

Language as an Ultra Human Power and the Authority of Leaders as Marginal Men : Rethinking Kipsigis Administrative Chiefs in the Colonial Period

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Language as an Ultra-Human Power and the Authority of Leaders as Marginal Men: Rethinking Kipsigis Administrative Chiefs in the Colonial Period

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It is generally said that the British colonial government appointed minor and lesser known persons to positions of chief and headman, as the Kipsigis of southwestern Kenya wanted to hold their traditional leaders in reserve so that they could be consulted in times of need. This essay reconsiders the attribution and authority of both colonial and traditional Kipsigis leaders: were colonial Kipsigis chiefs and headmen really unimportant and peripheral among the Kipsigis in the early stages of colonial days? On the other hand, were the traditional leaders, in fact, very important and central among them? In fact, both types of Kipsigis leaders have marginality in common for two reasons. Firstly, many were from several marginal clans such as those originating from captured and adopted individuals from hostile tribes such as the Gusii and the Masai. Moreover, most were not only bilingual but also so skilful in persuading both their own people in ethnic meetings as well as enemies in inter-ethnic peace negotiations that their speech often made them look like the "playful persons" or tricksters of Kipsigis folk tales.

The Kipsigis regard language as a mighty ultra-human power. They believe in the "reincarnation" of an ancestral spirit in a newborn baby, or, at least, they give it the name of a clan's ancestor in memory of the person. Language, however, can be invoked for malicious as well as beneficial purposes. The effect of speech can change according to the various modes of expression, including praying, blessing, cursing, taking an oath, bewitching, etc. Moreover, as an autonomous ultra-human power, it may sometimes severely affect people regardless and independent of the utterer's initial intention. Thus, the Kipsigis believe, it is always desirable for an ordinary person not to talk much lest he should cause unintended mishaps to him and/or someone unknown.

Both traditional and colonial leaders were excessively talkative due to the very nature of their posts. This doubled their marginality and ambivalence concerning social justice. Therefore, the public always tried to control the leader's authority through communal cursing directed by the elders belonging to particular clans that specialize in cursing. These clans are among those who are regarded by the Kipsigis to be the backbone of society. In short, the traditional political structure of the Kipsigis was dynamically balanced between the potential antagonism between opposite and interdependent categories of people: i.e. those who took the roles of leaders owing to their marginality and

the public as the central existence of the people, and also between the opposite and interdependent powers of operating language: i.e. professional and tactical speech and defensive communal cursing.

The traditional political structure was hardly touched in essence even when the British colonial government and the Kipsigis themselves chose "minor" or "obscure" individuals as colonial chiefs, as long as they were chosen owing to their marginality and ambivalence. This being the case, British indirect rule was rather successful despite the fact that the Kipsigis had traditionally no centralized authority which might effectively assume the chieftainship on behalf of the British colonial government.

Indeed, in due course of time, the Kipsigis people rapidly adjusted to the colonial and capitalistic economy so well that they soon became labeled a "show tribe" of Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

With the colonization of Kenya by Great Britain, an administrative chief system was introduced to the Kipsigis people of Southwestern Kenya that, to the surprise of many, worked rather well. This paper analyzes various factors responsible for this outcome, and through such analyses, reexamines attributes of the administrative chieftainship and the traditional leadership of the Kipsigis.

Moreover, the paper will provide a tentative model for the correlation between the various forms of language usage and political structures in a non-centralized traditional society in Eastern Africa.

1. INDIRECT RULE AND TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

1) General View of Indirect Rule

The management styles of colonial settlements by European countries are usually classified into direct and indirect rule.

It is said that indirect rule, as represented by British colonial rule, was most effective among peoples who traditionally had had a rather powerful centralized political mechanism and that it was not always successful with peoples not having had such a system.

This view has been supported widely by historians, economists, and political scientists. Furthermore, cultural and/or social anthropologists have repeatedly expressed their support for this view as if it were an axiom. The following excerpts of two anthropologists' accounts illustrate this tendency.

The British administrative policy of indirect rule, intended to preserve indigenous political institutions in the interests of a more economical and humane foreign control, could succeed fully only in states where native rulers had already acquired considerable powers of coercion. Elsewhere chiefs confirmed in office because they appeared to enjoy popular confidence were ground between the upper millstone of a colonial government and the lower of

their own people. [LIENHARDT 1964: 69]

Where there are no indigenous chiefs, the Government has no machinery to work through, since it cannot handle the allegiances of kinship groups and of religious congregations. Where Governments appointed their own chiefs, these were not restrained by indigenous sanctions, and often became rank exploiters of their fellows. Moreover, they were not part of the indigenous cross-cutting alliances. They were regarded as tools of Government, and became the first objects of attack, as among the Ibo (of Nigeria) in 1929—and possibly now among the Kikuyu (of Kenya). [GLUCKMAN 1956: 80]

Let us now consider whether this stereotyped view can be applied as well to the Kipsigis of Kenya. This shall be examined roughly in the next chapter, although doing so may preempt the argument of this entire paper.

2) Indirect Rule over the Kipsigis

In the political structure of the Kipsigis at the time of its colonization in 1905, a combined system of age-sets and age-grades served as the frame of reference regulating the social status and roles of individuals as well as social behavior, as in the case of the Gikuyu (Kikuyu) of Kenya. On the other hand, while each Gikuyu clan owned a clearly defined territory, none of the numerous, separate, small agnatic Kipsigis clans did. In other words, the Kipsigis clans were not localized at all. Each member of a Kipsigis clan could locate his habitat wherever he wished in the vast Kipsigisland providing the immediate neighborhood accepted him. Cooperation among clansmen, in theory the most important social group, was not always a reality for the scattered Kipsigis. The basic political and economic unit of the Kipsigis was in practice not the clan, but rather a neighborhood (*kokwet*) consisting of small families, which were components of various clans. A neighborhood had an independent council of elders (also called *kokwet*), the primary legal and political organization.

In the case of the Nuer of the Sudan, who had a combined system of age-sets and age-grades similar to the Kipsigis as their primary social integration principle, a consistent segmental lineage principle based on segmentation and fusion of a fictitious patrilineage can be found in its political structure [EVANS-PRITCHARD 1947]. A Kipsigis, on the other hand, actually knows or hears of only some of clans with whom he was friendly and of those to which his affines belong. Although each of the Kipsigis clans is usually small and segments into a few sub-clans (*oltanyit*), it does not have a multiple segmental lineage structure (cf. [EVANS-PRITCHARD 1940]). Generally, the Kipsigis can trace back to three or four generations of ancestors, their genealogy consciousness not being deep.

It can be said that the Kipsigis constituted a rough alliance of presumably over 200 non-localized exogamous agnatic clans. Among them, the combined system of age-grades, based on a foundation of the entire people, cross-cutting clans and neighborhoods, was the central organization for the integration of their ethnic society.¹⁾

The Kipsigis was a society established upon an acephalous political mechanism, and had several types of traditional leaders, such as elders of rituals, war-leaders and advisory judges, who exercised *ad-hoc* authority only in specific extraordinary situations, such as important ceremonies including initiation rites, warfare, and peace negotiation. Such temporary and situational leaders were selected from among members of an age-set occupying an age-grade suitable for power at that time in compliance with the common law regulations.

When the British Colonial Government attempted introduction of the administrative chief system to the Kipsigis, however, leaders recommended by the Kipsigis, at the request of the Colonial Government, as administrative chiefs or headmen were not experienced exercising traditional authority. Instead, they recommended, as mentioned later, "lesser known and even obscure individuals" [MANNERS 1967: 321], whom the Colonial Government appointed as new administrative leaders of the Kipsigis (see Chapter 4, Section 2 for details).

In connection with the general view concerning the success and failure of indirect rule, mentioned earlier, it is assumed that the social condition of the Kipsigis in the early colonization period was such that the British Colonial Government held rather pessimistic prospects for ruling it. Certainly some measure of confusion and friction took place in the early stages. Despite such initial difficulties, however, the administrative chief system not only won relatively smooth acceptance by the Kipsigis but functioned considerably well, eventually leading the Kipsigis to be considered "a show tribe" [MANNERS 1967: 208] of the modernization of East Africa. Now comes the question: how did this come about?

3) The Purpose and Method of This Paper

To answer the question posed at the end of the preceding section, careful and

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- 1) Early administrative documents suggest that the British Colonial Government was not able to substantially understand how the non-centralized Kipsigis were unified. The word *emet*, meaning a great geographical region with almost no political or social significance, was incorrectly taken to mean "tribe". As a result, residents of the three great geographical regions (*emotinwek*) of Kipsigisland, Belgut, Buret and Sot were taken to be of three respective "tribes", the Belgut, the Buret and the Sot. In 1905, the Colonial Government sent a punitive expedition to the residents of Sot who cooperated for the anti-British war of the Nandi. According to Kipsigis folklore, soon after that, the British questioned Kipsigis people living in Belgut and Buret whether they were of the same tribe as "the Sot" and told them that, if so, they could be punished the same way they would. Upon this warning, large meetings were held in Belgut and Buret, where it was reconfirmed that the Kipsigis in Belgut and Buret were indivisible from those in Sot. Therefore, people in Belgut and Buret willingly let the British confiscate a large herd of livestock from them. This punitive act severely damaged the Kipsigis livestock-based economy, from which it took a long while for them to recover. Since then, the Colonial Government recognized the Kipsigis as a single ethnic group and governed them as such. At the heart of this incident was the reestablishment of their unity by the Kipsigis based on their compatibility with the British conceptual framework of "tribe".

detailed study and analysis of administrative documents of the colonial era filed at the Kenya National Archives and elsewhere will be necessary at some point. It is not, however, the immediate purpose of this paper. The author, at present, intends not only to describe and analyze the administrative history of the Kipsigis but also to present a hypothesis for understanding characteristics of their political structure common to both the pre- and post-colonization eras.

The author shall find in the attribute of marginality of authority of the leaders, whether traditional or modern, part of the reason the administrative chief system functioned quite effectively. The author shall also demonstrate, from the standpoint of a research in symbolism, that the attribute of their marginality is indivisibly connected to the Kipsigis's concept of language as ultra-human power. The purpose of this paper, through doing this, is to get a firm grasp of various aspects of the political structure of the Kipsigis society, especially the power structure of its leaders.

Specifically, points that the author wishes to make can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Were the individuals appointed as administrative chiefs and headmen among the Kipsigis really of lesser standing? Moreover, is it true that "they were not restrained by indigenous sanction?" Is it also true that "they were not part of the indigenous cross-cutting alliances?"
- 2) From the opposite point of view, did the traditional leaders, as scholars have vaguely assumed, really embody the central values of the ethnic group, therefore enjoying stable authority and popular respect, unlike the colonial-era administrative chiefs?
- 3) Could essential commonalities exist between the traditional leaders and the administrative chiefs of the Kipsigis in terms of their position within the

2) The author conducted social anthropological field research on the Kipsigis at five different times: July, 1979–March, 1980; July, 1981–January, 1982; November, 1983–March, 1984; July–October, 1984; September, 1986–March, 1987. The first two were conducted as part of the Hitotsubashi University-sponsored "A Comprehensive Research Based on Ethnohistorical Techniques on the Composite Societies in the Circum-Lake Victoria Area"—a project carried out under the Japanese Ministry of Education's Grant-in-aid for Scientific Research Overseas (research representative: Professor Nobuhiro Nagashima, Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo). The fifth research was conducted during the author's stay in Kenya as the senior resident of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), Nairobi Office. The author also conducted social anthropological field research on the Kalenjin-speaking Terik and the Tiriki, a group of the Bantu-speaking Luhya, from September, 1987 to March, 1988 in Southwestern Kenya. During this period, the author made several short visits to the kipsigis people for supplementary research. The research on the Terik and the Tiriki was carried out as part of the Saitama University-sponsored "Comparative Studies on Socio-Cultural Changes in Western Kenya" (research representative: Professor Toshiharu Abe, Saitama University, Japan)—also a project carried out under the Japanese Ministry of Education's Grant-in-aid for Scientific Research Overseas.

political structure of the ethnic society?

- 4) Could the possible commonalities between them derive from their status as unrestricted manipulators of language as ultra-human power, especially over social justice, and the marginality of their social existence which the leaders assumed because of their status?

From the next chapter the author shall develop the argument based on these points, referring to the author's field notes as the main source of data as well as papers by other researchers.²⁾

2. THE KIPSIGIS—HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE: A SUMMARY

1) Migration and the Traditional Living Structure

The Kipsigis are an ethnic group (so-called "tribe") with the largest population (estimated at nearly 1 million)³⁾ among Kalenjin-speaking peoples who belong to the Southern Para-Nilotes.⁴⁾ The main groups of the Kalenjin (-speaking) people live in the Rift Valley Province and some at the eastern foot of Mt. Elgon stretching over the boundaries of Kenya and Uganda. The Kipsigis are the southernmost group among them. Although they continued southward migration well into the 20th century, colonization stopped this movement. At that time, the plateau they had owned, 1,600–2,000 meters above sea level on the equator, was divided in half into King's Land, a settlement for whites, and a habitat for the Kipsigis named Lumbwa Native Reserve.⁵⁾ Today's Kericho District of the Rift Valley Province, where the bulk of the Kipsigis people live, consists of the former Lumbwa Native Reserve and the alienated land.

Although the Kipsigis were semi-nomadic pastoralists who also conducted supplementary slash-and-burn farming before the colonization, they were forced to settle owing to the land policies accompanying the colonization. In the beginning of the 1920s, young men educated in Christian mission schools were awakened to the concept of private land ownership started marking off their land, [MANNERS 1967: 286]. This movement of marking off one's land spread over Kipsigisland by

3) Population data of individual ethnic groups (*ditto*) of the Kalenjin cluster were available up until the Kenya National Census of 1969 since various kalenjin ethnic groups were recorded separately. In 1979 and 1989 Censuses, however, all kalenjin ethnic groups are recorded as one, i.e. the Kalenjin; therefore, official population data of the Kipsigis and other Kalenjin ethnic groups are not available. The results of 1989 Census have not yet published.

4) J. Greenberg classified kalenjin languages, including Kipsigis, as Nilotic language. In this paper, however, his purely linguistic classification is not adopted since it is deemed more appropriate to consider geographical proximity and cultural similarity as well for social and cultural comparison, an objective of this paper.

5) Lumbwa is a misnomer for Kipsigis [cf. HUNTINGFORD 1969: 10]—cf. note 19. The Reserve was later renamed Kipsigis Reserve.

around the end of the 1940s. The Kipsigis primarily consider themselves a cattle-raising people and maintain a cattle-complexed culture even today, although they also rely on maize, tea and pyrethrum for their living [KOMMA 1983a].⁶⁾

The core of the Kipsigis is said to have been a group belonging to the Miot, a people who had migrated from their birthplace called Too (Lit. stranger) to Burgei (Lit. hot [place]) and then moved southward to their present habitat. The history of the Kipsigis ethnic formation has many obscure areas. The historical process of the Kipsigis migration can be surmised not only from their own folklore but also from the folklore of other Kalenjin-speaking peoples and neighboring ethnic groups which had contact with them. Although even some archaeological data is available, it is extremely difficult to clearly define each stage of the formation. As is the case, the following is only a tentative hypothesis.

The Proto-Kalenjin started moving southward from somewhere around the present Sudan-Uganda border in the 17th century, stayed for a while near Kamalinga, and later settled on the eastern slope of Mt. Elgon on the Kenya-Uganda border. In the late 17th century, a group of the Proto-Kalenjin migrated southeastward from there to a mountainous region called the Mau bamboo forest in Southwestern Kenya. This group became Proto-Kipsigis. They hid in the Mau forest for a while owing to oppression by the Masai but resumed their southward migration in the 18th century. After repeated wars against the already-settled Bantu-speaking Gusii (Kisii), the Nile-speaking Luo and the Para-Nile-speaking Masai, the Kipsigis gradually expanded their exclusive territory. By the end of the 19th century their territory included the present Kericho District and the surrounding grazing lands. It is assumed that in the process they absorbed numerous sub-groups of the Ogiek (a group of the so-called Ndorobo), which could have been an aboriginal mountains hunter-gatherer people, and even incorporated a considerable portion of the Gusii, who surrendered to them. The population of the Kipsigis is said to have reached some tens of thousands in the beginning of the 20th century [HUNTINGFORD 1969: 40].

Around the time of colonization and even at present, the foundation of the Kipsigis people's daily social and economic activities was the neighborhood (*kokwet*). In the early days, a neighborhood was founded on a highland (*masop*) with relatively cold weather and a large rainfall. One neighborhood usually consisted of 10 to no more than 100 small households. Instead of forming a village, houses were built away from one another, within farmland used by each

6) Economic dependence on livestock farming is greater in the southern Kipsigisland, climate and soil conditions of which are not always suited for tea growing, as compared to the northern and central Kipsigisland, where tea growing is active. In the author's main research field, Chepalungu Division, and so-called "Kipsigis's Masai area" in the Narok District and the southern Sot Division, cash crop cultivation is mostly undeveloped. A household survey the author conducted in Chepalungu revealed that maize growing was almost of subsistence scale and that cash income came mostly from the sale of milk and livestock.

household. Since the Kipsigis population was small at that time, it can be said that neighborhoods were scattered about like isolated islands in the "sea" of the vast Kipsigisland—cf. [PERISTIANY 1939: 126].

Kipsigis women lived with elders and young children in the neighborhood, growing eleusine and sorghum on small farms by the burned-field method. Elders were solely responsible for the neighborhood's legal and religious functions and spent their time chiefly drinking locally-brewed beer with no involvement in labor except occasionally tending a few cows. Children cared for goats and sheep. Married warriors also lived in the neighborhood, protecting people and livestock from enemies and wild animals.

Eldest boys were responsible for raising the cattle, the most valuable livestock. They set up a cattle-grazing camp by the neighborhood on relatively dry pasture (*soin*) at a distance of a half to a full-day's travel from the neighborhood, gradually moving the camp in search of water and grass. There, cattle were not kept in mass, but each household took care of its own herd. Unmarried warriors lived with boys at the grazing-camp to protect the boys and the cattle from enemies and wild animals. The important role for eldest girls was to periodically shuttle between the neighborhood and the grazing-camp to bring milk and lifeblood of the cattle to the neighborhood and powdered grain to the camp.

2) Important Leaders

The most important social organization unifying the Kipsigis as an ethnic group (so-called "tribe") and structuring their society was the combined system of age-sets and age-grades. The Nandi, a "brother tribe" whom the Kipsigis called and who lived adjacently northwest, had a combined system of age-sets and age-grades almost identical to that of the Kipsigis. A variety of literature states that the Nandi opened one age-set every 15 years, using as an indicator the forest creeper *setiot*, which blooms all at once every 7 or 8 years [HUNTINGFORD 1953, 1969]. The Kipsigis, on the other hand, according to the author's own investigation as well as other data [ORCHARDSON 1961: 12], did not seem to adjust the timing of opening an age-set with *setiot* creeper blooming. While Orchardson hypothesized that an age-set was opened every 21 years [ORCHARDSON 1961: 125], various documents discussing the Kipsigis do not have identical years for the opening of an age-set, and furthermore, the intervals were irregular and described as 15 or 20 years, [DOBBS 1921; BARTON 1923; PERISTIANY 1939]. In fact, the Kipsigis age-set system consisted of co-existing seven age-sets formed in order at intervals and given fixed titles which appeared cyclically in accordance with the passage of time.

Roughly speaking, when a new age-set started forming and was completed in several year's time, the members of this age-set occupied the age-grade of warriors while the members of the age-set which had occupied the warrior grade assumed the age-grade of elders, along with members of other, much older age-sets. Those in the age-grade of boys did not have an age-set of their own yet.

Warriors of each neighborhood formed a "platoon" which had a *kiptaiyatap*

murenik, or "leader of warriors." This "platoon" was the minimum and maximum defense unit for each neighborhood. There was a far larger organization for offensive actions against other ethnic groups. "Platoons" of several adjacent neighborhoods formed a military "company" with a *kiptaiyatap boriet*, or "leader of the army." This leader was known in a considerably wide area, and each "company" was named after its leader as "so-and-so's *boriet*."

The Kipsigis have the concept of "great region" (*emet*), which is a simple geographical division without political or social meaning. Before the colonization, Kipsigisland was composed of three "great regions," namely Belgut, Buret and Sot. A "battalion" roughly corresponded to each "great region" and was under the control of one of three "great leaders of the army" (*kiptaiyat neo nebo boriosiek*). However, there was generally no warrior leader at a higher rank who would give commands to the "great leaders of the army" of the three great regions (*emotinwek*).

Although the combined system of age-sets and age-grades served as a principle of military organization, the correspondence between age-set and age-grade was not necessarily rigid in practice. Members of the warrior age-grade mainly constituted an advance guard (*ng'oimetiet*) and a rear guard (*oldimdo*). Meanwhile, a unit called *birtich* was positioned in the middle of the rank and its special role was to plunder enemy livestock while protected by the advance and rear guards. *Birtich* could sometimes include male adult members of the age-set which had just retired from the warrior age-grade, and it is said that at times even eldest boys were included in this unit for major wars.

A "leader of warriors" was chosen from members of the age-set which had just retired from the warrior age-grade, and at times from members of the age-set corresponding to the warrior age-grade. A "leader of the army" and a "great leader of the army" were usually chosen from members of the age-set which corresponded to the elder age-grade. When a "great leader of the army" or a popular "leader of the army" were no longer able to participate in warfare owing to physical disability, they were almost automatically made *kirwogindet*, which may be translated as "advisory judge."⁷⁾ The role of advisory judge (*kirwogindet*) was different from warrior leaders in that an advisory judge did not have a specific area under his jurisdiction. Instead, an advisory judge visited any of the neighborhood when requested and served the council of elders of a given neighborhood as an arbitrator, his main political function.

7) The title *kirwogindet* derives from the verb *ruoch*, which means to discuss or to take council, or the verb *ruokin*, which means to arrange, to settle, or to adjudicate [ORCHARDSON 1961: 17]. As quoted below (Section 2 of Chapter 6), Peristiany called the council of elders established in each neighborhood "council of *kapkiruok*" [PERISTIANY 1939: 180]; however, *kapkiruok* is actually the noun for the place where elders of a neighborhood do *ruoch* or *ruokin*. Kalenjin ethnic groups used to have one *kapkiruok* at a specific place for each neighborhood, but the Kipsigis had not a fixed place for *kapkiruok* but instead chose an appropriate place in the shade of a tree each time elders gathered for discussion.

The power given to the warrior leaders at all levels was so great that they were even allowed to eliminate any warrior who disturbed group unity in wartime. Their authority was, however, strictly limited to wartime; in everyday situations, all male adults had equal rights and duties. A neighborhood council of elders, basically consisting of all equal male adults of the neighborhood, represented the legal functions of the Kipsigis. The council of elders took up and discussed all matters relevant to the neighborhood as a whole and its constituent individuals, ranging from neighborhood management such as cooperative work and coordination of farming areas among household to the investigation of causes of discord, misfortune and sickness in a certain household, natural disasters and epidemics, as well as countermeasures for them. The council of elders also had judicial functions in the neighborhood, playing a highly important role in solving disputes between individuals and families.

Each Kipsigis neighborhood has a "leader of neighborhood" (*kiptaiyatap kokwet*) alias "elder of neighborhood" (*boiyotap kokwet*). Those who bear such titles are in effect the neighborhood peacemakers. At the time of a dispute within the neighborhood, for example, they listen to those involved and make every effort to persuade them to settle the matter privately. Their arbitration efforts are usually exhaustive before summoning the council of neighborhood elders. The "leader of neighborhood" also chairs the council of elders and plays the part of arbitrator.

Disputes among the Kipsigis are characterized by the lack of political dynamics between clans in the council of elders deliberations since disputes are limited to interpersonal and inter-family relationships. This is because clans of the Kipsigis are small in scale and the foundation of daily cooperation is virtually the neighborhood rather than clans, whose members are usually scattered around the vast Kipsigisland owing to neolocality after marriage as the residence rule.

Previously, when a council of elders encountered great difficulty solving a dispute or when members of two or more neighborhoods were involved, it was customary to invite one or more advisory judges from outside the concerned neighborhoods for a joint-council of elders. After the council of elders gave judgement, an ox was sacrificed for the council attendants to eat together—today, they drink (locally-brewed) beer instead. After such procedures, no one was

8) The author agrees on many points with Orchardson and Lang'at rather than Peristiany. Peristiany wrote that many neighborhoods cooperated for defense and that each fixed cluster of neighborhoods has a "leader of warriors," and "advisory judge" and a "ceremonial elder" (*boiyotap tumdo*), who exercised authority in the areas of military, politics, and religion, respectively [PERISTIANY 1939: 164 *et al.*]. Actually, Peristiany's description on the whole—and especially that of the Kipsigis language—has quite a few errors and much confusion. For example, simple observational errors shown above include the following: he confused an insignificant practician, "blessor" (*kibisio*, alias *boiyotap ko-mda*; lit. meaning an "elder of *komda*-type guard"), with a "ceremonial elder" (*boiyotap tumdo*). Peristiany generally has the tendency to excessively categorize the social and political structure of the Kipsigis society with segmental diagrams.

allowed to protest the decision. If someone appealed, he was labeled as an "unnatural-doer" (*kipsagarindet*) and shunned as if he was a witch or some evil.

The leaders of the Kipsigis, not only warrior leaders of different levels but leaders of other kinds as well, had specific functions and titles, but their authority was limited and did not extend to all daily situations. Moreover, they did not receive any special remuneration for their work, and these leaders did not differ from others in terms of assets, clothing, accessories and so forth. According to Peristiany, however, advisory judges were the only leaders with an obvious outward characteristic which differentiated them from others [PERISTIANY 1939: 179]. He said that since an advisory judge carried a whisk of wildebeest tail (*saruriat*) he was also called "whisk-holder" (*kipsaruriat*).⁸⁾

3. LANGUAGE AS ULTRA-HUMAN POWER

Among the Kipsigis, the selection of warrior leaders was based on individual abilities and achievements, disregarding family background. The primary attributes sought were bravery and eloquence. Positive recognition of bravery, and even ferocity were formal to the Kipsigis, who upheld self-sufficiency of clan and neighborhood as the fundamental social principle. On the other hand, behind the attitude of giving more weight to eloquence, or skillful manipulation of language and persuasion than to bravery is the Kipsigis's view that language (*ng'alek*) is an autonomous power transcending its user. Because of this, it is necessary to have a general view of their concept of language to understand Kipsigis leaders' attributes correctly.

1) Language as the Power to Turn Man into a Human Being

The kipsigis believe in the existence of ultra-human powers such as god, ancestral spirits, and witchcraft [KOMMA 1983b]. Language is one such form of ultra-human power and is believed to be essential part of human curses, oaths (*mumek*), blessings and prayers.

According to an idea first proposed by Durkheim and now widely accepted in anthropology, language precedes individuals as an *a priori* entity. It exists outside his psychology and binds him while heavily relying on him as a typical form of collective representation which expresses itself through an individual in his life. Thus, it can be said that language exists beyond individuals and is an ultra-human power which transforms an individual from a biological species (i.e. man) into a social existence (i.e. human being).

Here, the author notes not a ultra-human aspects of language as an analytical entity understood on the part of a researcher, but rather the following important fact: the Kipsigis themselves recognize language as a unique power existing beyond individuals. Therefore, they believe that words, once spoken, will faithfully realize the content of the speech regardless of the true intension of the speaker or the recipient of the speech.

The Kipsigis believe that language ability makes humans unique. According to them, although both humans and animals have life (*sopondo*), animals do not have soul (*atondoiyet*). A specific example they cite to prove this point is the fact that animals do not use language, i.e. they do not address one another by names [KOMMA 1987a: 4].

When a human dies physically, his or her soul (*atondoiyet*) leaves the body, enters the world of ancestral spirits and becomes an ancestral spirit (*oindet*). The ancestral spirit eventually enters, with the first inspiration, the newborn's body, an agnatic descendant of the same sex as the spirit's, thus becoming the infant's soul [KOMMA 1987a]. This idea is typically represented in the ritual of giving a newborn the name of the ancestral spirit recognized to have entered its body as one of its childhood names, i.e. an ancestral name (*kainetap kurennet* or *kainetap oiik*). In this ceremony, old women of the infant's clan, namely old women who married into the clan, recite the names of its agnatic ancestors of the same sex as the infant's one by one immediately after its birth. Eventually the infant gives its first sneeze, and it is decided that the ancestral spirit whose name was being recited at that moment entered the infant's body and become its soul. This is because the newborn's very first sneeze is believed to be a response from the infant (that is, the ancestral spirit which has become its soul) to the old women's temptation. While people call the infant by one of its childhood names, including this ancestral name, family members and kinsmen address the infant by relation terminology such as "Father" or "Grandfather," in accordance with their relationship to the ancestor who has become the infant's soul.⁹⁾

One function of this custom is to show the ancestral spirits through concrete daily action that their existence is continuously kept in descendants' memory and thus they continue to be clan members. It is also believed to comfort amoral ancestral spirits who try to gain descendants attention by whimsically tampering with them to cause sickness or misfortune. As well, it is possible to note the social function of frequent reference to ancestors fosters family and clan unity [KOMMA 1982a].

Therefore, it is believed among the Kipsigis that language is the power which

9) It is necessary here to briefly explain the technical terms, ghost and ancestral spirit. Fortes, for example, distinguished ancestral cult from ghost cult from a structural/functional viewpoint. According to him, ancestral cult is characterized by the ambiguous relationship between neighboring generations as its central factor and direct descendants, excluding affines, as worshippers. It is safe to say that ancestral spirit is the conceptualization of the dead, set up as the worshiped, while ghost is the conceptualization of the dangerous dead whose favor toward the living must be maintained by gift-giving [FORTES 1965]. The Kipsigis view of spirit, on the other hand, is monistic: the dead are all believed to become *oindet* (pl. *oiik*). *Oindet* roughly corresponds to Fortes's ancestral spirit, but it also has a ghost-like aspect, beside the protective aspect of ancestral spirit, in that Kipsigis people fear and appease *oindet*. Thus analytical understanding of the concept of *oindet* poses a major theme; however, for convenience' sake, *oindet* is translated as ancestral spirit in this paper.

turns man into humans, i.e. the power which makes man a social or cultural existence as well as a power allowing inter-generation communication between a clan's living members and those in the world of ancestral spirits.

2) Language and Taboo

While considered a strong ultra-human power with aspects beyond human control, language is also championed and revered as a power making humans what they are. Once vocalized by the human mouth, words are believed to be able to faithfully realize the content of the speech, controlled by the speech form, regardless of the real intention of the speaker. Therefore, words should always be given great care and used in the most appropriate manner and with due formalities. According to this language concept, a person not careful with language usage is seen as likely to bring about unexpected misfortune, not only on himself but also others. Such a person is not only looked down on by others but feared and even abhorred.

One focus of language taboo was on the respect-avoidance relationships based on the genealogical generation among a particular person, his immediate family, kin and affines. Among them, for example, there were complicated rules governing the mutual use of a person's names in several categories for different situations. These rules were also mutually applied among clan members, i.e. "extended family," so to speak. Furthermore, there was a rule concerning the organization of the age-set system by which a son (at least the eldest son) had to belong to the age-set second from his father's. The respect-avoidance relationship between a father and children also extended to the two age-sets to which the father and the children belonged, respectively. As a result, a language taboo based on the respect-avoidance relationship between a given set of father and his children extended to the entire Kipsigis people, influencing every corner and nook of their daily life.

Even today, a taboo concerning the use of individual names is partially maintained. For example, the name of a dead person should not be spoken until his ancestral spirit reincarnates in the body of a family's newborn. Instead, he must be referred to as a "person of yesterday" (*chichigonye*); otherwise, it is believed, the dead spirit attaches himself to this world and haunts the family, bringing about misfortune or illness to family members.

In the past as well, language taboo extended beyond interpersonal relationships to relationships between humans and animals. It was believed, for example, that such fierce animals as elephants, lions, rhinoceroses, African buffaloes, leopards, hyenas and ratsel's would become extremely violent if one spoke their names a short distance from them, and people nearest to such animals were sure to be attacked by them. Because of this belief, an elephant (*beliot* or *ongenyot*), for example, was referred to as *kiptechit* (lit. honorable one), the secret word for elephant [cf. ORCHARDSON 1961: 26, 89]. A similar taboo was applied to an imaginary, halfman-like gigantic monster called *chemosit*, referred to as "that one" (*kononet*) in similar situations [ORCHARDSON 1961: 26]. For another example, when a waterbuck (*kipsomberut*) was close to a herd of goats and/or sheep, or when goats

and sheep were kept inside a pen or a house, a waterbuck had to be referred to as “*chemokemwa*,” or “the one which must not be talked about” because it was believed that otherwise the goat and sheep fur would become coarse and gray like that of the waterbuck [cf. ORCHARDSON 1961: 89; HOLLIS 1909: 24].

A similar practice of language taboo was also applied to the “power” which inflicted illness and injuries on humans. It was believed that when someone contracted anthrax (*brasta* or *kiptegoit*), the disease most feared by Kipsigis, it must be called by the secret code, *kuserwet* (meaning a type of small, soft shrub), or the patient would never be cured [ORCHARDSON 1961: 124]. For another example, when a thorn of bracken (*birirwet* and *tilowet*) became stuck in arms or legs, it had to be referred to not as a bracken thorn but as a simple thorn (*katet*); otherwise, it was believed, the bracken would break into pieces in the body and could never be removed, thus causing the wound to fester [ORCHARDSON 1961: 89]. These are only a few examples of the language taboo the Kipsigis applied to various daily situations.

3) The Language of Adults and the Language of Children

Riddle (*tang’ochik*) is the play in which the logical gap or loophole connoted in a given word is intentionally expanded. Kipsigis children love to play riddles by the fireside at night. However, the Kipsigis strongly abhor the engagement by those who have been circumcised, i.e. who have gone through initiation and thus become adults, in the game of riddles or riddle-like logic since it is considered an extremely dangerous act which nullifies and confuses the distinction of most important human categories, adult and child. An adult who speaks in a riddle-like manner or attempts childlike activities is called “riddle player” (*kiptangoiyan*) and is detested by people.¹⁰

As well, adults and children sing songs differently. Before circumcision-initiation children sing songs in high-pitched sounds at the top of their lungs whereas post-circumcision-initiation adults must sing in their deep, low-keyed natural voice.

It is also believed that even innocent acts by children can bring about an unexpectedly horrible outcome if proper speech manners are not followed. For example, if there is a man to whom many children have been born, but only children of one sex grow up suspicion arises that either he or his wife, when children, said something impertinent such as, “When I grow up and get married, I don’t want a son (daughter).” Such an utterance is suspected to be the primary cause of misfortune, and people try to ascertain the fact. Underlying this idea is

10) Conversely, there is a manipulative ritualistic speech form with which an adult describes what he regrets to have done deliberately as child’s play or a riddle (*tang’oi*), thus nullifying the destructive effect of his act. The phrase to be used for a person who begs forgiveness after official procedures of apology is usually fixed as follows: “Let’s say that was child’s play (*tang’oi*); (I have) no word (*Momi ng’ala*, meaning “no problem”).”

the belief that such misfortune is caused by adult-like speech by children, an act that disturbs the adult-child distinction of human categories as well as an improper approach to language.¹¹⁾

Kiperenge is one nickname given to uncircumcised Kipsigis boys. Its origin is almost unknown today, although Huntingford reported that the nickname was also known among the Nandi, with an intriguing comment as follows [HUNTINGFORD 1927: 437]:

“Kiperenge” is a common nickname given to uncircumcised boys; I have never heard of it as a patronymic (“arap Kiperenge”)...It is said that “Kiperenge” means “Chatterer,” and that it is a Kipsikis word. It is possible that it is derived a stem occurring in *eren* (snake) and *erengatia* (spear); the latter may be resolved into *eren* and *kat* (neck), *eren* signifying something that pricks like a snake or spear. The meaning of “Kiperenge” will thus be *eren* (prick) and *ke* (reflexive suffix): he who pricks or injures himself by talking.

The author does not have the ability to determine whether the etymological interpretation in this comment by Huntingford is accurate or not; however, it indicates clearly that the Nandi, the most intimate “brother ethnic group” of the Kipsigis with whom the Kipsigis have been maintaining a strong alliance since the dawn of history, showed a keen interest in the strange nickname “Kiperenge,” believed to be of Kipsigis origin. It may be just as possible that Huntingford’s etymological interpretation was based on the folk-etymology of the Nandi. If so, the above quotation has in a sense great importance beyond linguistic propriety—because it is an ethno-etymological fact which makes sense to those who actually live in reality and use language, and not a linguistic fact with a linguistic meaning that has the ability to affect human hearts as well as social and cultural existence. In other words, for those who actually “live on language,” significance lies not in the accuracy of linguistic interpretation and language usage but in the actual social usefulness of what language signifies [KOMMA 1989: 123–124].

If viewed this way, it can be said that the above comment by Huntingford vividly shows the language view of the Kipsigis through the eyes of the Nandi. It reveals that adults must always use the specific ultra-human power, language with great care, and that uncircumcised boys not yet knowing this truth of life are stupid in that they play with language and consequently inflict misfortune on themselves for no good reason. The fact that the Nandi used the childhood nickname, Kiperenge for themselves, which they believed to be of Kipsigis origin, and took interest in it should be viewed as proof that the Nandi admired the linguistic sensitivity of the Kipsigis and sympathized with the language view of the Kipsigis.

11) Children’s adult-like, presumptuous way of speaking can also be described with the verb “curse” (*chub*). For example, when children are speaking to each other in a presumptuous way, and onlooker may say, “Children are cursing each other.”

4) Language and Speech

Language is more than the power which realizes the content of speech; language is, moreover believed, to be the power which realizes, if the speaker follows a certain speech form, the wishes a speaker holds deep in his psychology and behind his speech or even hidden wishes of which he himself is not aware.

The Kipsigis have considered it detestable to speak of the beauty, size and quantity of wives, children, livestock and crops of others and to guarantee recovery to a sick person. Such acts are considered as the reverse expression of hidden jealousy. It is believed, therefore, that the hidden motives of a speaker will naturally materialize if such acts are committed. This means it is believed that speaking of such subjects somehow attracts unknown evil power which consequently inflict misfortune or death on those that are mentioned.

These acts of speech are a specific form called *mong'set* or *manysset* [KOMMA 1983b: 77–78]. This has an idea in common with the legal term “advertent negligence.” In other words, it is tantamount to half-intentionally creating for a person of whom one is secretly jealous a situation in which “touch wood” or “absit omen” are likely to be uttered.

Mong'set (= *manysset*) and blessing (*kaberuret*), another specific speech form, complement each other in that blessing is a speech form which encourages, by referring to it, the realization of a certain matter which has not materialized or is in the process of materializing while *mong'set* is a speech form attempting to reverse the completion of a matter which is partially completed or being completed, by referring to it.¹²⁾

5) The Concept of “Kat”

Ambivalence of the ultra-human power of language is plainly expressed in the concept of the Kipsigis word *kat* or *gat*.¹³⁾ According to Nagashima, the etymon “*gat*” is found in at least several Para-Nilotic languages. Nagashima, based on data from his own fieldwork, compared the Teso living in Uganda (the North Teso) and the Teso living in Kenya (the South Teso) and expressed an intriguing view as

12) So far, the concept of *chubisiet* (*chub* is its verb form) has been translated as “curse” to facilitate translation. However, the concept of *chubisiet* differs from that of the English word *curse* in that it can be reversed for attacking. For this reason, *chubisiet* is sometimes called “*ponisiet* (witchcraft) by mouth”. Incidentally, the Kipsigis believe that the power of language can be harnessed even without resorting to speech. For example, initiation novices are prohibited from speaking during the period between the first initiation ceremony and the second one. During this period, novices may carry out *chubisiet* with gestures instead of speaking. As this example indicates, it can be said that the Kipsigis believe that although language is closely connected to speech, it is not speech itself but rather the more expansive communicative power of which speech is a subset.

13) In Kalenjin languages, including the Kipsigis language, voiced sound and non-voiced sound (not necessarily limited to the set of /g/ and /k/) do not constitute significant phonemic opposition; thus, *gat* and *kat* are considered identical phonemically.

follows [NAGASHIMA 1981: 16–17]:

...the word *akigat*, which means “blessing” in Kenya is actually used in Uganda to mean “curse.” It is possible, therefore, that its etymon *gat* has the meaning “fair execution of mystic power” which existed before the word developed to express the two conflicting meanings “curse” and “blessing.” For example, the Karimojong of Uganda, who belong to the same linguistic family as the Teso, have the word *ekegatan*, which is translated by Dyson-Hudson as “prayer leader.” Here the leader is the one who leads elders when they give collective blessing or curse.

In the Kipsigis language, a Para-Nilotic language as the Teso language is, *kat* is not directly connected to blessing (*kaberuret*) or curse (*chubisiet*); however, they are both connected, in some aspects, to the concept of Nagashima’s “fair execution of mystic power.”

The nuance of the Kipsigis word *kat* can be approximated by the English word “inflict.” This Kipsigis verb is most frequently used to mean “to greet,” and its noun form is *kagatanet*. When used as an intransitive verb with a reflexive pronoun as its object in the form of *katge*, it means “to greet one another,” or “shake hands.”

Among the Kipsigis, meanwhile, greeting can actually mean imposing a burden on a person, since greeting is always given from a person belonging to an older age-set (i.e. an older person) to another belonging to a newer age-set (i.e. a younger person). To reverse this rule is to humiliate an older person gravely. In other words, greeting for the Kipsigis has the aspect of daily courtesy in that younger people are forced to express agreement or submission to elders. From a different point of view, greeting is legal coercion of agreement and submission which older people impose on younger ones. To borrow Nagashima’s expression, this is a form of “fair execution of mystic power” for which language is the vehicle, and relative seniority the source.

Greeting also plays an important role in the Kipsigis divorce ritual. A married couple about to divorce exchange daily customary greetings in the presence of the council of elders of the husband’s neighborhood by calling each other’s childhood names. It is said that the couple, by greeting this way, publicly announce that they in fact belong to human categories between which marriage is not allowed and ask for public approval for their divorce.

In parallel with the divorce ceremony is the custom that a married couple should never call each other by their childhood names in their daily life. Previously, this custom was observed quite strictly. It is said that couples considered even stems of their spouses’ childhood names as taboo and avoided uttering them.¹⁴⁾ To cite an example, suppose there was a husband whose

14) More accurately, it is a kind of childhood name called “name of porridge” (*kainetap musarek*) that is prohibited from being mentioned between man and wife.

childhood name was Kiprotich—Kiprotich means a boy who was born when “cows” (*tich*) “returned home from a pasture in the evening” (*rot*). His wife, then, avoided using the verb *rot* (lit. [cows] return home from a pasture in the evening) and instead used *bwa* (meaning “to come”). This is because they believed that uttering the spouse’s childhood name or even words directly suggesting it was tantamount to publicly announcing, as in the couple’s exchange of greetings in the divorce ceremony, that they belonged to categories between which marriage was prohibited. Once again, the Kipsigis believe that language is ultra-human power which realized the content of speech once words were spoken, regardless of the situation in which they were uttered or the true intention of the speaker, and therefore should be used with maximum care.

Unlike greeting, “ritual apology” (*nyoetap kat*) is a form of “unfair execution of mystic power.”¹⁵ In “ritual apology,” a person who has committed an unfair act executes mystic power over his victim, who is in a fair position, so as to lead him to agree to forgive his crime or sin. Among a wide variety of ritual apology, most typical is in the following example: a man who has stolen another family’s assets (excluding cows) or small livestock or raped the family’s mature girl puts a calabash full of milk and a stem of a palm leaf used to wash its inside by the altar (*mabwaita*) in the victim’s homestead within the night of the crime. The next morning, he grandly claims to be the culprit and then apoligizes to the head of the family. Now the victim’s family is required to put away anger, quietly listen to the offender’s apology and accept the apology without objection; otherwise, the victim’s family will be shunned by the community as a narrow-minded person.

Thus, it can be said that *kat* expresses the concept of inflicting something on the other person via language without allowing him to have a say about the act, whether it is fair or unfair—after all, the judgment of fairness and unfairness is relative, for it largely depends on the position of the person who judges.¹⁶

As generally discussed in this chapter, the Kipsigis believe that language is ultra-human power, and thus can be dangerous if misused.

Because of this belief, the Kipsigis detest, or rather, avoid a talkative person as “a person of many words.” Being talkative per se is considered a negative trait found in senseless children. This fact is supported by the above-mentioned analysis of the childhood nickname Kiperenge.

15) The verb form of *nyoetap kat* is *nyogat* (*nyokat*).

16) Incidentally, Hilders and Lawrence cited *a-gat* as relevant to the Teso stem *gat*, along with *ai-gat* (curse), and translated into English as roar [Hilders and Lawrence 1978]. The author cannot be sure whether *a-gat* can be used about human beings as well, but if it can, it may be said that the Teso stem *gat* primarily means inflicting something on someone via language.

17) The author once reported at a seminar that Kipsigis beer parties were usually held in a relaxed yet quite orderly atmosphere. My colleagues, researchers of the Luo, the Teso, the Gusii and the Isukha (a group of the Luhya) of southwestern Kenya for many years, were quite surprised at the report and said they could not easily believe it.

For example, it is customary that a beer party is held quietly and orderly under the supervision of a person in charge (the head of a family in most cases) and drunkard or noisemaker is expelled from the party.¹⁷⁾ It is believed that unnecessary words should not be spoken since speech misuse or abuse can result in a horrible outcome far beyond the imagination of the speaker. It is assumed that owing to this belief the routine response to the greeting asking how one is doing is "no word" (*Momi ng'ala*).¹⁸⁾

4. ADMINISTRATIVE CHIEFS OF THE KIPSIGIS

This chapter discusses in detail from among what kinds of people early administrative chiefs were selected and examines the relationships between such leaders and the characteristics of their language use.

1) Prophets as Leaders

It is said that since the late 19th century, the Kipsigis repeatedly had small military clashes with the British army. In 1905, however, in the town of Lumbwa (presently Kipkelion) in Belgut, i.e. the northernmost district of Kipsigisland, the Kipsigis and the British army performed the traditional Kipsigis peace ritual in which the both parties hold a live dog by its forelegs and hind legs, respectively, to sever the dog's body in half, which is a type of *muma*. Nevertheless, the Kipsigis were completely put under the rule of the British Colonial Government after this ritual.¹⁹⁾

It is assumed that it would have been a bit convenient for the British Colonial Government to appoint administrative chiefs or headmen from among the traditional leaders if the British had wished to exercise effective indirect rule over the Kipsigis that worked successfully as in Northern Nigeria. Another option for the British was to take advantage of the religious authority of prophets for administrative purposes. The Kipsigis prophets were homological to those found among the Masai, i.e. the *laibon (oloiboni)*, socially central prophet.

In the late 19th century, a prophet (*orkoiyot*) named Kipchomber arap

18) Incidentally, there is also an idiomatic phrase "No word" (i.e. "*Hakuna maneno*.") which means "no problem" in the lingua franca of East Africa, Ki-Swahili (the Swahili language).

19) It is popularly believed that this incident gave the Kipsigis the misnomer Lumbwa. A dog is *mbwa* in Ki-Swahili, which is believed to have been mistaken for *lumbwa*. Of course, this is incorrect. It seems more appropriate to think that the misnomer came from the Maa word (the Masai's language), *I-Lumpua* (sg. *O-Lumpuani*), meaning agricultural Masai people in general [HUNTINGFORD 1969: 11]. Pastoral Masai people used the word *kakesang'* (sg. *kakesang'i*) to accurately distinguish the Kipsigis; however, since Pastoral Masai classified the Kipsigis something as part of agricultural Masai, they often called the Kipsigis *I-Lumpua*. It is believed that as such Maa usage penetrated white settlers Kipsigis came to be known by the misnomer, Lumbwa. Incidentally, the town of Lumbwa has been renamed Kipkelion relatively recently.

Koilegen defected from the Nandi, this was already mentioned recently, to Kipsigisland owing to his failure to win the position as chief prophet for which he fought against his brother, Koitalel arap Samoei. Shortly after his defection Kipchomber arap Koilegen correctly prophesied the historic crushing defeat of the Kipsigis in the Mogori War (*vide infra*), and for this he began to have great influence among the Kipsigis. He never spoke to ordinary people directly but instead gave directions to them via his confidential spokesmen (*maotik*) whom he posted at various locations. The Colonial Government could have taken advantage of this organization if it wished to establish effective indirect rule. In fact, some of Kipchomber arap Koilegen's spokesmen, such as arap Mastamet, arap Cheriro and arap Tombo, were later chosen administrative chiefs [KORIR 1974: 165].

In the early colonial period, Koilegen's authority was not fully recognized among the Kipsigis, although it gradually gained ascendancy over the Kipsigis as a whole for prophecy regarding cattle raids and battles.

The British Colonial Government, however, did not take any action to use Koilegen's authority. The Colonial Government, in fact, was so deeply impressed with the repeated armed anti-British protests over the long period from 1895 to 1905 by the Nandi, politically united around the chief prophet Koitalel arap Samoei, usually a traditional religious authority, that they feared similar protests could happen among the Kipsigis. In 1914, Koilegen was exiled by the British from Kipsigisland and died shortly afterwards. All members of his clans were exiled to Gwasi, an island on Lake Victoria in Nyanza Province. However, Koilegen's spokesmen, all members of other clans than arap Koilegen's own clan, Talai, were spared from punishment.

2) Individuals Chosen as Administrative Chiefs

Then, what kinds of persons were chosen from among the Kipsigis to be the first administrative chiefs and headmen? Manners wrote as follows [MANNERS 1967: 321]:

Most often, lesser-known and even obscure individuals were appointed by the British...in practice the job of "chiefing" the different parts of the Reserve fell largely to men who had exercised no leadership functions in the past. In effect, these lesser men were chosen by the Kipsigis themselves, for they made it a policy in those earliest days to steer the British away from their own most competent people. Since they could not be sure of what would happen to the men whom the British were appointing they decided to offer them not their most desirable leaders but lesser people. If anything bad were to happen to these new British servants, they did not want it happening to their best people. These were to be held in unencumbered reserve so that the Kipsigis might have them to turn to for advice, help, and leadership in times of need.

The point in the above passage is almost identical to what the author heard from Kipsigis elders. Then, to what category did the "lesser-known and even obscure individuals" belong? According to the Kipsigis elders, they included

persons called “riddle-players” (*kiptang’oiyan*), such as rowdy men, and *kipsagarindet* (*vide infra*).

There was a man named Kenduiwa arap Bariach, who later became an administrative chief and won fame and popularity from the people of the southern Sot Division of the kericho District. His grandson wrote a short biography of him as a thesis in regional history. From it, one can tell quite objectively that Kenduiwa, an orphan was an uncontrollable rowdy young man. From boyhood he repeatedly engaged in violent acts.

In fact, he at one time conspired with other boys to beat the recently circumcized men of the Nyongi generation-set after quarrelling with them over girls. He also fought—and beat—Kapsimet arap Bitienei when there was some dispute over the ownership of a gourd. [KORIR 1974: 164]

Although he might be inclined toward violence due to his orphanage and concomitant unfair treatment by others, his rough behavior aroused hostility in many. As a result, during his isolation period of circumcision-initiation, warriors already-circumcized and slightly older than Kenduiwa as members of senior subsets of his age-set, retaliated. These young warriors imposed a variety of tortures on initiates as the legal means for retaliation.²⁰⁾

...he was notoriously insolent from the young men’s viewpoint—as was demonstrated by his fighting Kapsimet, as already narrated—and they took advantage of his recuperating to avenge themselves. He was beaten a good deal, stinging thistles were pressed into his cheeks and temples, etc. This probably explains the cause of his present very poor eyesight; but at the end of it all, he emerged a man, now known as arap Baliach. [KORIR 1974: 165]

Particularly notorious among “riddle-players” was a man nicknamed “roof-climber” (*kiplany kot*). He would be expelled from every beer party he attended for his rude way of speaking. Then he would always climb on the roof of the house in which the beer party was being held, stand up on the peak of the cone-shaped thatched roof, and pull out the apex stick installed there.

The apex stick (*kimonjogut*) of a main house represents the erect penis of the head of the family, a symbol of his virility. When he dies, his family would pull it out at an appropriate opportunity during the mourning period [KOMMA 1981: 111–113], always after it has been confirmed that there is nobody living in the house.

Of course, the “roof-climber” took off the apex stick although he knew well that the head of a particular family was alive and well and there was a beer party going on! It was considered nothing but an abnormal act full of malice toward

20) The following should be added to defend the honor of Kenduiwa arap Bariach: he was not chosen as an administrative chief in the earliest colonial period. He was chosen for the job, among other reasons, for his career and excellent reputation as a KAR (King’s African Rifles) member. Therefore, the author acknowledges that he is not always a most appropriate example in this context.

people.

There is another example of a “riddle-player”—some versions, however, say that the following is also an episode of the “roof climber.” To pass gas in public is considered one of the gravest taboos among the Kipsigis [KOMMA 1991b]. In fact, the author, despite long association with them, has almost never encountered a situation where a Kipsigis adult passes gas in public or has never heard of a person of such rudeness. Therefore, the person introduced below may be the only exception to the rule.

In the early 20th century, there was a man who would always “gate crash” beer parties and retaliate in a horrible manner if rejected admission. He would turn around so that his buttocks were before the beer pot from which elders were drinking with long tubes and pass gas with full force. Now, not only was the beer no longer worth drinking but the party was also spoiled. He made it a rule to obtain a quantity of beer by exploiting his reputation for such obnoxious conduct.²¹⁾

Before the colonization, the “roof-climber” and the gas-passer would probably have been sentenced to death under Kipsigis common law. On the contrary, the Kipsigis did recommend such insolent individuals as administrative chief candidates.

3) “*Kipsagarindet*” or “Stranger” and Administrative Chiefs

“*Kipsagarindet*” principally means a person naturalized as a Kipsigis after being adopted from another ethnic group. It is sometimes said that naturalized

21) Incidentally, Ryo Ogawa made a short but intriguing report on the taboo of passing gas among the Flube people of Cameroon. The following is an excerpt from an illustrative story [OGAWA 1987: 116]:

An old man passed gas in front of others by mistake. He was so embarrassed that he left his village. Seven years later, he came back to the village, thinking that by now villagers must have forgotten about the incident. As he approached the village, he overheard children talking in a hut. One child was saying, “You know, that was the year when the old man passed gas, a long time ago.”

Noticing then that people were handling down the incident as a landmark, he left the village again and never returned any more.

The author’s colleagues, who have been researching other ethnic groups of Southwestern Kenya for many years, unanimously speak of the gas-passing taboo in each ethnic group—cf. [MATSUZONO 1991: 77, 84–87, 108, 125]. The only time the author encountered gas-passing by the Kipsigis was when torture was about to take place as part of the initiation rituals. Novices about to face the fear of unknown challenges were repeatedly passing gas, making light noise. I thought it was the effect of chilly highland night winds on the stomach of completely naked novices. However, adults insisted that it was due to their fear and abused novices saying it was as grave a blunder as incontinence [KOMMA 1991b: 5–7].

22) Orchardson wrote that those who spontaneously came to settle in Kipsigisland from other groups were called *kipsagarindet* but not those who were adopted [ORCHARDSON 1961: 9]. However, the author’s survey revealed that both were called *kipsagarindet*. This is probably due to the gap between principle and practice.

Kipsigis were never discriminated against in terms of common law. However, the word "kipsagarindet" derives from the reflexive verb *sogor-ge*, meaning "to conduct an unnatural act not suited to the nature of a particular entity," and has quite an unpleasant ring to it.²²⁾

"To conduct an unnatural act not suited to the nature of a particular entity" means, in the case of human beings, committing incest, adultery with one's affines, and other such gravely sacrilegious acts. Needless to say, the above-mentioned "roof-climber" and gas-passer counted as *kipsagarindet*. In this paper, *kipsagarindet* is translated for convenience as "stranger."

arap Tengecha is a representative "stranger," who served as the administrative chief of Buret Division in the center of Kipsigisland for many years. For his achievements as an administrative chief, a street is named after him in Kericho, the capital of Kericho District. He came from a group of hunter-gatherers called the Ndorobo in East Africa. The Kipsigis call the Kalenjin-speaking Ndorobo branch in alliance with the Kalenjin speaking peoples "Ogiek," and the Maa-speaking branch in alliance with the Masai, "Omotik." It is said that arap Tengecha was originally a member of either the Ogiek or the Omotik and that he was able to speak Ikwobek, a dialect of the Maa language, in addition to the Kipsigis language.

Moreover, arap Tengecha learned to speak English from while working on a British-owned farm. There were quite a few administrative chiefs and headmen in the early colonial period who understood English while working under whites, just as arap Tengecha did.²³⁾

One obvious reason these individuals were recommended as administrative chiefs and headmen was their English ability allowing them to work as intermediaries between the Kipsigis and the Colonial Government. However, a more important reason was their status as "strangers," who maintained secret communication with whites. In other word, the concept of the term "stranger" was expanded to include a naturalized person as well as a person who had abandoned the customs of his own ethnic group to live among people of other groups, betraying his own people.

Other persons recommended as administrative chiefs and headmen in the early periods were the spokesmen (*maotik*) for prophets. A small fraction of the spokesmen also had prophesying ability. In fact, the Kipsigis say that the well-known man Mugeny was the best prophet, but actually he was spokesman for a prophet, and not a prophet himself. arap Cheriho is renowned as a person who served as a traditional "leader of the army" (*kiptaiyatap murenik*) and at the same time as a spokesman for a prophet. He later became an administrative chief.

The Kipsigis used to turn to prophets for consultations before war and plundering to ensure victory and successful plunder of a large herd of livestock, although using prophets for such purposes was not as strongly established as among

23) The above-mentioned arap Bariach is another example of a well-known man who worked on a white man's farm when young.

the Nandi. Prophets, on the other hand, were also considered witches manipulating natural phenomena at will, thus inflicting disasters and epidemics upon people and taking people's assets for their services. The Kipsigis, therefore, both respected and feared prophets. The following should be noted in this context: spokesmen existed as intermediaries between ordinary people and prophets, the language experts who never spoke to ordinary people directly, and in this sense the spokesmen were marginal men themselves.²⁴⁾

4) Vernacular Terms for Administrative Chiefs

It is noteworthy that the term *kirwogindet*, meaning traditional advisory judge in the Kipsigis language, was adopted as it was to mean an administrative chief. Equally noteworthy is the change which the Kipsigis term meaning "headman" underwent. At first, a headman was called "*atmeniyat*"; a combination of *atmen*, the phonetically Kipsigisized word for headman, and *-iyat*, a singular noun suffix. However, this word soon went out of use, and a headman came to be called *kiptaiyat*, meaning a traditional leader in general, with no adjective attached to it.²⁵⁾

Needless to say, the indirect rule by the British Colonial Government based on the administrative chief system was not accepted by the Kipsigis smoothly without any problems. Yet, as discussed in the beginning of this paper, it later began to function almost unexpectedly well. Part of the process in which the traditional

24) The only two categories of persons whom ordinary people considered deviates but did not recommend as administrative chief and headman candidates were blacksmiths and those called *kimumuaiyat*. Blacksmiths were outcasts of a sort, an exception to the egalitarian Kipsigis society. *Kimumuaiyat* were feared by people for their habit of casually resorting to *muma* (sg. def. *mumiyat*, sg. indef. *mumiya*, pl. def. *mumek*, pl. indef. *muma*). *Muma* has been translated conventionally by earlier scholars as oath. In practice, it is the combination of *ponisiet* (witchcraft) and *chubisiet* (curse) with oath added to it. A person who hoped to clear himself of a false charge exercised one-way *muma* toward his opponent in a dispute, or either or both of the parties involved in a dispute exercises one- or two-way *muma*. As well, elders may ask one or both parties to attempt *muma* for ordeal in a council of elders. When *muma* is conducted, it gradually pursues the true sinner by bringing death to members of his clan one by one in the order of lineal distance from him and of a young age. It is said that the majority of a clan have often died when the effect of *muma* is finally noted. The verb *muma* means to upset something while the noun *muma* means, derived from the verb, an act of upsetting daily order. Thus, it was believed that people should refrain from casually resorting to it and that those who easily exercised *muma* were considered anti-social for this reason alone. Blacksmiths were experts in the most fearful kind of *muma* conducted with the clay tube (*soiwet*) attached to the part where the bellow's ventilation outlet contacted the slag. The effect of this *muma* was, regardless of the propriety of the accusation, gradual death of both parties of a dispute as well as their entire clan. Blacksmiths undertook this *muma* not for themselves but as commissioned business—cf. [ORCHARDSON 1935 a].

25) The word *kiptaiyat* is the combination of the noun *tai*, meaning front, first or right (-hand), the male prefix *kip-* and the singular definitive noun-forming suffix *-at*. Literal translation of *kiptaiyat* is a man who is positioned in front or first.

Kipsigis power structure gradually accommodated, assimilated, and incorporated itself into the newly introduced administrative chief system can be found in the change of Kipsigis terms for administrative chief and headman. Of course, behind the change and incorporation was the situation in which the Kipsigis were not only deprived of a half of Kipsigisland almost as if it were King's Land but also many of them forced to virtually become squatters on white settlers' farms due to the imposition of poll and hut taxes. Therefore, as the Kipsigis were dragged into the cash economy of the colonial settlement, the traditional power structure was similarly incorporated into the new administrative chief system.

At the same time, however, a linguistic phenomenon in which a completely new type of authority gradually came to be called by a traditional term which meant a traditional authority is itself of great significance and should be examined independently. It is believed that the administrative chief was eventually called "advisory judge" (*kirwogindet*), and headman, "leader (of the army)" (*kiptaiyat*) because the Kipsigis found some common attributes in the traditional and new leaders.

It is assumed that those recommended by the Kipsigis as administrative chiefs and headmen in the early colonial period were actually, as Manners said, individuals of little importance. Nevertheless, as discussed, these individuals were not necessarily "undistinguished." Rather, they were socially and culturally marginal and thus marked. In fact, it seems possible that from the traditional, thus natural, Kipsigis view, the common trait of the leaders, i.e. social and cultural marginality itself, guaranteed their potential as leaders.

Conversely, the traditional leaders managed to be recognized as individuals of importance by displaying their competence as leaders and building on their experience; then, were they chosen to be assistant leaders and leader candidates in the first place because of their marginality? A major point of this paper lies in this question.

Manners said that the Kipsigis recommended individuals of little importance as administrative chiefs because "they could not be sure of what would happen to" them [MANNERS 1967: 321]. While this view is assumed correct, one should not overlook the fact that the traditional leaders were not always safe as compared to ordinary people, but rather, they had to take risks voluntarily. The warrior leaders of several levels led the army to attack enemy territories, and advisory judges also had to travel frequently to enemy territories for peace negotiations, fully aware of the danger of being cursed or even murdered by enemies. In other words, the traditional leaders had a duty to put themselves in dangerous situations where anything could happen at any time and whose authority was derived from this fact.

If the Kipsigis offered "obscure" individuals to the British since they were unsure of what the Colonial Government would do to the newly appointed administrative chiefs, those "obscure" people must have replaced the traditional leaders in performing their functions under the new circumstances of colonization. They were able to fill the shoes of the traditional leaders because they, like the

traditional leaders, had a marginal existence in Kipsigis society. It is assumed that the marginality of both is indivisibly connected to their ambiguity about social justice derived from their excessive ability to manipulate language, the ultra-human power which can do either evil or good, depending on how it is harnessed.

5. TRADITIONAL LEADERS

In this chapter, the folklore of some famous traditional Kipsigis leaders will be analyzed, as well as attributes characteristic of them and the relationship between such attributes and their ability to manipulate language.

1) Menya arap Kisiara

Menya arap Kisiara, an advisory judge famous for unprecedented leadership among the Kipsigis. He was originally from the southern part of the Buret (Division) in central Kipsigisland. It is estimated that he was a member of the Korongoro age-set which assumed the warrior age-grade from 1870 to 1880.²⁶⁾ For some unknown reason, Kisiara left Kipsigisland when he was very young and lived among the Masai people. It is said that for this reason he spoke the Maa language fluently.

According to Lang'at, Kisiara showed excellent ability as a warrior, became rear guard leader of "platoon" in his 30s and later was chosen rear guard leader of a "company," and in his 50s became leader of the entire Kipsigis army [LANG'AT 1969: 85]. As well, according to Manners, Kisiara exercised power almost equal to that of a chief, and "no warriors would have raided enemy territory without first receiving permission from Kisiara" [MANNERS 1967: 249-250]. Manners also wrote that Matson suggested that Menyakishavia, with whom Frederic Jackson of Imperial British East African Company signed a contract of blood brotherhood on October 13, 1889, was probably Menya (arap) Kisiara himself [MANNERS 1967: 249 note 3].

Manners surmised that at about the end of the 19th century Kisiara began exercising power over the entire Kipsigis owing to consolidation of their military power to counter the threat of Arabic caravans [MANNERS 1967: 250-251]. Manners's estimation, however, does not agree with Kipsigis folklore.

The entire Kipsigis population had probably belonged to one of four major agnatic "grand clans" (*boriosiek*)—leagues of common origin clans—which had powerful military functions at least from 1870 to 1880, and two large military units, from armies of two of the "grand clans," respectively, were in alliance and attacking other ethnic groups (so called "tribes"). However, due to miscommunication between them, not so rare then, they were severely defeated in several wars including the Ngoino War. The leaders of the four "grand clans" gathered to discuss this problem; as a result, they abolished the residential code that people of a "grand clan" should live together. Thus, members of all clans freely scattered over

26) This age-set is also known as *Kipkoimet*.

Kipsigisland and mixed with other clans, initiating the unique residential system of the Kipsigis. The leaders also decided that all warriors of one neighborhood should form one "platoon" while at the same time maintaining their membership in the "grand clans." Thus, a system cross-cutting the military chain of command came into being.

At this meeting, where they radically transformed their traditional social/military structure, considerably differentiating themselves from other Kalenjin-speaking peoples, Kisiara succeeded in taking the initiative—cf. [LANG'AT 1969: 84–85]. As the result, the Kipsigis began to be remarkably successful in wars against other ethnic groups (*ditto*). At the same time, Kisiara gained on his authority so greatly that at one time it was even said that it was almost impossible to become a warrior leader if one was not a member of Kapkaon clan, to which Kisiara belonged. It is also said that Kisiara was as exceptional a strategist as he was an advisory judge (*kirwogindet*).

There were considerably detailed traditional rules established over a long time period between the Kipsigis and the Masai concerning military matters such as sanctuary, surrender, plea for salvation, cease-fire, and peace, with which both sides complied. On the other hand, the Kipsigis did not have similar established rules with the Luo or the Gusii. In other words, apart from the relationship between the Kipsigis and other Kalenjin-speaking peoples, the political relationship between the Kipsigis and the Masai was much more structured than that between the Kipsigis and the Luo or between the Kipsigis and the Gusii.

The Kipsigis considered the Masai most formidable of the ethnic groups they knew and at the same time greatly respected them. The political relationship between the two groups had a mysterious balance which could be described as "hostility-based coexistence." Orchardson said of their relationship that they fought each other while observing strict rules in a cheerful atmosphere as if they had been participating in an adventurous game in which cows were the prize [ORCHARDSON 1961: 7].

It seems the Kipsigis considered the Masai suitable opponents for such war-games as well as their "host" whom they should continue to exhaust. There is proof that the Kipsigis hoped to maintain a noncommittal relationship of "live-and-let-live" with the Masai at all times. For example, Toweett, referring to the Kipsigis victory in the "battle of shield," wrote as follows [TOWEETT 1979: 23]:

After the defeat of Olesiriani Maasai at a place called Siryat near Chemagel in location 3 in Bureti the Maasai left for farther areas. The Kipsigis, who are reported to have been at their highest point of war-mongery at the time, were disappointed at the disappearance of these Olesiriani Maasai. These were other occasions when the Kipsigis with green grass in their hands' prayed to their Almighty God to make the Maasai return and dwell near the Kipsigis so that the two groups could fight each other.

But the Almighty God of the Maasai and that of the Kipsigis would not make the Maasai return.

In marked contrast to the Masai, the Kipsigis had almost no inter-clan disputes. It can be said that for the Kipsigis the Masai constituted a "structured enemy," so to speak, which was indispensable for maintaining their ethnic identity and solidarity and promoting inter-clan harmony. For this reason, the Kipsigis did not try to destroy the Masai completely or drive them farther away; instead, they maintained semi-coexistence while at the same time slowly exhausting them, a wise policy for the Kipsigis. Kisiara showed remarkable talent for peace negotiation with the Masai based on such a strategy. The "advisory judge," in this sense, mediated and organized the political relationship structurally—at least from the Kipsigis point of view.

It is said that Kisiara would take two leaders, Tapkilel and Kipketes, to Masailand as aides to peace talks with the Masai. Throughout the history of the Kipsigis, it is said, there have been no greater peace-makers than these three men. Among the peace negotiations in which they were engaged, the one introduced in folklore below is said to have been exceptionally successful [KOMMA 1984b: 10-11].

...The Masai insisted that it was the Kipsigis that should relocate closer to Masailand. arap Kisiara replied, "We would love to do so, if possible. But we have an incredibly huge cow which produces a tremendous amount of milk. This cow has broken legs, and so we can't take her near to Masailand. We don't wish to leave this cow behind or to slaughter her because we can't survive without this cow." Now the Masai had to compromise. They said, "We understand. Then, we shall move closer to Kipsigisland. Now that we have signed a peace treaty, our two groups are very close." Thus it was decided that the Kirebi Masai would move closer to Kipsigisland.

One day, an advisory judge of the Kirebi Masai visited arap Kisiara and asked, "Where is the huge cow that you told us about?" arap Kisiara answered, "That cow? Well, why don't you come again in a little while? Then I will show it to you."

After a while, Kirebi Masai people came back. arap Kisiara first generously offered them a large amount of eleusine beer which he had prepared for this day. Then Kisiara took them to an eleusine field where the eleusine was forming full ear. "Look, this is the cow I told you about. How can we make it walk close to Masailand. This is the staple food to us (just as cow milk and blood are to you). The milk (beer) you have just enjoyed so much came from this cow."

Now the Kirebi Masai and the Kipsigis lived in peace for several years until one day the Kipsigis attacked the Kirebi Masai, killed many warriors, and plundered them of their cows.

arap Kisiara took advantage of the sentiment of the Masai, a genuine cattle-raising people and succeeded with a unique logic.

This is said to be just one of the episodes. The Kipsigis and the Masai signed many similar peace treaties through the efforts of advisory judges like Kisiara and their aides. After each treaty, the two groups lived side by side for a while, and it

was always the Kipsigis that attacked and plundered the other of their cattle, claiming that the peace pact had already expired. Each time they were attacked, the Masai would escape to farther areas. It is said that the Kaptorongi clan of the Masai in particular, who had moved near to Kipsigisland in compliance with the peace treaty signed with Kisiara, was met with an all-out Kipsigis attack and annihilated.

In the above-cited anecdote of Kisiara, what is noteworthy is a clever application of the Kipsigis children's riddle (*tang'ochik*), "what is the cow that milks well but cannot walk?" As mentioned in Chapter 3, it was taboo for Kipsigis adults to say a riddle—even children were allowed to play riddles only by the fireside at night. An adult who broke this rule was given a stigmatic title "riddle-player" (*kiptangoiyan*) and was shunned and detested by society. Kisiara was actually well known among the Kipsigis as a great "riddle-player."

The logic and tactics in which arap Kisiara was skilled remind one of the boy named Kibrio Mokwo, a celebrated character in Kipsigis folk tales. The best-known Kibrio Mokwo folk tale is as follows [KOMMA 1984b: 11]:

One time, the Kipsigis proposed a peace treaty to the Masai. The Masai people did not feel that a peace treaty was definitely necessary then. So, during their peace talk, the Masai made an extraordinary demand of the Kipsigis. They said, "We might as well sign it, but on one condition: we want you to bring a pitch-black ox which does pitch-black dung, a pure-white ox which does pure-white dung and a cow horn-ful of fleas to the place of negotiation."

Faced with this impossible demand, Kipsigis advisory judges did not know what to do. Then, a boy Kibrio Mokwo, came up and gave them this idea: give only milk mixed with soot to a pitch-black ox, and only milk mixed with salt lick to a pure-white ox; cut the edge of a black ox's tail hair into pieces, fill a cow horn with them and spread them into the air to let them fly in the wind when you meet the Masai.

The tactic that Kibrio Mokwo devised worked beautifully, and the Masai had to conclude the treaty somewhat against their will.

This folk tale could pass as a historical anecdote of Kisiara if the character Kibrio Mokwo was replaced by the advisory judge who actually existed. Yet, the fundamental difference between the two stories was that Kibrio Mokwo was depicted as a boy. Riddle was considered to be a logic exclusively in the realm of children, and only children were allowed to use this form of speech. Thus, Kibrio Mokwo became a hero of children because he was depicted as a child. On the other hand, even though Kisiara was a hero who actually existed, he was also obviously a "riddle-player" (*kiptangoiyan*) who used riddle logic. In a way, he was really feared by people as a violator of social rules.²⁷⁾

27) Tactics the historical folklore says arap Kisiara used should remind one not only of Kibrio Mokwo but also a hare which appears in numerous Kipsigis folk tales as an active "riddle-player"—more generally speaking, as a trickster.

He was actually offender of essential social norms. The Kipsigis hold clan-exogamy as the inviolable principle of marriage regulations. The Kipsigis itself is the combination of clans loosely integrated through the maintenance of multiple political alliances formed by numerous agnatic clans by the clan-exogamy system. Thus, clan-exogamy was considered unchallengeable in the Kipsigis ethnic group. Kisiara, a Kapkerichek clansman, however, performed an engagement ritual (*ratet*; lit. tying) with a young girl from his own clan named Chebo Chepkochok. It was impossible to dissolve the marital relationship once the ritual was performed. As a result, Kisiara was to become a grave sinner, violating the most essential marriage rule and committing [clan-] incest. Kapkerichek clan held an urgent clan council to avoid such a consequence. As a result, the clan decided to perform a ritual to divide Kapkerichek into two at the point of the genealogical ramification where it branched into the separate lines of Kisiara and Chebo Chepkochok—this ritual, which included *muma*, was one of the most solemn rituals and had the same style as peace negotiation between two ethnic groups. Kapkaon clan, to which Kisiara now belonged, came into being in this way. An arrangement was also made so as to allow recognition of the engagement between Kisiara and Chebo Chepkochok after the division of the two clans.

It is now very important to remember that Kisiara once left Kipsigisland and lived among the Masai; thus he had already been given the stigma of being a “stranger” (*kipsagarindet*) at that point and must have formed his identity as he internalized the outside “gaze” that this stigma included.

2) Kipketes—arap Kisiara’s Aid

Kipsigis folklore says that the Masai also had an “advisory judge” the equal of Kisiara of the Kipsigis. Ole Lang’unya was hated by the Kipsigis because he would often outsmart them at peace talks.

One day, Ole Lang’unya assassinated Kipketes, Kisiara’s right-hand man who was often visiting Masailand for negotiations. Afterwards, Ole Lang’unya attended a peace talk with the Kipsigis as if he had done nothing. The Kipsigis people became suspicious of Ole Lang’unya because Kipketes was missing after he had left for Masailand, and they performed *muma*, the sin-testing ritual which accompanies a kind of oath-taking. The *muma* showed its power later; it is said that one day when Ole Lang’unya was talking to the Masai he suddenly bit off his tongue and died [TOWEETT 1979: 13; LANG’AT 1969: 86].

This episode suggests the ultra-human power of language connected to *muma*.

28) It is assumed that Lununya and Kipkeles of whom Orchardson wrote [ORCHARDSON 1961: 6] were actually Lang’unya and Kipketes, respectively.

29) According to Toweett, this is the first large-scale war fought between the Kipsigis and the Gusii around the 17th century when the Kipsigis left Mau bamboo forest and advanced into Buret Division where the Gusii lived. The Gusii were severely defeated by tactics of the Kipsigis and hurriedly abandoned Buret for a new place [TOWEETT 1979: 15–16]. In my own judgement, Toweett established the date of the Chemoiben War too old.

Another version of this incident also expresses the faith the Kipsigis had in the power of language in another fashion: it says that Ole Lang'unya stumbled and fell down, bit off his tongue and died on his way from the peace negotiation with the Kipsigis. Incidentally, Kipketes is the Kipsigis nickname given to a person who often stumbles. The Kipsigis interpreted the way Ole Lang'unya died, biting off his tongue when stumbling, as evidence that he killed Kipketes.²⁸⁾

As for arap Kisiara's other aide, Tapkilel, almost nothing is known about him. Meanwhile, Kipketes is known to have been of the Narachek clan. The clan is known to be one of the relatively new clans originated from a group of the Gusii, absorbed into the Kipsigis with their defeat in the Chemoiben War.²⁹⁾ Even today the Kipsigis say, speaking of not only the Narachek clan but others such as the Bokserok and Mabasik clans which originated with conquered Gusii, "they are not genuine Kipsigis, but Gusii." In fact, it is said that there were many "Kipsigis people who could only speak the Gusii language" on the south of Kipsonoi River, which runs east to west across Southern Kipsigisland (i.e. the present Chepalungu Division and the southern Sot Division) around the end of the 19 century.

It is obvious that the tendency to label people belonging to clans of Gusii origin as semi-Gusii was much stronger in Kisiara's time than today. Therefore, the fact that Kipketes worked actively as Kisiara in such a period well indicates the marginality of Kipsigis leaders.

3) Malabun arap Makiche—the Man Loved Most

arap Mugeny, who prophesied the arrival and dominance of whites and was, as mentioned, prophet arap Koilegen's spokesman, and arap Kisiara may be the two most famous men in the history of the Kipsigis. Another person equally well-known is Malabun arap Makiche. He is a tragic hero whom the Kipsigis are more proud of than anyone else and love and respect deeply.

Malabun was "leader of the army" who brought about the devastating defeat of the Kipsigis in the Mogori (-Saosao) War.³⁰⁾ The Mogori War seems to be fought in the end of 1880s around Manga hills located 7-8 km east of the modern town of Kisii, capital of the present Kisii District (Nyanza Province). After the major military reform, mentioned in Section 1 of this chapter, the Kipsigis won wars against the Gusii and the Luo almost successively, expanding their territory southward rather rapidly. The Mogori War was a long war of the largest scale waged against the Gusii under such circumstances. At that time, the Kipsigis army,

30) This war is called the Mogori War by the Kipsigis and the Saosao War by the Gusii.

31) The northern Belgut Division was several dozens to 100 km away from the hostilities; therefore, the number of warriors from Belgut was not large, and are believed to have joined the plunderage unit. It is said that the Kipsigis army was able to march some 100 km per day while chewing raw eleusine grain kept in a little shoulder bag when they did not have plundered livestock to eat. Yet, the Kipsigis say the Nandi had better marching ability. Incidentally, today, there are many world-class athletes of Kalenjin origin including the Kipsigis and the Nandi.

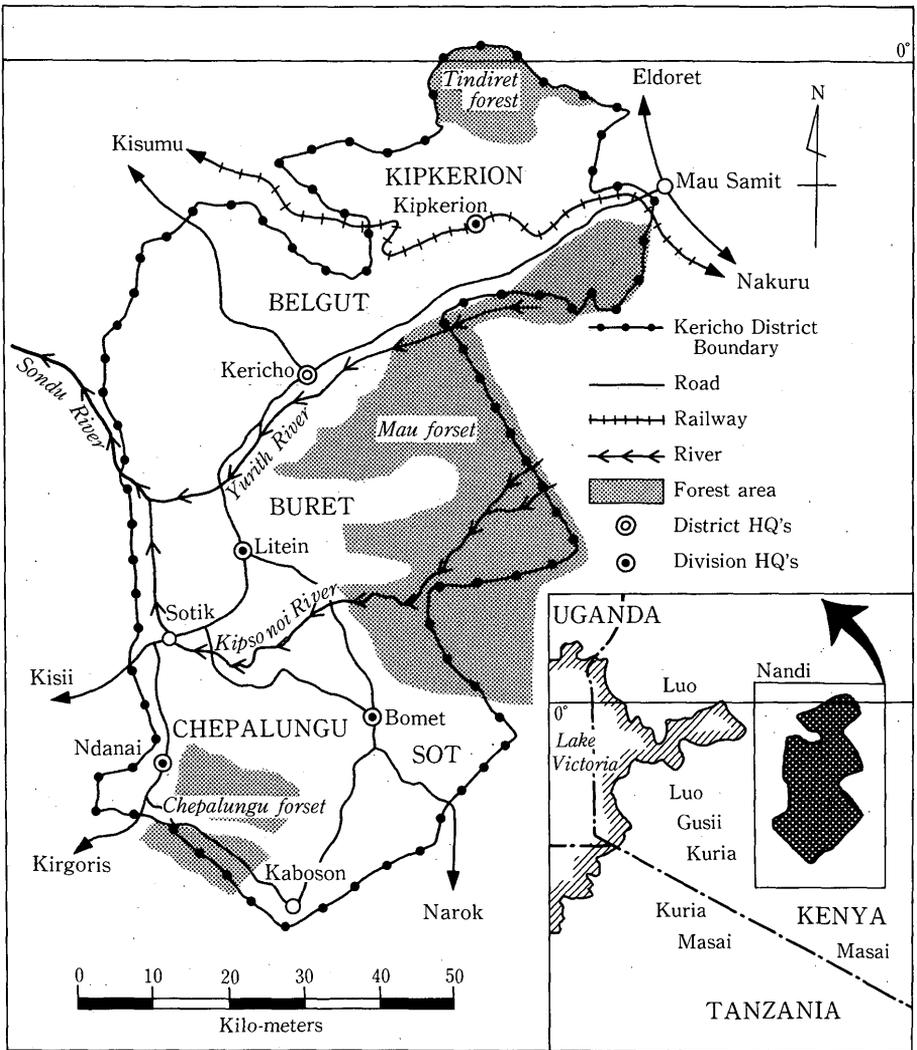


Fig. 1

including many healthy elderly men, was organized mainly around warriors from the two “great regions” (*emotinwek*) of Buret Division in the center and Sot Division in the south of Kipsigisland.³¹⁾ Moreover, it is said that uncircumcised boys and even women were mobilized in great numbers for food transportation and small livestock plundering. This is because a long march was necessary to attack the Gusii since they had retreated to the area where the Luo and the Bantu-speaking Kuria Lived, expanding hostilities. Meanwhile, the Kipsigis, accustomed to successive victories, did not doubt they would win this time as well.

In the Mogori War, the Kipsigis won small battles successively in the beginning and plundered as they wished. However, they continued on the offensive and

invaded too deeply into Gusiiland. One morning they found themselves completely surrounded by the allied army of the Gusii and the Luo.³²⁾

Leading the Kipsigis army were Malabun arap Makiche, "leader of the army" of Sot Division, and Chesengeny arap Kaborok, "leader of the army" of Buret Division, both under the supervision of arap Kisiara. In fact, Chesengeny had already been concerned about their excessive pursuit of the Gusii and suggested the night before that they promptly withdraw. Malabun, on the other hand, strongly insisted that they should rest for the night near Manga hills. Chesengeny was obliged to agree.

Even at the very moment it became clear that they were completely besieged by the Gusii and the Luo, the two leaders sharply opposed each other as to what tactics they should employ. Chesengeny maintained that they should focus on breaking through the enemy lines at one corner, opening a way for warriors to withdraw. Meanwhile, Malabun would not compromise his plan for all-out resistance. Consequently, many warriors followed Malabun and were massacred.

Chesengeny managed to break through the enemy and, although many were lost, the army escaped to Masailand and struggled back to Buret Division with a small number of warriors. The folk history states that the defeat in the Mogori War proved a major blow to the Kipsigis and after the war there were few men among the Kipsigis for a while. To rebuild the Kipsigis population, elders considerably lowered circumcision-initiation age for boys and marriage age and reduced the bride-wealth amount. Moreover, it is said that even widows were actively encouraged—although against Kipsigis common law—to have secret sexual relations so that they could have children as well.

Perhaps because some of the Kipsigis were descendants of a hunter-gatherer people called the Ndorobo, they were skillful at night attack.³³⁾ However, "they were not good fighters at daytime" [MOKAMBA *et al.* 1974: 231], and moreover "the Luo and the Kisii (Gusii) were specialists in daytime fighting" [MOKAMBA *et al.* 1975: 231]. The all-out attack by the Gusii-Luo army started at dawn and continued until late in the evening.

Then, why did Malabun insist so strongly that they take a night's rest near Manga hills and that they should fight a hopeless battle when he knew the Kipsigis

32) The Kipsigis folk history states that the allied army was formed of three ethnic groups: the Kuria added to the allied army of the Gusii and the Luo. Some Gusii folk history states the same, but it has not been well verified [cf. MOKAMBA *et al.* 1974: 230].

33) Kipsigis men who were members of the KAR (King's African Rifles) take pride in the high evaluation of their night attack ability by the British Army during W. W. II. It is said that the Kipsigis often rescued the British from predicaments since they were able to accurately tell directions by stars even when the compass was broken. The following is the episode in which they take greatest pride: when the British Army was fighting the Italians from an inferior position in Somalia, the Kalenjin unit, mainly consisting of the Kipsigis and the Nandi proposed a night attack. Their vigorous fighting, allowed the British to finally overcome the Italians.

army was in a desperate situation? What seems more confusing is the fact that many warriors followed reckless Malabun over calm Chesengeny and lost their lives.

Some researchers³⁴⁾ said of this obvious question as follows:

Malabun's mother was a woman from Kisii. It is suggested that Malabun ordered the rest because he hoped to meet some of his relatives [LANG'AT 1969: 87].

Malabu (*sic.*) retorted that the army would not withdraw until he greeted his uncle's people in the morning. He spoke of them because his mother was a Gusii [KIPKORIR 1978: 37].

Explanations like the above give only a one-sided description of Malabun almost as a traitor and conclude that the reason for his "betrayal" was simply his blood relation with the Gusii through his maternal relatives. Considering the deep affection and respect that the Kipsigis have for Malabun even today, however, such reasoning is unconvincing.

In the successive Kipsigis-Gusii wars, left-handed Malabun was nicknamed as Nyankebee (meaning a left-hander in Gusii) and feared as the strongest Kipsigis warrior leader by the Gusii. Sakawa,³⁵⁾ the supreme commander of the Gusii in the Mogori War, ordered that each Kipsigis warrior body be speared carefully one by one to confirm death. As for the body of Malabun, he ordered that its front side should be skinned from forehead to toes as soon as it was found and the skin brought to him; this order was faithfully executed [MOKAMBA *et al.* 1974: 233]. Another version says that Sakawa ordered Malabun's genitals to be cut from the body and brought to him. In any case, these episodes indicate that Malabun was strong and brave, and for that he was detested by the Gusii.

It is unthinkable that the strong Kipsigis warrior leader whom the Gusii hated to this extent would suddenly think of going to greet his "uncle's people" or "his relatives," who were Gusii, in the middle of the crisis of besiegement by the allied Gusii-Luo army. If he had actually thought about it and mentioned it, it only makes it harder to comprehend why the majority of the Kipsigis warriors chose Malabun over Chesengeny, who had a more reasonable plan. The explanation by the above two quotations is thus simply unconvincing.

Here is another explanation:

...Mbale (*sic.*) of Sotik, a Kisii by birth, said that it was very cowardly to run away home with cattle by night. He said, "We are not going to flee away with other people's cattle at night when they are not present to witness how we are

34) Lang'at is a Kipsigis, and Kipkorir is a Marakwet, a Kalenjin people.

35) The Kipsigis believed that the Gusii male prophet Sakawa was a woman with one breast in the middle of her chest; for this reason the Kipsigis called him Chepkinet (meaning a woman with a single breast). The Kipsigis feared Sakawa, for they believed Sakawa turned into a lion from time to time.

taking their cattle away like men and not like thieves. We must wait until tomorrow" [TOWEETT 1974: 25].

The above explanation by Toweett somewhat glorifies Malabun's act literarily, but just a glance tells one that it lacks reality and is not convincing.³⁶⁾ As far as I, the author, know, there is no other version of Malabun's motives similar to that of Toweett. Other versions the Kipsigis public tell differ from all of the above three in one point: the other versions all state that Malabun said, "I will not leave until I meet the uncles who gave birth to my mother and greet them."

This may sound, however, as if Malabun insisted on meeting and greeting his maternal uncles. Nevertheless, it was not really so. The key to understanding his motives lies in the phrases "uncles who gave birth to my mother" and "greet." What is hidden behind these words is severe irony toward the cowardice of Chesengeny. "I will not leave until I meet the uncles who gave birth to my mother and greet them" was the "clincher" Malabun used to denounce Chesengeny and to instill the Kipsigis warriors with the fighting spirit for his aggressive tactics—*vide infra*.

For Kipsigis men, bravery was the supreme virtue whereas cowardliness, or being labeled as coward, was an utmost disgrace. The three quoted above are all first-rate scholars in Kenya today. In Kenya, ironically, excellent students coming from various ethnic groups are usually sent to be educated at prestigious secondary and high schools away from their native ethnic land at early ages; this tendency has become stronger in recent years. Therefore, even well-educated persons tend to be unacquainted with their own ethnic culture and language. It is assumed that the three scholars, perhaps for this reason, did not understand Malabun's rhetoric which any ordinary Kipsigis person, i.e. a Kipsigis person born and brought up in Kipsigisland, would easily understand.³⁷⁾

Malabun's clever rhetoric should be interpreted as follows: Kipsigis men often called their sisters of the same mother "our daughters" because of the following custom: when a girl married, her bridegroom's family gave a number of cows as bride-wealth which were handed to the girl's father and put under his management; actually, the cows benefited the bride's brothers of the same mother since they were kept to be used as future bride-wealth for the sons' marriages. The father was allowed only to care for the cows and strictly prohibited from using them to get his own new wife. When the father died, the cows came under his son's management. In Kipsigis common law, if a father used cows given as his daughter's bride-wealth

36) Toweett is a Kipsigis and the first graduate of Makerete University College (then makerere High School) among Kalenjin peoples. He is also a political representative of the Kipsigis active since before the independence of Kenya to the present. His father was a Gusii naturalized as a Kipsigis.

37) It is supposed that Kipkorir, a Marakwet, recorded the story of Malabun with the help of his informant, a Kipsigis student at Nairobi University where he was working [cf. KIPKORIR 1978: "Acknowledgement"].

to get his own new wife, he was labeled as a "man who slept with his daughter" and shunned as an "unnatural-doer" (*kipsagarindet*).³⁸⁾

Malabun reversed that phrase Kipsigis men often used, "our daughters" (meaning sisters), and called Gusii warriors as "uncles who gave birth to my mother." In the agnatic Kipsigis society, one's paternal kin represent structure while one's maternal kin suggest sentiment. One's maternal uncles, in particular, are usually known to give affection and protection generously at any time. What Malabun hoped to emphasize by expressly referring to the presence of his maternal uncles among the Gusii was his unyielding spirit that said fighting the Gusii would be as easy and sweet as shaking hands with his maternal uncles, however difficult the war situation might be.³⁹⁾

Another key-word in Malabun's rhetoric is the word, "greet" (*kat*). While the word *kat* is often used to mean "to greet," the general meaning behind *kat* is to inflict something on someone, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Thus, Malabun's comments could be more precisely interpreted as "I will not leave in a shameful manner until I show the Gusii a thing or two."

Thus, Malabun denounced Chesengeny's cowardice in a short statement full of cutting sarcasm. For the Kipsigis warriors, nothing was more shameful than to be looked down as cowards. "Before you kill at least an enemy warrior you are not a man but just a coward, or a woman, the shame of the clan..." this was the kind of tactics which Kipsigis elders used to arouse fighting spirits in warriors before going to war. Malabun's skilled rhetoric must have hit each of the Kipsigis warriors like a thunderbolt. Thus, Malabun overwhelmed Chesengeny. In an elevated mood, the warriors thought that they did not want to be called cowards. This should be the reason why not only warriors from Sot Division but also those from Buret Division, who usually followed Chesengeny, willingly joined Malabun to fight a hopeless battle.

What should not be overlooked here is the fact that the principle of the traditional Kipsigis military organization differed from that of an army trained in a modern nation. As mentioned, the Kipsigis combined system of age-set and age-grade also effectively served as a vehicle for the military organization. The system

38) The norm of this custom is basically the same today. However, the remarkable prevalence of a cash economy is forcing cash expenditures on families, such as for children's education. Therefore, it is now publicly approved that cows obtained as bride-wealth of the family's daughter may be used for purposes on which all members of the family agree, such as for the sons' education and so forth.

39) Besides the theory that Malabun's mother was a Gusii, it is often said that Malabun himself was a Gusii adopted by the Kipsigis [cf. TOWEETT 1979: 25]. It was often the case that young children were adopted during war and that trading of children for grain took place between the Kipsigis and the Gusii during famine. Needless to say, it was the Kipsigis, a cattle-raising people, that usually gave up children. If the theory that Malabun was adopted from the Gusii was correct, he would be a "stranger" (*kip-sagarindet*) representing a more pronounced marginality.

did not have definite correspondence between an age-set or age-grade and its functions, compared to other age-systems typically found among cattle-raising peoples of East Africa, such as the *Gada* system of the Oromo, thus to an extent allowing those older than the age-set members in the warrior age-grade to participate in war voluntarily. Actually, all warriors were basically volunteers; they eagerly received circumcision-initiation, and as a result, became warriors. They were not drafted or under one-sided obligation to go to war. For them, victory meant gaining fame and popularity as well as the spoils of war, mainly cows, which could be accumulated and used as bride-wealth, allowing them to take a wife for the first time. Fighting in war was the key to all the future success a warrior could hope for.

Kipsigis warriors were not assigned to a systematized, specialized role as in modern armies. Neither did they blindly concentrate on a single task nor did they mechanically follow a commander. The outcome of battle for the Kipsigis army depended on the culmination of each member's independent efforts and creativity.

Looking back on the account of the Mogori War, one should notice that Malabun and Chesengeny asserted themselves during a serious state of confrontation at crucial moments of the war. As the account of the opposing relationship between them clearly indicates, the Kipsigis warriors chose a leader and staked their lives on each occasion by their own judgement and will, regardless of the location of their residence in Kipsigisland.

In such a military system, therefore, commanding leaders must be able to attract warriors to achieve their goals. To be a competent leader of the Kipsigis army, it was not sufficient to have only the ability to accurately read the tide of the war, as a staff officer would be required to do in a modern army. More important and indispensable for a leader was to seize and control completely in any situation. In other words, it was actually the ability to manipulate language freely, particularly with a succinctness which could impress warriors deeply. An able Kipsigis leader, had to illuminate the hearts of all warriors with just a few words at a critical moment, stirring fighting will in each and giving impetus to creative fighting, creating any army to achieve far more than its physical capability would have allowed.

The wise commander Chesengeny's calm judgment of the war situation was certainly more accurate than Malabun's. Yet, Chesengeny did not merit comparison with the fierce leader Malabun in terms of the language ability to attract the hearts of warriors and ignite spontaneous fighting will in them.

Another point that should be noted is that the rhetoric Malabun used was close to the riddle logic which Kipsigis children liked. Malabun was not a "stranger" merely because of his blood relation with the Gusii; he understood the Gusii language, and furthermore, had eloquence, i.e. extraordinary ability to manipulate the ultra-human power of language. For this reason as well, he was a marginal man.

From an objective point of view, it seems as if Malabun's misjudgment of the

war tide determined the major defeat of the Kipsigis army in the Mogori War. Nevertheless, responsibility for the defeat was not necessarily attributed to Malabun. Today, the general view of the Kipsigis is that defeat was their fate, predetermined by God (*Asis*). As discussed in Section 1 of Chapter 4, around the time of the Mogori War, a leading Nandi prophet, Kipchomber arap Koilegen was hiding among the Kipsigis after he lost the position of the chief prophet of the Nandi to his brother, Koitalel arap Samoei. He sent a spokesman to the Kipsigis army, which had started marching to Gusiiland, to suggest that they should stop at once. At that time, however, Koilegen had not gained much authority, and so the Kipsigis army leaders laughed off Koilegen's prophecy, abusing the spokesman for being a coward. It is believed that the moment that Koilegen's prophecy was rejected, the consummation of the tragedy was determined.

Besides, or in addition to, this view, there is a theory that the Kipsigis army's defeat in the Mogori War was a direct result of their negligence to carrying out the traditional fortune-telling before going to war. In the Kipsigis tradition, when



Photo. 1. This is a council of elders discussing a divorce case. The council of elders is a traditional organization which discusses neighborhood family problems and management to pursue better policies. Today, it is attached to the judicial mechanism of Kenya as its lowest level. In many cases (especially for civil actions), the magistrate court does not accept the filing of a suit unless accompanied with a certificate of a council of elders trial of the concerned neighborhood.

The Kipsigis have no fixed council location (*Kapkirwok*); a council is held in the shade of a tree deemed appropriate. (Kiptenden Neighborhood, Ndanai Location, Chepalungu Division, Kericho District, July, 1983.)

someone travels he must decide whether to proceed or to return every time he sees a woodpecker or a white-bellied eagle perched on a tree ahead of him by accurately interpreting an omen suggested by the relative location of the bird and himself—cf. [ORCHARDSON 1961: 31]. It is said that at the time of the Mogori War, the leaders of the Kipsigis army were so conceited with their successive victories that they neglected the important duty of interpreting good or bad luck for which God had given an omen. Hence, their complete defeat in the Mogori War.

The analysis of the cause of their defeat in the Mogori War aside, this should not be forgotten: Malabun was not a traitor, but he is remembered with much fondness as a tragic and limitlessly brave hero. Malabun, who did not step back even in a hopeless state but instead fought to the end, demonstrated the bravery and dauntlessness of the Kipsigis army to neighboring ethnic groups despite defeat. Elders say that Malabun defended the pride of the Kipsigis with his life.

The principal political effect of the Mogori War on the Kipsigis was the establishment of Kipchomber arap Koilegen as their chief prophet for his precise prophecy. After the war, Koilegen, his Talai clan and his spokesmen gained authority, and Koilegen, as the first prophet of the Kipsigis, started exercising religious influence over the entire Kipsigis. He died in 1914 at Gwasi of Nyanza Province, the place of exile—cf. pp. 19–20. It is surmised that the Kipsigis might have undertaken a long-term, organized military protest against the British, as the Nandi did, depending on conditions, with the Koilegen as the new core of ethnic solidarity, if the British Army had gained control of the Kipsigis later than it actually did.

In any case, defeat in the Mogori War brought about the major historic change that a prophet (*orkoiyot*), a new type of expert with unrestricted ability to manipulate language, started having strong influence over the entire Kipsigis.⁴⁰⁾ In connection with this, it should be noted that the prophet and his clan were “strangers,” i.e. descendants of the Uasingish Masai who joined the Kipsigis via the Nandi, and thus people of intense marginality in Kipsigis society.

6. LANGUAGE AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE

In this chapter, the relationship between people with the special ability to manipulate language and the Kipsigis political structure will be discussed again.

1) Language Experts

As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, warrior leaders of several levels

40) It is believed that a prophet never fail to sense if people are gossiping about him, however far away and quietly they speak. For negative gossip prophets would retaliate immediately. People liken this ability to a radio receiver since it can receive signals from distant places and tune into transmissions of necessary information. The prophet's special ability of language manipulation supports his ability to “inflict himself” (*kat*) on others.

performed an important political function in the acephalous and egalitarian Kipsigis society. The basic requisites for leader status were bravery as a warrior and eloquence, the ability to persuade both his Kipsigis colleagues and foes. The latter, in particular, became important in proportion to the rank of a leader. Eloquence was indispensable for a "leader of the army" to be selected "advisory judge" when it became physically impossible for him to participate in war. The "advisory judge" not only had the highest authority in the realm of law but also enjoyed great influence over army leaders by occasionally giving them advice — an exceptional example of such an advisory judge was arap Kisiara, sufficiently discussed in Section 1 of Chapter 5.

It is said that a man had to be able to speak in a certain way called "*berir*" to succeed as a warrior leader or an advisory judge. To "*berir*" is a way of speaking by which the speaker impresses his listeners with relatively brief words and illustrates his point without directly referring to it. Developing a logical argument with deductive reasoning, borrowing terms from Western logic, is an ordinary person's way of reasoning and not especially convincing for the Kipsigis.

As evidenced by the detailed analysis of the historical accounts of arap Kisiara and Malabun, the act of "*berir*" includes a variety of rhetoric. Sometimes, it resembles very closely the riddle logic officially allowed for children only. It is said that arap Kisiara was able to "*berir*" without stopping. To "*berir*," however, inevitably turned the speaker into a "person with many words," making his social existence ambiguous.

Many of the individuals the Kipsigis recommended as early colonial administrative chiefs and headmen were "riddle-players" or "strangers." It is now clear that the precolonial traditional leaders were also individuals of excessive language ability and similar marginality. In addition, prophets who gained overwhelming power over the Kipsigis after the Mogori War were also language experts as well having strong social marginality due to their descent.

Furthermore, female diviner-healers (*chepsageinik*) who interpret the cause of people's misfortune and illness and provide appropriate remedy shared important political functions with the various leaders already discussed. Many female

41) Female diviners still maintain an important position in society as experts who dissolve and remove causes of people's misfortune and illness and provide remedy. On the other hand, they are suspected of misuse of their ability by intentionally causing misfortune and thus are feared by people. For example, the most feared *muma*, for which *soiwet* (i.e. the clay tube attached to the part where the bellow's ventilation outlet contacts the slag) is used, was cast on a female diviner whom the author knows—cf. note 24. This incident indicates that she was terribly detested and abhorred by someone. Incidentally, the Kipsigis call a Gusii *Kosobindet* (pl. *Kosobek*). Meanwhile, in the Nandi language, a healer is generally called *kasobindet* (pl. *kasobik*). Considering this together with the fact that most Kipsigis female diviners are of Gusii clans origin or with Gusii relatives or affines, it seems that *kosobindet* and *kasobindet* are etymologically connected. Until the present, however, this possible connection has not been elucidated.

diviner-healers either have relatives in neighboring ethnic groups such as the Gusii or belong to clans which originated by "strangers" (mostly from the Gusii) who came to live among the Kipsigis for some reason in the not-so-distant past.⁴¹⁾ As well, blacksmiths, who undertook witchcraft-like "oath" called *muma* as commissioned business and were feared greatly in the past, also were descendants of people outside the Kipsigis, namely the Gusii or the Masai.⁴²⁾

All persons discussed in this Section had the special ability to manipulate language in specific styles as an ultra-human power. As mentioned in Chapter 3, an ultrahuman power of language could do either good or evil, depending on how it is used. For this reason, those who willingly involved themselves in this great power and tried to manipulate it beyond the level of daily requirement assumed social ambivalence or ambiguity. Conversely, marginal men, whose existence itself was ambivalent, were suited to assuming the role of language expert as characterized above.

2) Verbal Antagonism

Another point which should be noted is the fact that an advisory judge did not have a particular region under his exclusive jurisdiction and would go to any neighborhood in Kipsigisland the people of which sought him for his fame and popularity to give advice.⁴³⁾ Moreover, in the case of a dispute, an advisory judge had to be invited from outside the neighborhood (or neighborhoods) in dispute. This clearly indicates the marginality of advisory judges. The unlocalized authority of advisory judges had the catalytic function of binding the loyalty and interests of a neighborhood, the minimum and maximum daily social and economic unit and a major judicial function in Kipsigis society, to the loyalty and interests of the whole Kipsigis. In this manner, a neighborhood, which was (and is) an autonomous group restricted within a very small geographical area with somewhat unique values, was kept free from narrow-mindedness and self-

42) According to Toweett, one of the common occupations for those incorporated into the Kipsigis from the Gusii was blacksmith [TOWEETT 1979: 66]. Kenduiywa, meanwhile, wrote a short biography of a blacksmith who was obviously of Masai origin from his name, Ole Tangile [KENDUIYWA 1980: 27-28].

43) Peristiany wrote that an advisory judge (in his own writing, *kiruogindet neo*, i.e. "great advisory judge") did "rule over" a specific area under his jurisdiction [PERISTIANY 1939: 179-183]. He also wrote as follows: "As Judge the Kiruogindet cannot try any case outside the boundaries of his group. This is a clear and definite rule" [PERISTIANY 1939: 181]. The author, however, did not meet a single informant during the research who supported the view that an advisory judge ruled over a specific area. Peristiany, by the way, wrote after the above quotation as follows: "Sometimes Judge like arap Terer, who are famous all over the country, are called to Groups very far away from their own to help the local Kiruogindet, but in that case the Kiruogindet neo of that group must ask him himself, or through the medium of an alamaliet, to be present at a case" [PERISTIANY 1939: 181]. It is assumed that Peristiany's understanding of the duties of an advisory judge was somewhat confused.

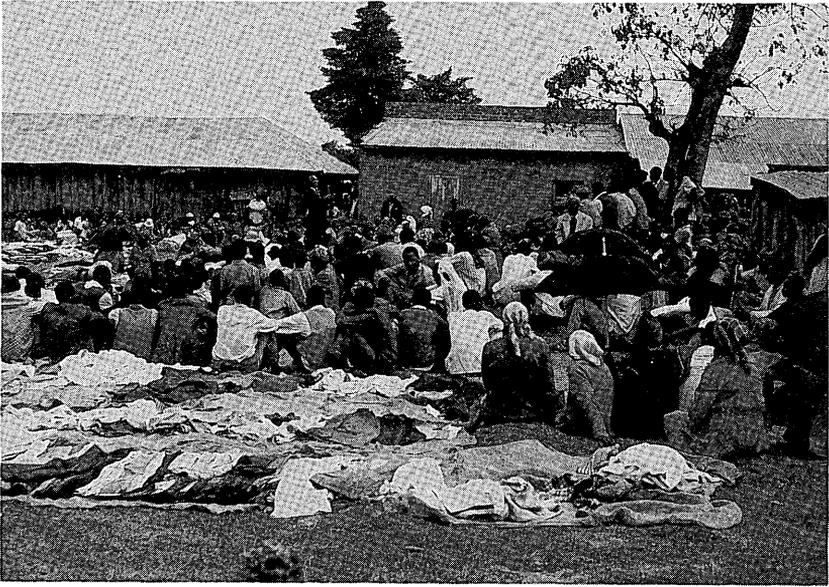


Photo. 2. Members of Parliament can be the present-day marginal men who intermeditate between ethnic and national values and loyalty. They spend most of the year in the capital, Nairobi, but they do have a house and large pasture in Kipsigisland, too, as members of the Kipsigis: Kipsigis who abandon cows are looked down upon almost as if they were “strangers” [KOMMA 1985]. Some Kipsigis politicians have exceptional eloquence. This gentleman is making an MP election campaign speech, entertaining his audience by mocking the voices of several politicians. (A campaign meeting on a market day, Ndanai Trading Center, Ndanai Location, Chepalungu Division, Kericho District, December, 1979.)

righteousness. Besides common law, the condensation of more universal values of the Kipsigis, were constantly supported by new realities in the same way. As Peristiany accurately pointed out [PERISTIANY 1956: 45], the authority of advisory judges intermediated between neighborhoods, the basic social/economic units, and the higher-level mechanism in the Kipsigis political structure.⁴⁴⁾

To allow such a political system to function smoothly, a reverse vector must have been needed. In choosing marginal men as the ethnic group’s leaders, the possible threat of their marginality to the ethnic unity should be taken into consideration. In other words, there must have been a need for a central authority which could counteract the authority of such leaders. Against the backdrop of the adoption by the Kipsigis of this political system was the fact that they incorporated into the language concept the Kipsigis belief of “curse” (*chubisiet*) which they believed could fully control the individual and marginal language ability of leaders and their authority from it.

In the Kipsigis society, *chubisiet* basically means “curse” of a person in a

negative social justice position by a person in a socially just position by harnessing the ultra-human power of language in a specific style. It was mentioned that in Kipsigis society curse has the function of giving social sanctions to society's deviates and maintaining social order [KOMMA 1982a: 150, 155, 1983b: 89].

At least in the early colonial period, collective curse executed by the council of elders of a particular neighborhood was able to control fully leaders of every type. One notices, upon collecting the life histories of early colonial administrative chiefs and headmen, that quite a few did not live long. Very often, they died only several years after their appointment as administrative leaders. It is said that people carried out collective curse on them since they became excessively pro-British. In fact, today the Kipsigis still believe collective curse has a powerful effect and fear it greatly.⁴⁵⁾

Among public servants and officials of the Colonial Government, it was *shamba*-boys and headmen from the administrative police called *kanga* in Swahili, rather than administrative chiefs themselves, that treated people cruelly. They were considered tools of the Colonial Government, and many were not only cursed personally or collectively but also often had their houses burned down. At such times, people would make up a story together and insist that a meteor fell and burned the house. According to the belief of the Kipsigis, God (*Asis*) never fails to severely punish a sinner, i.e. and "unnatural-conductor" (*Kipsagarindet*), by having thunder and meteors fall on him.

3) The Concepts of "kat" and "chub"

To understand the correlation between the Kipsigis collective curse and the

44) Moreover, administrative chiefs in the early colonial period were assigned to posts regardless of which part of Kipsigisland they came from. During their terms, they were usually posted far away from their home at all times. Today, there is no person whose position precisely corresponds to that of a traditional advisory judge. Yet, the principle that a council of elders of a neighborhood cannot be just unless it has some sort of outside factor is strictly maintained. For a council of elders to be recognized officially, at least one person from outside the neighborhood should be present. It is believed that misfortune will fall on all attendants if a council of elders is held with no outsider participating and judgement is given forcibly. In such an undesirable situation, it is often the case that an attendant refers to this belief and, in fear of his welfare, insists cancelling the council. On outward appearance, a neighborhood council of elders is composed of all male adult members of the neighborhood. In practice, however, it is not so: all Kipsigis male adults have the right to participate in the council of elders of any neighborhood. This is a right as well as an obligation. For example, suppose a man happens to be visiting a certain neighborhood when a council of elders is about to be held. In this case, it is considered a grave sin if he neglects to attend the council meeting. This means that a mechanism is already incorporated into the neighborhood council of elders linking neighborhood loyalty and values to those of the whole ethnic group. In fact, it is necessary to think that the past custom of inviting an advisory judge from outside a certain neighborhood derived from this mechanism built in the council-of-elders system itself. An advisory judge, for his unique language ability, embodied this mechanism most precisely.

authority of traditional leaders, it is convenient to cite the case of Kipsiongo arap Terer, Peristiany's most important informant and sympathizer of his research. Before the colonization, Kipsiongo arap Terer was a "leader of the army" of the whole Pelgut Division in the north of Kipsigisland and became, after retirement from this position, a traditional advisory judge who enjoyed an excellent reputation for a long time. According to Peristiany, arap Terer chose "a very undistinguished person, arap Cheriro" as his "assistant" to make his own son his successor [PERISTIANY 1939: 179-183].⁴⁶ In those days, it was customary that when an advisory judge stepped down for his "assistant" to be recommended as his successor. It seems that there was an unspoken agreement between arap Terer and arap Cheriro that arap Cheriro would appoint arap Terer's son as his "assistant." Of course, people were aware of this arrangement. When arap Terer decided to carry out this plan and asked for retirement, however, the council of elders (alias "council of *kapkiruok*" in his monograph) prevented it as follows [PERISTIANY 1939: 180]:

45) For example, the following incident took place in the author's main research field, Ndanai Sub-location, Ndanai Location, Chepalungu Division: Ndanai Primary School was robbed of many school supplies. It seemed that the culprits would never be found. Then one day, all the faculty members and students gathered in the school yard and cast a collective curse on the unidentified culprits. They were all satisfied knowing that the offenders would definitely die a horrible death. Aside from this incident, the following must be clarified: in the pre-colonial years, collective curse (*ke-chub tim*, lit. meaning "to curse bush") was only conducted so that an unidentified sinner (or offender) would be punished. In case the sinner or offender was known, he was punished in accordance with the degree of his sin or crime. For a particularly heinous crime, the criminal's clansmen announced that they would disown him, cast a curse on him, and the public threw sticks with sharp edges on both sides called *mosigisiet* (lit. meaning "no birth") sentencing him to death—cf. [PERISTIANY 1939: 119-120]. It is said that abolition of the common law-based death sentence by the Colonial Government triggered the practice of collective curse on identified criminals of major offenses to bring them death.

46) Peristiany described the advisory judge's titles as *Kiruogindet neo*, and the assistant's title as "*chemengesh*." *neo* is used to suggest a variety of nuances, but basically means largeness or greatness. In this case, it may be translated as "major". Its antonym is *neming'in*. *Chemengech* (not *chemengesh* as he described), the plural form of *neming'in*; Peristiany's *Kiruogindet neo*'s "assistant" is in fact called *kirwogindet neming'in*, which could be abbreviated to *neming'in* (meaning "the minor") but never *chemengech* (i.e. Peristiany's *chemengesh*). Peristiany called Kipsiongo arap Terer *Kiruogindet neo* to emphasize his greatness. Generally speaking, an advisory judge was called *kiruogindet neo* deliberately just in the context that the caller felt a special need to emphasize his respect for *kirwogindet* or when an advisory judge had to be clearly distinguished from his "assistant i.e. [*kirwogindet*] *neming'in*." It is also possible that local people called arap Terer *kirwogindet neo* to express their respect for him. In any case, it is deemed more appropriate to set the advisory judge's title as simply *kirwogindet*. In fact, Peristiany called the advisory judge *Kirwogindet* without *neo* in some parts of his writing. It is no use causing confusion by adding *neo*.

arap Terer has asked three times during the last four years for permission to retire, but it was each time refused under threat of *chubisiet*, a curse placed on his head, if he disobeyed their orders. This shows that the Kiruogindet neo has no individual authority, but is the mouthpiece of his *kapkiruok* council.

This incident is quite intriguing. While Peristiany thought that "Kiruogindet neo has no individual authority, but is the mouthpiece of his *kapkiruok* council," the author has a different view: it is believed that the advisory judge also had the authority of a strong personal nature as other leaders did and that his authority strained the relationship with the authority ordinary people had collectively. The confrontation and balance of the two kinds of authority depended on the relationship between the independent ability of the two sides to manipulate language as an ultra-human power and the counteractive relationship of their manipulation styles. It seems that the case Peristiany cited is more consistent with the author's interpretation than his own.

Up to this point, many types of traditional Kipsigis leaders have been discussed. All were language experts who, in their own ways, manipulated language as ultra-human power. Warrior leaders of several levels and advisory judges were leaders who acquired their position solely through personal attributes and achievements. On the other hand, prophets and female diviners were reserved for members of specific clans descended from other ethnic groups or those with close ties with such clans. In this sense, it is possible to classify Kipsigis leaders into two major types, achievement- and ascription-based. Yet, examined from another point of view, such divisions seem meaningless. Warrior leaders and advisory judges certainly obtained their status from their personal achievement; however, many of them were "strangers" (*kipsagariik*, i.e. pl. of *kipsagarindet*) in one way or another, often members of clans descended from other ethnic groups, since such leaders were expected in many cases to be multi-lingual. In this sense, they can be categorized with other leaders tentatively classified above as ascription-based. Such categorization aside, those chosen as warrior leaders were "riddle-players" (*kiptangoinik*) after all, and thus a kind of "strangers" (*kipsagariik*). Aspects common to all was the marginality of their existence and their ambivalence about social justice. As for leaders' attribute of language ability, it can be condensed in the unique Kipsigis concept of *kat*, discussed in detail in Section 5 of Chapter 3, the central concept of which is to inflict some effect or oneself on the other (in an unfair manner).

Curse (*chubisiet*) and especially collective curse, on the other hand, is carried out by ordinary people to give sanctions to sinners or offenders or to prevent leaders and social deviates from causing excessive infliction. When a council of elders decides to execute collective curse, there are particular clans which lead as representatives, namely the Kapcheboin, Kapchebokolwol, Kibaek and Kipsamaek clans. Besides, of these, it is said that the Kapchebokolwol and Kipsamaek clans have an especially excellent ability to curse rapacious birds and hyenas, respectively.

Members of clans with such exceptional cursing ability are called people with

“bitter mouth” (*ng’wan kutit*). Many such clans are of old origin and are often called “authentic Kipsigis,” a title they take pride in. The central concept of the power of language described as “*chub*” (to curse) is fair retaliation or attack by resorting to the ultra-human power of language by a person who has been (or thinks he has been) unfairly inflicted with excessive evil doing.

The meaning of the Kipsigis word *ng’wan* can be expressed as “bitter.” The word, which has other important meanings, is considered a key word to understanding Kipsigis culture. For example, *ng’wan* is also used to describe excessive sharpness—Orchardson wrote, quite appropriately, that *ng’wan* was also used to describe smart retort [ORCHARDSON 1961: 28].

“Bitterness” (*ng’wanindo*) is, as discussed, a trait central to an ultra-human power of language; it was considered an attribute required of a good leader. Incidentally, the Kipsigis sometimes say that the “bitterest” thing is snake poison; in this connection, it is noteworthy that arap Kisiara is described as “a person who could *berir* as a snake trembles its tongue.” It should be noted again that the bitterness of the language of such strong leaders as arap Kisiara and Malabun derived from the marginality of their social existence and that the marginality came from their personal experiences.

Meanwhile, clans which have an excellent ability to curse are said to have “bitter mouth” (*ng’wan kutit*) or “bitter tongue” (*ng’wan ng’eliepta*). Members of such clans are given the ability collectively and ascriptively for being part of their respective clans. Comparison between individual leaders and the members of cursing clans suggests a counteractive relationship between marginal (or peripheral) individuals and central groups in terms of the “bitterness” of language.

The “bitterness” of language of individuals chosen as leaders is characterized by “*berir*” (*vide ante*). In comparison, although the spell of cursing clans, which

47) By the way, the word *katam*, which means left, also stems from *kat* mentioned above. A lefthander is believed to be a man of strong arm and of skill. Besides, baboons (*mosonik*) are also believed to be left-handers and have great physical strength. Hence comes lefthander’s nickname Mosonik. Thus Malabun arap Makiche’s left-handedness, an additional marginal trait, seems to have strongly impressed the kipsigis just as well as the Gusii who highly feared and nicknamed him Nyakebee meaning left-hander in Gusii. The author discussed the stem *kat* with many informants. A few cited *katigonet* (meaning “advisory session,” “advice”), *katamset* (meaning “false accusation”) and *kataleset* (meaning “cunning coercion”—driving a person into a difficult situation by deliberately requesting him to carry out an act which he cannot reject and yet is reluctant to do) as stemming from *kat*. Obviously, the *kat* of these words is pronounced the same way as the stem in question, *kat*. Nevertheless, it is difficult to consider these words stemming from it; it is more appropriate to consider them as verbal noun forms of *tigon*, *tam* and *tal*, respectively, i.e. the type of verbs which take the verbal prefix *i* in the third-person simple progressive tense. The verbal noun form of this type of verb takes the prefix *ka-* at the beginning and often the suffix *-set*. Since the prefix *ka-* is attached to the initial sound of the verb stem *t*, the sound is united as *kat*, thus causing confusion with the *kat* stem.

are central in society, is bitter, the bitterness is, so to speak, formalized. Meanwhile, "the elder of the neighborhood" (*boiyotap kokwet*), a person of authority who holds the neighborhood's central values, usually speaks formalistically and in a distinctively prose style.

A dispute within a neighborhood is not immediately brought to the council of elders. Before that, "the elder of the neighborhood" usually has small personal advisory sessions (*katigonet*) repeatedly with those involved in the dispute.⁴⁷ When his effort for arbitration has failed, the dispute is first brought to the council of elders and publicly discussed—cf. [SALTMAN 1977: 37, 38, 88, 89, *et al.*] Then, the council of elders is required to break through the deadlock of the "advisory sessions," but it often takes an extensive period of time to do so. It was on such occasions in the past, that an advisory judge with the ability to *berir* was invited.

CONCLUSION

The following conclusion can be reached. Among the Kipsigis, leaders traditionally have been selected from marginal men. Their ability and authority are connected to the concept of *kat*, a specific speech form with which one could inflict oneself on others by resorting to an ultra-human power of language. Meanwhile, the ability of ordinary people, the central existence in society, is connected to the concept of *chub*, a defensive speech form used, by resorting to an ultra-human power of language, to counteract those who caused excessive infliction. The ability of the latter is represented by cursing clans of a long history, who are given central authority in society. Balanced and yet sharp tensions potentially exist between these two types of people who represent, respectively, complementary and counteractive ability to harness an ultra-human power of language. Kipsigis politics has been operating dynamically in this power structure.

It is not appropriate to consider traditional Kipsigis society as a so-called "cold or static society," in which reform is abhorred and change is minimal. It had not only the fluidity of a slowly migrating semi-nomadic pastoral society but also a relatively flexible structure as a non-segmental acephalous society based on loose consolidation of numerous exogamous agnatic clans mixed and scattered over a huge region. Meanwhile, the Kipsigis ethnic society in East Africa, with its relatively small scale and vulnerable existential foundation, had to struggle to maintain and reproduce its members under the constant threat of enemy attack and famine. To meet social requirements for survival of the group, they wisely used the cultural device of circumcision-initiation and succeeded in arousing from all members total loyalty to the tribal society. Yet, they would not have survived historical changes if they had not realized, in parallel with ethnic unity, a social system by which they could introduce self-made change, whenever necessary, so as to allow unrestricted response to any novel situation.

Rapid changes of situation can be successfully met not with the prosaic spirit of the conservative and decent who fix themselves peacefully in the center of society.

The task is fulfilled only with the self-supporting and yet poetic spirit of those who have a non-rigid pluralistic viewpoint from their peripheral existence in society. The Kipsigis ethnic society boldly adopted the policy of incorporating such marginal individuals into their social structure as leaders who realized a flexible structure enabling spontaneous response to changes and self-reform.

Such a political structure functioned well at least up to the early colonial period. Therefore, the fact that administrative chiefs and headmen in the colonial period were chosen from among people of little importance did not always change basic Kipsigis political structure. In fact, the administrative chief system worked relatively smoothly, eventually enjoying public acceptance.

Later, a cash economy brought by the colonization penetrated speedily and deeply into Kipsigis daily life, and land was enclosed and segmented, and the warrior age-grade completely lost its function. Around this time, administrative chiefs and sub-chiefs emerged from former warrior leaders as well as those well-versed in the new social conditions from their military service with the King's African Rifles (KAR), the modern counterpart of war leaders. Thus, Kipsigis's traditional political structure merged with the administrative chief system increasingly well.

At present, many administrative chiefs and sub-chiefs are inclined to be chosen from former members of the King's African Rifles and the administrative police.⁴⁸⁾ Meanwhile, the traditional neighborhood council of elders has been preserved. It is operated faithfully in compliance with the ethnic group common law—gradually modified under the influence of modern laws—and is functioning quite effectively as the lowest system incorporated into the national judicial mechanism. Today, as Saltman pointed out [SALTMAN 1977], the magistrate court, effectively attached to the neighborhood councils of elders and surpassing the logic and interest of individual neighborhoods, performs a role corresponding to an advisory judge of the past. It can be said that today, in a sense, the neighborhood is still the minimum and maximum social and economic cooperative unit in Kipsigis society. In the past, advisory judges translated people's loyalty to their neighborhood into loyalty to the whole ethnic group. Today, language experts called judges of magistrate courts translate neighborhood loyalty into loyalty to the "nation state" called Kenya. They are unmistakably residents of Kipsigisland, but most are not Kipsigis. In this sense, they also constitute an ambivalent existence in society as advisory judges once did and are thus marginal, in other words, "strangers."

48) Those who gained experience in the KAR were also "strangers." They were traditional in that they respected the warlike spirit of the Kipsigis above all; however, they were at the same time marginal men in that they served as intermediaries between values of the colonial policy and loyalty to the British and the traditional values and loyalty to the Kipsigis. They were also intermediaries between Kipsigisland and outside, especially Nairobi, capital of Kenya.

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