WORDY WOMEN: GENDER TROUBLE AND THE ORAL POLITICS OF THE EAST AFRICAN REVIVAL IN NORTHERN GIKUYULAND

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ABSTRACT: This essay explores conversion to the East African Revival as a way that Gikuyu women and men argued about moral and economic change. Rural capitalism in the 1930s and 1940s attacked the material basis of Gikuyu gender order by denying some men land. Familial stability was at stake in class formation: landless laborers could scarcely be respectable husbands. Rural elders and revivalists offered contending answers to the terrifying problem of gender trouble. Literate male elders at Tumutumu Presbyterian church used customary law and church bureaucracy to discipline young men and women. Revivalists, many of them women, talked: they confessed private sins vocally, cleansing themselves of sorcerous familial strife. Tumutumu’s debate over Revival played out as a contest between the oral politics of conversion and the bureaucratic power of church elders. Mau Mau continued the debate.

KEY WORDS: Kenya, Christianity, gender.

EARLY one Sunday afternoon in April 1952, a group of twenty members of the East African Revival, mostly women, gathered under a tree outside the Presbyterian church in Kibirigwi, in Kenya’s Nyeri district.1 They had been banned from using the church building by the pastor, Johanna Wanjau.2 They sang the Lugandan hymn ‘Tukutendereza Jesu’ (‘We praise you Jesus’); one woman then stood up and told the story of her personal salvation from sin. She began to preach against Wanjau, using as her text II Corinthians 4:3, ‘But if our gospel is hid, it is hid to them that are lost’. She or another speaker called Wanjau a ‘servant of the Devil’.3 Wanjau, furious,

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Archival sources are referenced as follows: KNA: Kenya National Archives, Nairobi; SA: Presbyterian Church of East Africa archives, St Andrew’s Church, Nairobi; AIM: Africa Inland Mission Kenya office archives, Nairobi; TT: Tumutumu church archives, Karatina, Nyeri district; ACK: Anglican Church of Kenya archives, Nairobi; EUL: Edinburgh University Library, Scotland; NLS: National Library of Scotland. Transcripts of oral interviews are held at Tumutumu and will shortly be deposited at the Kenya National Archives.

2 T[T] Correspondence with Kikuyu file: Calderwood to Muhoro, 17 Apr. 1951.

3 TT ‘Marua makonii synod’ file: Executive committee of Tumutumu Presbytery, 8 Apr. 1952.
burst out of the church, rushed at the speaker, and holding her by the breasts, commanded her to be silent. At an inquest following the incident, the government chief threatened to arrest the revivalists for ‘bringing confusion’, while the Presbytery moderator ordered church leaders to ‘beat them, excommunicate them, and imprison them’.6

Conversion in contemporary scholarship is supposed to be a personal, inward transformation leading to a cathartic acceptance of new religious ideas.6 As a private matter between God and believer, conversion seems to have more to do with personal choice than with public matters of economics and politics. It is therefore not surprising that the historiography on the East African Revival is to a large extent biographical.7 Most histories begin with the story of the Ugandan landowner Simeon Nsibambi, who was perhaps the first to convert. In the early 1920s, he received a vision from God instructing him to forsake earthly things and seek out salvation. He found a kindred soul in the Anglican missionary Joe Church, a Keswick revivalist who longed for the awakening of the Ganda church from its ‘Laodicean’, lukewarm state. Calling for the church to ‘Awake!’ , Church and Nsibambi convened the first Revivalist convention at the Gahini station in Rwanda in 1931. Six years later, evangelists from Uganda preached at a convention in southern Gikuyuland. At the heart of their message was the practice of confessing private sin. Revival meetings were marked by converts’ public admissions of adultery, theft, drunkenness and other vices. Obadiah Karuki, later bishop of the Anglican Church, and others were ‘saved’ after hearing the message. Many made restitution for their sins, repaying employers for stolen goods or apologizing to neighbors for speaking badly about them. In 1947, the first convention organized by Kenyans was convened in Murang’a district. It drew 3,000 attendees, including several from Tumutumu. Subsequent yearly conventions were attended by as many as 15,000 people.8

There are now several published collections of revivalists’ autobiographies.9 Drawing from these sources, the sparse secondary histori-
ography on the Revival dwells on the personal crises that led individuals to convert. But as Revd. Wanjau discovered, there was more to Revival than individual stories of religious transformation. Being converted at Kibirigwi was never simply a private affair. The dichotomies of Revivalist theology – good and evil, God and Satan, the redeemed and the lost – were good to argue with. Conversion was a way for the Kibirigwi women to criticize the failings of a church bureaucracy dominated by men, a way also to claim moral authority for themselves.

It is the politically creative nature of conversion that current scholarship on Revival obscures. By accepting uncritically converts’ highly personal accounts of their religious transformation, historians have ignored the ways that the language of conversion served very public social and political purposes for the ‘saved’. What is needed is an account of the Revival that describes what converts accomplished in their conversion and how they used the dualistic grammar of salvation and damnation to argue about political and social problems. The Indianist scholar Gauri Viswanathan shows the way in her work on conversion in colonial India and Victorian Britain. In its ability to upset given categories of identity, Viswanathan argues, conversion is an act of critical consciousness, an epistemology. By treating conversion as a critical action that comments on social and political relationships, Viswanathan makes it possible to think of conversion not as an inward, subjective experience but as a grammar of dissent.

Inspired by Viswanathan, this article argues that conversion to the Revival was one means by which Gikuyu women and men argued about moral and economic change. The essay focuses on debates over the Revival at Tumutumu, a Church of Scotland mission in the northernmost Gikuyu district of Nyeri. By linking the Revival to economic changes in 1940s Nyeri, the essay raises new questions about the place of the Revival within the history of colonial East Africa. The late 1940s were a time of matata, disorder, and mgogoro, tumult, throughout the region. In central Kenya, rural capitalists attacked the moral basis of social order by denying some men land. Land implied people in Gikuyu thought; owning and working land was for men the means of achieving respectable adulthood. Rural landlessness thus compelled husbands and wives to argue about masculinity and marriage in a context where men could not be good husbands. Church courts were overburdened with cases of marital infidelity and sexual indiscretion. Terrified at the chaos, Gikuyu elaborated contending theories of marital order to meet the moral challenges of the times.

Christian male elders, called ‘readers’ in the Gikuyu language, used their facility with government and church bureaucracy to guard their families against destruction. They chastened their sons and daughters with fines for sexual indiscretion and used record books to hold young men accountable for


bridewealth. Customary law and church bureaucracy in readers' conservative thought fostered the will to virtue among the young by creating fixed standards of decency, tests against which to measure conduct. Revivalists, many of them women, advocated a different theory of marital obligations and rights. Terrified at a morally inchoate world, converts like those at Kibirigwi used the rhetoric of good and evil as a dichotomous language of social criticism. Christian theology helped concretize social disorder; marital strife was the work of the Devil in revivalist thought. Conversion was therefore a necessary civic duty; in conversion, men and women freed themselves and their families both from Christian sin and from the sorcerous burden of Gikuyu marital strife. Their conversion was a means of recreating order at home and a way of criticizing the dissipation of husbands.

Male church elders thought the converts insane. Loud-mouthed Revivalists broke church laws, refusing elders' authority and publicizing marital wrongs best kept private. Church elders condemned wordy converts for their sexual and political delinquency. They banned Revival from the church in 1948 and forbade the 'saved ones' from speaking in church assemblies. Tumutumu's debate over Revival—later to shade into the violence called 'Mau Mau'—was a struggle between gendered theories of marital order. Revivalists' conversion and church bureaucracy, oral confession of sin and customary law, were contending means of engendering civility among a people intimately divided by the agony of class formation.

CLASS FORMATION AND MORAL CHAOS

Inspired by relatively high market prices for maize and wattle during the inter-war period, big landlords throughout Nyeri district expanded cultivation at the expense of tenants and family juniors. Land litigation increased markedly in the early 1940s as landlords sought to reclaim land from dependents. Missionaries reported that many of the disputes involved church leaders. By 1946, native tribunals in Mathira and North Tetu had instituted double panels to deal with the backlog of land cases. The wealthy men of the Local Native Council (LNC) redefined 'customary' law to narrow junior family members' access to clan land. In 1943, the LNC recommended that eldest sons should inherit fathers' property as an unbroken block. Primogeniture ensured that senior family members would control clan land, leaving junior family members destitute. A 1945 survey found that 24 per cent of landholdings in Gikuyuland were smaller than the 2.4 acres necessary for bare subsistence. Land pressure may have been more desperate in parts of Nyeri's Mathira division, home to most of Tumutumu's graduates. As early as 1936, junior families bordering the mission claimed that land shortages were causing their children to go hungry. Wealthy churchmen, it seems, prospered at juniors' expense.

Facing pressure from landlords and lacking enough land for subsistence,
some smallholders became part-time proletarians. In 1943 and again in 1947, Nyeri district produced the most migrant workers per capita of all districts in Kenya colony. But migrants’ cash wages did little to compensate for their land poverty. Most Nyeri workers were unskilled; a 1936 survey found that almost half worked at menial tasks, bringing Shs. 66.155/ in total into the district. During the same year, maize exports from landed farmers brought in Shs. 204,000/, almost three times the total earnings of unskilled laborers. Farmers with plenty of land prospered, while those without sufficient land found it difficult to make up the difference through wages.

Land poverty was an ontological problem for Nyeri working men. We can hear something of land-poor men’s terror in Vincent Mwaniki’s 1947 appeal to the Nyeri district commissioner for land:

I am in severe trouble due to lack of residence and food for the family, as I am landless even a small piece of ground on which to farm would enable me to fight for them. The family is ever miserable … really I am awfully worried about them, surely they cry, and their condition proves to be unhealthy. I try hard to work, but without land I cannot do more than just keep the wolf from the door.

Before the British came, forest-clearing Gikuyu clans had worked hard to keep wild animals from homesteads. Thick hedges built around pioneering homesteads walled out the wild and protected children and women. The verb *gita* linked domestic order to prosperity; it meant both ‘grow thickly (as in a hedge)’ and ‘prosper, flourish’. Their houses hedged and in good order, prosperous men earned *wiathi*, self-mastery. John Lonsdale has shown how intimately land, prosperity and moral agency were related in Gikuyu political thought. Wealth talked; as a common saying put it, ‘wisdom (or forensic skill) (is) through property’. The evidence of a prosperous household proved men’s right to speak in public assemblies and to exercise judicial authority. Where prosperity built up self-mastering men and established households, poverty tore them down. Poverty was exhausting, draining; the verb *hungura* meant both ‘render destitute’ and ‘exhaust, drain of vitality’. Poor, exhausted men were compelled to keep silent in elders’ meetings, sitting with women while eavesdropping on the deliberations of their betters. They were sometimes dismissed as *atereki*, ‘beggars’, but also ‘timid, silent people’. Poverty shut men’s mouths, making them socially forgettable.

By denying family juniors and tenants access to cultivable land, rural capitalists in the 1930s and 1940s thus attacked the material basis of Gikuyu

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masculinity. Class formation compelled Nyeri people to debate the moral economy of manhood. Without property, without land in which to invest their work, wage-working men were delinquent. Both male elders and wives doubted their integrity. Frederick Ruheni and Pilisila Wangari’s 1947 dispute before the Tumutumu Kirk Session shows how intimately rural impoverishment and sexual disorder were joined. The couple had been married in church in May 1946. But by mid-1947, Ruheni had yet to build a proper house for his wife. Wangari, disgusted, went home to stay with her father’s family. Ruheni’s failure to invest in a house endangered his wife’s reputation; Gikuyu called a wife without a house a mukoma thi, someone who ‘sleeps on the ground’, a concubine. Lacking a house to establish it, Ruheni’s marriage was an illicit affair. The couple came before the Kirk Session in July, she to seek divorce, he reconciliation. The argument was sparked by sexual infidelity. But more deeply, Ruheni and Wangari argued about masculinity, and about the obligations of marriage in a context where men could not be good husbands. She would not go home with Ruheni, Wangari said, for four reasons:

(1) She found Frederick was not a Christian because there was beer at his wedding.
(2) He himself drinks beer and brings other beer drinkers to the house.
(3) He brings prostitutes to his home to take beer and they disturb her a lot.
(4) He got an infection and cannot have sex, unless he is treated for the infection for six years.

The Kirk Session, shocked at Wangari’s disclosures, sent Ruheni to the hospital for an examination and resolved that the couple should remain separated pending the court’s investigation. Moral indiscipline, sexual dysfunction and propertyless poverty combined to make the men of the Kirk Session doubt Ruheni’s integrity as a husband. Without a house, Ruheni scarcely looked a self-mastering man. With a sexual disease, he scarcely looked a man at all. His poverty, and his sexual indiscipline, made church elders question his manhood.

Property helped Ruheni solve his marriage problem. At a later hearing before the Session, the court learned that Ruheni had recently paid the dowry for Wangari to her father. Moreover, he had begun building a house, apparently with the assistance of his father. Ruheni’s payments of dowry convinced the Kirk Session of his integrity, and they resolved that Wangari should do her duty and return to her husband. Ruheni’s investments proved his fitness as a man and a husband to the men of the Kirk Session. White male missionaries concurred, reasoning that if Ruheni had paid dowry, his wife was obligated to live with him.

28 EUL Gen. 1785/2: Barlow, notes on mukoma thi.

As Ruheni’s case shows, poverty in land and property made it difficult for some men to make and maintain stable marriages. Domestic harmony was in the early 1940s increasingly a privilege of wealth. Wealthy farmers used wartime profits to finance brideprice payments for second wives. During one meeting in 1942, the Kirk Session disciplined no less than eleven church deacons and elders for polygamous marriages. Wealthy older men seem to have monopolized marriageable women, stifling young men’s hopes for marriage. They drove up brideprice; some young men had to pay as much as Shs. 800/ to marry in 1940. Earning Shs. 180/ per year as wage workers on white settler farms, laborers had little hope of meeting such a price. The frequency of church marriages throughout northern Gikuyuland dropped precipitously in the early 1940s as formal marriage became too expensive for the rural poor.

Lacking the means to establish stable and productive homes, some young men dallied with church elders’ daughters. Church courts were flooded with sex cases; 74 unmarried male and female catechumens or communicants were accused of indiscretions in 1935. Sixteen cases resulted in pregnancies. In 1938, 33 young people were accused, with 14 pregnancies. The numbers are remarkable; the total adult congregation at Tumutumu was 1,534 in 1935, meaning that close to 5 per cent of church adherents were publicly accused of sexual impropriety. Young men may have hoped to convert their sexual indiscretion into an illicit claim on elders’ daughters. Mwati wa Kiruba’s pregnant sister, for example, ran off to Nairobi with a male teacher from Tumutumu in 1940. He had not paid brideprice. Kiruba’s father searched her out, but perished when his daughter’s suitor slipped poison into his beer. The marriage crisis was a deadly serious matter for young men and old.

Marriage was the most immediate moral context in which Gikuyu men and women argued about economic crisis. Rural men worried about their wives, who increasingly participated in market trading during the 1940s. They thought that working women would trade away their virtue. In 1945, Clement Kimiru, married for several years to Jelious, reported on his wife’s failings in this way:

She went to Nairobi having been urged otherwise. She also refused to accompany the husband from Kiambi. She went to a wedding even when Clement urged against it. Someone told Clement he had found her inside a wattle forest with someone else. She even refuses to give him food or water ... When Jelious sold

33 TT Coci ya Tumutumu: minute, 14 Sept. 1940.
34 TT Correspondence with Chogoria file: Philp to Irvine, 24 Jul. 1942.
35 TT Mbuku ya maciira, kiama gia Tumutumu: cumulative entries for 1935.
36 TT Mbuku ya maciira: cumulative entries for 1938.
37 TT Statistics file: Tumutumu church, 1935. Tumutumu church, to which these numbers refer, was one of several churches comprising Tumutumu Presbytery. The total population of catechumens, communicants, and children of the Presbytery was 5,300 in 1935 and 8,400 in 1938.
milk or even dresses Clement could not get any of the proceeds. Clement had gone to take some fermented porridge and when he can back he found she had escorted someone else …

Their control over cash made working wives like Jelious morally suspect in husbands’ eyes. Men worried that wives maddened with money would sap husbands’ virility with sorcery. In 1940, Duncan Thinji complained to the church court that his wife, a trader, had caused him to become sexually impotent. He called a mundu mugo, a ‘witchdoctor’, to his house and asked him to determine if his wife had laid a wasting curse on him. The mugo divined that the wife was not at fault. Thinji received no reprimand from the Christian Kirk Session for his dalliance with the ‘pagan’ mugo. The worried husbands and fathers of the elders’ court could sensibly agree that it made sense to be careful of women who trafficked with cash.

Class formation drove Gikuyu debate about marriage, setting husbands against wives and land-poor men against wealthy elders. Church elders and converts elaborated contrary theories of familial order to remedy marital conflict. Male elders, Christian and non-Christian, worked to meet the stern test of twiathi, self-mastery, by restoring discipline in their fractious households. The morally instructive history of homesteading taught elders the dangers of familial discord. Soft words proverbially made homes cool and prosperous. Public argument, in contrast, destroyed households; the verb teta was both ‘to rail at, indulge in recrimination’ and ‘creak, as in timber or an unsafe tree’. Angry words put pressure on Gikuyu homesteads, destroying the hedges with which men protected their property and progeny. A muhinguria was both a ‘seducer of married women, an adulterer’ and ‘one who opens’. In elders’ conservative thought, the moral agency of husbands and the sexual virtue of wives demanded that family matters be walled off from outsiders.

The marital strife of the 1940s endangered the quasi-religious basis of Gikuyu moral order by undermining household discipline. Worried at the chaos, elders reworked ‘customary’ rules about marriage and sex to establish tests of virtuous conduct. In 1943, the elders of the Nyeri Local Native Council (LNC) ruled that men causing pregnancy out of wedlock should pay a bullock and a sheep to location elders and 10 goats and Shs. 10/ to the woman’s family. By 1949, the price of sexual indiscretion had increased; the elders of the Nyeri District Law Panel ruled that the fine for pregnancy out of marriage was 10 goats, 2 rams and 2 bullocks. Furthermore, the panel ruled that the child thus born belonged to the woman’s father’s family. Running away with a woman without paying bridewealth to her father was by 1949 a criminal action, punishable by the District Commissioner.

It is important to recognize that these legal reforms were not merely an oppressive means of controlling young men and women. In elders’ con-

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40 TT Mbu ku ya maciira, kiama gia Tumutumu: minute, 5 Aug. 1940.
41 Kana na njega na nyumba ndingiraarika ni heho, ‘soft words and a cool house’, said to be a common aphorism in Barlow, ‘Kikuyu Linguistics’ (EUL Gen 1786/6).
42 EUL Gen 1785/3: Barlow, notes on teta.
43 EUL Gen 1785/2: Barlow, notes on muhinguria.
45 TT Nyeri Law Panel, 30 Nov. 1949.
sociable conduct, bridewealth rules encouraged young men to be disciplined. In 1943, church elders from throughout Gikuyuland meeting at Kahuhia refused to consider lowering the brideprice they demanded for their daughters. They reasoned that high bride prices encouraged young men to 'earn huge salaries'. By law, payments were recorded in a bridewealth register kept by the LNC. The ethnographer Jomo Kenyatta thought the register a noble practice, listing it in 1938 among the practices accompanying 'traditional' Gikuyu marriage. There was nothing paradoxical about Kenyatta's valuation of record keeping. By recording the amount paid and the amount owed, bridewealth books established clear records of young men's virtuous investments. Registers held young men accountable to elders' 'traditional' sexual and social discipline. Like 'customary' rules listing fines for illicit sex, bridewealth registers established standards of conduct fostering the will to virtue among corrupted youth. Elders hoped that registers and laws would teach the young that sex was a privilege only earned through diligent work.

In a wilderness of social and moral flux, record books and 'customary' rules were tests of sociability; they secured clear markers against which the morality of young men and women could be measured. So too did church bureaucracies help hold young men and women accountable. In 1937, Tumutumu churchgoers formed the 'Tumutumu Mercy Union' with 224 members. The Union was rural landholders' effort to protect young men and women against the demoralizing dangers of Nairobi. The Union, asking prosperous farmers to 'pull together' to ensure migrant men's moral well-being, promised to build a hostel for Nyeri men in Nairobi. Rural men's investment was supposed to keep wage earners away from prostitutes' lairs. The Union promised to pay to bring the bodies of those men who expired in Nairobi back home to Nyeri. It also promised to be certain that their wives, abandoned in the corrupting city, would be returned to Nyeri. Rural landholders seem to have contributed eagerly; some 30 rural outschools are listed as supporters of the Union. Their cash investments demanded discipline of young men, and controlled widows likely to become prostitutes. Bureaucratic organizations like the Union parlayed rural men's cash into an investment in moral order.

With women out of control, with young men demoralized, wealthy elders worked for sexual and moral discipline using the skills of literacy. They used the devices of government and church bureaucracy – fines for sexual impropriety, the Tumutumu Mercy Union, bridewealth registers – to foster upright conduct among dissolute youth. The apparent fixity of literacy made it useful; by establishing sure tests against which human conduct could be measured, laws and record books encouraged the young to be respectable.

46 This, contra E. Schmidt's analysis of the rationale underlying Shona customary law, in Peasants, Traders and Wives, ch. 4.
47 TT Conference reports: Meeting of CSM and CMS church people at Kahuhia, 23 Aug. 1943.
50 SA 1/B/7: Tumutumu annual report, 1937.
Elders' morally enabling investments in bureaucracy and law protected familial order just as men in the past had crafted palisades of brambles with which to keep out the threatening animals of the forest.  

ORAL POLITICS

While elders’ conservative theory of social order blamed out-of-control young men and women for the sexual strife of the early 1940s, Tumutumu revivalists, many of them women, offered a different explanation for the crisis. They publicly condemned greedy men for causing sexual disorder. In improvised sermons confessing private sins and castigating the godless, the converts of the Revival loudly inveighed against marital strife. By doing so, they protected themselves – redeemed by the blood of Christ – from accusations of infidelity and sorcery. Revival was a language with which to condemn the moral dissipation of the times. This is not to dismiss the importance of the Revival’s theology; theology plainly mattered, deeply, to converts. But revivalists did not ‘believe in’ Revival as an internalized, subjective, private act of allegiance. Revivalist theology was an epistemology, a way of interpreting social conflict. The dichotomous grammar of conversion was a means with which women made public claims on men and imagined solutions to the problem of marital disorder.

Tumutumu women had argued from the 1930s, well before Revival evangelists reached Nyeri, that men’s delinquency was what generated discord. The public nature of these arguments over intimate wrongs illuminates what I take to be a female strategy for managing marital strife. Public preaching, open dispute over men’s infidelity, was one means by which Nyeri women protected their households in dangerous times. Salome Kagume said as much in 1935 when testifying before the church court. Her husband Isaaka had gone to Nairobi for wage work, and Salome accused him of going around with prostitutes. Salome was not alone in her worries about husbands’ inconstancy. In 1938, Mariko Macaria accused Jakubu Kibuku of adultery and sorcery before the Kirk Session. Macaria was a brother to Kibuku’s wife. Marital infidelity divided families. Jakubu, the accused husband, refused to talk about the matter before the court; such things were too private to be discussed openly. Women hoped that church courts would reveal men’s infidelity – and protect feminine virtue. Kanuthu, an un-baptised girl accused of sexual indiscretion with Kahiu wa Ndegwa in 1934, maintained that she had been menstruating throughout the period when she was supposed to have been cohabiting with her lover. Besides, she argued, Kahiu’s appetite was at fault; he had repeatedly told her that he was hungry, asking for sex. Kanuthu offered to be examined by a doctor to prove that she had resisted his hungry advances. Public arguments over sex and menstrual blood guarded women’s virtuous reputations from men’s sexual appetite.

Blaming working men’s indiscipline for sexual disorder, women used the

53 TT Kiama gia coci: minute, 16 Mar. 1935.
54 TT Mihuti church committee: minute, 6 Apr. 1938.
55 TT Kiamwangi church committee: minute, 6 Jul. 1934.
evidence of their domestic labor as a public proof of their virtue. The Tumutumu Women’s Guild, founded in the early 1930s, was the platform for women’s argument. Doris Nyambura, president of the Guild and itinerant evangelist, listed women’s duties at a local convention in 1935:

Get up early in the morning. Pray and read part of the book of God and put on the clothes of the day and open the windows. Heat up water for tea or porridge or food like bananas, sugar cane or bread, and milk for children and water to wash faces and even the children themselves. Sweep and remove the leaves and look around the household to see if it is clean. Wash the face and arms and hands and wash the children then read them the Bible. Also pray with the children before washing. Drink *cai* and bananas, sugar cane or bread. This work is to be done before 8 a.m.  

Nyambura went on to detail women’s activities throughout the day, laying particular emphasis on sewing and the mending of children’s clothing. It sounded like hard work. And indeed, Nyambura’s recitation of women’s labor was meant to be heard, read aloud at Guild meetings and in conferences with male church elders. By reminding husbands of the labor they committed to households, church women put men to shame. Guild members drove the point home at a 1937 convention. They endured long lectures from male church leaders about the ‘Model of a God-fearing Woman’, with good cooking and the welcoming of visitors figuring prominently in men’s speeches. But at the end of the conference, the assembled women pointedly reminded church elders that domestic indiscipline was a male issue when they passed three resolutions:

1. There are some wrong things done by men and should be corrected.
2. The elders who are family heads should meet and should be notified of their mistakes as they destroy their families.
3. Women asked that: a) their workload should be lessened; b) they should be allowed to travel to see the hospitality of other women; c) cooking utensils and other cutlery should be looked into. Items such as this should be sufficient.

The members of the church should look into these resolutions so that Christians can set examples for others. See Exodus 5:14.  

The Guild members closed their resolutions with the pointed Biblical reminder that ‘you are the light of the world’, meant to shame men. Women reminded male church leaders that their self-interested pursuit of wealth had undermined domestic peace. They hoped their laundry list of domestic labor would embarrass men with evidence of women’s commitment to families. The parable of the woman at the well, who was told about her most intimate sins by Jesus, made the point clearly. Guild member Naomi wa Paulo used the parable to preach to men and women at a conference in 1939:

We too get into sin and look like this woman. For example, elders and preachers should be good people. But when (an elder) dies people can get into trouble. Such a person could be seen in church saying ‘people thought I was fine but that is not the case. I was a sinner, I would like all women with whom I have sinned to stand and if they refuse I will mention their names’. They refused and he mentioned their names. He said all their sins. After finishing a fire from beneath burned him

completely. People see us as being good but we do hide our sins like theft, hatred, hypocrisy, curses, being mean, laziness, jealousy etc. The reward for sins is death. Let’s come to Jesus, to be made aware of our sins, and be given his water of life.58

As Naomi’s parable carefully reversed the gender of the characters in the Biblical story, making a male elder into the subject of a lesson on hypocrisy, she turned around the accusations of church elders. Male hypocrisy, secret sins men committed, was to blame for the social disorder of the 1930s. Their refusal to confess their sin in this life made them devilish.

Condemning husbands for their hypocrisy, women joined the Revival at Tumutumu in the late 1940s. The Revival extended the grammar with which church women argued about men’s turpitude. In December 1947, the Anglicans in the southern station of Kahuhia organized a Revival convention that drew some 3,000 people. Among the attendees was Doris Nyambura, a leader of the Tumutumu Women’s Guild. She became the first evangelist for the Revival in Nyeri. By 1950, three-fourths of Tumutumu churches were filled with women, most revivalists.59 They met for hours after Sunday services and during weekly fellowship meetings, loudly confessing their sins and testifying to Christ’s salvation. Church elders were appalled and forbade the revivalists from meeting in church buildings in January 1948.60 The converts moved outside, there to continue their loud discourses under the trees.

Domestic conflict drove the first revivalists, both men and women, to convert. Their testimonies highlight how closely revivalism was bound up in the politics of familial strife. Alice Wanjeri contemplated suicide after her husband married another wife in 1948, but instead joined the Revival at the urging of her friends.61 She was not alone in seeing in Revival an answer to husbands’ ill-will; one leader remembered that many wives of polygamous men joined the movement in the late 1940s.62 Abinjah Wanjike, from Murang’a, joined the revivalists after her husband married a second wife and began to treat her as a ‘slave’.63 She eventually settled with another revivalist family and was given a plot of land to farm. Revivalism was a means of escape for some women threatened by the domestic tyranny of men. For male converts, too, revivalism resolved marital tension. Phares Wahinya began to ‘hate himself’ in 1936 after realizing that he was an adulterer and a heavy drinker.64 He was ‘saved’ in 1946 and immediately ran home from church to beg forgiveness from his wife. Geoffrey Ngare, from Tumutumu, heard a revivalist sermon and was convicted of beating his wife with angry words.65 Revivalism could rebuild bonds fractured by the stresses of marital struggle. Frances Ndigwa was saved in 1942, but spent three years in continual argument with his wife. In 1945, he and his wife celebrated a new marriage, this one consecrated by other revivalists.66

For both men and women terrified at the marital discord of the times,

58 TT Conference reports file: Meeting of churches of Murang’a and Nyeri, 1939.
60 SA II/C/3: Lamont to Calderwood, 23 Jan. 1948.
63 Smoker, Ambushed, 93.
64 Smoker, Ambushed, 104.
66 Smoker, Ambushed, 258.
conversion was a way of managing moral crisis. The Devil allowed converts to put a name to the personal play of immorality afflicting Gikuyu households.\textsuperscript{67} Missionaries reported that revivalist preachers illustrated their sermons using posters picturing Apollyan and Christ fighting, or life's travelers on two ways - one to destruction and the other to the Eternal City.\textsuperscript{68} Their earliest leader, Heshbon Mwangi from Muranga'a, was 'saved' after hearing a sermon on Hebrews 11:24 asking him to come from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of Christ.\textsuperscript{69} Christian teleology posed private choices within a dualistic narrative. But the Revival was not only about the next world. The Christian dichotomies of revivalist preaching also had immediate implications.

Revivalists thought their salvation cleansed them of the pollution of sorcery. Gikuyu knew sorcerers by their greed; sorcerers sucked the life out of neighbors, adding to their own wealth at the expense of others. Revivalists' public confessions of sin looked like cleansing ceremonies. Some converts confessed publicly to the intimate sins of hatred, jealousy, lying, envy, making false accusations and selfishness. Others confessed to greed, to adding to their own land at the expense of others.\textsuperscript{70} A few confessed to practicing witchcraft in secret.\textsuperscript{71} These were Christian sins, but listeners would have also recognized them as confessions of sorcerous practice. Conversion to the Revival was a means of protection against sorcery and a means of clearing one's reputation. Converts claimed in their public confessions of sin to be free of sorcery, to be redeemed from the curse of death.\textsuperscript{72} Eunice Kagio of Muranga'a was 'saved' after she realized that her life had become a 'stinking thing' to God. She rejoiced that Jesus' blood had washed her clean from sin.\textsuperscript{73} Revivalists told each other to 'walk in the light' in public sermons and private devotionals. Sorcerers were known to practice their smelly magic in the dark. Christian salvation protected revivalists from the dark stink of sorcery. Some thought the revivalists an anti-witchcraft league; in 1945, a few testified that the Holy Spirit had thrown them to the ground, making them feel as though they were being burned.\textsuperscript{74} Gikuyu had long punished sorcerers with fire. The Holy Spirit translated traditional punishment into fiery salvation. The largest revivalist conference in central Kenya, held at Kabete in 1949, had as its theme Isaiah 1:8, which read 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow'. Revivalists were careful to guard themselves against the taint of sin by refusing to eat with those who were not 'saved'.\textsuperscript{75} Some refused to take communion from the hand of church pastors who they suspected of trafficking with the Devil.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{67} Birgit Meyer has come to similar conclusions in her work on Pentecostalism in Ghana, for which see "If you are a devil, you are a witch and if you are a witch, you are a devil": the integration of "pagan" ideas into the conceptual universe of Ewe Christians in southeastern Ghana", Journal of Religion in Africa, 22 (1992), 98–132.
\textsuperscript{68} SA II/BA/10: Irvine, Chogoria annual report, 1949. \textsuperscript{69} Smoker, Ambushed, 87.
\textsuperscript{70} NLS Acc/7548/B/32: Monteith, home letter, July 1942.
\textsuperscript{71} Smoker, Ambushed, 161, 196.
\textsuperscript{73} Smoker, Ambushed, 263.
\textsuperscript{74} SA II/D/30–34: Hesbon Mwangi to revivalists, 1949.
\textsuperscript{75} SA II/D/30–34: Philp, notes.
\textsuperscript{76} TT Marua makoni synod on members acio file: C. Muhero to G. Ngare, 1 Jun. 1950.
Cleanliness was at once a Christian and a Gikuyu virtue, simultaneously protecting the saved from the pollution of sorcery and sin.

Translating Gikuyu social strife into the Christian theology of good and evil, converts used the Devil to rethink their marriages. Cecilia Muthoni Mugaki, daughter of first-generation converts and an early school teacher, was among the first to be saved at Tumutumu. She had married Eustace, another schoolteacher, in September 1937. Soon after the marriage, continual discord made her doubt God’s wisdom:

The happiness we had enjoyed was destroyed by the Devil and we became a pair of fighters and complaining people, until I declared that the Devil had come into our prayers, that this was not my real choice.77

Many of their arguments, remembered Cecilia, were over her travels as a schoolteacher; Eustace was jealous of her educational attainments and suspicious that her travels had compromised her virtue. But on a deeper, more anguished level, marital strife looked like dangerous bedevilment. The Devil put a name to dangerously divisive disagreements. Revivalism redeemed Cecilia from the Devil’s power. Early in 1948, Cecilia was ‘saved’, vocally confessing how she had forsaken Bible reading, fought with her husband and thought herself better than he. She spent the next months reading the Bible, with marriage in mind:

I found that the word salvation is all over the Bible because it was Jesus’ main work ... I also came to understand even persecuting my husband that he did not love me was because I had not trusted in Jesus as my only true husband.

Careful reading of the Bible gave Cecilia words to rethink marital strife. In being saved, Cecilia also remade her marriage, wedding herself to Christ in order to restore harmony with her husband. Cecilia remembered that, after her husband was saved in November 1948,

our work for the Lord became lighter and lighter with time. Now it is very light ... I used to say that it was ngoma (spirits) who had invaded our home. It was me who failed to commit everything to the Lord.

In a world where social order was under siege, the Christian narrative of good and evil was for converts a useful way of rebuilding domestic discipline. What made the Devil singularly useful was his materiality; the Devil concretized moral chaos. In naming the Devil as the face of marital strife, women like Cecilia made conversion into a socially necessary means of recreating civility. Christian conversion simultaneously freed Gikuyu from the Devil and from marital disharmony. Conversion was therefore a civic duty, a morally enabling way of rebuilding domestic harmony. By ‘marrying Christ’, converts fixed the chaos of the times within the established narrative of redemption. The victory of Christ over the Devil was also a Gikuyu victory over marital disorder.

At stake in men’s and women’s debates over marriage and Christian salvation was the possibility of progeny. Women, worried at husbands’ deceit, condemned wage-earning men as impotent, unable to fulfill marital duties. Revivalism was for some mothers a means to guard children against

men's turpitude. Beer-drinking and fornication were among the sins that male revivalists most frequently confessed. Both sins endangered the future by making men impotent. Teetotalling protected children from male delinquency. Hosea Munene remembered that his wife, after being 'saved' in the late 1940s, had condemned him for wasting household resources on cigarettes and beer. G. N. Muurage, writing to the Tumutumu Presbytery in 1948, argued that church should ban beer-drinking because beer led to (1) laziness
(2) weak children will be born
(3) venereal diseases will increase and there is no cure for these.

Teetotalling revivalists called beery men to account, blaming household disorder on their indolence. Gikuyu posterity was endangered by the moral decay of the time. Revivalists guarded their children against the danger by committing themselves to sober discipline and work for the future.

Committing themselves to the future, the women and men of the Revival invested in new standards of personal and corporate responsibility. As I showed above, male church elders used customary law and church courts to manage marital strife. Revivalists thought the church bureaucracy was simply an excuse for elders' greed. Tumutumu's elders in the 1940s were involved in multiple land cases, using government courts to consolidate landholdings at the expense of tenants and junior family members. Some converts thought church offering envelopes were going directly into elders' pockets. Cecilia Mugaki, shortly after being 'saved' in 1948, voiced converts' fears. She complained that receipts were rarely issued for money collected in church, that elders made decisions in private outside the hearing of other members, that leaders used church money to conduct private business or to fund land cases. Church bureaucracy looked like a means of sucking wealth out of members.

Insofar as there was a Revival 'movement' in Tumutumu in the late 1940s, it took shape orally, under the trees where converts vocally confessed their sins. Public talk, not literacy, called revivalists to Christian commitment. Many revivalists remembered being 'saved' after hearing a voice reminding them of their sins. Walter Mwangi Rurie of Murang'a, for example, was eating at table when he heard a voice tell him, 'Walter, you are full of sins – very many sins'. He lost his appetite, went to his room, and pled for forgiveness from God. While mission converts were called 'readers' in Gikuyu, revivalists called themselves ahonoku, the 'saved ones', or more tellingly, 'those who escape'. Vocal confession of sin, not skills in literacy, defined revivalist communities. They testified in public about their salvation, meeting for hours to confess their sins. Heshbon Mwangi, an early leader from Murang'a, enjoined the 'saved ones' to be forthright about their talk in 1949:

80 *TT Presbytery of Tumutumu file: Issues addressed at Tumutumu meeting, 25 Jul. 1948.*
We need to watch this pilgrimage so that Satan may not kill some of us before we reach the heavenly city ... we must not joke or talk lightly of sin or play with it. Worldly people speak soft words like butter and those who have not wisdom to discern what they are after are deceived and fall. The Lord help us to go on! Walk in the light always, make use of the precious blood that you may conquer daily and hourly in this battle.  

Revivalists at Tumutumü literally created new grammars of Christian faith and experience. Revivalists sang, in Lugandan, the hymn ‘Tukutendereza Jesu’, ‘Let us praise Jesus’, to open their meetings. The phrase became a password for the group. Missionaries reported in 1949 that revivalists used the phrase continually in conversation, greeting one another by calling ‘Tukutendereza Jesu’ and identifying other ‘saved ones’ based on their reply. Their speech was littered with the phrase Mwathani arogocwo, ‘Praise the Lord’. Revival’s critics complained that they spoke to one another in a ‘foreign dialect’ and faulted them for using the name of God over the slightest matters. Speech constituted the Revival at Tumutumü, marking converts off from the bureaucrats of the presbytery.

Revivalists’ public theology defined gendered lines of debate over conversion and church law at Tumutumü. Church elders banned the Revival from Tumutumü’s churches at the beginning of 1948. They also ruled that no members of the group could preach in church. The church cut off funding for theological students who had joined the Revival at the Protestant school in Limuru. Some elders condemned the revivalists as heretics. Others, in an internally critical accusation, called them mikora, lazy loafers or hooligans, who contributed little to the building of Gikuyu polity. Teachers in Tumutumü were warned against ‘confusing children, instead of teaching them’. The matron of the girls’ school, a convert, was disciplined for refusing to be silent. Elders worried that revivalists would corrupt the young.

What was behind Tumutumü’s ‘resistance’ to the Revival? Impressed with the Revival’s successes elsewhere in Gikuyuland, missionaries thought Tumutumü an aberration, and fretted that elders’ ‘defensive conservatism’ would split the church. But there was more than conservatism in Tumutumü elders’ reply to the vocal claims of the revivalists. Underlying Tumutumü’s sometimes violent debate over the Revival were contending theories of gender. Converts preached publicly, orally, about private wrongs, calling impotent, beery men to repentance. They thought public preaching was civic duty. Confession of private sins was for ‘those who escape’ a way of freeing themselves and their children both from the Devil and from the deadening

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87 c.f. David Karigi, in Smoker, Ambushed, 161, who in 1952 identified a group of strangers by calling ‘Tukutendereza Jesu!’ to them.
89 TT Kirk Session: minute, 21 Feb. 1948.
92 KNA MSS/3/408: Lamont to Dickson, 2 Jan. 1948.
93 TT Kirk Session: minute for 28 Feb. 1953.
grip of marital disharmony. Male elders thought revivalists' preaching would heat up private conflicts, destroying concord in the church. They used customary law and bureaucratic organizations like the Tumutumu Mercy Union to foster virtue among the young. To 'readers' committed to rebuilding Gikuyu polity through law and bureaucracy, the revivalists were importunate word-mongers. Their public speaking challenged the church bureaucracy with which readers hoped to protect Gikuyu civic order. Tumutumu's debate over the Revival was structured by converts' and readers' contending answers to the common problem of gender trouble.

DISCIPLINING REVIVAL

Worried at converts' public professions of sin, elders disputed the moral economy of speech with revivalist preachers. We can hear something of elders' worries in one elderly teacher's critical description of revivalist talk.

(The Revival) was called Ndukananderehere by detractors (You will not bring me). We hated them because of the way they used to jump and some other funny things. It was funny because it appeared like child's play. You know preaching at that time was cool. We were used to the Scottish way; the Europeans had come in a cool and decent manner. They would not speak harshly to people. They preached in a slow and orderly manner — also in a mature manner and they would not cheat you. The Revival was disruptive.94

Church elders cooled private disputes with church bureaucracy, using laws to defend against social change. Revivalists' speech tore down the hedges around literate men's households, publicizing marital conflict to invading ears. Their words were like 'child's play', the antithesis of the discipline demanded by church elders. One former deacon remembered that the revivalists 'recited Bible verses like poetry but they were empty in (their) hearts'.95 Revivalists' many words ignited private vendettas. Charles Muhoro, moderator of the Tumutumu Kirk Session, condemned the revivalists in 1950 for 'preaching because of existing disagreements'.96 Their public preaching about husbands' sins reminded some elders of the gossiping busybodies condemned in I Timothy 5.97 At some point in the 1940s, Nyeri people began using the verb goco, the root of the Revivalists' oft-repeated Mwathani arogocwo (Praise the Lord), to mean 'purposeless, idle talk; disturbing chatter causing disorder or discord'.98 Converts' public talk opened up private disputes and set husbands and wives against each other in public argument.

Elders thought women converts immoral, sexually uncontrollable. As I argued earlier, Gikuyu elders made intimate connections between vocal discipline and marital stability; soft words made for a productive house. Revivalists' airing of private matters was therefore a sexual problem, and their talk opened up the palisades around homesteads. There were rumors

98 EUL Gen 1785/1: Barlow, notes on goco.
that traveling evangelists had sexual rights to women converts. Some missionaries reported scenes of sexual license at revivalist meetings, where men led by the Holy Spirit sought out women to lie with. At least one woman, from Murang’a, recounted sexual indiscretions among converts. Tumutumu elders attacked the group for destroying women’s virtue. The synod committee appointed to investigate the revivalists in 1949 condemned the group for ‘their manner of greeting which involve kissing and hugging and ecstatic jumping’. Moreover, revivalists called each other by intimate names reserved for the closest of kin relations. As a result, the committee maintained, they broke up marriages, ‘creating strife instead of harmony between husband and wife’. ‘Their preaching is such that it could cause war’, the committee concluded.

Their public speaking and sexual indiscipline made converts into bad citizens of the nation-of-books that elders sought to create. Elders hoped to renew civic order by disciplining women and young men using customary law and church bureaucracy. Revivalists were contemptuous of church bureaucracy, disrespectful of elders’ laws. The investigating committee appointed by the Tumutumu Session criticized the Revival on 21 counts. Thirteen of the criticisms had to do with infractions against church rules. Among other wrongs, revivalists were known to meet in secret without the knowledge of chiefs, fail to show respect for church leaders, improvise new rules, refuse to obey the laws of the land and refuse to accept the benediction from the pastor at the end of the service. Revivalists were subversives.

Unwilling to recognize the necessity of church law, converts’ politics were questionable. There were rumors in 1950 that the revivalists, meeting 15,000 strong at a convention in Kabete, had sold the Nairobi City Charter to the British. At the insistence of European settlers, Nairobi had been raised to the status of a full-fledged city during Charter Week celebrations in March. Gikuyu feared that the new city would expand its boundaries 32 miles into Kiambu, alienating more land to European settlers. Stories circulated that revivalists sang so happily at the Kabete convention because they had sold Gikuyu land to the Europeans. In their irresponsible wordiness, revivalists looked like traitors, or political dupes of the whites.

Singing revivalists terrified both church elders and their political opponents, the members of the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA). From their underground headquarters at Chief Koinange’s homestead in Kiambu, KCA elders began administering oaths against the Revival in 1948, and politicians pilloried revivalists for their willful irresponsibility. One writer in the Gikuyu vernacular press condemned the Revival in this way in 1950:

100 Smoker, Ambushed, 261–3.
I ask you, how much money was raised at the (Revival) convention in Embu and Kabete when there was not enough money to finish the school at Githunguri? ... I tell you no schools have been built for us by Jesus.\textsuperscript{107}

Githunguri, the Gikuyu-run teachers’ college in the southern district of Kiambu, was the crowning achievement of KCA elders’ theory of discipline.\textsuperscript{108} Sponsored by Chief Koinange, headed by his son Mbiyu and, later, Jomo Kenyatta, the school was built in 1939 with cash from local elders and labor from young men’s age sets. The school was an effort to renew Gikuyu polity by learning the secrets of the whites. The nineteenth-century prophet Mugo wa Kibiru was its inspiration; he foretold that the coming of the Europeans would bring social decay, but if Gikuyu renewed themselves and learned foreign secrets, the whites would depart. Investing in Githunguri was a politically and morally necessary project for the KCA, a means by which to renew Gikuyu polity. The word-mongers of the Revival wasted Gikuyu resources and words on foreign gods. KCA members and church elders, usually at odds, agreed that revivalists endangered Gikuyu polity. Revival loudmouths were irresponsible, delinquent in their civic duty.

Terrified at the immorality of the Revival, Tumutumu’s church court sought to discipline the revivalists by controlling their words. Some elders attempted to prevent revivalists from meeting in private homes for prayer.\textsuperscript{109} The elders forbade the Revd. Solomon Ndambi, converted at the convention in Kabete in 1949, from talking about his experiences.\textsuperscript{110} Within months of Ndambi’s conversion, the court transferred him from Tumutumu to the faraway church in Chogoria.\textsuperscript{111} The church’s ban on revivalist speech was called the \textit{muhingo}, the closed door. Church discipline was meant to close revivalists’ mouths, stifling their public preaching of private ills. There was a second, protective meaning to the ‘closed door’. By closing converts’ mouths, church leaders hoped to rebuild the palisades guarding Gikuyu households from danger. To revivalists the \textit{muhingo} felt like dehumanizing censorship. Peterson Muchangi, nephew to Ndambi, described the ban in this way:

\textit{Ahonoku} were not allowed to speak in church – I could not even greet people, or even tell them what I am doing. It was like I was completely an outcast. So in the church we were disciplined, but when we walked out we built our church outside under the trees, and we started singing, and giving testimonies. So outside we took advantage.\textsuperscript{112}

The church’s ban on revivalists’ words was meant to silence converts, restoring marital discipline by closing their mouths. But revivalists kept talking. Banned from speaking in church, revivalists convened their meetings outside the church building. Some went further. At Kibirigwi, where this article began, revivalists broke into the church building to hold day-long

\textsuperscript{107} KNA MAC/KEN/33/1: Martin Capon (at CMS Weithaga), prayer letter, Sept. 1949–Aug. 1950.
\textsuperscript{109} KNA MSS/BS/1/8: Philp to Barlow, n.d. (but 1948).
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{SA} II/C/22: Lamont to MacPherson, 16 Sept. 1949.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{SA} II/C/22: Lamont to MacPherson, 5 Oct. 1949.
services in 1951.\textsuperscript{113} The pastor, Wanjau, suspended them from communion for six months. Incensed, revivalists spread rumors that Wanjau was a servant of the Devil.\textsuperscript{114} Wanjau was at that time deeply involved in land litigation over Tumutumu Hill.\textsuperscript{115} Some revivalists thought him a greedy sorcerer. Others thought him possessed by evil spirits, and refused to take communion from his hand. Wanjau, in reply, accused the revivalists of denigrating church sacraments. Besides, he told the Tumutumu Kirk Session, some converts had married outside the church.\textsuperscript{116} All of this was more than Christian name-calling. Driven by the contrary claims of church discipline and revivalists' theology, the Kibirigwi conflict was one of many disputes in which Gikuyu men and women argued about the Devil and church law as they debated social change.

One year after he attacked the Kibirigwi women, Wanjau himself was dead, murdered by 'Mau Mau' rebels.\textsuperscript{117} He was the only Tumutumu church pastor to perish during the emergency. Missionaries remembered him as a martyr, killed by the anti-Christian pagans of Mau Mau. Revivalists remember differently. As one old woman recalled: 'During the period of the Emergency that person who drove us away was mutilated and killed by Mau Mau. You see Mau Mau was assisting the people of God'.\textsuperscript{118}

As the incident at Kibirigwi suggests, the violence of Mau Mau was driven by longer-running struggles within Gikuyu communities over social order, church bureaucracy and Revival. For their part, Revivalists in Nyeri fought the war by refusing to bear arms for either loyalists or Mau Mau. They were pacifists because their very Gikuyu commitment to posterity led them to oppose violence, but both loyalist church elders and Mau Mau rebels thought them delinquents. Their agreement about the Revival highlights how much Christian readers and Mau Mau fighters shared. Divided by class and political allegiance, both elders and forest fighters used bureaucratic skills to create new means of measuring virtuous conduct. The famous Mwathe meeting, convened in the Aberdares Forest by the Mau Mau leader and former Tumutumu schoolgoer Dedan Kimathi in August 1952, was a rigorous lesson in book-keeping. Kimathi commanded camp leaders to keep some ten record books, noting down the names, ranks and duties of fighters.\textsuperscript{119} The books were to be kept in specially constructed memorial halls after the war was won. Mau Mau's record keeping was meant to ensure that kinless forest fighters would be remembered. As one leader put it while encouraging his fighters to keep careful records, 'if we succeed in liberating this country from European imperialism, our people will immortalize us. We will become their great ancestors'.\textsuperscript{120} Facing social extinction because of their lack of land, the young men in the forest hoped record books would

\textsuperscript{113} TT Correspondence with Kikuyu file: Calderwood to Muhoro, 17 Apr. 1951.
\textsuperscript{114} TT Marua makonii Kirk Session file: Executive Committee of Tumutumu Presbytery, 8 Apr. 1952.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{SA II/C/25}: Irvine to Lamont, 25 Apr. 1952.
\textsuperscript{117} TT Miscellaneous file: Muhoro, sermon at St Andrews, 20 Dec. 1953.
\textsuperscript{119} K. Njama, \textit{Mau Mau from Within} (New York, 1966), 246–7; see also Gucu wa Gikoyo, \textit{We Fought for Freedom} (Nairobi, 1979), 80.
\textsuperscript{120} Maina wa Kinyatti, \textit{Kimathi's Letters} (Nairobi, 1986), 26.
establish lineages of remembrance in which they would live again. Mau
Mau’s record keeping created clans of books in which they could invest their
sweat and blood.

Record books were useful for Mau Mau fighters, as for church elders,
because they established permanent records of virtuous conduct among a
people demoralized by class formation. Like brideprice registers, Mau Mau’s
record books were morally enabling; they inclined young men toward hard
work. Working for discipline using books, Mau Mau sought to control the
vocal delinquency of the revivalists. Silence was a civic duty for Mau Mau;
the ‘oath of unity’ demanded that oath-takers keep secrets from the British.
Revivalist preacher Ephantus Ngugi was slashed on the mouth and had
his front teeth knocked out by forest fighters. They also smashed his
megaphone, saying that ‘this will never speak again’.¹²¹ Mau Mau opposed
the Revival not because – as missionaries supposed – the forest fighters were
bestial anti-Christians, but because revivalists gossiped about matters best
kept from the British. During the height of Mau Mau, over a hundred
converts gathered at the Anglican mission station in Weithaga. Without even
the most elementary military protection, the revivalists were nonetheless
never attacked by the forest fighters. As the revivalist Timothy Gathu
explained, Mau Mau only fought against those who talked: ‘Mau Mau hated
being talked about ... if you were talking about them too much, then they
would fight you. If you kept silent, they wouldn’t touch you’.¹²²

Mau Mau was a moral war, fought by men and women divided in their
hopes for renewal. The violence was structured in part as a struggle over talk
and writing, contrary Gikuyu means of addressing the pressing problem of
gender chaos.¹²³

By treating conversion as a grammar of ethnic and gendered debate, I have
attempted to link the Revival to wider processes of social and economic
change in Gikuyuland. Such a perspective could usefully be employed to
examine revivalist thought elsewhere in eastern Africa. It is presumably not
coincidental that the marked growth of the Revival in Rwanda, Uganda and
Tanzania in the 1940s and 1950s coincided with the ‘second colonial
occupation’, the program of soil conservation and rural land conservation in
which the British intervened to manage peasants’ livelihoods. It is equally
improbable that processes of rural class formation throughout post-war East
Africa were unconnected with the popularization of revivalist theology. How
Africans commented on these deeply disturbing economic processes in and
through their conversion remains an important subject for further research.

¹²¹ Smoker, Ambushed, 111.
¹²³ For which, see J. Smith, ‘Njama’s supper: The consumption and use of literary
potency by Mau Mau insurgents in colonial Kenya’, Comparative Studies in Society and
History, 40 (June 1998), 524–48; and D. Peterson, ‘Writing in revolution: Moral renewal
and the bureaucratic politics of Mau Mau’, in Peterson, ‘Writing Gikuyu’.