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## **Women's groups in Kiambu, Kenya : it is always a good thing to have land**

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# Women's Groups in Kiambu, Kenya

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Maria Maas

It is always a good thing to have land

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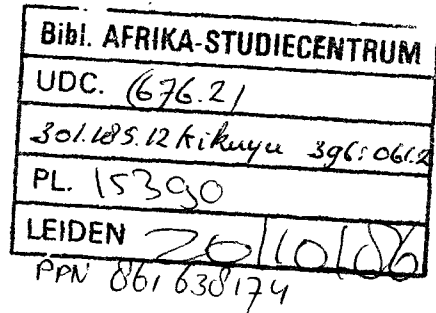


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## WOMEN'S GROUPS IN KIAMBU, KENYA

It is always a good thing to have land

Maria Maas

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Dfl. 7,50

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.... for, as Sillitoe points out, the classical concept of a peasant hardly applies to the Kikuyu - at least not the Kikuyu men. They are the migrant laborers par excellence of Kenya. It is the women who are the only true peasants - in the sense that they are anchored to the soil (Sorrenson, 1967: 234).

## INTRODUCTION

The subject of this study is the co-operation between Kikuyu women in a village, Kulima, in the district of Kiambu in Kenya. The forms of economic co-operation and mutual aid that these women enter into are organized in what they call "Women's Groups".

During the last three months of 1979 and the beginning of 1980 I had the opportunity of getting to know one of these women's groups quite well, and to maintain intensive contacts with a number of its members. The information upon which the present study is based was obtained from informal talks with the members of this women's group and with their relatives. Most of the time I spent the day on the farm of a family and joined in with the women's activities at home and on the land. While working, we discussed all manner of aspects of their lives which were of particular interest to me. I also attended the activities of the women's group on several occasions. I have supplemented my findings with information contained in the literature.

This study deals with two aspects of the women's group in particular. I give a description of the importance of such a group for the position of a woman within the larger family network to which she belongs. The second aspect that comes to the fore concerns the relationships between women's groups and politicians and church organizations.

I had already put forward my interest in women's groups in a research proposal. In this draft-proposal I started out from the obligations that Kikuyu women have vis à vis their children and husbands, and from their activities on their husbands' farms. I was particularly interested in the extent to which women's groups could be a source of help in complying with these duties and in performing the tasks on the farm. Another point of interest was the question whether participation in a women's group also signified a greater degree of economic independence for the women concerned. From the literature <sup>(1)</sup> it was apparent that the economic independence of Kikuyu women had diminished considerably in the course of this century, and that large groups of women were hardly capable of providing sufficient food for their children. The same sources suggested that women's groups could make a contribution to the improvement of the standard of living of the participating women and of their families.

The women's group is, from an economic viewpoint, of the utmost importance for the women of Kulima. However, the way in which this women's group improves the economic position of its members did not match the idea I had formed in my mind on the basis of the literature on this subject. My first impression upon making acquaintance with the women's group was that it seemed like an investment company: the women seemed to be accumulating land without putting it to agricultural uses, and without it being of direct advantage to the families of the participating women. My aim in this study is therefore to establish why these women buy and accumulate land, and what their ultimate motives are. The answer to this question throws light on the significance of women's groups for the position of women within their family and at the same time provides some insight into the conditions which make such successful forms of co-operation both possible and necessary.

The second aspect of my research imposed itself on me as it were during my field work. My stay in Kulima coincided with the national parliamentary elections. Initially this was the reason why the chairwoman of the women's group requested me to postpone my visit to Kulima to the day after the elections. Perhaps they were not anxious to be observed at such close quarters at this particular time. For reasons that I never discovered, the initial objections to my presence there on that occasion suddenly ceased to exist, and I was able to move into the house that had been offered to me. I decided to keep aloof from the events surrounding the elections. However, the house where I was staying was situated directly opposite the place where the election meetings were held, so I could not help noticing the joint activities of a campaigning member of parliament and local women's groups. This roused my curiosity about the specific ties that seemed to exist between them, and my findings on this score have been incorporated into the present study.

These two aspects of women's groups are not separate from each other. For in the relationships between members of parliament and women's groups, land transactions play a major role. Both aspects are connected with certain developments in the history of the Kikuyu, notably the arrival of the British at the end of the last century and Kenya's independence in 1963. Both events are discussed in the context of my research; they enable me to point out those historical circumstances which are of importance for the emergence of women's groups, while at the same time filling in the background for my research findings.

The different subjects are treated in the following order: Chapter I describes how a women's group was formed. This history is placed against the background of the severe shortage of land with which the Kikuyu have been confronted

in the course of this century, and of the development of a nationalistic ideology.

Chapter II deals with the position of women within the household and the extended family, and with the function of women's groups in relation to this position. Chapter III places their organization in a historical perspective, and attempts to show how the political activities of women's groups fit into the time-honoured phenomenon of co-operation between Kikuyu women.

I wish to express my gratitude here to all those who have helped me in conducting my preliminary research and in undertaking this study, and notably to Rob Buijtenhuijs, Rudo Niemeyer and Rien Verhagen. Thanks are also due to Willy Jansen and Anton Blok for their valuable comments on an earlier version, to my husband Wim Bremmers for his moral support, and last but not least to the women in Kulima with whom I share the memory of a relatively brief but most intensely experienced part of my life. Finally I am deeply grateful to the Fonds Doctor Catharine van Tussenbroek for providing me with the grant that enabled me to carry out research in Kenya and the African Studies Centre, Leiden, for the financial support that enabled me to have the manuscript translated.

## I THE SETTING

### The village

Kulima<sup>(1)</sup>, in the district of Kiambu<sup>(2)</sup> is situated approximately 45 kilometres north-west of Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. Connections with Nairobi are very good. There is a paved road which is passable under all weather conditions. Every morning a bus departs for the capital and during the day matatus, public taxis, drive to and from, covering the distance between Kulima and the city in an hour and a quarter.

The town of Gatundu<sup>(3)</sup> is a few kilometres away on the same main road. It is the regional administrative centre, and the offices of the agrarian and veterinarian services as well as of the water development are to be found there. Free medical aid is available in the Self-Help Hospital, and there is a weekly market. Women from the entire region sell fruit and vegetables there, and men hawk a variety of plastic utensils from Taiwan. Encircling the market is the shopping centre<sup>(4)</sup> a string of shops, bars and restaurants. Gatundu also serves a political function, having been the residence of President Kenyatta until his death in 1978. Kiambu is inhabited mainly by Kikuyu<sup>(5)</sup> and President Kenyatta, himself a Kikuyu, was in charge of local and regional affairs. During his terms of office the people of Gatundu had strong ties with the political elite in the

capital. This situation continued to exist after his death. The Kenyatta family is among the most powerful in Kenya, and Gatundu is now part of the constituency of the former president's nephew.

The soil in the Kulima region is fertile and, since it is 1650 meters above sea-level, it is eminently suited to the cultivation of coffee<sup>(6)</sup>. Missionaries introduced this crop at the end of the nineteenth century and, along with the European colonists, held a monopoly on its cultivation for a long period. The Kikuyu were not entitled to grow coffee until the 1950s<sup>(7)</sup>, since which time there has been a steady increase in production. The damage caused to the Brazilian coffee crop by frost in 1976 precipitated a sharp rise in the price on the world market and led in Kulima to a doubling of the number of hectares under cultivation within two years. This increase is entirely due to the small farmers<sup>(8)</sup> who attempt to grow coffee on every piece of land which they do not need for the production of food crops. During the short rainy season in 1979 I still saw women at work planting coffee seedlings.

The most important food crops are maize, beans, potatoes and bananas. Where irrigation is available women also grow melons, tomatoes, cabbages and onions.

At the end of October 1979 they began sowing maize and beans, and planting potatoes. By the middle of November the fields already required weeding. Later on this was less necessary since there was a dry spell which lasted until January 1980. The potatoes were already harvested in the middle of January, but they were very small. The bean harvest was also meagre and the women did not expect much better results with the maize. At the end of January they decided to harvest the maize for cattle-fodder. Consequently the field could be readied for the next crop. This does not involve very much work. Some of the women left the stalks of the maize and beans standing, others tilled the soil with a panga, a kind of machete, to loosen the earth. They then had to wait for the next rains, which were expect-

ted in March, to sow again. The women hoped to be able to harvest these crops in June and July.

When there is sufficient rainfall the women sell part of the produce on the markets of Gatundu and Kulima, or directly to the middlewomen - tradeswomen who buy up as much produce as they can from the farms, which they resell on the markets of Nairobi. On most farms the food and coffee crops do not leave much land for cattle-grazing. However, people still try to keep one or two cows, chiefly for the milk. Children are preferably given milk to drink daily<sup>(9)</sup>, the rest being sold to individual customers or to the local subsidiary of Kenya Co-operative Creameries Ltd. Due to lack of space the cattle are kept in a shed or tied to a rope in the yard. The women and children feed them with grass, which they cut from the road-side or from the strips between the fields; all consumable household throwaways are also fed to the cattle.

According to one young man the shortage of land is not the most important reason why farmers keep so few cattle. He sees the problem as being mainly financial. If he had some starting capital he would buy a car in order to travel the long distance necessary for purchasing larger quantities of grass, which would enable him to keep at least twenty cows. However, it is difficult for him to obtain a loan from a bank or co-operative. His father refuses to register the land in his sons' names before his death, and land serves as security for a loan. "One really can do little more than look for a job in the city and hope to be able to save a little as well", he sighs. Yet the farms in Kulima are too small to make a decent living, the average size being 1.6 ha.<sup>(10)</sup> The sale of coffee and milk provides households<sup>(11)</sup> with some income and the food crops supply the daily diet. The men in particular often work for a wage. Some are employed in the local coffee factories or as teachers, but

the majority work in Nairobi and only come home in the weekends.

#### Land-ownership, land-shortage and the hunger for land

The landscape of Kulima consists mainly of chains of hills and valleys, with the houses and fields spread across the slopes and hilltops. The hills are coloured the dark-green of the coffee plants and the paler-green of the maize and beans. Since the two types of crop are planted in a sequential pattern the slopes are chequered and interspersed here and there by spots of dark-red: the earth of a compound. Here stand the houses, kitchens and sheds for the harvest and the cattle. On some compounds they are dispersed, on others clustered together.

The hilly terrain becomes flatter towards the southwest, in which direction there are coffee plants as far as the eye can see. This is one of the largest coffee plantations in Kiambu. Here there is not one house or field owned by a Kikuyu peasant, for from 1915 until 1960 this area was reserved exclusively for European farmers. Kikuyu were not allowed to live here, and the departure of the European colonists in the 1960s did little to change this situation.

The Land Transfer Programme, part of the independence agreement of 1963, was set up for the purpose of buying up the land of the European colonists with funds provided by the British government.<sup>(12)</sup> It was intended that the plantations would be divided among landless Kenyans, but in fact little true land reform was effected. The result was that most of the plantations, altogether covering an area totalling four-fifths of the available farmland, remained intact. The new owners are for the most part politicians and businessmen who run the farms from their offices in the city.<sup>(13)</sup>

When I asked people in Kulima who the owner of the large plantations was, some replied 'the government', others

suggested that it might be a powerful family. They believed that the government did not divide the plantations for fear of losing revenues. For coffee is one of Kenya's most important export crops, and re-distribution of this land could well be detrimental to productivity.

The history of the Kikuyu has been marked from the sixteenth century on by a continuous gradual territorial expansion. For example, increases in the population forced young men to leave their ancestral lands and to settle in as yet uninhabited or thinly-populated regions.<sup>(14)</sup> Land was owned<sup>(15)</sup> by the mbari<sup>(16)</sup>, the descent group, whose members traced their descent through the male line from a known ancestor. A mbari usually split up when the number of members claiming part of the territory became too large. Groups of men would leave to acquire land elsewhere, and thus to establish a new mbari.<sup>(17)</sup>

In the course of the eighteenth century Kikuyu came to Kiambu from Murang'a in the north-east.<sup>(18)</sup> They either purchased the land where they settled from the original inhabitants the Dorobo, or they acquired rights of land-ownership by being the first to clear this land.<sup>(19)</sup> The founders of the mbari were the first owners of the newly acquired land and after their death the land became the common property of all male members of the mbari.<sup>(20)</sup>

For a long time, from the sixteenth until the end of the nineteenth century, Kikuyu were thus able to acquire land. The arrival of the British in the early years of this century put an end to this. The British made their homes near to the existing Kikuyu settlements, which tended to become literally squeezed in between the vast estates of the Europeans. Moreover in 1926 the colonial government ruled that the Kikuyu were only entitled to settle in the so-called native reserves.<sup>(21)</sup> Within a period of less than thirty years the Kikuyu were deprived of all opportunities of expanding their territory and, partly due to a considerable

population-growth beginning in the mid-1920s, land became a scarce commodity.<sup>(22)</sup>

The shortage of land led to an increasingly stratified society. Kikuyu society had never been all that egalitarian to start with. Among the Kikuyu who decided to leave their mbari, there were usually young men, mostly warriors, whose task was to help prepare the land for farming, and to defend it against rival mbaris or against the Masai. In return for these services they, as tenant farmers or ahoi, obtained user rights to the land of the mbari.<sup>(23)</sup> Their children often stayed on the land of the mbari and the latter retained user rights to the land. After one or two generations at least one third of the population of a mbari consisted of tenant farmers.<sup>(24)</sup> Land scarcity and the limited possibilities of acquiring land elsewhere eventually induced Kikuyu who had rights of land-ownership to decide to stop observing the user rights of the tenant farmers. The conflicts that ensued were usually settled by the colonial government in favour of the land-owning Kikuyu, thereby contributing to the emergence of a group of landless Kikuyu.<sup>(25)</sup>

At the same time, the British rulers created a new class of land-owners by appointing chiefs and headmen. Kikuyu who had played a leading role in the first contacts with the Europeans were made responsible for maintaining order among their fellow Kikuyu, collecting taxes and ensuring that the colonial government and the European farmers could depend on a constant supply of manpower.<sup>(26)</sup> The new chiefs and headmen did not hesitate to take advantage of their positions and interpret the traditional codes and laws pertaining to land in their own favour.<sup>(27)</sup> Besides, because of their contacts with the British they were also the first Kikuyu to send their children to missionary schools. This gave them access to European culture, a circumstance that proved of great importance in their efforts to consolidate their position. Their sons were appointed to positions in schools and government and this

gave them a lasting economic and social advantage over the Kikuyu masses. <sup>(28)</sup>

The new and the traditional classes of land-owners were aware that their interests were supported by the colonial government. Already at the end of the 1940s British functionaries commented approvingly on the large-scale accumulation of land by a small group of Kikuyu. They believed that this would further productivity, and the - in their view - proper use of the fertile lands of the Kikuyu. And in their opinion landless peasants and small farmers would benefit from this, too - they could in any case find sufficient employment on the large farms. The consequences of these developments led to new conflicts between the different classes of Kikuyu. <sup>(29)</sup> Partly due to the insistence of some of the Kikuyu themselves, the British eventually decided to call a halt to this situation. Under a programme of consolidation and registration all land fragments worked by a man and his wife or wives were ascertained and measured. The scattered plots were combined into one by means of a reallocation system and registered in the name of the owner or all of his sons. <sup>(30)</sup> Each owner had to give up part of his land for communal usage, and the rights of the tenant farmers were ultimately recognized <sup>(31)</sup>, although they were often allocated the least favourable plots of land.

This land-registration programme was implemented in Kulima in the 1950s. Some people in Kulima believe that certain individuals were allotted more than their share through bribery. According to Sorrensen <sup>(32)</sup>, the colonial government did try to distribute the land among as many people as possible, but the inequality in land-ownership remained virtually unchanged. In any event, the registration and consolidation of plots of land did serve to protect the rights of the small farmers. They can now be certain that their land will no longer be taken from them as a result of claims by a more influential Kikuyu. <sup>(33)</sup> The new regulations concerning inheritance, however, left much to be desired.

Prior to the introduction of the consolidation and registration programme, all sons received part of their father's land, but despite new rules, the majority of Kikuyu persist in adhering to these customs. <sup>(34)</sup> This implies continual fragmentation of the land worked by one family, with the result that none of the sons can earn a living from his portion of the land. So the husband's wages from employment and the wife's labour on the land are both necessary for the upkeep of a household.

There are indications that the scarcity of land has once again been responsible for a further development in this division of labour. Young couples from Kulima move to the city and - for the time being - forego the advantages of living in the countryside. The piece of land they have inherited is so small that the woman can better devote her energy to more productive work. She too tries to find employment in the city. In such cases the man will allow the wife of one of his brothers to work his land, but he will not give it up for good. The division of labour between women and men is indeed not determined by immediate economic factors only, but also by long-term economic considerations. The minister of the Presbyterian church in Kulima, for instance, lives in the parish next to the church, but his wife and children live in the village of his birth. He does not want to sell his property in this village. His wife and children can live off it inexpensively and besides he wants to keep the farm as security for his old age. He will receive a pension but it will not be enough to live on. Moreover he likes the idea of being able to go 'home'. Another reason is that he is transferred every three years and does not want his children to have to change schools so often.

There is another aspect to the Kikuyu's relationship to the land. According to Neckebruck <sup>(35)</sup>, they are obsessed by the idea of acquiring land at all costs. Only the possession of land is a true indication of wealth - as long as a Kikuyu

has no land he will be dissatisfied, even if he has a good job or a business of his own. Obviously this desire for land can seldom be satisfied, since it is usually the rich Kikuyu who get the opportunity of expanding their properties. And the purchase and sale of land does not always proceed honestly. Significantly, President Moi proclaimed upon taking office in 1978 that all land transactions would be forbidden until more honest procedures could be put into effect. Nevertheless the accumulation of land by well-to-do politician-entrepreneurs is still a matter of course in Kenya. (36)

In Kulima people purchase land on a modest scale. Successful families sometimes succeed in acquiring land in the direct vicinity belonging to those less prosperous, but the land involved very rarely amounts to more than half a hectare. Usually, however, they have to buy land further away in the neighbouring districts of Embu or Nyeri, or even 500 kilometres away on the coast. A family member may then be asked to settle there and to work the land. Quite often the land does not get worked at all. It tends to be considered in terms of providing security for one's old age, or for the children's education.

If you work alone you can fill your stomach; by working together you can buy something of value.

In the centre of Kulima lies an area which is off-limits to the villagers. Tall bushes and bamboo hide it from curious gazes. It is rumoured that a tiger dwells here ... This is the property of Mama Ngina, widow of former president Kenyatta. She also owns a small coffee plantation in Kulima.

Kikuyu laws of inheritance do not assign women the right to own property, and until today these laws are more or less adhered to. Women have user rights to land, that is,

when they marry they obtain the right to work at least part of their husband's land.

The Kenya Law of Succession Act, which was passed by parliament in 1972, introduced a number of major changes in women's rights to land. According to this law widows are entitled to their husband's land for the rest of their lives, and they have the right to divide it among their children, daughters, whether single or married, having the same rights as sons. (37) However, until today this law has remained no more than a dead letter. In practice land inheritance proceeds largely according to Kikuyu tradition. A man decides for himself who will inherit his property - in most cases his sons, who likewise inherit the obligation to care for the widow(s) and unmarried daughters and sons.

The mere existence of a law does not necessarily change the attitude and views of the people to which it applies, and in practice this law is seldom enforced. As it is, and much to their frustration, sons must often wait until their father's death before obtaining his land, and they are not eager for the risk that their mother, too, could postpone the distribution of the land until her death. Men in Kulima asked if I did not consider it unjust that "a mother should rule the farm". They could only see this as leading to trouble.

The inheritance laws are not the only means of gaining access to land. Land can also be purchased, it is a commodity like any other, and can essentially be owned by anyone. The most important requirement for this way of acquiring land is the possession of money, or access to money. Rich Kenyan women, such as Mama Ngina, do own land, and rural women too compete for this scarce commodity.

Since 1966 about a hundred women in Kulima have become members of the Kulima Harambee Group. (38) Its current chairwoman, Agnes, told me that the group had been her own initiative. One day she visited her friends and asked them

if they too thought it "a good idea" for a group of women to work together. The aim was to buy corrugated iron roofs for the homes of each participant. Roofs had always been made of grass but due to the shortage of grassland other alternatives had to be found. Besides, a corrugated iron roof also offers the possibility of collecting rainwater.

In order to buy the corrugated iron they worked on the large farms and plantations in the district. They worked in groups of thirty for one or two days a week, depending on the season, until they had earned enough to purchase a roof for each member. In the same way they managed to buy manure to improve the grassland, so that each woman would be able to keep one or two cows.

These two initiatives lasted until 1973, when the members of the Kulima Harambee Group decided to set out on a new course by concentrating on activities of a more permanent nature. The group split up into three smaller groups, each with its own activities and a self-chosen board. The group was split up for practical reasons - the members of each working group live within walking distance of one another which facilitates contact, while joint activities are also easier to organize in smaller groups.

One of the working groups has received a field in . extended loan from the District Council. This field has an area of one hectare and is not far from the farms of most of the women. Here they grow maize, beans and cassava, the exact combination depending on the season. The women work the fields once a week and can purchase the produce themselves for an attractive price. The remainder is sold to the middlewomen. This money is deposited in a bank account, from which the members can take out interest-free loans.

This working group also has a so-called rotating savings and credit scheme. Every two weeks each member deposits 21 Ksh<sup>(39)</sup> (\$3)<sup>(40)</sup> into a fund. The entire amount 30 x 21 Ksh = 630 Ksh (\$90.46) is then placed at the disposal of the women on a rotating basis. This system was

initiated in 1973 and six years later the thirty women had received an average of 52 x 630 Ksh each, for a total of 3.276 Ksh (\$ 470). The chief advantage of this system is that the members regularly have a larger sum of money at their disposal. They are under an obligation as it were to put aside money because they cannot shirk the duties of membership. The women themselves believe they would never have been able to save such large sums on their own. Some of them regard this money as being for a "rainy day" and deposit most of it in the bank. Others prefer to spend it on building a new home and on furniture.

Agnes has had a wooden house built with three rooms and a corrugated iron roof. The room in the middle of the house, where she serves tea in china cups, contains two tables and four chairs. There is also a stove which can heat the home comfortably in the rainy season.

Within the group the women still devote most of their time and energy to their work as hired labourers, which can amount to two or three days a week in peak periods. In 1979 a day's work by thirty women was good for about 240 Ksh (\$ 34.46), for which the women had to work from 8:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Each member is required to participate in the work-days. If she is unable to, she sends a daughter or neighbour in her place, or pays a fine equivalent to the sum she would have earned for the group that day (\$ 1.15).

The earnings which the three working groups receive from farm labour are deposited in a joint bank account in the name of the Kulima Harambee Group. The board, which is made up of the chairwomen of the three sub-groups, a treasurer and a secretary, are entrusted with the task of finding safe investments for their capital. Since 1973 they have acquired a parcel of land in the vicinity of the town Thika and another near Ngenda Mission (both are in Kiambu). They also own two shops, one in Kulima, the other in Ngenda Mission.

Each member can lay claim to part of the properties; they are, so to speak, shareholders in the Kulima Harambee Group.

The board makes the preliminary contacts for the acquisitions of land and other real estate, although the purchase must have the backing of a majority of the women. Such decisions are taken during the meetings, but on the whole there is general agreement with regard to how the money is invested. The women's object is to earn as much money as possible and to invest it quickly, preferably in land.

They have leased the shop in Kulima and are attempting to do the same with the premises in Ngenda. Perhaps a tailor will set up a shop there, if not, the Kulima Harambee Group may start their own business. The women are prepared to sell both shops if they receive an attractive offer, nor are they unwilling to speculate in land, since the purchase of property is always done with an eye towards their future value. All profit, from sale or rent, will immediately be invested anew. 'It is better to have land than money' is their motto.

Women's groups are a common feature of life in Kiambu. At the invitation of the Community Development Officer I accompanied her on visits to twelve of these groups and so received an impression of how they function. Seven of them showed the same development as the Kulima Group. They were all founded between 1966 and 1973 and had a variety of possessions, ranging from land and shops to shares in co-operative coffee factories and large farms in the district. They also wanted to invest the proceeds from the shops and group work as well as the profit dividends from the co-operatives in the acquisition of land.

### Harambee

Throughout Kenya women have been setting up co-operative groups. The Daily Nation<sup>(41)</sup> reported on 3 December 1979 that there were 6,000 women's groups in the country, with an estimated 500,000 women participating in a wide range of activities. The goals of the different groups also vary considerably. But however different their motives may be, the enormous distribution of these groups indicates that this development is more than a local or regional trend. The women's group in Kulima should be seen in relation to developments on a national level, such as the ideology of harambee, which means 'let us unite'. Essentially, this ideology states that the individual should place the interest of the community before his or her own, and thereby emphasizes the importance of such African traditions as mutual social responsibility. All citizens must contribute to the development of the country's economy in accordance with their capacity. By working together and by combining their labour and means the people of Kenya can help to develop their country and eventually participate in society's prosperity.<sup>(42)</sup> The people of Kenya have responded enthusiastically to this appeal, concentrating their efforts particularly on the improvement of the country's infrastructure by, for instance, assisting with the construction of schools and hospitals.<sup>(43)</sup>

Central to the development of this ideology was the transfer of power from British to African hands and the role therein of the Kenya African Union (KANU). Initially this party represented a kind of nationalism aimed at reclaiming the farmlands that had been occupied by European colonists and distributing them among landless Kenyans.<sup>(44)</sup> With independence in sight the KANU politicians became increasingly preoccupied with the idea that Kenya should have a strong economy, which they believed would be the most important factor in guaranteeing political stability after

independence. It would not be in the country's best interests, therefore, to divide the large plantations into innumerable small plots, for this might well cause a serious drop in productivity. (45)

The changes in attitude towards the distribution of land went hand in hand with official statements concerning the opportunities and duties of the citizen of Kenya. Although KANU politicians still held that the economic position and status of the Kenyan masses had to be improved, this was not to be effected at the expense of groups that had already attained some degree of prosperity and status. (46) They therefor emphasized that which the people could undertake together and at their own initiative, without assistance from the government. (47) President Kenyatta in particular brought about the widespread acceptance of this idea among the Kenyan population under the title harambee. (48)

In the 1963 elections the KANU came forward as the strongest party, and formed the first African government under Kenyatta. (49) As we have seen, however, this government did not bring about true land reform. The large farmsteads and plantations, such as those in Kulima, were handed over in their entirety to wealthy, influential Kenyans.

In Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, Moore describes how Ghandi's doctrine helped unite the many socio-economic and culturally disparate groupings within Indian society in the struggle for independence. Gandhi called for a return to traditional values and the village lifestyle. With this concept he succeeded in mobilizing the Indian population. This added much to the strength of the nationalistic movement and enabled him to operate effectively against the British. Moreover, the Indian elite were thus able to join in the struggle without giving up their privileges - Gandhi's doctrine did not contain the same radical ideas about equality as do certain Western ideologies, the elite had nothing to fear. (50)

Although the situation in Kenya was somewhat different, harambee fulfilled a similar function. Independence was already in sight at the time when this ideology was being developed, but the future African government would have to be able to count on the continued support of the population.

The government used harambee to encourage as many citizens as possible to participate in the process of national development, which would in turn assure the new rulers of the necessary political support. At the same time, the harambee idea made it possible to leave the vested interests - not in the least those of the government - unimpaired. Kenyans were after all offered the prospect of a better standard of living through the application of traditional values, rather than through a more equal distribution of land. The function of harambee has been and still is to unite the various classes - the masses of small farmers, civil servants and entrepreneurs - in the process of nation-building.

Harambee has given women the opportunity to unite en masse. It is they who take the initiative in the harambee or "self-help" projects. (51) They are responsible for raising funds and organizing activities for the establishment of community services such as schools, maternity and out-patient clinics, and water-supply projects. These initiatives are often the direct cause for the establishment of a women's group; the first activities of the Kulima Harambee Group were in fact, undertaken within the framework of a major harambee project. Throughout Kiambu groups of women began to furnish their homes with corrugated iron roofs, since which time they have expanded their range of activities.

There are a number of reasons why women in particular are enthusiastic about harambee. One of them, as far as the Kikuyu are concerned, is the division of labour between the sexes, as a consequence of which women are directly involved in running the farm. It is therefore not surprising that

they make such efforts to obtain new roofs for their homes, because it is they who are confronted with the discomfort of a leaking roof and it is doubtful whether anything would be done about it if they did not take the initiative themselves. "It is not a woman's job to provide a roof," they told me, but "if a woman sees that her husband cannot afford one, then she can help". In other words, if a woman wants to do something about the living and working conditions on the farm she will be inclined to think of a solution on her own, and co-operative groups such as those in Kulima offer many Kikuyu women an opportunity of improving their financial situation.

Besides, since independence the government has continually tried to persuade women that they have a specific contribution to make to the country's development. In the first instance the authorities held the view, predicated in the colonial period, that women in particular should contribute to improving the welfare and well-being of the family.<sup>(52)</sup> In the early 1950s the authorities already began establishing "women's clubs". The emphasis was on domestic crafts such as embroidery, and on improving the family diet, particularly that of the children. The initiators of these women's clubs - the wives of European colonists - attached importance to these activities as being conducive to raising the family's<sup>(53)</sup> living standard.<sup>(54)</sup>

From the 1970's on the government has placed greater emphasis on women's activities in the agrarian sector, and these activities are now explicitly associated with the country's economic development. Although in the preceding period it was also women who had been largely responsible for the production of food and cash crops<sup>(55)</sup>, this was not officially recognized until the 1970s. It is no coincidence that this new appreciation of the role of women came at a time when, on an international level, too, the importance of 'the small farmer' in the development of Third World countries began to receive attention. Major international

organizations such as the World Bank make their aid dependent upon the degree in which the small farmer profits from developmental projects.<sup>(56)</sup> Donor countries such as the Netherlands, too, make similar demands.<sup>(57)</sup> At the same time, interest in the role of women in general is growing. In African countries, particularly south of the Sahara, the small farmer is often a woman.<sup>(58)</sup>

The success of the women's groups in Kenya has contributed to this new appreciation of the role of women. At the time of research, these groups had existed for about fourteen years, and the government considers them a good starting point for the improvement of rural living conditions. Representatives of foreign aid organizations pay working visits to these women's groups and have advised the government that programmes for improving the welfare of the family as well as for agricultural development should preferably be carried out via these groups - they should receive information, professional guidance and financial support. Consequently the government has launched special programmes geared to the women's groups for improving living standards and social conditions in the rural areas.<sup>(59)</sup>

I do not have information on how much support women's groups actually receive from the government. It is not realistic to expect the government to be able to provide assistance to the countless women's groups. In Kenya self-help is a more realistic approach to attain the set goals and to meet the people's needs.

### Conclusions

In this chapter I have placed the establishment and evaluation of the Kulima Harambee Group against the background of the history of Kikuyu land-ownership and the emergence of a political ideology shortly before and after independence in 1963.

The need for political and economic stability after independence led the African elite to opt for a model of national development as expressed in harambee. The population of Kenya has been impressed with the fact that only through their own efforts, together with those of others will they be entitled to a share in the country's future prosperity.

The establishment of the Kulima Harambee Group was a direct result of this nationalistic zeal. The idea of harambee has been realized in a number of different ways within this co-operative group. By working together the members have managed to supplement the income of their household; they have had new roofs installed, purchased manure and built homes. In addition to the material benefits of their collaboration, the group is a source of mutual assistance.

The history of Kikuyu land ownership shows how the arrival of the British at the beginning of the century restricted the Kikuyu's possibilities of expanding their territory. In addition, the presence of the British settlers brought about an unfair distribution of farmland, which trend did not stop after independence. This process of social and economic differentiation aggravated the economic insecurity of large sections of the Kikuyu population, but enabled women to acquire property in their own right. For Kikuyu codes did not permit women to own land and the prevailing inheritance laws still uphold this prohibition. This institution of individual property registration officially sanctioned a process in which competing Kikuyu men ignored the codes and laws of their society concerning the distribution of property. Land became a commodity and as such was accessible to everyone, including women. On their own most women would not be in a position to take advantage of this opportunity, but thanks to their membership of a women's group, rural women, too, were able to join the quest for land.

Both processes, the history of land-ownership and the emergence of a national ideology, were important preconditions for the establishment and further development of women's groups in Kiambu. Historical circumstances have contributed to the rise of the women's groups and this explains how it happened that women, who were previously not entitled to own land, are nowadays able to acquire property in their own name.

The acquisition of land by women can also be seen here in a different perspective, notably in terms of a change in the goals of the Kulima Harambee Group. At first these women worked together in order to improve the working and living conditions on the farm owned by their husbands. Now they invest almost all of the group's income in the acquisition of land which is the common property of all members of the group, and which is moreover not used for agrarian purposes.

The following chapter will discuss the circumstances leading to this change in the objectives of the women's group.

## II IT IS ALWAYS A GOOD THING TO HAVE LAND

Not surprisingly, the women in Kulima are very enthusiastic about their group. Considering their success, it is perhaps superfluous to describe the different motives of the women involved. However, I shall do so anyway because these motives are the best illustration of the importance of the group.

According to Agnes, the chairwoman, the women established the Kulima Harambee Group because they wanted to develop their country: they wanted a house made of stone or wood, a corrugated iron roof, a table, chairs and beds. Another motive is mentioned by Wambui. She says that the other women will offer help when a child is born or when there is a wedding feast in the family. "The women also help you out when you don't get your work done in time".

The women's motives are almost without exception, connected with money and what it can be used for, and with mutual assistance. The women's families, too, tend to stress these advantages of belonging to the group. "Women in Kenya help each other in this way".

But I was not wholly satisfied with these explanations. I wondered why the women had changed course. Why have the women stopped spending the money they earned together on their homes or farms? Why do they invest it in land, shops, shares, commodities that do not serve an agrarian purpose, or commodities from which the other members of the family do

not benefit? Time and again I asked them why they bought land. The women tended to be somewhat irritated by my persistent questions and more often than not I was given the following answer: "It's always a good thing to have land".

As we have seen, the Kikuyu are very keen to possess land, even when they do not need it as a source of income. This may be the reason for the women's irritation, for surely it is obvious that they will try to acquire land. The possession of land gives them status, and it is a profitable investment since the value always increases.

Still, I think there is another, more specific reason for the women of Kulima to want land. My attention was drawn to this by certain occurrences within the group. Women who are prevented by sickness, physical weakness or old age from continuing their participation in group activities pass on their claim to the communal property to their daughters. The Kikuyu laws of inheritance postulate that women must hand down their rights to the use of land to the wives of their sons, but now that they actually own land themselves they leave it to their own daughters. This development drew my attention to the possibility that there was a connection between the acquisition of land and other real estate and the changing relationships between the members of a Kikuyu family. <sup>(1)</sup>

Relating the activities of the Kulima Harambee group to the ties within a family has also enabled me to indicate which conditions induce particular women to become a member of a women's group, and why such groups continue to exist for such a long time.

At this point it is necessary to define a number of terms more clearly. The term extended family refers to the total number of households living together on one compound. I also use the word family in this text, which always denotes the extended family, unless stated otherwise. A household consists of a husband and wife, or a widow, or a wife of a

polygamous husband, with unmarried children. A compound denotes the plot of land on which stand the houses and sheds of the various households. The term farm refers to the complex of buildings and land at the disposal of an extended family.

#### Prelude

Each farm in Kulima is usually occupied by more than one household<sup>(3)</sup> belonging to the same and successive generations: an older couple with their unmarried children, their married sons with wife and children, and one of the grandparents (usually a grandmother). The middle generation sometimes lives in a polygamous situation, and sometimes, if rarely, a young male member of the family and his wife might decide to settle elsewhere. In the latter case the farm is occupied only by the young couple and their children. Each household, whether it consists of a husband and wife, a widow or a woman with a polygamous husband, has its own dwelling with kitchen or cooking area and storage space for the harvest, and each household works a separate part of the land.

When she marries a woman usually goes to live on the farm of her husband's family, where she is allotted a part of the land that her mother-in-law worked until then. She spends most of her time working the land and doing household chores. She has to fetch water, gather firewood, wash and cook, and when she gets children she will have to look after them. If her husband works in the city, she must also look after the cattle and the coffee.

The women on a farm do not usually work together, although the mother-in-law is entitled to the services of her daughter-in-law if required.

"When you put the big cooking-pot on the fire", says Wambui, "everyone on the farm knows you are cooking for them too. So then they don't cook for themselves.

When I put the suferia<sup>(4)</sup> on the fire, everyone knows that I am only cooking for my husband and children. I can go and see what my mothers<sup>(5)</sup> have been doing. Then I know whether I have to cook that day or not. There are no rules; you cook when you feel like it". But things are not quite as easy as this. Most days Wambui has her big pot on the fire, and her mothers benefit from her cooking.

Sisters-in-law help each other when one of them has just given birth or when she is ill; they do the necessary jobs around the house and look after the children. They don't work each other's land. Other people must be found to do this - a women's group, for instance.

During the first years of her married life a woman is largely tied to her home. Work on the farm and care for small children leave a woman very little time for other activities, but even before she has children a married woman is not allowed to move about very much. Her position on the farm is one of subservience, and she must do as the mother of her husband wishes. A young woman, for her part, wants to show what she is worth, and the best way of doing that is to work hard, all the time.

Warimu, with whom I often went for walks in Kulima, was embarrassed to be seen idle, so she always took her crochet with her. She would crochet as she walked, with me holding the yarn. If<sup>(6)</sup> it was morning she would take her basket with pangas<sup>(6)</sup> i<sup>(7)</sup> "So they will think I'm going to work on my land"<sup>(7)</sup>.

Consequently a young wife's contacts outside the farm are infrequent and are connected with her duties as a mother and farmer. She goes to the market, to the shopping centre or to the policlinic in case of illness and for preventive medical care. On Sundays she goes to church. A woman who was not born in Kulima or in the direct vicinity is at an extra disadvantage in not knowing anyone except her own in-laws. A woman who was born in Kulima and who married a local young man occasionally visits her own relatives and friends - which she likes to do.

As the children grow older a woman gets a little more freedom. The older children prepare their own meals, and after school they fetch water and grass for the cows, and they look after their younger brothers and sisters. This means that a mother need not be present all the time. Also her relationship with her mother-in-law has changed to some extent. The older woman has to start taking into account that she will eventually be dependent on her daughter-in-law, and will make an effort to stay on good terms with her.

Now is the time that the younger woman has the opportunity of starting or joining a women's group; she can also go to work on a coffee plantation. In fact she is often obliged to do so, because as the children grow older they cost more and more money for clothing and education. When the eldest are old enough to leave school and to go out to work, they can contribute to the cost of educating the younger children.

Major changes in the life of a woman take place when her children get married. When her son marries she gives part of her land to her daughter-in-law to work. So with each son who marries, she sees the land which she has to work become smaller.

Most of the members of the Kulima Harambee Group are at this stage in their lives. Their children have grown up and they have only a fraction of the land they once had to work left. (8)

This means a gradual decline of her economic position but as the mother of adult children she is allowed to go where she pleases and to participate in all kinds of social activities. Church organizations, all sorts of Harambee projects and political meetings would be unthinkable without these women. Her involvement in these activities can bring her prestige, influence and material benefits - important reasons to continue her involvement as long as possible.

The time eventually comes that a woman is confronted with the loss of all her income. When all her sons are married she can no longer provide for her own food. She must depend on her sons and daughters-in-law for her needs. Then ill health or weakness can become a severe restriction of their contacts outside the farm. She becomes more and more withdrawn and ends her days sitting on a stool in the shade all day long, while the adults and children go about their business without paying much attention to her.

Chances are that a woman spends the last years of her life without her husband. Even when the children are grown up and the need to work in the city diminishes accordingly, a man tends to go on living in Nairobi. Some men have business concerns in the city, others have a second household there. And women tend to live longer than men. In Kiambu women are in the majority in all age groups, but after sixty they outnumber men by far<sup>(9)</sup>, another reason for this being that the men, especially the older generations, tend to be quite a lot older than their wives. Old women spend the last years of their lives in the company of sons and daughters-in-law.

This brief outline of the life of a married woman serves to indicate what her most important economic possibilities are. As the mother of unmarried children she has land at her disposal, and she must work the land to provide food for herself and her children. By the time all her children are married she has given up her rights to the land, and she becomes dependent on her sons and daughters-in-law. But on the other hand her position of mother of married children gives her status and the freedom to do all sorts of things outside the farm.

The life of a married woman is determined by the access to land and by whether or not she has children. In these respects her position resembles those of her mother, her grandmother and her great-grandmother.<sup>(10)</sup> But the increa-

sing scarcity of land together with the practice of partial inheritance have given rise to big differences in the opportunities between these generations of women. From the beginning of this century on each generation has had less land at its disposal. A young woman nearly always works fewer fields than her mother-in-law when she was young, for the latter managed all the fields that her daughters-in-law now have to share. In other words, the amount of land that the older woman worked to feed one household must now quite often provide food for three or more households. One of the consequences has been that nowadays young women seldom produce a surplus. <sup>(11)</sup> They work so little land that all its produce is needed to feed themselves and their children and it even happens quite often that at the end of the season a woman has to ask her husband for money to buy food. This kind of situation makes the older woman, the mother-in-law, feel insecure. The land of those she must depend on for food, her sons and daughters-in-law, is often not enough to feed their children. This situation does not make the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law any easier. And yet, as we have seen, they do have quite a lot to do with one another.

#### Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law

From the woman's viewpoint one of the consequences of a patrilocal <sup>(12)</sup> pattern of settlement is that she must get used to the habits and personality of a complete stranger at least twice in her life. When a woman gets married she must establish some kind of relationship with her mother-in-law, and when her own sons get married, she will have to accept the presence of their wives on the farm.

These women get to know each other better in due course, but quite often they do not manage to get along at all well. Relations between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in Kulima are, more often than not, rather strained.

Their behaviour can range from polite reticence to ignoring one another or to an irritating amount of interference on the part of the daughters-in-law. <sup>(13)</sup>

On some farms the daughter-in-law wandered around with a blank expression of her face and, unless I addressed her directly, stayed in the background, making herself invisible, almost. On other farms I did not even get a chance to talk to the woman I came for - in those cases the daughters-in-law simply intruded constantly, thereby making it impossible to obtain information about the women's group.

Abbott <sup>(14)</sup>, too, mentions the fact that Kikuyu mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law often do not get on with each other. She blames this on the circumstance that the ambitions of a young woman clash with the responsibilities she and her husband have vis à vis the older woman. The younger woman must share the food with her mother-in-law and her husband must provide his mother with clothing, household necessities and sometimes also with a house. He must, in fact, spend his money on "someone else", as one young woman in Kulima puts it.

For a good understanding of their relationship it is not enough to merely establish that mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law do not usually get along, and why this is so. There are also their relative positions of power to be considered. Whose interests are given priority depends to some extent on the personal capacity of a woman to influence others, while in addition social and economic circumstances and attitudes determine how much power a woman has to get her own way.

In the nineteenth century and during the first decades of the twentieth, for instance, mothers-in-law leaned heavily on the principle of seniority. Respect for their elders and obedience were among the most important things that Kikuyu children were taught. <sup>(15)</sup> Even more important was that young people could hardly afford to risk treating their elders disrespectfully. Buijtenhuijs <sup>(16)</sup> calls tradi-

tional Kikuyu society a gerontocracy<sup>(17)</sup> and although he is referring specifically to the relations between younger and older men, I believe that the same can be said of the relations between the women of different generations.

All women who married into a lineage or mbari,<sup>(18)</sup> as well as the daughters of the mbari, had to submit to the authority of the ndundu ya atomia, the council of women, in which the eldest women had the most power. This power was based on their position as mothers of children who had been initiated. They held disciplinary right over all women who had not yet reached this status. For the latter women it was of the utmost importance to behave according to the rules laid down by this council, and which centred on subservience and obedience. Older women passed judgement on the behaviour of younger women, and any breaking of the rules was punished by excluding the woman in question from the right to ngwatio. This meant that they could no longer count on the help of other women when they gave birth, at harvest time or at any other times when they were unable to perform their duties. Exclusion from ngwatio was a very serious matter, and a woman could hardly afford to take such a risk. Another field in which the older women wielded all the power was their leadership during ceremonial events, the most important of these being the clitoridectomy.<sup>(19)</sup>

In her marriage the young woman was again confronted with the authority of an older woman, this time her mother-in-law. Polygamy only strengthened the position of the mothers-in-law. In order to organize things as smoothly as possible a husband had to divide his attention as equally as possible among his wives, which meant always keeping a certain distance. Very rarely did a husband have an intimate relationship with one of his wives or her children. His behaviour could indeed be termed authoritarian, and if necessary he would even use force to make his wives obey his wishes.<sup>(20)</sup>

The organization of domestic life, however, encouraged close ties between a mother and her children in all respects. Each woman and her children constituted a more or less self-contained economic and domestic unit on the farm. She looked after her own cattle, worked her own plot of land, and ate and slept with her own children in the same hut. The husband did not live with any of his wives, who took turns to do his housekeeping. Children got to know their mother as the person who gave them protection and security. She was their principal educator, it was she who produced and prepared their food, and who mediated between them and their father. Indeed, the distance between a child and its father was so great that the child did not dare address him directly.<sup>(21)</sup>

The arrival of a daughter-in-law did not always pose a threat to the ties of affection linking a mother and her sons. The polygamous marriage largely cancelled out the potential influence that these young women could exert on their husbands. A man, after all, kept a certain distance from his wives in order to avoid difficulties. In other respects, too, the influence that a young wife could exert on her husband was limited. The services she could render him could also be provided by his other wives, and under these circumstances her sexual attraction was obviously also subject to considerable competition.<sup>(22)</sup>

We may conclude, therefore, that upon marrying a young woman was confronted with a mother-in-law who enjoyed general respect by virtue of her status as a mother of initiated children. Through the ndundu ya atomia she and the other women of her rank had authority over all the other women who had not yet reached this stage, while the power of mothers-in-law was further strengthened by the tradition of polygamous marriages.

The influences of the ndundu ya atomia declined gradually in the twentieth century, and the institution as such finally disappeared altogether. Older women with whom I

tried to discuss these matters responded by shaking their heads. Their mothers would still have known about this organization but, they added, our mothers experienced the struggle for independence (in the fifties), and had not time for that kind of activities. Its disappearance has meant a loss of power for older women. They are no longer in a position to exert a strict authority over their daughters-in-law and consequently to make sure they will receive help from them when the time comes. It is quite easy to imagine, once the ndundu ya atomia had disappeared, that mothers were obliged to use their emotional ties with their sons to maintain their former position of power. Moreover, the disappearance of the council of women was only one of a whole series of changes brought about by the arrival of the British. It is enough here to point out the serious consequences of colonization for the Kikuyu's means of existence. As stated in the foregoing, one of the consequences was that the land of one family now had to feed more and more people. The relations between the members of a family obviously became more and more strained under these circumstances, while the necessity of influencing others within the family with a view to ensuring one's future security became accordingly greater.

Research conducted during the seventies led me to conclude that the power of older women is still decreasing. Research conducted by Abbott<sup>(23)</sup> into stress among Kikuyu women showed that older women were quite often afraid of their daughters-in-law, because the latter insulted them. From a study undertaken by Stamp<sup>(24)</sup> it would appear that daughters-in-law pose an increasing threat to their right to care in their old age, and that younger women can sometimes put so much pressure on their husbands that the latter even "forget about their mothers".

Once we educate our sons they get married and forget about their mothers and only concentrate on their wives ... These days our sons' wives tell them what to do and

that is why they do not remember their mothers. (Stamp, 1975-1976: 40).

#### The ambitions of a young woman

Although young women are hardly capable to provide sufficient food for their children, this does not stop them from having great ambitions for the future. They want their children to be able to go to school, that is, to receive secondary education, and "if they want to go to university, that's all right, too". Education is the only alternative that mothers can offer their children if there is insufficient land. Women have always derived their status from their children, but nowadays it is mostly a matter of having children with a good education.

Education costs a lot of money. Ideas about what is a good home have changed, and this led to considerable sums being required to invest in adequate accommodation. Women, both young and old, want to have a "European home", meaning a house made of wood, sometimes although not often of stone, and certainly with a corrugated iron roof. And usually it is not enough to build just one house for a family, for the boys are supposed to have their own place once they reach a certain age.

Young families often have to do without the extra income from the sale of coffee or milk. The women in such households therefore have a little less work to do, but this does not please them. They think it is "a waste of time if you only work your own fields". What they mean is that they think it is a great pity that they cannot make their time and labour productive in another way. For everything they grow on their own land is consumed by the members of their household, and does not provide them with any cash. So these women try all sorts of ways of obtaining an extra source of income. A woman with small children must restrict her plans to activities that she can undertake on the farm. Rearing

pigs on a small scale is a popular method, but even the realization of such a plan requires certain investments, such as material for a shed, the purchase of piglets to start the venture, and fodder to feed them with. Since she has no money of her own a woman must ask her husband to pay for these expenses. He is usually the one who has a regular income, and who has the contacts that enable him to borrow money.

Women often do not know exactly how much their husbands earn. The men tend to be secretive about that. A kuuk<sup>(25)</sup> will not tell his neighbour how much he sold his coffee for - and nor will he be inclined to tell his wife, I might add. It is customary for the husband's wages as well as the proceeds from the sale of coffee and milk to be deposited in the bank in the husband's name. Larger expenses, e.g. for fertilizer, pesticides and the children's school fees are usually made through the bank. Men who are members of a coffee co-operative usually have these expenses deducted from their pay. Their argument for doing so is that the money "would otherwise too easily be used for the daily expenses of a household". As a consequence the women have hardly any access to the bulk of their husbands' income. Nor is she formally entitled to withdraw money from her husband's account.

This situation puts a woman at a disadvantage compared with her husband. She has to use her powers of persuasion to convince him of the necessity of a specific purchase. A woman does not have the authority to make her own decisions, and if her husband refuses to listen to her arguments there is nothing she can do about it.

It took a lot of persuasion before Warimu's husband finally agreed to lease an extra plot of land. It had not been worked for a long time, and he was not looking forward to the heavy labour involved in preparing it for planting. He had argued that they did not need it. He could give her money to buy food. Warimu told me that her children were very fond of potatoes. The extra

plot of land will enable her to grow sufficient potatoes to last the entire season, and she will not have to ask her husband for money.

This inequality between husband and wife does not warrant the conclusion that the men are unwilling to help the women to realize their plans. But their income is usually far too small to comply with all the household's needs and wishes. The men have to decide what they want to spend money on, and their obligations towards their wives do not always have priority. However, the men do have to take their wives' wishes more into account than in the past.

The men are still entitled to more than one wife if they wish, but due to the shortage of land, few men actually practise polygamy. Most marriages in Kulima are monogamous. This does not only apply to young couples, but also quite a lot of the older generation were unwilling or not able to enter into a polygamous relationship. In spite of the gradual disappearance of the practice, polygamy is still sometimes a hotly debated issue. Small farmers and workers cannot usually afford to have more than one wife, but rich Kenyans do continue this tradition, and polygamy is still legal according to the new marriage law. Articles about the pros and cons of this form of marriage still appear regularly in the daily newspapers and in women's magazines.

The young women in Kulima are strongly opposed to polygamy. They cannot and will not conceive of sharing their husbands with anyone else. Young men tend to think that the women of today are no longer suitable for polygamous marriage. They compare them with their mothers, who were friends and who did everything together. "Nowadays women quarrel all the time and do not give a man a moment's peace. A sensible man will not take more than one wife". This kind of statement reflects, to my mind, a real and recognized loss of power of the men with regard to their wives. The wives, too, are fully aware of this. Although they tend to giggle and be quite shy when they give their opinion on these

matters, they know that their position is quite strong. After all, their husbands cannot afford to take a second or a third wife - the land that they inherit is usually hardly enough to provide food for just one wife and her children.

So young wives need fear no competition from co-wives, but still they do have some worries on this score. They are convinced that they cannot expect their husbands to be sexually faithful to them. They will do everything they can to see to it that the "opportunity does not arise". Obviously, the fact that their husbands live in the city most of the time while they must stay in their village does not make them feel more secure. Indeed, this situation often gives rise to the observation that Kikuyu husbands are generally not very interested in their wives at home. Pala and Stamp, for instance, point out that men often have girl-friends in the city, on whom they presumably spend a considerable proportion of their income. <sup>(26)</sup> My own observations, however, do not correspond with this assumption. Many young men told me that they did not know what to do with their leisure time in the city, and that they would prefer to return home every evening. One of them was even thinking about buying a car: the money that this would cost, he argued, was now being spent on public transport and on the expenses of living in the city. One of them told me about the time when he was still a bachelor. He had been in the habit of drinking and hanging about in the city every evening, but now that he was married he went home whenever he could, and helped his wife.

I do not claim that none of the men has a woman friend in the city without their wives at home knowing about this. The feelings of women about the sexual behaviour of men is certainly based on their experiences with men. But the men, too, are severely restricted in their possibilities. Considering the low average wages, they can seldom afford to spend money regularly on other women. Men in general depend on their wives for sexual contact.

There is another aspect in the relation between young couples which contributes to their mutual dependency. Young husbands share their wives' wish to give their children a good education. This is indeed one of the reasons for them not to take more than one wife, for they believe that it is irresponsible to have many children if you are unable to give them a good education or to provide them with a reasonably sized plot of land when they grow up. The shortage of land is, for the men, too, the main reason for sending their children to school.

The men often made these statements in connection with observations about their relationship with their own fathers, and they have a certain undertone of bitterness, for their fathers did not always offer them adequate opportunities to study. They depended largely on their mothers, or older brothers. <sup>(27)</sup>

Kamau is a man aged about 75 years <sup>(28)</sup>. He has four wives, two of whom are quite a lot younger than he is. He is not poor: he owns 100 cows and 100 goats <sup>(29)</sup>, as well as two farms. Nonetheless he has allowed only one of his 30 children, aged between 14 and 40 years, to study. He also refuses to give some of his land to his eldest sons to work, his argument being that the youngest children must be able to stand on their own two feet before he can distribute the land.

However, the other people in the village offer quite a different explanation for Kamau's behaviour. They maintain that he refuses to share out his land for fear of losing his sons' respect: "once he has distributed his land among them, they will stop doing him favours and treating him with respect". The same motives were attributed to old, monogamous men who refuse to part with their land while they are still alive. They play out their sons against each other by promising to give the best plot of land to the one who takes care of him best, and also by keeping it a secret to whom he intends to give his coffee plantation. <sup>(30)</sup>

Only those men who still have a reasonable amount of land at their disposal can put this kind of pressure on their sons. On average, young households do not have more than half a hectare of land, which is too little to live off, while for the next generation, their children, its importance will be negligible. So young fathers cannot count on their land being a guarantee for the maintenance of their ties with their sons, and consequently not for their sons' taking care of them in their old age either. But it would not be fair to interpret the responsibility that a young father feels towards his children exclusively in terms of self-interest. The efforts that fathers are prepared to make is certainly also a question of emotional commitment, although this commitment cannot be viewed as entirely separate from the need they feel to bind their children to them in some way. In a situation where land-ownership loses its function in maintaining the ties between a father and his sons, love and affection gain accordingly more prominence.

An indication of this is also to be seen in the difference between the behaviour of old and young men on the farm. Both of them live in the city during the week, so that their presence on the farm tends to be that of a visitor. This is more so with the older men than with the younger ones. The older men visit their wives and children less frequently, and their presence on the farm creates an indefinable, detached atmosphere. The members of the family wait until the father addresses them, for the rest they tend to keep silent. He assumes his wife's responsibility for doing certain kinds of work on the farm, such as picking the coffee beans, and often does so in a very authoritarian fashion. On the other hand it is quite common to see a young father playing with his children. He may even do some cooking. His sojourn in the city has taught him to take care of his own needs, and he will not hesitate to do the same at home. Young men know that they behave differently from their

fathers, but "modern men can cook meals and take care of their children. It is nonsense to think that only a woman can do those things".

The developments described above concern changes in the relationship between the members of a Kikuyu family. There is a distinct tendency towards more emotional and economic involvement between husband and wife.

Now if we place these developments in the context of the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, it is easier to understand why a mother-in-law should complain and feel insecure about her daughter-in-law. Her daughter-in-law's monogamous marriage strengthens the younger woman's position, her son is sexually dependent on his wife, which gives her the possibility of influencing him. Young wives use modern contraceptives for family planning purposes, and although they live on the farm with other households, the living conditions do offer a certain degree of privacy. Husband and wife sleep in the same room, with only very young children sharing that space. Another development is the greater emotional involvement of the young husband with his own children, which in turn strengthens his emotional and economic commitment to his wife. In order to achieve their ambitions young married couples must work together to make their labour as productive as possible and to spend their income as efficiently as possible.

This does not mean to say that the position and decisionmaking powers of men and women are equal. A woman must still make an effort to persuade her husband when she wants something - he still has the last word. The interest at stake for the woman will determine how much energy she will invest in trying to get her way - and the developments described above put her at a greater advantage than in the past.

To a mother-in-law these developments signify a loss of power and authority. The influence she has on her son is

undermined by his increasing dependence on his wife and children, and this dependence can oblige him to give priority to their needs and wishes over those of his mother.

Re-considering the position of the older woman, the mother-in-law, brings us to the following conclusion: the older she gets the more insecure her material position becomes. In addition there are indications that her influence on the farm is also decreasing in favour of her daughters-in-law. However, older women are less restricted in their movements: unhampered by young children, they can undertake activities outside the farm. And this possibility is the most important means of changing her position of increasing dependence to one of more self-sufficiency and power.

I will stay with the group until I die

With these words many women express their enthusiasm for the women's group, while this and similar statements are a clear indication of what these women expect of their old age. They do not expect much of their children, for in addition to the steadily diminishing power that they will wield when they are old, they are well aware that the financial means of their sons are limited. Rather than leaning on them for everything, they prefer to do their utmost to retain as much independence as possible.

Njoki is a widow aged about sixty. She and her five daughters-in-law each work half a hectare of land. Njoki has the use of her plot until such time as her youngest son marries and her sixth daughter-in-law will need the land. Njoki also runs a coffee plantation of one hectare, which will eventually also go to her youngest son. Until that time the proceeds from the coffee are shared between her and her youngest son. Njoki's circumstances are still more favourable than those of her daughters-in-law in a number of

respects. She only has her youngest son to feed, whereas the other women on the farm have to share the available food among an average of six people. At the end of the season her daughters-in-law run out of food, and are obliged to buy potatoes and maize on the market. Each time they return from shopping they talk at length about how much the price of maize has risen this time, in an attempt to persuade Njoki to give some of her provision to them. For she lacks nothing. On the contrary, she is able to sell produce to the middlewomen once or twice a week. And this makes it quite easy for her to pay contributions to the women's group - she does so with the money she earns with the sale of vegetables. If for some reason she has no vegetables to sell. "there is always the coffee". What she means is that her coffee has yielded sufficient profits to enable her to save some money. Njoki has her own bank account.

With the assistance of her women's group Njoki has managed to build a house. It is made of stone, and has windows with flowered curtains. She has a fake leather couch and armchairs, and a wooden side-table. Compared with this the other houses on the farm are shabby and in urgent need of repair or replacement. Daniel, one of her sons, started building a new house in October. The following February it still had no roof, and the prospects were gloomy: there was no more money.

Njoki's behaviour and life-style reflect the ambitions of the older women in Kulima. Her friends in the women's group live in much the same way. Unlike the younger women and unlike themselves when they were younger, they no longer contribute to the upkeep or feeding of the younger generation. Nor are they willing to invest their money in the farm or to help build a house for one of their children. These women keep aloof from the financial cares of their children. All the money that they have at their disposal via the farm or via the women's group is used for the improvement of

their own circumstances. They do this to be able to maintain their independence vis à vis their sons and daughters-in-law.

For Njoki her house is the most tangible proof of the success of the women's group. But there is more: as a member of the women's group she also has many close contacts outside the farm. The meetings of the women's group and the countless informal contacts resulting from their collaboration, make her and her friends into the best-informed women in the village. Via this group Njoki also has a network of business relations. In addition to her work in the group she regularly works individually as a farm labourer. This provides Njoki with an extra source of income. Even after she has handed over her plot of land to her youngest son, she can still earn money and provide for her own food.

Let us sum up the different activities of the women's group. Together they work a plot of land leased from the District Council. The produce of this land can be bought by the members for a low price, lower than the price they would have to pay on the market. Furthermore the group has a so-called rotating savings and credit scheme: each woman contributes a certain sum to the group twice a month. In turn, each member is entitled to the entire sum collected in contributions. This money is usually spent on the construction of a house or on furniture. But the system also functions as insurance against unforeseen expenses, and members can get an advance if circumstances such as illness, loss of a cow or reparations to the house necessitate this.

The women's group enables Njoki and the other members to lead a comparatively independent kind of life. The women do not depend on their sons for either a home or for food. Thanks to the many contacts that they have outside the farm they are not dependent on their relatives either for attention, friendship or favours. A women's group increases the independence of a woman vis à vis her relatives in very many respects.

However, the wish to remain in the women's group until death cannot be fulfilled in all cases. Sickness or weakness due to age oblige them to leave the group. Yet the contacts remain as the story of Wanjiru and Wambui will show.

#### From mother to daughter

The farms of Wanjiru and her daughter Wambui are close together. Wambui says that her mother's house is the only place where she can get some rest. Anton, her husband, likes to converse with his brother-in-law. They eat together, help each other and borrow each other's tools. One of Wambui's daughters lives with her grandmother and helps her after school. She fetches water and selects the beans and maize before they are cooked. Wambui knows that her children are always welcome on her mother's farm, which makes it easier for her to leave home.

Wanjiru suffers from sudden bouts of pain in her back. She had to leave the women's group, because she couldn't handle the work on the land anymore. Wanjiru's disability not only makes it difficult for her to do her share of work for the women's group, it has also become much more difficult for her to work her own land properly. Yet she cannot do without the food that grows on the land. Wanjiru also has to care for her mother-in-law, who is very old, for herself, and for Wanjiru's daughter. Of course she would also like to receive guests. So Wanjiru has asked her daughter Wambui to work her land in her stead. Thanks to Wambui's help Wanjiru is able to do her chores on the farm, and so she can retain her independence. She does not have to ask her daughter-in-law for food, and she can even sell part of the produce of her own land. In exchange for the assistance she receives from her daughter, Wanjiru has transferred her claims to the possessions of the women's group to Wambui, and has also asked her to become a member in her place. All the women who are obliged to leave the women's group for

reasons of health do the same. Young women in Kulima know that they will become members later on in their lives: "My mother is a member, and if I don't join, the group will die out".

Mothers and daughters, married and unmarried, usually get along quite well with each other. Daughters who live quite near to their mothers visit them as often as they can. In their mothers' houses they behave as if they never left. As they get older the sort of contacts that mothers have with their daughters gains even more importance. It is, as Njoki told me, "not pleasant to eat your bread alone". Attention, favours, but also information about the women's group and the occurrences in the village are important to dispell the monotony of old age. It is their confidence in each other, strengthened by the handing over of considerable material goods, and the membership of the women's group that gives the mother the certainty that her daughter will not fail her. The daughter becomes a member of a well-organized and influential group in the village at a fairly young age. She becomes co-owner of land, and gains access to a network of contacts which in turn give her access to money and work. And the benefits can only be fully enjoyed if she obeys the rules and conforms with the expectations of the group.

#### Conclusions

In the foregoing I have attempted to provide an answer to the question why the women of the Kulima Harambee Group buy land. The question arose because of a certain development within the women's group. After having used the proceeds from their activities in the group for improvements on the farm of their husbands, the women then spent their money on the purchase of land and other real estate: commodities without an agrarian purpose and without direct demonstrable use for the families of the participating women.

The increasing material and emotional dependence of older women on their sons and daughters-in-law, the scarce means which a family has at its disposal and the competition to gain access to these means have shaped the development within the Kulima Harambee Group described above. This development reflects the changed interests of the participating women. Whereas when they were younger they were still interested in investments for the improvement of the yields and circumstances on the farm, at a latter stage in their lives it is more advantageous for them to invest their money in ways that permit them to continue to exercise control over it, that is to say: to be independent of those with whom they live on the farm, their sons and daughters-in-law.

It is in this perspective that I see the specific function of land for the women in Kulima. The possession of land serves to strengthen their position within their family. It is a highly valued commodity and puts them in a position to negotiate with the members of their family. In Kulima women use their land as a means to ensure the help and support of their daughters and thereby to lessen their dependence on their sons and daughters-in-law.

As the most important explanation for the property dealings of the Kulima Harambee Group I have put forward the increasing dependence of older Kikuyu women. The position of a woman and her rights to the land belonging to the family are such that an old woman depends entirely on her sons for food and housing. At the same time I have indicated which possibilities these women have to change this situation of increasing dependence. It is the greater freedom of movement to which they are entitled by tradition that enables these women to start an organization such as the Kulima Harambee Group, and to turn it into a well-oiled form of collaboration.

This statement enables me to determine an important prerequisite for the establishment of women's groups. Only women with adult children are in a position to start such groups. Younger women, that is women with young children to look after, cannot join, nor do they have the possibilities of starting a group of their own. The care for young children and traditional ideas about how they ought to behave on the farm prevent these women from becoming members of a women's group. This also applies to the new members of the Kulima Harambee Group. The daughters of former members of the group already have adult children, who can replace them on the farm. Moreover they have acquired such a position on the farm, through their children, that they can afford to be absent quite frequently.

With respect to the relations between the members of a family, between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and between mothers and sons, the conclusion may also be drawn that we are concerned here with a form of co-operation which becomes more and more meaningful as the women grow older. The influence that these women can exert on their sons and daughters-in-law diminishes accordingly, and the contacts that they have with people outside the farm start to be used more and more intensively for their own purposes. The increasing necessity of some form of co-operation outside their own farm in order to maintain a certain degree of independence vis à vis these members of the family is an important contributing factor for the continued existence of a women's group. The older the members of a women's group are, the more necessary this contact outside the farm becomes.

### III ALL THE WOMEN'S GROUPS IN KIAMBU ARE MINE

Land in Kiambu is scarce, and a commodity for speculation by people far more powerful than the members of a rural women's group. This chapter deals with the ways in which they gain access to this scarce commodity. The discussion of these political activities of the women's group constitute part of an attempt to reconstruct the different ways in which Kikuyu women have organized themselves in the past and to demonstrate that they have always used their organizations to safeguard their own interests in the community.

#### Politics and power among Kikuyu women

##### The nineteenth century

From the male point of view the formal political system of the nineteenth century Kikuyu mbari, the most important political and administrative unit, was democratic. After his initiation, each man was entitled to membership of a council, a ndundu, corresponding to his status. His initiation, marriage, the birth of his first child and the initiation of his children gave him this right.<sup>(1)</sup> Women were excluded from membership, nor were they entitled to hold religious and juridical positions.<sup>(2)</sup> Unlike the men's council, the ndunda ya atomia, the women's council, is not described in the literature as a political organization.<sup>(3)</sup>

The women's council, however, meant that a considerable proportion of the Kikuyu population - the women - were organized, and it exercised a certain form of authority over them. The council regulated the hierarchy among women, their activities, and it had a function for the most important ceremonial event in the life of the Kikuyu: the initiation. For this reason I regard the ndundu ya atomia as one of the political institutions of the Kikuyu.

The difference in power between the men's councils and the women's councils was considerable. The decisions of the women's council did not extend beyond the women and their specific domain: the supply of food, care for the children and the initiation of young girls. The men's councils had the authority to take decisions about matters involving the mbari as a whole. The women did not have to be consulted concerning such decisions.<sup>(4)</sup>

Starting out from the fact that women were organized, a number of comments are in order here. Being organized means that joint action can be taken and that influence can be exerted on decisions. In other words: even if the women did not have access to the councils of the men, this did not mean that they could not exert pressure on them, the more so since the women held considerable economic power. The division of labour between men and women signified, among other things, that the women grew nearly all the food crops, such as millet, maize and beans. They had complete control over these products; a man was in fact not entitled to enter the fields of his wives<sup>(5)</sup>, nor to dispose of the food stocks without consulting them first.<sup>(6)</sup> The women did not refrain from using this situation to exert power over men. If a man insulted one of his wives, he could be sure that the ndundu ya atomia would reprimand him: the council saw to it that none of the man's wives or female kin gave him food.<sup>(7)</sup>

The distribution, or refusal, of food could take on political overtones under certain circumstances. The activi-

ties of women and the food that they prepared were indispensable for trade with other tribes, for ceremonial activities and for the recruitment of tenant farmers.<sup>(8)</sup> I have mentioned the expansionist policy of the Kikuyu during the last century previously. Groups of men left their native mbari and settled elsewhere. In many cases the area claimed by a group of kinsmen was too big to be worked and defended by them alone. In the last century more and more landowners started asking tenant farmers to settle on their land.<sup>(9)</sup> These men helped to prepare the land for farming, and to defend it against rival mbaris or other tribes, such as the Masai.<sup>(10)</sup> The tenant farmers formed working parties to undertake the heavy labour involved in preparing the land for farming. These working parties had to be supplied with food and drink.<sup>(11)</sup> The hospitality that the men of the mbari displayed determined their prestige in the eyes of the tenant farmers, and hence also the subsequent relationship between them.<sup>(12)</sup> At this point the opportunity arose for the women's council to exert influence on the policies adopted by the mbari. By supplying food and by offering assistance with the preparation of food and beer (or by their refusal to do so), the women played a major role in enabling the mbari to attract tenants and to strengthen its position vis à vis other mbaris and tribes.<sup>(13)</sup>

Women were not by definition opposed to the expansion of the power of the mbari. However, they did have to take different interests into account at the same time. On the one hand the provision of food for the recruitment of tenant farmers had to be weighed against other needs. A woman had to see to it that her children and her husband had enough to eat until the next harvest; she had to reserve seeds and food for her husband's guests. In addition a woman always wanted to put something aside for her trade with other tribes. Successes in trade increased her prestige, and indeed such profits could not be disposed of without consulting her.<sup>(14)</sup> On the other hand the recruitment of large

numbers of tenant farmers also signified an expansion of the power of the women's council. The women and daughters of the tenant farmers came under the authority of this organization; the working groups for communal labour became larger and the number of women whose assistance could be called in at times of birth or marriage grew accordingly.<sup>(15)</sup> Which interests were given priority - strengthening the mbari's position of power or safeguarding sufficient food supplies for the children and for trading purposes - depended to a considerable extent on the available stocks of food.<sup>(16)</sup> In times of abundant harvests the problems were presumably minor, but during periods when that was not the case, Clark assumes that hard bargains were driven between men and women.<sup>(17)</sup>

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the number of tenant farmers increased, and consequently also the power of the councils of women. The men of the mbaris sought to strengthen their ties with the tenants by the exchange of women. They gave their daughters to the sons of the tenants, and claimed the daughters of these marriages for their sons.<sup>(18)</sup> A consequence of this was, for the women, that they continued to live on the territory of the mbari when they married. Mothers, daughters and sisters lived their lives in each other's proximity. This made the collaboration between women better and also stronger. The chance of conflicts arising between these women was smaller than between the different wives of one husband and between sisters-in-law.<sup>(19)</sup> This period also saw a more formal recognition of the power of the women's council. On the occasion of the ceremonial feasts of the ndundu ya atomia the women received a gift from the men, usually a goat.<sup>(20)</sup>

#### The colonial period (± 1900-1963).

The arrival of European colonists marked the beginning, for the women, of a period in which it became increasingly

difficult for them to comply with what was expected of them. The lack of possibilities for expansion and the population increase made land a scarce commodity. Many women had great difficulty in providing their children with sufficient food.<sup>(21)</sup> Their political activities were in this period largely determined by resistance against the colonial government.

In 1934 and 1938 thousands of women flocked together to hold demonstrations. In Meru, for instance, they demanded that the bodies which had been buried there at the order of the colonial government be disinterred. The women wanted these bodies to be removed because they believed that their presence here was to blame for the lack of rain.<sup>(22)</sup> Later on certain measures taken by the Agricultural Department gave rise to widespread agitation. Owing to the shortage of land many mbaris had proceeded to cultivate the less accessible slopes of the hills, too. The government fearing erosion, ordered that the slopes be terraced. This work was done largely by women, who were obliged to spend two mornings a week on such labour. Besides the investment in terms of time the terraces also represented a drop in production due to the decrease in the area of farm-land. In 1947 and again in 1951 the women in Fort Hall decided to refuse to do this work, and after a massive demonstration the government had to repeal the measure of forced terracing.<sup>(23)</sup> In 1952 women in Fort Hall demonstrated against cattle dipping.<sup>(24)</sup>

The actions against the colonial regime united the women of various mbaris. This suggests that there must have been consultations and planning prior to these actions, and raises the question of which role was played therein by the women's councils.<sup>(25)</sup> Only Lambert<sup>(26)</sup> sees a relationship between these organizations and the demonstrations in the first half of the twentieth century, but his reasons are highly uncertain. He says that he does not know if the women had organizations of their own; he does draw the conclusion, however, that they must at any rate have had the means and

the will to organize themselves. For within a short time they succeeded in mobilizing thousands of women to take action.<sup>(27)</sup> Other information presented by Lambert indicates that women's councils still existed in the early years of this century. He recounts how older women exerted authority over younger women much as they had done in the nineteenth century, and how older women exerted pressure on a man by forbidding his wives to supply him with food.<sup>(28)</sup> The women had their own methods of making public the fact that they no longer recognized the authority of a man, or that they wished to break off contact with the members of another mbari.<sup>(29)</sup>

The method is then to remove their undergarments, stand in a line with their back towards the offender, bend forward and lift their skirts in unison. In this manner they indicate that they will have no further social dealings with the people of the area concerned or that they do not recognize the authority of the man whom they have thus deliberately insulted (Lambert, 1956: 99).

Lambert's uncertainty about the existence of women's councils and their significance for the demonstrations are, in my view, connected with the circumstances under which he collected his data. He received his information from men who did not give him straightforward answers to his questions.<sup>(30)</sup> They may have had a mild appreciation for the organizations of the women and Lambert's study is, moreover based on material which he collected in his capacity of civil servant.<sup>(31)</sup> Surely it is hardly surprising that the men were unwilling to give information, in so far as they had this information, to a representative of colonial rule, let alone to refer to any possible connection between the demonstrations and the women's councils.

I assume that there was indeed such a connection. The mobilization of thousands of women presupposes a certain degree of organization. The women must have informed each other about the plans to hold a demonstration and they must

have held meetings during which they discussed their displeasure and decided that action was necessary. It is not unlikely that they used the existing organizations, the women's councils, for the indispensable communication between them.

The actions and demonstrations of the women were not isolated incidents. They were part of a situation in which Kikuyu, women and men, offered increasing resistance to the arbitrariness and discriminatory nature of the colonial government. They do this - entirely in keeping with tradition - via separate organizations.<sup>(32)</sup> Only when the resistance of the Kikuyu assumed violent proportions in the fifties<sup>(33)</sup> did this change. Within the Mau Mau<sup>(34)</sup>, the militant resistance movement of the Kikuyu, women and men worked side by side to combat the English.

Years before Mau Mau turned to guerilla warfare, the Kikuyu had joined the movement by taking an oath to pledge their support and secrecy. Large numbers of women and men took one or more oaths.<sup>(35)</sup> Women are also reported as having taken part in the guerilla in the forest. There is still a lot of confusion as to what exactly their guerilla activities consisted of. On the one hand it is believed that they were the lovers of the male warriors<sup>(36)</sup>, on the other hand there are sources indicating that the women joined in the fighting. In the guerilla army in the forest of Aberdare women were officially appointed warriors and could acquire the rank of colonel.<sup>(37)</sup> However, the women were most active as cooks and nurses: they brought food to the warriors in the forest, they worked as spies, scouts and seers, and they led the oath-taking ceremonies.<sup>(38)</sup>

By participating in Mau Mau Kikuyu women broke with a tradition. They worked together with men in the same organization. Nonetheless Kershaw believes<sup>(39)</sup> that we should not conclude from this that this resulted from a change in the attitudes of women towards their tasks and

responsibilities. The conclusion she draws from her research <sup>(40)</sup> is that Kikuyu women became members in order to help their husbands. Mau Mau gave women hope for a better future: promises had been made about the distribution of land and work for their children. They did not expect or wish to hold leading positions within this organization, nor to become the leaders of the future. The motives of the women were, therefore, economic rather than political.

It seems very likely to me that the women's reasons to join the Mau Mau organization were indeed economic. The demonstrations at the beginning of this century, too, were inspired by economic motives. The measures of the colonial regime and the settlement of European colonists usually signified a serious infringement of their livelihood and although the entire Kikuyu population suffered, the situation was especially frustrating for the women. Their tasks and responsibilities lay in the provision of food, and their power and prestige were determined by their key position in the distribution of food. In that respect, then, their participation in Mau Mau also deserves to be seen in a political perspective. Political in the sense that by taking part in the struggle, the women also acted in their own interests, and that the restoration of their economic position would also mean the restoration of their power in the community. Nor do I wish to exclude the possibility that participation in Mau Mau had an influence on the attitudes of women. They did have leading positions, albeit on a modest scale, and their activities as spies and soldiers were entirely new experiences for them. Mau Mau therefore represented change. For the first time men and women worked together in the same organization, and for the first time, too, there was a far less strict division between the tasks of women and of men. <sup>(41)</sup>

The conflict between the Kikuyu and the British had far-reaching consequences for the collaboration between women.

During the Mau Mau period the women's councils disappeared, and at the same time co-operation between women was stimulated in other ways.

The British soon realized that military defence would not be sufficient to counter Mau Mau. The main problem was how to stop the Kikuyu population from helping the guerilla fighters in the forest. <sup>(42)</sup> The scattered settlements made effective control virtually impossible and the British decided to house the entire Kikuyu population in special emergency villages. The people were forced to build these villages themselves; they also had to construct new roads, to clear the surroundings of woods and bushes where Mau Mau warriors could hide, and to dig ditches to protect the villages from the guerilla fighters. <sup>(43)</sup>

As it turned out it was mostly women who did all this kind of work. <sup>(44)</sup> The men were fighting in the forest or were in hiding there; many of them had been deported to camps or prisons. <sup>(45)</sup> The few men who did live in the emergency villages were often loyal to the colonial government, and they had to see to it that the women spent a few days a week on construction of the village. In addition the women continued to be responsible for the provision of food - a task which now took far more time than before. The fields were no longer in the direct vicinity of the houses, but several kilometres away. When they worked in the fields they were supervised. It is not difficult to imagine that under these circumstances, "there was no time for the women's councils", as several women in Kulima informed me. They had no opportunity to hold meetings. This was not only due to the lack of time, there were also political reasons. The emergency villages were built to cut off the supplies to the guerilla fighters in the forest, and women had been an important link in these supply chains. <sup>(46)</sup>

The severely declining living conditions, but especially the malnutrition of children had already in the early fifties, just before the outbreak of Mau Mau, led to active

intervention by the colonial regime in the life and work of Kikuyu women. The organization Maendeleo ya Wanawake (Swahili for "Progress for women") had been established<sup>(47)</sup> at the initiative of a small group of European women, under the auspices of the colonial Department of Community Development and Rehabilitation, for the purpose of improving the living conditions of African women and children.<sup>(48)</sup> Under the leadership of this organization and with the aid of Community Development Officers (C.D.O.s) the so-called women's clubs came into being, which played a very active role in organizing the work of the women in the emergency villages. Groups of women in turn participated in the compulsory work in the village, in working the land and in taking care of the children.<sup>(49)</sup>

After the disbandment of the emergency settlements at the end of the fifties most of the Kikuyu returned to their homes and farms. The women's clubs continued to be very active, and their number grew rapidly. The objectives were to inform as many women in rural areas as possible about modern, European methods of child-care and to develop their skills in the field of domestic production such as pottery and basket-weaving.<sup>(50)</sup> In practice, quite a lot of time was spent on embroidery. It is for this reason that Maendeleo ya Wanawake was criticized in later years. This organization was accused of having taken as a model the European housewife who had enough time on her hands to occupy herself with embroidery and intensive child-care. The true interest of the African woman, such as modern agrarian information, had reportedly been neglected.<sup>(51)</sup> From the mid-sixties on the influence of Maendeleo ya Wanawake started to decline. Its leaders belonged to the new African elite in the capital, and showed little real concern for the problems of rural women.<sup>(52)</sup>

In spite of the criticism that was levelled against Maendeleo ya Wanawake, the importance of this organization and the women's clubs that were sponsored by it should not

be underestimated. The distribution and initial successes of these clubs were of course not due exclusively to the initiatives of Maendeleo ya Wanawake. The encouragement of forms of collaboration alone is not enough to get an effective organization started within such a short time. The organizational skills of Kikuyu women were at least as important. Maendeleo ya Wanawake, however, gave women the opportunity to organize themselves legally in circumstances under which they would not have been able to do so on their own. Also, the women's clubs enabled women to put their traditional skills to good use under profoundly changed political circumstances. The political change I am referring to here is the emergency of a national state. The most important political and administrative unit of the Kikuyu, the mbari, had in the course of this century lost much of its power. The political functions of the mbari declined steadily in importance vis à vis the decision-making powers of the colonial officials. For women this meant that the most important decisions as far as they were concerned were no longer taken by their own husbands, and this called for an adjustment of the content of their political activities, as was illustrated by the demonstrations earlier in this century. Women left the territory of the mbari, and gave vent to their discontent elsewhere, in the administrative centres of the Europeans.

These demonstrations were of a strongly ad hoc nature. Maendeleo ya Wanawake regularly brought women into organized contact with representatives of the government, and demonstrated to them the advantages of such contact. Maendeleo ya Wanawake provided a stream - albeit not a steady stream - of goods such as sewing machines, information, and money to set up training facilities.<sup>(53)</sup> The structure of the organization, a chain of representatives ranging from the local level, via committees, to the district and provincial levels, promoted the development of regular consultations between the different local organizations.<sup>(54)</sup> It is impor-

tant to note, in this context, that Maendeleo ya Wanawake strove, from the outset, after the Africanization of the leadership of the Women's Club and of the membership on all levels. (55) Members were given the opportunity to take courses and to use their newly acquired knowledge to set up new clubs. (56) These experiences, the contact with the government, and the establishment of an organization that extended beyond the mbari, were very useful when Kikuyu women had to orientate themselves concerning the political and economic possibilities of an independent Kenya.

My conclusion is that Kikuyu women have a tradition of mutual aid and economic co-operation. The women's groups in Kiambu are the sequel to a tradition that has bound Kikuyu women together since the last century. They also have a certain tradition in the field of political action. Women, mostly united in groups, stand up publicly for their rights and try to exert influence on the decisions concerning the community that they belong to. (57)

In the course of this century there have been demonstrable changes in the ways in which they participate in the political decision-making process. In the last century they were not entitled to membership of the political institutions of the men. They had to resort to manipulation and negotiation to exert influence on the decision-making process. By their participation in Mau Mau this taboo ceased to exist. Since Kenya's independence the participation of women in the formal decision-making process has assumed more concrete proportions. They now have the right to vote, both actively and passively. In the following section I hope to demonstrate how the Kulima Harambee Group uses this newly acquired right.

## Politics and power of a women's group: a network of relations

### Electoral politics

"All the women's groups in Kiambu are mine" - with these words a member of parliament introduced himself to me. I was to meet him frequently during the electoral campaign of members of the parliament in October 1979. This politician was duly voted into parliament during these elections.

The members of parliament are chosen by the people in general elections which are held every five years. Candidates for membership of parliament in 1979 were given three weeks to campaign for votes. The conventions during the electoral campaign of the candidate I met several times in Kulima were usually held on Sundays and were dominated by women. The cheering assumed frightening proportions: the word Nyayo (58), leitmotiv of the elections, sounded like the crack of a whip coming from the mouths of hundreds of women. The candidate's speeches were interspersed by songs and dances performed by the women's groups.

The decision of a group of women to "get up and dance" for a candidate means that they intend to vote for the person in question. This is how these women express their political preferences. (59)

The day after the election results were announced, I met a number of women of the Kulima Harambee Group in the village. They were wearing their best clothes, and were in a cheerful mood. "The candidate has asked them to come to see him" my companion explains, "they are going to hear all about what he is going to do for them".

Women are in the majority in the rural areas of Kiambu, which means that they also make up the majority of the voters. But that is not all, many of them are organized, and support the election of a particular candidate as a group instead of using their vote individually. They try to reach

agreement about the candidate they want to support by mutual consultation.

The candidate it supports is indispensable for the Kulima Harambee Group's business transactions. He supplies information about where there is land for sale, about its potential future value, and he acts as intermediary in the purchase and sale of their land. He is also in a position to intervene when their claims to a certain plot of land threatens to be undermined through manipulation by others.

This candidate is also the man behind the water supply system, which provides part of the households in Kulima with water for their farms. During the election campaign he had promised the women that he would do everything in his power to extend this water supply. A few years previously he introduced a new crop in Kulima: French beans, and guaranteed sales to buyers in Europe.

#### Harambee once more

The most striking buildings in Kulima are the churches: the Catholic Church, the African Independent Church and the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. Much of the activity concentrated around the churches is the domain of women. It is they who take care of the interior, who sing during the services, and who do the fund-raising for the construction and maintenance of the church buildings.

The women who belong to the Presbyterian Church of East Africa are organized in the Women's Guild <sup>(60)</sup>, a nation-wide organization with head-quarters in Nairobi. The Women's Guild is led by a staff of female officials. One of their most important tasks is to hold church services in rural areas. The members of the Women's Guild come from all over the district to attend these services. During lengthy sermons they are reminded of the special duties of women: the church, caring for the children, and keeping the home clean.

After the service the representatives of the local groups of the Women's Guild hold a meeting. A topic of particular importance is the organization of a harambee gathering. I have discussed harambee previously as Kenya's political ideology. Within this context harambee can be interpreted in a narrower sense: as a meeting intended to raise money for a specific project.

A harambee is a festive occasion. First there is a church service in the morning, after which the congregation eats together. It is one of those times when goatmeat is eaten - the traditional food accompanying ceremonial and ritual occasions. For the actual harambee everyone goes outside. The women stand in a circle, start dancing in a ring and singing to encourage people to give money. They pause at regular intervals to give themselves and others a chance to throw some money into the centre of the circle. Finally the Women's Guild official is presented with the money.

During my stay the Women's Guild once collected 35,000 Ksh (\$ 4846) at such a fund-raising meeting, and at another 84,000 Ksh (\$ 11630). <sup>(61)</sup>

Obviously, these sums of money were not raised by the Women's Guild members alone. Usually the organizing committee asks a member of parliament to address such a gathering. He or she is also expected to make a donation. A member of parliament does not always make a contribution out of his own pocket - far from it, in fact, for his function is precisely to persuade others to give money. He can invite a high-ranking government official to attend a harambee, and if the latter accepts the invitation it is almost certain that a donation from the state treasury will be made. The member of parliament can also put pressure on the business community in Nairobi. <sup>(62)</sup>

These harambees bring together a number of contacts that the women of the Kulima Harambee Group have with the world of politics and with a religious organization in their district. A number of them belong to the Women's Guild,

including the chairwoman. The regional chairwoman of the Women's Guild is the mother of the parliamentarian who is supported by the Kulima Harambee Group. The member of parliament himself is one of the important guests at the harambees of the Women's Guild in Kulima (see fig. 1).

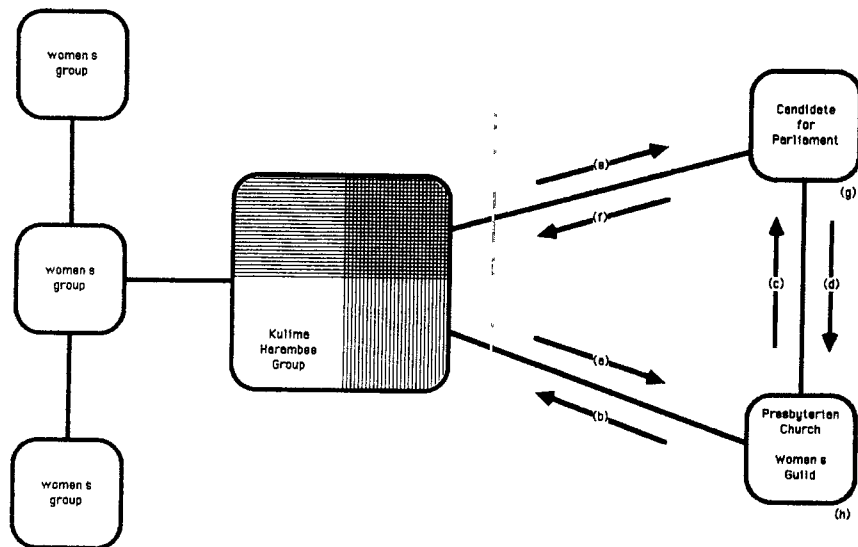





Figure 1 A Network Of Relations

#### Key

-  Supporters of candidate
-  Members of Women's Guild
-  Supporters who also are members of Women's Guild

- (a) priorities regarding projects
- (b) influence via Harambees
- (c) Harambee meeting as political platform
- (d) donations for Harambee projects

- (e) electoral following
- (f) protection, mediation
- (g) "All women's groups in Kiambu are mine"
- (h) chairwoman is mother of candidate

Harambee meetings serve a political purpose. For a member of parliament a harambee is a legal opportunity, apart from elections, of meeting his or her own consti-

tuents. These harambees give members of parliament the chance to keep their election promises or to demonstrate their importance for the district by supporting special projects. In this respect harambees are indispensable for a member of parliament's re-election. (63)

The gatherings are not organized by the politicians. The demand for a harambee comes from the people themselves, and women play a particularly prominent role in this. The network of women's groups in Kiambu performs the function of mutual consultation. They take stock of the different wishes and eventually decide on what is to have priority. They inform the Women's Guild of their interest in a particular project through the members. It is the interest of the Women's Guild to comply with such a request, for a successful harambee raises the prestige of the organization and consequently its influence in the region. During my stay harambees were organized to raise funds for a maternity clinic and for a secondary school for girls.

#### Conclusions

The power-base of Kikuyu women is their ability to organize themselves, to mobilize large groups of women to take united action. I have attempted to demonstrate that Kikuyu women have a certain tradition in the field of organization and political action. The way in which women organize themselves and the means they use to exert their power have changed in the course of time. At the back of those changes lies the development of a national state, and subsequently the formal recognition of the political rights of women by means of the active and passive right to vote.

In the nineteenth century women used their organizations to influence the decisions of their men, which were formally no concern of theirs, and to alter them to suit their own needs. The ndundu ya atomia organized all women who lived in the territory of a mbari and, partly because of

the hierarchical structure of this organization, the women could make common cause against their husbands.

They tried to influence decisions by the colonial government that they did not approve of by getting as many women as possible to demonstrate their opposition en masse. The demonstrations in the first decades of this century marked a new stage in the collaboration between women. They brought together the women of different mbaris, and thereby also made them leave the land of the mbari. This new development was the consequence of the establishment of colonial rule, which had meant the diminution of the political function of the mbaris. The demonstrations were the expression of the realization that it was necessary to join forces with women from other mbaris if they wanted to make a common front against the decisions of the central government.

After independence the importance of the mbari as a basis for organization diminished. On the local level women organize themselves in women's groups on the basis of age and neighbourliness. With this the strictly hierarchical structure of the ndundu ya atomia has also disappeared: women of the same age act on the basis of majority decisions. Women still organize themselves primarily on a local level today, but now their groups belong to a network of women's organizations on the district and national level. The women's group in Kulima is part of a network of similar groups in Kiambu, and has close ties with the Women's Guild, the nation-wide women's organization of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa.

The fact that women are organized and can therefore take joint action enables them to exert power in a variety of circumstances. The ways in which they do this have not changed fundamentally, only the means they have employed vary in the course of time. In the nineteenth century women had a monopoly position as far as the provision of food was concerned, and they were able to put pressure on their

husbands by refusing to give them food. In the colonial period they used a similar method: they refused to co-operate when it came to carrying out government measures. The key position held by women in the execution of that kind of labour enabled them to exert pressure.

Common to both situations was the exclusion of women from the formal political decision-making process in their society. In the nineteenth century the leadership of the mbari was in the hands of men, during the period of colonial rule women, like men, for a long time had no formal say in politics. With the recognition of their formal political rights, via the active and passive franchise, women again obtained a means of assuring themselves of a key position. Their votes, which they offer as a group, are decisive for the election of a member of parliament. Thanks to the permanent nature of their organization and the network of contacts their organization is part of, they are in a position to negotiate with politicians between elections.

#### IV CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

With regard to the question I raised in the Introduction - namely why the women of the Kulima Harambee Group buy land - the following conclusion may be drawn. The main motive underlying these purchases is the necessity of older Kikuyu women to improve their material circumstances in such a way as to ensure their maintaining their position within the family context. The answer to the question as to the nature of the ties between a member of parliament and women's groups can similarly be given briefly. The member of parliament acts as intermediary in the purchase and sale of land, and the Kulima Harambee Group, together with other similar groups in the Kiambu district, is part of his constituency.

On the basis of these conclusions, and on the basis of the arguments that I have put forward to support my statements, I would like to formulate a more general, overall, conclusion. Women's groups in Kiambu are, for the participating women, a source of domestic and social power. The different aspects of that power and the conditions under which they have evolved are summed up below.

The establishment of the Kulima Harambee Group coincides with the convergence of two developments in the history of Kenya: the situation of Kikuyu land-ownership and the emergence of a national ideology - harambee.

The history of Kikuyu land-ownership is determined to a high degree by the arrival of the British at the end of the

last century. The European settlers, accompanied by the restriction of the Kikuyu possibilities of expansion, and the growth of the Kikuyu population brought about a far-reaching differentiation among the Kikuyu population within half a century. On the eve of independence in 1963 the great mass of the Kikuyu population had severely limited reserves of land at its disposal, while a considerable proportion had no land at all. Only a small group had sufficient land to live on. The landlessness of large sections of the Kikuyu population was an important breeding-ground for the emergence of African nationalism, and secured this movement a massive following. Yet independence, in 1963, did not bring about any fundamental changes in the distribution of land. The large plantations and estates of the European colonists were handed in their entirety to the African elite: members of the government, their families and business associates. The motive of the new government to refrain from dividing up the fertile farmlands was to safeguard Kenya's economic and political stability. The government expected severe losses if the lands were distributed among the comparatively inexperienced African farmers. Instead, the citizens of Kenya were encouraged to use the resources that they had plenty of: their own manpower. Traditional African values, especially those of co-operation and mutual aid, were given new attention. Under the title of harambee, this ideology gained great importance in Kenya.

Women in particular were inspired by the spirit of harambee. They entered on a large scale into forms of mutual aid and economic co-operation, which, as women's groups, acquired a permanent nature. The Kulima Harambee Group, too, originated in this way. The women who set up these co-operative organizations did so for very good reason. Their families do not, admittedly, belong to the group of landless Kikuyu, but they and their husbands can often not afford even the most basic necessities. This is indeed borne out by the activities of the women in the Kulima Harambee Group.

The money they earned with their joint labour was spent on roofs for their homes and on manure to improve their land.

The history of this group and that of other similar groups in the district of Kiambu is characterized by a remarkable development: at a certain point they decided to invest the group's earnings on the purchase of real estate - preferably land. What is especially remarkable is that land in Kenya today is a speculative commodity, and the real estate market is dominated by wealthy Kikuyu. The land involved is not always farm-land: modern developments are making real estate an attractive proposition for housing construction or as industrial sites.

The purchase of land by these women's groups is significant for yet another reason. Land-ownership has always been a men's affair, and in spite of a number of legal provisions women still do not, in practice, inherit land. And here we come to an important aspect of the power of women's groups. By working together women succeed in gaining access to a prized commodity from which they as individuals would be excluded.

This development within the Kulima Harambee Group and other women's groups in Kiambu aroused my curiosity about the function of this land-ownership, the more so since the properties involved were not intended for agricultural purposes. The explanation would seem to lie in the relationship between the members of a family: between mothers and sons and between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. An important consideration in this analysis is the fact that the members of the Kulima Harambee Group are all about sixty years old. They are the mothers-in-law who partly due to the restricted financial means at the disposal of a Kikuyu family, have reason for anxiety about their old age. On account of the uneasy relationship with their daughters-in-law and their diminishing authority over them, the members of the Kulima Harambee Group want to remain

independent from their daughters-in-law as long as they possibly can. The women's group gives them the opportunity to do so. The activities of the group provide the members with an income and with regular social contacts. The real estate owned by the Kulima Harambee Group serves the same purpose. A woman can use her claim to this land as a means of assuring the assistance of a daughter. Consequently she need not appeal to her sons and daughters-in-law for help in case of ill health or infirmity, while the daughter can maintain contact with the women's group on her behalf.

This analysis makes it possible to indicate two conditions for the establishment and continued existence of women's groups. Young women have only limited possibilities of joining a women's group. They usually have small children to take care of, which prevents them from leaving home for extended periods of time. They also hold a subservient position within their husband's family. Young women therefore are not at liberty to organize their time and activities as they please. It is only when her children are old enough to take over her work on the farm that a woman can participate in activities outside the farm.

The women's group becomes increasingly important to these women as they grow older. It is this, coupled with the increasing necessity of entering into forms of co-operation with people other than the members of their family, that explains why the women's groups continue to exist for such a long time.

Each member derives a certain amount of power from her membership of the women's group - power, which enables each woman individually to take a more independent stand vis à vis the relatives with whom she lives on the farm, her sons and daughters-in-law.

In addition, these women can exert influence as a group on matters concerning their district. The Kulima Harambee Group is part of a network of women's groups in Kiambu, and

this network belongs to the constituency of a member of parliament. This politician acts as intermediary with the business transactions of these groups, and protects their claims to land against the manipulations of others. Via his contacts with the members of the government and the business community, this politician is also in a position to provide money for community provisions within the district on a regular basis. Through their relationship with this member of parliament the women in the network can help decide which projects should receive financial assistance. They have seen to it that a maternity clinic and a girls' secondary school were built - both institutions being specifically geared to women.

I have discussed the nature of the contacts between the member of parliament and the Kulima Harambee Group in connection with what I see as a tradition among Kikuyu women, that is, to be organized for the purpose of mutual aid and economic co-operation and to use their organizations to obtain social influence and power. This tradition adds another aspect to the circumstances that have played a part in the development of women's groups. It gives the actions of women a certain legitimacy. Their behaviour is accepted by others because it is neither unorthodox nor new. This is certainly true in a situation where tradition is used to legitimize correct and approved behaviour, as is done in the harambee ideology. Tradition, viewed from this angle, indeed constitutes part of the power of women's groups.

## NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

1. See e.g. Pala, 1974 and 1975, and Government of Kenya, ECA/FAO/UNFPA/-UNICEF, 1977

## CHAPTER I

1. Kulima is a fictitious name for the village under study and all the names of the people referred to have been changed as well. I have done so to protect the identity of the inhabitants of the village under study.
2. Kenya is divided administratively into 7 provinces. Each province has districts which are in turn sub-divided into divisions, made up of several locations. The sub-location is the smallest administrative unit. Kulima has a population of 6,000 in an area of 11 km<sup>2</sup>. Kiambu is one of the most densely populated districts in Kenya (Kenya Population Census 1979).
3. Gatundu is the centre of Gatundu division.
4. Kikuyu themselves use the term 'shopping centre'.
5. Kenya Population Census 1979.
6. Odingo, 1971:8.
7. Reining, 1977: 51.
8. Interim Report, Agricultural Service Ngenda Location (unpublished).
9. Since 1979 children receive free milk at school.
10. Interim Report, Agricultural Service Ngenda Location (unpublished).
11. A household consists of a husband and wife with unmarried children.
12. Veenstra, 1980: 359.
13. Veenstra, 1980: 359.
14. Muriuki, 1974: 37-38.
15. The terms property, ownership, owner, ownership rights and user rights are used in the literature. (cf. Sorrenson, 1967 and Kershaw, 1975-1976). See for more discriminate description of Kikuyu ownership rights to land e.g.: R. Buijtenhuijs, 1971, Le Mouvement 'Mau Mau': une révolte paysanne et anti-coloniale en Afrique noire, The Hague/Paris: Mouton and G. Kershaw, 1972, The land is the people: a study of Kikuyu social organization in historical perspective, Ph.D.Thesis, Chicago: University of Chicago.
16. Mbari is the Kikuyu term for lineage. For the functions of the lineage for the Kikuyu I have drawn on the literature. I should like to draw attention here to the recent criticism of the lineage concept in anthropology expressed by A. Kuper: Lineage theory: a critical retrospect, Annual Review of Anthropology, 1982, 11, 71-95.
17. Sorrenson, 1967: 10.
18. Kershaw, 1976: 174.
19. Sorrenson, 1967: 8.
20. Sorrenson, 1967: 5.
21. Buijtenhuijs, 1971: 69, 73-74.
22. Kershaw, 1975-1976: 173.
23. Muriuki, 1974: 35 and 78 and Kershaw, 1976: 173-184. The matter of the tenant farmers is more complex than one would expect from this description. See for a more discriminate description

- of their position: Kershaw, 1975-1976: 175-178, and Sorrenson, 1967:11.
24. Kershaw, 1975-1976: 184.
  25. Kershaw, 1975-1976: 183-184, Muriuki, 1975: 79, 176.
  26. Kershaw, 1975-1976: 184-185, Sorrenson, 1967-44.
  27. Muriuki, 1974: 174-175.
  28. Kershaw, 1975-1976: 185.
  29. Sorrenson, 1967: 220-222.
  30. Sorrenson, 1967: 116, 224.
  31. Harbeson, 1973: 60-65.
  32. Sorrenson, 1967: 227-236.
  33. Sorrenson, 1967: 228.
  34. Sorrenson, 1967: 215, Harbeson, 1973: 60.
  35. Neckebrouck, 1978: 77.
  36. Khapoya, 1980: 24.
  37. Coldham, 1974: 98-100.
  38. Kulima Harambee Group is a fictitious name. See note 1. "Harambee" is Swahili and means "let us unite".
  39. Ksh = Kenyan Shilling.
  40. At the average exchange rate of 1979. This applies to all sums mentioned in this chapter.
  41. The Daily Nation is a Kenyan newspaper.
  42. Harbeson, 1973: 173.
  43. Mutiso, 1977: 306.
  44. Harbeson, 1973: 119-123.
  45. Harbeson, 1973: 119-123.
  46. Harbeson, 1973: 140-141.
  47. Mutiso, 1977: 306.
  48. Mutiso, 1977: 305.
  49. Harbeson, 1973: 167.
  50. Moore, 1966: 370-378.
  51. See e.g. Mutiso, 1977: 311.
  52. The term "family" here refers to a husband and wife living with their unmarried children.
  53. See note 52.
  54. Pala, 1978: 44.
  55. Cf. Kitching, 1980.
  56. World Bank, 1981: 108-109.
  57. Memorie van toelichting op de begroting 1982 voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking, 1982.
  58. Boserup, 1970: 16.
  59. Cf. Government of Kenya/ECA/FAO/UNFPA/UNICEF, 1977.

## CHAPTER II

1. Cf. L. Lamphere, 1974; M. Wolf, 1974.
2. Polygamy is a form of marriage whereby one individual has two or more spouses simultaneously. Since only Kikuyu men are entitled to have more than one wife, the correct term here would be polygyny. This is a form of marriage whereby one man has two or more wives simultaneously. Both women and men in Kulima use the term polygamy, hence the latter term is employed in this study.
3. The number of households varies per farm. The description in the text concerns an average situation. I visited 17 farms, on which a total

- of 30 households lived: 65 adults, 27 men and 38 women. Of these 38 women, 31 were farmers, 6 of them were unmarried mothers and wage-earners and 1 woman was too old to be able to perform any task. Of the 27 men 11 were farmers (most of them of necessity because they could not find a job), the others wage-earners.
4. A suferia is an aluminium pan without a lid. Large cooking pots are made of pottery and are used for cooking maize and beans, which takes several hours.
  5. Wambui's deceased father-in-law had a polygamous marriage. Wambui addresses all these women as "mother", and refers to them by the same term.
  6. A panga is a sort of machete.
  7. The land belonging to a family is usually near to their home; in a few cases land has been leased, sometimes at some distance away.
  8. Most of these women gave 1919 as the year of their birth; in view of the striking consistency it is more probably that this date refers to the year of their initiation.
  9. To be precise: in Kiambu 54% of the population over 60 years of age are women, and 61% of the over-75 age group. (Kenya Population Census 1979).
  10. Cf. Abbott, 1975; Reining, 1977.
  11. A Kikuyu woman traditionally has the right to sell or exchange part of the produce of the food crops, on condition that she reserves sufficient amounts for her household and for her husband's guests (Kershaw, 1975-1976: 179). The present small surplus signifies a diminution of the traditional economic independence of these women; the surplus serves primarily for the purchase of household goods such as tea, cooking fat, matches, salt and detergents, and for the contribution to the women's group.
  12. Patrilocality is a form of marriage-settlement whereby a couple moves in with the husband's family (Kloos, 1981: 244).
  13. The differences in behaviour of daughters-in-law are connected with how long a daughter-in-law has been living on the farm.
  14. Abbott, 1975: 53-55.
  15. Kenyatta, 1961: 113.
  16. Buijtenhuijs, 1971: 33.
  17. A gerontocracy is a form of administration in which power is held by the elders of a society (Kloos, 1981: 241).
  18. See also chapter I, note 16.
  19. Kershaw, 1973: 55; Stamp, 1975-1976: 25-26.
  20. Whiting, 1977: 224.
  21. Kenyatta, 1961: 10, 99.
  22. Cf. Jansen, 1981: 40.
  23. Abbott, 1975: 77.
  24. Stamp, 1975-1976: 40.
  25. Kikuyu sometimes call themselves "Kuuk".
  26. Pala, 1974: 155; Stamp, 1975-1976: 28.
  27. The members of Kikuyu families have certain expectations and duties via à vis each other. Older children often pay the school fees for their younger siblings. In Kulima this gave rise to conflicts between the families of a husband and wife. Complying with such duties is in fact no longer as self evident as it was. Young households are beginning to question the traditional order of priorities. Should they give priority to the education of their own children, or should younger siblings come first?

28. Old people in Kulima do not know exactly when they were born - hence the "roughly".
29. The number of cows and goats are probably not accurate - they stand for "many".
30. Even when a father refuses to register the land in the name of his sons, they do live on his farm. His sons complain about the behaviour of their father because it prevents them from making any long-term investments, such as tree-crops. In addition, no bank or co-operative will grant them a loan, as they do not own the land.

### CHAPTER III

1. Buijtenhuijs, 1971: 20-29.
2. Kershaw, personal communication.
3. Cf. Buijtenhuijs, 1971 and Lambert, 1956.
4. Clark, 1980: 360.
5. Kershaw, personal communication.
6. Leakey, 1977: 280.
7. Kershaw, personal communication.
8. Kershaw, personal communication.
9. Kershaw, personal communication.
10. Muriuku, 1974: 78.
11. Clark, 1980: 365.
12. Clark, 1980: 362, 365.
13. Clark, 1980: 366.
14. Clark, 1980: 363.
15. Kershaw, personal communication.
16. Clark, 1980: 365.
17. Clark, 1980: 365.
18. Kershaw, personal communication.
19. Clark, 1980: 365; Kershaw, personal communication.
20. Kershaw, personal communication.
21. Kershaw, personal communication.
22. Lambert, 1956: 100.
23. Sorrenson, 1967: 42 and 75.
24. Buijtenhuijs, 1982: 185.
25. I have used the plural here to indicate that several mbaris were involved and each mbari had a ndundu ya atomia, a council of women.
26. Lambert, 1956: 100.
27. Lambert, 1956: 100.
28. Lambert, 1956: 98.
29. Lambert, 1956: 99.
30. Lambert, 1956: 95.
31. Lambert, 1956: foreword
32. Cf. Buijtenhuijs, 1971: 122.
33. Military confrontation between the Kikuyu (Mau Mau) and the colonial regime between March 1953 and June 1954. Buijtenhuijs, 1971: 203.
34. Cf. note 33.
35. Kershaw in Buijtenhuijs, 1982: 184.
36. Kershaw, personal communication
37. Buijtenhuijs, 1982: 186.
38. Buijtenhuijs, 1982: 185.
39. Kershaw, personal communication
40. She points out that information about Mau Mau was difficult to obtain so soon after independence (1963). It was a very delicate subject and

- there was no obligation to provide information to researchers, who were now no longer supported by the ruling political power.
41. Sporadic information indicates possible change, brought about by participation in Mau Mau (Stamp, 1975-1976 and Kanogo in Buijtenhuijs, 1982: 186).
  42. Sorrenson, 1967: 107.
  43. Shannon, 1955: 8.
  44. Shannon, 1955: 8.
  45. Sorrenson, 1967: 103.
  46. Shannon, 1955: 8.
  47. Wipper, 1975: 99.
  48. Wipper, 1975: 100.
  49. Shannon, 1955: 9-10.
  50. Wipper, 1975: 100.
  51. Pala, 1978: 44.
  52. Wipper, 1975: 104-105.
  53. Wipper, 1975: 102.
  54. Wipper, 1975: 102-103.
  55. Wipper, 1975: 102.
  56. Wipper, 1975: 100-102.
  57. With respect to this proposition I must make some reservations. Although Kikuyu women did stand up for their own interests, they did not always do so, as in the case of clitoridectomy. Kikuyu men, especially those who were organized in the Kikuyu Central Organization, and the missionaries of the Church of Scotland Mission were involved in a far-reaching conflict concerning this issue (Neckebrouck, 1978: 257). The conflict became very serious when the missionaries demanded that Christians refrain from this custom. Kikuyu, Christians and non-Christians alike, opposed this (Kenyatta, 1961: 130). During this conflict, which took place in the 1920s and 1930s, the women did not voice an opinion - at least not publicly - either for or against, while this issue must have been of particular interest to them (Buijtenhuijs, 1982: 185). The conflict was very serious. Buijtenhuijs raises the question why the Kikuyu resistance focussed on this particular issue (1971: 127). It is certain that this practice acquired a specific symbolic function, and clitoridectomy sometimes served just as a pretext for resistance (Buijtenhuijs, 1971: 127). Still, the question remains why it was precisely the practice of clitoridectomy that played this role. In trying to answer this question Buijtenhuijs starts out from the presumed chauvinism of Kikuyu men in their attitudes towards women. More or less unconsciously, this author maintains, they wanted to keep at least one sector of their society free from European influences and notably that of women. Now does this attitude, Buijtenhuijs wonders, derive from the wish to act in the interests of women or does it arise from the desire to keep women in a subordinate position? (Buijtenhuijs, 1971: 127). It is important to note that clitoridectomy was used by the missionaries as the spearhead of their attacks on the "barbarian elements" of Kikuyu culture (Cf. Neckebrouck, 1978: 212). It is therefore not inconceivable that, if the missionaries had attacked the circumcision of boys, Kikuyu men would have opposed this just as vehemently. Moreover, implicit in Buijtenhuijs' assumption is the expectation that Kikuyu women were themselves opposed to clitoridectomy and that they allowed themselves quite easily to be persuaded under the influence of the missionaries, to oppose this practice. But it is by no means certain that Kikuyu women opposed clitoridectomy en

masse, for this institution was of prime importance for their status and position. Their chances of marriage, it seems, would be seriously affected by the abolition of clitoridectomy (Kenyatta, 1961: 132), and it would also undermine the basis for respect. Mothers attached importance to the practice because the initiation of their children represented an advancement of their social status, while older women derived their authority, in part, from this institution. Still, this does not explain why the women in question did not express their views. An answer could perhaps be found in the traditional fields of competence of men and women. Clitoridectomy was part of the initiation of girls, and, like the initiation of boys, among the most important institutions of the Kikuyu (Kenyatta, 1961: 133). Initiation constituted the basis of the political, religious and juridical existence of the Kikuyu (Kenyatta, 1961: 133) - all three, in the formal sense, the domain of men. This is why, I presume, it was the men who dealt with this issue. If we assume, moreover, that Kikuyu women were not en masse opposed to clitoridectomy (and there are no grounds for assuming the contrary) it becomes understandable that they left it up to the men to decide in this case - it was, after all, their legitimate responsibility. The duties and responsibilities of women lay primarily in the provision of food. As soon as this was threatened, they did take action.

58. Nyayo is Swahili and means footsteps. This term, which has become a catch-word, was introduced by president Moi on his nomination, and meant that he intended to continue in the same direction as president Kenyatta, as indeed he appears to have done (cf. Khapoya, 1980; Veenstra, 1980).
59. Abbott (1975: 74), Staudt (1978: 13) and Mutiso (1977: 299-300) stress the great importance of women's groups for politicians who wish to be elected members of parliament. Abbott (1975: 74) even believes that few candidates would succeed in being elected if they did not have the support of the women's groups.
60. A group of Roman Catholic Women was less formally organized; they had leased a plot of land and divided the yields among landless women.
61. According to the average rate of exchange in 1979.
62. Wipper, 1975: 116.
63. Khapoya, 1980: 19.

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