

John Moore
Dr. Helman
Cultures and Traditions 1
23 September 2005

Notes on *The River Between*

9/23/05

Main Characters:

Waiyaki
Chege (Waiyaki's father)
Joshua
Muthoni (Joshua's daughter)
Nyambura (Joshua's daughter)
Livingstone
Kamau
Kabonyi (Kamau's father)

Brief sequence of important events:

- 1.) Chege tells Waiyaki about prophecy
- 2.) Circumcision rites
- 3.) Muthoni's death
- 4.) Waiyaki become Teacher
- 5.) Waiyaki enters and leaves Kiama
- 6.) Waiyaki proposes to Nyambura
- 7.) Final debate between Waiyaki and Kabonyi
- 8.) Waiyaki and Nyambura are left in the hands of Kiama

Discussion:

Female circumcision rites: removal of the clitoris

-Muthoni's motivation

-fit in, be free

-rebel

-pressure?

Purpose of circumcision: pact between man and God

Pleasure during sex-same for men and women

Time frame-general missionary policies described 1928-1929

Ending

-what happens?

-does prophecy get fulfilled?

-exiled then return?

-killed?

Is Waiyaki a failure?

- at least he tried
- brought education to all the ridges
- didn't completely save his people
- he preserved traditions and modernized in certain ways
- he united his own ridge (Makuyu)
- the education he implemented will last a lifetime for the kids he gave it to

What is he teaching? (subject matter)

Basic government ideals

- explain the white man's moving into their territories

-explain taxes

History

- where this country/culture has come and where they are going in the future with all the changes that are coming on

Religion

- Joshua was teaching on the other side how great Christianity was

-would only make sense for Waiyaki to do the same with his people and "followers"

Value of education

- good to beat kids

-parents knew their children were learning when they were coming home with bruises

Why is circumcision so important?

- initiated into tribe, turning point to becoming a man

-fulfill certain duties afterwards

-elders respect you and you gain qualifications to do more important jobs, have more responsibility

Waiyaki's age:

2nd birth-about eight or so, young child

Circumcision: fourteen or fifteen

Talking about sex is a taboo before the ceremony

-ceremony itself is a large sexual ritual

Allure of white man's power

-Acceptance of Christianity embraced without complete understanding of either

-nobody knows why either came into their lives

-very little questioning, especially by Joshua and his followers

Why convert?

Improved technology and knowledge of the white man

Might want to be different and unique from all the rest

Both sides used Muthoni's death to advance their stance on tradition vs. Christianity

Joshua

- Christianity
- newcomers

Kabonyi

- purification and restoration of the tribe
- upholding traditions
- burned Christian hut
- blinded by pride (hatred for Waiyaki)
- stubborn and close-minded

Waiyaki

- education
- acting on orders from his father to learn ways of the white man
- doesn't have a clear destination yet

With Christianity and white man's influence Waiyaki has not really embraced either
-he's learned about them, and retained parts he liked