

h) Do you think *Njuri Ncheke* will remain strong and survive changes that are taking place in modern life?

Yes

No

Give reason (s) for your answer above

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....

i) Are there activities of *Njuri Ncheke* that you do not like? Mention them.

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....

...

j) Are there activities and roles of *Njuri Ncheke* that you feel are good and should be retained?

Yes

No

Mention them:

i).....

ii).....

iii).....

k) Would you like to see *Njuri Ncheke* remain strong and influential in Meru County or should it be eliminated? (Tick where appropriate)

i) Should remain strong and influential

ii) Should be eliminated

l) In your opinion, what makes the council popular and influential that most men want to be associated with it?

i).....

ii).....

iii).....

iv).....

m) As a religious leader, what would you like the Kenyan government to do regarding councils of elders in Kenya?

i).....

ii).....

iii).....

iv).....

v).....

vi).....

APPENDIX C

SEMI STRUCTURED QUESTIONS FOR ORDINARY RESPONDENTS

I am Hellen Kagwiria Orina, a student at Egerton University pursuing a doctorate degree in Religious Studies. You have been purposively selected to take part in a survey to establish the resilience of *Njuri Ncheke* as a traditional religious institution in Meru County. The information you will provide will be useful to policy makers on the role and place of councils of elders in Kenya. Your identity and responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. All the information will only be used for the purpose of this study. You are requested to respond to all the questions honestly and comprehensively. Your co-operation is highly appreciated.

Part One: Respondent Background

1. Name (optional).....

2. Age..... years old

3. Sex (Tick where applicable)

a) Female

b) Male

4. Marital status (Tick where applicable)

a) Married

b) Single

5. Residence

Sub

county.....

Division

.....

Location

.....

Sub-

Location.....

Village.....

6. Educational background (Tick where applicable)

a) Primary

b) Secondary

c) College

d) University

7. Occupation (Tick where applicable)

- a) Teacher
- b) Farmer
- c) Businessman
- d) Any other specify

8. Religion (Tick where necessary)

- a) Christianity
- b) Islam
- c) African traditional religion
- d) Any other (specify).....

9. Have you ever been a member of *Njuri Ncheke*?

- Yes
- No

If your answer is no, why are you not a member. (Tick appropriate reason (s))

- a) Am not old enough to be a member
- b) Because of gender (women are not allowed to join)
- c) My religious beliefs do not allow me to be a member
- d) Cannot afford the initiation fee
- e) Do not like *Njuri Ncheke*

10. Do you support *Njuri Ncheke* and the roles they play within the County?

- Yes
- No

11. Mention the activitie (s) the members of the council are involved in, in your area.

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....
- v).....
- vi).....

12. What has been the influence of *Njuri Ncheke* in the following areas?

a) Religious

influence.....
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b) Political influence.....

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c) Social influence.....

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d) Economic influence.....

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.....
.....

e) Cultural influence.....

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.....
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13. Are there role (s) of *Njuri Ncheke* that you do not like?

Yes

No

Mention them.

i).....

ii).....

iii).....

iv).....

v).....

14. How does the council respond to the following emerging issues in modern life?

a) HIV and

Aids.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

b) Gender inequalities.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

c) Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

d) Education.....

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.....

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e) Environmental issues.....

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.....
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.....

15. In your opinion, what makes the council so popular and influential that most men want to be associated with it?

- i).....
 - ii).....
 - iii).....
 - iv).....
 - v).....
-

16. Are there some development project (s) the council has initiated in your area?

Yes No

If yes, name them.

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....
- v).....
- vi).....

17. Do you think *Njuri Ncheke* will remain strong and survive the changes that are taking place in modern life?

Yes No

Give reason (s) for your answer above.

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....
- v).....

18. Are there activities and roles of *Njuri Ncheke* that you feel are good and should be retained? Mention them.

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....
- v).....
- vi).....

19. In your opinion, what should the Kenyan government do to support councils of elders in Kenya?

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....
- v).....

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS
(FOR COUNCIL ELDERS)

1. Are you proud to be a member of *Njuri Ncheke*?

Yes

No

Give reason (s) for your answer.

i).....

ii).....

iii).....

iv).....

2. What are your roles and activities as members of the council?

i).....

ii).....

iii).....

iv).....

v).....

3. What has been your influence as a council in the following areas?

a) Religious

influence.....

.....

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b) Political

influence.....

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c) Social influence.....
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d) Economic influence.....
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e) Cultural influence.....
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4. What in your opinion makes the council so popular and influential in Meru County?

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....
- v).....

5. As a council of elders, what development projects have you initiated in Meru County.

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....
- v).....
- vi).....

6. As a council, how do you respond to the following issues that are pertinent in modern life?

a) HIV and

Aids.....
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.....
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.....

b) Gender inequalities.....
.....
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.....
.....
.....
.....

c) Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).....
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d) Education.....
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.....

7. In your view, do you think *Njuri Ncheke* will survive the changes that are taking place in the contemporary society and remain popular and influential? Give reason (s) for your answer.

i).....

..

ii).....

....

iii).....

....

iv).....

....

8. What problem (s) do you face as a traditional government and as you perform your duties.

i).....

.

ii).....

iii).....

iv).....

v).....

vi).....

9. What would you like the Kenyan government to do in regard to the place and roles of councils of elders in Kenya?

i).....

ii).....

iii).....

iv).....

v).....

vi).....

vii).....

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS
(FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS)

1. Are your religious beliefs and doctrines in line with the activities and roles of *Njuri*

Ncheke? Yes No

Give reason (s) for your answer.

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....
- v).....

2. How is the relationship between your religion and *Njuri Ncheke*?

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3. Has *Njuri Ncheke* influenced worship and other religious practices in your church?

Yes No

Give reason (s) for your answer.

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....
- vi).....

4. Are there activities and roles of the council that you do not like? Mention them.

- i).....
- ii).....
- ii).....
- iv).....
- v).....

5. Are there activities and roles of *Njuri Ncheke* that you feel are good and should be retained?

Yes

No

Mention them.

i).....

ii).....

iii).....

iv).....

v).....

6. Would you like to see *Njuri Ncheke* remain strong and influential in Meru County or should it be eliminated?

i) Remain strong

ii) Be eliminated

Give reason (s) for your answer.

i).....

ii).....

iii).....

iv).....

v).....

7. In your opinion, what makes the council so popular and influential that most men in the county want to be associated with it?

i).....

ii).....

iii).....

iv).....

v).....

vi).....

APPENDIX F
INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS
(FOR ORDINARY RESPONDENTS)

1. Would you like to be a member of *Njuri Ncheke*?

Yes No

Give reason (s) for your answer.

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....
- v).....

2. Do you support *Njuri Ncheke* and the roles it plays in the County?

Yes No

3. Does the council have any influence in the following areas?

a) Religious

influence.....

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b) Political

influence.....

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c) Economic influence.....

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d) Social influence.....
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e) Cultural influence.....
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.....

4. In your opinion, what makes *Njuri Ncheke* so popular and influential in Meru County?

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....
- v).....

5. Would you like to see the council so popular and influential or should it be eliminated.

- i) Should be popular and influential
- ii) Should be eliminated

6. Do you think the council will survive the changes that are taking place in modern society?

Yes No

Give reason (s) for your answer.

- i).....
- ii).....
- iii).....
- iv).....

APPENDIX, G

S/NO.	NAME	AG E	POSITIO N	INTERVIEW VENUE	INTERVIE W DATE
1.	Batiri M'Mwirichia	62	Elder (S'Imenti)	Muuki Hotel	22/11/015
2.	M'Mucheke Kithaka	70	Elder (Igembe C	Home	25/11/015
3.	Zaverio M'Ariithi	72	Elder (Igembe C)	Home	23/11/015
4.	Kiraithe Mutuerandu	63	Elder (Tigania East)	Home	27/11/015
5.	M'Matiri Ntongai	61	Elder (Tigania East)	Home	27/11/015
6.	M'Mburugu Kioria	91	Elder (Igembe N	Home	25/11/015
7.	M'Aburi Musa	90	Elder (Buuri)	Home	30/11/015
8.	M'Muna Muguna	89	Elder (Igembe S)	Home	02/12/015
9.	Mutari Kungania	70	Elder (Buuri)	Home	07/12/015
10.	M'Ariithi Japheth	54	Elder (Buuri)	Home	07/12/015
11.	M'Mutiga Kimencu	90	Elder (Nchiru)	Nchiru	10/12/015
12.	M'Mutiga Kibwi	92	Elder (Nchiru)	Nchiru Shrine	10/12/015
13.	Sabastiano Ntongondu	87	Elder (Tigania	Home	20/12/015

			S)		
14.	Jakubu M'Mungania	45	Elder (Tigania S)	Home	22/12/015
15.	M'Mukangu Kioni	47	Elder (Tigania S)	Home	23/12/015
16.	Shadrack Rutere	49	Elder (Imenti N)	Home	20/01/016
17.	Kaumbuthu Kiunga	52	Elder (Imenti N)	Home	20/11/016
18.	Kirimi Muketha	55	Elder (Imenti S)	Home	25/01/016
19.	James M'Njau	67	Elder (Imenti C)	Home	26/01/016
20.	Kiunga M'Naiture	66	Elder (Tigania W)	Home	28/01/016
21.	Kibacho M'Mirugi	54	Elder (Tigania W)	Home	28/01/016
22.	Kinoti Baikiao	55	Elder (Imenti C)	Hotel	29/01/016
23.	Jamlick Kiraitu	46	Elder (Imenti C)	Hotel	29/01/016
24.	Jakubu Kaura	38	Elder (Imenti C)	Hotel	29/01/016
25.	Kiambati M'Nkabu	77	Elder (Tigania W)	Home	30/01/016
26.	Ntongai Kiraitu	71	Elder (Igembe C)	Home	31/01/016


27.	Cyprian Kaaria	50	Elder (Imenti C)	Hotel	31/01/016
28.	Mbaabu Kairebua	52	Elder (Imenti N)	Hotel	31/01/016
29.	Mwongera Thuranira	76	Elder (Igembe E)	Home	31/01/016
30.					
31.	Mungatia M'Ncebere	77	Elder (Igembe E)	Home	01/02/016
32.	Mucheke Marangu	39	Elder (Imenti S)	Hotel	01/02/016
33.	Muthuri Sabastiano	35	Elder (Imenti S)	Hotel	01/02/016
34.	Kinyua Marete	36	Elder (Imenti S)	Hotel	01/02/016
35.	Gitonga M'Mauki	39	Elder (Tigania E)	Home	03/02/016
36.	Moses Karere	44	Elder (Tigania E)	Home	03/02/016
37.	Bishop Lawi M'Imathiu	72	Retired Clergy (M.C.K)	Hotel (Thiiri Christian Centre)	29/11/015
38.	Father Zakayo Murianki	55	Clergy (Catholic Church)	Nkubu Diocese Office	28/11/015
39.	Father Kimathi	49	Clergy (Catholic Church)	Nkubu Diocese Office	28/11/015
40.	Father Micheni	51	Clergy (Catholic Church)	Nkubu Diocese Office	30/11/015

			Church)		
41.	Rev. Jack Mawira	40	Clergy (M.C.K)	Home	05/12/015
42.	Pastor Elias Gitonga	47	Clergy (Pentecostal)	Home	04/12/015
43.	Pastor David Nthiga	55	Clergy (Pentecostal)	Muuki Hotel	06/12/015
44.	Jane Gitonga	47	Clergy (Pentecostal)	Home	04/12/015
45.	Mrs. Nthiga	53	Clergy (Pentecostal)	Home	06/12/015
46.	Rev. Paul Arioto	55	Clergy (M.C.K)	Home	27/12/015
47.	Rev. Mary Kina	53	Clergy (M.C.K)	Home	27/12/015
48.	Maria Gatwiri	39	Church Secretary (M.C.K)	Home	28/12/015
49.	Damaris Kambura	43	Church Secretary (M.C.K)	Home	29/12/015
50.	Pastor Mutonga	50	Clergy (Pentecostal)	Home	14/01/016
51.	Pastor Jeniffer Mutonga	49	Clergy (Pentecostal)	Home	14/01/016
52.	Mr. Koome	50	Primary Sch.	Home	06/12/015

			Headteacher		
53.	Muriuki Mwenda	52	Villager (Igembe C)	Home	07/12/015
54.	Kangondu Mwenda	50	Villager (Igembe C)	Home	07/12/015
55.	Mwiti M'Arimi	60	Villager (Doctor)	Hotel	08/12/015
56.	Joanina Kanana	45	Villager	Home	13/12/015
57.	Justus Munene	42	Villager	Home	13/12/015
58.	John Mutegi	48	Villager (Lawyer)	Home	13/12/015
59.	Zachary Maore	42	Villager (Teacher)	Home	14/12/015
60.	Lucas Kinoti	44	Villager (Teacher)	Home	20/12/015
61.	Kirigia Muchai	50	Villager	Home	20/12/015
62.	Mercy Gatwiri	30	Villager	Home	19/12/015
63.	Jacob Kaaria	60	Villager	Home	27/12/015
64.	Purity Muchai	48	Villager	Home	20/12/015
65.	Severina Kanario	48	Villager (Teacher)	Home	27/12/015
66.	Mr. Micheni Kimeu	50	Villager (Banker)	Home	28/12/015
67.	Timothy Mutwiri	29	Villager	Home	28/12/015
68.	Christine Nkirote	28	Villager	Home	29/12/015
69.	Silvia Kaaria	25	Villager	Home	29/12/015
70.	James Kobia	31	Villager	Home	31/12/015
71.	Patrick Mutai	32	Villager	Home	31/12/015
72.	Jamlick Riungu	35	Villager	Home	15/01/016
73.	Silas Kinyua	35	Villager	Home	27/01/016

74.	Susan Nkirote	45	Villager	Home	05/ 12/ 15
75.	Zaverio M'Ariithi	56	Villager	Home	06/ 12/ 15
76.	Dr Jasper Mwiti	52	Villager (Doctor)	Hotel	13/ 12/ 15
77.	Joan Kanana	48	Villager (Teacher)	Hotel	14/ 12/ 15
78.	M'Mbijiwe Kibanga	70	Elder (south imenti)	Home	15/ 12/ 15
79.	Salesio M'Ngencho	73	Elder (Igembe Central)	Akirangondu shrine	23/ 12/ 15
80.	M'Ciita M'Amwiri	69	Elder (Igembe North)	Akirangondu shrine	23/ 12/ 15
81.	Mercy Kagendo	23	Villager	Home	19/ 12/15
82.	Diana Kathambi	30	Villager	Home	20/ 12/ 15
83.	Zaverio Mutugi	59	Villager	Home	21/ 12/ 15
84.	Clement Mungania	56	Villager	Home	30/ 12/ 15
85.	Joeli Marete	78	Elder (north imenti)	Home	02/ 01/ 16
86.	Mwenda Nkunga	24	Villager	Home	02/ 01/ 16
87.	Monica Gacheri	28	Villager	Home	04/ 01/ 16
	James Kithinj i	4 9	Churc h Leader	Home	05 / 01 /

<p>THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT: MS. ORINA HELLEN KAGWIRIA of EGERTON UNIVERSITY, 300-40200 Kisii, has been permitted to conduct research in Meru County</p> <p>on the topic: RESILIENCE OF TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTICES IN KENYA: THE CASE OF NJURI NCHEKE OF MERU COUNTY, KENYA</p> <p>for the period ending: 24th October, 2017</p> <p>..... Applicant's Signature</p>	<p>Permit No : NACOSTI/P/16/61025/13888 Date Of Issue : 24th October, 2016 Fee Received :Ksh 2000</p>  <p>..... Director General National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation</p>
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**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,
 TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION**

<p>Telephone: +254-20-2213471, 2241349,3316171,2219429 Fax: +254-20-318245,318249 Email: dg@nacosti.go.ke Website: www.nacosti.go.ke when replying please quote</p>	<p>4th Floor, Utalia House Uthuru Highway P.O. Box 30623-00100 NAIROBI-KENYA</p>
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Ref. No. **NACOSTI/P/16/61025/13888** Date: **24th October, 2016**

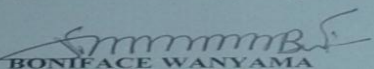
Orina Hellen Kagwiria
 Egerton University
 P.O. Box 536-20115
 EGERTON.

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

Following your application for authority to carry out research on **“Resilience of traditional religious institutions and practices in Kenya: The case of Njuri Ncheke of Meru County, Kenya.”** I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Meru County** for the period ending **24th October, 2017.**

You are advised to report to the **County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Meru County** before embarking on the research project.

On completion of the research, you are expected to submit **two hard copies and one soft copy in pdf** of the research report/thesis to our office.


BONIFACE WANYAMA
FOR: DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO

Copy to:

The County Commissioner
 Meru County.

The County Director of Education
 Meru County.

National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation is ISO 9001:2008 Certified