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THE KIKUYU BIBLE RENDERING OF  
HEBREW WORDS THAT FUNCTION TO  
MARK OFF AN UNTOUCHABLE ZONE OR  
OBJECTS OR IMPOSE RESTRICTIONS  
IN RELATION TO SANCTA

THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
DIVINITY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF THEOLOGY

BY

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## ABBREVIATIONS

DV	Douay Version
JOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
NAST	New American Standard Translation
NEV	New English Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OC	Oral Code
RSV	Revised Standard Version
UBS	United Bible Societies

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## PREFACE

This research is as a result of my previous paper based on some theological and hermeneutical problems in the Kikuyu Bible translation with special reference to sin in the OT at St Paul's United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya. This research which was undertaken as partial fulfilment of a Bachelor of Divinity Degree was under the supervision of the Rev Johan Beks, Hebrew and OT tutor and Dean of Studies.

In this study, I realised that my efforts to have a clear understanding of this subject were curtailed by the lack of a deeper knowledge on the area of taboo, which to my surprise dominated the Kikuyu life as a whole.

Again, my life as a Bible translator, after college, pushed my desire to do research on taboo even further, after encountering a number of Hebrew terms that function to mark off an untouchable zone or objects or impose restrictions in relation to sancta. This research is an attempt to bridge the two cultures, the OT and the Kikuyu, from the point of view of taboo, through the Bible translation.

I shall begin by defining anthropologically the idea of taboo, ie considering different cultures from the standpoint of Polynesia. The OT terminologies that connote taboo in certain contexts have taken the major part of this research and have been thoroughly examined. These terms include, אָסוּר , אֶבְרָתָא , אֶבְרָתָא , אֶבְרָתָא and אֶבְרָתָא . Once this is done, and I am now confident that these words exist in the OT, an attempt has been made to subject to scrutiny the translational problems these Hebrew words create for the Kikuyu Bible translators. This has been achieved through a careful study of the Kikuyu words expressing the idea of a taboo, namely *mugiro*, *thahu*, *magigi* and *ng'uki*. Furthermore, following Walter Houston's advice, and given the elasticity of the term taboo, I have endeavoured to make more

precise distinctions not only between the various terms treated, but in relation to  $\aleph \gamma \theta$  . Thus, I have distinguished between, on the one hand, the ritual uncleanness generated by natural process (e.g. childbirth) or social responsibilities (burial of the dead), which creates a restriction in relation to the cult, but is purifiable, and, on the other, the infringement of prohibitions, which is described as 'making yourselves unclean' in the rhetoric of the Holiness Stratum (Lev 11:43ff 18:24ff) and which is punishable but not purifiable.

Such a comparison has not been done in isolation. Inevitably, different Bible versions had to be consulted for further illumination on the difficulties involved in this kind of translation and also in assisting us to reach the best Kikuyu rendering of the sister Hebrew words.

## INTRODUCTION

'You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean.'

Man, from time immemorial, has throughout lived in a world torn between choices, clean and unclean. His desire has always been to strive for the 'clean'. But has this goal been easily achieved, if ever?

Opinion varies from society to society as to what should be considered clean or unclean. But this problem has even been much more compounded by the need to set the criteria to be used in determining what objects or acts are to be avoided because of their inherent impurity, and who should impose such prohibitions. It is common knowledge that for these injunctions to be respected and honoured they must come from the mouth of a chief or a priest or a king.

Similarly, in the OT, it is the priest in the name of Yahweh who sets ritual guidelines, ie he helps his people to make the distinction between the holy and the common and between the unclean (cf Lev 10:10). Yahweh is considered to be the author of the 'pure-impure' rules. That means 'Israel was by no means unique in the ancient world in associating restrictions (especially) on diet specifically with the cult of their God' (Houston 1993:33). Subsequently, for Israel to be a special people as is required by God, they have no choice but to be holy just as he is holy, something that calls for complete adherence to these regulations.

The OT exhibits very close affinities to other tribal societies as far as these rules are concerned, both in their formulation and contents. While in other societies, like the Polynesian, the term 'taboo' has been used to describe these prohibitions, in certain contexts

the OT words like אָסַר , שָׁקַט , חָרַם , שָׁקַץ , etc have been applied to convey the same idea.

The need to have the Hebrew Bible translated into indigenous languages in different parts of the world, especially for my own people, the Kikuyu of Kenya, implies that, among other biblical terminologies, Hebrew words conveying the idea of taboo have to be translated. But how would that be done, given that the Kikuyu had different names describing their innumerable taboos covering all the spheres of life? Obviously, translation of such words poses almost unresolvable problems, not only for the translators in their effort to decide on which words to use, but also for the readers who may find the translation meaningless.

A study to attempt to unearth the underlying basic translational problems at this time in the history of the Kikuyu Bible is quite opportune. It is hoped that this will shed more light not only on the difficulties involved, but also the seriousness with which such Hebrew words should be treated by Bible translators and consultants in Kenya in general, and among the Kikuyu in particular.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE NATURE OF TABOO AS AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONCEPT

#### Introduction

In the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth centuries, the study of taboo became the centre of interest, not only for theologians but also anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists. The concept of taboo which seems to have a high degree of religious overtones had to be investigated from various angles of academic analysis: theological, anthropological, sociological and psychological. These scholars, with their researching instruments handy, had to dissect the cultures of different tribal societies<sup>1</sup> and cross-examine them carefully, so as to determine, from the point of view of their study, the origin and significance of taboo among these people.

Such works include, among others, William R Smith (1889), *The Religion of the Semites*, in which Smith gives special attention to Jewish and Muslim taboos, and Sir James Frazer (1911-1915), who devoted a whole volume in the *Golden Bough* to taboos among the ancient peoples. The work of Smith and Frazer influenced psychologists who felt the need to do more research, this time from the standpoint of psychology. Wilhelm Wundt (1916), the *Elements of Folk Psychology*, came up with the theory that taboos originated from fear of demonic powers. Sigmund Freud (1913) was influenced by Wundt and in his attempt to develop Wundt's idea he

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'tribal societies' has been adapted from Roger M Keesing (1981:3) and refers to 'primitive people'. Keesing says that although in anthropological usage the word 'primitive' is intended to refer only to relatively simple technologies, unfortunately it has pejorative connotations. Ayisi (1972) has used the terms 'primitive society,' 'simple societies' and 'primitive people' interchangeably.

further introduced the concept of ambivalence.<sup>2</sup> Recently, other scholarly studies on taboo and other related subjects have been done by people like Franz Steiner (1967), *Taboo*; Mary Douglas (1970), *Purity and Danger* and Jacob Milgrom (1991), *Leviticus 1-16*.

Unfortunately, Eilberg-Schwartz's (1990), the *Savage in Judaism*, which would have been of unquestionable relevance to our study, came into my possession too late to respond to satisfactorily. Eilberg-Schwartz's approach to the study of Judaism in the perspective of other cultures is particularly remarkable. He argues from the outset for a change of attitude towards the savages: 'The argument of this book is contained in the title. The savage in Judaism exposes and challenges the opposition between Judaism and 'savage' religions that have shaped the conceptualization of Judaism in the discourse of modernity' (ix). Eilberg-Schwartz has no difficulty in suggesting that the interpreters of Judaism have something to learn from 'the discipline of anthropology or comparative inquiry'. For example, referring to Herder *Ideas for the Philosophy of History* (1782-83), 1:51-52, he says that 'Primitive religions do not deserve the bad press they received during the Enlightenment. Early religion was not based on fear or stupidity as earlier writers had suggested, but was rather a noble, grand, and poetic reaction of the human to the natural world.'

But more interesting is part two of this book, entitled 'Cows, Blood and Juvenile Fruit Trees' (115-217). Under this rubric, Eilberg-Schwartz has dealt extensively with: animal metaphors in the rituals and narratives of Israelite religion; menstrual blood, semen, and discharge - the fluid symbolism of the human body; and incest, among other things. To him these issues have metaphoric and symbolic meanings. He argues that 'the concept of metaphor makes it possible to see the significance of animal names in the Hebrew...Israelite thought is saturated with metaphors drawn from domains of experience concerned with raising animals and growing crops' (117).

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<sup>2</sup> See Bacon (1990:208), 'Taboo' The Encyclopaedia Americana, Connecticut, for a complete summary of scholarly studies on taboo.



Concerning the dietary rules he says that they 'are a dramatization of the metaphors that govern Israelite thought. Israel identifies itself with the herds and flocks by eating them and dissociates itself from the animals that represent other nations by declaring animals inedible' (125). Since Israelite social life according to Ellberg-Schwartz has parallels with the animal kingdom, herds and flocks, or is patterned on animal behaviour, so to speak, incest taboo should be traced to the same origin (Deut 27:20; Lev 18:6 cf Deut 27:23; Lev 20:14). On menstrual blood, semen, and discharge, the pendulum shifts from metaphor to symbolism. He suggests that 'the levitical rules regarding bodily fluids represent a kind of palimpsest, in which symbolisms are superimposed on the same raw data. There are distinctions men/women, life/death, and control/lack of control'(189).

Ellberg-Schwartz's work is plausible, especially his readiness to use anthropology as a fruitful way of understanding the OT ritual impurity. However, the use of metaphors and symbolism should not be overemphasized and need not be seen as the sole approach to the proper comprehension of the OT taboos.

In the present study I shall examine taboo in the OT in the light of Kikuyu Bible translation. Inevitably, for us to enter into the field of translation, we shall have to cover a similar ground as my predecessors who dealt with this idea of taboo at length and whose work we have quoted extensively. But since a detailed comparative study is beyond our scope, it will suffice to examine, briefly, the meaning of the term 'taboo', and then compare the Polynesian understanding of taboo with the Kikuyu people of Kenya.

Later in this work, before we embark on the problems of translation, we shall, first of all, consider in depth various forms of taboos in the Hebrew scriptures.

#### Definition

The most recent dictionary definition of taboo in the Collins Concise English Dictionary (1992:1371) reads:

1. forbidden or disapproved of taboo words,

2. (in Polynesia) marked off as sacred and forbidden,
3. any prohibition resulting from social or other conventions,
4. ritual restriction or unclean,
5. (transl.) to place under a taboo (from Tonga tabu)

In their attempt to understand the meaning of taboo and its significance among the tribal societies, anthropologists came up with different definitions of this term. Frazer (1888:15) says that,

taboo (also written *tabu* and *tapu*) is the name given to a system of religious prohibitions which attained its fullest development in Polynesia (from Hawaii to New Zealand) but of which under different names traces may be discovered in most parts of the world. The 'taboo' is common to the different dialects of Polynesia, and is perhaps derived from *ta* 'to mark', and *pu*, an adverb of intensity. The compound word 'taboo' (*tabu*) would thus originally mean 'marked thoroughly'. Its ordinary sense is 'sacred'. It does not, however, imply any moral quality, but only 'a connexion with the gods or separation from ordinary purposes and exclusive appropriation to persons or things considered sacred; sometimes it means devoted as by a vow'.

A few years later, Northcote Whitridge (1911:337), writing for the same encyclopaedia, gave his definition of taboo as the Polynesian name given to prohibitions enforced by religious or magical sanctions. He further says that in Melanesia the term is *tambu*, while in Malaysia and East Indies it is *pantang*, *bobosso*, *pamali*, and in North America the word for tabu is *wakan*. The word tabu, he says, is derived from '*ta*', to mark, and '*pu*', an adverb of intensity.

Almost at this same period, Marret, quoted by Steiner (1967:108), gave his understanding of taboo. He says :

Taboo I take it to be a mystic affair. To break a taboo is to set in motion against oneself mystic wonder-working power in one form or another. It may be of the wholly bad variety.

According to Burris (1974:225-27), taboo means 'negative mana', where mana means mysterious force found in things which are potentially dangerous and contain a strange power

to do him harm. He also says that taboo can be treated as positive mana, where positive mana refers to mysterious powers which can be used to secure the good and to avoid or ward off the evil. Burris further observes that the fundamental principle from which taboo springs is the fact that the thing in question is strange, or new, abnormal, and hence dangerous.

The near contemporary of Burris was Margaret Mead, quoted by Steiner (22). Writing for the Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, she had this to say about taboo:

*tabu* may be defined as a negative sanction, a prohibition whose infringement results in an automatic penalty without human or superhuman mediation. The word was introduced in English from Polynesia, and special Polynesian usages have coloured the interpretation of the institution.

Lastly I have Steiner (29) whose work on this subject has influenced me tremendously as far as my understanding of taboo among other tribal societies is concerned. He says that the best account we have of taboo from the first half of the nineteenth century was written by de Freycinet, who accompanied Kotzebue on his first journey (1817) and who translated taboo as *prohibe ou defendu*, and he described the custom of taboo as an institution *a la fois civile et religieuse*.

According to Steiner (22), taboo is concerned with all the social mechanisms of obedience which have ritual significance; with specific and restrictive behaviour in dangerous situations. He goes on to say that 'taboo deals with the sociology of danger itself for it is also concerned with the protection of individuals who are in danger and with the protection of society from those endangered - and therefore dangerous - persons'.

This list of definitions is not exhaustive, but with the few examples at my disposal, I can now pause for a while and subject them to scrutiny. This approach will enable us to have at least a glimpse, if not a full understanding, of taboos.

A quick glance at the meanings of taboo given by various scholars reveal that there are both agreements and disagreements as to the correct definition of taboo.

To begin with, it seems to me that all the definitions I have examined are in agreement

that taboo is a ritual restriction or prohibition whose infringement always results in ritual impurity or uncleanness which is consequently punishable. But there is one exception. According to Collins English Dictionary one of the definitions of taboo is 'any prohibition resulting from social or other conventions'. Admittedly, this definition does not necessarily have any ritual connotation. Furthermore, as we shall see later, in the biblical texts not every taboo results in ritual impurity or uncleanness, even if there appears to be very close analogy. Again, it is generally true in the biblical text that uncleanness is contracted without the infringement of a prohibition. Houston has pointed out that in the biblical texts and in Jewish thought generally it is the transgression of the prohibition, or the pollution of the sanctuary (Lev 15:30), and not the contraction of impurity in itself, which results in punishment. Secondly, taboo is a concept which was universally practised in many tribal societies of the world, but different tribes used different terms to refer to the same concept. According to Ayisi (1972:93), 'The kinds of ritual prohibitions which are seen in most Polynesian societies are also found in various forms of African societies, with a few cultural modifications.' Thirdly, wherever and whenever this term was used, it either had a religious or social value, hence its origin should be traced in both. For example, Ayisi has pointed out that if ritual purification was not performed on a person who had become ritually impure, that 'person was exposed to danger and something unpleasant would happen to him. The victim then constituted a sociological virus.' Lastly, the use of the word 'uncleanness' in these definitions implies the contagious nature of the violation of taboo.

Nevertheless, while Mead argues that tabu is a negative sanction whose infringement results in an automatic penalty without human or superhuman mediation, Steiner (26) perceives the punishment of taboo breakers as civil. He gives an example of the islanders of Polynesia where a girl got a terrible beating for having eaten on board a ship that belonged to Captain Cook. To me there is no conflict between the two forms of punishment and I consider them correct. For while one form was applicable in one society, it was inapplicable, or perhaps completely unknown, in the other. For example, among the Kikuyu people a victim of taboo

suffered from illness which attacked the person automatically, as we shall see later. It should, therefore, be accepted that the consequences of violating a taboo were either automatic or civil depending on the tribe and also the nature of the taboo thus violated.

The other fact which seems to be remarkable, and where scholars seem to be at variance, is the dangerous and fearsome nature from which taboo is said to have sprung. Steiner (20, 128), among other anthropologists and psychologists, attributes wholesale the source of taboo to 'restrictive behaviour in dangerous situations for', as he says, 'taboo deals with the sociology of danger itself', or, to use Mary Douglas' (11-12) words, 'beliefs in horrible disasters which overtake those who inadvertently cross some forbidden line or develop some impure condition'. According to Mary Douglas(11)

But anthropologists who have ventured further into these primitive cultures find little trace of fear. Evans-Pritchard's study of witchcraft was made among the people who struck him as the most happy and carefree of the Sudan, the Azande. The feelings of an Azande man, on finding that he has been bewitched, are not of terror, but of hearty indignation, as one of us might feel on finding himself the victim of embezzlement.

To support this argument, she cites another example of girls' initiation rites of the Bemba where the performers are seen in casual, relaxed attitude. And so she concludes, 'so primitive religious fear, together with the idea that it blocks the functioning of the mind, seems to be a false trail for understanding these religions'.

In the light of this argument, I think it would not be rash to suggest that any generalized treatment of any cultural concepts of other people is inhibitive, and is likely to render insignificant the reason underlying such a concept, for example, taboo behaviour. It is justifiable, therefore, to say that ideas such as taboo could only be understood, or understood best, if seen in the sociocultural contexts in which they operate.

Zuesse's work (1974:482-504) on this subject is plausible and convincing, and is worthy of mention. In his article 'Taboo and the Divine Order' Zuesse begins with a negative approach with which taboos and the reasons behind them have been treated by scholars like Hutton Webster, Tylor, James Frazer, Levy-Bruhl and W C Willoughby (483). He cites one example, from

Webster's *Taboo: A Sociological Study*, where Webster says, 'Fear is systematized in taboo ... They make anything potentially dangerous and so prompt [primitive man] to avoidances, which, in their simplest forms, are almost as instinctive as those of lower animals' (482). Another similar example of a derogatory description of taboo is taken from Willoughby: 'Africans who do foolish things in their terror of taboo should be classed, not with evil-doers, but with children who have been threatened with bugaboos till they shriek at shadows' (484).

Zuesse's approach, following Emile Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, is from the opposite direction. To him,

taboo is the structural behaviour of culture, and all cultures are sustained by taboos (493). To understand a taboo, therefore, it is essential to study its full specific cultural context. In that context taboos are rational, or perhaps rather supra-rational, since they involve not merely the cognitive but also the physical, moral and spiritual levels of experience (495).

In this approach which Zuesse terms 'Durkheimian school', 'religious symbols represent the socialization and humanization of the cosmos, and by this fact they create a cosmos' (485). A similar opinion has been expressed by Adalf E. Jensen (1963:113) in his discussion about the archaic cultivators. Jensen has argued that archaic religion like any other religion has produced a great number of configurations which are primarily forms in which 'knowledge' is expressed. He has pointed out the significance of cultural behaviour of these people e.g. taboo. According to Jensen 'the life cycle in those cultures is paralleled by ritual commandments, taboo, and observances through which peoples try to express the world order as they see it.'

This approach is particularly important in a study like this where different forms of taboos touching on different cultures are examined. The open-mindedness with which this method attempts to understand taboos, where the actions and sentiments of the societies concerned are given symbolic meaning (they are expressions of inner and deep-seated attitudes), will illuminate various aspects of these phenomena leading us to constructive and instructive conclusions on the criteria used to determine what behaviour or objects were to be considered taboo.

The use of symbolism as the sole means by which tribal societies' cultures can be understood has, however, been cautioned against by Hallpike (1979:145). He points out that 'it would be quite misleading to suppose that because symbolism is particularly characteristic of pre-operatory thought, it will therefore necessarily emerge and flourish prolifically in all (tribal) societies'. Hallpike rather suggests that 'for this to happen, the intermediary agencies of social and cosmological categories are necessary'. He maintains that the tribal society's thought is intellectually inaccessible to the European ethnographer because of the innate difference between the two. Hallpike argues that since 'symbolism is inherently sub-linguistic, the ethnographer can never be completely sure that he has properly understood the meaning of a piece of symbolism, and in many cases he can only hope to make an educated guess'.

Following Hallpike's argument, we have further evidence of the intellectual inaccessibility of the tribal society's thought or religious precepts to the Western scholars as shown by Jensen (196) in his examination of the ethical element in, for example, taboo. He remarks that 'If we search for the ethical component of the taboo, we must forgo comparison with the ethical base of our Western Social order.' This handicap is caused by the fact that the 'primitive taboos differ in principle; rational, ie purposive, meanings cannot usually be stated.' This explains the reason why it is not very easy to see the logic behind the punishment inflicted on people who broke certain forms of taboo among the tribal societies. For example, why was purification necessary for a person on whom Kite's dropping fell? Among the Kikuyu people, 'If a Kite, when flying over a homestead let its dropping fall on any person, that person had to be purified, the manner of purification depending upon the sex of the person involved' (OC 1:21). To a Kikuyu, a kite belonged to the forest, the world of the spirits (the bodies of dead people were taken to the forest where they were eaten by hyenas) where other wild animals lived. The dropping of a kite falling on a person symbolized the coming together of the two worlds - the world of the living and the world of the dead, or better still, the world of people and the world of wild animals. Sometimes that was unpleasant and abominable. As we shall see later the Kikuyu people did not eat the flesh of wild animals except for the antelope (the family

of sheep and goats). In view of this, any association with wild animals was taboo. For example:

If a hyena should enter a village or homestead and dung either in the open clearing of the entrance (*thome*) or in any courtyard, ceremonial purification was essential (OC 1:2); If a jackal barked in the entrance area or in the courtyard of a homestead a ceremonial purification was necessary (OC 1:7); Should a toad, frog or lizard fall or jump into the fire in the hearth of a hut, a purification ceremony was essential (OC 1:9); If an owl hooted near a homestead, or worse still, perched on any hut or granary, purification was necessary (OC 1:11). If a snake was killed within the confines of a homestead, a purification ceremony had to take place (OC 1:12); and it was a taboo to kill a bird called '*nyamindi*' (cossypha or Robin chat) within the confines of the homestead (OC 1:20).

Needless to say, the taboo commandments among the tribal societies had deeper, symbolic meaning inaccessible to a foreigner, and as Jensen (194) says, 'nothing could be more obvious than that according to primitive belief, the commandments (taboo) incorporate the correct ethical behaviour, based on the ethical code related to the idea of the divine.'

Hallpike's call for heedfulness in the emphasis of symbolic elucidation of cultural value systems among the tribal societies is suggestive of the complexities of this kind of study. I take it that it would be incorrect, even for the experts who are convinced that a certain approach would be the best in a cultural study, to say '*erureka*' (like the traditionally known exclamation of Archimedes when he realized during bathing that the volume of an irregular solid could be calculated by measuring the water displaced when it was immersed). Whereas the use of symbolism will inevitably feature quite prominently, we cannot say that we have 'found it', and an attempt will be made to use other knowledge acquired directly from my participation in certain issues discussed in this paper, eg hunting.

Lastly, in definition of taboo, the word Polynesia is important. It features quite prominently as the origin of the word taboo. It is worth our while considering, before we conclude this section, the Polynesian understanding of taboo, and possibly looking for analogies in other cultures. Perhaps by so doing we shall have a clearer idea of taboo in the Hebrew scriptures and among the Kikuyu than we have already.

The origin of the word taboo among the Polynesian is not an instance of disputation among the scholars. Steiner (31) says (and this should be considered true):



...much of most theories of taboo still refers to Polynesian taboo customs or compares the Polynesian type with others. Therefore we need as background a brief description of the working of Polynesian taboo.

The word taboo became part of the English vocabulary when Captain Cook used it to describe his third journey round the world in the eighteenth century. I think it is appropriate, at this point, to use extracts of Cook's writings [quoted by Steiner, (22,25)] and see how he came in contact with the word taboo and what he understood about it among the Polynesian.

He says:

The people of Atooi ... resemble those of Otahete [Tahiti] in the slovenly state of their religious places, and in offering vegetables and animals to their gods. The taboo also prevails in Atooi, in its full extent, and seemingly with much more vigour than even at Tongataboo. For the people here always asked, with great eagerness and signs of fear to offend, whether any particular thing, which they desired to see, or we were unwilling to show, was taboo, or as they pronounced the word, tapoo?

In another place, Cook explicitly gives the concept of taboo a purely religious meaning, when he says:

We fixed on a field of sweet potatoes adjoining to the Morai, which was readily granted to us; and the priests, to prevent the intrusion of the natives, immediately consecrated the place, by fixing their wands round the wall, by which it was enclosed. This sort of religious interdiction they call taboo: a word we heard often repeated during our stay amongst these Islanders, and found to be of very powerful and extensive operation.

However, it seems Captain Cook, like anybody else who finds himself in a new culture, and one which is totally different from his own, could not actually understand the deep-seated principles regulating taboos and their real significance among the indigenous. This is especially clear in his use of the words 'mysterious significance', as he describes human sacrifice in Tahiti, where he says, as quoted by Steiner (23):

The solemnity itself is called Poore Eree, or Chief's Prayer; and the victim, who is offered up, Tataa-taboo, or consecrated man. This is the only instance where we have heard the word taboo used at this island, where it seems to have the same mysterious significance as at Tonga...

Steiner in his response to the misunderstanding of these words by Marett, who gave them a magico-religious significance, confirms that Cook did not know the precise meaning of the word taboo and it was therefore a mystery to him.

So far, with the kind of background we have now, we can proceed and examine, comparatively, the concept of taboo in the light of Polynesia.

### Menstrual Flow

It is appropriate to point out at the outset that menstrual taboos, which is going to be our first area of study, are not a particularly Polynesian phenomenon. It is quite evident, as we shall see below, that the idea of uncleanness believed to be inherent in menstrual flow, is not an unknown phenomenon in many cultures all over the world.

According to Steiner (21), menstrual taboos among the Polynesian ranged from keeping the woman out of sight, through details of strict hygienic avoidance, to her complete reintegration into daily life. Among the Marquesas a woman had to be kept out of sight for three days. Among the Maori tribes the woman moved out freely, and also worked in the house, only the bodily secretions being considered to be taboo. For the Tuhoe tribe, he says that the taboo applied to kopa, the cleansing material used by the women. Among the Wemale of Ceram, Indonesia, similar taboos were observed. Here, a woman with menstrual flow stayed in separate houses or 'in designated places under the pile - dwellings; conversation with the segregated women or any sort of approach is forbidden to the men' (Jensen, 1963:200). One fact about Wemale understanding of menstruation is very interesting. Menstruation among these people, as says Jensen, 'is linked to the moon, which the Wemale consider the manifestation of Rabie, one of the three chief Dema - deities.'

Pliny the Elder, quoted by Burris (1974:43), gives us an account of menstrual taboos among the Romans. Pliny says that a woman who was menstruating was taboo, and therefore

considered harmful. The ritual uncleanness inherent in her was thought to have enough power to sour must (grape juice), make grain barren, kill grafts, wither vegetables, dull mirrors, and do a lot of other harmful things.

Among the Kikuyu people it was a taboo to come in contact with human blood in general. But it was more serious if menstrual blood was involved. If a man had sexual intercourse with his wife and found later that she was menstruating, both he and his wife became ritually unclean. Again if a woman accidentally came in contact with menstrual blood of another wife, she became ritually unclean. It was also a taboo for a young married man to have sex with a girl in her period, as says Leakey (1977:1235):

If a young unmarried man or married man who still belonged to the warrior class slept with a girl in the restricted form known as *nyuiko*, and if during the night the girl's menses started and some of her blood contaminated him, but he did not notice this until after he had left the hut in which they had spent the night, he became contaminated with *thahu* (uncleanness) and had to be purified. The girl did not become contaminated with *thahu* at all.

One thing that strikes us most in these few examples is the belief in the transmission of ritual uncleanness through menstrual blood. Hence a woman in this state becomes tabooistic, as does any person who comes in contact with her blood. I shall try to find out later why blood was viewed with such great horror by many tribes in the world.

However, I think it is worth mentioning here that while human blood, especially menstrual flow, was viewed as a source of uncleanness in many tribal societies, in others it was a source of blessing. In her work, *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art*, Linda Schele (1982) in a very detailed account informs us how kings and queens had to shed their own blood on important ritual occasions, and this act was so significant that 'the bloodletter, often a stingray spine, was itself deified' (3). The victims of war, captured by the Maya people, became 'the state sacrifice victims, whose blood was then drawn and offered to the gods'<sup>3</sup>. The

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<sup>3</sup> of the Lalauna people of Goodenough island where 'eating the raw flesh of captives induced or renewed the frenzy of Meadoba'

importance attached to blood by the Maya is intriguing. Schele notes:

At death, Maya kings were placed in richly furnished tombs that often displaced the imagery of the watery Underworld, their walls painted the colour of blood or in blood symbols. In the Maya view, none of these behaviours was bizarre or exotic but necessary to sustain the world. To speak of the Maya and their rulers is, therefore, to speak of the blood of kings (15).

But what was the underlying motive behind this practice? Schele informs us that 'through bloodletting the Maya sought a vision they believed to be the manifestation of an ancestor or a god' (176). This information is crucial. Here we have blood viewed not so much as a source of the life of an individual, but as a means by which people seek inspiration by communicating with the Underworld: through visions produced after drawing large amounts of blood, 'they came directly into contact with their gods, and ancestors' (177). But, very importantly, we must not lose sight of the sacredness with which blood among the Maya is considered: 'it was the most precious and sacred substance of this world' (176).

To summarise, while the use of blood in this way is unique, it nonetheless helps us to have a glimpse of the centrality of blood in human life and the symbolic significance which different tribal societies all over the world attach to it. For example, Mbiti (1987:185), says that in many societies in Africa it was a taboo to shed the king's blood because it was 'the very essence of his life and therefore that of his nation'.

#### Childbirth

In Frazer's (16) article on taboo, we can identify a few examples of taboos imposed on new mothers and their new-born. He says: 'Mothers after childbirth were taboo, and so were their new-born children. Whatever a new born child touched became taboo in favour of the child'.

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(Young, 1983: 105)

Among the Kikuyu people, the midwife who assisted a woman at childbirth was supposed to be an old woman who had stopped childbearing, and was therefore free from sexual desire or intercourse. This had to be done since it was a taboo for a woman who had had sexual intercourse to come in contact with a woman at childbirth or immediately after. Kabetu (1972:8) tells us that a Kikuyu woman was taboo until after the fourth day of her childbirth, when her head was shaved, symbolically disconnecting her from the uncleanness of afterbirth. The shaving was also followed later in the day by a ceremonial sexual act between the wife and the husband to further disconnect the wife from the impurities of afterbirth. But why? Keesing (1981:150) tells us how Lindenbaum (1972), basing his explanation on the Euga of Highland New Guinea, notes that pollution taboos related to women are 'symbolic means of regulating population'. According to Keesing, Lindenbaum 'notes that pollution taboos and the accompanying sexual polarization are most commonly found where population pressures are extreme'. Whiting (1964), also referred to by Keesing, gives the polarization of the sexes a cultural meaning and a nutritional value. He suggests that 'it may be that semen and the mother's milk must be kept separate; but by spacing childbirth the adaptive consequences may include insuring maximum protein for infants in a society subsisting dangerously close to the margins of protein deficiency'.

Whereas these explanations seem to be convincing, they are nonetheless peripheral and secondary. The universality of sexual related pollution rules out the possibility of this kind of interpretation. It is most unlikely that the natives were conscious of these values (symbolism) which seem to appeal to a foreigner.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Keesing (342), who is in agreement with Lindenbaum's ecological explanation of sexual polarity, however says 'but contemporary Kwaio traditionalists, fully aware that such customs limit population at a time when they are dwindling in numbers and beleaguered by Christianity, continue to follow ancestral rules'. To me this awareness may not be original and it may be a later development.

Primarily, the modern biological understanding of the reproductive system (eg menstruation, birth and afterbirth) was vaguely known by the tribal societies, if they knew anything at all, and yet in this process they saw life come and go; there was life and death at the same time. At these weakest points of a woman's life, dare a man approach his wife in his attempt to satisfy his sexual desire? That would be like a doctor having sexual intercourse with his/her patient. Unbelievable! At this point it is not pleasure but care that is needed.

### Incest

Taboos among the tribal societies were not confined only to sexuality; rules regulating marriage were also prevalent and widespread. We shall now consider this aspect of human sexual prohibitions between two persons who are too closely related: incest.

According to Driver (1990:840), incest is a heterosexual relationship that is disapproved of by society because the partners are too closely related by blood, marriage or traditional connection. Keesing (1981:262) remarks that 'a central question in social anthropology for decades has been why human societies prohibit matings between siblings, and between parents and children, as incestuous. Why are there incest taboos?' Whereas Keesing informs us that incest was accepted in, for instance, Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, the Azande of Africa, Peru and Hawaii, he nevertheless points out that the incest taboo is universal.

For example, in the Western system, as says Lucy Mair (1965:84):

'incest is thought of as something particularly dreadful, not to be mentioned without a shudder, if at all. We have all heard of Oedipus, who was so appalled when he learned he had unknowingly married his mother that he put out his eyes'.

Lucy further informs us how Elizabethan dramatists 'ascribed incestuous relations to particularly villainous characters.' Again, there was a man called Byron who left his home in England 'when it was said that he was a lover of his half-sister.' Among the Kalenjin of Kenya,

according to Kipkorir (1973:50), there were forbidden marriage relationships and before marriage process could begin, a full process of identification of the marriage partners was conducted. Such forbidden relationships 'included members of the same totem, *senge* and *mana* against whom there was an absolute taboo, and cross-cousins to the third remove.' The Khasi people considered 'incest the worst and unremissible crime' (Jensen 1963:310). A victim of such transgression, as says Jensen, is punished by expulsion, denial of death rites, and denial of burial in the clan's burial plot.

Incest prohibition is a phenomenon whose origin, like many other cultural concepts, has puzzled many scholars. As a result, many theories have been advanced in the attempt to find out the real beginning of incest prohibitions. Firstly, as the New Encyclopaedia Britannica (1985:278-9) explains,

prohibition on incest with a group and the corresponding rules of exogamy require males to seek sexual and marital partners outside the group, thereby establishing functional alliances with the men of other groups with whom they have exchanged women.

Secondly, we have the origin of incest prohibitions traced from social needs. The same encyclopaedia states:

Another theory, emphasizing socialization, argues that the taboo is an important method of regulating the erotic impulse in children, preparing them to function with mature restraint in adult society.

From the standpoint of psychologists incest prohibition has its source in ambivalent emotions. This is clearly stated in the encyclopaedia:

The psychoanalytic explanation of Sigmund Freud speculated that the horror of incest derived from the combination of ambivalent emotions toward one's immediate family and repressed forbidden desires to commit sexual acts with family members of the opposite sex.

Lastly, we have sociobiological anthropologists who consider incest prohibition as a

matter of genetics. The same source says:

From the viewpoint of the sociobiological anthropologist incest, exogamy and endogamous marriage are primarily a matter of genetics. This view is based on the fact that inbred populations have diminished reproductive success and become gene pools for hereditary disorders.

While all these theories seem to be convincing, depending on one's standpoint, it is clear that theorists have not yet reached a general consensus, and as a result the origin of incest certainly remains highly speculative. But even having said that, I believe that given the sacredness and secretiveness with which sex was regarded among many tribal societies, it would have been abnormal and earnestly undesirable for any person to engage in marriage, or sex for that matter, with a close blood relative.<sup>5</sup> I mean, particularly for the few tribes that I know well in Kenya, that there is no girl or woman who would willingly expose her nakedness to a close blood relative, unless during the time of circumcision. In view of this, I am in agreement with experts, who, as Driver says, believe that early forms of man probably preferred the less familiar women outside their own kinship groups, and that the possibility of finding a mate within the small kinship groups produced by the high mortality rate was remote.

Whatever explanation we give to the origin of incest and its related prohibitions, it should be accepted that many people in the world viewed marriage with seriousness and the selection of marriage partners had to be treated with great caution. In one way, the

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<sup>5</sup> of Keesing (263). He points out that there are vulnerabilities to sexual attachment as well as obstacles between mother and son and father and daughter - as witness Oedipal and Electra complexes. Keesing goes on to say that 'cultural reinforcement of psychobiological barriers, and culturally fostered abhorrence of what otherwise might be temptations, have served to rule out incest in most times and places'. Note however the acceptance of marriage between cross cousins among the Maolans (Sahlins, 1976:29).



enforcement of prohibitions varied from society to society. In some societies incest was considered as a legal issue.

For example, in England, according to the article 'incest' in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (11th edition), Vol. XIV, incest was treated as a crime. It says:

In 1908, the Punishment of Incest Act was passed, under which sexual intercourse of a male with his grand-daughter, daughter, sister or mother was made punishable with penal servitude for not less than 3 or more than 7 years, or with imprisonment for not more than two years with or without hard labour... This law did not apply to Scotland, incest being punished in Scots Law. Under the Matrimonial Causes Act 1857, s.27, incestuous adultery is *per se* sufficient ground to entitle a wife to divorce her husband.

Similar, or even harsher, legal penalties are given to people who violate the incest taboo in the United States. According to Driver (840) in his article 'incest' in the Encyclopaedia America, Vol.14,

State laws show considerable variation in the relatives one is forbidden to marry, and the penalties range from a small fine and a few months in jail to a \$5,000 fine and life imprisonment.

Having observed the legal technicalities of incest, let us now turn to taboo as a means of enforcing incest prohibitions among the tribal societies. We shall return to Polynesia and see how they applied incest taboos to their own lives, and then briefly examine the same among the Kikuyu people. As I have already mentioned, we cannot embark on a serious study of the concept of Hebrew scriptures in relation to the Kikuyu Bible translation unless we understand the complexities involved.

In connection with incest taboos among the Polynesian, Steiner says:  
If a person committed incest with his sister he became kapu (the Hawaiian form of tabu). His presence was dangerous in the extreme for the whole community, and since he could not be purified he was put to death. But if a chief of high rank, who by reason of his rank was, of course, sacred (kapu), married his sister he became still more so. An extreme sanctity or untouchability attached to a chief born of a brother and sister and sister who were themselves the children of a brother and sister. The sanctity of such a chief and the uncleanness of the person put to death for incest have the same source and are the same thing.

The comparability of breaking incest taboos in Polynesia and non-observance of incest

law in some states in America is quite amazing; in both cases the victims suffer death penalties. This, I believe, is an indication of the strictness with which the two societies consider incest.

In Africa, according to Mbiti (137), marriage is not allowed between close relatives in the traditional societies. A person is allowed to marry only from another clan (exogamous), and where marriage may be allowed within the same clan, it is carefully scrutinized to make sure that the couple are not close relatives. He further says that taboos exist to strengthen marriage prohibitions. Mbiti also attempts to explain, like other theorists before him, the origin of incest taboos. He says: '...it is feared that children of close relatives will die, and that the living-dead are displeased with such marriages and would therefore bring misfortune to those concerned'.

I think something needs to be said about the much quoted phrase used by Mbiti, 'the living-dead'. In as much as this phrase signifies the involvement of the ancestral spirits in regulating the modalities of the religious life of the living with whom they had close association, it fails to disentangle the problem of how incest prohibitions started. For, it is that which is hated by the living that the living-dead hate. Again if we may ask, what came first, incest or the living-dead? Or put in other words, since the living-dead were at one time the living, what explanations did they have of the existence of incest prohibitions? Certainly, we should not trace the origin of incest from the dead, but from the living, and even though we should admit that Mbiti was not trying to help us in our struggle of finding out how this concept began, the problem remains unresolved.

We have already seen the significance attached to marriage as an institution, and the carefulness with which marriage partners were to be selected. It is important for us to examine the same element among the Kikuyu people, as it is stated by Kenyatta (1972:168):

...marriage among the Kikuyu means the linking of two families in bonds which are social and economic as well as biological, and which are, in fact, the connecting-links of tribal life. The code which regulates the behaviour of relations by marriage is, therefore, most important in its bearings on the whole structure of social life, and has to be very carefully learnt and punctiliously followed.

On the basis of this fact, and probably others, various incest taboos covering a wide range within the extended family, and more so the *muhiriga* (clan), were to be imposed among the Kikuyu. In his list of Kikuyu taboos, Kabetu (105-108) has included a few of these taboos. He says that it was a taboo for a person to sleep (euphemism for sexual intercourse) with his mother or mother-in-law or his father's wife, particularly when his father was alive, for that was tantamount to wishing him dead. It was also a taboo for a person to sleep with his sister or a step-sister or his aunt or his wife's mother.

A mention has been made to the effect that violation of incest taboos in some cultures was a social responsibility thus, being punishable by civil law, which in its severest form was death. Such extreme penalties were not known among the Kikuyu, for any punitive measures resulting from violation of any taboo followed automatically.<sup>6</sup> In any case, if the problem was not discovered in good time and purification done, the victim died a very gradual death.

In case of incest taboo, this could be removed by what Levy-Bruhl, quoted by Steiner (112), calls 'the cutting in twain of an exogamous group'. He uses an example from the Kikuyu to show how this was done. He says:

it sometimes happens that a young man unwittingly marries a cousin; for instance, if a part of the family moves away to another locality a man might become acquainted with a girl and marry her before he discovered the relationship. In such a case the result of the taboo is removable. The elders take a sheep and place it on the woman's shoulders, and it is then killed, the intestines are taken out, and the elders solemnly sever them with a sharp splinter of wood ... and they announce that they are cutting the clan, by which they mean that they are severing the bond of blood-relationship of the clan which exists between the pair. In so much as there was clan-relationship between them, their union was incestuous, but when this relationship is ended, the incest disappears. The marriage being 'regularized', no fatal consequences are to be feared.

Our exploration into incest and sexuality has been quite illuminating and we can understand taboo more clearly. But a concept of the nature of taboo cannot be fully

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<sup>6</sup> of also the Nandi of Kenya whose victim was flogged by the women who stripped for the purpose, and destroyed the offender's house. For more details, see A S Diamond (1971:260).

understood from one or two pieces of information (eg incest) for such categorization should be seen only as scholarly artwork which was unknown by the tribal societies, who saw life as one complete whole and not in terms of classified rules of pollution. In this respect, I agree with Douglas (54) who says that:

...any piecemeal interpretation of pollution rules of another culture is bound to fail. For the only way in which pollution ideas make sense is in reference to a total structure of thought whose key-stone boundaries, margins and internal lines are held in relation by ritual of operation.

It is in the light of this that we shall examine more examples of taboos among the tribal societies. Once again we shall go back to Polynesia and briefly consider royal and priestly taboos.

#### Innovators of Taboos

In Polynesia kings and chiefs were thought to be possessed of great power and should their people address them directly they would die. The taboos imposed by chiefs, priests and kings were usually more powerful than those imposed by a common person. According to Frazer, kings traced their lineage to the gods and such kings were called *arii tabu* ('chiefs scared'). He continues to tell us more about taboo in Polynesia:

In Hawaii taboos were imposed only by priests; but elsewhere in Polynesia kings and chiefs, and even to a certain extent ordinary individuals, exercised the same power. The strictness with which the taboo was observed depended largely on the influence of the person who imposed it: if he was a great chief it would not be broken; but a powerful man often set at nought the taboo of an inferior ... A chief could also render taboo in favour of himself anything which took his fancy by merely calling it by name of a part of his person. Thus if he said 'That axe is my backbone' or 'is my head', the axe was his; if he roared out 'That canoe! my skull shall be the baler to bale it out'. The canoe was his likewise.

This particular subject is very important for our study. It is significant to note the centrality of chiefs, priests and kings in the involvement of regulating the religious lives of

their people by the imposition of taboos<sup>7</sup>. Again, whatever comes in contact with these people becomes sacred, and hence a taboo. We shall see later, in our study about the Jews, that the God of Israel was perceived in more or less similar ways, and anything associated with him was believed to be sacred and therefore holy (cf taboo). But let us push this idea a little further by examining more examples in Polynesia. Frazer (16) tells us that:

If the king and queen of Tahiti trod on a ground it became sacred; if they entered a house, it became taboo to them and had to be abandoned to them by its owner. Hence special houses were set apart for them on their travels, and except in their hereditary districts, they were always carried on men's shoulders to prevent them touching the ground ... In New Zealand the spots on which great chiefs rested during a journey became taboo and were surrounded with a fence of basket-work. The head and hair, especially of a chief were particularly taboo or sacred ... Again if a drop of a chief's blood fell upon something, that thing became taboo - his property.

This whole idea is extended to cover the names of great men. We learn from Frazer that the names of chiefs and kings were taboo and could, therefore, not be uttered. And if the name of a king of Tahiti was a common word or even resembled a common word, that word dropped out of use and a new name was substituted for it.

### Food

Frazer also observed many taboos related to foods and feeding behaviours among the Polynesian. He says:

There was a rule called *ai tabu* which forbade women to eat with men as well as, except on special occasions, to eat any fruits or animals offered in sacrifice to the gods ... A woman engaged in the preparation of coconut oil was taboo for five days or more, during which she might have no intercourse with men. A tabooed person might not eat his food with his hands, but was fed by another person; if he could get no one to feed

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<sup>7</sup> cf Lev 11-15 where Moses and Aaron impose ritual taboos on the Israelites on behalf of Yahweh.

him, he had to go down on his knees and pick up his food with his mouth, holding his hands behind him.

Food taboos were to be observed with complete strictness. The seriousness involved in these taboos is evidently shown by the fact that the uncleanness inherent in a taboo person could be transferred to vessels which in turn became taboo, and could not be used again. To this Frazer says:

The law which separated tabooed persons and things from contact with food was especially strict. Hence a tabooed or sacred person ought not to leave his comb or blanket or anything which had touched his head or back in a place where food had been cooked; and in drinking he was careful not to touch the vessel with his hands or lips (otherwise the vessel became taboo and could not be used by anyone else), but to have the liquid shot down his throat from a distance by a second person.

Concerning the kind of foods which were taboo, and hence not to be eaten, he says:

Certain foods were permanently taboo in favour or for the use of gods<sup>8</sup> and men, but were forbidden to women. Thus in Hawaii the flesh of hogs, fowls, turtle, and several kinds of fish, coconuts, and nearly everything offered in sacrifice were reserved for gods and men, and could not, except in special cases, be consumed by women. In the Marquesas Islands human flesh was tabooed to women. Sometimes certain fruits, animals and fish were taboo for months together from both men and women.

Many tribes in Africa observed different kinds of food taboos. But for the purpose of our study, we shall consider a few examples among the Kikuyu.

A careful study of the list of taboos connected with foods and drinks appended to this work clearly reveals a high degree of hygienic, and to some extent moral, values. For example, it was a taboo to eat food in which a woman's bead had fallen accidentally when she was cooking. In this case, the bead was symbolically considered to be unclean, and by falling into the food, the latter became dirty and therefore unfit for human consumption.

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<sup>8</sup> of the Kikuyu taboos on sacrificial meat offered to *Ngai* discussed later in this study. A similar notion is traceable in the OT (cf bread of the Presence, 1 Sam 21:1-6).

Again, it was a taboo to have sexual intercourse in a hut while there was a pot of food cooking on the fire, and should this happen, the food could not be eaten, for it had been defiled. It is needless to say that the Kikuyu people saw this kind of sexual behaviour as morally unacceptable - a woman to engage in sex and at the same time have a pot cooking on the fire - incredible! In the eyes of the traditional Kikuyu, the two were incompatible.

Sahlins (170-179) has attempted a modern explanation of food taboos under the rubric 'Food Preference and Tabu in American Domestic Animals'. Right at the outset, Sahlins has declared his aim concerning his discussion about American uses of common domestic animals.

It is

merely to suggest the presence of a cultural reason in our food habits, some of the categorical distinctions of edibility among horses, dogs, pigs and cattle. Yet the point is not only of consuming interest; the productive relation of American society to its own and the world environment is organized by specific valuations, edibility and inedibility, themselves qualitative and in no way justifiable by biological, or economic, advantage (170).

Sahlins' elucidation is especially important at this stage, and serves as foreknowledge of the food criteria applied in the disqualification of various species of animals, birds and insects from the Jewish table discussed later in this study. But more significant still is Sahlins' assertion that

The principal reason postulated in the American meat system is the relation of the species to human society. Horses are shown affection, where cattle that are raised for beef ... they've never had someone pet them or brush them or anything like that.

Does this affirmation help us to see, for example, why the camel is forbidden in the OT? Perhaps not. Many reasons seem to be put to work as far as food prohibitions are concerned, as we shall see.

#### Funerary Taboos

Our attention is now drawn to other types of taboos among the tribal societies - funerary and allied taboos.

Let us use Frazer (16) again for this purpose. He says:

One of the strictest taboos was incurred by all persons who handled the body or bones of a dead person or assisted at his funeral. In Tonga a common person who had touched a dead chief was tabooed for ten lunar months; a chief who touched a dead chief was tabooed for three to five months according to the rank of the deceased. Burial grounds were taboo; and in New Zealand a canoe which had carried a corpse was never afterwards used, but was drawn on shore and painted red. In the Marquesas a man who had slain an enemy was taboo for ten days; he might have no intercourse with his wife.

Taboos connected with death and corpses were also common among the Romans. Burris (72-78) traces the origin of the feeling with regard to the dead in man's instinct for self-preservation. He says that among all peoples, things which are strange are to be avoided. It is also quite interesting to note how he connects the word taboo with the Latin word religio. He says, 'The nearest equivalent to the word taboo in Latin is religio; and it seems that the Romans at times used this word in the sense of taboo on death'.

The Kikuyu considered a woman who had had a miscarriage or who had given birth to a still-born child to be taboo. By coming in contact with the dead foetus she became ritually unclean. Although this uncleanness was confined to herself, it could also be transmitted to another person by sexual intercourse. Ritual uncleanness caused by taboos connected with death among the Kikuyu was therefore of a very serious nature, and the exact degree of the seriousness involved depended upon the extent of the contact. People who actually came in contact with a dead body contracted ritual uncleanness in a much more serious form than those whose contact was due only to relationship.

To this list of taboos may be added taboos connected with sick people. In many cultures, people who became dangerously ill and those with certain kinds of diseases were taboo. The author has witnessed a case where a Maasai family in Kenya left their *boma* (home) after the death of the owner of the *boma*. I think the whole *boma* became taboo in the eyes of



these people.

### War and Seasons

A mention needs to be made concerning war taboos. Such taboos were not unknown among the Polynesian and also among the Greeks. Whitridge (340) tells us that among the Greeks an army was sacred and that warriors were not allowed to eat fish, from which there was a general custom of abstinence except under the pressure of famine. He also gives us the Greek word for taboo. According to him the Greek word for taboo is ἅγιος, which means sacred or pollution. But the notions of sacred and unclean are distinguished by the use of different terms from this root ἅγιος for sacred, ἐν ἁγίῳ for unclean or accursed.

Earlier in this work, we mentioned that in order to understand the rules of pollution in a given culture, life has to be seen in its totality. In view of the fact that seasons and festivals are one of the many components that make life to be what it is, we shall now consider taboo connected with such great days among the Akans.

The Akans have a good way of marking out the seasons. This is done by performing *Adae*. According to Ayisi (83), 'this is an important rite performed by chiefs and elders of the clan and lineages.' The two forms of *Adae*, *Awukudae* and *Akwastidae* are used as units for counting the days and months of the year. These rites are also used to mark out seasons and to indicate the kinds of agricultural activities for each particular season. During this period the chief ritually purifies his soul. Ayisi says that among the Akans 'the chief's soul is sacrosanct and so is his body. He is therefore preserved by special rites on such festive occasions. *Adae* is also a day of rest like the Jewish sabbath, it starts at sunset the previous day with drumming, and is dominated by fasting and drinking.'

The idea of taboo connected with seasons and festivals can be better understood among the Polynesian. Here, there were taboos kept during the 'approach of a great religious ceremony, the time of preparation for war, and the sickness of chiefs' (Frazer 15-16). The

length of these taboos varied from years to months or days. For example, there was one in Hawaii that lasted thirty years and during this time there was no trimming of beards. Again, there were two types of taboos connected with seasons, common or strict. Frazer tells us that during a common taboo people were allowed to attend morning and evening prayer and had to abstain from their ordinary work. But fire and light were extinguished during a strict taboo. Again, no person was allowed to bathe or go out. Dogs could not bark or pigs grunt. Neither could the cock crow. 'Hence at these seasons they tied up the mouths of dogs and pigs, and fowls under a calabash or bandaged the eyes' (Frazer). Among the Naga tribes of Assam top-spinning, which is a man's game is not played while the rice is growing because the earth is said to be pregnant. Again, 'on certain holidays, when the village community may be said to be in a state of taboo - no one may work, leave the village' (Jensen, 1963:63).

The Kikuyu people observed similar taboos, especially after the death of a member of the family. A purificatory rite was to be performed 28 days after the burial of the deceased. During this ceremony which is called *hukura* (to unbury), work continued as usual, but no sexual intercourse was allowed. Again, no cooking was to be done during *hukura*. Therefore, the widow of the dead person, with the help of other women had to prepare quantities of foods before the ceremony started. This ceremony was marked by fires that were to go on burning throughout the whole night for eight days, the period within which the whole process of ritual purification was completed. During the second, fourth and sixth days all normal activities were suspended. This was *mutiro*. A time when people were not to be engaged in any work apart from eating, sitting in the courtyard and sleeping. These days were strict taboo. This was a time of cleansing - putting away the contagion of death, and failure to observe these taboos would have led to the postponement of the whole *hukura* ceremony.

#### Taboo Violation and Consequences

On several occasions, during our study of taboo in general, we have alluded to the

consequences of violating taboo. We have seen that the breaking of a taboo in some societies could be a legal issue depending on the nature of the taboo (law), while in others the consequences follow automatically.

Legal penalties against taboo-breakers is something that was unknown among the Kikuyu where the punishment was automatic (religious). For example, when a person broke a taboo the outward sign was wasting away without visible cause. Any person or live animal that had been subjected to conditions which resulted in ritual uncleanness caused by breaking a taboo automatically showed some visible signs of the condition unless steps were taken to purify them at the earliest possible opportunity. If a person or animal was afflicted in such a way and reached the stage where it showed the symptoms described above, it had to be purified as soon as possible, or the condition would become worse and end in death of the victim.

In my earlier work based on sin in the Old Testament, I observed that the victim of *thaku* among the Kikuyu began to pine very gradually and eventually he became very thin and died. From a standpoint of a Kikuyu traditionalist this is exactly what is happening to AIDS victims today, and the best explanation for the cause of AIDS would be, to him, ritual uncleanness. It could also be argued that the fearsome nature of AIDS as seen by the village folk which makes them avoid interacting or coming in contact with AIDS victims, is traceable to the deep-seated fear of taboo. Is AIDS a modern taboo? In the eyes of a traditionalist among the Kikuyu the answer would be in the affirmative - AIDS is contagious in the same way as taboo, and medical personnel have yet to exonerate their patients from this inextricable blame by giving the village folk a satisfactory explanation of the nature of the disease.

The association of diseases with the violation of taboos is widely accepted. For example, among the Kalauna people of Goodenough Island, a person who fails to observe widower's taboos, which restricts him from having intercourse with *Heloava* (his dead wife's hamlet) has himself to blame. The afflictions of age from which he suffers are 'attributed to his breaches of these taboos: his blindness, infections of the ear and chronic stiffness of the legs are text-book

demonstrations of the consequences' (Young, 1983:167).

Finally, we should say that there were as many taboos as there were different cultures in the world. Equally, there were as many forms of penalties as there were methods of purifications. It follows, therefore, that we cannot, in any way, exhaust our comparative study on taboo. Neither can we, for the purpose of purification of taboos, say precisely what every tribal society did to remove taboos. I suppose it will suffice in our conclusion of what we have said, so far, to mention water as a symbol by which the ritually unclean became ritually clean.

Water, for many tribal societies, has been a religious symbol of purity, and it has been a common instrument for removing the harmful effects of contact with persons or things which possess a mysterious power to harm. According to Burris (151),

inasmuch as these people find in everyday life that water can cleanse their household utensils and their bodies, they believe, ... that it can cleanse them of the uncanny contagion of those persons and things which are believed to be taboo.<sup>9</sup>

A good example of water being used for purification rites of taboos is found among the Tonga people. According to Frazer,

a person who had become taboo by touching a chief or anything belonging to him could not feed himself till he had got rid of the taboo by touching the soles of a superior chief's feet with his hands and then rinsing his hands in water, or rubbing them with the juice of the plantain, in case water was not available.

So much for our study of taboos among the tribal societies. Perhaps what needs to be said is that later we shall study more about taboos among the Kikuyu during our discussion about translational problems.

On and off, we alluded to the connection between what we have been discussing concerning taboos in the different cultures and the Hebrew Scriptures in terms of taboo. We have also said that our main concern in the entire work is to investigate the translational problems involved in the translation of the Kikuyu Bible. I think it is permissible at this point,

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<sup>9</sup> For use of water by the Romans, see Burris.

using a bird's eye view, to look for examples of taboos from the Hebrew Scriptures to serve as a foretaste of what a study of this kind entails.

For a student of Old Testament, it is quite unusual that in the study of such an important religious term, we have not explicitly mentioned the word 'holy'. Perhaps the closest we have come to it is our mention of sacredness associated with certain people or objects, which as a result were considered taboo. Again when, by chance, we mentioned this word it was referring to the God of Israel. The avoidance of the word 'holy' in our study was deliberate, for rules of holiness and uncleanness among tribal societies were not distinctive. Or to use the words of Smith(446):

Various parallels between savage taboos, and Semitic rules of holiness, will come before us from time to time; but it may be useful to bring together at this point some detailed evidence that the two are in their origin indistinguishable.

However, among the Jews there is a distinction between holy and unclean, and the Hebrew vocabulary is full of words expressing these two concepts. But it should be pointed out, and very clearly, that the rules regulating both concepts coincidentally agree with the Polynesian rules of uncleanness. Nevertheless, there is one noticeable difference between the two, as Smith asserts (153):

But though not precise, the distinction between what is holy and what is unclean is real; in rules of uncleanness it is primarily fear of an unknown or hostile power, though ultimately, as we see in the Levitical legislation, the law of clean and unclean may be brought within the sphere of divine ordinances, on the view that uncleanness is hateful to God and must be avoided by all that have to do with Him.

After Smith (452-456) has given several examples of what he thinks is taboo in the Hebrew Bible, he finally says it is impossible to separate the Semitic doctrine of holiness and uncleanness from the system of taboo. He further suggests that the word  $\text{טָמֵא}$  might more exactly be rendered 'taboo' for it is evidently a technical expression. Having said that, let us now look at a few examples of taboos in the Hebrew Bible, using the spectacles of Smith (140-164, 441-456), but in a summary form.

To begin with, things connected with God were holy and had therefore to be protected by rigid taboos; his name, places or sanctuary. Apart from things tabooed because of their holiness, we also have innumerable examples of taboos covering many spheres of life among the Jews.

Certain foods were taboo among the Jews. Furthermore, the uncleanness of the eight tabooed unclean swarmers (Lev 11:29-38) could be transferred to an earthen vessel, which under certain circumstances, would be broken, like in Polynesia. Other taboos include touching a dead body, or a person with leprosy, and should this happen, the person became unclean and could communicate his uncleanness to other people. There were taboos related to menstruation and sex. Related to this were taboos imposed on new mothers and their newborn. There were also taboos connected with the use of iron which was forbidden in the construction of the temple. Warriors on a campaign were taboo, and were required to observe continence. There were taboos imposed on a Nazarite, ie he was not allowed to partake of certain foods, nor touch a dead body nor shave his head, which was believed to be sacred.<sup>10</sup>

With this list of taboos, it is legitimate to consider each example in much greater detail so that we may have a complete understanding of taboos in the Hebrew Bible. But we need to mention that we are not dealing with a single concept of taboo in the Hebrew Bible, for such a concept is non-existent. What we shall do is to consider Hebrew words which seem to reflect taboo in certain contexts.

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<sup>10</sup> See Northcote (340) for details of this summary.

CHAPTER TWO  
HEBREW WORDS THAT FUNCTION TO MARK OFF AN UNTOUCHABLE  
ZONE OR OBJECTS OR IMPOSE RESTRICTIONS IN  
RELATION TO SANCTA

Introduction

It is admissible to say at the outset that when we apply the term 'taboo' to our understanding of biblical terms which semantically fall under 'holiness' in the Hebrew scriptures, such an application is not in any way derogative. Or, in other words, we are not giving 'holiness' a negative value.

Israel, like many other societies, was not living in isolation, and if the study of taboo in these cultures has proved worthwhile in the understanding of cultural and religious beliefs, then Israel is no exception. Zuesse's understanding of taboo is particularly remarkable. He says that taboo is the structural behaviour of culture, and all cultures are sustained by taboos (Jenson:73). Further, Jenson points out that the priestly texts are very similar to other societies, both ancient and modern, in which investigations into ideas of purity and impurity have considerably increased our understanding (59). He also suggests that 'the priestly texts reflect a world-view delineated by taboos and rules of contagion and maintained by sanctions and corrective rituals' (74).

The book of Leviticus is central in our study of taboos. It is here, more than anywhere else, we have many cultic prohibitions, and unlike in the cultures of tribal societies where some prohibitions are said to be imposed by demonic powers, in Israel the author is said to be God himself. According to the priestly texts, holiness cannot be attained without laws and rules which prohibit Israel from coming in contact with anything that can defile them, and therefore sour their relationship with God. The sole purpose for which the priestly texts lay such a stress on purity and impurity is that Israel shall be holy, for the Lord himself is holy.

The קדש - יהוה (Holy - The Lord) Formula

A good knowledge of the relationship between holiness and Yahweh is certainly necessary for our understanding of why there are so many cultic prohibitions in the Hebrew Scriptures and why severe penalties were to be inflicted on those who infringed them. Perhaps, this knowledge will equally be needful in shedding more light on the nature of the contagion of holiness, as we shall see later.

A close look at the occurrences of the Hebrew root קדש reveals noteworthy facts about the connection between this word and Yahweh. This relationship, henceforth called קדש - יהוה (holy - the Lord) formula, is clearly seen in Lev 11:44a: 'For I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy' (cf Lev 19:2).

For the purpose of proper scrutiny of this passage let us use the same Hebrew text:

For I am the Lord your God

כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם w

so consecrate yourselves (Israel)

וְקַדְשׁוּ אֶתְפֶּסֶחַם x

and be holy (Israel)

וְקָדְשִׁיתֶם y

for I am holy (God)

כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי z

This diagrammatic representation of the passage makes quite explicit the fact that the context in which holiness operates is only in Yahweh, the God of Israel. See how emphasis is



made of  $\square \text{ך} \text{ו} \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$ , 'your God' (w). The distinction of 'your God' and 'not-your-gods' is an indication of the exclusiveness with which the word holy is used for Yahweh. This is further supported by the very fact that while the  $\square \text{ך} \text{ו} \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$  formula may appear without the mention of  $\square \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$  (God), the latter never appears in the absence of  $\square \text{ך} \text{ו} \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$ , i.e.  $\square \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$  formula is either rare or non-existent and the relationship between holiness and God is found in the formula  $\square \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$  (cf Lev 11:44; 19:2; Ex 3:4-5). Nevertheless, a few exceptions of the  $\square \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$  formula need to be mentioned here. In Jos 24:19, we have 'a holy God', but even here the holiness refers to Yahweh. Isaiah also makes use of this formula, 'and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness' (5:16b). However, if v 16b is considered to be parallel to v 16a, then  $\square \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$  is synonymous with  $\square \text{ך} \text{ו} \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$  and so, on the basis of what has been said, the holiness mentioned here refers to  $\square \text{ך} \text{ו} \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$ .

In the book of Daniel the usage of this formula is unusual in the sense that it defies all that has been said about these formulas. Here the word holy refers to gods, 'Because I know that the spirit of the holy gods<sup>11</sup> is in you and that no mystery is difficult for you' (4:9 cf v 8). However, Houston points out that this text should not be seen as an 'exception since it is Nebuchadnezzar, a pagan who is speaking.' In conclusion, holiness is not a characteristic of gods, 'There is none holy like the Lord' (1 Sam. 2:2).<sup>12</sup>

This fact can further be illustrated by using Lev 11:44. Let us now bring together (w) and (z) in our diagram:

I am the Lord your God	$\square \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$	$\square \text{ך} \text{ו} \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$	$\text{ו} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$	w
I am holy	$\text{ו} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$	$\square \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$		z

In this simple analysis, the words  $\square \text{ך} \text{ו} \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$  and  $\square \text{י} \text{ה} \text{ל} \text{א} \text{ל} \text{ה} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י} \text{י}$  are symmetrically connected. Or to use mathematical language,  $w = z$ , the two are inseparable and yet distinctive. However, it

<sup>11</sup> RSV footnote has 'Or Spirit of the holy God'

<sup>12</sup> NAST (1978:1935) says that Yahweh is a name of relationship between his people and, when used, emphasizes God's holiness.

should be admitted that deductively this approach may pose an unresolvable problem, for while Yahweh is holy, holiness is not Yahweh! All the same, this approach helps us to understand the closeness with which the two should be viewed.

This distinction is specially crucial for our study, and if the above argument is anything to go by, then we can say with certainty that it is Yahweh who 'owns' holiness and not the 'not-your-gods'. Or, in other words, outside Yahweh there is no holiness, and the 'not-your-gods' and any practices associated with them are incompatible with the holiness of Yahweh - they are taboo.

We can now use our diagram again and doubtlessly say that for Israel (x) to have any association with Yahweh, it is imperative that they consecrate themselves (x), which may also imply getting rid of anything that belongs to 'not-your-gods'. This done, then y is achieved,

□ יִשְׂרָאֵל    □ יִשְׂרָאֵל (be holy). Note here that Israel (y) becomes holy in the likeness of Yahweh, but they do not become Yahweh themselves. This process can be represented thus:

$$w \rightarrow x \rightarrow y \rightarrow z.$$

While this representation shows us the normal process of attaining holiness (positive holiness), the converse of this process  $z \rightarrow y \rightarrow x \rightarrow w$  would be an abnormal order and may be used to explain the principle of the contagion of holiness (negative holiness) <sup>13</sup>, and the

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<sup>13</sup> So Amorin (1986:155-6). Amorin notes that 'there seems to be no doubt that holiness, like uncleanness, is pictured in the OT as being contagious. And that is certainly why both are seen as untouchable and dangerous'. He further says that 'the contagious aspect of holiness is explicitly stated in Ex 29:37, 30:29; Is 65:5. Most scholars agree that there is in the concept of holiness in the OT the notion of contagion (Sincox, Smith, S M Cook, Jacob, Leenhardt, Whitehouse, Seebass)'. Cf also Jensen (1993:10), holy as being destructive and as a source of blessing

resultant death<sup>14</sup> (cf Lev 10:2; Num 4:15; 1 Sam 6:19; 2 Sam 6:6f; 1 Chr 13:9, 10; 2 Chr 24:19). In the case of the positive holiness we have seen that Israel (x) begin by consecrating or sanctifying themselves and this action leads to their becoming holy (y). In the negative holiness, this process is reversed: Israel begins by coming in contact with the holy (z) before the action (x) of sanctification is done. This in essence means when that which has not been sanctified comes in contact with Yahweh (w), the anger of the Lord is kindled against Israel and the latter meets with death or other consequences.

With this knowledge at our disposal, we can now proceed and examine in greater depth the idea of holiness in the perspective of contagion, and more so its consistency with the idea of taboo.

#### שָׁדֵד - Holy

In order to have a clear perception of the Hebrew root שָׁדֵד, we shall use Levine's (1987:241f) definition, which seems to me to be very appropriate for our study.

Levine notes that the etymology of the Hebrew root שָׁדֵד which means holiness is uncertain (so Snaith, 1960:21)<sup>15</sup>. He says that the word 'holy' is designated by the adjective שִׁדְדָה, 'holiness' by the noun שִׁדְדָה, and a temple or shrine is called שִׁדְדָה. He further points out that the process whereby sanctity is attributed to persons, places, objects and the like are usually expressed by forms of the verb שָׁדֵד.

Even having said that, Levine attempts an etymological understanding of the Hebrew

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at the same time.

<sup>14</sup> For Snaith (1960:40), this is the destructive effect of qodesh-mana. This שָׁדֵד is like mana in both respects for it is dangerous and deadly as well as beneficent and life-giving.

<sup>15</sup> Snaith has nonetheless pointed out that the correct etymological explanation of a word is by no means the conclusive factor as to its meaning at any particular stage of its history.

root  $\psi\text{-}\tau\text{-}\rho$  in the point of view of Akkadian and Ugaritic (we shall only consider Akkadian) languages which according to him are related to Hebrew and are attested in the same ancient Near Eastern milieu. Levine considers the following Akkadian words: *qadashu*, *ellu*: 'pure, clean, clear'; *ebbu*: 'clean' and *namru*: 'bright'. Cultic personnel, he argues, are 'identified by forms derived from the verb *qadashu*'. Under this rubric he considers *qadishtu*: 'consecrated woman'; *qashdu*: 'holy'; *qashdatu*: 'priests; consecrated woman'; and an abstract noun *qadshutu*: 'holiness, the status of a priest'. Concerning these words, he suggests that, 'seen in the light of the verb-forms, point us in the direction of the cult - its consecrated personnel, its sacred spaces, and its sacral rites'.

Another interesting point about this etymology is Levine's statement on the physical properties of this root. He argues that these terms do not signify any inherent mana. To which he adds :

This is an important point, because further on we will have the occasion to suggest that monotheistic writers in ancient Israel found the root q-d-sh particularly appropriate for characterizing the God of Israel, for every reason, perhaps, that it did not inevitably denote physical properties (243).

Levine, however, admits the change of state where the 'not-holy' becomes 'holy'. To him 'this relatively uncommon form conveys the atmosphere of tabu, the negative dimension of holiness-its dangers, its restrictiveness, and its insulation from the profane'.

Snaith is in favour of 'separative' which originated in Baudissin's theory which says that a comparison with *ch-d-sh* makes it natural to conjecture that *q-d-sh* meant from the first 'to be separated'. In support of this theory, Snaith (1960:24-25) argues that 'the modern view has it that the development of religion must be traced from below and not above. Religion is a movement from man to God rather than a revelation of God' (so Amorim 1986:152)<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Other scholars in support of this theory according to Snaith are Skinner, Whitehouse and Davidson. Cf Douglas (63), 'Holiness is the attribute of Godhead. Its root means "set apart". What else does it mean?' Jenson (48) says that 'separateness is often thought to be the basic meaning of holiness, but it is more its

Admittedly, however, the meaning of the root  $\text{שׁוּׁר}$  is not exclusively 'separation' and other interpretations are possible. But in the light of taboo, the theory of separation suffices, and it gives us good ground to proceed and examine tabooistic ideas related to holiness.

It is noteworthy to point out at this juncture that it was the duty of the priest to make sure that a clear distinction was made between holy and profane, clean and unclean. Lev 10:10 which Jenson (1992:43) calls a key text for the discussion of these word groups is particularly significant: '...to distinguish between the holy and the profane and between the unclean and clean'. This text shows us the place of holiness in the priestly texts. True worship of God is seemingly very important to a priest. As a result, Israel must distinguish between what is holy and what is not, so that they may worship God properly and at the same time protect themselves from harm (Lev 10:16) and defilement (cf 22:17-33). For example, Nadab and Abihu were devoured by fire which came from the Lord because they had offered unholy fire before the Lord (v 2).

In Num 4:15 the sons of Kohath were warned not to touch the 'holy things' (RSV), 'sacred things' (NEB), and if they did not take heed, they would die (cf 1:9; 4:19,20; 2 Sam 6:6,7). In order to avert this dangerous situation, Aaron and his sons had to cover the sacred objects and the utensils, as the camp set out, and it was only after he had finished the covering that the sons of Kohath were to come and carry these things so that they did not come in contact with them and die. Wenham (1981:72) is more specific as to the role of the Kohathites. He says that 'the Kohathites carried the furniture of the tabernacle, such as the ark, lampstand and

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necessary consequence. Consecration is a separation to God rather than a separation from the world (Snaith 1944:30). From the standpoint of our study our definition of the Hebrew root  $\text{שׁוּׁר}$  favour Douglas (1966) - holiness means separation, especially when it is viewed as contagious and the consequential prohibition thus imposed.

golden incense altar. But they were not allowed to pack and unpack these items. Aaron and his sons, ie the priests, had to do this because, if the Kohathites had looked at these holy things uncovered, or touched them, they would have died.'

Since the objects in this passage are supposed to be holy, then the only contagion which can affect the sons of Kohath is holiness. It follows that from the standpoint of the Kohathites these objects were a taboo (not in the sense of Polynesia) whose violation would lead to automatic death. Nevertheless, Budd (1984:51) points out that 'the Kohathites must be persuaded that the stipulations were not intended to degrade them or to rob them of privilege, but to protect them from danger'. The fact that the Kohathites were not allowed to see these holy things or what Wenham (1981:40) calls 'the most potent symbols of the presence and power of God and which partook of his holiness' uncovered, leads us to yet another dimension of taboo regarding the holiness of God, namely, seeing God or going near him.

On Mount Sinai, the place where God was going to meet Israel, Moses had to set bounds for the people round about, saying<sup>17</sup>

Take heed that you do not go up to the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death; no hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast<sup>18</sup> or man, he shall not live (Ex 19:12-13).

We have already seen that holiness and Yahweh are undetachable. We therefore need to suggest that so long as Yahweh is on this mountain, his holiness spreads throughout the whole place like a magnetic field whose limit is marked by the bounds set by Moses (v 12). Or to use the words of Hyatt (1971:295), the holiness can be seen here 'as a quasi-physical quality that is contagious'. Note, as an object after falling within the magnetic field gets magnetized, similarly, should a person come in contact with holiness, he becomes 'contaminated' by

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<sup>17</sup> of Frazer (1888:16) where he says that in New Zealand the spots on which great chiefs rested during a journey became taboo and were surrounded with a fence of basket-work.

<sup>18</sup> of taboos among the Kikuyu people where animals were also affected.

holiness and since this is what we termed as negative holiness (destructive) it has to be forbidden. But a person who may have thus become contaminated has to die and the killer has to be at a distance and throw stones lest he comes in contact with the contaminated person, and in turn becomes contaminated by the forbidden holiness.

A similar instance where ordinary people are prohibited from drawing too near Yahweh and fencing around that which is considered to be holy is explicit in Num 1:49-3:10. When the people of Israel had pitched their tents by their companies, every man by his own camp and every man by his own standard, the Levites encamped around the tabernacle of the testimony, that there may be no wrath upon the congregation of the people of Israel; and the Levites kept charge of the tabernacle of the testimony (1:53)<sup>19</sup>. Going beyond the 'Levitical wall' or fence surrounding the tabernacle (holy) would be a serious infringement of the prohibition which would spell out the wrath of God against the congregation (cf Num 8:19). Wenham (1981:60) remarks that this 'drastic measure expressed the reality of God's presence in the tabernacle'<sup>20</sup>.

The face of God is taboo. It is equally dangerous and should not be seen by human beings: 'And so, when Moses asked to be shown God's glory, he was told, 'you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live' (Ex 33:17-20, cf 32:30; Deut 4:33; 5:24, 26; Jg 6:22f; 13:20). Durham (1978:452) points out that

The human family cannot look upon Yahweh and survive: the gap between the finite and the infinite is too great; it is an experience of which man is incapable. Yahweh thus makes provision for the experience Moses is to have by designating a place on Sinai in the fissure of a rocky cliff. There Moses can stand as Yahweh's glory (= Presence) comes near and passes by.

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<sup>19</sup> Budd (1984:18) points out that this represents a continuation of an older faith concerning the ark (1 Sam 6:19; 2 Sam 6:6-8), and the word 'wrath' occurs only in exilic or post-exilic texts.

<sup>20</sup> of Ex 24, where Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel go up the mountain and see the God of Israel (v 9).

But even here God had to cover Moses' face with his hand until he had passed by, and then the hand was removed and Moses could now see God's back, 'but for his face, it shall not be seen' (vv 21-23).

In the OT prohibitions are also imposed concerning garments and mixed seeds:

You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall there come upon you a garment of cloth made of two kinds of stuff (Lev 19:19 cf Deut 22:9-11)<sup>21</sup>.

In Deut 22:9, Levine (1987:244) sees no problem in equating 'holiness' with 'taboo'. He says that 'it is forbidden to plant grain or vegetables in proximity to vines. If, in violation of the law, such planting occurs, the produce yielded thereby, along with the fruit of the vines, becomes tabu'. Using G van der Leeuw in his, what Levine calls 'classic study of the phenomenology of religion', in which Leeuw explains the term 'tabu', Levine says that the verb 'tapui' means 'to make holy'. Concerning the above text, he suggests that 'the change to status of tabu is legally determined. The law declares the total yield holy'. Levine's explanation of this text, though brief, is particularly significant in our understanding of prohibitions related to mixtures.

Before we come to any conclusion about 'the mixtures', let us, first of all, try and understand the origin of this practice. Craigie (1978:29) tells us that 'The law (of mixtures) reflects a certain antipathy toward Egyptian practice, and there are a number of Egyptian paintings from Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasty tombs showing gardens and orchards in which various types of fruit-bearing trees are growing side by side'. He also traces the origin of

ⲧⲓⲛⲓⲛⲓⲛⲓ from Egypt, for various complicated types of pattern weavings were introduced to Egypt, perhaps from Syria, and they may therefore have had reprehensible

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<sup>21</sup> Milgrom (1991:447) says that there were taboos concerning clothing made of more than one material ⲧⲓⲛⲓⲛⲓⲛⲓ (Lev 19:19), and that in the deuteronomic version of the taboo, the materials are specified as linen and wool (Deut 22:11), where it falls among several other taboos against mixtures *kil'ayim* (v 9-11).



associations (no longer known) for the Israelites.

Now, having said that, we can well assert, at least provisionally, that the fact that the origin of this practice is traced from non-Israelites whose practices were considered not consistent with the worship of Yahweh, and where the 'not-your-gods' were worshipped, then certainly the NAST's rendering of 'defilement' (  $\psi\text{-}\text{רָבָה} \text{ } \text{וְ}\text{רָבָה}$ )<sup>22</sup> may be justified.

Milgrom's interpretation, which, in keeping with RSV's rendering, calls these mixtures 'sacred', is that such a mixture would transmit its holiness to the total yield. If we may suspend our judgment at the moment, we may presumably suggest that in both renderings, 'holy' and 'defilement', one thing is common - both would transfer their contents to the rest of the other seeds, hence the need to forbid such a practice.<sup>23</sup>

The idea of harmful holiness is not unknown in Ezekiel. In Ezek 46:20, he says, 'This is the place where the priests shall boil the guilt offering and sin offering, and where they shall bake the cereal offering, in order not to bring them out into the outer court and so communicate holiness to the people'.

The NAST renders  $\text{וְ}\text{רָבָה} \text{ } \text{וְ}\text{רָבָה}$  , 'transmit holiness to the people', NEB, 'transmit the sacred influence to the people', GNB, 'nothing holy is carried to the outer courtyard, where it might harm the people'. The atmosphere here is sacrificial. The setting is in a room where the flesh of 'the guilt offering' (  $\text{וְ}\text{רָבָה}$  ) and 'the sin offering' (  $\text{וְ}\text{רָבָה}$  ) is cooked and 'the cereal offering' (  $\text{וְ}\text{רָבָה}$  ) baked, all referring to the share given to the

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<sup>22</sup> RSV has rendered this phrase as 'forfeited to the sanctuary'. But on the footnote the rendering is 'become holy'. NEB avoids the translation of this phrase completely (cf also GNB). The RSV (1962) footnote has 'The mixing of kinds was believed to be a violation of the differences which God has ordained' (v 5; Lev 19:19).

<sup>23</sup> cf GNB 'Do not plant any crop in the same field as your grapevines; if you do, you are forbidden to use either the grapes or the produce of the other crop' (Deut 22:9).

priest (cf 44:29). Zimmerli (1983:501) argues that the explicit aim of the passage is the insuring of the priest's due which must not be removed from the inner sanctum of the temple. He also says that even the preparation of this sacred food must not take place outside the sacred precinct. Zimmerli refers to 44:19 to show the dangerous infection of the people by the holy. Lastly he remarks that in this prohibition the concern is with the carrying out of the holy to the people.

Further to this may be added Stalker's (1968:308) statement about the offerings involved here: 'These were offerings to be eaten by the priests exclusively, and were not to be brought into the outer court where they might communicate holiness'.

#### The Sabbath

The religious life of Israel was marked by the observance of the Sabbath and other annual festivals. These days were considered to be holy and were characterized by very stringent rules whose violation resulted in death (Sabbath). The solemnity with which these days were observed and the severity of the punishment inflicted on the victims who failed to comply with these rules has very close affinities with our understanding of taboos imposed on certain festival days among the tribal societies<sup>24</sup>. Schmidt (1983:117-118), concerning the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Harvest of Weeks and the Feast of Ingathering or of Tabernacles, says that since all three feasts attested in the pre-exilic period reflect the cycle of nature, foreign influence on the Israelite cult can be clearly traced. But Hunter points out that 'Israel emerged from the general matrix of Canaan, so her cult and religion grow from that basis -

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<sup>24</sup> For Eliade (1959:86) words 'prohibitions' and 'taboos' imposed during festival time have no distinction and can be used interchangeably. He says that, 'The festival time in which Tikopia (a Polynesian island) live during ceremonies is characterized by certain (tabus): noise, games, dancing cease'.

Israel is not a completely alien institution imposed on Canaan from outside<sup>25</sup>.

The sanctity of the Sabbath is to be sought from different facts. Firstly, Sabbath is a reminder of the creation, 'for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it' (Ex 20:10,8; 31:14f)<sup>26</sup>. Secondly, as Levine says (1989:262) Deuteronomy links Sabbath rest to the Exodus: Sabbath rest is the expression of freedom and the negation of bondage (cf Ex 34:21; 20:5f; Deut 5:12f)<sup>27</sup>. He also points out that the emphasis on sanctity, to be expected in priestly legislation, is epitomized in the term  $\text{שָׁבֻת קֹדֶשׁ}$  'a sacred assembly', a term that probably originates in the Holiness Code (Lev 17-26), and it occurs no fewer than ten times in chapter 23.

A mention has been made of prohibitions imposed on Israel to protect them from going too close or touching holy objects or places, something that may result in either profanation of the holy or the objects or people of Israel being hallowed, which in turn leads to the destruction of the objects or death of the victim (cf Ex 31:14; Num 15:32-36). In a similar manner, regulations governing the observance of the Sabbath were stiff. The primary regulation, as Levine suggests, was the prohibition of  $\text{תַּקְנֵי עֲשֵׂה}$ , 'assigned tasks'.

One of the most striking characteristics of a Sabbath, and which has a high notion of taboo, was the prohibition of making fire on this solemn day; 'six days shall work be done, but

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<sup>25</sup> This is verbal communication. More about foreign influence on the cult and religion of Israel will be discussed later.

<sup>26</sup> Schmidt (1983:92) traces the idea of creation in Gen 2:2ff, and says that the creation narrative, according to which God blesses the seventh day, already attempts to give a motive for the observance of the Sabbath.

<sup>27</sup> This is consistent with Eliade (1959:87), 'religious man periodically becomes the contemporary of the gods in the measure in which he reactualizes the primordial time in which the divine works were accomplished'.

on the seventh day you shall have a holy Sabbath of solemn rest to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death; you shall kindle no fire in all your habitations on the Sabbath day' (Ex 35:2-3 cf 12:16; 16:23).

□□□ (Separate)

The Hebrew term □□□ vb Hiph (unused in Kal) means ban, devote, exterminate, pronounce sacred. It also means 'to shut up' or 'to shut in' 'to prohibit to common use' or 'to consecrate to God'.

From the standpoint of etymology, the semitic root of this word is *h̄m*. According to Lohfink (1986:188), its reflexes in the West Semitic languages include words meaning 'separate', 'forbid' or 'consecrate'. He also compares this root with the Arab *ḥaram*, 'sacred precincts', and *ḥarim*, 'ḥarem'. Interestingly, the Swahili people in Kenya use the word *haramu* for anything which is taboo. For example, eating pork is *haramu* which means that it is forbidden or taboo. Such usage, however, should not surprise us since the Swahili people have very close linguistic links with the Arabs.

The definition of this word is close to taboo, but it does not however, really mean the same as the Polynesian taboo. Probably, Miller's definition (1974:56) is suggestive of this fact. In reference to Jos 6:17-19 he says: 'Since the enemy and the booty belong to the Lord, they are sacred or taboo'. Or to use de Vaux's words '... *ḥarem*, the anathema carried out on the vanquished enemy and his goods.' His definition is equally significant in shedding more light on the meaning of this term. De Vaux points out that the word denotes the idea of separation i.e. taking something 'out of profane use and reserving it for sacred use - forbidden to man and consecrated to God'.

Malamat, following Landsberger (referred to by Lohfink), has worked out the relation between the Akkadian term *asakku*, 'taboo', found primarily at Mari, and the OT concept of

□□□ . But Lohfink has rejected this idea, and by using Jos 7, he argues that 'the

appropriation of objects under taboo can bring guilt upon the violator of the taboo (originally subjecting him to the death penalty), and in certain cases a military commander could place the booty under taboo, while in Mari the taboo was only temporary, so that the booty could be distributed fairly later'.

We shall now consider carefully very important issues raised by the text (Jos 7) under discussion in relation to  $\square\text{ך}\square$ . We have already mentioned that objects that belonged to Yahweh are  $\psi\text{ׁ}\text{׃}\text{׃}$ , and so long as such an object is in this state it is prohibited for use. It therefore follows that when anything that is 'common' is devoted to God it becomes holy and it is essentially separated from the 'common' use: 'every devoted ( $\square\text{ך}\square - \text{ל}\text{׃}$ ) thing is most holy ( $\square\text{ׁ}\psi\text{ׁ}\text{׃}\text{׃} - \psi\text{ׁ}\text{׃}\text{׃}$ ) to the Lord' (Lev 27:28). However, while this assertion is true with regard to holy objects in general, being  $\square\text{ך}\square$  does not make things untouchable, but the appropriation of such objects would be prohibited.

This text is therefore a further indication of the seriousness involved in  $\square\text{ך}\square$ . Every thing devoted to the Lord is not only holy but most holy ( $\square\text{ׁ}\psi\text{ׁ}\text{׃}\text{׃} - \psi\text{ׁ}\text{׃}\text{׃}$  - taboo of taboos?)<sup>28</sup>. Consequently, such an object cannot be sold or redeemed ( $\text{ל}\text{א}\text{ׁ}\text{׃} - \text{א}\text{ׁ}$ ). Furthermore, Israel are warned not to keep the booty in the camp for the booty was devoted to the Lord, something that would result in the destruction of the camp (Jos 6:18<sup>29</sup> cf Deut 7:26).

<sup>28</sup> Brekelmans, as says Lohfink (1986:188) sees in  $\square\text{ך}\square$  an original noun expressing a quality, like  $\psi\text{ׁ}\text{׃}\text{׃}$  and  $\text{ל}\text{׃}$ . He finds this character preserved in Lev 27:21; Deut 7:26; Jos 6:17; I Kings 20:42; Is 34:5; Mal 3:24 (,46). But Lohfink suggests that these passages should be understood with the word taken as a concrete noun or a noun expressing an action. Procksch, quoted by Snaith (1960:33) holds a similar view -

$\square\text{ך}\square$  is the primitive Hebrew root for 'holiness'.

<sup>29</sup> Lohfink (1986:186) argues that in the context of war, it is only in Jos 6:17 that *herem* (in the phrase  $\text{ה}\text{ר}\text{מ}\text{ׁ}\text{׃} \square\text{ך}\square$ ) refers to both human beings and plunder. Elsewhere in the context of war the application to human beings is always

In Jos 7:1, it is stated that 'the Israelites defied the ban' (NEB), 'the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban' (NAST), 'the Israelites broke faith in regard to the devoted things' (NRSV)<sup>30</sup>. These renderings are no doubt quite suggestive of a prohibition that has been broken, and as a result 'the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel' (v 1). It is true that while it was Achan who took the devoted things ( אֲחָאן ), the whole community of Israel met with the wrath of God. It is surprising to note here that although it is God who is said to be offended, the punishment resulting from the violation of the prohibition is inflicted by his agents, the imposers of the ban. Since the devoted things are unredeemable, they have to be destroyed together with Achan - the violator of the ban. The devoted things are burned with fire, while the killers of Achan keep distance and then throw stones at him to avoid coming too close. (Jos 7:25).

Note, however, that although Israel are spared from the death penalty, even after keeping the devoted things, sanctification is necessary since as a covenant people (Ex. 19.6), they have transgressed the covenant of the Lord and have done a shameful thing (7:15). Hence, Joshua is told by the Lord to sanctify the people, and this would be done by removing the

אֲחָאן objects from their midst: hence Joshua is told by the Lord to sanctify the people:

Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the

expressed verbally and the noun is reserved for things or cattle: Deut 7:26; 13:18 (17); Jos 6:18; 7:1, 11-13; 22:20; 1 Sam 15:21; Chr 2:7.

<sup>30</sup> GNB has lost the idea of devoted things to the Lord ( אֲחָאן ) in its rendering. Lohfink (1986:188) rejects 'ban' as the correct rendering. He argues that it is and always has been false and misleading, for it was an appropriation rendering of the medieval Jewish *herem* corresponding to secular outlawry and ecclesiastical excommunication, but is based on a later development of the word *herem* that is unattested in the OT. My view is that when something is devoted to God and cannot be used by human beings, then such a thing is essentially under ban.

Lord, God of Israel, There are devoted things in the midst of you, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies, until you take away the devoted things from among you. In the morning therefore you shall be brought near by your tribes (v 14).

Lohfink says that such a cultic assembly helps to avert the  $\square\text{ר}\square$ . Another point that needs to be underscored is that, in this context of war, all silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron remain sacred to the Lord; and they should go into the treasury of the Lord (Jos 6:19, cf v 24). But this is another evidence that these objects are still forbidden from use by Israel.

One major question we need to ask ourselves is whether war booty is  $\square\text{ר}\square$  because the objects have been devoted to the Lord or because they are unclean. We have already alluded to the fact that the content of something is determined by its source or the place of its origin. Following this argument, we can say in reference to Deut 7, where the Deuteronomist has used this ancient war custom as part of his campaign against idolatry that if holiness proceeds from Yahweh, then conversely, from 'not-your-gods' proceeds uncleanness (abomination), and since the war booty is taken from non-Israelites, such things should be considered unclean, and should in turn be detested and abhorred.

But if, on the other hand, the reverse is true, ie the booty is a ban because it is holy, then this would certainly pose a more difficult question - at what point did the booty become holy? Was it when the war was going on, or when the objects were in the hands of Israel, the holy nation whose holiness was passed to the objects or was it when this ban was declared by Yahweh even before the war began (Deut 27:17-26)? Given the exclusiveness with which holiness is used for Yahweh (cf the  $\square\text{ר}\square\text{ר}\text{?} - \text{ש}\text{?}\text{ר}\text{?}$  formula), we can suggest that in a context of war against the other nations, objects are taboo due to their association with the 'not-your-gods', and are consequently unclean. So, if the Israelites were to preserve the integrity of their religion, they had to separate themselves completely from their enemies, the Canaanites and the other nations round about them, by destroying them completely, make no covenant with them, show no mercy to them and not make marriage with them (cf. Deut 7:1-5).

In Jos 7, the  $\square\text{ר}\square$  is, however, different since there is no reference to idolatrous

objects. Here we are simply reminded the many violations of covenant obligations occasioned by contact with pagan nations. Israel was a nation that was set apart - a chosen nation. Hence the need to preserve their religious integrity by total destruction of war booty. The  $\square\text{ר}\square$  was therefore a means of protecting the covenant and the holiness of Yahweh, the God of Israel.

It is striking to note another peculiarity of war  $\square\text{ר}\square$ ; even after what was devoted to Yahweh in the context of war (Jos. 7) was destroyed, it did not cease to be taboo. This is clear in the way Joshua lays an oath upon Israel and curse on anyone who would rise up and rebuild the city of Jericho (Jos 6:26 cf 1 King 16:34). In the beginning of this study we saw that the strength of a taboo depended on the social/religious status (power) of the imposer. Here, the proposer of the ban on this city is Joshua but he acts at the directive of Yahweh<sup>31</sup>. The solemnity by which this ban is imposed is particularly striking: Joshua and his men have to make a magical march around the city once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day, and during all this time they have to maintain strict silence (Jos 6:1 ff).

The seriousness or the consequences of breaking this kind of taboo is seen in the death of Achan. First, in vv.16-21 Joshua had to bring Israel near tribe by tribe and the guilt person had to be identified by casting lots - the Urim and Thummim (different coloured sticks or stones which were placed in the ephod). Casting lots was a duty reserved to the Levitical priests (Num 7:21; Deut.33:8). But here, this duty is performed by Joshua, and after Achan is discovered, he gives glory to God by confessing his sins. Then, the booty is confiscated and

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31 Smith (1927:453-54) says that 'such a ban is a taboo, enforced by the fear of supernatural penalties and as with taboo, the danger arising from it is contagion (Deut 7:26 of 7), and whoever brings a devoted thing into his house falls under the same ban himself.' To this may be added Lohfink's (1986:192) statement concerning  $\square\text{ר}\square$  and taboo. He argues that since the war of *herem* of Israel involved the total extermination of a population, such action could not be carried out in the ancient Near East apart from religious consecration and taboo.



together with Achan, his whole family and possessions was destroyed - Achan was stoned to death.

Second Saul was stripped of his duties of kingship after he broke a similar taboo by failing to destroy what was devoted to destruction (1 Sam 15:23). At the same time, a sacrifice to the Lord of plunder from the war, the best sheep and cattle, is rejected (v 22). In the campaign against the Amalekites, Saul was commanded to: 'Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.' (v.3). The prophet's command was in implementation of Yahweh's own words in the Deuteronomic code (Deut.25:17-19). But Saul chose to disobey. He spared Agag, King of Amalek; and the spoil - sheep and oxen which should have been utterly destroyed, and 'he was condemned for not interpreting it strictly' (de Vaux 260). In view of this, how would the Hebrew word  $\square\text{ }^{\text{~}}\square$  be translated, following the modern principles and theories of translation, where words are given their proper meaning? This subject will be discussed later as we deal with other words that seem to be problematic from the point of view of translation.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DIETARY PROHIBITIONS

#### Introduction

In the preceding chapters we discussed how the OT concept of holiness is viewed as a source of danger in certain texts especially when people are told to avoid coming in contact with it lest they be 'contaminated'. Our study of the Hebrew root  $\square\Gamma\Gamma$  has also been illuminative even though the word does not connote taboo in the understanding of tribal societies. The way objects related to war are devoted to God, hence taboo, and any attempt to violate this taboo, for example in the case of Achan, results in his death by stoning.

But it is in the Hebrew root  $\aleph\Delta\omega$  that we have ritual taboo in the true sense of the word. In the following two chapters we shall endeavour to survey very carefully how the root  $\aleph\Delta\omega$  displays a notion of taboo especially when seen from the perspective of the Kikuyu people and other cultures we have studied so far.

#### $\aleph\Delta\omega$

Etymologically, according to Andre (1986:330), the root that appears in  $\aleph\Delta\omega$ , 'be unclean', appears with the same meaning in Jewish Aramaic, Syriac and Middle Hebrew. It is not attested in classical Arabic, but later Arabic has a verb *tama*, 'be choked with mud', and a noun *tammy*, 'mud of the Nile'. But he says that according to Paschen, *tammy* basically means 'wet dirt'.

The Akkadian *ikkibu* and *assaku* have sometimes been compared to the Hebrew root  $\aleph\Delta\omega$  or as an expression of taboo. The primary meaning of *ikkibu*, as suggests Ringgren (1986:332), is 'something forbidden: an object, place or action barred by divine prohibition'. He further says that 'certain animals ... must not be eaten or taken because they are *ikkibu*; often

the God who issues the prohibition is named and a punishment is threatened'. Ringgren gives examples of how *ikkibu* was applied, 'to cross a river is an *ikkibu* of *Ea*, which connotes both 'forbidden by *Ea*' and 'sin against *Ea*', and in certain cases it also suggests that something is reserved to a god or king'. Concerning the word *assaku*, he sees it as a synonym of *ikkibu*, except that it refers to what is sacrosanct to a god or to the king, whereas *ikkibu* usually refers to something terrible that causes human pain or disease. However, according to Ringgren, both *ikkibu* and *assaku* mean something other than a mechanical taboo, even though they presuppose a divine prohibition. He nevertheless admits that in certain cases they come close to the meaning 'sacred, sacrosanct (to someone)'. Concerning the relationship between the Israelite term  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$  and the Akkadian *ikkibu* and *assaku*, Ringgren rejects their comparability.

The word  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$  belongs to the same semantic field with  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$  and  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$ , 'abomination',  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$  which means sexual uncleanness,  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$  'abomination' and  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$  'sacrificial flesh not fit to eat' (so Amorim, 1986:244). The principal root in the OT to express the idea of uncleanness is  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$ , and it appears 286 times in the OT. Statistically, Ringgren says that evidence also shows that the root  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$  appears primarily in the books dealing with cultic practices such as Leviticus (52% = 149 times), Numbers (13.2% = 38 times) and Ezekiel (15% = 38 times).

In his study of terms related to desecration and defilement, Amorim (255-6) also includes the roots  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$  and  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$ . About  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$  he points out that although the idea of loathing, disgusting and abomination is present, the concept of defilement and pollution is not necessarily implied, except in the poetical construction of 2 Sam 1:21. The root  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$ , on the other hand, primarily means apostasy or alienation from God, probably because of child sacrifice to Molech.

Since our study in this section is principally based on instances where the root  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$  has overtones of taboo, ie prohibitions related to ritual uncleanness, the roots  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$  and  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$  fall out of the scope. We shall attempt, however, to consider  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$  and  $\aleph\aleph\aleph$ .

## The Forbidden Animals in Leviticus

In our discussion about holiness in the OT, mention was made that holy objects and places were forbidden because of their contagion which was seen to be dangerous. In view of this we argued that these kinds of prohibitions were similar to taboo but not in technical terms. Similarly, objects and certain foods were tabooed because they were said to be unclean and that the uncleanness inherent in them was contagious and therefore harmful. Consequently, a person who thus became ritually unclean as a result of violating especially food taboos had to be purified ritually or became automatically clean after a period of time. This was also true for other uncleanness, eg coming into contact with a dead body, menstruant, male and female discharges and a leprous person (cf Lev 11-15)<sup>32</sup>.

Ringgren (331) has no difficulty in taking the term taboo to refer to uncleanness in Israel. He argues that the

religio-cultural similarity between unclean and taboo has been pointed out. In fact there are many contexts, especially those involving sex or death, in which the Israelite laws governing uncleanness are probably connected with ancient taboos; in other cases, uncleanness is more likely rooted in the rejection of alien cultic practices.

One point that needs to be understood is that unlike the tribal societies, food taboos in the biblical texts were not contagious, ie a person did not extract a contagious and purifiable uncleanness by eating forbidden foods (cf Lev 11:2-23). That means, in our discussion about food in this section, our rendering of the Hebrew word  $\text{טָבוּאָה}$  'taboo' does not mean taboo in the light of the tribal societies, but prohibitions whose violation does not require ritual purification.

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32 The concept of purity and impurity in P, according to Jenson (1992:75) is a difficult one, and has proved of great interest to anthropologists as well as biblical scholars. He further remarks that 'the laws which define who or what is clean or unclean primarily in Lev 11-15 have long puzzled commentators'. This is clear in the food taboos as we shall see later.

Food is any substance that can be ingested by a living organism and metabolized into energy and body tissue, anything that provides mental nourishment or stimulus. It is true that while some people may choose not to belong to any religion at all, no one under normal circumstances would choose not to eat, for this would mean bringing life to a halt. The centrality of food in human life cannot be underrated<sup>33</sup>, and the significance attached to it by all races of the world is manifested in the dietary rules and regulations which vary considerably from society to society<sup>34</sup>. This is also true about Israel:

These are the living things which you may eat among all the beasts that are on earth. <sup>3</sup>Whatever is hoofed and is cloven-footed and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat. <sup>4</sup>Nevertheless among those that chew the cud or is hoofed, you shall not eat these: the camel, because it chews the cud but is not hoofed, is unclean to you. <sup>5</sup>And the rock badger, because it chews the cud but is not hoofed, is unclean to you. <sup>6</sup>And the hare, because it chews the cud but is not hoofed, is unclean to you. <sup>7</sup>And the swine, because it is hoofed and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. <sup>8</sup>Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean to you (Lev 11).

In the priestly tradition certain animals are considered as a potential source of uncleanness and as a result, distinction between clean and unclean animals was therefore inevitable (cf Lev 20:25). Douglas (1966:70), using the Book of Genesis, suggests that the basis on which this distinction was to be made was in the way they moved:

Here a three-fold classification unfolds, divided between the earth, the waters and the firmament. Leviticus takes up this scheme and allots to each element its proper kind of animal life. In the firmament two-legged fowls fly with wings. In the water scaly fish swim with fins. On the earth four-legged animals hop, jump or walk. Any class of creatures which is not equipped for the right kind of locomotion in its element is contrary to holiness and contact with it disqualifies a person from approaching the temple.

While in Leviticus it is assumed that Israel knew which land animals have true hooves

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33 In the creation narratives of Genesis, chapters 2 and 3, the verb  $\text{לָקַח}$  appears 24 times, and the whole atmosphere is very kitchen-like.

34 of the Polynesian food taboos in chapter 1 and the Kikuyu dietary rules appended to this work.

and are cloven-footed and chew the cud (Lev 11:3)<sup>35</sup>, in Deuteronomy the animals are clearly specified: 'These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, the hart, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope and the mountain sheep' (Deut 14:4).

In both Leviticus and Deuteronomy animals that do not meet the above criteria are named: 'the camel, the rock badger, the hare and the swine' (Lev 11:4-7 cf Deut 14:7-8). The reasons given for the inedibility of these animals is no other than that even though the camel, the hare and the rock badger chew the cud, they are not hooved and are therefore taboo  $\text{אֲבִיטָה}$ . And the swine, because it is hooved and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is taboo (cf Lev 11:5-8).

The criterion for determining edible sea creatures is in their movement: 'Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat' (Lev 11:9). Any sea creature short of these two characteristics is an abomination,  $\text{אֲבִיטָה}$  (cf v 10). Note, however, that while in Leviticus the term  $\text{אֲבִיטָה}$  has been used to describe the inedible sea creatures, in Deuteronomy  $\text{אֲבִיטָה}$  has been used instead: 'And whatever does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean ( $\text{אֲבִיטָה}$ ) for you.' (cf v 10). Among the birds the following were considered abominable,

the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, the kite, the falcon according to its kind, every raven according to its kind, the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk according to its kind, the owl, the cormorant, the ibis, the water hen, the pelican, the carrion vulture, the stork, the heron according to its kind, the hoopoe, and the bat. (Lev 11:13-19 cf Deut 14:11-18)<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, in both Leviticus and Deuteronomy the texts are silent about the birds that

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<sup>35</sup> Eugene Hunn, quoted by Houston (1993:36) has shown that those characteristics define a zoologically recognizable taxon: the sub-order Ruminantia of the order Artiodactyla ('with an even number of toes'). According to Houston, the zoologists have used precisely the same criteria to identify the group as the biblical text does.

<sup>36</sup> The translation of many of the names of birds is uncertain.

should be eaten<sup>37</sup>. Perhaps it is assumed that Israel knew what birds were allowed to be eaten: 'You may eat all clean birds' (Deut 14:11).

Again, whereas the Deuteronomist is silent about the abomination of these birds, and does not give any reason as to why they should not be eaten, the priest categorically states that they are an abomination (Lev 11:13). However, while the birds are said to be  $\gamma\text{קֹשֶׁר}$ , the term

$\aleph\text{קֹשֶׁר}$  is used to refer to quadrupeds (v 4-8). But in Deuteronomy this terminological distinction is not made, and the whole pericope dealing with prohibition of unclean food begins with the word  $\aleph\text{קֹשֶׁר}$  (cf v 3).

In Lev 11:20-23 winged insects which have legs above their feet, with which to leap on the earth, are edible, 'the locust according to its kind, the bald locust according to its kind, and the grasshopper according to its kind. But all other winged insects which have four feet are an abomination.  $\gamma\text{קֹשֶׁר}$  to you'. Harrison (1980:129) remarks that 'locusts have been eaten in the Near East for Millennia.' He refers, for example, to the King of Assyria, Ashurbanipal (c669-627 BC) whose guests ate locusts brought on sticks during a royal banquet.

We have seen how the priest assumes that Israel know which animals they must eat. The Deuteronomist makes the same assumption about the animals Israel must not eat, and he is silent about swarming things: 'You shall not eat any abominable (  $\aleph\text{קֹשֶׁר}$  ) thing. These are the animals you may eat.' (14:3-4). In Leviticus a list of swarming things whose carcasses are considered unclean is given: 'And these are unclean (  $\aleph\text{קֹשֶׁר}$  ) to you among the swarming things that swarm upon the earth: the weasel, the mouse, the great lizard according to its kind, the gecko, the land crocodile, the lizard, the sand lizard and the chameleon' (11:29ff). Touching of the carcasses of these animals would cause ritual pollution. This leads us to

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<sup>37</sup> Douglas (1966:69), whose work on this section has been quite helpful, says that about birds she has 'nothing to say because they are named and not described and the translation of the name is open to doubt'. So, Houston (43,66,109).

another dimension of our discussion - the contagion by touching.

In Lev 11:24-40, which is very relevant to our study, touching of carcasses of land animals is prohibited since uncleanness would be transmitted to the person involved. In this section the use of the formula  $\text{וְאִשֶּׁר יַחֲבֹטֶנּוּ} \text{ } \text{לְמַעַן} \text{ } \text{יִטְמָא} \text{ } \text{בָּהֶן}$  (whoever touches), has been employed: 'whoever touches their carcass shall be unclean (  $\text{טָמֵא} \text{ } \text{בָּהֶן}$  ) until the evening' (vv24, 27, 31). Following Houston (49, 50) three groups that fall under this category of 'whoever touches' can be recognized in this section. First, 'Every animal which is hoofed but is not cloven-footed or does not chew the cud...' (v26). Concerning animals that do not have cloven hooves, Houston mentions the horse and the donkey and for the animal that does not chew the cud, he identifies the pig. The other group include all the animals that 'go on their paws  $\text{וְאִשֶּׁר יַחֲבֹטֶנּוּ} \text{ } \text{לְמַעַן} \text{ } \text{יִטְמָא} \text{ } \text{בָּהֶן}$ , among the animals that go on all fours' (v27). Houston, following Milgrom, rejects the earlier assertion that  $\text{וְאִשֶּׁר יַחֲבֹטֶנּוּ} \text{ } \text{לְמַעַן} \text{ } \text{יִטְמָא} \text{ } \text{בָּהֶן}$  means that 'they use their hands for walking on' (Douglas, 1966:56; Porter, 1976:90; Wenham, 1979:177). According to Houston the  $\text{וְאִשֶּׁר יַחֲבֹטֶנּוּ}$  does not mean the hand-like foot of the lizard (Douglas), but the flat of the foot, ie the paw, which 'simply distinguishes all quadrupeds without hooves from those with hooves' (50).

As we have just remarked, in this section we are not dealing with food prohibitions but with the contagion that results from contact with carcass of dead animals. It goes without saying that contact with the two groups of animals, namely 'animal that is hoofed but is cloven-footed or does not chew the cud', and the 'swarming things that swarm upon the earth', made a person ritually unclean until the evening. The contact was in two ways, touching the carcass or carrying any part of their carcass. While in the former no purification was necessary, the latter necessitated washing of the clothes (cf vv 24-26), but even after the washing was done the victim remained defiled until the evening<sup>38</sup>. Again, at that time, as

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<sup>38</sup> Porter (88) has remarked that 'contact with a human corpse meant being unclean for a week (cf Num 19:11, 16), but with an animal the case was less serious and the uncleanness lasted only until the beginning of the succeeding day, since the Hebrews



Harrison says (130), 'he would wash his body also, and until this had been done he could not participate in tabernacle worship or in any personal sacrificial rites.'

Finally, we have the third group in Lev 11:29ff, the swarming things that swarm upon the earth or 'the teeming creatures that teem on the ground' (Houston). It is not possible to identify for certain all the animals included in this group. Here I follow Houston (51) who generally concludes that both reptiles and small mammals are included. And according to him, 'this indicates the upper size limits of the whole class of teeming things of the ground, which of course goes down to include all creeping insects, spiders, worms and other invertebrates (cf v 42).' The carcass of animals in this group defile anything they touch: an article of wood or a garment or skin or a sack, any vessel that is used for any purpose (cf v 32). Objects and articles that were defiled by contact with a carcass were to be put into water to remove any uncleanness and had to remain impure until the evening; then they were clean. But the earthen vessel in which any of the animals fell had to be broken (v 33), since it was 'considered to become impregnated with uncleanness' (Porter, 91). Cooking equipment, an oven and a stove were equally contaminated should any part of their carcass fall upon them (v 35), and like the earthenware vessel, they had to be destroyed. Only a spring or a cistern (v 36) and seed intended for sowing were not contaminated by contact with carcass. For the former, the reason could be that the water was continually flowing thereby taking away any impurities, while for the latter 'the need to preserve the essentials of life limits the application of the principle of uncleanness' (Porter).

Contact with the corpse of a clean animal conveyed a purifiable pollution: 'And if any animal of which you may eat dies, he who touches its carcass shall be unclean (  $\text{K} \text{Y} \text{Q} \text{Q}$  ) until the evening and he who eats of its carcass shall wash his clothes...' (v39f).

While the aliens were allowed to eat meat of the carcasses of clean animals that had died from natural death, if they so wished, the Israelites were strictly forbidden on ceremonial

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began their day at sundown'.

reasons (cf Deut 14:21). So, the Israelites were not supposed to touch  $\text{אֲרָאִים}$  the carcasses of such animals, lest they become  $\text{טָמֵא}$ . But Milgrom (1991:681-2) argues that in P generally the carcasses of clean animals do not defile by touch and that Lev 11:39-40 is a late harmonization. Further, Houston (51) remarks that vv39-40 may 'have been added here for the sake of completeness in the law about ritual pollution arising from carcasses.'

Finally we have vv41-45, which serves as the conclusion of the whole section on prohibition of unclean animals. This section begins with an enlarged list of swarming things, 'whatever goes on its belly, and whatever goes on all fours, or whatever has many feet, all the swarming things are an abomination  $\text{טָמֵא}$ ' (v 42). The enlarged list now include 'insects, snakes, lizards, worms, caterpillars and the like' (Porter, 132). The carcasses of these animals must be avoided, lest the Israelites defile themselves and become unclean  $\text{טָמֵא}$  (cf v 42). Surely, it is permissible to compare this particular section (vv 24-45) with the tribal societies' understanding of taboos concerning corpses of dead people discussed in chapter one.

The Hebrew terms  $\text{טָמֵא}$ ,  $\text{טְבוֹאָה}$  and  $\text{טָמֵא}$  have severally been mentioned in the description of unclean foods. Let us now examine briefly a comparative study of these terminologies in both Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

CREATURES	VERSES	LEVITICUS	VERSES	DEUTERONOMY
quadrupeds	3-8	$\text{טָמֵא}$ unclean	3-8	$\text{טָמֵא}$ unclean
sea creatures	10-12	$\text{טָמֵא}$ an abomination	9-10	$\text{טָמֵא}$ unclean
birds	13-19	$\text{טָמֵא}$ an abomination	11-18	
insects	20-23	$\text{טָמֵא}$ an abomination	19	$\text{טָמֵא}$ unclean

swarming 41-43

יִצְפֹּץ  
an abomination

all (general) 46-47

טִמֵּא 3  
unclean

תִּזְעֶזַע  
an abomination

A critical analysis of the way both the priestly text and the Deuteronomist describe inedible foods is important for our understanding of the biblical dietary laws.

Whereas in Deuteronomy the word יִצְפֹּץ is avoided completely<sup>39</sup>, in Leviticus it seems to be the best term to describe the state of the inedible foods: the sea creatures, the birds and the insects are all יִצְפֹּץ (vv 10-23). Again, while in Deuteronomy the sea creatures and the insects are טִמֵּא (vv 9-10, 19), in Leviticus such creatures are יִצְפֹּץ. The term טִמֵּא in Leviticus is only used to refer to land animals in terms of impurity or to all the inedible creatures in general (cf 46-47)<sup>40</sup>. In Deuteronomy, however, the general term describing all the inedible living things is תִּזְעֶזַע (v 3), and not טִמֵּא as is the case in Leviticus.

The two texts devoted to the uncleanness of inedible creatures are in agreement in the order in which these creatures appear:

	טִמֵּא	יִצְפֹּץ	יִצְפֹּץ	יִצְפֹּץ	יִצְפֹּץ
LEVITICUS	LAND	SEA	BIRDS	INSECTS	SWARMING
	טִמֵּא	טִמֵּא		טִמֵּא	
DEUTERONOMY	LAND	SEA	BIRDS	INSECTS	

<sup>39</sup> Milgrom (1991:699) suggests that in Deuteronomy יִצְפֹּץ is discarded because this root is used in the condemnation of idolatry (Deut 7:26; 29:16).

<sup>40</sup> Houston (56) calls these verses a subscript and notes that they redactionally summarize the contents of the chapter as part of the larger collection. For the purpose of this study, these verses have been compared with the introduction of food taboos of Deut 14:3 above.

We need to note however that while the interchangeability of these Hebrew key words for ritual impurity is readily acceptable (Houston, 41), their interpretation is still debatable. Houston, for example, argues that even in this context (Lev 11) these words have different connotations. He points out that 'the noun  $\text{רָצוּץ}$  is used only with reference to forbidden flesh. The root suggests personal disgust or abhorrence, and in this legal context is appropriately used for rigorous avoidance'. Houston, who rightly parallels v 8 with v 11, where eating and touching of the carcasses of land animals (v 8) and scaleless sea creatures (v 11) are described both as  $\text{טָמֵא}$  (unclean) and as  $\text{רָצוּץ}$  (abomination), respectively, remarks that the root  $\text{רָצוּץ}$  has not 'any technical ritual connotations.'

#### Rationale Behind Meat Prohibitions

So far we have discussed in brief the kind of creatures that were permitted to be eaten by Israel. Mary Douglas (1966:70) is right in asserting that 'In the firmament two-legged fowls fly with wings. In the water scaly fish swim with fins. On the earth four-legged animals hop, jump or walk. Any class of creatures which is not equipped for the right kind of locomotion in its element is contrary to holiness'. But she fails to balance this emphasis with, for example, chewing the cud<sup>41</sup>, a fact that is equally emphasized in Leviticus (11:3 cf Deut 14:6), where it is categorically stated that any edible creature should be qualified on the basis of:

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41 The significance of Douglas' notion of locomotion deciding the food criteria (Lev 11, Deut 14) is also rejected by Firmage (180). He points out that locomotion is not the unifying principle behind the perception of uncleanness. But it is Harris who comes out very clearly on this point. He says, 'Had the Levites possessed a better knowledge of zoology, they could have used the criterion of cud-chewing alone and simply added the proviso, 'except for the camel'' (79).

'whatever is hoofed פְּרָשִׁים וְכָפָרָשִׁים and is cloven-footed פְּרָשִׁים  
 וְכָפָרָשִׁים and chews the cud הַרְגָּה וְלִצְלָהּ , among the animals,  
 you may eat.'

Emphasis on 'chew the cud' in essence implies that since all meat-eating land animals do not chew the cud they are automatically disqualified from the list of edible animals. This is in line with what Mary Douglas has argued (1993:3-23).

Referring to Gen 1:29-30, she has pointed out that at 'creation all living beings were expected to subsist on leaves, berries and seeds' (17). However, she says that this law was modified in the new covenant after the flood and the people were allowed to eat meat, but never blood. Blood-eating animals and carrion eaters were to be avoided because 'their bodies have already ingested blood.' Concerning the denizens of the waters without scales and the crawlers, Mary Douglas argues that the issue is not blood eating, but lack of something they need. Under the rubric *blemish*, using Lev 21:18-24, and 22:26, which deal with the physical defects of the priests and what is acceptable as a sacrifice, respectively, she points out that 'the forbidden species which are not covered by the law against eating blood, either have something lacking (like joints, legs, fins or scales) or something superfluous (like a burden on their backs) and that their disfigurement has something to do with injustice' (20).

Mary Douglas has abandoned her earlier approach on unclean animals of Lev 1.1, which was basically based on 'movement'. This is clear in her remark that:

'An anthropologist hardly needs to apologise for trying a new approach to the dietary laws in Leviticus. For one reason, the various interpretations offered so far are not agreed. For another, these rules are generally interpreted as rules of purity, whereas they are unlike any purity rules in the anthropological record. Third, the explanations offered in the book itself are ignored, for lack of interest in its rhetorical structure' (3).

In this new approach, she argues that the forbidden creatures 'are to be honoured as symbols of the victims of injustice, enacting Isaiah's concern for the fatherless and oppressed' (23). While Mary Douglas admits that her interpretation is allegorical, ie it depends on symbolizing virtue and vice, she nonetheless rejects Philo's use of allegory, 'whose free-wheeling allegories do not depend on Isaiah's teachings about righteousness.' According to

her, the animals allowed for food do not stand for virtues and the prohibited animals do not stand for vices:

'Though this interpretation makes the dietary rules symbolic for virtue and vices, the permitted animals do not stand for any virtues, they simply keep the rule of avoiding blood, and the forbidden animals do not represent vices in their own bodies, but the effects of vicious actions on the part of others.'

In her earlier work (1966), Mary Douglas had shown that the forbidden animals in the Book of Leviticus were 'very comparable to taboos in other parts of the world, a rational construction of nature, society and culture' (1993:7). But in her present work, she links the forbidden animals with morals and social distinctions:

'The main argument of *Purity and Danger* was that taboo organizes consensus by attributing the dangers which regularly threaten to breaches of moral law. In the case of the forbidden animals in Leviticus I could not find this link with morals and social distinctions, but trusted that, as the idea was relatively new, further research by qualified biblical scholars would discover ways in which eating the animals could be used as accusations in the same way as breaking taboos' (1993:6).

While this allegorical interpretation, which Mary Douglas had rejected earlier (1966:6) seem to be plausible, other reasons why certain creatures were considered clean and others unclean need to be sought, especially from a non-biblical perspective.

It should be admitted that on the surface of these food injunctions, biblically, it is locomotion and diet that are the determining factors, but beneath the surface other reasons seem to be at work. And even without engaging ourselves in a detailed discussion about these prohibitions, it will be clear from what follows below that, apart from allegorical interpretation, the association of certain food elements with the nations round about Israel which Mary Douglas (1966:61-63) accepts reluctantly, contributed to some extent to their imposition.

And you shall not walk in the customs of the nations which I am casting out before you; for they did all these things, and therefore I abhorred them. But I have said, 'You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey'. I am the Lord your God, who have separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore make a distinction between the clean beast and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground teems, which I have set apart for you to hold

unclean. You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine. (Lev 20:23-26)

The idea of Israel borrowing certain elements of their culture from other nations and especially Canaanites cannot be denied. Meek (1963:123) concludes his section on how much Hebrews have borrowed from other nations by saying, 'All in all it was no small contribution that Canaanites made to the Hebrews, but what the Hebrews borrowed they sublimated and ethicized in the end improving what they borrowed'<sup>42</sup>. In his reflection on this notion, Jenson (1992:145), however, has a different attitude, especially from the point of view of Priestly understanding. He argues that there are several references to the necessity for Israel to reject the religious practices of other nations, but the forbidden practices are not purity laws, and the defilement that they bring is of a different kind from that found in Lev 11-15<sup>43</sup>. It is admissible, I think, to accept that Israel as a nation were not living in a religio-cultural vacuum. Certainly, they had their own culture (so Douglas) and religious beliefs which regulated their day to day life, but it is also true that the idea of borrowing from other cultures cannot be ruled out wholesale.

However, even having said that, from a non-biblical perspective, and perhaps in a much wider scope, other reasons behind food prohibitions in Israel need to be sought in view of the fact that this was a world-wide phenomenon. Kikuyu people, for example, did not eat any sea creatures, let alone the scaly fish which swims with its fins, and the Maasai did not eat any bird, not even the chicken. It is true that these kind of examples seem to be relatively far-fetched and should be used with caution especially in a study that claims to be biblical. But such examples help us understand the biblical dietary laws. I think, therefore, by way of

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42 So Professor Hooke, quoted by Douglas (1966:62).

43 Concerning Lev 20:25 which is basically about making a clear distinction between animals and birds that are ritually clean and those that are not, Jenson (146) argues that it is the structure, not the content, of the food laws that distinguishes Israel from the nations.

digression, in a study of this nature we cannot restrict ourselves to the comparative studies of cultures of nations around Israel, for such an approach would seem to be inhibitive.

Jenson's (1993:14) criticism of Miller and Roberts for failing to consider other cultures in their work *The Hand of the Lord* is definitely supportive of this view. He says that 'in their treatment of the expulsion of the ark, Miller and Roberts compared it to Hittite rituals against pestilence: when a plague befalls the ark is selected, adorned and driven out'. Miller and Roberts, he argues, 'do not pay any particular attention to the ritual procedure; to them the important fact is only that a pestilence could be attributed to an enemy god'. Finally he says that 'like the majority of OT scholars, Miller and Roberts restrict the limits for Old Testament comparative analysis to Near Oriental cultures, including, however, Hittite texts'. Again, to use another example, Maccoby (1991:132) tells us how Eilberg-Schwartz (1990) pleads for a revival of cross-cultural comparisons in anthropological method, urging that it is time to halt the reaction against what were felt to be superficial parallels drawn by 'armchair anthropologists' such as Frazer and Robertson Smith<sup>44</sup>. Eilberg-Schwartz argues that 'metaphorical comparisons' between remote cultures can be useful and enlightening. Societies everywhere, he argues, use similar methods of ordering societal data by metaphorical use of natural objects and animals. Eilberg-Schwartz gives suggestive similarities to Israelite religion among the Nuer<sup>45</sup>, Dinka and Samoan cultures, as well as in Babylonian or Canaanite religion.

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<sup>44</sup> Jenson (1992:57) expresses the same sentiments when he says that biblical scholars have not used anthropological studies extensively in the investigation of Priestly texts, and several essays written by anthropologists have met with criticism. He further says that the challenge to understand the text remains, and any approach which deals with central questions of meaning and interpretation deserves careful consideration. See also Houston (1993:16) who here seems to follow Howard Eilberg-Schwartz.

<sup>45</sup> cf Houston (187). Houston here connects meat eating with ritual especially among the Nuer.



Furthermore, Houston (15f), the most recent work on this subject to my knowledge, admits that he has not responded to Eilberg-Schwartz's work adequately; nonetheless, he refers to it in connection with the need to make use of anthropological approaches to the understanding of dietary prohibitions. According to Houston, Eilberg-Schwartz has argued at length for the validity of a comparative method derived from anthropology as a tool in the elucidation of Israelite religion. Houston himself remarks that 'we must take seriously the work of social anthropologists who studied the cultures of a wide range of societies, most of which included food prohibitions and avoidances'.

Kikuyu people, who are found to the further south of the Nuer and Dinka people of Sudan, already cited above, have very close, if not similar, principles that govern food injunctions in the OT, and a comparative study between the two cultures is inevitable in this study. Against this background, and following Eilberg-Schwartz, Houston and other scholars who are in favour of anthropology as a profitable approach to food prohibitions, we shall proceed to re-examine food selection criteria in Israel *vis a vis* the Kikuyu people using the chart below. For this exercise, other creatures that are not mentioned in the Hebrew texts have been included, in order to help us understand better why certain animals are considered unclean for food while others are not. Having grown up in a rural area, far away from any urban influence, and in a family of non-believers, I have participated in many traditional ceremonies, rituals and hunting. This experience, plus invaluable verbal information received from elderly people in my society, will be needed for this section.

EDIBLE AND INEDIBLE CREATURES IN THE OT AND AMONG THE KIKUYU

CLEAN	UNCLEAN	DIET		MOVEMENT		COVERING	SHAPE	CONSUMER	
		GRASS LEAVES CEREAL	CHEW THE CUD	HOOVES	CLEFT	FUR/WOOL	GOOD	ISRAEL	KIKUYU
ox		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
sheep		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
goat		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
hart		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
gazelle		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
wild goat		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
ibex		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
antelope		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
wild sheep		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	camel	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	hare	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	detestable	no	no
	rock badger	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	no	no
	swine	no	no	yes	yes	yes	detestable	no	no
	swarming creatures	no	no	no	no	yes/no	yes/no	no	no
	giraffe	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	detestable	no	no
	elephant	yes	no	no	no	no	detestable	no	no
	snakes	no	no	no	no	no	detestable	no	no
	Lion	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no
scaly fish		no	no	no	no	scales	yes	yes	no
	fish	no	no	no	no	no	detestable	no	no
birds		yes	no	no	no	feathers	yes	yes	yes
	birds	no	no	no	no	feathers	yes/no	no	no
locust		yes	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes
cricket		yes	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes
grass-hopper		yes	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes
	fly	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no
	bee	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no
	spider	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no

Before we highlight a few points for a better understanding of the food prohibitions in the OT in the light of the chart above, we need to mention three categories of edible substances found in all societies as suggested by Leach (Houston, 183):

1. Edible substances that are recognized as food and consumed as part of the normal diet.
2. Edible substances that are recognized as possible food, but are prohibited or else allowed to be eaten only under special (ritual) conditions; [which are] consciously tabooed.
3. Edible substances that by culture and language are not recognized as food at all; [which are] unconsciously tabooed.

While Leach's categorization of edible substances is plausible, we still need to ask ourselves why certain edible substances are not recognized as food - unconsciously tabooed? It is true that our chart is not exhaustive, and that our attempt to find a solution to this problem is not exclusive and yet, the chart is suggestive of the fact that there could be very many reasons behind food taboos as we shall see below, eg feeding habits, shape, size, etc.

First, and perhaps incidentally, except for the fish, a Jew of biblical times would have felt quite at home dining on meat in a Kikuyu home, except for the lack of fish. This is quite explicit in this chart where all the animals allowed to be eaten in the OT are the same among the Kikuyu, and vice versa. Second, all the edible creatures seem to have several things in common, ie they all eat either grass or plants or cereals as their main food, except for the fish which seem to defy this rule.

SPECIES	FOOD
goat <sup>46</sup>	grass,leaves
pigeon	cereals

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<sup>46</sup> Edible animals do not only qualify because they have true hooves, are cleft-footed and chew the cud, but they are also used as a simile for beauty and grace, as says Gardner (1983:19).

locust

grass,leaves

Note, here, that it is only vegetarian animals that are accepted as the right kind of food, i.e. species of animals that eat grass or leaves or cereals. Meat-eating creatures are not fit for human consumption. Incidentally, according to Gardner (1983:20-21), in the OT meat-eating creatures seem to serve as a metaphor of menace. The wolf's reputation as a plunderer of flocks appears consistently in biblical imagery. Jeremiah called the enemies of Judah wolves. The leopard serves as a metaphor of menace. A king's wrath was like the growling of a lion. Daniel is put in a den of lions. The Lord's anger is symbolized by a bear robbed of her cubs. Jerusalem is referred to as a lair of jackals.

This metaphorical understanding of animals in the OT is crucial for this study, and needs to be discussed further. For example, Eilbert-Schwartz (117) argues that the 'concept of metaphor makes it possible to see the significance of animal names in the Hebrew Bible'. But more importantly is his assertion that there seem to be a connection between the natural metaphors of Israelite thought and the biblical prohibition against eating any land animals that do not chew the cud and have cloven hooves (125).

Eilbert-Schwartz has further pointed out that the animals that serve as metaphors for other nations, such as predatory animals, are defined as unclean. But Houston (185) has noted that while it is true that the animals that serve as metaphors for Israelite society are seen as clean, while the predators that symbolize the enemies of Israel are unclean, the national aspect is not essential to the metaphor.

Concerning the insects, it is now clear that apart from having 'elongated hind legs' (Harrison:129), with which to leap on the earth, the winged insects that may be eaten in the OT (cf Lev 11:20-23) are also in keeping with the rest of the other edible creatures as far as their feeding habits are concerned. This is also true for the birds. According to Levine (1989:68), the impure birds are virtually all birds of prey and can be classified into 5 groups: (1) Four types of

falcons: falcon; sparrow hawk; kite and buzzard. These eat living flesh and carrion<sup>47</sup>. (2) Four types of vultures or eagles: eagle, griffin, vulture; black vulture; Egyptian vulture and bearded vulture. These eat carrion. (3) Six types of owls: long-eared owl; dark, desert eagle owl; barn, screech owl; little owl; Saharan owl and fish owl, ostrich. These are nocturnal birds of prey. (4) The raven: ravens eat living flesh and carrion. (5) Marsh, or sea birds: stork; heron and sea gull. Perhaps it is also worth our while to consider edible birds according to Levine's classification. According to Levine, these birds can be grouped into 4 classifications<sup>48</sup>: (1) Columbiformes: various types of doves and pigeons; (2) Galliformes: hens and quail, gathered as food in the Sinai desert as told in the narratives of Ex 16:13 and Num 11:31-32; (3) Anseriformes: domestic geese and ducks; and (4) Passerines: specifically the house sparrow. All these birds, except for the ducks, are in the group of pigeons in regard to their eating habits.

Another common feature among the edible animals is the body covering:

#### BODY COVERING

goat \_\_\_\_\_ fur  
 fish \_\_\_\_\_ scales  
 pigeon \_\_\_\_\_ feathers  
 locust \_\_\_\_\_ rough wings

Except for the locust, which even though it has a covering on its body, does not seem to

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<sup>47</sup> Medically, according to Clements (1970:34), birds of prey eat carrion and are dangerous disease carriers.

<sup>48</sup> Levine also argues that determining which birds are permitted has been in some cases a matter of custom and has resulted in persistent discrepancies among various communities in the course of Jewish history.

fit very well in this classification, the rest of the other edible animals and birds have their skins protected - fur, scales or feathers. A pig and more so an elephant which have no proper covering on their bodies and seem to be naked may be disqualified on the same reason. Their rather smooth skin characterizing the skin of human beings<sup>49</sup> certainly makes them detestable<sup>50</sup>. But Porphyry's (Houston, 186) comment, which here includes the elephant among the domestic animals together with the ass, states that, 'we do not slaughter asses or elephants or any of those animals that share our labours but do not enjoy their benefits.' Among the Kikuyu elephants were never kept as domestic animals and it could be that they were considered unclean because of their shape and size. Further, why should a locust be eaten and not a bee or a fly or a spider? While a locust eats leaves and has a rough covering like the other groups of edible creatures, the bee (hostile?), the fly and the spider do not have these qualifications and are as a result unclean. Further, the shape of animals permitted for food seems to conform to a set standard or paradigm, and any creature that did not measure to this standard was seen as detestable:

PARADIGM

land	_____goat	Lev16
sea	_____scalyfish	Lev11
birds	_____pigeon <sup>51</sup>	Lev 5:7

49 of the primates

50 of a bat

51 The Hebrews' domesticated doves, according to Gardner(1983:21), were the poor man's sacrificial offering. In the NT the dove was an enduring symbol in Christian art, stemming from Matthew's description of Jesus' baptism: 'the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove...'. Houston (235-36) is not in favour of the dove paradigm as the starting point. Using examples from Ugarit where the dove, the goose and other unspecified birds were sacrificed, Houston argues that the evidence indicates that it would be unwise to assume

insects \_\_\_\_\_ locust Lev 11

It is evident in our chart that a camel, which can physically be compared to a giraffe, apart from its failure to be categorized as a cleft-footed animal, also falls under the animals we have termed as detestable because of their shape. After all, why should a Kikuyu eat a buffalo (not in the chart) and not a giraffe or an elephant or a snake, except for their detestable shapes? Again, why should a locust be eaten? I am quite aware that this approach is rather speculative and lacks any biblical support and yet it helps us to see beyond the biblical reasons why certain animals were excluded. For example, why should a Kikuyu not eat a giraffe even in the absence of Priestly influence, and yet it feeds on leaves like a goat? Other than for its ugly shape and size, it would be definitely illogical to exclude a camel just because it is not cleft-footed and yet in our chart it seems to pass any other test making it a potential candidate on the food list.

Before we conclude this section we need to say a little more about the understanding of food avoidances among the Kikuyu people. To begin with, the Kikuyu country had a limited wild fauna in most of the places, except in the forest where many animals like elephants, leopards, buffaloes, rhinoceroses, hyenas, wild pigs and different species of monkeys lived. In the plains, there were zebras and antelopes. Other smaller animals like wild cats and mongoose existed. The Kikuyu knew their natural history well and all animals, birds and insects, regardless of size, colour or shape were given a name.

But since, in general, the Kikuyu were agriculturists their main source of food was vegetable like maize, millet, sorghum, yam, sweet potato, banana, pea, bean, cowpea and

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with Firmage (1990:190-91) that we should begin from the paradigm of the dove. Houston suggests that it would be safe to 'begin from the other end; with the unclean birds that are actually mentioned'. While both approaches are plausible, I think it is good to begin with the known and move to the unknown - from the dove to the other birds.

different types of green vegetable (*kahurura* and *nyeni cia marange*). However, the Kikuyu were not entirely vegetarian - meat and other animal products, such as blood and milk, were also consumed, even though they were not considered as food.

One point that needs to be underscored, at this point, is that meat eating among the Kikuyu had a religious meaning. This included meat feast, and meat connected with sacrifice or ceremony. This is true especially when we consider many taboos connected with meat eating. For example,

If the pot in which meat was being cooked, or the small earthen pot in which the soup was being stirred should break, a ram or a ewe had to be sacrificed at once, to restore peace and ward off evil influences (cf OC iii:1-9).

The strictness with which these taboos were observed is suggestive of the fact that any undesired creature could not be cooked in a Kikuyu pot or come in contact with the fire in the hearth. This explains the reason why a purification ceremony was necessary when, for example, a toad or lizard fell into the fire in the hearth of a hut (cf OC i:9). But as we have just mentioned the question of edible and inedible animals did not arise because the Kikuyu knew their natural history well.

Finally, the striking similarities of food avoidances between the OT and the Kikuyu, and perhaps other cultures, direct us to rule out any possibility of attributing wholesale OT dietary rules to pagan cults, granted that among the Kikuyu who have very close dietary affinity with the Jews, such an association was completely unknown. Needless to say, meat taboos in both cultures may have taken a long period of time to reach their present form and may have primarily been considered on the basis of the general observation of the behaviour of different species of animals in their natural habitat, in their relation to man and what had already been accepted as the right food<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> Concerning the development of food avoidances in the OT, Houston (1993:20) remarks that 'if there were food avoidances in the society in which the present law was developed, they may have been entirely different from those in the present law, or if they



However, our attempt to use the chart above is not by any means exhaustive, given the complexity of food taboos, and it is quite obvious that other reasons lying behind these prohibitions need to be sought. We shall therefore need to consider other theories propounded by different scholars. Admittedly, in view of the space available to us, we cannot discuss these theories in any detail. It will suffice here to reflect briefly on James Fisher's summary (Amorin 1986:275)<sup>53</sup>. Fisher lists ten rationales behind food prohibitions:

The Arbitrary Command - the reason is only known by God. He commands and man has to obey, and that is all. This is the old Jewish explanation (J R Porter);

Allegorical/Symbolic - used by Philo and Aristeas;

Taboo/Totemism - suggested by Robertson Smith;

Psychological/Repulsive - animals that are repulsive were considered unclean (Herod S Stern);

Death/Life Antithesis - death is the basic rationale. Animals that relate to death, those that kill to eat, or even those related to the cult of the dead in other religions are unclean because of their association with death (Paschen, Fletcher-Watts)<sup>54</sup>;

Separation of Israel/Protest against Paganism - unclean animals are those worshipped in the surrounding nations (Von Rad, Pedersen, Link and J Schattenmann, Martin Noth);

Anthropological/ Conformity to Normality - cleanness implies wholeness. Clean animals are

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were similar they may have been entirely reinterpreted'.

<sup>53</sup> For a detailed discussion of these rationales, see Milgrom (1991:718-742).

<sup>54</sup> So Kiuchi (1987:63). Following Dillman, W Kornfield, W Paschen, N Fuglister and E Feldman, Kiuchi in his explanations as to why certain things and conditions are designated as 'unclean', argues that explanations based on hygienic and cultic polemic against pagan cults are only partial and unconvincing, as Wenham has argued, and as a result he (Kiuchi) would rather take up the explanation which symbolizes an 'aura of death'. As we have already noticed, any attempt to overemphasize any rationale at the expense of the others is, unfortunately, doomed to fail.

those that fit in the scheme of 'normality of the world' (Douglas);

Ethical/ Moral - concerned about teaching self-control, and mastery of the appetite (Aristeas, Maimonides, Milgrom);

Ceremonial/ Cultic - only sacrificial animals are clean;

Hygienic/ Health - animals that when used as food cause diseases or animals living in anti-hygienic conditions were unclean (Albright, Thomas H Nelson, Gerhard F Hasel).

Houston (68-123) has very carefully reviewed these theories in detail which cannot be covered in the present study. But his conclusion of this section is particularly significant. First, Houston (123) does not see food prohibitions as peculiarly an OT phenomenon: 'It will be shown (in the following chapter) that the dietary repertoire suggested by the code is general among Israel, its immediate neighbours and predecessors in the land, except that in some places there is some limited use of the pig...'. Second, Houston admits following Firmage in tracing the basis of the distinction between clean and unclean animals to the sanctuary: 'My hypothesis is that the systematic classification of animals as clean and unclean for food developed at the sanctuaries as a measure to ensure the purity of the worshippers, and was therefore naturally based on those animals that were acceptable for sacrifice'<sup>55</sup>. This seems to me to be Houston's response to his own question which he argues has not been adequately answered by Mary Douglas' abstract structural approach. He remarks, 'The question remains how its (code) elements originally acquired the meaning that they have'.

While Houston's answer may be considered right from the perspective of the OT, our

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<sup>55</sup> cf Douglas' idea of holy which she closely links with the temple (1986:64). She notes, 'Any interpretations will fit which take the Do-nots of the OT in piecemeal fashion. The only sound approach is to forget hygiene, aesthetics, moral and instinctive revulsion, even to forget the Canaanites and the Zoroastrian Magi, and start with the texts. Since each of the injunctions is prefaced by the command to be holy, so they must be explained by the command' (63).

accepting the use of examples from other cultures in the examination of the biblical food taboos leads us to yet another question. How, for example, did the Kikuyu people arrive at the list of edible animals which seem to agree with Lev 11, except for the fish? It is true that the Kikuyu had sanctuaries (sacred places) where both the sacrifice (without any blemish) and the sacrificer and whatever else that was involved had to meet the required standard of purity. But, even having said that, it is most unlikely that food taboos in Kikuyu developed on the basis of a sanctuary. Admittedly, any infringement of food prohibitions was a religious matter and necessitated ritual purification, but cases of this kind were rare, since everyone in the society knew exactly what to eat and what not to eat. I remember as a young boy when we went hunting and our dogs killed a wild animal, the first thing we did was to open its mouth to see whether or not it resembled the mouth of a goat (toothless upper jaw), and then we examined its feet to see whether it had split hooves. This to some extent is indicative of the rigorousness with which dietary rules were observed among the Kikuyu.

If Houston's 'systematic classification' of edible animals goes beyond the point of recording, i.e. the written form of the biblical food prohibitions, which is not the case in Kikuyu where they circulated in an oral form and were handed on from one generation to another verbally, then we can as well say that the Kikuyu dietary rules were 'systematically classified', as we have already seen, even in the absence of a sanctuary in the true sense of the word. In view of this fact, it follows that the systematization of the biblical dietary rules may have been effected prior to the sanctuary and the priest's role was to codify them, and perhaps make some modifications. This point also seems to be against Douglas' sole attribution of the same to the idea of holiness (63, cf temple, 64).

In the light of these views and our discussion on the chart, we should finally say, with Amorim (276), that 'no single rationale does justice to all the different species of animals, fishes and birds'. I think while one species may have been prohibited because of one or two reasons, another species may have needed several reasons to exclude it from the list of edible animals. For example, if our chart is anything to go by, the pig seems to be disqualified on

several grounds, ie it does not chew the cud, it does not eat grass/leaves, its body is partially covered, its shape is objectionable and its relationship with human beings can at times be harmful<sup>56</sup>.

It is acceptable now to point out that, as is evident throughout this discussion on food taboos, while we have found it quite helpful to use generalizations such as 'locomotion', 'diet' etc as the only criteria on which clean and unclean meat were determined, it would be safe to suggest that it would be more appropriate to treat each kind of animal on its own merit.

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<sup>56</sup> For a detailed study about the pig, see Houston (1993) and Harris (67-87). Harris attributes pig taboo to ecological and economic factors, and rejects the notion of filth associated with pigs. Houston, who admits dealing with the issue of pigs disproportionately (182), traces the source of dietary prohibitions, that of the pig included, in pastoralism: 'If we look at the whole body of customary avoidances codified in the Levitical and related codes, not only the pig, we are, I think, confirmed in our assumption that pastoral tradition is their ultimate source' (212).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISEASES AND FUNERARY TABOOS

#### Introduction

Diseases, as we saw in the very beginning of this study, were another source of ritual impurity. In many societies, when man failed to establish the cause of a certain illness from the examination of symptoms, their explanation was that a supernatural power was involved<sup>57</sup>. Throughout the ancient Near East, claims Milgrom (1991:820), diseases were considered the work of divine, malevolent forces, and scale disease (which is under consideration in this section) was a prime means of divine punishment. The sin and scale disease syndrome, he says, 'is not limited to the ancient Near East but is a universal phenomenon that cannot be confined to cultural bounds; rather, it stems from the concerns of the human psyche'.

Furthermore, if a person got flu, respiratory or intestinal, no isolative measures were needed. But if the same illness persisted and failed to respond to all the forms of known treatments, then such an illness would obviously be attributed to a deity or evil spirits, and in the case of skin diseases, quarantining of the victim was inevitable. The mysterious nature surrounding such a disease, especially skin disease which tended to disfigure its victims, would always demand that such a person be isolated from the midst of the people, not only for the purpose of avoiding ritual contamination, but also, to a lesser degree, the detestable appearance of the victim, particularly at mealtimes<sup>58</sup>. However, it is in the former avoidance

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<sup>57</sup> of Konyatta (1971:155). He says, about the Kikuyu people, that illness which seemed to defy the wisdom of man was attributed to a supernatural power, or the agency of ancestral evil spirits.

<sup>58</sup> of Amorim (294) who argues that one of the reasons leading to isolation may have been due to external appearance that could give the impression that the person was doomed to death or was

that we truly see taboo in operation and not in the latter.

But worse still were taboos related to death, an event that marked a permanent end of all functions of life (social and religious) of a member of a given society. Coming in contact with corpses was viewed as a source of the worst type of ritual impurity. Our translation of the Hebrew texts connected with this kind of taboo reveals very close parallels with the OT views surrounding certain diseases and dead bodies, not only of dead human beings but also, to some extent, animals, as we have already mentioned.

### Scale Diseases

(Lev 13: 1-59)

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 2 'When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a leprous disease on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests, 3 and the priest shall examine the diseased spot on the skin of his body; and if the hair in the diseased spot has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous disease; when the priest has examined him he shall pronounce him taboo.

It is evident that in Leviticus 13 and 14 (cf 22:4, Num 5:2) the priest is supposed to diagnose thoroughly skin diseases and establish whether it is a leprous disease תִּצְרָף 59.

The process involved in this medical investigation is quite remarkable.

First, the case under diagnosis is skin disease (v 2). Then the symptoms of the disease are carefully studied to determine the nature of the disease (vv 3, 8, 15, 22, 25, 30). Acute

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seen as a living dead.

59 Milgrom (1991:818) compares תִּצְרָף with an aspect of death and says that its bearer is treated like a corpse (cf Num 12:12, Job 18:13). Again, both תִּצְרָף and a corpse contaminate not only by direct contact but, unlike all other impurity bearers, also by overhang, that is, by being under the same roof (Lev 13:46). cf Jenson (79). Other scholars mentioned by Jenson: Dillman, Pascher, Feldman, Fuglister, Amorim, Kiuchi and von Rad.

, according to Levine (1989:76), is indicated by a whitish discoloration of the body hair in the infected areas of the skin and by lesions that appear to be recessed or lower than the surrounding skin. If after seven days the lesions do not become enlarged, and if, within fourteen days, the hair in the infected areas reverts to a more normal, darker colour, a determination may be made that the infection is not acute  $\text{תַּעֲרַץ}$ <sup>60</sup>. He also says that if the rash continues to spread, the person is considered to have acute  $\text{תַּעֲרַץ}$  and is declared impure indefinitely.

The thoroughness with which this particular disease is examined is indicative of the seriousness of  $\text{תַּעֲרַץ}$  in its relation to ritual impurity. Milgrom (819) as we have already noted associates  $\text{תַּעֲרַץ}$  with death. Quoting the rabbis, he says,

Four are similar to a dead man: a pauper, a leper, a blind man, and he who has no children. Like the corpse, the scale-diseased person contaminates by overhanging; neither the corpse-contaminated person nor the scale-diseased person may cut his hair, wash his clothes, engage in sex, extend greetings or send sacrifices to the temple.

It is true to say, in support of the association of  $\text{תַּעֲרַץ}$  with death, that both phenomena exhibit the same characteristics, namely, that they are both mysterious and therefore uncontrollable from the standpoint of man. Both  $\text{תַּעֲרַץ}$  and death are considered to be ritually contagious, hence the need for isolation. Presumably, if, as we have seen, touching a dead body is taboo  $\text{אָסִיף}$  (Num 19), similarly, touching a  $\text{תַּעֲרַץ}$  is taboo, too.

Second, when the priest has established that the case is leprous, his findings are made public by instructing his patient to wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose and then cover his upper lip and cry 'Taboo, taboo'  $\text{אָסִיף אָסִיף}$  (Lev 13:45). Milgrom

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<sup>60</sup> Concerning the identification of the disease, according to Amorim (1986:293), Hulse suggests psoriasis seborrhoeic dermatitis, fungus infections of the skin, patchy eczema, and pityriasis rosea. He (Hulse) rejects that it is Hansen's disease (leprosy). But Amorim thinks that Hansen's disease was one of the diseases meant by the term. For rejection, see also Jensen (140).

(778) says that the declaration of a victim of  $\text{מַצְרֵחַ}$  as  $\text{מְצֻרָה}$  implies that the person suspected of scale disease is in a state of impurity while he is quarantined, analogous to the quarantined house, which contaminates everything within it and all who enter it (vv 46-47)<sup>61</sup>.

But our main question is, why should a leper wear torn clothes, let the hair of his head hang loose, and then cover his lip and then shout 'Taboo, taboo'? This is somewhat comparable to our modern words: WARNING, DANGER! on posts that carry live electric wires. These words are supposed to warn passers-by against coming into any possible contact with these wires lest they be exposed to electric shock and the resultant electrocution. Or should we liken a leper to a modern ambulance carrying a patient to the hospital which is fitted with a device for emitting a loud wailing sound as a warning to other traffic so that they may clear the way for its passage to the hospital?

Whatever analogy we may look for, one thing is clear - a leprous person was believed to be highly contagious. Milgrom (803-4) says that 'a leper had to cover his mouth since his breath could contaminate, and no one was, therefore, supposed to walk to the east of him, but west of him'. On the basis of this interpretation and the contents of Leviticus 13, we can now see why a leper had to be isolated. In the midst of the people he was unquestionably dangerous and as a result he had to dwell alone in a habitation outside the camp (cf v 46).

#### Fungus Houses

(Lev 14:33-47)

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<sup>61</sup> Jenson (1992:140) says that it was unlikely that  $\text{מַצְרֵחַ}$  was contagious and 'Quarantine is therefore a misleading description of what is primarily a ritual category and dealt with ritual not with civil procedure'. For use of this term, see also Milgrom (817-18), and Levine (1989:77,88). Note that Jenson (75) himself uses the same term. This notion is not convincing, as we shall see later.



33 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 34 'When you come into the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put a leprous disease in a house in the land of your possession, 35 then he who owns the house shall come and tell the priest, 'There seems to me to be some sort of disease in my house.' 36 Then the priest shall command that they empty the house before the priest goes to examine the disease, lest all that is in the house be declared taboo; and afterward the priest shall go in to see the house.

Houses infected with leprous disease were taboo כִּטְוָה (Lev 14:33-47). As in the case of a leprous person, it was the duty of a priest, once the appearance of such a disease was detected on the walls of a house to act swiftly, examine thoroughly the nature of the disease and confirm whether it was malignant or not: 'If the disease breaks out again in the house, after he has taken out the stones and scraped the house and plastered it, then the priest shall go and look; and if the disease has spread in the house, it is a malignant leprosy in the house; it is taboo כִּטְוָה (vv 43-44)<sup>62</sup>. The uncleanness of a leprous house did not only affect the inhabitants of the house, but also anything in its stones and timber and all the plaster of the house (v 36). Similarly, lying or eating in this house was prohibited, and a violator of those rules had to wash his clothes to remove the uncleanness (v 47).

But what caused leprosy on houses? The Mesopotamians, says Milgrom (867), attribute the fungus houses to demons<sup>63</sup>, and the Hittites to its occupants<sup>64</sup>, but Israel to neither. We would suggest here that the attribution of this disease to Yahweh by Israel cannot be denied, and Leviticus seems to point in this direction, 'When you come into the land of Canaan, which I

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62 The symptoms of a leprous house resembled כִּטְוָה in leprous persons (cf 13:2ff).

63 Jenson (157) says that since the Priestly texts pay little attention to the demonic in any form, Milgrom suggests that humanity has become the demonic source of impurity in the 'Priestly theodicy'. Jenson also mentions Douglas 1966; Meggs 1978; Ikenga-Matuh 1985, and says that in anthropological discussion, they have shown that it is possible to interpret purity laws without reference to the demonic.

64 The rabbis also betray no hesitation whatever in attributing a house infected with leprosy to the sin of the owner (Milgrom, 868).

give you for a possession, and I put a leprous disease in a house...' (v 34).

Lastly, it should be mentioned here that a leprous house that had been declared taboo could not be redeemed by any purificatory rite and had to be broken, its timber and stones and all the plaster taken out of the city to a place that had already been declared unclean (v 45).

### Corpse, Bones of The Dead and Grave

(Num.19:11-22)

11 'He who touches the dead body of any person shall be taboo seven days; 12 he shall cleanse himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and so be not taboo; but if he does not cleanse himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not become clean. 13 Whoever touches a dead person, the body of any man who has died, and does not cleanse himself, defiles the tabernacle of the Lord, and that person shall be cut off from Israel; because the water for impurity was not thrown upon him, he shall be taboo; his taboo is still on him.

So far, we have seen several instances where the Hebrew term  $\text{טָמֵא}$  has been rendered 'taboo', but it is in this section we notice the most serious form of taboo, ie taboo related to corpses, human bones and graves. The human corpse, according to Jenson (167) generates the most extreme impurity<sup>65</sup>.

In Num 19 victims of funerary taboos are clearly specified: 'He who touches  $\text{גֵּשֶׁת}$  the dead body of any person shall be taboo  $\text{טָמֵא}$  seven days' (v 11)<sup>66</sup>; whoever touches a dead person, the body of any man who has died, and does not cleanse himself, defiles the tabernacle

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<sup>65</sup> So Amorim (1989:239-40), who says that this uncleanness belongs to a higher and more contagious degree which according to the rabbinical literature is called the 'father of uncleanness'. Other similar cases are menstruation, and both male and female discharges.

<sup>66</sup> Other references of human corpses and human bones, according to Amorim (298, 300), are Deut 21:23, 28:26, Jos 8:29, 1 Kings 13:22-30, 2 Kings 9:37, Ps 79:2, Is 5:25; 26:19, Jer 7:33; 9:22; 16:4; 19:7; 26:23; 34:20; 36:30 (corpse); Ex 13:19, 1 Sam 31:13, 2 Kings 23:14,17, Jer 19:6-13 (bone).

of the Lord, and that person shall be cut off from Israel; because the water of impurity was not thrown upon him, he shall be taboo; his uncleanness is still on him (v 13) and: whoever in the open field touches one who is slain with a sword, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave shall be taboo seven days (v 16).

The weight of this kind of taboo is clearly indicated. For example, a person does not necessarily have to touch a corpse in order to become unclean. Being under the same roof with a corpse is enough to declare such a person unclean: 'This is the law when a man dies in a tent, and every one who is in the tent shall be taboo seven days' (v 14). This form of uncleanness is not just limited to persons, it does also affect vessels in the tent, vessels which have no cover fastened upon them (cf v 15). Moreover, contamination by a corpse necessitated isolation of the victim in the camp for seven days, something that puts corpse-contamination on a par with a leper and a person with a discharge (cf Num 5:1-4).

Since corpses represent death and estrangement from God, as argues Amorim (300), those who stand in a closer relationship, ie priests and Nazirites, are not allowed to enter into contact with such a source of defilement, for holiness and uncleanness stand in total opposition. He also points out that the more holy the thing, the more strict the rules to prevent a possible contact with uncleanness. This is further supported by Feldman, quoted by Amorim, who in referring to a priest remarks that he 'represents the presence of God and

שִׁטְפוֹ : According to Feldman, death represents the absence of God and the absence of שִׁטְפוֹ which is אֵלֹהִים; and there can be no relationship between אֵלֹהִים and שִׁטְפוֹ . Having said this, let us consider the relationship between a corpse and a priest or Nazarite.

The Nazirites and the high priest were not spared from the effects of funerary taboos, and they were, therefore, supposed not to attend to the bodies of their dead parents, lest they contaminated themselves (Lev 21:11, Num 6:7). Nevertheless, priests were allowed to defile themselves by contact with a dead person; father or mother, a son or daughter, a brother or unmarried sister (Ezck 44:25). But even then, such contact rendered a priest taboo for seven

days and after purification by the ashes of the Red Cow (Num 19) he would not take up his duties for another seven days. People who became unclean as a result of coming near a dead body were not allowed to celebrate the passover.

Taboo acquired by contact with a dead body could be removed by performing a ritual purification, which involved mixing some ashes of burnt sin offering  $\text{ןןן}(\text{ן})\text{ן}$  with running water in a vessel and a clean person would take some hyssop and dip it into the water and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the furnishings, and upon the persons who were there, and upon him who touched the bone or the slain, or the dead, or the grave (cf Num 19:18). The ashes used here are of the red heifer and not just any purification offering. N. Kiuchi (1987:137) has pointed out an important fact about the purification ritual in vv 9, 17. He argues that the peculiarity of the ritual lies in the fact that though the term  $\text{ןןן}(\text{ן})\text{ן}$  appears (vv 9, 17), the whole ritual differs radically from that of the usual  $\text{ןןן}(\text{ן})\text{ן}$  ritual. A red heifer, instead of being slaughtered on the altar, is slaughtered outside the camp'. This act would be repeated on the third and the seventh day and after washing the clothes and bathing in water, such a person or object was no longer taboo (cf vv 12, 17-19). A corpse-tabooed person could pass uncleanness to his captives, every garment, every article of skin, all work of goat hair, and every article of wood. These, too, needed purification (cf Num 31:20).

### Ritual Purification

In chapter one we saw the importance of cleansing as a remedy for ritual contamination in different cultures, and in many cases water was used. Similarly in the OT water plays a very significant role in the purification of ritual uncleanness. We have noticed how the priest, in the scrutiny of skin diseases, prescribed cleansing as the only way of removing ritual impurity of a non-malignant leprous person after he was physically healed (Lev 14:1-10). Purification of a leprous person after he was healed involved, among other things, bathing in running water (v

5)<sup>67</sup>. And after the cleansing, seven days were set for recuperation, so to speak, during which time the victim was believed to be taboo. This was followed by shaving of all the hair on the body and a second bath in water (cf vv 8-9).

Given the emphasis of the cleansing of skin disease victims, let us now have a brief account of the process involved in this purificatory rite. Strikingly, a similar procedure is followed among the Kikuyu people, and we have put it alongside Lev 14:1-7, for a better understanding of the text.

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<sup>67</sup> of 2 Kings 5:10. Naaman is here healed from his leprosy after bathing in the running waters of the River Jordan.

He shall be brought to the priest and the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall make an examination. Then, if the leprous disease is healed in the leper, the priest shall command them to take for him who is to be cleansed two living clean birds and cedarwood and scarlet stuff and hyssop; and the priest shall command them to kill one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running water. He shall take the living bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet stuff and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water; and he shall sprinkle it seven times upon him who is to be cleansed of leprosy; then he shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird go into the open field ... And on the eighth day he shall take two male lambs without blemish, and one ewe lamb a year old without blemish...

A medicine-man was called in, and he took the person who had been ill down to a stream or river, along with a small ram for a male patient, or, for a female patient, a virgin ewe<sup>69</sup>. At the stream the medicine-man slaughtered it, and divided its stomach contents into two. He then dug a large hole near the bank of the stream, lined it with banana leaves, and into it put half the stomach contents, water from the stream, and some of each of the following: *ruthuko*, *mumu*, and *ng'ondu*. In this bath he made the patient wash himself, all his ornaments, and his clothing. Having washed in this mixture, he was then to wash in pure river water and come upstream where he would find the medicine-man...

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<sup>68</sup> Leakey (1977:1264)

<sup>69</sup> cf a year old lamb without blemish (v 10)

While the priests fails to prescribe the treatment of leprosy, he nevertheless outlines the procedure to be followed in the cleansing of the leper (14:1-10). He orders the family of the leper to take to him two living clean birds and cedarwood and scarlet stuff and hyssop and the priest then commands them to kill one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running water,  $\square^? \text{ ?} \square \square^? \text{ ?}$  (v 5)<sup>70</sup>. The use of water, especially running water, is certainly significant and requires comment.

Throughout the centuries dirt from filthy persons or objects has been carried downstream by the running water, after a bath or washing<sup>71</sup>, leaving that person or object clean. Therefore, running water became a universal symbol of purity, and in some cases water was believed to have the power to heal<sup>72</sup>. In Leviticus, however, running water is used for the purpose of cleansing (cf v2, 15:13, cf Num 19:17).<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> of the Kikuyu: use of leaves (banana, *ruthuko*, *uumu* and *ng'ondu*), killing of a young ram (clean), use of a mixture, and, lastly, bathing in pure river water.

<sup>71</sup> In Hindu Religion, according to Milgrom (841), to become pure a person must have a complete bath, including pouring water over their hair among other things. Again, purificatory ablutions among the Hittites also mandated. the bathing of the entire body. Their temple personnel not only had to bath before entering the sacred precincts but, like their Egyptian counterparts, they had to remove their body hair and pare their nails.

<sup>72</sup> of Naaman who was healed from leprous disease after bathing seven times in the running waters of the River Jordan, where he is healed physically and ritually (2 Kings 5:10, 14). Milgrom (839) says that in Israel's environs purificatory water had both medicinal and apotropaic, i.e. magic, powers.

<sup>73</sup> of Jer 2:13 for metaphorical use of running water.

CHAPTER FIVE  
TABOOS RELATED TO SEX

Introduction

In this section we shall consider form of uncleanness -impurity caused by genital discharges, ie emission of semen and abnormal blood flow in females. The key word in this discussion is  $\aleph \text{ } \text{\textcircled{D}} \text{ } \text{\textcircled{Q}}$  which appears very frequently in Leviticus 15. Interestingly, the principle of contagion in which the term  $\aleph \text{ } \text{\textcircled{D}} \text{ } \text{\textcircled{Q}}$  operates here is not in any way different from what we have already seen in sex related taboos in other cultures.

In our earlier discussion concerning this form of taboo among the other societies, especially the Marquesas, Maori, Romans and the Kikuyu, we saw the strictness with which sex related taboos are observed. For example, menstruating women were isolated, and their bodily secretions were considered to be ritually unclean, and any contact with them would render a person unclean. In this chapter we shall be struck by the similarities between these societies and the OT in their attitude towards a menstruant. In the OT, these taboos are connected not only with women but also discharging men -in both cases the victim is described as taboo

$\aleph \text{ } \text{\textcircled{D}} \text{ } \text{\textcircled{Q}}$  , as we shall see in our translation of Leviticus 15.

Male Discharges

(Lev 15: 1-18)

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, <sup>2</sup> Say to the people of Israel, When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is *taboo*. <sup>3</sup>And this is the law of his *taboo* for a discharge: whether his body runs with his discharge, or his body is stopped from discharge, it is *taboo* in him. <sup>4</sup>Every bed on which he who has the discharge lies shall be *taboo*. <sup>5</sup>And any one who touches his bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be *taboo* until the evening. <sup>7</sup>And whoever touches the body of him who has the discharge shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be *taboo* until the evening. <sup>8</sup>And if he who has the discharge spits on one who is clean, then he shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be *taboo* until the evening. <sup>9</sup>And any saddle on which he who has the discharge rides shall be *taboo*. <sup>10</sup>And whoever touches anything that was under him shall be *taboo* until the evening; and he who carries such a thing shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be *taboo* until the evening. <sup>11</sup>Anyone whom he that has the discharge touches without having rinsed his



hands in water shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be *taboo* until the evening. <sup>12</sup>And the earthen vessel which he who has the discharge touches shall be broken; and every vessel of wood shall be rinsed in water. <sup>13</sup>And when he who has a discharge is cleansed of his discharge, then he shall count for himself seven days for his cleansing, and wash his clothes; and he shall bathe his body in running water, and shall not be *taboo*. <sup>14</sup>And on the eighth day he shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and come before the Lord to the door of the tent of meeting, and give them to the priest; <sup>15</sup>and the priest shall offer them, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord for his discharge. <sup>16</sup>And if a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water, and be *taboo* until the evening. <sup>17</sup>And every garment and every skin on which the semen comes shall be washed with water, and be *taboo* until the evening. <sup>18</sup>If a man lies with a woman and has an emission of semen, both of them shall bathe themselves in water, and be *taboo* until the evening.

The nature in which abnormal male discharges contaminate is quite evident in this text, and the discharge  $\text{זִבּוּחַ}$  is uncleanness enough to make a man *taboo* (vv 3-15)<sup>74</sup>. The tabooed person (vv 2-3) is also capable of transmitting his uncleanness to anything that comes in contact with him, 'Every bed on which he lies and everything on which he sits shall be *taboo*  $\text{טָמֵא}$  (v 4). Not only is the uncleanness transmitted to objects, but also to the person who makes use of these objects, and this person has to wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and remain unclean until the evening (vv 8-9). But worse still was if this discharging person spat on another person who was clean. The clean person became unclean as well and

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<sup>74</sup> This discharge, argues Milgrom (907), is not seminal, for the term  $\text{זֶרַע}$  'seed, is never attached to the  $\text{זִבּוּחַ}$  and where the two occur in the same verse they are carefully distinguished (22:4). Again, he says that the rabbis provide an anatomical and analogical distinction: 'Discharge comes from a limp penis, and semen from an erection. Discharge is watery like white of a crushed egg, and semen is viscous like the white of an egg which is not crushed'. Further, he argues that scientifically the only illness that can be referred to here is gonorrhoea, an identification already made by the LXX and Josephus. According to Milgrom this is not Gonorrhoea virulenta, unknown before the fifteenth century, but blennorrhoea urethrae or gonorrhoea benigna, urinary bilharzia which solely refers to an inordinate secretion of mucus.

had to wash his clothes and bathe in water and was taboo until the evening (v 8).

A man who has discharge is in this text forbidden to touch another person lest he transfers his impurity to him. He, however, could touch a person but only after he had rinsed his hands in water (v 11). Of all the impurity bearers discussed in Leviticus chapters 11-15, the case of  $\text{זִיב}$ , according to Milgrom (914), is the only one that deals with the consequences of the impurity bearer touching someone else. And this, he says, provided an opening for the Qumran sectaries to investigate the consequences of a menstruant touching a person with a discharge: 'A woman whose blood flows for seven days should not touch a person with a discharge or any object which he has touched, lain upon, or sat on. If she has touched any of them she shall launder her clothes and bathe; afterward she may eat'<sup>75</sup>. Vessels were not spared from the uncleanness of a person with a discharge. If he touched an earthen vessel or wooden vessel, they too became unclean and in the case of the former it was broken, while the latter was rinsed in water (v 12).

Emission of semen was perceived as equally contagious. A person with an emission had to bathe in water (whole body) and was taboo  $\text{נִזְיָו}$  until the evening (v 16). Also if a garment of a skin on which the semen came became affected, it had to be washed and was tabooed until the evening. Further, uncleanness could be contracted by lawful sexual intercourse, 'if a man lies with a woman and has an emission of semen, both of them shall bathe themselves in water, and be taboo until the evening' (v 18). It is surprising, however, to note how the priest fails to see the need for isolating a person with a discharge (disease), given the high degree of the transmissibility of impurity. For the rabbis, although they allowed a person with a discharge to remain in the city, as says Milgrom (920), they nonetheless barred him not just from the temple but even from the Temple Mount.

Lastly, we need to point out that as in the case of scale diseases, a person with a discharge remained impure for seven days even after the purification was done (Lev 15:13-15,

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75 Further details (Milgrom: 920)

of 1 Sam 20:26). Here, the purification is also thorough. Not only is running water necessary, but animals had also to die. Two turtle-doves or two young pigeons were to be sacrificed, one for a sin offering  $\text{ןןן}(\text{ןן})$  and one for a burnt offering  $\text{ןןן}$  (vv 13-15).

### Female Discharges

(Lev 15: 19-30)

15 When a woman has a discharge of blood which is her regular discharge from her body, she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be *taboo* until the evening. 20 And everything upon which she lies during her impurity shall be *taboo*; everything also upon which she sits shall be *taboo*. 21 And whoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, and be *taboo* until the evening. 22 And whoever touches anything upon which she sits shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be *taboo* until the evening; 23 whether it is the bed or anything upon which she sits, when he touches it he shall be *taboo* seven days; and every bed on which he lies shall be *taboo*. 25 If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness; as in the days of her impurity, she shall be *taboo*. 26 Every bed on which she lies, all the days of her discharge, shall be to her as the bed of her impurity; and everything on which she sits shall be *taboo*, as in the uncleanness of her impurity. 27 And whoever touches these things shall be *taboo*, and shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be *taboo* until the evening. 28 But if she is cleansed of her discharge she shall count for herself seven days and after that she shall be not *taboo*. 29 And on the eighth day she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and bring them to the priest, to the door of the tent of meeting. 30 And the priest shall offer one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering for her before the Lord for her unclean discharge.

In Lev 15:19-30, the monthly discharge of blood and the cellular debris from the uterus by non-pregnant women is viewed as a serious form of impurity, and this includes also the prolonged abnormal discharge. Like the male counterpart (normal and abnormal discharge), the contagious characteristics of female discharge necessitated stringent rules prohibiting any possible contact with the discharge or the discharger herself, and there is no doubt whatsoever that this is another pericope that exhibits a form of taboos similar to cultures of other tribal societies<sup>76</sup>. 'When a woman has a discharge of blood which is her regular discharge from her

<sup>76</sup> Milgrom (1948-1953) in his detailed study of different cultures in relation to their attitude towards a menstruant points out that the abhorrence of a menstruant is a cardinal rule

body, she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be taboo

כִּי־עַד־עֶרְבַּיִם until the evening' (v 19).

The impurity of a menstruant is not only dangerous to anyone who touches her, but also to objects upon which she sits or lies (v 20), and in turn a person who touches these things becomes equally contaminated, as shown below:

MENSTRUANT → OBJECT → THIRD PARTY (PERSON)

These rules apply to a woman with an abnormal blood discharge (cf vv 25-30), except for purification which in the case of an abnormal discharge is the same as in male discharge, where both sin and burnt offerings are required (vv 29-30), while in a normal discharge the priest is silent (vv 19-24), which implies that there is no purification needed.

Sexual intercourse with a discharging woman is also forbidden. We have seen that sexual relations with a man who has an emission renders both the man and the woman taboo until the evening (v 18). The same act with a woman with a discharge makes the man (not the woman) taboo for seven days, especially when the blood of the woman is on him<sup>77</sup>. The period of impurity between the two is intriguing:

SEX WITH MALE DISCHARGER                      כִּי־עַד־עֶרְבַּיִם                      (v18)

SEX WITH FEMALE DISCHARGER                      כִּי־עַד־שֶׁבַע־יָמִים                      (v24)

The uncleanness contracted from a female discharger is here conceived to be of a more serious nature than a male discharger. But, it is interesting to note that, while a male discharger is supposed to wash his clothes and bathe in running water after he is cleansed for his discharge

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among all tribal societies. He remarks that the avoidance of a menstruant, her monthly flow, birth, miscarriage and sexual intercourse especially before worship was practised in Egypt, Babylonia, Mesopotamia and many African cultures. For more examples on this subject see chapter one of this study.

<sup>77</sup> cf Kikuyu taboos and regulations on sexual intercourse OC ix 2, 3.

(v 13), a female with a discharge is not required to do so. She just counts seven days after which she becomes clean (v 28).

We should understand, however, that, serious as this genital discharge may appear to be, once again the priest remains silent about the isolation of a woman with a monthly flow or a prolonged abnormal discharge, as may be the case in other cultures<sup>78</sup>. What is clear in this text is the fact that such a woman remains in her home doing all her daily chores. The only care which should be taken is coming into contact with her chair, bed and of course having sex with her (vv 20-24, 26-27). And as Milgrom (1953) remarks, the ingenious answer of legislators was to restrict her impurity to that which was underneath her, in effect, whatever might receive a drop of menstrual blood.

#### Childbirth

(Lev 12)

The Lord said to Moses, <sup>2</sup>Say to the people of Israel. If a woman conceives, and bears a male child, then she shall be *taboo*. <sup>3</sup>And on the eighth day of the flesh of his skin shall be circumcised. <sup>4</sup>Then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purifying; she shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying are completed. <sup>5</sup>But if she bears a female child, then she shall be *taboo* two weeks, as in her menstruation; and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying for sixty-six days. <sup>6</sup>And when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the door of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering, <sup>7</sup>and he shall offer it before the Lord, and make atonement for her; then she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, either male or female. <sup>8</sup>And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall *not be taboo*.

Connected with female discharge is taboo imposed on childbirth. It is true as Clements (1970:34) says, that people of all ages of history have recognized childbirth as an experience filled with mystery and wonder<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>78</sup> Milgrom (1949), quoting Turner and Evans-Pritchard, says that 'Each Ndembu and Nuer village has at least one grass hut near the edge of the bush for menstruants'. Rabbis and Zoroastrians, he says, also quarantined the menstruants.

<sup>79</sup> of Houston (206f). Referring to Peter Parke's study (1987)

In Lev 12:1-5, the priest in his long list of taboos (chapters 11-15) has not lost sight of the impurity related to mothers of newborns and this kind of uncleanness has been compared to the time of menstruation where a woman became taboo  $\text{קָדָשׁ} \frac{19}{7}$  for seven days: 'If a woman conceives, and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be taboo' (v 2). Certainly, the issue here is the blood<sup>80</sup> that comes after the birth and the cellular debris that accompanies it. But, behind this blood, the mysterious circumstances surrounding these two events may have contributed to some degree.

During her impurity, which lasts for 33 days for a baby boy and 66 days for a girl, a new birth mother was to keep off from holy things and the sanctuary: '... she shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into sanctuary until the days of her purifying are completed' (v 3). But why should the birth of a boy render his mother impure for 33 days while that of a girl is 66 days? We have already noticed that a man who lies with a woman and whose impurity is on him becomes unclean for seven days, while a man lies with a woman and he has an emission of semen, both of them bathe in water and become unclean until the evening (15:18). Amorim (282), who remarks that the difference between 33 and 66 days defies logical explanation, mentions David I Macht who gives this phenomenon medical significance, 'the blood of a woman after the birth of a girl is more toxic than after the birth of a boy'<sup>81</sup>.

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about the Kalasha, a non-Muslim community in the Hindu Kush, Houston says that the Kalasha 'woman spend six days in the *basali* house for menstruation and twenty to thirty days after birth. They may not touch anything associated with the goat stables [(of a Kikuyu woman in her period) the words in the brackets are mine]; an unwitting breach requires a purificatory sacrifice'.

<sup>80</sup> of Amorim (281) and his list of scholars holding to this view: Noordtzij, Harrison, Snaith and Rodriguez. Amorim (305-7) also points out that blood defilement is found in other people, although the rationale that lies behind it may not necessarily be the same, i.e. the Romans and the Greeks. See also chapter one.

<sup>81</sup> For more details about the scientific evidence for this

Amorim, with whom I seem to be of the same mind, accepts this medical expertise, but quite reluctantly. I think, even without engaging ourselves in a detailed debate on this issue, that it would be acceptable to conclude that the Priestly texts generally portray ritual impurity related to females to be of a higher grade than that of males<sup>82</sup>.

### Incest

Our study of the Hebrew term  $\text{כְּלֹאֲוֶה}$  would be incomplete without our consideration of taboos on incest (Lev 18, cf 20:10-21). As we have already seen in the preceding discussion with reference to other cultures, here we also have a case of taboo. But since in this text the term  $\text{כְּלֹאֲוֶה}$ , which is the object of our investigation in this chapter, does not feature very prominently, as in the previous forms of impurity (chapters 11-15), it will suffice here to highlight only a few points about incest in the OT.

Leviticus 18 begins with a warning: 'You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you (v 3)'. Then it is followed by prohibitions of indiscriminate sexual relations: 'None of you shall approach any one near of kin to him to uncover his nakedness  $\text{לְפָנָיו}$  (v 6)<sup>83</sup>. A detailed account of a woman whose nakedness a man shall not uncover (metonym for sexual intercourse) is given in vv 7-18. The text also includes unconventional sexual behaviour, ie homosexuality and bestiality (vv 22-23). In v 19 sexual relationships with a menstruant are also

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theory, see Amorim.

<sup>82</sup> Perhaps this is a cultural phenomenon. Among the Kikuyu, for example, the birth of a boy was honoured with five allusions said by the midwives, while for a girl only four were said [male domination? of 'Control and Combination' in Eilberg-Schwartz (1990:191-2)].

<sup>83</sup> Fredrick W Basset (1971:233) compares  $\text{לְפָנָיו}$  'uncover' to  $\text{רָאָה אֶת אֲדָמָתוֹ}$  'see the nakedness of someone' and both idioms mean having sexual relationship.

forbidden. Adultery is here seen as another source of impurity (v 20). The defiling nature of incest, on the whole, lacks the intensity or sternness with which the other sources of uncleanness are portrayed. For example, the Hebrew term  $\text{כִּזְבּוּן}$  in this chapter appears only 9 times, while in chapter 11, it appears 34 times. It is surely surprising from the point of view of tribal societies to see how the rules about incest are somewhat relaxed. But, it should be noted that in this section we are dealing with a different kind of uncleanness. Unlike incest among the tribal societies, incest here is to be understood as an infringement of prohibitions which is described as 'making yourselves unclean' in the rhetoric of the Holiness stratum (Lev 11:43, 18.24 ff etc), and which is punishable but not purifiable.

Other cases of incest, according to Basset (1971:236), include Reuben's incestuous affair with Bilhah, his father's concubine, which he argues is explicitly cited as the reason why his descendants lose their natural right of pre-eminence in Israel as the first born (Gen 49:3-4; 35:22). He further suggests that the story of Lot's sons by his daughters (Gen 19:30-38) has a similar etiological purpose disparaging the Moabites and Ammonites.

Despite the rejection of this interpretation by some scholars, Basset argues that it is clear that an act of incest between father and daughter is not on a par with that between mother and son in the OT. It is true that the statement that Ham, as argues Basset (235), 'saw the nakedness of his father' (Gen 9:20-27) originally meant that he had sexual intercourse with his father's wife, then here we have another case of incest, and as Basset says, this would explain the seriousness of the offence which led to the curse. There is no doubt, however, that incest seems to connote a taboo of a non-contagious nature whose violation was given a societal punishment, and sometimes a curse by the families concerned.



CHAPTER SIX  
TRANSLATIONAL PROBLEMS

Introduction

In the previous chapters we endeavoured to investigate the existence of the concept of Hebrew words that function to mark off an untouchable zone or objects, or impose restrictions in relation to the sancta. Our study has so far shown that there are several words that overlap with each other to some extent, eg נִדָּב and שִׁטְט. Further, there seems to be similarity between the OT and the other tribal societies we have mentioned in this study. In these other cultures, ritual prohibitions were imposed by the head of the community, ie a chief or a headman. Similarly, in Israel it is the priests who impose these injunctions on the behalf of Yahweh (cf Lev 11-15, 18, 20, Deut 14). They determine what Israel should consider as clean or unclean, and in the case of food prohibitions, they set the criteria to be followed.

In our consideration of these restrictions in the light of the OT, it must be borne in mind that even though Kikuyu culture was characterized by many taboos permeating all spheres of life, comparatively God was not, in any way, involved in their origin. This is true especially when we know that among the Kikuyu people, God was not to be vexed, and he was consulted only at times of crisis affecting the whole community. In support of this view, Kenyatta (1971:129) says that

so far as people and things go well and prosper, it is taken for granted that God is pleased with the general behaviour of the people and the welfare of the country. In this happy state there is no need for prayers. It is only when humans are in real need that they must approach him, without fear of disturbing him and incurring his wrath.

Perhaps it is admissible at this juncture to point out that even in the case of illness the purificatory rites performed to make a victim of taboo clean were not directed to God; if anything, they were meant to appease the ancestral spirits who seemed to have direct communion with the living members of their family.

We have already noticed that in certain contexts, certain OT words have been used to

mark off untouchable zones or objects or impose restrictions in relation to the sancta namely

שִׁדְרָה, אֲדֹמָה, תַּוְעֵבָה and קִדְּוֹ, יִקְרָשׁ / יִקְרָשׁ. Similarly, among the Kikuyu people there were many rules and taboos that regulated their socio-religious life, and even though we do not have many words that reflect this idea in Kikuyu, the world of Kikuyu religion was, nonetheless, not sin but taboo-centred<sup>84</sup>. Two main words are however used to express tabooistic ideas among the Kikuyu, *thahu*, *mugiro* and to a lesser degree, *ng'uki* and *magigi*.

Since the main task for which this study was undertaken was to find out whether the above Hebrew words pose any problems for the Kikuyu Bible translation, time is opportune now to examine thoroughly how these words have been rendered in the present Kikuyu Bible whose work began in 1902 and was completed in 1965. We shall begin this exercise by examining the linguistic structures of the main Kikuyu words used in connection with taboo. We shall also suggest the correct rendering using dynamic equivalence, also called primary and communicative translation or functional equivalence translation (Jan P. Sterk, 1990:109). This kind of translation as Sterk has remarked 'makes it appear as if the source text has been written directly in the target language ... tries to make it possible for the source language text to be immediately, understood in the target language wording.'

#### *Mugiro* Prohibition

The Kikuyu noun *mugiro* is derived from the verb *giria* to prohibit, which is generic

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<sup>84</sup> See along list of Kikuyu taboos appended to this work. This list, though not exhaustive, shows different forms of Kikuyu taboos: village, homestead and hut taboos; agricultural taboos; meat feasts taboos; food and drink taboos; tobacco taboos; divining gourd taboos; castor oil taboos; cattle, goats and sheep taboos; sexual taboos; and death taboos.

and in its ordinary usage is non-cultic and means any kind of prohibition. On the other hand, when the word *mugiro* is used, it always connotes a cultic prohibition. This term is usually used in warning people to keep off from objects that can contaminate them - things that are considered to be ritually unclean. For example, it is *mugiro* to touch a corpse.

### *Thahu* Uncleaness

The Kikuyu word *thahu* is used to refer to the consequence of violating *mugiro* whose result is *thahu* (unclean). While the word *mugiro* has both meanings, secular and religious, *thahu* is exclusively used to indicate ritual impurity.

This word is phonetically very close to the Polynesian taboo words *tapu*, *tabu* and *tafuu*. The Hebrew root תאב, (abomination), also exhibits similar phonetic congruence, especially in its transliterated form. Hence:

Hebrew	<i>taabu</i>
Kikuyu	<i>tahu</i>
Polynesia	<i>tabu</i>
	<i>tapu</i>
	<i>tafuu</i>

Needless to say, this similarity cannot be accounted for and should be treated as coincidence. Among the Kikuyu the sound *fu! fu!* is uttered to signify something with a terrible smell, taste or a shameful act. For example, to warn a little child who is learning how to speak not to touch a filthy object, eg faeces, her mother will say, *fu! fu!* If the same is true for these other cultures, then this may suggest tentatively how these taboo-words came to exist, and also why the last syllable in each word above is either *bu*, *hu*, *pu* or *fu* - taboo is 'an obnoxious smell or act'. Incidentally, according to Webster *Third International Dictionary* (1971:243, 2478) the English abbreviations 'BO' and 'U' are used for 'body odour' and 'unpleasant', respectively, and colloquially the word 'poo' in English is used both in the

context of a bad smell, and in a baby talk (in some localities) to denote faeces, which could be seen as supporting the linguistic trend.

In Kikuyu the use of the noun *thahu* to mean uncleanness creates some grammatical problems, for the same word may also be used in its adjectival form to express 'unclean'. A similar problem is also evident in the English word 'taboo' where it is used as a noun and an adjective. Further, we should not lose sight of the interchangeability of the OT terminologies we have studied so far. This phenomenon is also found in the Kikuyu taboo-words, something that means that our effort to give each word a specific meaning is doomed to fail. All this leads to one very important fact, ie translation of OT terminologies, already discussed, in Kikuyu is quite intricate. But for the purpose of consistency we shall in this study use *mugiro* to mean 'a prohibition' and *thahu* to mean the result of breaking a *mugiro*, unless otherwise stated, ie if a person breaks a 'mugiro' he becomes 'thahu'.

#### 𐤀𐤃𐤅 in Kikuyu

While a prohibition in Kikuyu is *mugiro* and to become unclean is *thahu*, this is not so in the OT, where the same root 𐤀𐤃𐤅 is used to express both ideas. In this study we shall, therefore, use the following rendering:

𐤀𐤃𐤅	vb (to become unclean)	=	<i>thahu</i>
𐤀𐤃𐤅	adj (unclean)	=	<i>mugiro</i>
𐤀𐤃𐤅	n (uncleanness)	=	<i>thahu</i>

While this rule seems to have been followed in the translation of the Hebrew root 𐤀𐤃𐤅 into the Kikuyu Bible (cf Lev 11:1-28), in certain passages it has been very difficult to decide which words are to be used, especially where a triple occurrence root 𐤀𐤃𐤅 is found.

'And everything upon which any part of their carcass falls shall be unclean 𐤀𐤃𐤅;

whether oven or stove, it shall be broken in pieces; they are unclean  $\square^{\prime} \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$  and shall be unclean  $\square^{\prime} \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$  to you.' (Lev 11:35).

This text refers to carcasses of the swarming things  $\aleph \aleph \aleph$ , that swarm upon the earth, creatures that were considered taboo (cf v 29), ie should they fall on an oven  $\aleph \aleph \aleph$  or stove  $\square^{\prime} \aleph \aleph \aleph$  then the uncleanness in them is in turn transferred to these objects. That means  $\aleph \aleph \aleph$  here should be seen as the consequence of a carcass coming into contact with an object. This is particularly so if we follow Levine (1989:70) who says that ovens and stoves became contaminated as soon as dead swarming creatures fall onto them, a condition for which there is no remedy, and therefore the stoves and ovens must be smashed.

Among the Kikuyu swarming things were a taboo, and should a toad, frog or lizard fall or jump into the fire in the hearth of a hut, the hut and all that was in it became *thahu*, and a purification ceremony was essential (cf OC i 9). And again, if a person killed a lizard his hands would begin to shake for ever.

It then follows that in Kikuyu the need for a purification ceremony to purify the entire house is a clear indication that the house is now in a state of *thahu* (Lev 11:35). That means, the Kikuyu rendering of the Hebrew word  $\aleph \aleph \aleph$  as *mugiro* (prohibition) is incorrect, for anything into which a carcass falls has already been affected by the uncleanness of the dead creature. The oven and stove are now *thahu*  $\square^{\prime} \aleph \aleph \aleph$  and they shall be *mugiro* (prohibition)  $\square^{\prime} \aleph \aleph \aleph$ . This is certainly true if we consider the immediate need for purification among the Kikuyu, for as long as an object is in a state of *thahu* it cannot be used or touched, and it is therefore *mugiro*<sup>85</sup>

The translation of the adjectival phrase  $\aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph \aleph$  (is unclean) in Lev 15:2 is also problematic in the Kikuyu Bible translation. The adjective  $\aleph \aleph \aleph$  in Kikuyu means *mugiro* as we have just mentioned, ie when a man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean, implying that it should be avoided. The Kikuyu Bible has rendered this phrase as *e*

<sup>85</sup> cf OC iv 11, where food becomes *thahu* and could not be eaten except by old women past child bearing, after a lizard or a frog fell into the fire while the food was cooking.

*na thahu* (literally, he has uncleanness). This would only be true in the light of Kikuyu understanding of what happens when a man's semen falls on the oxhide on which he and his wife are having sexual intercourse:

'Never have intercourse with your wife in such a way that your penis can slip and ejaculate semen onto the oxhide sleeping mat. If this should happen, it is great evil, and before you sleep with your wife again you must arrange with someone else of your initiation age-group to sleep with her first and thus remove the evil (*thahu* - cf OC ix 10).

It could be argued that among the Kikuyu, semen as 'matter out of place', to use the language of Mary Douglas (1966:53) is a potential source of *thahu*; and it would therefore be *mujiro* (prohibition) to spill it on an oxhide. It is interesting to note that when the semen touches the skin, then not only does the skin become contaminated, but it also contaminates the woman lying on it - she becomes *thahu*.

This would explain why it is wrong to render  $\aleph \cdot \aleph \aleph$   $\aleph \aleph \aleph$  in Lev 15:2 as *e na thahu* in Kikuyu, something that would mean that the discharge has been made unclean. The discharge itself is not the 'result' or 'product' but the causative agent<sup>86</sup> by which an object becomes unclean. In this text, therefore, we have a context that requires that the Hebrew root  $\aleph \aleph \aleph$  be translated as *mujiro* in the Kikuyu Bible.

Finally we have Lev 13:45.

The leper who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry, "Unclean, unclean".

In the Kikuyu translation, the Hebrew words  $\aleph \aleph \aleph$ ,  $\aleph \aleph \aleph$  have been rendered '*Ndi na ng'ukil Ndi na ng'ukil*' (literally I have a curse! I have a curse!). This is quite unnatural.

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<sup>86</sup> cf OC iv 17, 'If a woman getting food from a granary (*ikumbi*) should have accidentally let any menstrual blood touch the granary, all the food in that granary had to be given away: none might be eaten by any member of the family - it had become *thahu*.

Among the Kikuyu a child who disobeyed his parents or beat them or refused to help them especially when they were sick or very old, would receive a curse. Consequently, a victim of a curse would gradually lose his toes and fingers or any other form of disfigurement. The Kikuyu people were very keen on matters of ritual purity and they were able to identify cases of curses from ritual uncleanness (*thahu*).

In Lev 13:45, to translate  $\aleph \gamma \delta \zeta$   $\aleph \gamma \delta \zeta$  (Unclean unclean!) *Ndi na ng'uki! Ndi na ng'uki!* is erroneous since it implies that the leprous person is cursed and this would in turn raise the question: Who cursed this person? Again since in this text we have an idea of transferrable uncleanness, that sense is lost in the translation. In the preceding chapters 11-12 the Hebrew root  $\gamma \delta \zeta$  is rendered *thahu* or *mugiro*, depending on the context. The change from *thahu/mugiro* to *ng'uki* is therefore inconsistent and creates a problem in the Kikuyu Bible and needs to be corrected, since we are not dealing with a curse in the Kikuyu understanding, something that creates a state of *ng'uki*.

Following Milgrom (778) who argues that the declaration of a victim of  $\gamma \delta \zeta$  as  $\aleph \gamma \delta \zeta$  implies that the person suspected of scale disease is in a state of impurity while he is quarantined, analogous to the quarantined house, which contaminates everything within it and all who enter it, the phrase  $\aleph \gamma \delta \zeta$   $\aleph \gamma \delta \zeta$  should be translated *Thahu! Thahu!* in Kikuyu in order to convey the idea of transmissibility of the uncleanness involved, hence the warning.

Similarly, it is not correct to render  $\aleph \gamma \delta \zeta$  in Lev 14:36, *thahu* while in v 44 the same word is rendered '*ng'uki*'. One may argue that in the former case the uncleanness refers to the objects in the house while in the latter it is the house itself. But such an argument cannot be accepted since in both cases what causes the uncleanness is the scale disease, i.e. both the objects and the house are unclean and in the case of the latter, purification is necessary (vv 49-53). A bird had to be set free which indicates that this rite symbolically expresses the carrying away of the uncleanness by the fleeing bird. It would be natural to render  $\aleph \gamma \delta \zeta$  in this chapter '*thahu*', since the idea of a house becoming '*thahu*' was not unknown among the Kikuyu and also Maasai. For example, a house in which the owner of a homestead died became

*hahu* and it had to be abandoned to avoid ritual contamination by the corpse of the dead body.

מְבַרְכִים / מְבַרְכִים in Kikuyu

In Kikuyu, מְבַרְכִים would be best rendered *mugiro*. But while this is true with the noun מְבַרְכִים and מְבַרְכִים, the Pi'el מְבַרְכִים (to abominate/to pollute/to contaminate) should be rendered in the same way as the verb מְבַרְכִים *thahu* and not *mugiro*, since in Kikuyu there is no verb that can be formed from the word *mugiro*. Care should, however, be taken in the rendering of the Pi'el מְבַרְכִים, especially in places where it appears in the same passage with the Hebrew root מְבַרְכִים, for example in Lev 11:43 (cf 20:25):

'You shall not make yourselves abominable מְבַרְכִים-לְבַרְכִים with any swarming thing that swarms; and you shall not defile yourselves מְבַרְכִים-לְבַרְכִים with them, lest you become unclean מְבַרְכִים .

The Kikuyu Bible has rendered מְבַרְכִים-לְבַרְכִים *Mutikaneikire mugiro* (literally, do not make yourselves a prohibition). This translation does not make any sense. We have just said that the Kikuyu word *mugiro* cannot be verbalized and it would be wrong even in this context to attempt to do so. In Kikuyu it is quite unnatural to say 'don't make yourselves abominable' using the word *mugiro*. In such circumstances, where the word מְבַרְכִים means 'to make abominable' as a result of violating a prohibition, the Kikuyu verb *thahia* would be the best translation. Hence,

*Mutika'nae gwithahia* (literally, You shall not make yourselves unclean).

This translation is in agreement with Milgrom (1991:684) who says that in this text

מְבַרְכִים has an object מְבַרְכִים-לְבַרְכִים, and is synonymous with 'you shall not contaminate yourselves' מְבַרְכִים-לְבַרְכִים. If this translation is accepted, then we shall have a double *thahia*, a verb from *thahu*, ie מְבַרְכִים-לְבַרְכִים... מְבַרְכִים-לְבַרְכִים *Mutikanae gwithahia...kana mwithahie* (literally, Do not defile yourselves). All we are saying is that in Kikuyu the writer of this text is warning the Israelites not to make themselves *thahu* by coming in contact with the forbidden creatures.

We need to point out that the Hebrew term מְבַרְכִים, 'an abomination', fits very well with the Kikuyu Bible translation *thahu* and needs no further comment (cf Nah 3:6, Zech 9:7, 1



Kings 11:5, 2 Kings 23:24, Dan 11:31).

### קָדַשׁ in Kikuyu

Our definition of the Hebrew term קָדַשׁ, as we saw earlier in this study, especially in the context of war, is 'to prohibit to common use' or 'to consecrate to God or to use [an Cairns (1992:45) words, 'The equivalent verb *haram* in Hebrew and other Semitic languages has the root meaning 'forbid, or to make taboo' hence set apart to become the property of a deity.'

Among the Kikuyu, taboos connected with war are not unknown, even though the ban is not on the loot which among the Kikuyu consisted of cattle, sheep and goats. After a successful war with for example the Maasai, the warriors became *mugiro* by their association with blood and corpses and also by being cursed by the dying enemies who were killed in the battle. According to Kenyatta (1971:111f), after 'kaare' songs (battle songs of praise) were ended, the warriors' long hair was shaved off and a purification ceremony performed to remove the curse (*thahu*). Num 31, even though it is not a קָדַשׁ passage displays the idea that the slaughter of war is ritually polluting: 'Encamp outside the camp seven days; whoever of you has killed any person, and whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves and your captives on the third day and on the seventh day. You shall purify every garment, every article of skin, all work of goats' hair, and every article of wood' (vv 19-20).

This background is profitable in our understanding of the Hebrew word קָדַשׁ and the problems it causes in the Kikuyu Bible translation. But we need to make it clear that while the Kikuyu enjoyed their loot, in Israel it was devoted to God irredeemably, i.e. the booty must be destroyed (cf Jos 7). On the other hand, taboo *thahu* connected with war among the Kikuyu seems to shed light on why in the OT objects taken from Israelites' enemies at a time of war are devoted to God. It is true to say that the Kikuyu warriors became *thahu* by their association with a) blood, b) corpses and c) curse from their dying enemies, but in Israel 'those

defeated in battle and their possessions were regarded as belonging to an alien God' (Cairns, 45). He further argues that 'the writer of Deuteronomy does not stress the sacrificial aspect of  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  (Hebrew *mine*) but characterizes it as a drastic but necessary step to ensure that Israel is not lured into paganism by the indigenous population of Canaan (Deut 7:1-6; 20:16-18).

From the standpoint of our discussion about the contagion brought about by blood and corpses among the Kikuyu, it would seem to be in order to say that war booty in the OT is taboo  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  not because it is holy, but because it has been defiled by its association with blood and corpses, and, given the severity of corpse-taboo, this would further explain the irredeemability of such objects. Nevertheless, this is not the case, as Cairns has shown above. Again such interpretation would render the dedication of metal objects to Yahweh's cultic service (Jos 6:19) completely inexplicable. However, even having said that our next task will be to examine Jos 7:1 to find out how  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  has been rendered in the Kikuyu Bible, 'But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$ .'

*'No riri, ciana cia Israeli niciaagararire watho ukonil indo icio ciamuritwo cia kuninwo.'*

In this translation, the Hebrew phrase  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  has been rendered in Kikuyu '*indo icio ciamuritwo cia kuninwo*' (literally, those things consecrated for destruction). The word '*ciamuritwo*' in its ordinary usage means 'to set aside for general use', but when used in a religious context, it means 'to set apart for God's use'. This is the same Kikuyu word used in the ordination of a church minister or in the dedication of church properties, and our present translation 'set apart for destruction' would therefore sound very strange and unreasonable to a Kikuyu reader, for when an object or a place is *amurwo* (consecrated) it is considered to be holy and cannot be destroyed.

Presumably, to a native Hebrew speaker the mention of the word  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  in a context of war would spontaneously say the following: (a) things set aside for God, (b) these things have been plundered in war, (c) these things are prohibited, hence the need for

destruction. Unfortunately, Kikuyu language lacks a single word that can embrace the three meanings at the same time, and even saying that these things are prohibited does not do any justice to the text, since the prohibition would only refer to the state of the objects without giving any explanation as to why the objects are in such a state, as is the case in the Hebrew word  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  .

Having noted that the above Kikuyu translation fails to meet the definition of  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  , we should now attempt a better translation, with the three components of meanings in mind, as mentioned above. Hence, *indo iria ciatahitwo mbaaraini na iria ciari na mugiro ni undu nicianuriirwo Ngai* (literally, things that were plundered in a time of war and which were prohibited for they were set apart for God). I am aware that too many words in Kikuyu have been used here to translate a single Hebrew word  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  , something that may seem to be unacceptable according to the principles of Bible translation, and yet the translation is useful since it retains the three originally intended meanings.

The translation difficulty of the term  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  is even more compounded by the occurrence of other OT *mugiro*-words in the same passage. For example in Deut 7:26, a text we referred to earlier:

And you shall not bring an abominable thing  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  into your house, and become accursed  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  like it; you shall utterly detest  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  and abhor it  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  for it is an accursed thing  $\square \text{ } \text{ } \square$  .

Deuteronomy 7 as a whole is generally about foreign influence (idolatry of the Canaanites) on the lives of the Israelites as we have already noted. The chapter begins by introducing nations that the Israelites will encounter in the land they are about to possess: the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites (v 1). The way of life of these people, in its totality, is seen to be incompatible with the worship of Yahweh, who considers Israel to be a special nation, 'For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the surface of the earth' (v 6). This implies that Israel must shun any association, whatsoever, with everything that belongs to these foreigners: graven

images of their gods, silver or gold, for it is an abomination, (v 25). Anyone who stole what was  $\square \uparrow \square$  became infected as it were with mystic quality which stems from the foreign deity it once represented (Cairns, 94). He goes further to say the 'tampering with what is taboo in this deeply compromising way was said to be revolting (abomination) to God.'

A similar claim for being a special people was evident among the Kikuyu and the need to keep away from the influence of the tribes round about them was observed with complete strictness<sup>87</sup>. Should a Kikuyu accidentally (eg captured during the war) or willingly come into contact with a foreigner, for example, a Maasai, this person became *thahu*, and a purification ceremony was necessary. But the *thahu* acquired by contact with a foreigner was less severe, and the Kikuyu preferred to call it *giko* (dirt).

Nevertheless, the ceremony of purification to remove uncleanness of the *giko* type was complicated, even though not to the level of *thahu*. A detailed account of this ceremony, as given by Leakey (1977:1260f), is significant for this section, and it will help us not only to have a glimpse of the seriousness with which the Kikuyu people viewed contamination by a foreigner, but also a proper understanding of Deut 7:26 from the perspective of translation.

#### The Ceremony of *Ndahikio* to remove Uncleanness of the *Giko* Type

The particular form of uncleanness known as *giko* could be contracted in a number of different ways, and it nearly always necessitated a purification ceremony of the *ndahikio* type to remove it. Although the details of the ceremonies for purification from *giko* varied according to the circumstances in which the uncleanness was contracted, in general the *ndahikio* for this type of uncleanness followed the same lines. As an example we will take the case of a man who had dwelt for a period among the Maasai and then returned to his family in Kikuyu country. Such a man was held to be unclean in the sense of having *giko*, because he had been in contact with Maasai rites and ceremonies while he was resident among people of that tribe. He could not, therefore, be allowed to re-enter his own family circle without being purified, for if he

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<sup>87</sup> This tradition has not completely died even with the introduction of Western culture. Today, while the other tribes in Kenya find Kikuyu girls good to marry, marriage between Kikuyu and 'nduriri' (a derogatory term used to refer to other tribes) is rarely practised.

did so, he would probably transmit the uncleanness to the others.

When he arrived back in Kikuyu country, therefore, he communicated with his family but did not enter any of their homesteads, and the elders of his family made arrangements to provide a ram for a purification ceremony, and engaged a medicine-man to come and conduct the proceedings. The returned traveller was given a smoked banana leaf (*icoya irige*), and was sent down to the nearest stream with instructions to bring up water in this leaf, and at the same time to bring up another fresh banana leaf.

When he came with the water he was led out by the medicine-man to a place in the bush where there was an old overgrown path. A ram was taken along. Here a small hole was dug, lined with the new banana leaf, and into it was poured the water. Then the medicine-man proceeded to build two small symbolic huts on either side of the basin. The first of these was built of bitter and bad plants such as *mugere* and *mucatha*, and represented the hut in Maasai country where he had been living. The second hut was built of good wood such as *muthakwa*, *mukeni*, or *mukenia* to represent his own Kikuyu home to which he was about to return.

When the symbolic huts were ready, the ram was slaughtered without any ceremony of making it pass round the man, and its stomach contents were put into the basin, together with the water and some of each of the five magic powders always used in *ndahikio* ceremonies. Then the man was told to sit inside the hut which symbolized the place he had come from, facing the land of his sojourn. The medicine-man came, and with two bunches of twigs of the ceremonial plants always used, he proceeded to 'cause the man to vomit his uncleanness', using the stem ends of the bunch of twigs. This done, the man was made to 'come out of the bad hut', step over the water in the basin, enter the 'good' hut, and sit down. Five embers were then put into the good hut, which represented his real home. Then the medicine-man solemnly pulled up the sticks of the symbolic bad hut and scattered them far and wide, saying, '*Nindatharia nyumba. Nindeheria giko gia kuria uratuire*' (I pull down the hut, I remove the uncleanness of the place where you have been living).

Taking the intestines of the slaughtered animal, he encircled the good hut in which the man was squatting by the fire. The man was then again caused to vomit the uncleanness of his temporary home, and this time the medicine-man used the leafy ends of the bundles of twigs for the ceremony. When he had done this, the medicine-man stood by the doorway of the new hut and called to the man to come out. As his face emerged from the door, the medicine-man rubbed *ira* powder on his nose and then told him to remain thus, half in and half out of the door, while he removed the intestines that encircled the hut.

Then he told the man to come right out, and as he did so he rubbed *ira* powder on to his shoulders, navel, the palms of his hands, and his two big toes. Then, with the man standing just outside the door of the good hut, the medicine-man arranged the intestines of the ram so that one end lay between the man's feet on the ground, and then passed through the good hut and out through the back wall. The medicine-man then seized the end projecting through the back wall and pulled, drawing the intestines between the man's legs, through the good hut, and out through the back wall. As he did so, he said, '*Ndagarura giko gia kuu uratuire, gitigakurumirire*' (I turn back the uncleanness which belongs to that place where you have been residing, that it may not follow you).

These intestines were then thrown away, and the medicine-man pulled up the sticks forming the symbolic good hut. These he did not throw away, but placed in a neat bundle at the foot of a *muthakwa* tree. The man was then given some of each of the five magic powders to swallow, after which he was allowed to enter his family homestead. Here he had to take part in the ceremony of *kurianira* (eating together), after which he resumed normal life in his own home. (Leakey, 260f).

It is interesting to note in this purificatory rite how the medicine-man makes the victim of this kind of contamination symbolically vomit (*ndahikio*) the uncleanness he has brought with him from the foreign land. This vomiting is repeated two times. First, the man is caused to vomit using the stem ends of the bunch of twigs, and second, the man is made to vomit the uncleanness of his temporary home. Note also the two ceremonial huts built by the medicine-man: the Maasai hut is built of bitter and bad plants like *mugere* and *mucatha* (to symbolize uncleanness) and the Kikuyu hut, on the other hand, is built of good wood like *muthakwa*, *mukeu* or *mukenia*<sup>88</sup> (a symbol of purity). There is no question now that in the eyes of the Kikuyu, any foreign rites and ceremonies were deemed unclean and therefore detestable, and any person thus contaminated became a taboo, and could not be allowed to join his family before being purified, for as Leakey says, he would probably transmit the uncleanness to the others. With this knowledge, we can now try a translation of the text under consideration.

Deuteronomy 7:26a is a warning to the Israelites not to bring into their houses objects belonging to the foreigners, and these things are here referred to as  $\text{כִּלְיֵי זָרִים}$ . On the basis of what we have said above about the Kikuyu attitude towards foreigners,  $\text{כִּלְיֵי זָרִים}$  would be correctly rendered *giko*. But the word "*giko*" has in the present day dropped its religious connotation, and is commonly used to refer to ordinary dirt. It would therefore, be appropriate to suggest that the word *giko* be used alongside *nduriri* (other tribes). Hence, *giko kia nduriri* (the dirt of other tribes). The present translation of  $\text{כִּלְיֵי זָרִים}$  as *thahu* is incorrect given the inferior form of the uncleanness involved here as is evidenced by the *giko* type purification ceremony, unlike the *thahu* type which requires a more sophisticated purificatory rite.

The Hebrew word  $\text{כִּלְיֵי זָרִים}$  in v 26a seems to mean "to destroy utterly" i.e. if Israelites were to bring the forbidden foreign objects into their houses, they would be utterly

<sup>88</sup> *Nukenia* is a name given to a tree that makes a person happy.

destroyed. Perhaps it may be added here that  $\square\eta\eta$  is in this passage used in the form of a simile, to destroy like objects devoted to God for destruction", but basically the idea is "to destroy" if this interpretation is accepted, then the Kikuyu rendering would be *kuninwo* (cf "doom" in the MTB).

The Hebrew phrase  $\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta$   $\eta\eta\eta\eta$  in v 26b comes after the consequence ( $\square\eta\eta$ ) of harbouring foreign objects which are considered to be  $\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta$  has been spelt out. It is logical then to suggest that this phrase is suggestive of the intensity with which the  $\square\eta\eta$  "utter destructions" should be detested. But the detestability of  $\square\eta\eta$  is intensified even more by the phrase that follows  $\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta$   $\eta\eta\eta\eta$ . Our concern now is to make this idea of intensification explicit in the Kikuyu Bible translation.

The present translation has combined the two phrases as though they were one, *thuura o guthuura* (utterly detest). But a better translation is the one that would attempt to translate them separately, the second one being an intensifier of the first phrase. Hence,

$\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta$   $\eta\eta\eta\eta$  should be rendered *thuura o guthuura* and  $\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta$   $\eta\eta\eta\eta$ , *mwigigime*, a verb derived from *magigi* an adjective meaning a filthy object that is repugnant or a shameful act too nasty to hear. In religious circles, *mwigigime* would mean both "to hate" and "to shun" an object because of its uncleanness. In our present text, Israel must "hate" and "shun" foreign objects since their presence causes "utter death," and the right word in Kikuyu to express this idea is *mwigigime*.

$\eta\eta\eta\eta$  in Kikuyu

In our earlier discussion of the Hebrew root  $\eta\eta\eta\eta$ , we made a distinction between positive and negative holiness. We then suggested that in certain contexts negative holiness exhibits the same characteristics as 'taboo' related to the contagion by uncleanness. But most interesting was the fact that in the OT the term  $\eta\eta\eta\eta$  is commonly used for Yahweh, ie he is the only one who is endowed or invested with the extreme purity.

The association of holiness with Yahweh is crucial, particularly for this section where the concept of the transmission of negative holiness is considered on the basis of the Kikuyu Bible translation. One major question that we need to ask ourselves at the outset is whether we are trying to impose and translate a foreign idea that was non-existent among the Kikuyu, or a concept that was there but known in different terms?

Kikuyu people believed in one God who was known as *Ngai* or *Murungu*. But when the Kikuyu spoke to him in prayers or sacrifices they referred to him as *Mwene-Nyaga* (the owner of brightness or sparkle or dazzlingness), a name that was used exclusively for the deity. The Kikuyu supreme deity was believed to be 'clean', 'pure' or 'white'. In other words he was without any blemish, and was associated with the white snow on Mount Kenya, which was thought to be his earthly abode. It is instructive to note that objects or places or food once identified with God henceforth ceased to be available for human beings, and any attempt to do otherwise was met with very severe consequences<sup>89</sup>. Only priests were allowed to go too close to the presence of *Mwene-Nyaga* to offer sacrifices on behalf of the community they represented. Sometimes two little boys who because of their age were considered to be uncontaminated would accompany the priests to the place of sacrifice.

One thing is definite about the Kikuyu understanding of the deity - he is 'clean', cleanness that surpasses their vocabulary. It is indescribable purity, and the best way they could speak about him was to compare him with the 'cleanest' place (the top of the mountain) and the 'whitest' object (the snow). To them the *Mwene-Nyaga ni mutheru* (the owner of brightness is clean or pure). The Kikuyu Bible translators took up the name *mutheru* (clean) to translate the Hebrew root  $\text{טָהַר}$ . Good! But how did they deal with the concept of contagious holiness?

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<sup>89</sup> A man in his 80s whom I interviewed for the purpose of my earlier paper at St. Paul's College said to me that he suffered swollen feet because he ate the meat kept for the deity under a sacrificial tree.



The book of Haggai is probably the best source in the comparison of contagion by both the holy objects and an unclean person. Haggai under the directive of the Lord wanted to know from the priest the difference between the two: "If one carries holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and touches with his skirt bread, or pottage, or wine, oil, or any kind of food, does it become holy?...if one who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?" (Hag 2:12-13). Concerning the first question, the priest gives an emphatic, No! But in the second he answers in the affirmative.

In this text, where the prophet requests the priest's ruling on cultic matters, uncleanness seem to be more contagious than holiness, ie holy flesh does not transmit its holiness, unlike ritual defilement from contact with a corpse (Num 19: 11-13). In Lev 22:4, for example, a person who touched a corpse was unclean (taboo) until evening and may not eat of the holy things unless he had bathed his body in water (cf 21:11). Hag 2:13 exhibits a similar contagion. Aware of the contagious power of this kind of uncleanness, Haggai in his question seeks to know whether the objects in 2:12 will be effected by a person who has come in contact with a dead body. Surely, I may be allowed to put this question in the light of the Kikuyu who definitely see a form of *thahu* in the text:

"If one who is *thahu* by contact with a dead body touches any of these does it become *thahu*? To which the priest answers, Yes!

I have noted in Haggai's question that the holiness of holy flesh in the skirt of a priest's garment is not transferrable to the foodstuffs when his garment touches them. In the first place, it seems that the person carrying the flesh has not been sanctified. Furthermore, his garments, even though they have been affected by the holiness of the flesh, the sancta has not been transmitted to the foodstuffs.

Milgrom's (1991:449) mention of Lev 6:27 as he discusses the meaning of

וְשֵׁנֵי הַכֹּהֵן? וְלֵבָבוֹתָם וְלֵבָבוֹתָם formula is particularly crucial for a better understanding of the problem raised in this text. In his careful study of the Hebrew particle וְשֵׁנֵי, Milgrom attempts to give the right rendering of this term. Does the word mean

'whoever' or 'whatever'? He points out that 'the rabbis are unanimous in opting for 'whatever' and eliminating the human factor completely.' According to him Lev 5:14-16, Hag 2:12, Ex 30:26-29, and finally Num 4:15 are indirect examples of the fact that the sancta are not contagious to persons - 'both Haggai and the rabbis agree that the sancta transmit their holiness only to foods'.

Having explained why the sancta are not contagious to persons in Haggai, it is equally important to say that the rendering of  $\text{כִּלְכֵּל}$  as 'whatver' thus excluding persons from contagious power of holiness has not always been the case (cf Lev 10:1-5; 1 Sam 6:19; 2 Sam 6:6-7). Milgrom (453) has shown that 'in the earlier period, whenever the formula originated, the range of  $\text{כִּלְכֵּל}$  was unrestricted: even persons were included.' This is particularly true when we consider, for example, Lev 6. Here, the sacrificial animal used for sin offering  $\text{זֶבֶחַ חַטֹּאת}$  was considered 'most holy' and had to be eaten in a holy place - in the court of the tent of meeting (cf Lev 6:25-27). Again, the shoulder of the ram of the peace offering  $\text{זֶבֶחַ שְׁלָמִים}$ , together with unleavened cake and water were holy portions for the priest and the priest had to wave them for a wave offering before the Lord (cf Num 6:19-20). It is obvious that the priests had to carry the holy portions in their robes. Surely, the garment must have been affected by the holy flesh. 'Whatever' <sup>90</sup> touches its flesh shall be holy; and when any of its blood is sprinkled on a garment, you shall wash that on which it was sprinkled in a holy place' (Lev 2:27, cf Lev 6:11; Ex 29:37; 30:26-29).

While it is not easy to account for the Priestly's shift from 'contagious power of sancta to persons' to 'not contagious', Milgrom (455) suggests that the change was due to 'the stream of murderers, thieves, and assorted criminals who flocked to the altar and resided on the sanctuary grounds on the basis of hoary, venerable traditions that the altar 'sanctifies' - something that deeply disturbed the priests. Milgrom's summary of this development merits our consideration:

(1) In the prebiblical stage all sancta communicate holiness to persons, the inner sancta

<sup>90</sup> 'whatever', RSV

directly by sight and indirectly by touch. This contagion is lethal even if the contact is accidental. The early biblical narratives exemplify this deadly power of the sancta in the Ark, Mount Sinai, and the divine fire. (2) The priestly account of the Levites' work assignment in the Tabernacle (Num 4) reveals the sancta unchanged from previous stage... Ezekiel, however, opts for the older view that sancta are contagious to persons. (3) Haggai restricts the contagion of sancta to foodstuffs. (4) The Tannaites follow Haggai...'

Certainly, this change creates an unresolvable translational problem in the Kikuyu Bible. For, how can sacrificial meat offered to *Ngai* (God) be contagious to persons at one time, and non-contagious at another time? In Ezekiel 46:20 we have an instance where holiness is seen to be dangerous, and must therefore be avoided due to its destructive nature (cf 2 Sam 6:6f, Lev 10:1f). We shall now use this text to show how the idea of contagion by negative holiness is uncertain in the Kikuyu Bible.

'This is the place where the priests shall boil the guilt offering and the sin offering, and where they shall bake the cereal offering, in order not to bring them out into the outer court and so communicate holiness to the people  $\square \Delta \square - \text{JIN} \psi \text{JIN}$ '

The idea here is simple: when people come in contact with holy objects, they too become holy, and in the case of negative holiness, this kind of contact is prohibited. We have already mentioned that in Kikuyu it was *mugiro* (prohibition) to tamper with anything that had been set aside for *Mwene-Nyaga*. Similarly, in this passage we have a situation where guilt offering and sin offering are not to be brought out into the outer court lest they transmit holiness, for it is *mugiro* to do so. Our problem now is to make this idea plain in our translation.

Since in the rest of the OT (cf Is 6:3) the Kikuyu Bible uses the word *mutheru* (clean) to render the Hebrew root  $\psi \text{JIN}$ , the same word needs to be used here. Hence  $\square \Delta \square - \text{JIN} \psi \text{JIN}$  would be best translated *itikagwatie andu utheru* (not to communicate the cleanness to the people). The word *itikagwatie* does not mean the English 'communicate'. This word is used in Kikuyu in a derogative sense, and is usually used to refer to the transmission of diseases. This is the same word we use for the transmission of *thahu* (taboo related to uncleanness). It then follows that its use here would automatically give *mutheru* a negative meaning, ie it places holiness in the category of *thahu*.

The present Kikuyu translation has *mutikaumure andu* (not to ordain people or set them apart), following English versions (DV, NJB). In this translation the idea of taboo inherent in this passage is lost, and it raises a very serious question in the minds of the readers: why is it improper for people to be sanctified? In other words, such a translation would only help to make the passage meaningless, and doubtful, especially in view of the fact that a good percentage of people who are interested in the Word of God among the Kikuyu are semi-literate, and usually take the words of the Bible literally.

Another example of a case where the Hebrew root  $\psi^{-1}\bar{\psi}$  is seen to operate as though it were a taboo of the *mugiro* type (prohibition) is in Deuteronomy 22:9, this time concerning mixtures. 'You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed, lest the whole yield be forfeited to the sanctuary  $\psi^{-1}\bar{\psi}\bar{\psi}\bar{\psi}^{-1}\bar{\psi}$ .'

Even without entering into any detailed exegetical understanding of this passage, ground that was covered in our earlier discussion of this text, it will suffice here to reconfirm that since in the OT it was a taboo to plant mixed seeds, the phrase  $\psi^{-1}\bar{\psi}\bar{\psi}\bar{\psi}^{-1}\bar{\psi}$  should be seen as the consequence of the violation of this prohibition.

We have already noted that in Kikuyu *mugiro* means 'prohibition' and that the result of breaking *mugiro* is *thahu*. We have also noted that in certain contexts these two words could be used interchangeably. Here, *mugiro* is to plant mixed seeds and *thahu*, the result, is that they (the seeds) will become holy. But if we render the root  $\psi^{-1}\bar{\psi}$  *thahu* we are in essence saying that holiness is defiling in the same way as ritual uncleanness. True. But that is not the case here, and it would be safe to suggest that we use *mugiro* and *thahu* interchangeably, so that we may get a good translation. Since it is *mugiro* for ordinary people to use holy objects, then definitely the issue in this context is that these seeds will directly become *mugiro* (because they have become holy) once they are planted together in the garden or after they have been surrendered to the sanctuary where they will become *mugiro* as a result of coming into contact with a holy place, in the same way as the Kikuyu sacrificial objects (eg meat) became *mugiro* after they had been taken to the sacred tree.

Whatever alternative we consider to be true, one thing is clear, that holy objects are *mugiro* to the ordinary people, something that would lead us to conclude that the Hebrew phrase  $\psi\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}$  -  $\text{ṭṭ}$  in Kikuyu means *itigatuike mugiro ni undu ni theru* (lest they be prohibited since they are holy). This is consistent with the naturalness with which Kikuyu ideas of taboo related not to the result (*thahu*), but to the prohibition (*mugiro*), are expressed.

It would be unsuitable to render  $\psi\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}$  -  $\text{ṭṭ}$  *itikaamurirwo Ngai na iticooke gukuurika* (same as for  $\square\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}$ , devoted to God irredeemably, cf Jos 7:1) as the present Kikuyu Bible reads. This translation is obviously misleading and gives the root  $\psi\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}$  another nuance, ie utterly destroy. Admittedly, this shade of meaning fortunately is not explicit, even though it is implied in the Kikuyu translation. But the fact that the translators have rendered the roots  $\psi\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}$  and  $\square\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}$  in the same way is indicative of a discrepancy which could easily be avoided if the suggestions we have put forward above were followed.

#### Kikuyu Translation of Lev 11

In Lev 11 we saw how certain animals are considered as a potential source of uncleanness. Again different words were used to describe the animals mentioned in the text namely  $\aleph\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}$  and  $\gamma\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}$ . We also pointed out that in vv 2-23 a person did not contract a contagious and purifiable uncleanness by eating forbidden food, since the section consists only of prohibitions. But at v 24ff the uncleanness is contagious and purifiable. Our main concern in this section will be to deal with translational problems of  $\aleph\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}$  and  $\gamma\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}$  in Kikuyu.

While the main division of this chapter by subject at v24 has been followed in the Kikuyu Bible, ie the Kikuyu word *mugiro* has been used for vv 2-23 and *thahu* for vv 24-40, respectively, the rendering of  $\aleph\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}\text{-}\text{ṭṭ}$  as *thahu* vv 41-45 is problematic since in this section the style is rhetorical rather than technical.

Do not defile yourselves (make yourselves abominable, RSV) by any of these creatures. Do not make yourselves unclean (you shall not defile, RSV) by means of them or be made unclean by them.

The GNB which follows the principles and theories of the UBS has: - 'Do not make yourselves unclean by eating any of these'. Similarly, in the Kikuyu Bible we should avoid literal translation which 'fails because it is largely insensitive to the difference in the way form/meaning interaction takes place in the source and the way it operates in the receptor languages' (Sterk, 1994:130). In order to do so, we shall follow René Pétér - Contesse and John Ellington (1990:173) who suggest that since 'The words make yourselves abominable are parallel to defile yourselves and the pronoun them in the second part corresponds to any swarming thing that swarms in the first', then the repetition of the same idea using two different sets of words could be avoided in the receptor language if it is unnatural. Following this argument, and in view of the fact that the language in this section is rhetorical, the Kikuyu rendering of this text should be:

'You shall not make yourselves abominable  $\text{מְטֵמְאִים אֶתְכֶם}$  with any swarming thing that swarms; and you shall not defile yourselves  $\text{לֹא תִטְמָאוּ אֶתְכֶם בָּהֶם}$  with them, lest you become unclean  $\text{אֲלֵכֶם}$  (v 43).

The Kikuyu rendering of the Hebrew words is as follows: -

$\text{מְטֵמְאִים אֶתְכֶם}$ -	<i>mutikanaikire mugiro</i>
$\text{לֹא תִטְמָאוּ אֶתְכֶם בָּהֶם}$ -	<i>mutikaneqwatie thahu</i>
$\text{אֲלֵכֶם}$ -	<i>mwithukie</i>

The problem in this translation is that it is quite unnatural. In Kikuyu we do not say 'mutikanaikire mugiro' (literally do not make yourselves a prohibition). Again it is unnatural to say *mutikaneqwatie thahu* (literally do not make yourselves uncleanness). *Mwithukie* (literally make yourselves spoilt) is generic for anything bad, but it seems to agree with the context.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion we need to point out that both words and culture are not static but dynamic. It must be accepted that the Kikuyu way of life and its language are not the same as they were many years ago, especially due to the introduction of Western lifestyle. For example, the present generation perceive life quite differently, ie their worldview is seemingly less concerned about the religious thought cherished by their forefathers. They now speak differently - foreign words have become part of our vocabulary. Certain words, phrases and idioms, and even proverbs, have acquired different meanings.

But while ritual taboos seem to play a very insignificant role in modern Kikuyu society, they nonetheless reappear particularly when there is a crisis in the family or society. For instance, in some families, funeral ceremonies are marked with strict observance of taboos. That is to say, a culture that has taken centuries to build cannot be destroyed in a few decades. Such a culture should be seen as being deeply-seated in the bone marrow of the Kikuyu people and as a result, now and then, these people revert to their old religion, perhaps when Christianity seems to have no immediate answer to their problems. In recent times, some women who were demanding the release of their sons from detention had to strip in the streets of Nairobi. Traditionally, it was a taboo for a woman to strip in public. And should that happen, the person who saw the nudity of the woman would meet with very severe consequences. An ill omen would befall him. When the women stripped in the streets of Nairobi, that was indicative of the existence of old taboos in the modern society.

All we are saying is that translating OT into a language whose old cultural value system is diminishing, and yet is alive in the minds of some members of the society, is an event that is not only fascinating but difficult. Needless to say, Bible translators in areas where people have divided loyalties, ie they have one foot in the west and the other firmly rooted in their tribal culture, need to be well informed about both the original culture (Hebrew) and the recipient

culture into which the former is being translated.

The thoroughness with which cultures and languages involved in a Bible translation should be studied is further supported by the inexhaustiveness of the present study. Whereas an attempt has been made to shed more light on the problems of translating taboo words, we have failed to deal adequately with every Hebrew text related to our study that would obviously have needed our attention. For example, the Hebrew root  $\text{פָּרַד}$  which means 'profane' or 'common' has received a somewhat negligible treatment. The taboo imposed on 'the bread of Presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away' (1 Sam 21:1-6) should have been discussed in the section dealing with food taboos, and would have been a good ground to compare the OT food prohibitions, especially food set for Yahweh, with the Kikuyu taboo of the sacrificial meat offered to *Ngai* under the *mugumo* (fig) tree. It will also be realized that many Kikuyu taboos, appended to this work, which would have helped us to have a better understanding of the Kikuyu world of religion, and which in turn would be of great value in the comprehension of the Hebrew concept of uncleanness, have not been exhaustively utilized.

The relevance of this study, however, should not be underrated. The comparison between the Hebrew texts and the Kikuyu understanding of ritual impurity has highlighted some of the translational problems of key biblical terms likely to be encountered not only by a Kikuyu translator, but also by other tribes in Kenya with whom we share the same cultural background. Such biblical terms include, sin, grace, holiness etc. Again, the use of different words in different contexts in the OT to convey the same idea is particularly important. It goes without saying that, while for the sake of consistency a single word should be used to express the same idea throughout the whole translation, for example *thahu* to mean  $\text{חָטָא}$ , the fact that there are many Hebrew words covering the concept of taboo would obviously override this rule, as our study has shown. It would therefore be correct to suggest that in the Kikuyu Bible translation different words expressing the idea of taboo need to be used as the context requires.



APPENDIX  
KIKUYU TABOOS AND REGULATIONS

ORAL CODE I

VILLAGE, HOMESTEAD AND HUT TABOOS AND REGULATIONS<sup>91</sup>

1. In no circumstances might all the fires in a homestead be allowed to go out together.
2. If a hyena should enter a village or homestead and dung either in the open clearing of the entrance (*thome*) or in any courtyard, ceremonial purification was essential.
3. If the owner of a homestead cut himself and drew blood either while in the homestead or when he was out in the fields, he had to sacrifice a goat or sheep for purification.
4. If a woman was preparing castor oil from castor oil berries, and during the process of heating them over the fire, she either let them boil over or dry up in the pot, a purification ceremony and sacrifice was essential.
5. If anyone, other than a child that had not been 'born a second time' (*guciarwa na mburi*), or a very sick person, defecated within a hut or in the courtyard, a purification ceremony was essential.
6. Should any beast, calf, goat or sheep, suck or lick any part of a human in a homestead, that animal had to be sacrificed for a purification ceremony at the village or a relation-in-law.
7. If a jackle barked in the entrance area or in the courtyard of a homestead a ceremonial purification was necessary.
8. If anyone deliberately broke a cooking pot or gourd in a homestead, ceremonial purification was necessary.
9. Should a toad, frog or lizard fall or jump into the fire in the hearth of a hut, a purification ceremony was essential.
10. If a cooking pot cracked while food was being cooked in it, that food might not be eaten except by woman past child birth.
11. If an owl hooted near a homestead, or worse still, perched on any hut or granary, purification was necessary.
12. If a snake was killed within the confines of a homestead, a purification ceremony had to take place.
13. No one might touch or approach the midden dump (*kiara*) of a homestead other than the member of that homestead. If they did so, a purification would be necessary.
14. Should any one in anger or drunkenness pluck thatch from any hut in a homestead, a sacrifice and purification would be essential to avoid disaster.

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<sup>91</sup> This list has been compiled from Leakey's work, op cit pp 165-167, 204-206, 277, 296-298, 301, 302, 1208-1209, 248, 250, 786, 1233-1234, with some amendments and additions.

15. It was a taboo for a man to sleep on the side by the outer wall of his wife's bed.
16. It was a taboo to start moving a woman's hut to a new site while she was menstruating.
17. It was a taboo for a fire in a hut to go out at any time when beer was being brewed in that hut, or when any special ceremony or sacrifice was taking place in that hut, or in connection with it.
18. In a woman's hut, the head end of her bed was towards the '*thegi*' (food store in the house) and foot end towards the '*kwera*' (the open space in the house). It was a taboo for anyone to sleep in these beds except with their heads at the head end of the bed.
19. It was a taboo to lean a spear up against the roof of a hut. All spears had to be either stuck in the ground, or leaned against the fence or under the fence. There was no penalty for breaking this taboo, but it was never done.
20. It was a taboo to kill a bird called '*nyamindigi*' (cossypha or Robin chat) within the confines of the homestead.
21. If a kite, when flying over a homestead, let its droppings fall on any person, that person had to be purified, the manner of purification depending upon the sex of the person involved.
22. If a woman or man fell down within their own homestead, purification and sacrifice were necessary.
23. It was a taboo to come into contact with the menstrual blood of any other person (something which could happen easily in a hut), and purification was necessary if this happened. But there were also minor exceptions.
24. When entering a hut, a person had to pass to the right of the hearth.

## ORAL CODE II

### CUSTOMS AND TABOOS CONNECTED WITH AGRICULTURE

1. When a man worked in the garden or fields of a relative-in-law, he had to wear his ordinary skin cloak, however inconvenient it was to walk in, and could not adopt the kilt of banana leaves that he would normally wear when in his own fields.
2. A girl or woman working in the fields of a relative-in-law had to lay aside her cloak and work bare to the waist as she would in her own fields.
3. An elderly man working in his own garden could wear an *ithitiri* instead of a banana, one over his buttocks and anus and one over his genitals.
4. A bunch of bananas that fell down of its own accord or was blown down by wind could not be eaten by any of the family owning that banana grove, but had to be given to some other family.
5. It was a taboo to allow any sugar-cane plant to come into flower. If a plant so flowered, a very old man not related to the owner of the field had to be brought in to dig up a whole of the stool of canes by the roots. A ram was then killed on the spot where the plant had flowered and its stomach contents sprinkled over the hole where the cane had been uprooted. A *mitkenia* and a *muthakwa* plant had to be planted in the hole to take the

place of that sugar-cane plant. The canes so uprooted were taken by the old man who had dug them up, and he made beer from them, but the owner of the field and his relations could not touch a drop of that beer without endangering themselves.

6. It was strictly a taboo to cut down a banana tree in anger or slash it in any way. Doing so necessitated the sacrifice of a ram, and the whole stool so damaged had to be dug up and *muthakwa* and *mukenia* plants planted in its place.
7. If any man beat his wife or any other woman in a garden or cultivated field, and drew blood, a purification ceremony with sacrifice had to take place on the spot where the beating took place, as the garden had been thereby defiled.
8. If any married women threw soil at each other in the fields they could be purified only by the sacrifice of a ram, and by ceremonial sexual intercourse performed by a man other than their husband.
9. A man or woman wearing charm (*githitu*) could not pass under a banana prop because, if they did so, the charm would lose its power.
10. If a man or woman died suddenly in a cultivated area, the body was left there for the hyenas to drag away. Then the spot where the body had been was marked off with sticks, and the food plants in the marked off area were not harvested. In all future seasons nothing would be planted there, and the spot would be used as a rubbish dump.
11. There was no taboo against a menstruating woman walking in her gardens, or picking sweet potato vine for the goats and sheep, but she could not hang up the bunch of vine in the courtyard when she had taken it there, and she could not make gruel from bulrush millet (*gukia ucuru*) or other grains that she had fetched from the fields.

### ORAL CODE III

#### TABOOS CONNECTED WITH MEAT FEASTS

1. If the pot in which meat was being cooked, or the small earthen pot in which the soup was being stirred (*bira*) should break, a ram or an ewe had to be sacrificed at once, to restore peace and ward off evil influences.
2. If, in the case of a goat or a sheep, the man who pulled out the lungs failed to bring out the heart at the same time, a ram or an ewe had to be sacrificed at once for purification.
3. If the eyes of a goat or a ram burst when taking it out of the skull, a ram or an ewe had to be sacrificed for purification.
4. If the half-gourd (*kiuga*) in which the fat was put broke, a ram or ewe had to be sacrificed for purification.
5. If the fire went out during a meal feast, a ram or ewe had to be sacrificed 'for lighting a new fire'.
6. On the last day of a meat feast (*kirugu*) the participants could not leave the cave or shelter by the entrance they had been using all the time, but each man had to break through the walls at a separate place and go out that way.

7. On the last day of the feast each man had to put a little bit of meat on small skewers and leave it to toast at the fire made of all the rubbish and stakes used for the roasting platforms.
8. No man participating in a meat feast could sleep anywhere except at the shelter built for the feast.
9. No woman or girls could enter the cave or shelter where a meat feast was taking place.

#### ORAL CODE IV

#### TABOOS CONNECTED WITH FOOD AND DRINK

1. If a cooking pot cracked while the food was being cooked in it, that food could not be eaten by the family, but had to be given away.
2. If a woman broke a pot while she was making food (*gulcima irio*) in it, that food had to be given away.
3. If a woman was cooking food for a ceremony or sacrifice and the pot broke while she was doing so, then a ram had to be slaughtered for purification.
4. If a woman's bead accidentally fell into the food that was being cooked and was fished out, that food had to be given away and not eaten by the family.
5. If a woman's bead fell into the food when it was being cooked and was not noticed until food was being eaten, when someone found it in his or her mouth, a sheep had to be sacrificed at once for a purificatory ceremony.
6. No woman, except those past childbearing, could eat in the presence of her husband except in connection with special ceremonies.
7. No woman or initiated girl, except a woman past childbearing, could eat in the presence of men other than son or brothers.
8. No flesh of wild animals, bird, or fish might be eaten, except doves, which could be eaten by boys.
9. No bush millet of a new season's crop could be eaten before a sacrifice had been made to purify it.
10. If the fire went out while food other than edible arum (*nduma*) was cooking, that food had to be given away and not eaten by the family.
11. If a lizard or a frog fell into the fire while food was cooking, that food could not be eaten by the family, and had to be given to old women past childbearing.
12. If, while sweet potatoes were being cooked, the water boiled over, the potatoes might not be eaten by the family, but had to be given away.
13. Food to be cooked that was thrust into the fire through the gap between two hearthstones and removed through a different gap was called 'kirutiro', and could not be eaten by female children.
14. No one child in any circumstances could step over a hearth in a hut.

15. No sexual intercourse might take place in a hut while there was a pot of food cooking on the fire. Should this be done, the food could not be eaten, for it had been defiled.
16. No sexual intercourse might take place in a hut where beer is brewing.
17. If a woman getting food from a granary (*ikumbi*) should have accidentally let any menstrual blood touch the granary, all the food in that granary had to be given away: none might be eaten by any member of the family.
18. No menstruating woman or girl could make gruel by pounding corn and using the grindstones.
19. No menstruating woman could milk a cow or goat.
20. If a woman was menstruating when she was given beer to drink in connection with the offering and prayers to the ancestors, it had to be poured from the gourd cup (*ndahi*) into a half-gourd (*kinya*) for her to drink. She might not drink from a *ndahi* while in this condition.
21. No menstruating woman might handle a '*muratina*' (a staff used for brewing the native beer - *njohi*), the fruit of *Kigelia Africana*'.
22. No menstruating woman might handle sugar-cane or crushed sugar-cane, while preparing it for beer, but she could do the actual pounding if another woman filled and emptied her mortar for her.
23. If beer was taken to another village as a gift (*gutega*) in a small *ndua* (brewing vessel), as sometimes occurred, and it was later found that a *muratina* had accidentally been left in the '*ndua*', a sheep had to be slaughtered for purification.
24. If a sheep licked the canes from which beer was being prepared, or slipped some of the cane juice (*ngogoyo*) from the oxhide basin, that beer had to be thrown away or given away.
25. If a child should trip and fall into the sugar-cane juice in the oxhide basin where beer was prepared, a sheep had to be sacrificed and all the beer given away.
26. If any part of a woman's leather garment got into beer, a sheep had to be sacrificed for purification.
27. If any child unstoppered a gourd of beer that had been stopped in readiness for carrying elsewhere, that gourdful could not be used to take to another village as a present.
28. If a relation-in-law was at beer drink and vomited in the courtyard, a sheep had to be slaughtered at once for purification.
29. If a man at a beer drink was so drunk that he defecated in the courtyard, a sheep had to be slaughtered at once for purification.
30. If men at a beer drink fought and blood was drawn a sheep had to be sacrificed for purification.
31. If a woman was struck while carrying beer and the beer gourd (*kinya*) broke in

consequence, a sheep had to be slaughtered for purification.

32. If a man who was squeezing out juice from sugar-cane struck another man or woman with his bound up roll of sugar-cane pulp (*ikahi*), a ram had to be sacrificed in purification. But even so, the person struck would probably die.
33. If in anger a man broke a gourd containing beer, a sheep had to be sacrificed for purification.

#### ORAL CODE V

##### TABOO CONNECTED WITH TOBACCO

It was a taboo to tend tobacco plants after having eaten meat.

#### ORAL CODE VI

##### TABOOS CONNECTED WITH CASTOR OIL

1. It was a taboo for the pot in which castor oil was being prepared to be allowed to boil dry. If this happened a sheep had to be sacrificed for purification.
2. It was taboo to allow the castor oil to boil over, and this too necessitated the sacrifice of a sheep for purification.
3. Sheep and goats might not, on any account, drink water at the bottom of the castor oil cooking pot. If one did, it had to be slaughtered.
4. If the pot in which castor oil was being prepared for ceremonial purposes were to break, a sheep had to be sacrificed for purification.

#### ORAL CODE VII

##### TABOOS CONNECTED WITH THE DIVINING GOURD

1. In no circumstances could a *mundu mugo* (diviner) allow any member of his age-group to have sexual intercourse with a wife who was the guardian of his divining gourd. If there was nowhere else for a male to sleep he might be told to go and sleep in the hut where the divining gourd was kept, but he was warned that it was there, and that therefore he had to avoid all sexual contact with the woman, even though she might be 'an age-group wife'.
2. If the wife of the *mundu mugo* who kept the divining gourd was away for any reason, the *mundu mugo* was not in any circumstances to have restricted sexual intercourse with their lovers in that hut.
3. The grown-up unmarried daughters of the woman in whose hut the divining gourd was kept were not in any circumstances to have restricted sexual intercourse with their lovers in that hut.
4. If a *mundu mugo* had been away on a journey, no other *mundu mugo* might touch his divining gourd until he had returned and slept one night with the wife who was its guardian.
5. Gourds containing water were never put near the divining gourd.
6. A fire in any form other than of the *rumuru* (torch) was never to be used as a light near the divining gourd when it was hanging on the *kihanya* (a post inside the house with a place to hang things).

7. In the hut where the divining gourd was kept a fire had to burn all night. It did not matter if the fire went out by day, but from nightfall to dawn there had always to be a fire in the hut. If the woman in charge of the divining gourd found that the fire had gone out overnight, it had to be relit next morning by means of a fire stick, to the accomplishment of the slaughter of a ram.
8. The owner of the divining gourd had to take great care never to draw blood in anger or by accident from the wife who was the guardian.
9. If the woman in whose hut the divining gourd was kept died suddenly in her hut, she was for the time being spoken of as asleep and meanwhile the divining gourd had to be moved to the men's hut. Her death was then recognised, and henceforward the divining gourd was kept in men's hut. It was later transferred to the hut of the next senior wife, for it had been in contact with the former keeper's death.

#### ORAL CODE VIII

##### TABOOS CONNECTED WITH CATTLE, GOATS AND SHEEP

1. The skin of an ox or cow that had died a natural death and had not been slaughtered could not be used to make a sleep mat for a bed.
2. If a francolin alighted on the back of any animal, a ram had to be slaughtered and the purification ceremony of *guthiurura* (encircling) performed.
3. If a cow belonging to a man of the Kikuyu initiation guild had twin calves it was killed, but if it belonged to a man of the *Ukabi* guild it was allowed to live. A man of the Kikuyu guild was allowed to exchange his cow and the twin calves for a bullock if he could find a man of the *Ukabi* guild people put collars around the necks of twin calves, on which cowrie shells were sewn to avert evil.
4. If a cattle owner died, all his bulls were immediately castrated and none of his cows were allowed to be served by any bulls until the *hukura* ceremony (freeing from the plight of death) had been performed. All he-goats were also castrated, while his rams were segregated from the ewes.
5. Calves were kept in the men's hut at night. Sometimes a young bull would actually try to mount a woman who had come to sit in the men's hut. If this happened, it was immediately slaughtered, and its flesh could not be eaten by the man's wife or by him.
6. If a stud bull left the herd while grazing, and of its own accord returned to the homestead, it was either castrated or killed, according to the circumstances. If it returned to the homestead and was caught by men, it was castrated at once, and that was enough to remove the evil. But if it came back and only women were present, and if it then returned to the herd, it would have to be slaughtered, as this was a taboo.
7. If a bull went to the midden of the homestead and started to dig up the ground with its horns, that bull would have to be slaughtered at once, otherwise the owner of the homestead would die.
8. It was a taboo for a menstruating woman to milk a cow.
9. If a cow gave birth to a monstrosity, the monstrosity was split in half and thrown away at the foot of a *muthakwa* bush. The whole herd to which the cow belonged then had to be purified by the slaughter of a ram or ewe and by the ceremony of *guthiurura* (encircling).

10. If a cow or ox should get its tail twisted round a pot or growing tree and so get caught, it would be immediately killed because it had 'tied itself up'.
11. The birth of twin lambs or kids and/or monstrosity to ewes or goats was a taboo.
12. If a cow, ox or calf licked or bit a warrior's leather garment, it had to be slaughtered at once.
13. If a calf or adult cow, ox or bull reared up on its hind legs and set its front legs against a hut it had to be killed at once. This also applied to ewes, but not to goats or rams.
14. If any animal, cattle, goat or sheep, were to go to the pot where castor oil was being prepared by women and try to eat the mash, it would be slaughtered at once.
15. If a goat or sheep should by any chance get its horns or head caught up in a baby - carrying skin, it would have to be sent to the home of the parents of the woman to whom the skin belonged, and to be slaughtered.
16. If a goat or sheep drank water from a half-gourd kept for washing a baby, it would have to be given to some non-relations to slaughter.
17. If a goat or sheep, while in a hut at night, should touch a woman's breast, it had to be given to the woman's relatives to kill.
18. If a goat or sheep were to jump into a woman's bedroom while the woman was sleeping with her husband, then it would have to be slaughtered next morning.
19. If a she-goat or an ewe should give birth in hut when the woman of the hut was in labour, both the she-goat or ewe and its offspring had to be killed.
20. If a he-goat should attempt to mount a woman when she was sitting on her stool in the hut it would be slaughtered.
21. If a goat or sheep should drink sugar-cane juice while the juice was being extracted in preparation for beer, it had either to be killed or all that juice given away and not consumed by the owner or used by him for the ceremonial purpose for which he was preparing it.

#### ORAL CODEIX

##### TABOOS AND REGULATIONS ON SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

1. In no circumstances whatsoever should you either have or attempt to have intercourse with your wife from behind. This is strictly a taboo and if you do so you will surely die.
2. If you have intercourse with your wife and you find that her menses have just started so that the blood has touched your body, do not hide the fact, but come and tell your father and mother at once next morning in order that you and your wife may be purified. If you fail to do this, either you or your wife will surely die, for this is great evil.
3. If you are aware that your wife's menses have started, do not attempt to have intercourse with her till they are over, for this is very evil.
4. If your wife should at any time touch your genitals with her hands either by accident or deliberately, come at once and tell your parents so that you may both be purified. This is a very great uncleanness.



5. Do not touch your wife's breasts with your mouth or lips. Should you do so, deliberately or accidentally, you will die unless you are ceremonially purified.
6. In no circumstances should you have intercourse with your wife in the fields or in the bush, but only in her own hut.
7. In no circumstances should you have intercourse with your wife while the goats and sheep are grazing. This is very great evil, but you will not die from it.
8. In no circumstances should you have intercourse while lying by the outer wall of the bed so that you are to the left of her. Always be on the inner side of the bed nearest the centre of the hut when you go to sleep with your wife.
9. When you have intercourse with your wife always see to it that your legs and thighs are enclosed by hers, and not hers by yours, for that is very evil.
10. Never have intercourse with your wife in such a way that your penis can slip and ejaculate semen on to the oxhide sleeping mat. If this should happen it is great evil, and before you sleep with your wife again you must arrange with someone else of your own initiation age-group to sleep with her first thus remove the evil.

#### ORAL CODEX

##### THAHU CAUSED BY CONTACT WITH DEATH

1. Any woman who had a miscarriage or who gave birth to a still-born child acquired *thahu* as a result of contact with the dead foetus. This form of *thahu* was confined to the woman herself, but it was contagious and the contagion could be transferred by a sex act.
2. A woman who bore a child that was healthy and normal but which died before the second birth ceremony took place acquired *thahu* through the death of such a child. This *thahu* was contagious through sex.
3. The death of any child that had been through the second birth ceremony caused *thahu* to both the father and the mother.
4. The death of any unmarried adult, male or female, caused the condition of *thahu* to affect both parents and all the unmarried children of the mother.
5. The death of a married woman caused her husband and all her children who were unmarried to acquire *thahu*.
6. The death of a married man caused his parents, all his wives, and all his children to acquire *thahu*.
7. Any person who killed any other person by violence acquired *thahu* by contact with the death and the relatives of the deceased were also affected by the *thahu*.

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