

THE AMERU IN THE MAU MAU

1945-1965

BY

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DECLARATION

This research is my original work and has not been presented in any other University or College for the award of a degree, diploma or certificate.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the following categories of people who are all very special to me. Firstly, it is dedicated to my dear wife, the late Edith Karimi Ndubai and to my beloved son, the late QS Francis Muriungi Ndubai, both of whom suddenly passed away on 28th November 2014 and 8th February, 2015, respectively. This was followed by the death of my dear mother Mama Zipporah Kajuju Ndubai on 8th October 2016 at the age of 107 years. Up to the time of their tragic departure, which deeply affected the whole family, they had been a great source of encouragement and support for me in conducting this study. I dearly wish that the three of them were still alive today to share in the great joy of my graduation with the rest of the family members and friends. May God rest their souls in eternal peace.

Secondly, it is dedicated to all my children Jane Kanyua, Alex and Margaret Mwenda, Victor and Virginia Wangu Kithinji, Fridah Nkatha, Mama Munene (Catherine) and Mama Mugambi (Wanjiku) and to my grandchildren Joy Kagwiria, Malcolm “*Baraka*” Kaburu Mwai, Winfred Kathure, Doreen Kendi, Ashley Nkirote, Christian Munene, Lemayian Mugambi, Seville Nkatha and to my great-grand-daughter Shantelle Kanana (Naana).

Finally, this work is also dedicated to all the younger generations of Kenyans who, driven by patriotism and curiosity, may wish to learn more about the history of their motherland. They may wish to discover more about the heroic Mau Mau struggle by their forefathers for the liberation of this great nation and, in particular, the women’s participation in it. May God bless them all; May God bless Kenya.

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My very special thanks go to Hon. Kiraitu Murungi (Senator for Meru County) and his wife Mama Priscilla Murungi. Through Kiraitu Murungi Foundation, they facilitated my sponsorship for this Masters Degree course. Without such financial support, I could not have managed to attend the course. I shall forever remain grateful to them for their generous assistance and personal encouragement.

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government officials. Their personal accounts and insights into the Mau Mau struggle were very valuable for this study.

Last but not least my family, whose unwavering support and encouragement enabled me to complete this work. For this, I shall remain eternally grateful to them all.

ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

1. KADU	- Kenya African Democratic Union.
2. KANU	- Kenya African National Union.
3 KAU	- Kenya African Union.
4. KCA	- Kikuyu Central Association.
5. KHRC	- Kenya Human Rights Commission.
6 KEM	- Kikuyu, Embu and Meru Communities.
7. KKM	- <i>Kiama Kia Muungi</i>
8. LANC	- Local African Native Councils.
9. LEGCO	- Legislative Council.
10. MADC	- Meru African District Council.
11. MAU MAU	- The term used by the colonial administration in reference to the Africans' secret Movement which fought for Kenya's Independence (1952-1963).
12. MLC	- Member of the Legislative Council.
13. MMOT	- Mau Mau Original Trust
14. MMWC	- Mau Mau War Council.
15. MMWVA	- Mau Mau War Veterans' Association.

GLOSSARY OF AFRICAN TERMS

1. *Achunku* - The term used by the Ameru to describe the “Europeans” or the white people in general .
2. *Chomba* - These were the “ red-skinned” strangers from the coast who appeared in Meru Land in the 1890s. They were also referred to as Chomba ya Mwangia, in reference to their Kamba guide known as Mwanzia.
3. *Finger- Printing* - The term used by the colonial Police force in reference to the process of cutting off the hands of the dead Mau Mau freedom fighters for identification purposes.
4. *Handle* - The term *handle* was used in the coded Mau Mau message to their secret agents within the nursing profession to mean *eliminate* all the patients admitted for medical care and who were known to be either members or agents of the colonial administration .
5. *Treat* - The term *treat* was used in reference to the Mau Mau members and their agents who were admitted for medical care, meaning that their lives must be saved at all costs.
6. *Kaboorio* - The term used to describe the one- metre long leather strap used by the Home Guards as hand - cuffs (mpengu) for tying the hands of the arrested Mau Mau suspects . The term was eventually used in reference to the Home Guards themselves.
7. *Kamanda Dance* - A higly political dance perfomed by the radical ex-Second World War (1939-1945) soldiers and used to communicate coded Mau Mau messages in the late 1940s and early 1950s.
8. *Kangangi* - The “*Little Wanderer*”. This is the nick-name given by the local people to Edward Butler Horne, the first

		and longest- serving White District Comissioner for Meru (1908-1918).
9. <i>Karambii</i>	-	The term was used in reference to the self- help groups formed by the ex- Second World War soldiers upon their discharge from the Army after the War. It was the precursor of the national motto “ <i>Harambee</i> ”.
10. <i>Kuriithia Ng’ombe cia Kimathi</i>	-	“To Herd Kimathi’s Cattle”. This was the coded message used by the Mau Mau to refer to the Mau Mau members sentenced to death by the Mau Mau Court for breach of the strict Mau Mau code of conduct. Captives from the enemy side met the same fate
11. <i>Manjooni</i>	-	The local term coined to describe the young British soldiers (Johnnies) brought to Kenya to fight the Mau Mau during the State of Emergency.
12. <i>Matigari</i>	-	The ex-Mau Mau freedom fighters who survived the bullets in the forest. (<i>Matigari ja njirungi/mburuburu/risasi</i>).
13. <i>Mpeenja</i>	-	The term means “shave me”. These were fake Mau Mau errant gangs who often harassed women asking to have their dread-locks shaved. The groups emerged during the period leading to end of the State of Emergency.
14. <i>Muuma jwa Kuru</i>	-	The “ <i>Dog Oath</i> ” was administered by the Mau Mau oath experts to make them “vomit” the “ <i>Goat Oath</i> ” administered by the colonial Chiefs and to re-affirm the original Mau Mau Oath.
15. <i>Muuma jwa Kurita Antu Muundune</i>	-	The “ <i>Oath of Enlightenment</i> ” was essentially meant for general education and creation of awareness about the Mau Mau Movement. It was also the oath of removing people from the “ <i>darkness</i> ” or “ <i>ignorance</i> ”

- about the current political happenings in the country then.
16. *Muumajwa Ndwaai-* The “*Mbatuni (Platoon) Oath*” was the more serious oath and was administered in readiness for the actual combat and spilling of blood, if necessary.
17. *Muumajwa Ntaka -* The “*Oath of Mud*” was a “*fake*” oath purported to have been the real one taken by those individuals who had been detained earlier than 1946, before taking the more radical Mau Mau Oath. During screening, the suspect suffered merciless torture by the colonial forces who did not believe the suspects’ accounts, based on latter’s limited knowledge about Mau Mau. To save them from continued torture during subsequent screening sessions, their more knowledgeable Mau Mau colleagues coached them on what to say, while deliberately hiding the truth about Mau Mau operations; hence the fake “*Oath of Mud*” label used.
18. *Muumajwa Nthenge -* The “*Oath of the He Goat*” was administered under the instructions and supervision of the colonial Chiefs purportedly to “*cleanse*” those who had taken the true Mau Mau Oath (*Muumajwa Mau Mau or Muumajwa Kiama*) in order to make them change their allegiance to Mau Mau.
19. *Njuri Ncheke -* The Njuri Ncheke Council of the Ameru Elders. The traditional government of the Ameru dating back to the 16th Century.
20. *Nkibata -* A special traditional male dance performed in preparation for the public announcement of the Njuri Ncheke decisions that have been made at Nchiru.
21. *Ntiba and Kiruka-* According to the Ameru traditional system of governance, the two main age-sets alternated their

leadership roles every 12 to 15 years. The upper limit was allowed in the event of war or a serious natural calamity such as famine or out-break of an epidemic.

- 22. *Ntwiko* - The act of cutting off, severance or handing-over leadership between the Ntiba and Kiruka, the alteranating governing age-sets.
- 23. *Transfer* - “*Transfer to another duty station*” .The term was used in the Mau Mau “official communication” to members of the immediate families of senior Mau Mau *leaders* who had died in combat in the course of duty.

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to find out the role of the Ameru in the Mau Mau struggle for Kenya's independence. In particular, the study undertook to investigate the factors that influenced and sustained their participation in the Mau Mau, to examine the role played by the Ameru women in the struggle and to assess the impact of the Mau Mau movement on the Meru community.

The written history of the struggle for Kenya's independence so far appears to be selective. Whereas a lot has been written about the Kikuyu, the Ameru are the least covered despite their involvement and contribution to the struggle right from the early years up to the attainment of independence in 1963. Apart from the rather casual mention of Meru, as part of the Kikuyu, these studies have tended to create a general impression that Mau Mau struggle was an exclusively Kikuyu affair.

The theoretical framework is based on Abraham Maslow's human basic needs. These are the "deficiency needs" and "growth needs", as explained in his work "Human Basic Needs Theory". Colonization impoverished the Africans by adversely affecting the attainment of their basic needs; hence their violent uprising against the colonial administration. The study has the following hypothesis: The Meru played an important role in the Mau Mau struggle for Kenya's independence; the Ameru women played an important role to sustain the struggle; and Mau Mau movement had a significant and long lasting impact on the Ameru, as a community.

The methodology applied in the study comprised the use of secondary and primary sources, together with library research and field work. The data collected was analysed qualitatively. This approach was found to be more appropriate as it made it possible to use various historical sources collaboratively.

The following are the main findings of the study. The Ameru had their own grievances arising from the introduction of the oppressive colonial administration in their region. Right from the beginning the Ameru were suspicious of the white man's true intentions and they expressed their mistrust in several traditional songs. The white man's oppression included forceful alienation of part of Ameru land (Buuri area) for European settlement. Colonial administration also disrupted and negatively affected the Ameru traditional way of life and they had to fight against such oppression. The number of Ameru freedom fighters, including those in the senior ranks of Field Marshal, General, Brigadier, Major and Captain is a clear evidence of the Ameru's active participation in the struggle. There were other

fighters in the lower ranks as well. The various roles played by the Ameru women, both inside and outside the forest, was a crucial factor in sustaining the struggle for its entire duration.

The Ameru participated in both the Mau Mau movement (freedom fighters) and in colonial forces that fought against it (loyalists). Such participation affected the community's way of life politically, socially, culturally and economically. Some aspects of that impact were negative and others positive, depending on which side one supports. Deep-rooted bitterness and suspicion still exist between the ex-freedom fighters and the ex-loyalists.

Plagiarism

DISCLAIMER

During the State of Emergency, the researcher lived in Abothuguchi area and was schooling at Katheri Primary and Kaugu Intermediate schools, both of them Methodist Church –sponsored. Due to the prevailing disturbances in the whole area then, his schooling was disrupted for one year, 1955. Being a resident of the area, therefore, he witnessed some of the incidents narrated by the interviewees in this study, particularly those that took place in Katheri, Githongo and Kibirichia sublocations, as well as the neighbouring areas.

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MAPS

Map 1: Map of Kenya showing the 47 Counties

Map 2: The Ameru Region, comprising the two Counties of Meru and Tharaka-Nithi

Map 3: The Meru County, the focus of this study

MAP 1: MAP OF KENYA SHOWING THE 47 COUNTIES



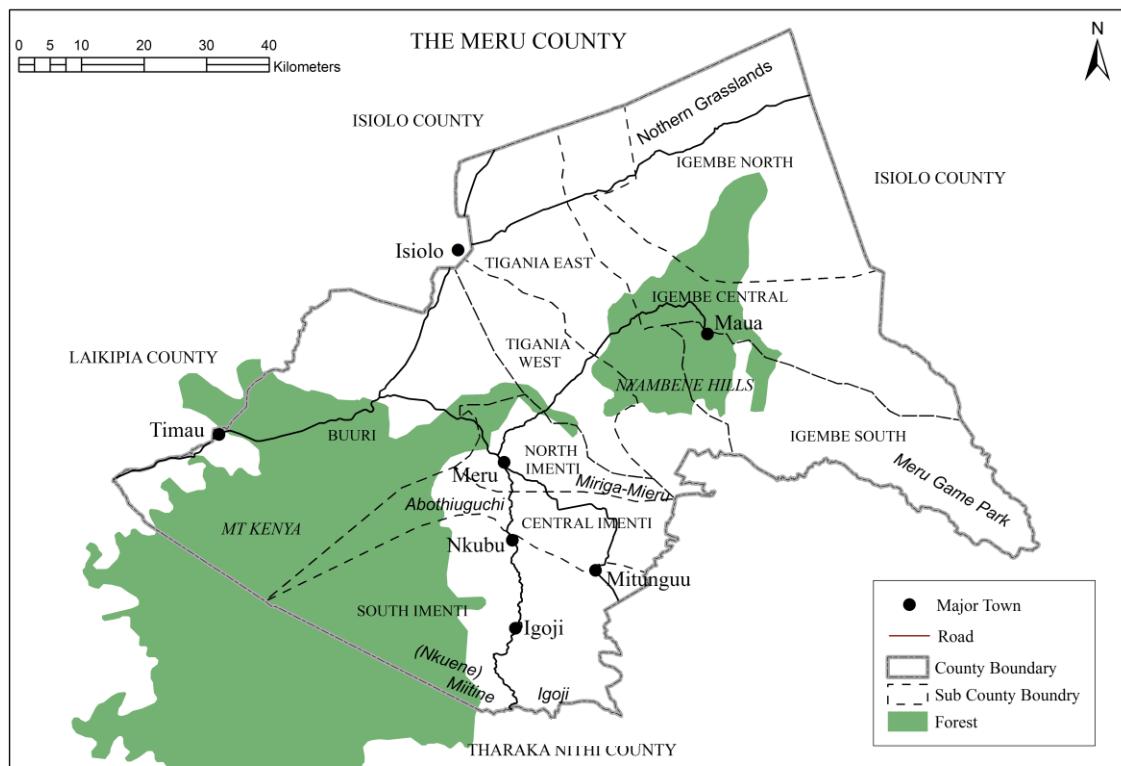
SOURCE : THE SURVEY OF KENYA (2011)

MAP 2: THE AMERU REGION, COMPRISING OF THE TWO COUNTIES OF MERU AND THARAKA-NITHI



SOURCE : MERU & THARAKA-NITHI COUNTIES DEVELOPMENT PROFILES

MAP 3: MERU COUNTY, THE FOCUS OF THIS STUDY



SOURCE : MERU COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PROFILE

CHAPTER ONE:

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Various Kenyan communities were opposed to the British colonial rule and therefore fought to over-throw it. They included the Agikuyu, Ameru, Aembu, Akamba, Maasai, Luo, Abaluhya and the Miji Kenda, among others. However the method, degree and extent to which each community was involved in the liberation struggle can only be established through a detailed research being conducted into the whole question of the liberation movement at various stages in Kenya during the colonial period. However, different communities responded to the colonial rule differently, depending on the prevailing local circumstances. In doing this, they borrowed from their traditional defence mechanism for survival and applied those tactics to fight the colonial ruler. For example, among the Agikuyu, Ameru and Aembu the practice of oath-taking and communication through songs were used to unify people and to convey coded messages among the members and supporters of the Mau Mau Movement.

The objective of this study was to find out the role of the Ameru in the Mau Mau struggle for Kenya's Independence. In particular, the study undertook to investigate the factors that influenced and sustained the Ameru's participation in Mau Mau, to examine the role of the Ameru women in the struggle and to assess the impact of the Mau Mau movement on the Ameru as a community.

1.2 Geographical Location

For the avoidance of ambiguity, the following terminology used in this study needs clarification. The term “**Ameru**” refers to **the Meru people**; “*Meru*” refers to the **land of the Ameru** and “*Kimeru*” refers to **the language of the Ameru**. The terms “*Ameru Region*” or “*Greater Meru*” are commonly used in reference to the two counties (Meru and Tharaka-Nithi) occupying the area on the north-eastern slopes of Mt. Kenya. It stretches from River Thuchi in the south and northwards into the drier grasslands up to Ntonyiri Hill. The indigenous inhabitants of that area are known as the Ameru. This study focuses on Meru County only. Its neighbouring counties are Tharaka-Nithi to the south, Kitui to the east, Isiolo to the north and Laikipia to the west. Traditionally Meru County is the home of the Igembe, Tigania, Imenti (North, Central and South), Igoji and Miitine sub-groups.

However, Igoji and Miitine are commonly grouped together within South Imenti. The Igembe and Tigania occupy the Nyambene Hills in the north while the larger Imenti occupy the central and southern parts on the slopes of Mt. Kenya.

Meru County is agriculturally rich with plenty of rainfall, a variety of cash crops (e.g. coffee, tea, pyrethrum, miraa) and dairy farming. It has many permanent rivers flowing eastwards from Mt. Kenya. It incorporates the thick Mt. Kenya and Nyambene Hills forests, expansive northern grazing areas stretching into Isiolo County and Meru Game Park to the north-east bordering Isiolo and Kitui Counties. The thick forests provided a convenient cover for the Mau Mau fighters during the struggle. Meru Town, locally known as “*Mutindwa jwa Kangangi*” is the County’s main commercial and administrative centre.

1.3 Historical Background of the Ameru Before and During Colonial Rule

Before the introduction of colonial rule, the Ameru traditional way of life was carefully structured and controlled by the powerful Njuri Ncheke council of elders. Njuri was the traditional system of governance for the entire Ameru community, with its headquarters at Nchiru in Tigania west. In Ameru culture, all major decisions were made through consensus at Nchiru and communicated to all parts of the greater Meru land through Njuri Ncheke elders¹.

Each section of the society had their specific role to play for the common good of the whole community. In summary, defence and security combined were the responsibility of the warriors, under the guidance of Njuri Ncheke and senior elders (*Aejani Kirira/Nkuagaya*). Women and girls were responsible for the domestic matters. Elders were responsible for all major matters affecting the whole community particularly settlement of disputes, protection of natural resources and sacred shrines, counselling and all matters relating to traditional religious ceremonies. Small boys were responsible for looking after domestic animals under the guidance of their grandfathers. There was the age-set system where everybody belonged to a particular age-group (*Nthuki*) and had to abide by its strict code of conduct. Governance was the responsibility of the two main age-groups (*Kiruka* and *Ntiba*)² between whom leadership alternated every 12-15 years when the handing-over ceremony (*Ntwiko*) which was conducted in public at an agreed venue

¹ Interview with Njuri Ncheke Elders

² Interview with Njuri Ncheke Elders

chosen by the elders. In addition to the age-set system, the community was structured along the family and clan lineages to which each individual belonged mainly by birth but sometimes by being “born” into a clan/family through performance of a special “goat ceremony”. After the ceremony, one became fully integrated into the clan and enjoyed equality rights with other clan members. Male members of the same clan refer to each other as “*Waba*”, “*Mutanoba*” or “*Mwanoba*” meaning “son of my father”. The last “*Ntwiko*” ceremony in Imenti took place in 1952 in Ntakira near Meru Town³.

Traditionally, the Ameru community was structured along the family, clan and age-set lines. Governance was vested in the powerful Njuri Ncheke council of elders which exercised authority over all aspects of the Ameru way of life. Leadership alternated between the two age-sets, *Kiruka* and *Ntiba*, regulated by the *Ntwiko* (handing over) ceremony held after every 12-15 years, depending on the prevailing circumstances such as war, famine or an epidemic. Men and women had their respective roles in society clearly spelt out. The military aspect was the responsibility of the warriors, under the wise counsel and guidance of the elders (*Akuru ba Kiama*).

The colonial Rule in Meru was firmly established during the period 1908 - 1918 under Edward Butler Horne, the first white District Commissioner for the region. He established Meru Town and made it his administrative headquarters in 1908, from where he effectively controlled the whole region. According to the Njuri Ncheke elders interviewed, the Ameru used the term “*Achunku*” to describe the Europeans or white people in general. The Arab traders who appeared in Meru land in the 1890s were referred to as “*Chomba ya Mwangia*” in reference to their Kamba guide known as Mwanzia. The Ameru were always suspicious of those “red strangers” appearing in their region. They referred to them as “*antu baria batune ja mwanki*” meaning (those people who are red like fire”.

The establishment of the colonial administration from 1908, followed by the introduction of Christianity and western education greatly affected the community’s traditional political, social, cultural and economic way of life. The Ameru participated in the first and second world wars 1914-1918 and 1939-1945, respectively. The colonial administration cleverly tried to control the Ameru through

³ Interview with Njuri Ncheke Elders

Njuri Ncheke, by appointing carefully selected prominent Njuri elders to the powerful positions of colonial chiefs. Such interference with the traditional system of governance, though welcomed mainly by the direct beneficiaries, was not received well by the rest of the community. Initially, there were instances of resistance mounted by the local people, though not in a well coordinated manner.

However, the existing dissatisfaction with the oppressive colonial administration, was fuelled by the active political radicalism introduced by the ex-soldiers during the post-second world war period (1945-52). Consequently, the radicalism and political awareness led to active participation by the Ameru in the Mau Mau movement and the armed struggle following the declaration of the State of Emergency in 1952.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

The written history of the Mau Mau struggle for Kenya's independence so far appears to be selective. Whereas a lot has been written about the Kikuyu, the Ameru as a community are the least covered despite their involvement and contribution to the struggle, right from the early years up to the attainment of independence in 1963. Apart from the rather casual mention of Ameru, as part of Kikuyu, these studies have tended to create a general impression that Mau Mau struggle was exclusively a Kikuyu affair.

1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The aims and objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the factors that influenced and sustained the Ameru's participation in the Mau Mau struggle for Kenya's independence.
2. To examine the role of the Ameru women in the struggle.
3. To assess the impact of the Mau Mau movement on the Meru community.

1.6 Hypothesis of the Study

This study has the following hypothesis:

1. The Ameru community played an important role in the Mau Mau struggle for Kenya's independence.
2. The Ameru women played an important role to sustain the struggle for independence.
3. The Mau Mau movement had a significant and long-lasting impact on the Ameru community.

1.7 Justification of the Study

The Kikuyu, Embu and Ameru communities were the main supporters of the Mau Mau movement which played a key role in the struggle for Kenya's independence. Yet, Meru's contribution appears to have been either deliberately down-played or conveniently ignored. From the little information available on the Ameru, there is hardly any mention of the role played by Ameru women in the Mau Mau struggle. Therefore, there is justification to investigate the factors that influenced the Meru into participating in Mau Mau, to examine the role of Ameru women in the struggle and to assess the impact of the Mau Mau movement on the Meru community.

1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study.

The greater Meru region is comprises of two counties: Meru and Tharaka-Nithi. Meru County comprises Igembe, Tigania, Imenti (North, Central and South) and Buuri sub-counties. Due to the time and financial limitations, this study has mainly focused on Meru County. However, where deemed appropriate references have been made to areas outside Meru County to illustrate the collaboration between the Ameru freedom fighters and the rest of the Mau Mau movement operating in those other areas.

The study has also focused mainly on the period 1945-1965. The year 1945 marked the end of the Second World War (1939-1945), and the beginning of intensified resistance to colonial rule leading to the declaration of the State of Emergency in 1952. The killing of Baimungi by Government forces in January 1965 effectively marked the end of armed Mau Mau restistance. It also demonstrated that President Kenyatta's KANU Government was firmly in control of the country's affairs.

Apart from time and financial challenges, the study has faced other limitations. Many of the individuals who actively participated in the Mau Mau movement, especially the ex-freedom fighters have since died. The few that are still surviving are now advanced in age and in poor health, while others are suffering from memory lapses and inconsistencies in their narratives. Some of them, particularly the ex-detainees, are still too traumatized to talk freely about Mau Mau or detention experience. Some of them, are still bound by the secrecy and fear of the consequences of the Mau Mau Oath that they took. They were therefore unwilling

to reveal some of the Mau Mau secrets, particularly those that they still considered critical for their own security and that of their families. Such secrets included the betrayal or involvement in the elimination of opponents or destruction of property which, if revealed, would invite revenge from the victims' families and relatives.

1.9 Literature Review

Many scholars have written on different aspects of the Mau Mau movement. The works reviewed are relevant to the study as they give useful insights into the Mau Mau in general, while some have focused on the role of women in Mau Mau as per the following examples:-

Margaret W. Gachihi, in her M.A. Thesis, “The Role of Kikuyu Women in the Mau Mau”, makes the following observations on the role of women in the Movement:

The activities of women were many and varied, but the most crucial ones were providing and transporting essential commodities particularly food, acting as couriers of information thereby creating a life-link between the fighters and the rest of the population and smuggling the vitally – needed arms from the suppliers, in both urban areas and the reserves, to freedom fighters in the forests. These activities formed the core of the Mau Mau operations and the success of the movement was dependent on them. Were it not for the women's resourcefulness and boldness the Mau Mau movement would certainly have not been as effective as it eventually proved to be. She continues to state that: “It was not the actual numbers of the women who went into the forest that is important as the nature of the work that they performed.⁴

Audrey Wipper, a pioneer in the field of scholarship on African women and development, is the author of “Kikuyu Women and the Harry Thuku Disturbances: Some Uniformities of Female Militancy”. She focuses on the collective activity of the African women in the “Harry Thuku Riots” in Kenya in 1922, which involved mass demonstrations, a clash with the authorities and the loss of lives. She poses this important question: “What did the women do, how and when did they do it?” She compares the example of the women's militancy in the “Harry Thuku Riots” with women's activities in the “Women's War in Nigeria (1929)” and the “Anlu Uprising in the British Cameroon (1958-1959)”. Wipper goes on to state that despite their formal subordination to men, in the cited incidents, women challenged not only the

⁴ Margaret W. Gachihi, “The Role of Kikuyu Women in the Mau Mau” M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi (1986)p 227.

male but also the colonial authority. This is not to imply that women in these societies wielded power or authority equal to that of men, but to show that given certain conditions, institutions and traditions, women did achieve strong political voice⁵. In Kenya, women did the same in the Mau Mau struggle for independence, where they played a key role to sustain it to the very end.

Cora Ann Presley is the author of “Kikuyu Women, the Mau Mau Rebellion and Social Change in Kenya”. In this article, Presley has quoted another author, Robert Buijenthuis in his work “Essays on Mau Mau: Contributions to Mau Mau Historiography” (1982). Buijenthuis has surveyed the state of scholarship on the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya from the 1950s to 1980s, and assessed the questions that researchers and participants in Mau Mau have so far addressed. Some of the fundamental questions explored are: What were the origins of the Mau Mau? What were its patterns of recruitment and definition of membership? A second level of questions attempts to portray the political, ideological and personal connections of Mau Mau to the nationalist associations in the pre-1948 period. Thirdly, the historiography has focused on the different phases of the Mau Mau rebellion. A fourth concern has been how the colonial state and the British government marshaled their forces to counter and defeat the Mau Mau.⁶ All these questions have helped to deepen our understanding of the multifaceted and secret nature of the Mau Mau Movement. Yet, there is a great deal more that we still do not know about the Mau Mau. This study will endeavour to investigate the role similarly played by the Meru women in the struggle.

Luise White is the author of “Separating the Men from the Boys: Constructions of Gender, Sexuality and Terrorism in Central Kenya: 1939-1959”. In this article, she discusses issues relating to gender, sexuality and terrorism (among other matters) in respect of the Mau Mau Movement. In one part of the article she states that “there is no narrative history of Mau Mau from 1952 to 1956, let alone one of the operations in the forest”⁷. However, she goes on to suggest a rather interesting chronology of events for that period which, in the researcher’s view,

⁵ Audrey Wipper. *Kikuyu Women and the Harry Thuku Disturbances: Some Uniformities of Female Militancy*. Africa Vol. 59 No.3, 1989.

⁶ Robert Buijenthuis. “Essays on Mau Mau: Contributions to Mau Mau Historiography” (1982).

⁷ Luise White, “Separating the Men from the Boys: Constructions of Gender, Sexuality and Terrorism in Central Kenya: 1939-1959.”

needs to be investigated. This study will attempt to do so, with regard to the role played by the Meru women during that period.

Tabitha Kanogo, in her book, “Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau”, examines the roles and images of women in the Mau Mau movement in Kenya. It hoped to depict the prevailing stereotypes of women and how men manipulated those stereotypes. It also hoped to depict the way in which women conformed to and, in some cases overcame, such stereotypes by creating new female images, and by adopting new roles during the struggle.⁸

In her article on “Kikuyu Women and the Politics of Protest: Mau Mau,” Kanogo observes that: “The bravery of the Mau Mau women, idealized and eulogized in the various Mau Mau songs, is a great inspiration to the village women and the struggling urban poor, especially among those Kikuyu who lived through the Mau Mau ordeal. On a general level, the extent of the ordinary woman’s entry into the traditionally male roles as heads of families, business women, political brokers and other roles are testimony to the landmark of the Mau Mau Women”⁹. This study will endeavour to examine the role of the Meru women in Mau Mau to find out any differences or similarities.

Terisa E. Turner is the author of “Nyabingi, Mau Mau and Rastafari: Gender and Internationalism in Twentieth Century Movements for a New Society”. In this article, Turner refers to the influence that Mau Mau had on the Rastafari movement of Jamaica. She goes on to add that the Kenyan women’s involvement in the Mau Mau revolt of the 1950s is an important heritage of the contemporary Rastafari. In support of the Mau Mau revolt, Mau Mau women living in the squatter villages on the European estates provided intelligence, runners, food, refuge, medical supplies and care. During crucial seasons, women refused to pick tea and coffee.¹⁰ On the part of women, this refusal was an effective weapon for fighting colonial oppression of the Africans.

Peter Kinyua Njiru, in his study, “Children and the Mau Mau: A Case Study of Kikuyu Division of Kiambu District:”, focused on the role and impact of the Mau

⁸ Tabitha Kanogo. “Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau” (1987) London: James Currey and Nairobi: Heinemann.

⁹ Tabitha Kanogo. “Kikuyu Women and the Politics of Protest: Mau Mau”-Reprinted with permission from MacMillan Publishers, Basingstoke, England.

¹⁰ Terisa E. Turner, “Nyabingi, Mau Mau and Rastafari: Gender and Internationalism in the 20th Century Movements for a New Society”.

Mau movement on the children during the stated period. He found that, like men and women, children also played a significant role in the Mau Mau movement. They served as combatants, suppliers of foodstuffs, materials, tobacco and other necessities to the designated places for the Mau Mau fighters. The children also spied, scouted and undertook various domestic duties, both in the forests and African reserves.¹¹

It can therefore be reasonably concluded that to facilitate the conducive background within which the children operated were women in their natural roles as grandmothers, mothers, sisters and aunties, played a very important role in the struggle. They also served as heads of the families in the absence of the men who had either joined the freedom fighters in the forests, got detained or even killed in the Mau Mau struggle.

In Ali A. Mazrui and Michael Tidy, “Nationalism and New States in Africa”, the section on “Mau Mau in Kenya”, Chapter 8 carries an article entitled, “The Armed Struggle: The 1940s and 1950s”. The article states as follows:

Kenya was the first African country to have a war of independence on a scale at all comparable to the original insurrection against the British Imperialism – the Revolt of the American Colonies. The final outcome (of the long suffering of the African people under the colonial oppression) was the revolt of the rural oppressed and the long years of the State of Emergency in the 1950s. Mau Mau in Kenya had the garb of traditionalism which was at times almost primeval. The nature of the Mau Mau oaths, administered as a way of commanding loyalty, indicated a profound traditionality in Kikuyu nationalism. The Kikuyu uprising had the reputation of being a radical, even a revolutionary movement.¹²

Tabitha Kanogo in her book, “Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi Wachiuri”, states as follows, regarding the role of women in Mau Mau:

Within a year of their entry into the forest, women sought to be equipped with guns. The matter was soon decided at the famous Mwathe Conference held in Nyandarua forest on 16 August 1953, where women would be included in the armed ranks of the movement and would become commissioned soldiers. This decision is regarded as a landmark in the reworking of gender relations in a manner that allowed women to participate jointly with men in decision making councils. As well as participating in

¹¹ Peter Kinyua Njiru. “*Children and the Mau Mau: A Case Study of Kikuyu Division of Kiambu District: 1952-1960*” (M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi, 2009).

¹² Ali A Mazrui and Michael Tidy, “*Nationalism and New States in Africa*”- East African Education Publishers Ltd. (1984) Chapter 8.

combat, some of the women undertook what would be considered as high profile tasks i.e. those of Mau Mau judges and executioners.¹³

Caroline Elkins captures the British brutality in its fight against the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya in her book “Britain’s Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya”. She highlights, among other brutalities meted out on the Africans, what happened inside Kenya’s detention camps, as well as the efforts by the colonial authorities to conceal the truth. As one reads the book, one begins to understand the full savagery involved in fighting the Mau Mau war of independence and the ruthless determination with which the British colonial power sought to save and control its Empire, which was once described as “the Empire where the sun never sets”.

Caroline Elkins further states as follows:

Mau Mau was portrayed as a barbaric, anti-European, and anti-Christian sect that had reverted to tactics of primitive terror to interrupt the British civilizing mission in Kenya.¹⁴

On reading the whole book, one gets the impression that it was only the Kikuyu that fought in Mau Mau. Surprisingly, in a book of 475 pages, there is only brief mention of “Meru” on pages 122, 123, 188, 263 and 273 without giving any details of the Ameru’s role in the struggle.

J.S.T Kamunchuluh, in his paper, “The Meru participation in Mau Mau”, has focused mainly on the activities of Mwariama as a young man and as the overall commander of the Mau Mau forces in the Nyambene Hills until 1963. He had also made interesting observations on the Meru involvement in Mau Mau. One of them is the role played by the Ameru young men who had interacted with fellow Kikuyu workers in the European settler farms and urban centres where they got politically radicalized. Upon their return home, their influence and active participation was a key factor in the introduction and spread of Mau Mau movement in Meru region. The paper was found useful for the purpose of this study.¹⁵

David Njagi, in his book, “The Last Mau Mau Field Marshals”, has focused mainly on Mwariama (from Meru) and Muthoni Kirima (from Nyeri). The author has

¹³ Tabitha Kanogo. “Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi Wachiuri”. East African Educational Publishers Ltd (1992, 2007).

¹⁴ Caroline Elkins, “Britain’s Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya” - Published by Pimlico (2005) in the United States and Great Britain- Quoted from first paragraph of the preface.

¹⁵ J.S.T Kamunchuluh, “The Meru Participation in Mau Mau; A Case Study of Ex-Field Marshal Mwariama” (Student Research Seminar, University of Nairobi, 22nd August, 1973)

highlighted the activities of Field Marshals Mwariama and Muthoni Kirima. The insights relating to Meru in particular were found useful for the purpose of this study.¹⁶

H.K Wachanga, in his book “The Swords of Kirinyaga: The Fight for Land and Freedom (1975), has highlighted the various important roles played by the Kikuyu women during the Mau Mau struggle. Key among them were the provision of essential supplies such as food, clothing, medicines, arms and ammunition, collected from the reserves and smuggled into the forest. Women were also involved in a well-organized Mau Mau intelligence network, particularly in the reserves and towns. Wachanga was the *General Secretary* of the Mau Mau Movement in the forests, reserves and towns. He was also *General Secretary* of the Mau Mau “*Kenya Parliament*” in the forest; hence the forest nick-name “*Colonial Secretary of the States*”.¹⁷ Being very close to the Movement’s top leadership, Wachanga was privy to and custodian of the Movement’s top secrets. Since the Meru community also participated in the struggle, it was important for the study to establish the role that Meru women played in it.

David Anderson, in his book “Histories of the Hanged: Britain’s Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire (2005)”, has commented on the “forced villagization programme”, introduced by the colonial administration in Kenya during the State of Emergency. He has observed that “the most punitive measure of all was villagization”, describing it as a “massive dislocation of the rural population in Kikuyuland”. He has further observed that, although “some villages were principally intended for the protection of the loyalists, most were little more than concentration camps to punish Mau Mau sympathizers ”¹⁸. Anderson’s observations are valid as they reflect the true picture of the situation in the “Emergency Villages” in Meru during the same period.

Daniel Branch, in his article “The Enemy Within: Loyalists and the War Against Mau Mau in Kenya”, quotes the case of Francis Gatheru, a loyalist:

¹⁶ David Njagi, “The Last Mau Mau Field Marshals –Kenya’s Freedom War 1952-1963 and Beyond (1993)”

¹⁷ H.K Wachanga, “The Swords of Kirinyaga–The Fight for Land and Freedom”(1975)pp xxii of 40-45)

¹⁸ David Anderson, “Histories of the Hanged-Britain’s Dirty War in Kenya and The End of Empire”. (2005) p.294.

“During the Emergency of 1952-1960, loyalists such as Gatheru supported the colonial military campaign against fellow Gikuyu, Embu and Meru amongst Mau Mau’s insurgents”¹⁹.

In Meru, such loyalists were locally referred to as “*Kaboorio*” and formed the bulk of the Home Guards. Those individuals were deeply hated by the villagers, especially the Mau Mau and their supporters. They were recruited mainly from among the more educated members of the community comprising teachers, chiefs, church leaders and government servants. They were effectively used by the colonial administration to oppress the villagers, particularly the Mau Mau, their families and suspected Mau Mau supporters.

Marina E. Santoru, in the article, “The Colonial Idea of Women and Direct Intervention: The Mau Mau Case” states as follows: “The participation of Kikuyu women in the Mau Mau movement has been the object of several works in the last decade”.²⁰

Maia Green, in the article, “Mau Mau Oathing Rituals and Political ideology in Kenya: A Re-analysis” states that:

The Mau Mau movement used a campaign of ritualized oath-taking to gain the support and cooperation of the Gikuyu masses. The oaths remain a continuing source of controversy in the literature on Mau Mau.²¹

This article was found relevant for the purpose of this study particularly with regard to oath-taking.

David W. Throup, in the article “The Origins of Mau Mau” states as follows:

The Second World War transformed the economic and political situation throughout Britain’s African colonies. This was particularly true in the settler colonies of East and Central Africa, where the economic depression of the 1930s had severely shaken the confidence of the local European community.²²

This helped to prepare the ground for the armed African uprising against the colonial administration, as demonstrated by the Mau Mau movement in Kenya in the 1950s. The article was found relevant for the purpose of this study.

On the whole, all the works reviewed as cited above offered valuable insights relevant to the areas covered by this study.

¹⁹ Daniel Branch, “The Journal of African History, Vol. 48 No. 2 (2007) pp 291-315”.

²⁰ Marina E. Santoru, “African Affairs, vol. 95, No. 379 (April 1996) pp 253-267”

²¹ Maia Green “Journal of International African Institute , vol.60, No.1 (1990), pp. 69-87”

²² David W. Throup “African Affairs, Vol.84, No.336 (July 1985) pp.399-433”.

1.10 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Abraham Maslow's "*Human Basic Needs Theory*"²³. Maslow, in his major works "Motivation and Psychotherapy", refers to the two categories of human basic needs, namely, the "deficiency needs" and "growth needs". He argues that an individual acts upon growth needs if and only when deficiency needs are met. Within the deficiency needs, each lower need must be met before moving to the next higher level. Once basic needs are met, the individual reaches self-actualization through growth. If the individual's efforts to satisfy these basic needs are frustrated he becomes violent, which may lead to a conflict. This is what happened in the case of the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya in the 1950s against the colonial administration when the African efforts to satisfy their basic needs were continuously frustrated by the colonial authorities.

Maslow's theory was found both useful and relevant in analyzing the participation of the Meru community (both men and women) in the Mau Mau struggle. Their bravery, resilience, ingenuity and commitment to the Mau Mau cause contributed significantly to the success of the struggle. Colonization impoverished the Africans and adversely affected their advancement through land alienation, squatter settlement like the Olenguruone Settlement Scheme, creation of labour reservoirs in the African reserves for European settler farms, villagization programme, detention and imprisonment. All these harsh measures cut Africans off from the means to satisfy their basic needs; hence the conflict. Faced with all these challenges, African women and children had to fight for their survival by joining hands with and fully supporting the men in the Mau Mau movement.

1.11 Research Methodology

Both secondary and primary sources, together with library research and field work, were used in this study. Secondary sources including books, academic articles from journals and periodicals on Mau Mau were used in the initial stages in order to obtain more information about the movement in general and the topic of study in particular. Of particular interest were references to the Ameru which formed the basis and gave useful leads into further research to establish the community's role in

²³ W. Huitt, "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs", [hyp://Chiron.
Voldesta.edu/whuitt/col/regsys/maslow.html](http://Chiron.Voldesta.edu/whuitt/col/regsys/maslow.html)

the movement. The main focus was on the factors that influenced the community into participating in the Mau Mau struggle, the role of the Ameru women in it and the impact of the Mau Mau movement on the Meru community. Primary sources used included archival material obtained from Kenya National Archives, University of Nairobi Library, Kenya National Library Services, National Museums of Kenya, the Standard and Daily Nation publications, Church records, (mainly from the Methodist and Independent Churches in Meru) and private records availed by individuals.

Several factors were put into consideration in the identification of respondents. They included geographical distribution, gender, level of education, age and most important, knowledge about the Mau Mau struggle. Accordingly, respondents were selected from all the sub-counties of Meru County. They included both men and women, even those with a moderate level of education, provided that they were knowledgeable about the Mau Mau Movement in the region. Age was another important factor, as those aged over 60 years were more knowledgeable about what happened during the State of Emergency in Kenya. Njuri Ncheke elders, being more knowledgeable by virtue of their senior position in the Ameru society traditionally, provided very valuable insights into what took place then both within the Mau Mau and Government forces. They were interviewed both individually and also in small discussion groups, where they discussed some of the more sensitive issues freely as elders belonging to the “same group” and in accordance with the Ameru traditional norms.

Oral interviews were also used with a view to obtaining as much as possible first-hand accounts of events as they occurred. In an effort to get a more balanced view on the Mau Mau movement, interviewees were sampled from among those who actually fought in the forest, those who actively supported Mau Mau but not directly involved in the actual fight in the forest and those who supported the colonial administration. Family members, relatives, close associates of the deceased fighters and individuals known to be generally knowledgeable about Mau Mau movement were also interviewed. However, the main challenge was that some of the respondents were reluctant to reveal some secrets, stating that they were still bound by the Mau Mau oath of secrecy. They expressed concern over their own safety and that of their families if they revealed any of the secrets.

Respondents were used to identify other potential interviewees for the study. The method proved very useful as the recommended individuals provided a lot of additional information and insights that corroborated some of the information already obtained. However, a few gave different perspectives to some of the events already narrated. Respondents had the liberty to choose the venue most convenient to them for the interview. A few chose their homes but the majority preferred other places especially Meru and Nanyuki towns as well as other urban centres depending on the distance from their homes and personal convenience. The questionnaire was used as the key guide for the interviews but valuable additional information was also obtained through informal conversations with interviewees.

Relevant issues arising from the insights given by the respondents in the course of the interview were explored. Such leads provided further valuable information that enriched the study. However, confidentiality regarding the source of certain sensitive information was respected especially where specifically requested by the respondents for personal reasons.

The data collected was analysed qualitatively. This approach was found to be more appropriate as it made it possible to use various historical sources collaboratively, in order to present a more balanced view of the Meru people's participation in the Mau Mau movement and its impact on the community.

CHAPTER TWO.

2.0 - THE AMERU UNDER COLONIAL RULE (1908-1945) :

2.1 - Introduction

This chapter discusses the forces of change that were introduced in Meru under the colonial rule. The main forces were Christianity, western education and the recruitment of the young Ameru warriors to participate in the two major world wars (1914-1918) and (1939-1945) respectively. These forces greatly affected the Ameru traditional way of life politically, socially, culturally and economically. They also created political awareness which resulted in the African resistance to colonial rule which intensified during the post-war period (1945-1952) leading to the declaration of the State of Emergency in 1952. Immediately before and soon after the declaration, incidents of unprecedented violence involving murder, destruction of property and mysterious disappearances of people were reported in some parts of Meru. This happened particularly in Upper Abothuguchi area of Central Imenti, bordering Mt. Kenya forest and in the European settler farms in Buuri (Timau and Nanyuki areas).

2.2 Establishment of Colonial Rule in Meru (1908-1918)

Establishment of the British colonial administration in Meru began with the arrival of Edward Butler Horne in 1908. Horne became the first colonial District Commissioner for Meru, at the age of 26 years. According to the informants, various stories were told about him by the local people, as they found him to be a rather strange person. Due to his small body size and queer habit of wandering through the villages riding on a white horse to enforce his authority, the local people nicknamed him “*Kangangi*” (The Little Wanderer)²⁴

Horne established Meru Town (*Mutindwa jwa Kangangi*) as his administration headquarters from where he effectively ruled Meru for three periods: 1908-1909; 1911-1912 and 1915-1918, becoming the longest serving colonial administrator for the region. Whenever local people were summoned to Meru Town they spent the whole day (*Gutinda*) and referred to the place as (*Mutindwa*) hence the name “*Mutindwa jwa Kangangi*” meaning Kangangi’s Town²⁵.

²⁴ Jeffrey A. Fadiman, “When We Began, There Were Witchmen: An Oral History from Mt. Kenya”(1993)p.136

²⁵ Jeffrey A. Fadiman , “When We Began”p.136

From 1908 onwards, Kangangi consolidated his authority by directly appointing chiefs to represent various geographical areas of the greater Meru region.

In 1910, Meru region was officially designated as a district and officially named “Meru District”. It became the only district where colonial administration ruled in collaboration with an indigenous institution, the Njuri Ncheke. However, since the area proved too large to be administered effectively from Meru Town. For the purpose of prompt and effective administrative action on incidents reported at Chuka, Embu was nearer to Chuka than Meru Town. It was arranged that Chuka Division be administered from Embu as part of embu district. However, that arrangement continued until June 1933 when the area reverted back to the Meru Town administrative jurisdiction.

While some people were not particularly happy with Kangangi because of his high-handed administrative style and the destruction of the traditional socio-cultural structures, he is positively remembered for the construction of roads in Meru. He managed to establish a wide road net-work linking the various parts of the district, thus laying the foundation for faster development of the region. The network comprised the following strategic roads: Meru Town to Embu through Nkubu, Igoji and Chuka; Meru Town to Maua through Kianjai, Muthaara and Kangeta; Kangeta to Mutuati; Maua through Maili Tat to Laare; Meru Town to Nanyuki, through Ngare Ndare and Timau; Meru Town to Kiirua, Kibirichia, Kithima to Timau and Nanyuki; and Meru Town through Mikinduri, Kiguchwa to Maua²⁶.

From 1919—May 1934 Kangangi served as Provincial Commissioner for the then Central Province comprising Kikuyuland ,Meru and Embu with its headquarters at Nyeri. He died in London in March 1947, aged 65 years²⁷. His legacy is still remembered in Meru in connection with the establishment of Meru Town in 1908 as his administrative headquarters. Today Meru Town is the commercial and administrative headquarters for Meru County and is locally still referred to as “*Mutindwa jwa Kangangi*” (Kangangi’s Town). He is also remembered in connection with the establishment of the initial road network in Meru region still referred to as “*Njira cia Kangangi*” (Kangangi’s Roads). It is also said that he was able to communicate in the Kimeru language.

²⁶ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke elders at Three Steers Hotel. in Meru Town

²⁷ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke elders at Three Steers Hotel. in Meru Town

Two Njuri Ncheke elders were interviewed and they recalled the following two special songs, which were specially composed by the local people in appreciation of Kangangi's road network.

<i>Kimeru</i>	Translation:
<i>Rwimbo 1:</i>	Song1:
"U-u-u- Munyooro-o	"Kangangi's road network
<i>Njira ya Kangangi-i,</i>	has extended widely,
<i>Munyooro-Okwijiira Buuri,</i>	Passing through our traditional grazing
<i>I-i-i-ya-a-i-i"</i> ²⁸ .	area <i>Buuri</i> ".
<i>Rwimbo 2:</i>	Song 2:
"Ndaugaga ndaara nja, <i>Kangangi areeja,</i>	"I was intending to spend the night at home quietly but Kangangi came with vehicles speaking like human beings and disturbed my peace. Ruungu Mwija, take due note of this matter".
<i>Areeja na ngaari,</i>	
<i>Chiaragia ja antu,</i>	
<i>U-u-u Ruungu-u-Mwija</i> ²⁹ ".	

2.3 Arrival of the Missionaries, Spread of Christianity and Western Education

2.3.1. Work of the Early Missionaries

The introduction and spread of Christianity in the greater Meru region was due to the work of the early missionaries from the Methodist, Catholic and Presbyterian Churches, with the support of the pioneer African convertees to Christianity (*Atemi ba Njira*). The colonial administration, particularly under Kangangi, played a key role in the process, especially in the initial stages.

Modern Christian work in Kenya began at the Coast in 1862 and the earliest missionary society was the Church Missionary Society (CMS) a Church of England society that was founded in 1799 in England³⁰. The first Christian missionary group to enter Meru was that of the British United Methodist Mission, later known as the United Methodist Church. They brought fifty years of East African experience to the

²⁸ Interview with Njuri Ncheke elders Gitije M'Ikiao and M'Imathiu M'Rintari 12.11.2013

²⁹ Interview with Njuri Ncheke elders Gitije M'Ikiao and M'Imathiu M'Rintari on 13.11.2013

³⁰ Zablon J. Nthamburi, "A History of the methodist Church in Kenya" (1982) p.13

venture, having initially entered the area in 1862. In that year, Charles New established a mission on Kenya's Swahili coast.³¹

Some of the accounts by early missionaries on their impressions about the Meru people make interesting reading as will be noted from the following two examples. Referring to the opening of the Meru region to Protestant Christianity in 1913, one missionary wrote:

"No tribe in Kenya is more deeply steeped in witchcraft than the Ameru. Witchcraft is their religion and the Wizard their high priest".³² Further, Rev. J.B Griffiths, one of the first two white missionaries of the United Methodist Church to visit Meru in 1910 (accompanied by Basset) and again in 1912 (accompanied by Mimmack), having served in the Coast Province since 1894, wrote as follows about the Meru people:

The women are decently dressed in skins which are often ornamented with cowrie shells and beads, but the men go about in a state of nudity. Physically, the people are more akin to the Maasai than the Bantu, but their language belongs to the Bantu family.³³

Basically, the approach to the missionary work in Meru was three-pronged, namely: the spread of Christianity, construction of schools for the spread of western education, and the establishment of hospitals and health centres for the enhancement of health care in the community.

2.3.2 The Methodist Church

The United Methodist Mission (The Methodists) with a half century of experience in Mission work at the Kenyan coast among the Pokomo people since 1862) reached Meru in 1910. With the active support of the District Commissioner "Kangangi", the Methodists established their mission at Kaaga, not far from Kangangi's headquarters in Meru Town. In the Kimeru language, "Ka-agá," means "a place where the traditional medicine men lived" and which was traditionally believed to be inhabited by the spirits. Unknown to both to *Kangangi* and the White Missionaries, the local people agreed to allocate this land to them believing that the strangers (Missionaries) would be frightened by the spirits and one day they would

³¹ Jeffrey A. Fadiman "When We Began, There Were Witchmen- An Oral History from Mt. Kenya" (1993) p.205

³² A.J. Hopkins, "Trail Blazers and Road Makers" p. 100

³³ Bertha Jones, "Kaaga Girls" (1985)

eventually go away and return to where they came from. The report by the Missionaries at that time on the issue states as follows:

Our premises are on a five-acre plot acquired from the Government and in a thickly-populated district. Our journey from the coast and back to Nairobi, the erection of temporary buildings and the clearing of a compensation for five acres of land cost less than £50" (about Kshs.1000).³⁴

In 1913, the Methodist Missionaries opened the first school and a wood workshop at Kaaga, thus marking the beginning of formal education for the Meru people. It is important to point out that today Kaaga is a nerve centre for education in Meru, incorporating various institutions, including the Kenya Methodists University (KeMU) one of the private universities in Kenya. Bishop Dr. Lawi Imathiu, a product of Kaaga, is one of the pioneer African ministers in the Methodist Church and was ordained in 1957. He later became a Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church in Kenya, a Nominated Member of Kenya's Parliament and the President of the World Methodist Council, among other senior positions that he has held. Dr. Imathiu is also a pioneer founder member and key player in the establishment of KeMU³⁵.

2.3.3 The Pioneer African Converts into Methodism.

In the Kimeru culture, a visitor is welcome and accorded due hospitality within the means of the host family. This is in line with the traditional belief that “*Mugen ni ruuji neka rukurukite*”. This means that “a visitor is like water in a river, it is just passing by”. The Ameru did not regard a visitor as somebody coming to settle on their land permanently. Accordingly, Ameru welcomed “the missionaries” as their temporarily guests and therefore did not feel constrained to give up their religious practices. For the traditional Meru society, the whole of existence was a religious phenomenon; a religion that emphasized the profane from the sacred did not appeal to them.³⁶ Traditionally the ameru believed in one Supreme Being (*Murungu kana Kinii Kiiru*) the Creator of heaven and earth and everything therein (*Mumbi wa Iguri na Nthi na into on the biria biri ku*). (*Kinii Kiiru atiuragua biuria kinya ni antu ba nthu kana ba nkurii*) which means that Murungu is the one whose authority is never questioned, not even by people of unsound mind. He alone

³⁴ Bertha Jones, “Kaaga Girls” (1985)

³⁵ Interview with Bishop Imathiu at his home, Thiiri Centre,near KeMU University in Meru Town

³⁶ A group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Njuri Ncheke Shrine,Nchiru

gave life, blessings and administered punishments to the wrong doers. Being the father of our fore-fathers (*Ithe wa Bajuuju betu*) he communicated with his people through his own chosen messengers (*Iroria*). His holy residence known as (*Kiuruko kia Murungu*) was believed to be on top of Mt. Kenya and Nyambene Hills. Before embarking on any serious mission Mau Mau freedom fighters always sought through prayer (*kuthaayia Murungu*) God's guidance. Upon successful accomplishment of their mission, they offered another prayer of thanks giving. Each time, they prayed facing Mt. Kenya or Nyambene Hills, depending on where they were operating from at that particular time. This strong belief in their traditional God was captured in the following song: "*Kinya nkarogwa ntikua,nduo-Ngai na Murungu;Murungu wa Kirimaara, Kiegombe na Nyambene*" meaning that , "Even if I am poisoned I will not die; I am protected by the God of Mt. Kenya Kiegombe and Nyambene Hills". The missionaries brought a new approach to the "traditional supernatural being" which was quite different and to some degree opposed to the Ameru understanding of their *Murungu*. The Ameru traditional authorities (*Njuri Ncheke*) "felt that their religion, which knit all people together, was being eroded"³⁷.

The new converts to the white man's religion (Christianity) "had to wear different European-type clothing and emulate the missionary in every possible way"³⁸ Among the pioneer African converts into Methodism and also Church Ministers were the following individuals commonly known as "*Atemi ba Njira*"(pioneers). Some of them played prominent roles in the colonial administration. They were: Philip M'Inoti, Samson Mutiga, Cornelius (*Korineliu*) M'Mukiira, Hezekiah M'Mukiri, Andrew M'Mwereria, Paul M'Ituoki, Isaac M'Ithiri, Nahashon M'Ibiiri, Naaman M'Mwirichia, Gerrishon M'Imanyara (Manyara wa Kirigu), Ibrahimu M'Murungi wa Kabuutu (Kabwi) and Wilson M'Rithara wa M'Mboroki. M'Murungi wa kabuutu was well-known among his age-mates for his firm discipline hence the saying which was popularized in the following song. "*gukaba uthaka ja mpaara,ja M'Murungi wa Kabuutu kana Kanyiru wa Kanyonga*"³⁹

Most of these people belonged to the *Nkonge* and *Kiruuja* age-groups. Age-wise, *Nkonge* was a sub-age group between *Miriti* (*Kaaria/Mwebia*) and *Kiruuja*

³⁷Zablon J. Nthamburi, "A History of the Methodist church in Kenya"(1982) p62.

³⁸Zablon J. Nthamburi - p63.

³⁹Group discussion with *Njuri Ncheke* Elders.

age-groups, but was officially recognized as part of *Miriti* age-group. *Kiruuja* (also known as *Murugu*, *Kaburu* or *Rukuya*) is well-known for being the first age-group in Meru to have accepted Christianity and western civilization generally. They embraced the western way of life including adoption of Anglicized names such as *Andrew, Wilson, Johnson, Stanley, Jackson and Livingstone* (for men), and *Janet, Priscilla, Joane, Mary, Anne, Beatrice and Catherine* (for women). Those with traditionally elongated ear-lobes had them medically cut and sewn, hence the nickname “*Nkunja-matu*”, meaning “those with folded ears”. They were too inquisitive and their manner of holding discussions in a question-answer style also earned their daughters a nick-name “*Ba Cio-Kiuria*”, meaning “Daughters of those who always ask too many questions about everything”. They were considered to be too inquisitive about everything new introduced to them⁴⁰.

Traditionally, the Meru people did not bury their dead. Instead, the dead bodies (*ntungu*) were taken out of the homestead to an isolated spot in the bush along the known animal route for the hyenas to eat. Sometimes, a sheep or goat was killed and left near the body to attract the hyenas. Dead bodies of those without sons to bury them were buried by the traditional undertakers (*Eenji* -plural; *Mwenji* – singular). In complete defiance of this body-disposal tradition, and to the great surprise of many people, Wilson M’Rithara wa M’Mboroki from Katheri became the first person to bury the dead (his own child) in 1938, in accordance with the Christian burial rites in the whole of Abothuguchi location, Central Imenti.⁴¹ Those who had converted to Christianity were also known as “*Athomi*” (the educated or learned ones). Their female counter-parts who pioneered education in Meru were educated at Kaaga Girls Mission School, which was known as “*Mambere*” meaning (advancement through western education). They were accordingly referred to as “*Airitu-a-Mambere*” or “*Aari-ba-Mambere*”.

Initially, there was strong opposition to the girls’ education in the early 1920s at Kaaga, as remembered and recorded by Rev. Korinilio M’Mukiira from Katheri, one of the pioneer Methodist Church African ministers who was ordained in 1939. He states as follows:

⁴⁰ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders.

⁴¹ Wilson M’Rithara wa M’Mboroki was the researcher’s name-sake (Ntaagu)

Parents expected to be paid for sending their daughters to school and at that time, the elders said that if a girl was educated she would be unfit to be a wife. So Miss Taylor (*one of the two women missionary members of staff at Kaaga in 1922*) was left with one pupil only (*out of the initial 12 girls*). The girl's father came and told Miss Taylor to **take away the education his daughter had received**. Miss Taylor wrote on the black-board A,B,C,D. She called the girl and said to her, "**Say A is not A, say B is not B, say C is not C, and D is not D**". (*The girl politely complied*). When the father saw his daughter denying what she had been taught, he took her and off they went.⁴²

Regretfully, the Foreign Missions Committee of the United Methodist Church which met at Bristol (UK) in 1923 recorded as follows: "It has been decided that the women's work in Meru under special women missionaries must be discontinued".⁴³ However, the work continued though under many challenges during the initial period, as the number of girls seeking education continued to grow. The above examples are cited to highlight the clash of cultures in Meru between the well-established African culture on one hand and the newly introduced alien culture brought through Christianity and western education on the other. This was further reflected in the Mau Mau struggle where the freedom fighters supported the traditional way of life including female circumcision.

Philip M'Inoti (*Kinyiinga*) was ordained the first Methodist Church African Minister in 1934 and became a great influence in the expansion of the Methodist Church and education in general through his translation of parts of the Bible into Kimeru language and also other important topics covering other aspects of the Ameru culture. In 1948, he was appointed the Chief of Miiriga-Mieru Location and died in 1952 in a tragic road accident at Tuuntu in Meru Town. He was also a very influential personality in the Njuri Ncheke Council of Elders and was referred to as "*Ngiiri Kinyinga*" in the traditional dances. The term "*Ngiiri*" or "*Baiiri*" was a traditional title of high respect by which elders of the *Kiruka* age-group, to which Kinyiinga belonged, were addressed. Their daughters were addressed as *Cio-Baiiri*. At the same time their counter-parts, the *Ntiba* age-group elders, were addressed as *Baine*" or "*Bagine*". Their daughters were accordingly addressed as *Cio-Baine*. Naaman M'Mwirichia, another pioneer convert, succeeded him as Chief and was eventually appointed Paramount Chief for Miiriga-Mieru Location and also served for a long time as Chairman of *Njuri Ncheke* Council of Ameru Elders until his

⁴² Bertha Jones, "Kaaga Girls" (1985)p. 5

⁴³ Bertha Jones

death in 2002⁴⁴. Appointment of influential colonial chiefs to Njuri Ncheke chairmanship was a clever colonial strategy to influence important Njuri Ncheke decisions in favour of the colonial administration.

Inorder to get a balanced view on this matter it was felt important to seek comments from those that served from colonial administration. The researcher interviewed Paramount Chief Moses Marete, to seek his views on the role of the colonial chiefs who were also Njuri members. The Chief admitted that indeed those were very difficult days for the individual chiefs concerned. They fought a hard battle between their conscience as Africans sympathetic to the Mau Mau cause and the consequences of being accused of disloyalty to their master, the colonial administration. Some of the chiefs even preferred not to discuss the Mau Mau issue altogether, philosophically advising that “*ugokaukia nkoma imaami*” meaning that “it is advisable not to disturb the sleeping devils”⁴⁵.

2.3.4. The Catholic Church.

The Catholics showed interest in the Meru region in the early years of the 20th century. In 1910, Consolata Mission Fathers (J. Berlagia and T. Gays) were sent by Bishop Perlo, (the first Bishop of Nyeri) to Meru to explore the area. Privately, Kangangi objected to the presence of the Italians in Meru, preferring that his personal colony be restricted to the British influence only.

In 1913, the Catholics moved to Muujwa in Central Imenti and established a mission there and another one in Igoji in South Imenti. The Catholic Church, through the work of the Consolata Fathers, eventually spread out its work by establishing missions in other parts of Meru. For example, the Church’s presence was felt in Tigania (Athwana) and Igembe (Amung’enti) through the pioneering work of Father Aimo Boot and Father A. Russo. It is believed that Catholic Missions were easily accepted in those areas mainly for security reasons. There was a growing desire on the part of the local people to befriend the White man who would in turn provide them with adequate security against external aggression.

In March 1926, Meru was split from the giant Catholic Diocese of Nyeri and made an Apostolic Prefecture, under the Nyeri Prefects, up to the outbreak of the

⁴⁴ Discussion with a group of Njuri Ncheke elders at the Nchiru Shrine on 14.11.2014

⁴⁵ Interview with Paramount Chief Moses Marete, Secretary General and Senior Advisor, in Meru Town on 15.11.2014

Second World War in 1939. However after the War, it was placed under the Meru Resident Apostolic Vicar –General. In May 1953, the Meru Prefecture was elevated to the status of the Diocese of Meru and placed under the first Resident Bishop Rt. Rev Lawrence Victor Bessone of the Consolata Fathers of Turin, Italy. The Diocese of Meru covered Meru, Embu, Wajir, Garissa and Mandera Districts⁴⁶.

2.3.5. The Presbyterian Church

The Church of Scotland Mission (CSM), which later became the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) entered Meru region in 1913. Embu was under Anglican Church influence. The spread of PCEA Church into Meru was through the work of the pioneer missionaries Rev. Dr. Arthur and William Tait, from Tumutumu Church of Scotland Mission in Nyeri, who entered Chuka from Embu in October 1913. The two identified Chuka and Mwimbi as being suitable areas for their mission work, with the support of Kikuyu converts who eventually became pioneer preachers with the Presbyterian Church mission in Meru. Despite initial challenges in the following years, particularly during the First World War (1914-1918), work picked up well in the early 1920s.

Dr. Clive Irvine (whose work was a combination of religious, educational, medical and industrial activities) turned Chogoria in Tharaka-Nithi County into a well-established base for the Presbyterian Church activities in the region. The influence of the PCEA Church spread from Chogoria northwards and reached South Imenti in Meru County.

According to J.A Fadiman, the first African Christian converts to appear in Meru region were Kikuyu, having been baptized in their own home region. They were sent to Meru to assist the early white missionaries to preach the new religion during the first years following the British conquest.⁴⁷ The Kikuyu presence and influence became an important factor in facilitating Ameru's participation in Mau Mau in later years.

As already pointed out the PCEA Church influence in Meru County was limited to South Imenti. Dr. Clive Irvine was a very powerful person and his influence touched all aspects of the PCEA Church. He did not initially approve of Christians or his teachers and evangelists joining Njuri Ncheke. To him, Njuri Ncheke was “a

⁴⁶ Discussion with Catholic Church elders knowledgeable about the Church history

⁴⁷ Jeffrey A. Fadiman, “When We Began, There Were Witchmen –An Oral History from Mount Kenya” (1993) p.229

secret society which was essentially pagan and which possessed traditions of cruelty, murder and intrigue”⁴⁸. However, at one time Dr. Irvine sought the support of Njuri Ncheke and the Local Native Council Members, especially the Christians among them, to help him cripple the independent schools that were posing a threat to the CSM schools in his area of jurisdiction.

2.4 Establishment of the Meru Local Native Council.

Among the various measures introduced by the colonial administration with far reaching effects on the governance of the local peoples was the establishment of the local native councils. In 1924 the Local Native Council Ordinance was passed, leading to the establishment of Meru Local Native Council (MLNC) in 1925. On 22.11.1935 MLNC approved the establishment of the first African markets with the aim of encouraging expansion of commercial activities among the local inhabitants of the region. These markets were established at Meru Town, Nkubu, Igoji, Kanyakine, Kaongo(in Imenti area) and Kianjai,Mikinduri,Maua and Laare (in Nyambene area). Consequently, the sale of African food stuffs was forbidden outside the approved markets.⁴⁹ The growth of extra food crops for consumption or exchange with livestock, and the use of the Kangangi road network in the region encouraged commercial activities that were more beneficial to the local people beyond the level that they were traditionally used to.

2.5 The Ameru’s Participation in the First and Second World Wars.

The Ameru elders recall the First World War (1914-1918) and refer to it as “*Ndwaa ya Njirimani*” (The War against the Germans). The *Miriti* age-group, who were warriors then, were recruited by the colonial administration to serve in the British East African Campaign during the First World War (1914- 1918). They were posted to serve with the British forces in the former German East Africa (Tanganyika), the present-day Tanzania. African soldiers drawn from among the tribes in Kenya and Uganda served as porters in the Carrier Corp. Many of the carrier corp soldiers were drawn from the Mt. Kenya highlands.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Mary C. Mwiandi, “The Role of African Evangelists and Teachers in the Development of Western Education and Christianity in Nithi Division of Meru District of Kenya: 1907-1960” –MA Thesis, University of Nairobi (1993) p.213.

⁴⁹ Meru Local Native Council Minutes dated 22.11.1935.

⁵⁰ Jeffrey A. Fadiman, “When We Began, There Were Witchmen-An Oral History from Mount Kenya” (1993)

After the war, the ex-soldiers returned home with many new ideas acquired during their exposure and interaction with different peoples in foreign lands. They adopted two new names for their age-group. They referred to themselves as “*Kaaria*”, the Kimeru version of the English word “Carrier”. The name “*Carrier Corp*” was also corrupted into “*Kariokor*” as we know it today, in reference to “*Kariokor Markets*” both in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam. The age-group also adopted another name for themselves – “*Mwebia*”. This Kimeru word describes the graceful movement (*kweba*) of a feather on a soldier’s cap when marching. The ex-soldiers used to proudly display their military uniform, complete with the feathered cap, during traditional dances and other social/public occasions as evidence of their bravery having fought in the Great War alongside the Whiteman. The word “*Mwebia*” in this regard means one who wears something that is moving, or causes something to move, gracefully in the wind; hence the usage of the names “*Kaaria*” and “*Mwebia*” in reference to the same “*Miriti*” age-group⁵¹.

The ex-soldiers’ foreign exposure influenced the traditional socio-cultural practices in another radical way. Their military heavy coats and thick blankets which they brought back with them from the Army were highly admired. They elevated the owner to a higher social status. Consequently, the two items were added to the list of the traditional bride price (*Ruraacio* for the father and *Nteguri* for the mother). The heavy military coat (*Kabuti*) was given to the bride’s father and the blanket (*Muringiti*) to the mother, respectively, in addition to the standard Meru bride price of “*Ng’ombe Ithaano*” (five cows). This was the standard bride price in the Imenti region of Meru⁵².

Having fought alongside the White man and observed his strengths and weaknesses, the ex-soldiers no longer regarded the White man with great awe and admiration as was the case before the war. The ex-soldiers had become radicalized in their thinking about the White man and his assumed superiority. This radicalism was expressed by the ex-soldiers in a special song specially composed to ridicule the White man.

⁵¹ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Three Steers, Meru Town

⁵² Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Three Steers, Meru Town

The following song was recalled by a Njuri Ncheke elder, Zakaria M'Mwereria during the interview with the researcher with the researcher at the Njuri Ncheke Shrine, at Nchiru, on 15.11.2014.

The special message in this warriors' song was addressed to the Council of Elders (*Kiama*) to debunk the white man's assumed superiority and invincibility:

Kimeru:

"U-u-Kiama, Uchunku ti Ngai,
Turakuamiira
Na ndirica ya nthi"⁵³.

Translation:

"Elders, we have scrutinized
through the underground window
and confirmed that the White man
is not a God".

The song gave Ameru, particularly the radicalized youth led by the ex-soldiers, the courage to challenge the colonial authority through the Mau Mau Movement.

In Meru the older generation also recalls the Second World War (1939-1945) and refers to it as "Ndwaa ya Taliani" (The War against the Italians). The majority of the young Meru men recruited to fight on the side of the British forces the Kings African Rifles (KAR) during the Second World War were of the *Mbaya* (*Kibaya*) age-group. They were joined by the *Gichuru* age-group, which falls within the Junior *Kiruuja* age bracket by virtue of their being older than the *Mbaya* age-group. Both age-groups related quite closely particularly during the period of political radicalism, Mau Mau oathing and the actual groups in the forest against the British colonial rule in the 1950s⁵⁴. The solidarity between the two age-sets is emphasized in the following lines quoted from the "Kamanda" dance, one of the most radical and political dances of the post-Second World War period (1946-1952): The song was recalled by General Nkungi during the interview with the researcher at Meru Town on 9.11.2013.

⁵³ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at the Nchiru Shrine

⁵⁴ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at the Nchiru Shrine

<i>Kimeru</i>	<i>Translation</i>
“ <i>Gichuru kia Mwaromo</i>	“We, the Gichuru age-group, sons of
<i>Na Kibaya kia Mukami,</i>	<i>Mwaromo</i> , and the <i>Kibaya</i> age-group,
<i>Twaugire “noreba” tutigatigana</i>	sons of <i>Mukami</i> , swore in the name of God,
<i>No Ngai uri mbere</i> ” ⁵⁵ .	that we shall never forsake each other”.

The word “*noreba*” is the Kimeru corruption of the English phrase “*for ever*”. To underscore their seriousness and radicalism, they invoked God’s name, and those of their respective mothers’ age groups “*Mwaromo*” and “*Mukami*”. This was an unusual departure from the Ameru traditions whereby children were normally identified with their fathers’ names and not those of their mothers.

In many ways, the *Mbaya* (*Kibaya*) age-group was a very interesting group. They were the sons of the “*Miriti*” or “*Kaaria*” or “*Mwebia*” age-group who fought in the First World War (1914-1918). They adopted different names for their age-group. Since they were circumcised in 1939, and given the name “*Mukiiri*”, they also referred to themselves as “*Mbaya ya Thirty-Nine*”. They also adopted other names: “*Mbaya ya Mareru*” (the bearded radicals); “*Ntiirika*” (those who don’t take advice from anybody; diehards)⁵⁶.

By 1948, the radicalism in the *Kamanda* dance had reached a level that the colonial administration considered too dangerous for the smooth governance of the Meru region. *Kamanda* was essentially a modern dance performed by young men and women in public usually in day time. It combined both traditional and modern melodies as well as terminology, loaded with radicalism and defiance to the colonial authority. Ex-second world war soldiers were the main driving force, as they were considered to be more knowledgeable and daring having fought in the great war. The word “*Kamanda*” is a Kimeru corruption of the English military term “Commander”. Mau Mau movement effectively used *Kamanda* dance to spread its influence in Meru as the Kikuyu “*Anake a Forty*” (the 1940 age-group) used “*Mwomboko*” in Kikuyuland. The then District Commissioner for Meru C.M Johnstone (1945-1947; 1948-1950), who was nicknamed “*Baithumbi*” (because of his long, thick hair looking like a crown), promptly banned the dance. However, in complete defiance of the ban, the *Mukiiri* age-group (the *Kamanda* champions)

⁵⁵ Interview with General Nkungi at Three Steers Hotel, Meru Town

⁵⁶ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Gitune Shrine

decided to stage the dance at “*Miringene ya Kiguu*” in Meru Town near the Pig and Whistle Hotel, only a short distance from the District Commissioner’s Office. To cause maximum annoyance to the authorities, the radicals staged the dance during the official working hours when the DC was in the office. They deliberately used provocative language in their songs specifically meant for the DC and his officers to hear⁵⁷.

The following songs were recalled during the group discussions with Njuri Ncheke elders who witnessed the “*Kamanda*” dance:

Kimeru:

“*Kamanda ti ururi, umbiira ngwitaitire.*
Kamanda ni mpomu, ciatua kuthandika
Mboota ithandikirwe.
Kainagwa na biama, mboota itigaciure.
Twaina karataamba Miringene ya Kiguu.
Ngatiga gukaina Choomba yatiga ndanci.
Bwire Baithumbi ngaari yaremara
Mwena jwa Ikamba.
Mbuko ya kiriiranhi yathiria matunguru.
Kariinya ka njoka, gatiikagua kaara
*M’Ndatho atikwina, ni matu agutabia*⁵⁸.

Translation:

“*Kamanda* is not a bed, for you to ask me to create room for you. *Kamanda* is a time-bomb, when it explodes only the uninitiated will get hurt. It is sang in riddles, so that the uninitiated may not understand the messages. Despite the ban, we have danced it today so that the message may spread out from *Miringene ya Kiguu*, to other parts of Meru. We shall stop dancing *Kamanda* only when the white people stop engaging in their own dance.
Tell *Baithumbi* (the District Commissioner) that the support for our vehicle (secret movement) has taken root even deep in the Kamba land. The underground mole is capable of destroying a whole plantation of onions, despite the bitterness of the plant. You don’t insert your finger into a snake’s hole. M’Ndatho is not merely dancing, he is eaves dropping. Beware the spies amongst us.”

The furious District Commissioner, upon receipt of the intelligence report on the matter, ordered his *Askaris* to stop the dance and disperse the people immediately.

⁵⁷ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Gitune Shrine

⁵⁸ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke elders at Giitune Shrine

However, to the amazement of the *Askaris*, the dancers stood their ground unmoved and continued to dance, urging their supporters to remain defiant, through another song:

Kimeru:

“*Bwona beeja, bukarungike Koome ja ka Ngiri*”.⁵⁹

Translation:

“When you see them (*Askaris*) coming don’t run away. Stand your ground. Remain firm and stiff like the Warthog’s tail”.

The radical ex-soldiers expressed their dislike for the white man and the colonial administration generally through another song:

Kimeru:

“*Kinya utimwonkie muromo, Muntu ni muthuku akarema; Muntu ni muthuku arume, Ja kithumba kia makara*”.⁶⁰

Translation:

“Do not waste time trying to talk to him nicely
The white man is really bad,
The white man is nasty, and
As bad as a heap of charcoal.

The significance of this analogy is that a heap of hot charcoal may look harmless from the outside but it conceals fire which roasts the meat when it is poked.

Upon receipt of the report from his *Askaris*, the DC shouted angrily in Kiswahili: “*Hii watu mbaya, mbaya sana*”, meaning these young people are “*bad, very bad*”. However, to avoid a nasty confrontation, the DC advised his *Askaris* to leave the defiant *Kamanda* dancers alone. Thrilled by their “apparent victory” over the white man, the youthful dancers are said to have adopted the word “*Mbaya*” as the new name for their age-group. They popularised it through their *Kamanda* dance and other social occasions. They were very proud of it.⁶¹

The most celebrated *Kamanda* dance champions of the time were singled out for special praise in many songs. Among the men champions were “*J*”(Jackson M’Ringera wa Kibua) from Katheri and “*Mbulaka wa Kanyiri*” from Njuki Njiru,in Miiriga –Mieru. The latter was nick-named “*Mbulaka*” because of his dark complexion. Among the women champions were “*Gachunkwa wa Katheri*” from Katheri (in Abothuguchi) and “*Marion wa Nthimbiri*” from Nthimbiri (in Miiriga – Mieru).

⁵⁹ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke elders at Giritune Shrine

⁶⁰ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Nchiru Shrine

⁶¹ As explained by M’Ringera wa Mutariitho and collaborated by other Mbaya age-group informants during the interview on 9.11.2013.

2.6 The Rulers and the Ruled – Views on Each Other

Over the years since the establishment of the colonial rule, the white man developed certain views about the Ameru. Likewise, the Ameru developed certain views about the white man. Some of those views hardened on both sides particularly during the post -Second World War period leading to the outbreak of the armed Mau Mau struggle in 1952.

2.6.1 The Colonial View of the Ameru

According to the available records, the colonial view of the Meru tribe in general, and their leaders in particular, is captured in the following Meru District Annual Report for 1944:

As regards the leaders produced by the tribe they are remarkably open-minded, intelligent, well balanced - supremely loyal to and confident in H.M. Government – and they carry phenomenal weight with the tribe in general. They comprise, not only the majority of the chiefs but many individuals who have no official status whatever, and with their support and cooperation all difficulties and dangers of the next few years can be successfully overcome. Without their active support and cooperation or, against their opposition, the successful government of this tribe would become an impossible task. Like all worthwhile people, the Meru possess great potentialities for good or evil. They are not a negative people. The task of governing and directing their development is therefore one which will lead to magnificent success, or devastating failure⁶².

The colonial government acknowledged the Meru support to the British during the Second World War (1939-1945). In the District Annual Report for 1946, it is stated as follows:

“It is not out of place to pay tribute to the loyalty of the Meru tribe during the six years of war. Every quota asked for by the military authorities was filled two and three times over with eager volunteers, while many donations to the War Fund were made, including a substantial contribution by Local Native Council towards the cost of a spitfire Fighter, as well as gifts of oxen, snuff and money”⁶³.

According to the District Annual Report for 1940, the Meru Local Native Council contributed shs. 48,400/= towards the purchase of the said Spitfire Fighter Aircraft. The Meru people led by Chief M’Angaine (father of the former Cabinet Minister Jackson H. Angaine) and other colonial chiefs, contributed 231 bulls which were

⁶² KNA/DC/MRU/1/4, *Meru District Annual Report for 1944*. The above quoted Report was signed by the then District Commissioner for Meru, V.M. McKeag on 10.7.1945.

⁶³ KNA/DC/MRU/1/4, *Meru District Annual Report for 1946*

auctioned and raised shs. 8,109/25 towards the Kenya War Welfare Fund. The money was presented in early 1940 to the then Meru District Commissioner H.E. Lambert. In recognition of the Meru tribe for their assistance and loyalty during the war, and as a special tribute for his long and loyal service to the colonial Government, Chief M' Angaine was rewarded, He was awarded a Member of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) medal and his name appeared in the King's New Year's Honours List. It was the first time that a Kenyan chief had received such an award⁶⁴. Senior Colonial Chiefs were appointed to the position of Njuri Ncheke Chairman in order to influence Njuri Ncheke decisions in favour of the Government. They included: Senior Chief M'Angaine (from Miriga-Mieru), Senior Chief M'Imathiu wa Gathinya (from Tigania), Senior Chief Wallance M'Mwoga (from Mwimbi) and Paramount Chief Naaman M'Mwirichia (from Miriga Mieru)⁶⁵.

In accordance with the Meru culture, if the visitor in any way abuses the hospitality or over-stays beyond what is considered to be a reasonable limit is politely reminded by the host that “*Ugeni bugukura*”. This means that “your stay here has exceeded the acceptable limit”. The host may do this either through a song, a parable or by sending an emissary to convey the message to the visitor. As the Ameru grew uncomfortable with the oppressive colonial rule, they expressed their discomfort through traditional songs, which the White man either ignored or failed to understand their full implications. One of the songs stated that, “*muntu uti matu arijagwa ni mbiti iti matu*,” which translates to “a deaf person is eaten by an equally deaf hyena”. This means that, “a person who does not heed wise counsel ends up in destruction”. Contrary to the colonial view of the Ameru, resentment towards colonial administration and tension in Meru were increasing underground, particularly in the late 1940s and early 1950s, prior to the declaration of the State of Emergency on 20.10.1952. Support for the Mau Mau movement was growing faster, following the widespread administration of the secret oath during that period.

2.6.2 The Mau Mau View of the White Man

The introduction and spread of Christianity and western education in Meru were viewed by the local people as an integral part of the colonial rule. The process

⁶⁴ KNA/DC/MRU/1/4, *Meru District Annual Report for 1946*

⁶⁵ Interview with Paramount Chief Moses Marete at Meru Town on 15.11.2014

introduced a new categorization of people into Christians and non-Christians, Protestants and Catholics, the educated (*Athomi*) and the non-educated (primitive).

Mau Mau took advantage of this categorization to win support for their resistance to colonial rule. They advanced the view that both Christianity and western education were part and parcel of the colonial strategy to entrench their rule. The theory was popularized in a Mau Mau song: “*Muthungu ni mundu muuru ma; gutiri Muthungu na Mubea*”, meaning, “The white man is truly bad; there is no difference between an ordinary white man and a white priest; all white men are the same; they equally oppress the black man”. In the meantime, the Independent Church movement was gaining wide acceptance in Meru on in the then central province (which included Meru) as an African alternative for those were dissatisfied with the white man’s Christianity and education. The colonial administration responded by branding it the “*Mau Mau Church*” and applied harsh measures to suppress it. They included the arrest and detention of its leaders and destruction of its property at Kirigara, Kithaku (Katheri), Gisoyene and Kibirichia. As tension between the two sides increased, it was just a matter of time before it exploded into an open violent confrontation⁶⁶.

During the period immediately before and soon after the declaration of the State of Emergency in 1952, unprecedented incidents of violence involving murder, destruction of property and mysterious disappearances of people were reported in some parts of Meru region. They occurred mainly in Upper Abothuguchi area of Central Imenti bordering the Mt. Kenya forest and the European farms in Buuri area (Timau and Nanyuki). Two people, M’Itonga wa Kabooro and M’Rinyiru wa Mpuria, disappeared during this period without trace. Katheri, Kamurita and Kibirichia markets were attacked. The murder of M’Mwirichia (a Njuri Ncheke elder from Kianthumbi village), the destruction of Solomon Magambo’s coffee plantation (in Kaarene village), and the destruction of Kireru M’Kobia’s (*Mwiria*) cattle (Mbureene village) all took place during that period. The local people were traumatized by those incidents of unprecedeted violence⁶⁷.

⁶⁶ Interview with Robert M’Mukindia at his Gikuune home, Githongo

⁶⁷ Interview with Njuri Ncheke Elders from Katheri

2.7 Conclusion

The introduction of colonial rule in Meru land, arrival of Christianity and western education, Ameru's participation in the two world wars, exposure to foreign cultures and the disruption of the traditional way of life, all of them had a profound effect on the Ameru community politically, socio-culturally and economically. The radicalism and political agitation championed by the ex-soldiers following their continued frustrations and lack of opportunities for self-advancement, particularly after the Second World War (1945-1952), prepared the ground for a major violent confrontation between the Africans and the colonial administration. Those developments particularly in the then Central Province culminated in the outbreak of Mau Mau war, following the declaration of the State of Emergency in 1952.

CHAPTER THREE

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED AND SUSTAINED AMERU'S PARTICIPATION IN THE MAU MAU (1945 – 1965).

3.1 Introduction

It has been generally assumed that the Mau Mau struggle for Kenya's independence was an exclusively Kikuyu affair. This is an erroneous assumption as other communities, particularly the Meru and Embu, also participated in the struggle. Each community had its own reasons for doing so, some of which exhibited similarities with those of the Kikuyu.

Traditionally, the three ethnic groups have a closely related historical, cultural and linguistic background. This closeness was enhanced further with the introduction of colonial rule which grouped them together into an administrative unit known as central province. Their shared experience under the colonial rule made it easier and more convenient for them to cooperate in the Mau Mau movement for the purpose of effectively advancing their grievances against a common enemy, the oppressive colonial rule. This study undertook to investigate the factors that influenced the Meru into participating in the Mau Mau struggle.

3.2 Effect of Colonial Rule on the Ameru.

Introduction of the colonial rule had far-reaching effects on the Ameru traditional way of life politically, socially, culturally and economically. The effects were inter-related and would therefore be inappropriate to consider them in isolation, as doing so would present an incomplete picture of the situation. A factor like land, due to the great significance attached to it by the Meru traditionally, reflects all these aspects. Land in Meru was protected by the Njuri Ncheke for the benefit of the entire community, but was taken care of by the respective families and clans as the trustees. Any undue interference with any part of Meru land drew vigorous resistance from the whole community. The forceful alienation of part of Meru land in Timau, Nanyuki and Naro Moru(*Ndarumoro*) areas for European settlement, the unpopular agrarian reforms introduced by the colonial administration in the African reserves, restriction on growth of cash crop like coffee

by the Africans and forced supply of young men to work as cheap labour on the European farms caused great resentment among the Ameru⁶⁸.

Appointment of selected Njuri Ncheke elders to positions of chief or headman was viewed as a gross interference with the Meru traditional system of governance. The move was resisted and even more so, when some of the chiefs used their positions to benefit themselves and oppress fellow Africans. Other colonial agents (*Nchama*) were equally hated as they were used as tools for the implementation of unpopular colonial policies. They were regarded the enemy's agents and derogatorily referred to as “*Ncaguthi*” meaning “enemy's agents” or “sell-outs”⁶⁹.

Introduction of Christianity and western education were initially resisted as they were viewed as a foreign invasion on the Meru culture. In terms of leadership, there eventually developed a conflict of interests between the traditional elites (*Agaambi*) and the educated elites (*Athomi*), as the colonial administration favoured appointment of the latter group to senior positions. This did not go down well with the traditional elites. Traditionally the Meru did not bury their dead; instead dead bodies were left in the bush (*guta muntu*) for the hyenas to eat. But the Athomi group supported the burial of the dead.

The practice of circumcision rite (*gutaana*) was the basis of political, social, cultural and economic organization of the community and was central to the religious institution as well. The practice was compulsory to all Meru, both male and female. Anybody who did not undergo initiation was regarded as a “mere child” irrespective of the age, and had no say on any matter affecting the community. The burial of the dead and the controversial female circumcision issues introduced by the Church and supported by the colonial administration elicited a lot of resistance. It was seen as a gross assault on the socio-cultural traditional values of the Ameru⁷⁰.

The introduction of colonial rule interfered with and weakened the Meru traditional way of life leading to resentment and resistance by the people. Therefore, the factors that influenced Meru's participation in Mau Mau should be viewed against this background.

⁶⁸ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Gitune Shrine

⁶⁹ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Gitune Shrine

⁷⁰ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Gitune Shrine

3.3 Factors that Influenced and Sustained Ameru’s Participation in Mau Mau

A combination of factors influenced and sustained the Ameru’s participation in the Mau Mau. They included the following:

3.3.1 The Land Issue

The land issue was a key factor in the Mau Mau struggle, as appropriately captured in many of the Mau Mau songs, some of which were in Kikuyu and others a combination of both Kikuyu and Kimeru languages. One of the songs stated as follows:

<i>Kikuyu:</i>	<i>Translation:</i>
“Wiyathi na Ithaka,	“We demand freedom and land,
Wiyathi bururi wa Kirinyaga,	Freedom in the land of Mt. Kenya,
Bururi wa gikeno,	Land of happiness,
Uri utuamba na mititu,	Endowed with fertile valleys and forests,
Kenya ni bururi wa Andu Airu ⁷¹ ”	Kenya is the Black Man’s Land”.

Before the introduction of colonial rule, Meru land extended to the north-western slopes of Mt. Kenya to include Timau, Nanyuki and parts of Naro Moru, all the way to Naro Moru River, at a place known as “*Kieni gia M’ Nyaange*” in the present day Kieni East in Nyeri County. M’Nyaange was a prominent Meru livestock keeper in the area and that is how this particular place was named “*M’Nyaange’s Field*” in his honour. This expansive grazing area was known as Buuri, where Meru people used to graze their livestock freely before the white man’s arrival. Another prominent Meru livestock keeper of the time, known as Baisigiria, controlled huge chunks of land in the Timau area where a swampy lake was named after him, “*Iriaa ria Baisigiria*”⁷².

With the introduction of the British colonial administration this land was forcefully alienated eastwards all the way to River Rugusu (Maranya East) beyond Subuigaa. According to the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915, it was stated that: “All land previously occupied by native people becomes the property of the Crown, and the Africans or natives living thereon become tenants at the will of the Crown.”⁷³

⁷¹ Group discussions with Njuri Ncheké Elders at Nchiru Shrine

⁷² Group discussions with Njuri Ncheké Elders Elders at Nchiru Shrine

⁷³ Jomo Kenyatta, “Suffering without Bitterness- The Foundation of the Kenya Nation”(1968) p.25.

In view of the forceful acquisition of their traditional land in Naro Moru, Nanyuki and Timau grazing areas, the Meru people had a legitimate reason for fighting to regain their lost land. The Meru have always been very conscious about their land and ready to defend it against any interference with it by anybody. In the Meru District Annual Reports of 1939-40, this is described as Meru's "*land consciousness*" and "*keep off our land*" attitude. By the end of 1939, thirty (30) Kikuyus had been served with notices to leave Meru district. On 18.1.1940, twenty four (24) of them were convicted of failure to comply with the Provincial Commissioner's order. They were each fined shs. 10/= and, in default, serve 14 days hard labour. On 6.2.1940, twenty-two (22) of their huts were destroyed and the remaining two on 6.4.1940⁷⁴.

However, the anti-Kikuyu attitude gradually changed and the Meru became friendlier in the late 1940s allowing more of them to work and settle in Meru. Kenyatta's visit to Meru in August 1948 played a significant part in this process following his meeting with Meru leaders at Kibirichia. With increased Kikuyu presence influenced further by the ex-soldiers political radicalism, the Meru people's focus shifted to the growing anticolonial rule movement leading to the declaration of the State of Emergency in 1952.

3.3.2 Destabilized Rural Life and Urban Influence

The acquisition of large tracts of African land by white settlers, with active assistance of the colonial government, to create a "*White Man's Country*" (The White Highlands), had far-reaching effects on the Africans. Millions of them were herded like livestock into smaller "*native reserves*", particularly in the Rift valley and Central Provinces, where the exclusively "White Highlands" were located. The Africans provided a huge reservoir of cheap labour for the white settlers, under very unfair terms and conditions of service. It was sheer exploitation of the "*black*" by the "*white*" people.⁷⁵. The Kikuyu, Embu and Meru communities were grouped together to form the Central Province with Nyeri Town as its Headquarters. The African cultures and traditions were suppressed, in a determined effort to establish "*white supremacy*" in the country. The economic and agricultural development was deliberately manipulated so as to ensure that their purchasing power was far below

⁷⁴ KNA/DC/MRU/1/4, *Meru District Annual Report for 1940*

⁷⁵ C. Ojwando Abuor (1970) – "*White Highlands No More*" (1970).

that of the white masters. Africans, having been forcibly evicted from their ancestral lands where they had traditionally grown crops and grazed livestock, were now living like serfs under the White man. Consequently, two developments emerged affecting mainly the young, able-bodied male African adults. First, with the increasing demand for wage employment, some of them left the reserves to seek employment in the White settlers farms in the White Highlands. Second, with the emergence of urbanization and its modern/western attractions, others left for towns such as Mombasa, Nairobi, Nanyuki, Nakuru and other urban centres of the time. Urban centres, by their cosmopolitan nature, became inter-cultural centres for young people from different cultural backgrounds and eventually hot-spots for radicalism and political agitation⁷⁶.

During the early period of colonial rule “*Meru District*”, created in 1910, was for a long time regarded as a reservoir for male migrant labour for the railway lines and European farms elsewhere in central Kenya⁷⁷. The Ameru coined a word in Kimeru language, “*Kiaro*”, to describe “wage employment”. Those who worked as domestic servants in the European homes were referred to as “*Mpoi ya Muchunku*”. The Ameru warriors who found employment in Nairobi and the neighbouring European sisal and coffee farms in Kiambu District composed a song about the availability of money in Nairobi”.

Kimeru:

“*Nairobi iri mbia,*

Ni Thuchi ikurema”.

Translation:

“There is a lot of money to be earned in Nairobi;

The only challenge is how to cross the Thuchi River”.

According to the elders interviewed, there were several theories about the secret of crossing Thuchi River, which forms the boundary between Chuka and Embu Regions. One of the theories which sounded more convincing was that Chuka people were the only ones who new the secret of how to cross Thuchi River. There was a particular place hidden in the thick forest along the river, which was narrower than the rest of the river bank. Two huge logs would be placed across the river to serve as a temporary bridge, whose location was a top secret only known by the elders. Chuka people used the temporary bridge as a secret weapon for self-

⁷⁶ Group discussions with Njuri Nchekere Elders at Nchiru Shrine

⁷⁷ Lynn M. Thomas, “Imperial Concerns and Women’s Affairs-State Efforts to Regulate Clitoridectomy and Eradicate Abortion in Meru, Kenya”, University of Washington(1998) pp.122 – 123.

defence. Whenever the need arose they would remove the logs and hide them in the forest. Invaders would then be lured to the placed without the bridge, and be attacked from the rear side, pushing them into the river⁷⁸.

The Africans, whether working in the White settlers' farms or in the urban centres, were grossly discriminated against on the grounds of their colour. Whites were placed at the top of the racial ladder, brown-skinned people (Arabs, Indians and others) in the middle and the Africans at the bottom. Through urban exposure these young Ameru men became politically radicalized thus enabling them to champion the cause of Mau Mau movement when they returned home in "the native reserves".

3.3.3 Interaction with the Kikuyu

The Ameru people had a common destiny with the Kikuyu people, as a result of their shared experience particularly under the British colonial administration. Although there were instances of hostility towards the Kikuyu in the earlier years, the situation gradually changed in the 1940s.

Traditionally, the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru communities interacted with each other even during the pre-colonial period. The introduction and spread of both the colonial rule and Christianity came through Kikuyu land, Embu and eventually into Meru land. Being of the same Bantu stock, the three communities share a lot in common historically and socio- culturally and politically.⁷⁹

The period immediately preceding the Declaration of the State of Emergency in Kenya on 20th October 1952 witnessed an increased movement of the Kikuyu people into the Meru land. They can be grouped into various categories. There were those early Christian converts who accompanied the pioneer missionaries from the Presbyterian Church, through Chuka, Mwimbi and eventually into South Imenti. Some eventually settled in those areas, and became part of the Meru community. There were those who came in as small traders and settled in urban centres particularly Meru Town. An example of this group includes the Macharia, Muru-wa-Kagimbi and James Muita families who had settled in Kibirichia in Central Imenti and Meru Town, respectively. Macharia and Muuru-wa-Kagimbi allocated themselves huge chunks of land in Kibirichia. Macharia settled on a hill to the west

⁷⁸ Group discussions with Njuri Ncheke Elders Elders from Chuka

⁷⁹ Group discussions with Njuri Ncheke Elders Elders at Nchiru Shrine

of Kibirichia Market and re-named it “Kirima kia Macharia” (Macharia’s Hill). Muuru-wa Kagimbi settled on another hill to the east of the Market, between Muriinya and Ntharagwene and renamed it “Kirima-kia Muuru-wa-Kagimbi” (son of Kagimbi’s Hill). However, usage of those names in late 1950s when the land was re-allocated to new owners during the land consolidation programme under Chief Stanley M’Muriithi wa Mbarabari of Kibirichia Location⁸⁰.

In the road transport sector, there was another Kikuyu pioneer called Mugo who owned a bus that operated between Meru and Nyeri towns through Nanyuki in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It was popularly known as “*Bus ya Mugo*” (Mugo’s Bus). Other Kikuyus had come in at different times, mainly from Nyeri, and leased land in such areas as, Kiirua, Naari, Ruirii and even some parts of Nyambene. Others had come to participate in the shifting cultivation programme allowed in some parts of Mt. Kenya Forest, in particular Thege, Muchiene and Mutwaru schemes. Some Kikuyus participated in these schemes alongside the Meru people, while others had come into Meru land through intermarriage between the two communities. However, Kikuyu influence was felt more in South Imenti where Christianity was introduced by the PCEA Church with mission work, including education and health services, being conducted in the Kikuyu language.

Another factor that facilitated very close inter-relationship between the Meru, Embu and Kikuyu communities was their interaction while working together in the White settlers farms in the White Highlands and in urban centres particularly Nairobi and other urban centres. Others fought together in foreign lands during the Second World War (1939-1945). Upon their return, they continued that special comradeship as ex-soldiers and got involved together in the radical politics of the post-war period leading to the Mau Mau war of liberation⁸¹.

The above-cited factors provided the Kikuyu and Meru people with strong bond based on shared experience under colonial rule. It was, therefore, natural and logical for the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru, to stick together and fight for their rights against a common enemy during the Mau Mau struggle. This unity of purpose was captured in the following Mau Mau song (in Kikuyu language):

⁸⁰ Group discussions with Njuri Ncheke Elders Elders at Nchiru Shrine

⁸¹ Group discussions with Njuri Ncheke Elders Elders at Nchiru Shrine

Kikuyu:
“Ameru na Gikuyu,
Ciana cia Mwathani,
Ikaragai na thaayu,
Twambe tuiguane;
Nitukwamba gwiciiria
Uhoro wa Migwi,
Na wa Matino, na Ngo,
Takirai muigue.
Tene kwari ‘Judas’
Wa kwendia Mwathani,
Na riu kuri ‘Judas’
Wa kwendia Githaka”⁸².

Translation:
“The Meru and Kikuyu people,
You are children of One Lord.
Remain peaceful,
As we consult and among ourselves,
We shall first consider,
The use of arrows
Spears and shields
Keep quiet and listen carefully
In the past there a “Judas”,
Who betrayed the Lord;
Today, there is a modern-day “Judas”,
Who is betraying (selling) our land.

This song was in reference to the Biblical Judas who betrayed Jesus. It is drawing a parallel between that Judas and the modern-day traitors (*Judases*) who were colluding with the white colonial oppressors in order to sell African land to them.

3.3.4 Influence of Ex-Second World War Soldiers and the *Kamanda Dance*

There was a connection between the Ameru’s participation in the first and second world wars, and their involvement later in the Mau Mau movement. The *Miriti* age-group which participated in the First World War (1914-1918) got radicalized as a result of their exposure to foreign experience and new ideas, which they brought back home after the war. They were regarded as local celebrities and heroes whose bravery was often highlighted in songs during social functions and public ceremonies.

Their sons, the *Mbaya* (*Mbae/Kibaya*) age-group, fought in the Second World War (1939-1945), during which they served in different foreign countries including Ethiopia, Egypt, India and Burma as part of the British forces. They interacted with other soldiers and people from different cultural backgrounds. They also had the opportunity to observe both the strengths and weaknesses of the white

⁸² Group discussions with Njuri Ncheke Elders who were also members of the Independent Church

man in the battle field and concluded that he was not in any way superior to the black man, but an ordinary human being just like them. This observation simply debunked the white man's superiority myth previously created in the black man's mind, by way of intimidation and oppressive practices. This was captured in a traditional song by warriors addressing Kiama Elders stating that "*Kiama, Uchunku ti Ngai; Turakuamiira na ndirica ya nthi*", meaning: "Elders, we have scrutinized through the underground window and confirmed that the white man is not a God"⁸³.

The white ex-soldiers were paid generous pensions and assisted to acquire large farms in the White Highlands. African ex-soldiers, on the other hand, were given nothing, except the military uniform and a few other small worthless items that they were allowed to keep as souvenirs. A few of them ended up working as labourers on the farms owned by the white ex-soldiers, their former colleagues during the war. The Ameru ex-soldiers found employment mainly in the European farms located in Timau, Nanyuki, Laikipia, Naivasha and Nakuru.⁸⁴

The ex-soldiers' frustrations, together with the increasing political agitation, served as a catalyst and fertile ground for more radicalism and open defiance to the colonial rule, which was expressed in different ways. One of those ways was the "*Kamanda Dance*" in the Meru region. "*Kamanda*" mainly performed by young men and women, was a hybrid of European and African styles. The wording combined Kimeru, Kikuyu, Kiswahili and English expressions⁸⁵.

It was through *Kamanda* dance that Mau Mau coded messages were effectively conveyed to the supporters of the movement during social occasions like public devices. The brains behind the radical *Kamanda Dance* were the ex-soldiers, who also became some of the top leaders of the Mau Mau fighters in the forest. According to one theory, the word "*Kamanda*" is the Kimeru corruption of the English phrase "*to command*" meaning to give orders. One who gives orders in the military formations is the "*Commander*", hence the Kimeru version "*Kamanda*" or the one who is in control of others⁸⁶.

⁸³ Group discussions with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Nchiru Shrine

⁸⁴ Interview with the Njuri Ncheke elders who worked as cooks and herdsmen on the Europeans farms in the White Highlands.

⁸⁵ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders who were also Kamanda dancers

⁸⁶ Interview with General Nkungi in Meru town on 9.11.2013.

3.3.5 Influence of the Independent Church and Schools Movement

The African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (AIPCA) locally known as “*Indembeneti*” was a strong movement with its own churches and schools. It was based in Kikuyu land with its headquarters at Githunguri in Kiambu. Its influence eventually reached the southern part of Meru region in 1930 through the *Arathi* (prophets) sect which operated in Nithi division. The sect’s objectives were similar to those of the Independent Church Movement. In Meru, the Independent Church Movement was popular among the local people who wanted to practice their own religion and education that was not controlled by Europeans or missionaries. The new church therefore offered “a good alternative to those who wished to remain Christians while at the same time practising some aspects of Meru culture, such as female circumcision and polygamy”.⁸⁷

In Abothuguchi area, Independent churches were established at Kirigara, Kirungurune, Kithaku, Githoyene and Kibirichia. Traditionally, Githoyene (*Gisoyene*) was known as “*Mbubung’i ya ba – Rubuine*”. The main leader was the Archbishop Nathan Mukunga from Katheri who was based at Kithaku Church. He was assisted by Naftaly M’Rimberia wa M’Mukaria, M’Muthamia wa Kabua and Toma (Thomas) wa Thiuru. The Church commanded a large following by faithful local supporters. The sermons and hymns were conducted in the Kikuyu language and were mainly drawn from the Old Testament. They were also heavily loaded with political messages. In February 1952 the “comprised” Njuri Ncheke leadership (influenced by the colonial government and the missionaries), openly showed its dislike for the Independent Church and schools. The Njuri Ncheke leadership “condemned all the activities of independent schools, churches, the Mau Mau and KAU in Meru District”⁸⁸. They were viewed with great suspicion by the government and missionaries because they were seen as “training ground for rebellion”⁸⁹. Some teachers in those schools became “administrators of Mau Mau oath” with “some pupils and teachers going to the forest to fight the Europeans”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Mary C. Mwiandi, “The Role of African Evangelists and Teachers in the Development of Western Education and Christianity in Nithi Division of Meru District of Kenya: 1907-1960 –MA Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1993 p.185

⁸⁸Mary C. Mwiandi p. 185

⁸⁹Mary C. Mwiandi p.186

⁹⁰Mary C. Mwiandi p. 187

At the declaration of the “State of Emergency” in 1952, all the Independent Churches and Schools were burnt down or otherwise destroyed by the colonial administration. However, in the case of the Kithaku and Githoyene Churches, all the timber and roofing iron sheets were confiscated and used to build the District Officer’s new Office at Katheri Home Guards Post, which is still used as the area’s Administrative Office even today.

Despite the major set-back occasioned by their destruction, some of the Independent churches and schools were rebuilt after independence. Though not necessarily on the exact site where the previous ones stood in all cases, the new ones were built in the available plots preferably in the neighbourhood of the old sites. For example new churches have been built at Kithaku, Gikuune and Gisoyene. The plots were acquired through the joint effort of the church members and their many sympathizers. Robert M’Mukindia (1923- 27th April 2014) was one of the stalwarts of the Independent Church movement in Upper Abothuguchi area. Having been deeply involved in its affairs, he provided valuable inside information about the Church, its philosophy and activities in several interviews held with the researcher for this study. He was involved in the rebuilding of the African Independent Pentecostal Church (A.I.P.C) near the old site at Gisoyene. He was also instrumental in the acquisition of another plot and construction of a new Church, St. Philips A.I.P.C Church at Gikuune, in Githongo area.⁹¹

The Independent Church therefore attracted into its membership some of the people who had, for whatever reason, been expelled from other churches (Catholic or Protestant denominations). Politically, “the Independent church and schools Movement was connected with KCA, KAU and KISA, all of which were opposed to colonial rule. As a result, the government and missionaries did all that they should to discourage the spread of these schools”.⁹² The movement “gained a lot of popularity with the people of Meru because it was seen as another forum for airing their grievances against missionary and colonial domination”.⁹³

Educationally, missionary schools laid greater emphasis on practical or vocational education instead of academic education. Vocational education was viewed as an inferior type of education specially tailored for the African children,

⁹¹ Several interviews with Robert M’Mukindia at his Githongo home in February 2014.

⁹² Mary C. Mwiandi, p. 178

⁹³ Mary C. Mwiandi p.180

deliberately to prepare them for servitude positions in the colony. Independent schools strove to change all this by offering academic –oriented type of education which offered better jobs like teaching or clerical positions. In Meru region, Tungu became the headquarters of the movement and “offered the highest level of education among all independent schools”.⁹⁴ The existence of these schools provided an alternative for willing pupils who had been dismissed or voluntarily decided to leave mission schools. In 1948, the first independent school was opened at Tungu and was officially named the “Meru African Secondary School” to denote the absence of European influence in its management.⁹⁵

The influence of the Independent Church and Schools movement spread into the upper region of Central Meru (Imenti) particularly the area bordering Mt. Kenya as already pointed out above. Through strong connections with individuals committed to its ideals, the Independent church Movement extended its influence beyond Nithi Division into Central Meru. For example George Mworia Mwithimbu, a trained T2 teacher, who headed the primary section at Tungu School was one of those individuals. The school had registered its first Standard 6 pupils in the primary classes in 1942. Mwithimbu hailed from North Imenti, Nthimbiri village, Miiriga-Mieru location. He was educated at Kaaga Methodist Church School where he also taught. However, he was “dismissed because of his involvement with KCA and the Indiependent Church Movement. The Methodist Church also accused him of being an agitator for demanding higher salaries and better working conditions for teachers working in mission schools”⁹⁶

In 1954 Mwithimbu was the Head of Kaugu Intermediate School (a Methodist Church – sponsored School) in Githongo Location, Upper Abothuguchi. Pupils at the school nick-named Mwithimbu “Muuru”, the short form of “Muuru-wa-Ithe Witu” (Son of our Father), the Kikuyu language phrase term used by the Methodist convertees to address each other. He was a staunch convertee of the “*Tukutendereza Group*” (Praise the Lord Group). However, he was arrested in the same year on accusation of being involved in Mau Mau Movement. In support of Mwithimbu, pupils boycotted classes and spent most of the day within the school compound chanting Kimeru songs in his praise and demanding his release.

⁹⁴ Mary C. Mwiandi p.175

⁹⁵ Mary C. Mwiandi p.182

⁹⁶ Mary C. Mwiandi p.176

Eventually, the boycott ended and normal classes resumed the following day but under an atmosphere of fear, suspicion and uncertainty'.⁹⁷ Another prominent personality, who taught carpentry at kaugu, later joined politics on KANU ticket and became the first senator for larger Meru district after Indipendence in 1963.⁹⁸

The Independent Church and Schools had a great impact on the local community. They served as a catalyst to the development of education and offered competition to the missionary monopoly in the education sector. They enhanced the level of literacy in that, although in some cases the level offered in those schools was considered to be lower, it was still better than no education at all. The schools offered employment opportunities for teachers who had been dismissed from mission schools. They also provided a market for food crops (e.g. beans and maize) from local farmers, thus earning them quick income as opposed to coffee whose payment took long to process. These schools provided convenient meeting venues for KAU members and fostered the sharing of ideas between people from different cultural groups such ideas stirred nationalistic feelings among the local people, thus increasing their awareness of the prevailing socio-economic and political problems.⁹⁹ From the foregoing, therefore, it is evident that the Independent Church and Schools Movement played a key role in preparing the Ameru for active participation in the Mau Mau struggle.

3.3.6 The Mau Mau Oath (*Muuma jwa Mau Mau*)

The State of Emergency period (20th October 1952 –January 1960 is also sometimes referred to as the “Mau Mau period”. Mau Mau Movement was identified with militant nationalism and violence that characterized the politics of Central Kenya (the then Central Province) before and during the early years of the State of Emergency. It was a militant confrontation between the colonial administration and the colonized Africans.¹⁰⁰ The Africans on their part needed a strong bond that would unite them and sustain their fight against the enemy who was militarily better equipped and much stronger than them.

⁹⁷ The researcher was a Standard 5 pupil at Kaugu Intermediate School in 1954.

⁹⁸ The researcher was a Standard 5 pupil at Kaugu Intermediate School in 1954.

⁹⁹ Mary C. Mwiandi - “The role of African Evangelists and Teachers in the Development of Western Education and Christianity in Nithi Division of Meru District of Kenya: 1907-1960 –MA Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1993. p 196-199

¹⁰⁰ Mary C. Mwiandi p.196-199

According to the African traditions, taking an oath was a very serious matter, for its breach was believed to invite dire consequences including death, not only to the concerned individual, but also his entire family. In some cases, it was believed that the consequences would affect even the whole clan and relatives for many generations to come. The Mau Mau Oath, therefore, was seriously viewed in that light. Before the term “*Mau Mau*” was popularized by the colonial administration as part of their propaganda to demonize the movement, its founding members referred to it as “*Muhimu*” or “*Umuhimu*”, the Kiswahili term for “Essential”.¹⁰¹ It also meant “an important and trusted person” as the Oath was initially administered to a select few who were considered important and trustworthy, and who would not reveal Mau Mau secrets.¹⁰²

Basically, there were Seven Oaths taken by the hard-core Mau Mau fighters, and was known in Mau Mau terminology as “*Miuma Mugwanja*” meaning “*The Seal of Seven*”. Mau Mau members and their supporters took the Oath at different levels, depending on their seniority and level of responsibility in the movement. The basic Oath, known as “*The Oath of Understanding*” was essentially meant for general education and creation of awareness about Mau Mau its aims and objectives. The “*Mbatuni (platoon) Oath*” was more serious than the basic one in that it was administered in readiness for the actual combat and spilling of human blood if necessary. That is why it was also known as “*Muma jwa kugera ngero*” or “*kuriika nyamuuru*”¹⁰³

To conceal their identity, Mau Mau fighters usually adopted or were given special names by their colleagues. For example *Mwariama* (one who tells the truth); *Baimungi* (one who adorns a warrior’s or traditional leader’s ceremonial headgear made of the lion’s mane, colobus monkey (*nkoroi*) or a he-goat’s skin known as “*Mungi*”; *Matenjagwa* (one who does not cut his hair); *Mbiti Kioni* (the hyena that sees far); *Ruku* (hard dry wood) *Nyama iri ng’ana* (bitter meat); *Ndege* (airplane); *Kabogo* (small buffalo) and *Karangaita* (team leader) and *General Kula Twende* (eat quickly and we move on)¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰¹ Joseph Karimi “*Dedan Kimathi – The Whole Story*” (2013) p. 93

¹⁰² H.K Wachanga “*The Swords of Kirinyaga – The Fight for Land and Freedom*” (1975) p. 33

¹⁰³ Interview with General Nkungi at Nchiru Shrine on 9.11.2013

¹⁰⁴ Interview with General Nkungi at Nchiru Shrine on 9.11.2013

A special terminology was also used to convey serious messages. For example, in reference to the Mau Mau fighters who committed serious offences against the Movement and were tried by the special Mau Mau courts and sentenced to death for breaching the Mau Mau code of conduct, it was announced that they were to be taken “*To Herd Kimathi’s Cattle*”, meaning that “they would be put to death”. The “Oath of Secrecy and Obedience” or “*Siri Kali*” (Top Secret) was administered to all fighters requiring them to keep as top secret all information relating to the death of any of their colleagues. It was strictly forbidden to tell any civilian (including parents, wives, children or relatives) anything about the death of a freedom fighter. The only communication to the bereaved family from the Mau Mau, known as the “Official Message”, was that such fighters “had been transferred to another district on special duties for six months”. Sometimes the dead fighter’s “greetings” used to be conveyed to the family by the official deliverer of the message. The death of freedom fighters was kept such a top secret to ensure that people did not become disheartened and cease supporting the Mau Mau movement ¹⁰⁵

The Mau Mau Movement had become more active towards the end of 1947. From early 1948, oathing took place in Naivasha and Kiambu and subsequently spread fast, through the medium of the Kikuyu Independent Churches and schools, to other parts of the then Central Province, eventually reaching Embu and Meru. Initiates were forbidden from attending European Mission schools. Before the colonial administration realized fully what was happening, Mau Mau movement had spread to many parts of the then Central Province and urban centres, particularly Nairobi, among the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru (KEM) communities.

The Mau Mau movement was sometimes referred to as “*Kiama Kia Muungi*” (KKM) meaning the “*Council of the masses*” to conceal its identity. Whenever a decision was made by the top leadership of the movement, it was said that, “*Ni Muungi Jwauga*” meaning that, “It is the masses who have decided”. Due to its secretive nature and the fear deeply rooted in the African traditions, Mau Mau Oath became a very powerful unifying factor that guaranteed continued allegiance and unwavering support to the movement. It was a powerful force that bound the Meru, Kikuyu and Embu peoples together in the bitter struggle for their rights. The power of the Mau Mau Oath, therefore, was another strong factor that influenced the Meru

¹⁰⁵ H.K. Wachanga, “*The Swords of Kirinyaga: The Fight for Land and Freedom*”, (1975).p xiv

community's participation in the Mau Mau movement. "The oath united them from child to elder and everyone took the oath except the chiefs and headmen. We called this oath the oath of unity and it was much stronger than the previous oaths taken during the late 1920s and early 1930s".¹⁰⁶ Other types of oaths were administered for special purposes as per the following examples:-

"The Goat Oath" (*Muuma jwa Nthenge*) was administered under the instructions and supervision of the colonial chiefs to "cleanse" those who had already taken the Mau Mau oath, to make them change their allegiance to Mau Mau.

"The Dog Oath" (*Muuma jwa Kuru*) was administered by the Mau Mau to counter the "Goat Oath" administered by the colonial chiefs, and to re-affirm the original "Mau Mau Oath" (*Muuma jwa Mau Mau*). It was also meant to spell out a curse to the colonial government agents and doom to the British rule in Kenya. The "Dog Oath" curse stated as follows: "*May the Kingdom of the British fall like this fallen dog which we have felled now. Your reign, be it of men or women, may it come to fall like this blood we spill now. May a curse fall upon your very souls like this dog here. May death and destruction come upon you and those who help you, be they chiefs or anybody else who endevours to sell or betray Africans to Europeans*". The "curse" was signed under the official Mau Mau "Seal of Seven".¹⁰⁷

"The Oath of Mud" (*Muuma jwa Ntaka*) – This was a "fake" oath purported to have been taken by those individuals who had been detained earlier than 1946, before taking the more radical Mau Mau oath. They often suffered because they knew very little about the Mau Mau Oath, but the British colonial authorities refused to believe their lack of knowledge. Out of frustration and spite, the colonial forces punished them severely. To save their colleagues, the more knowledgeable detainees who had taken the true Mau Mau oath started coaching them on what to say during the screening sessions. The information they were given about Mau Mau oathing was "fake", in order to deceive the government agents who were conducting the screening sessions; hence the fake name of "Oath of Mud". This was in line with Rule No. 7 of the cardinal Mau Mau rules strictly observed by the detainees stating

¹⁰⁶ H.K. Wachanga, "The Swords of Kirinyaga"

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Karimi "Dedan Kimathi – The Whole Story" (2013) p 100.

that: "Nobody was allowed to disclose detainees' secrets to the prison authorities".¹⁰⁸

3.3.7 Categories of Allegiance to the Mau Mau Movement

For the purpose of devising effective methods of fighting the Mau Mau, the colonial administration intelligence categorized the degree of allegiance to the movement by which its supporters could be identified. Allegiance to the Mau Mau movement was divided into four broad categories, according to the official analysis by the colonial administration:¹⁰⁹

The Active Supporters Group (10%):

This group was branded "terrorists" and comprised the suppliers of items needed by the fighters, couriers, Mau Mau committee members, money collectors and Oath administrators.

The Passive Supporters Group (70%):

This group aided and abetted the Mau Mau fighters, but not as strongly as the first group.

The Actively Anti-Mau Mau Group (10%):

This group included the Home Guards (*Kaboorio*), Tribal Police (Administration Police), Government servants and some Christian mission adherents who were actively involved in enforcing anti-Mau Mau measures designed by the colonial administration. The measures included the brutal screening of Mau Mau suspects.

The Passively Anti-Mau Mau Group (10%):

This group comprised Africans who had acquired good jobs and other positions of responsibility in the colonial administration and therefore did not want to jeopardize their privileged positions.

However, it is important to caution that the above categorization oversimplifies the complexity of the Mau Mau Movement. The degree of allegiance to the Mau Mau was very difficult to gauge, as some people played double roles. Some were seemingly loyal to the colonial government but, secretly, they were among the strongest Mau Mau supporters. By operating incognito within the government

¹⁰⁸ Joseph Karimi "Dedan Kimathi"

¹⁰⁹ O.E.B Hughes – "Village in the Kikuyu Country" – *Journal of African Administration*, H.M.S.O, London, Vol.III, No. 4, October 1955).

system, the individuals concerned were very useful to the Mau Mau movement at various levels, thus contributing immensely to its eventual success.

3.3.8 The Ameru Mau Mau Freedom Fighters in Urban Centres

The Mau Mau operatives in urban centres were organized in battalions according to their home locations, divisions, districts and provinces. They had a special secret dress code known only to fellow fighters. They wore no uniforms but carried six-round ammunition pistols carefully hidden in their clothes. They kept their hair short and wore good clothes, usually smart suits and ties. Sometimes they wore wide-brimmed American cow-boy hats. Occasionally some of them wore women dresses to disguise themselves as women. Others wore red-soled half-boots to identify themselves to their comrades. Upon discovery of the red-soled shoe sign by Government agents, they quickly changed it and adopted other secret signs whose meaning was known only to their comrades. The new signs, which were changed frequently to keep Government agents off the track, were interesting. They included a special style of walking with a fake limp with one shoulder raised slightly higher than the other. Another sign involved the wearing of a cow-boy hat tilted at an angle to one side of the head¹¹⁰.

The Meru Mau Mau operatives in Nairobi and Mombasa included Bedan Kombiri, Joseph Njue, Mungania M'Riria, Kaburiki M'Amanja, M'Anampiu M'Itara, M'Inoti M'Igiria and Captain Njagi Nyaga, among others. They did so in accordance with the requirements of the Mau Mau War Council (MMWC), under the Kenya African Union (KAU) and in collaboration with a group known as the "Meru Helping Council Association" (MHCA)¹¹¹. These organizers ensured that funds were raised through voluntary donations from friends and sympathizers. However, sometimes force was applied to acquire money, food, medicine, clothing, guns, ammunitions and other essential materials from the White settlers and other accessible sources. Upon acquisition, these supplies were secretly delivered to the forest fighters through the elaborately lined-up networks. In December 1953, two of their leaders, M'Miragwi M'Mwithia and M'Murairi Karegwa, were captured in Nairobi's Pumwani Majengo area. They were subsequently tried, convicted and hanged. In October 1954, Captain Njagi Nyaga, then the Senior –most organizer was

¹¹⁰ H.K. Wachanga, "The Swords of Kirinyaga – The Fight for Land and Freedom" (1975) p.50

¹¹¹ Interview with Mwai wa Muthigi, Secretary General of Mau Mau Veterans Association at Kenya National Archives on 11.2.2014.

also captured in Dandora, tried, convicted and hanged. Captain Nyaga was unexperienced fighter in both Mt. Kenya and Aberdares Forests. According to his own confession during the trial, he had been specifically sent to Nairobi by his superiors, to co-ordinate collection of the urgently needed arms, ammunition and other supplies, as well as new recruits and to ensure their safe delivery to the forest¹¹².

3.3.9 Jomo Kenyatta's Influence in Meru.

The period between the end of the Second World War (1945) and the declaration of the State of Emergency in Kenya (1952) marked by major challenges and anxiety, particularly among the peoples of the then Central Province (Kikuyu, Embu and Meru). There emerged among them a strong feeling of brotherhood, “that we are all in this together, that we have a common enemy whom we can successfully fight only if we stuck together, that our common destiny is in our own hands, that we have no other choice but to fight for what is rightfully ours.

Of all the names of prominent personalities of the time that were often mentioned and even included in some of the songs specially composed in their praise, Jomo Kenyatta's stood out far above the rest. It had increasingly become a household name throughout the Province. Even the school children were taught songs and told stories about the brave Kenyatta's exploits in the Land of the White man (*Ruraya- Europe*). M'lkiara wa Nyonta (later to be known as *General Ruku*) from Katheri was the brain behind Kenyatta's first visit to Meru¹¹³. As President of Kenya African Union (KAU), Kenyatta visited Meru on 18th August 1948 and met prominent Meru leaders at the home of Mubea wa M'Aguoro in Kibirichia, Upper Abothuguchi, Central Imenti and delivered the following message to the people of the region;

God has given us a good fertile country and we can grow crops. We used to say that the Europeans got rich by planting coffee. But when I was in Europe, I heard that some parts of our country had been opened up for the planting of coffee by Africans. Then I came and saw that very fine coffee had been planted in Embu and Meru. Here you can work day and night to grow the best coffee possible. Where do you think all the fine things owned by the Indians and Europeans come from? They do not come down from Heaven, I can tell you. If you want to be respected by others, you must behave well and with restraint, you must tell the truth at all times and avoid idleness. Have nothing to do with thieves who not working themselves, live on other people's property.¹¹⁴

¹¹² David Anderson, "Histories of the Hanged" (2005) p.199-218).

¹¹³ More details are provided in Section 3.5.3 of this study under "General Ruku".

¹¹⁴ Jomo Kenyatta, "Suffering Without Bitterness- The Founding of the Kenya Nation" (1968) p.44

Peter M'Mburugu (*Gatumbo*) from Kirigara, founder of Kirigara the Independent Church, was involved in organizing Kenyatta's visit to Meru. He was one of the pioneer Ameru politicians with close contacts with prominent Kikuyu politicians of that time. He was nick-named “*Gatumbo*” for championing a new type of dance of the same name, which was popular among the radical youth, alongside the politically radical “*Kamanda*” dance of the late 1940's and early 1950's. Kenyatta's speech greatly endeared him to the Meru people, and was quoted in various fora and ordinary conversations. For many years thereafter, the Meru people accepted Kenyatta as their undisputed leader, a kind of a “*Messiah*” for all the black people in Kenya. Even when he was arrested on 20th October 1952 and subsequently detained after the Kapenguria trial, Meru people were still hopeful that Kenyatta would one day come back and lead them to freedom. Many songs were composed in praise of Jomo Kenyatta, as illustrated below:-

The first song (in Kikuyu) went as follows:

Translation:

<i>“Aria manyitire Jomo,</i>	“Those who arrested Jomo (Kenyatta)
<i>Makimutwara kiohoini;</i>	And sent him to detention
<i>Magathiina mono ngoro’</i>	Will be greatly troubled by their hearts
<i>Moona nowe Munene”.</i>	When they see that he is still the Leader.”
<i>“Ngai Mwene hinya wothe,</i>	The Almighty God,
<i>Utugucie hari we,</i>	Draw us closer to you so that,
<i>Nyumba itu ya Mumbi,</i>	We, the House of Mumbi,
<i>Tuhingie kirikaniro.¹¹⁵</i>	May fulfil the “promise”.

The “promise” mentioned in the song refers to the liberation of African land from the colonial oppression.

¹¹⁵ Interview Mung'atia M'Rinyiru (85yrs old) at Meru Town on 3.6.2014

The second song (in Kimeru) was adapted from the Christian Hymn: (*Onward Christian Soldiers*).

Kimeru:

*“Umagareni njuuri
Cia Jomo Kenyatta,
Tegeni bwa mbere,
Bwone Kenyatta,
Njuuni tumuthingate,
Na wiru bunthe,
Njuuni twinthe,
Kenda twinga, Mbari ya Nyakeru”¹¹⁶.*

Translation:

“Come out all of you,
Kenyatta’s soldiers,
Look ahead of you,
Kenyatta is leading;
Let us follow him,
With determination,
We shall chase away,
The white man”.

These songs were very popular among the Mau Mau fighters and their supporters as they were often sang during marches to attend Church gatherings (igomano) and the oathing ceremonies at their secret venues. Children were specially coached to sing them both in Church and at home Kenyatta never forgot the warm reception and strong support that he received from the Meru people during his 1948 visit. He often referred to it during his subsequent meetings in Meru. In August 1961, at his first meeting at Kinoru Stadium, Meru Town, after his release from detention. Kenyatta reminded the Meru people of their pledge to support him form the first African Government upon the attainment of Uhuru. The huge crowd excitedly roared back their support.¹¹⁷

3.3.10. The Use of Propaganda and Intimidation

The colonial administarion mounted a strong propaganda campaign using the currency notes and the Queen’s image appearing thereon. Africans were warned that “ the Queen’s eyes and ears were so powerful that she could see you and hear whatever you were saying , even in secret, all the way from London, so long as the currency note was either in your possession , or anywhere near you”. Anybody caught trying to print or in any way copy the Queen’s currency notes would have their both hands chopped off, hanged or imprisoned for life.Bodies and chopped hands of dead Mau Mau freedom fighters were displayed for Public viewing under

¹¹⁶ Interview Mung’atia M’Rinyiru

¹¹⁷ Interview with M’Imathiu M’Rintari and Gitije M’Ikiao at Meru town on 12.11.2013

the watchful eye of armed Home Guards. Any display of emotions or sign of public mourning was strictly forbidden. The practice of chopping off the dead Mau Mau fighters' hands was officially known in the colonial government official circles as "finger-printing the dead"¹¹⁸.

The Mau Mau fighters, on their part, developed their own propaganda to counter the government one. They said that Dedan Kimathi had the ability to make himself invisible or turn himself into an animal (e.g. cat, dog, snake or lion) to listen to private conversations or to avoid being captured. They also said "that Kimathi was able to read any letter while still inside the envelope". This was in line with the saying that, "*An educated person is able to read a letter while still inside the envelope*". To terrify the public even more, notes written in red ink to indicate "blood" were addressed to individuals targeted by Mau Mau for elimination, warning them of their fate in advance. Some of the notes stated: "*Kimathi wants your head*" and were strategically placed at a point where the targeted person or his relative could not miss them. Others were placed outside the doors of the victim's residence or business premises. They were normally placed at night so that the targeted person could see them the first thing in the morning. After the execution of the individual, or successful raid on a targeted military or police post or other government installations, a similar note (also written in blood) would be left at the scene, with the following warning: "*Kimathi was here and he will come again, soon. There will be no place for you to hide*". Such Mau Mau notes were known as "*Baruga cia Gikuu*" meaning (letters to announce death).

Abothuguchi area was the hot-bed of the Mau Mau war of liberation in Meru. As part of the colonial administration's strategy of intimidation, villagers were often rounded up and herded by armed Home Guards(*Kaboorio*)to Katheri Home Guards Post (*Kambi ya Murungu*) to view and identify the bodies of dead Mau Mau freedom fighters. Some of the dead bodies had soil stuffed into their mouths or held lightly in their clenched right hands. This was an indication that they had indeed died while fighting to liberate their land from the white oppressors. Ironically, this traumatizing public display of the dead freedom fighters had the effect of hardening the hearts of the villagers, including the children, and making them hard-core supporters of the Mau Mau fighters. This was contrary to the

¹¹⁸ Harry Hamilton, "Kenya- The Mau Mau Mountain" (1985) p.71

expectations of the colonial administration. People generally became bitter opponents, though secretly, of the colonial administration at the various levels of the community's social structure. Songs were composed despising those who supported the colonial oppressors and branding them traitors, sell-outs or Judases. Children and youth were under strict instructions never to reveal to the colonial agents and their supporters any information whatsoever, regarding their parents, relatives and villagers. They were instructed to always respond to such questions with, "*I do not know*", "*I have not seen anybody*" or "*I have not seen anybody around here*". There was a strong net-work of the youth acting under strict secrecy, in support of the Mau Mau movement even at school. Those were very difficult times, as it was not easy to know whom to trust. As a precautionary measure for personal and family survival, one had to always be on guard regarding what one said and to whom¹¹⁹.

3.4 Incidents of Unprecedented Violence (1952-1955)

The State of Emergency Period (20th October-January 1960) can be divided into two phase. **The militant phase** (1952-1954) which was characterized by violence and total disarray. The **rehabilitation phase** (1955-1957) characterized by the introduction of "emergency villages", which were designed to separate them (*the ordinary citizens*) and ensure they were not contaminated by the Mau Mau or terrorists from the forests".¹²⁰ Other accounts have included 1955 in the "militant phase".

According to Harry Hilton, the 24-year old white officer, who served in Nyeri, Murang'a and Meru, as a Superintendent of Police incharge of the scenes of crime, the period 1952-1955 were "operationally very active years of the Mau Mau War".¹²¹ The following examples from Meru are taken mainly from Upper Abothuguchi area, bordering Mt. Kenya forest.

In 1952, a woman known as Cio-Muguru, a devout Christian, was mysteriously murdered in Kathiranga village, Katheri sub-location, Central Imenti. Her death caused a lot of fear and uncertainty in the area, as the colonial administration swung into action to punish the villagers. It was rumoured that the

¹¹⁹ Group discussions with Njuri Ncheke elders from Katheri in March 2014

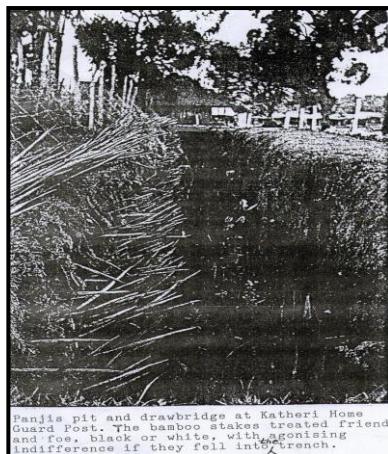
¹²⁰ Mary C. Mwiandi - "The role of African Evangelists and Teachers in the Development of Western Education and Christianity in Nithi Division of Meru District of Kenya: 1907-1960 -MA Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1993. p.245.

¹²¹ Harry Hilton, "Kenya-The Mau Mau Mountain" (1985) Herfordshire, England.

woman was murdered by the Mau Mau for allegedly refusing to take the Oath, an allegation that was never conclusively proved. In revenge, and as an excuse to arrest and punish those suspected of being Mau Mau members and their supporters, instant orders were issued by the colonial administration. They singled out and descended upon the entire Kiraita clan, arrested all male adults and took them to the District Officer's Camp at Katheri.

Katheri Home Guard Post

(*Kambi ya Murunyu*)



Source: Harry Hilton, "Kenya: The Mau Mau Mountain"
(1985) Hertfordshire, England)

The incident became a source of fear and the subject of many speculative theories for a long time Abothuguchi and Imenti in general. According to one of those theories, the then Chief of the area (name withheld for security reasons) had advised the DO to order the arrest and elimination of the entire Kiraita clan to serve as a lesson to other clans who might harbour sympathy towards Mau Mau. However, the then Headman for Katheri sub-location strongly opposed the Chief's extremist advice and the clan was spared the brutal action against them that had been recommended by the Chief. But among those arrested some were freee and others tried and hanged. In Mau Mau circles, the Chief was henceforth nick-named "*Chibu Mujinga*" meaning "The Foolish Chief" for not protecting his own people, as he should, but was betraying them instead¹²².

In early 1953, three young men who came to be referred to as, the "M'Kairu Brothers", from Githongo sub-location, were brutally murdered one night by the colonial forces on allegation of being Mau Mau fighters. Their half-dressed, bullet-

¹²² Source: The informant M'Rimberia wa M'Mukangu (89 years old) is a member of Kiraita clan who was privy to what was happening the within the Mau Mau circles.

riddled bodies were put on public display for several days, strategically lined up on their backs at Katheri market, near the District Officer's Camp at the busy junction of the Katheri-Githongo and Katheir-Kithaku roads. The entire village was forced by the Home Guards, on the orders of the White District Officer, to come out in large numbers to view the unusual spectacle. Everybody was deeply traumatized.¹²³

In early 1954 a prominent Njuri Ncheke elder from Kianthumbi village, by the name M'Mwirichia, was also brutally murdered one night. His fully clothed body, in a heavy military jungle green coat was left by the road-side lying on its back, with his neck slashed like a goat, and a small leather strap (*Kaboorio*) put round it, an indication that he had been strangled. The informant viewed the body early the following morning on his way to school but, afraid of the consequences, he did not talk about it to anybody for a long time. He remained silent whenever he heard people talk about the incident, in strict compliance with the Mau Mau code.¹²⁴

One night also in early 1954, a large coffee plantation in Kaarene village, near Katheri market, belonging to Solomon Magambo, was completely destroyed. All the coffee trees were cut down and others up-rooted. Magambo was then an influential senior officer in the colonial administration in Meru. He also owned a shop at Katheri market, which exclusively served bottled beer to the white soldiers (Johnnies). The local people referred to the shop as "*Jerusalem*". It was alleged that the coffee destruction exercise was carried out by the Mau Mau supporters, as a revenge against Solomon Magambo's brutality towards those suspected of being members of Mau Mau. It was further alleged that Magambo conducted the Mau Mau screening sessions in an extremely brutal manner, leading to the permanent maiming and even death of some of the suspects being screened at the DO's Camp, with a view to extracting confessions of their having taken the Mau Mau Oath. Sometimes suspects were forced, or induced, to implicate others on false promises of freedom after the screening sessions, which never materialized.¹²⁵

In the same year (1954), a herd of cattle belonging to the family of Kireru wa M'Kobia (Mwiria) in Mburene village, also in Katheri Sub-Location, were brutally attacked one night. The tendons of their hind-legs were slashed with a sharp

¹²³ The informant M'Marete wa Marete (in his late 80s) is a relative of the murder victims.

¹²⁴ The informant Wilson Muthomi (78 years) is from Kianthumbi village, Katheri

¹²⁵ The informant Mutwiri wa M'Matiiri (aged about 79 years) was one of the villagers who witnessed the destruction.

instrument, leaving the poor animals writhing in pain on the ground. Several others died of excessive bleeding. News spread fast like wild fire in the whole area with people talking only in whispers about the gruesome incident¹²⁶. It is worthy noting that, from November 1953, “a person found guilty of maiming cattle would serve (a jail term) of fourteen years instead of two” previously in force and “death penalty for convicted oath administrators”.¹²⁷

On the eve of Queen Elizabeth II’s Coronation in June 1953, Mau Mau fighters led by General Kagia attacked the Chief’s Camp at Kibirichia market and burnt the Njuri House (*Gaaru*) and several shops. The researcher’s uncle M’Marete wa M’Mboroki (*Gatunguru*) was among those killed and his shop completely burnt down while he was still inside. In July the same year, Chief M’Ikiugu’s camp at Katheri market was attacked and two people killed¹²⁸. In April 1954, Kamurita market was attacked and several people killed. Among those killed were Karuri and Stefano, a staunch Christian and the Senior Cook at Kaugu Intermediate School, in Githongo Location¹²⁹.

The young British soldiers (*Johnnies*) brought to fight the Mau Mau, had camped at a spot then locally known as “*Namba Mugwanja*” (Number Seven) on the banks of Kathita River, in Mwirang’ombe village. The *Johnnies* Camp (*Kambi ya Manjooni*) was located about two kilometers from Katheri DO’s Camp, near the junction of Katheri-Kathiranga and Katheri-Kithaku Roads. In 1953, there were reports that many “*Johnnies*” at the Camp had died suddenly and mysteriously. The Camp was hurriedly dismantled and the few survivors evacuated. It was relocated on the Katheri (Kithamburu) Primary School compound, in the space between the main road and the site where the modern Katheri Methodist Church stands today. It was then strongly rumoured that the soldiers had actually been deliberately poisoned by the Mau Mau agents, using sugarcanes and ripe bananas which the Johnnies were fond of eating from the locals around the camp. Young boys were used by the Mau Mau agents to sell the poisoned items to the Johnnies.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ The informant M’Magambo wa Kaumbuthu (aged about 87years) a former Mau Mau secret agent and a neighbour to Kireru narrated the incident.

¹²⁷ David Anderson, "History of the Hanged "(2005)p.70

¹²⁸: KNA/DC/MRU/1/3/12, Meru District Annual Report for 1953.

¹²⁹ The informant Moses Mugambi (76 years) a former student at Kaugu Intermediate School.

¹³⁰ The informant John M’Kiambati (aged 87 years) is himself a former Mau Mau operative in

In 1954, a group of teachers, including one named Karubiru, were killed in a broad-day-light ambush, as they were crossing Kuuru River, which serves as the boundary between the Imenti and Tigania regions. The teachers were travelling back home in a convoy of bicycles from collecting their salaries from Meru Town. According to the official reports released by the colonial administration at the time, the teachers were ambushed by the Mau Mau fighters who carried out the brutal attack on them¹³¹.

Harry Hilton, Senior Superintendent of Police incharge of the Scenes of Crime, gives the following eye-witness account, during his visit to Marimba Police Post in Uruku area of South Imenti, while operating from the Police Station in Meru Town. It illustrates the traumatizing experience that Meru children went through during that period:

Finally, but most vividly perhaps, for the two Meru children, a boy and a girl, I once lifted from the rear of a Land-Rover (a charnel wagon). They were among the dead bodies of the Mau Mau fighters, who possibly included their parents, being ferried to the Police Station for the usual police display and identification before disposal at Kinoru Mau Mau burial site.¹³²

The common practice in those days was that dead bodies of Mau Mau freedom fighters were loaded onto an open truck like logs, sometimes without clothes on, to deliberately cause maximum embarrassment to the public. Another common feature was the open lorry truck nick-named “*Ngaari ya Gikuu*” meaning “Lorry of Death” always driven by a heavily-built Driver of dark-complexion and deep-voiced who was known simply as “J”. Dead bodies were put on public display for several days at the DO’s Camp at Katheri Market, then ferried down to the Meru Town Police Station for eventual disposal at the Mau Mau mass burial site under a huge Mugumo tree near the Kinoru Stadium¹³³.

Sister Eugenia (a white Nun) of the Consolata Mission at Muujwa near Nkubu Town, in Meru County, was murdered and her both hands chopped off. It is thought that she was murdered because she possibly recognized and knew the members of the Mau Mau group that attacked the Mission on the night of St. Michael’s Eve (28.9.1953). She was buried at the Consolata Mission Mathari, near

Katheri area

¹³¹ The informant Stephen Limiri (87 years) is a former teacher from Kianjai who knew some of the teachers who died. Harry Hilton, “Kenya – The Mau Mau Mountain” (1985), Hertfordshire, England.

¹³² Harry Hilton, “Kenya – The Mau Mau Mountain” (1985), Hertfordshire, England.

¹³³ Interview with Kimathi Marete, former Home Guard, at Katheri in March 2014

Nyeri Town. Two other Catholic nuns, Sisters Rosetta Njeri and Cecilia Wangeci, were both similarly killed by Mau Mau at Baricho Mission, in Kirinyaga, at the same time¹³⁴.

In 1954, a woman named Cio-Kigwini from Katheri sub-location was generally known as a “loose talker” by fellow villagers. One night she was ambushed by the Mau Mau agents on her way home and had one of her ears chopped off as the first warning to change her behaviour, otherwise she would face more serious consequences. This was a warning against her habit of eavesdropping on Mau Mau and revealing their secrets to the Home Guards and other colonial agents in the area. For the rest of her life, she controlled her loose tongue and lived as an example to others. This also served as a stern warning of the fate awaiting those who would reveal Mau Mau secrets or report on its movements and activities. Without mentioning Cio-Kigwini directly by name, adults in the area alluded to the fate that befell “a certain woman”, through indirect songs and ordinary conversations by quoting the following Kimeru sayings that.

Kimeru:

1. *Mwekuru nthikiiri,*

Athirire matu ni ruthiingo.

2. *Ciari cia bairi,*

*Niku ciauma Nyomba ya Kiama?*¹³⁵

Translation:

1. “The old lady, who was a notorious eaves-dropper, had her ears worn out by pressing them against the wall, trying to hear what was being said on the other side of the wall.

2. The secret was between two people only; How come it has now found its way to the Council of Elders’ House (*Gaaru*)?

The ever-all effect of the above-cited incidents of unprecedented violence was that the local people were very frightened and traumatized. They began to question the government’s ability, or willingness, to protect them adequately. They became very suspicious of the government’s real intentions in all its activities in the area.

¹³⁴ Harry Hilton, “Kenya – The Mau Mau Mountain” (1985), Hertfordshire, England.

¹³⁵ The informant Tabitha Kathang'a knew Cio-Kigwini well, as they were neighbours in the village. She was quoting a traditional Kimeru saying by the Kiama elders).

3.5 The Mau Mau Operations in Meru Region

According to the Mau Mau military operational structure, Meru region fell under the Mt. Kenya Division (*Mathathi Army*) which was grouped together with Nyeri and Embu (including Kirinyaga and Mbeere), under the command of *General China (Waruhiu Itote)*. He was assisted by *General Tanganyika* (as his immediate deputy) and (5) other Generals¹³⁶.

3.5.1 Operational Structure.

Being essentially a guerilla warfare, Mau Mau in Meru region operated mainly in the Mt. Kenya and Nyambene forests. The fighters organized into four Divisions, each group under a Divisional Commander, as follows:¹³⁷

- General Mwariama - Incharge of Nyambene area.
(Later Field Marshal)
- General Kagia wa Kamuuru - Incharge of Imenti area.
- General Simba Makara - Incharge of Nithi(Chuka & Mwimbi) areas.
- General Muchoori - Incharge of Tharaka and the rest of the lower areas.

All Divisional Commanders were reporting to General Ruku, the Regional Commander for the Meru Region. Ruku was also the Vice- Chairman of the original Mau Mau War Council (MMWC) formed in early 1952, comprising the five KEM (Kikuyu, Embu and Meru) Districts of Kiambu, Muranga, Nyeri, Embu and Meru. Stanley Mathenge wa Mirugi was appointed its Chairman, in recognition of his military experience and leadership skills gained during the Second World War. Ruku's appointment was in recognition of his military exposure, high level connections in Ethiopia and resource mobilization skills¹³⁸.

3.5.2. Operational Areas

Traditionally, the Meru people devised clever methods of defending themselves against external aggression. They used secret hide-outs which included forested areas, tunnels, caves (*nkurunga*) and groves located strategically across the region, particularly along on the slopes of Mt. Kenya and the Nyambene Hills.

¹³⁶ H.K. Wachanga, “The Swords of Kirinya-The Fighter for Land and Freedom” (1975)p.xxiii

¹³⁷ Interview with General Nkungi at Meru Town on 9.11.2013

¹³⁸ Interview with General Nkungi and collaborated by Ruku's son (Geoffrey Kithinji) from the family records.

These, as well as strategic positions on hill-tops served as military bases, which Mau Mau fighters effectively used in their struggle against the more powerful British colonial forces during the state of Emergency (1952-1963). Some of them were used for Mau Mau Oathing ceremonies. The more secretive and strategic locations in the operational areas were used as command headquarters for the Mau Mau senior ranks of majors, generals, brigadiers and above¹³⁹.

Informants explained that the fighters' Movement to new operational areas, appointment to senior ranks and award of titles within the Mau Mau movement was a carefully guarded secret and the prerogative of the top leadership. Demotion or complete removal from any rank, were similarly handled. They further explained that when any of the latter measures were taken, they inevitably led to rivalry and weakening of the Movement, as was witnessed during the final years of the struggle after the capture of Dedan Kimathi. Smaller splinter groups emerged, each desperately struggling for its own survival.¹⁴⁰

The informants mentioned the following places as being the major operational areas during the most active years of the struggle. They were Magutuni, Kiera Hill, Ruguti and Mutonga Rivers caves; Nyomba-ya-Aathi caves; Mukunga in Nyambene area; Nkando-ya-Nkoma in Kimitu, Mukia and Muchege areas, M'Mwenda's Caves in Muchieene, Ithangune, Rutundu, Kathita River Caves, Mutuaru and Simangua forests. Most of these hide-outs were within or in the neighbourhood of the Mt. Kenya forest. They were used mostly as command posts for senior Mau Mau leadership in the ranks of majors, colonels, brigadiers and generals. Operationally it was therefore, considerably difficult for the British colonial forces to dislodge the Mau Mau fighters without the active co-operation and support from their local African collaborators (the Home Guards and other traitors) who had been compromised through bribery and empty promises by the colonial administration.

3.5.3 Mau Mau Freedom Fighters from the Meru Community

The Mau Mau freedom fighters leadership structure comprised captains, majors, brigadiers, generals and field marshal being the top rank.¹⁴¹ The profiles of the seven senior-most leaders (two women and five men) are summarized below.

¹³⁹ Interview with General Nkungi and fellow ex-freedom fighters at Three Steers Hotel Meru Town

¹⁴⁰ Interview with General Nkungi and fellow ex-freedom fighters at Three Steers Hotel Meru Town

¹⁴¹ The Military titles used by Mau Mau were adopted from the British Military Structure.s

Those of the two women, *Generals Kithonjo* and *Nkobia*, are given in Chapter Four-*The Role of Ameru Women in the Mau Mau*. Those of the five men are as follows:

Field Marshal Musa Mwariama (aka M'Kirigua M'Muchiri): 1928-1989.

In the Kimeru language, “Mwariama”, means “One who speaks the truth”. Mwariama was also known as “Muthigari Mugathe” or “Nkumbuku” His father was M’Muchiri Mawiri, himself a warrior-leader in his youth, and a wealthy person owing a lot of livestock by the standards of his time. Mwariama was born in 1928 in Muthara location, Tigania division, of Nyambene area, Meru district. He received the typical traditional Meru upbringing. In his youth he led an adventurous life after elementary schooling. His movements during the period 1942-1946 are difficult to trace. It is said that he frequently moved in and out of Meru, travelled extensively in Kikuyuland and worked for various employers doing some odd jobs¹⁴².

In 1950, Mwariama took the Mau Mau oath and worked for three masters until 1953. He worked as a watchman of a white man Captain Morris, as a “Special Police” for the colonial government and as chairman of the Action group for the Mau Mau and KAU operating in Naro Moru area (Nyeri district). While working as as a “Special Police” he used his privileged position to transport some the collected guns and ammunition to the Ruringu Mau Mau headquarters. This endeared him to the Mau Mau leadership, who gave him the name “Muthigari Mugathe” meaning (The Honoured Soldier)¹⁴³.

In 1953, Mwariama killed his manager and stole several guns and a pistol. He joined the forest fighters and declared war on the colonial government his former employer. From 1953-1961, he commanded Mau Mau operations in Meru while, based in Nyambeene Hills forest. Following the surrender negotiations initiated by Kenyatta’s government, Mwariama led his troops to visit Kenyatta at his Gatundu home on 16.12.1963. Thereafter, he led a quiet life at his farm in Timau, Buuri sub-county, Meru County until his death in 1989¹⁴⁴.

¹⁴² J.S.T.Kamunchuluh, “the Meru Participation in Mau Mau – A case Study of Field Marshal Mwariama”- 1973. B.A Dissertation, University of Nairobi, 1973.

¹⁴³ J.S.T.Kamunchuluh, “The Meru Participation in Mau Mau”

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Kinoti ,ex-Chieffor Timau Location,Buuri sub-county, at Nanyuki Town on 12.11.2013

Mzee Jomo Kenyatta & Mwariama



Mzee Jomo Kenyatta meets, at his Gatundu home, freedom fighters led by Field Marshal Mwariama, in December 1963

Source: Kenya National Archives

Field Marshal Baimungi (M'Marete wa M'Ikandi): 1922-1965

In the Kimeru language, “*Baimungi*”, means “One who adorns a traditional leader’s headgear made out of the skin of a he-goat, colobus monkey or the mane of a male lion”. It is known as “*Mungi*”. Baimungi was born in Mwereeru village of Katheri sub-location, Upper Abothuguchi, Imenti Central, Meru County around 1922. Little information is available about his early life. His real name was M’Marete wa M’Ikandi. He joined Mau Mau in October 1954 but was arrested in February 1955 and jailed up to 1958 when he escaped from prison and went back to the forest. Later he formed what was known as “*Mau Mau Kiraka*”, which literally means “*Special Oath for the purpose of repairing Mau Mau*”.¹⁴⁵

In 1963, Baimungi joined other forest fighters in surrendering arms in response to Mzee Jomo Kenyatta’s order. After a short while, he disagreed with the government administrators, allegedly over the terms of surrender and compensation payable to ex-Mau Mau freedom fighters. A disillusioned Baimungi and a group of his followers returned to the forest to await further consultation with Government, with a view to resolving the thorny issue regarding compensation and related matters. Baimungi was killed under unclear circumstances by Government forces who invaded his camp at Kionyo, in South Imenti, on 26th January 1965.¹⁴⁶ However, various theories were advanced about his death, as pointed our in Section 5.2- *The Political Impact*.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Rweni (ex-PA Baimungi) at Meru Town on 10.01.2014

¹⁴⁶ Peter Kagwanja with Humphrey Ringera “Kiraitu Murungi – An Odessy in Kenya’s Politics” (2012).

Field Marshal Baimungi

(M'Marete wa M'Ikandi)



Born in 1922 – Died in 1965

Source: Baimungi's Family Records

General Nkungi (Japhlet Thambu King'ua) 1922-2014

Nkungi was born in 1922 in South Imenti, Meru County, to King'ua Rugoji and was named Kithinji, in accordance with the Meru traditions. After primary education he trained as a teacher and taught until 1949 when he resigned to start timber business.

It was during the course of doing his timber business that Nkungi met some friends in Nanyuki who initiated him into Mau Mau in 1952. He became actively involved in the recruitment and oathing of new initiates in his home area in South Imenti. One evening in October 1953, he led a group of 58 Mau Mau members into the forest to avoid the crackdown on Mau Mau suspects by the colonial forces. He remained in the forest until 17th September 1955. While in the forest Nkungi distinguished himself as an organizer. Being an educated young man by the standards of those days, he quickly rose within the ranks of the Mau Mau leadership, earning the title of “General”.¹⁴⁷

Following his arrest, Nkungi was detained at Manyani detention camp until 18th November 1956, when he was transferred to Mbeu Rehabilitation Camp in Nyambene area. Upon his release from detention in 1958 and subsequent rehabilitation, he resumed his timber business and got involved in active politics as a member of KADU party until 1963.

Until his death on 7th April, 2014, Nkungi led a very active public life, holding senior leadership positions. He was an elder of the PCEA Church, Chairman of Yetu SACCO Board of Directors and a senior elder of the Njuri Ncheke Council

¹⁴⁷ Interview with General Nkungi at Meru Town on 9.11.2013.

of the Ameru Elders. The General willingly provided crucial insights into the Mau Mau operations which proved particularly valuable for this study.¹⁴⁸

***General Nkungi
(Japhlet Thambu King'ua)***



Born in 1922 – Died on 7th April 2014

Source: General Nkungi's Family

General Ruku (M'Ikiara wa Nyonta): 1908-1957

In the Kimeru language, “Ruku”, means “*a piece of hard, dry wood*”. Ruku was born in Katheri sub-location, Upper Abothuguchi, Imenti Central, Meru County, in 1908. His real name was M’Ikiara wa Nyonta. Ruku’s father, Nyonta, was a wealthy livestock owner both in Katheri and Isiolo grazing area. In accordance with the Meru traditions, Ruku looked after his fathers cattle in Isiolo area. Being a gifted linguist he was able to learn Somali, Borana, Turkana, Samburu and Dorobo languages, during that period.

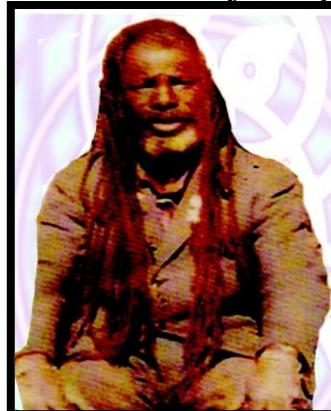
In 1940, Ruku was recruited into the Kings African Rifles (K.A.R) to fight in the Second World War. In 1941 he was posted to Ethiopia (Abyssinia) where he served in the special team that was detailed to guard the Emperor of Ethiopia Haile Selassie, by the British Government. While guarding the Emperor, Ruku met another Kenyan soldier Joseph Mathenge wa Mirugi. They both continued guarding the Emperor together, until their demobilization in 1945. After the War, Ruku found his way to Uganda, where he served briefly in the Royal Court of the Kabaka the traditional King of the Buganda.

Following his exposure both in Ethiopia and Uganda, the radicalized Ruku got convinced that a black man was also capable of ruling Kenya in place of the white man. In 1948 Ruku travelled back to Ethiopia to appeal to Emperor Haile

¹⁴⁸ Interview with General Nkungi at Meru Town on 10.11.2013.

Selassie for support of arms to overthrow the colonial rule in Kenya. He obtained the requested arms from the Emperor which he secretly smuggled into Kenya using camels and donkeys which he quickly disposed of and hid the weapons in secret caves (M'Mwenda's Caves) near Muchieene Forest Station in the Mt. Kenya Forest in Kibirichia area.¹⁴⁹

***General Ruku
(M'Ikiara wa Nyonta)***



The pioneer Meru freedom fighter, mastermind, main financier, armourer and supplier of arms from Ethiopia for use by Mau Mau freedom fighters in Mt. Kenya Forest. He was killed by the colonial government forces in 1957.

Source: Geoffrey Kithinji (General Ruku's Son)

In 1947 Ruku with his friend Mathenge visited Kenyatta at Githunguri twice and invited him to visit Meru. During that time Ruku was actively involved in the KCA and KAU radical politics of the time. On 18th August 1948, he and other senior Meru leaders welcomed Kenyatta to the home of Mubea wa M'Aguoro in Kibirichia location, Upper Abothuguchi, Central Imenti, Meru County. In early 1952, Ruku was appointed Vice-chairman of the original Mau Mau War Council (MMWC) at its formation in Nairobi. He was also appointed Regional Commander of the Mau Mau forces operating in Meru region with their headquarters in Mt. Kenya forest. During the previous year, he once again visited Emperor Haile Selassie and obtained more arms and ammunition, which he stashed away in secret caves under the care of his trusted younger brother nick-named "Karisasi" (a small bullet). Ruku was killed by the Government forces in Mt. Kenya forest in 1957.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Ruku's son, Geoffrey Kithinji, quoting family sources, in Meru Town on 10.01.2014

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Ruku's son, Geoffrey Kithinji, in Meru Town on 10.01.2014.

General Kagia (M'Ikiugu wa Kamuuru)-Killed in 1956

Little information is available on Kagia's early life. He was born in late 1920s and grew up in Githongo/Kathiranga area of Upper Abothuguchi. His real name was M'Ikiugu wa Kamuuru. Having been involved in secret Mau Mau activities for a while, he entered Mt. Kenya forest following the declaration of the State of Emergency on 20th October 1952.

According to Kibiti, an ex-Mau Mau freedom fighter who knew him well, Kagia led the attack on Kibirichia Chief's Camp in early 1953 where four people were killed. Several others were brutally tortured for allegedly having betrayed Mau Mau to the Government agents. In 1956, Kagia and a fellow freedom fighter were killed by Government forces in an ambush in a European farm in Kisima area (Buuri). According to an ex-Home Guard who was part of the ambush, General Kagia was shot at close-range and killed by a Home Guard who was Kagia's neighbour at home and therefore knew him well. Kagia's body and that of his fellow freedom fighter were put on public display, as was the practice then, at Katheri Home Guards Post (*Kambi ya Murunyu*). Thereafter, they were taken for burial at the Kinoru common burial site for Mau Mau freedom fighters near Meru Town.¹⁵¹

General Muchoori (M'Anampiu Nkanata):1917-2013

General Muchoori was incharge of the freedom fighters operating in Tharaka and the rest of the lower areas of Meru Region including the National Park from 1952-1963. He died in abject poverty at his home in Meru in April 2013 aged 96 years. Before his death he had been admitted at Chaaria Catholic Mission Hospital on several occasions.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Stefano M'Nkarichia ex-Home Guard, at Katheri on 5.01.2014

3.6 Summary of Ameru Mau Mau Freedom Fighters Killed and the Tricks Used.

3.6.1 Casualties

According to available records, approximately **1,827** Mau Mau fighters of Meru origin entered the forests in open defiance of the Government, in the early years of the Emergency. However, as shown in the following table, about **97%** of them were eliminated by Government security forces during the period October 1952-December 1956.

Year	Mau Mau Casualties
1952-53	59
1954	149
1955	809
1956	175
Total 1952-56	1,792
Outstanding on 1.1.1957	
35(Approx.)	
Grand Total	1,827¹⁵²



Bodies of Mau Mau freedom fighter killed by the colonial security forces are lined up on the ground for public viewing at a Home Guard Post. This was the usual practice, in order to intimidate and traumatize the villagers and turn them against the Mau Mau; but it did not work. Instead it hardened the villagers support for Mau Mau.

Source: Harry Hilton, "Kenya: "The Mau Mau Mountain" (1985) Herfordshire, England

3.6.2 Indification of the Dead Mau Mau

Identification of the dead Mau Mau fighters was a frightening experience for the villagers. Kiberenge was a Njuri elder from Kianthumbi village, in Katheri sub-location. He was officially designated by the white District Officer (DO) and his agents to lead other Njuri elders in identifying the dead bodies of Mau Mau fighters when put on public display at the DO's Camp. While carrying out the exercise, Kiberenge would strike the dead fighter's head with the elders' walking stick, mention the dead person's full name, that of his father as well as clan and village. All the elders accompanying Kiberenge would utter the following traditional curse in unison "*Urokua kairi*" (May you die again) and "*Arokua ungi ta uju*" (May another terrorist like this one die likewise).

¹⁵² Source: KNA/DC/MRU/I/12/I, Meru District Annual Report for 1956 dated 27.2.1957

One day, Kiberenge had a very difficult time in identifying the dead bodies which included his own son, who happened to have been an active secret Mau Mau agent without his father's knowledge. He had been caught up in a Government ambush early one morning in Muthangene (M'Agere's swamp) and was killed alongside other freedom fighters to whom he had gone to convey secret information that night. After initial hesitation followed by thorough beating by the DO himself using the butt of his pistol and threatening to shoot him. The shaken Kiberenge had to identify his son's body publicly, hitting it on the head and uttering the same traditional curse as he did with all the other dead bodies of the Mau Mau fighters.¹⁵³

To conclude the identification process, the Njuri elders were required to always demonstrate the curse and denounce the Mau Mau Oathing, by killing a he-goat in a cleaning ceremony. They were also required to perform a similar ritual while denouncing the dead or captured Mau Mau freedom fighters, after their identification. As they performed the ritual they had to sing as follows:

Kimeru:

1. “*U-u-u tukugwirua,*

Turi na Mukuu na Mugwate

Translation:

1. “We are happy in having

One Mau Mau terrorist dead

And another one captured alive.

2 *U-u-u kogerwe ngero,*

Nigwe waregere kwigua ukiirwa.

2. Face the consequences,

You refused to heed wise counsel.

3 *U-u-u nokamama,*

Muntu akwambatwa,

The culprit has been grabbed,

*Ni King'ang'i”.*¹⁵⁴

By the crocodile”.

3.6.3. Manipulation of Njuri Ncheke in the Fight against the Mau Mau

The colonial administration, in its fight against Mau Mau, used various approaches in its desperate efforts to manipulate Njuri Ncheke for support. Several District Commissioners served in Meru during this period. They were: F.D. Homan (1950-1953); A.C. Small (1953); W.B.G. Raynor (1954-1955) and J.A. Cumber (1955-1958).¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Group with Njuri Ncheke Elders from Katheri in March 2014

¹⁵⁴ Group with Njuri Ncheke Elders from Katheri in March 2014

¹⁵⁵ Group discussions with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Three Steers Hotel, Meru Town

In one of the approaches, the District Commissioner mobilized the local leaders through Njuri Ncheke in an effort to stamp out the Mau Mau uprising in the Meru region. It was agreed (on the DC's orders) that if anyone was asked to join Njuri Ncheke and refused, it would be taken to mean that such an individual was a Mau Mau associate or sympathizer. Consequently, he would be considered to be an obstacle to the development of Meru and an opponent of the government. The Njuri Ncheke was coerced to ensure that any alien in Meru had to identify his "*Father*" and the clan into which he was born in accordance with the Meru tradition. The trick was that this was a "fake Njuri" carefully selected and coached to act on behalf of the colonial administration, pretending to be the true Njuri.¹⁵⁶

According to the Meru traditions, a person could be accepted and be "*born into a particular clan*" by offering an agreed token (usually a goat) and undergoing the agreed traditional rituals (*guciarwa na mburi*). According to the District Commisioner's order, if any alien had not been born into a particular clan in accordace with the traditional requirements, he had to leave Meru land immediately and for good.¹⁵⁷

This particular measure was taken because of the strong belief in the official colonial circles that the Kikuyu aliens who had moved into the Meru region were behind the oathing and recruitment of the Meru people into the Mau Mau movement. It was made mandatory that any Mumeru with a visitor immediately reports the presence of such a person to the Chief and the District Commissioner. It was understood and accepted that after the District Commissioner administered "*Her Majesty the Queen's Punishment*", on the culprit, Njuri Ncheke elders would take over and continue with the rest of the process. Njuri would punish the culprit in the traditional way by imposing the customary fine, known as "*Mirongo Ithatu ya Kiama*", comprising a bull, a ram and a giempe (traditional container) of honey. Thereafter, the culprit would be taken to a special secluded place in the bush, to undergo special punishment designed for witch doctors; for the offense was equated with witch-craft.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Group discussions with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Three Steers Hotel, Meru Town

¹⁵⁷ Group discussions with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Three Steers Hotel, Meru Town

¹⁵⁸ Group discussions with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Three Steers Hotel, Meru Town

3.6.4 Mistrust of the White Man’s Intentions

The Meru and Abothuguchi people in particular, were always suspicious of the white man’s real intentions. They summarized their mistrust in the following song: “Abothuguchi bwikarie, Chomba ikwamba nthi Kambakia” meaning “Abothuguchi people beware, the white man has camped at Kambakia”.¹⁵⁹

According to local sources interviewed the name “Kambakia” is a corruption of the English phrase “Come back here”. Upon arrival in Meru in 1908, Kangangi (E.B.Horne) first visited Mwitari’s village at Thuura-Mairune “*Gaaru ya Kiama*” meaning “the elders meeting house”, located to the east of the location where Meru Town stands today. Thereafter, he moved west-wards to a spot closer to Mt. Kenya forest which was much cooler, than Thuura and set up his camp there. Curious children from the villages would crowd around the camp. On seeing the white man, the frightened children would run away, he continued shouting “*Come back here! Come back here!*”. When asked by their concerned parents to explain where they were coming from, the children would respond “*Tuumite Kambakia*”(we are coming from Kambakia);hence the new name “*Kambakia*” for the spot where the white man had set up his camp.¹⁶⁰

The colonial administration considered Upper Abothuguchi in general and Katheri area in particular to be the hot-bed of Mau Mau operations in Meru region. On 2.12.1952 the Meru District Commissioner, F.D Homan, directed Njuri Ncheke to be ruthless in Abothuguchi area where Mau Mau terrorists were reported to be operative. Anyone found having taken the Mau Mau Oath was to be regarded as somebody who was fighting the Government through Mau Mau. The DC urged Njuri to be vigilant and clear Mau Mau out of Abothuguchi area. He also promised a reward, through monetary terms or promotion to higher ranks, for all those who captured or killed Mau Mau terrorists.¹⁶¹ That explains the then often-used phrase “*Katheri ka Mau Mau*” (Katheri the base of Mau Mau) in reference to the whole area. The largest Home Guards Post was established at Katheri market, the operational headquarters of the most notorious white DO nick-named “*Murunyu*”. The post was also locally referred to as “*Kambi ya Murunyu*” (Murunyu’s Camp).

¹⁵⁹ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Nchiru Shrine in August 2014

¹⁶⁰ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Nchiru Shrine in August 2014

¹⁶¹ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Nchiru Shrine in August 2014

Some of the most prominent Mau Mau leaders came from Abothuguchi. They included Field Marshal Baimungi, Assistant Field Marshal Gachienja, Generals Ndege, Kagia, Kula-Twende, Ruku, Mukarange, Mengo and several captains, among others.¹⁶²

Following the capture of Dedan Kimathi on 21.10.1956, a massive air campaign was mounted by the colonial administration. A low-flying, slow-moving small aeroplane often circled Upper Abothuguchi area, dropping pamphlets with Kimathi's photograph. In the plane was one of the Meru senior colonial chiefs (name withheld for security reasons) calling out the names of specific Mau Mau leaders through a loud speaker and appealing to them in the Kimeru language to surrender immediately—"Umireni, Umireni Nandi"¹⁶³. Their fathers and close relatives were also named and urged to appeal to them to surrender. When none of them surrendered the campaign was eventually discontinued. Captured and dead Mau Mau fighters continued being brought to Katheri Home Guards Post for public display in order to intimidate the local people and weaken their strong support for Mau Mau. This approach did not succeed either.

3.6.5 “Finger - Printing” the Dead Mau Mau Fighters.

According to Harry Hilton's account, the statistics for Mau Mau casualties were given on a daily basis. The figures had to be meticulously prepared and officially "massaged" either in Kenya or at the Colonial Office in London, in order to convey the desired message to the world that the colonial forces were winning the war against the Mau Mau terrorists. The cutting off of the hands from the bodies of dead Mau Mau freedom fighters was officially known as the "finger – printing the dead". Individual colonial forces officers were handsomely compensated for every pair of hands they chopped off and presented to the authorities as evidence. The following is an eye-witness account by Harry Hilton, a white Senior Superintendent of Police in charge of the Scenes of Crime in Meru for the period 1954-1955:

My first knowledge of this practice, the cutting off of hands from the corpses of dead Mau Mau for the purpose of "Finger- Printing", came one bright morning when I was working in the crime Branch Office at Meru Police Station. I was handed a fully- loaded African shopping bag and told to sort out its contents. I opened it and took out eight black human hands that had

¹⁶²Interview with Kirimi Marete, a former Home Guard, at Katheri in August 2014

¹⁶³Interview with Kirimi Marete, a former Home Guard, at Katheri in August 2014

been severed at the wrist level. It was my job to try to straighten the fingers and attempt to get a good set of prints for the criminal Records in Nairobi, in order to try and identify the Mau mau involved. As for the handless corps, they were left deep in the forest.¹⁶⁴

Finger-Printing the Dead Mau Mau Fighters



A white Police Officer takes the finger prints of a dead fighter
who was killed while attacking a fortified police post

The cutting off of the dead Mau Mau fighters' hands would later become a stigma on the part of those who had collaborated with the colonial administration. It became a very hot issue in the political campaigns during the period leading up to independence (1961- 1963). The then two main political parties were the Kenya African National Union (KANU) supporting Jomo Kenyatta and Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) led by Ronald Ngala. The Mau Mau and their supporters sided with KANU whose symbols were the cockerel, one – finger salute, a flag with three main colours (black, red and green) and a shield. Each colour had a symbolic meaning. *BLACK* represented the Africans, *RED* symbolized the blood that was spilt during the struggle for independence and *GREEN* stood for the country. KADU's symbol was a flag with an open hand salute as its symbol.¹⁶⁵

During the political campaigns, each party mounted a major war of words full of propaganda against the other. In Meru KANU used the “cutting off of the dead Mau Mau fighters’ hands” very effectively against KADU. They accused KADU of being the White man’s stooges, for colluding with the colonial forces indirectly to sabotage the coming of the independence government under the full control of the

¹⁶⁴ Harry Hilton “Kenya – The Mau Mau Mountain”(1985), 16 Beech Drive, Borehamwood, Hertfordshire, WD6 4QU, England, p.71.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Silas Igweta on 31.8.2013 at Meru Town. He worked as a KANU Youth Winger at the KANU Office in Meru Town.

Africans. KANU convinced its followers that KADU's open -hand symbol was in fact a reminder of the dead Mau Mau fighters' hands that were cut off and put in baskets by the colonial forces for public display together with dead bodies. Songs were quickly composed warning KADU supporters of dire consequences if they did not abandon their party and support KANU. One of the KANU campaign songs, directed at the KADU supporters, was a Meru traditional curse:

“*Mu-KADU arokanduka*”, meaning “May those who support KADU burst and die”.

The following song threatened KADU supporters with public flogging:

“*Bukomiiria, Mu- KADU bukomiiria kiboko kia Baimungi kia nthara inya?*”¹⁶⁶ Meaning, “Will you, KADU supporters really endure Field Marshal Baimungi’s four-tongued whip?” These threats and political propaganda worked very effectively in favour of KANU, leading to KADU’s memorable defeat in Meru. The region, due to its strong support for Mau Mau, was clearly a KANU stronghold, with women constituting the majority of supporters.

The Ameru women (especially the elderly) expressed their loyalty and support for KANU through a song that stated that “*Kithoka miunda iraura, ntirithitie KANU ya baaba*”. Translated, the song meant that “We have abandoned our shamba’s in Kithoka area, while taking care of our fathers (Kenyatta’s) KANU”. The song was widely popularized during the KANU campaign rallies, particularly in Imenti and Nyambene areas.

3.7 The Colonial Memorial Plaque to Honour Loyalists

Involvement of the Meru loyalists and collaborators in fighting Mau Mau was at least acknowledged through a colonial administration plaque in Meru Town, bearing the following inscription:

English: “*This Plaque is to commemorate people of Meru and other races that died fighting the evils of Mau Mau 1952-1956*”.

Kimeru: “*Gikii ni kirikanio kia antu ba Meru na migongo ingi baria bakwire bakirwaa na uthuku bwa Mau Mau 1952-1956*”¹⁶⁷.

The purpose of the plaque was to recognize, glorify and reward the African loyalists and collaborators who assisted the colonial administration to fight the Mau Mau.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with John Murianki, also a KANU Youth Winger in the same Office

¹⁶⁷ The colonial memorial plaque which was removed after Independence taken to Meru County Council workshop for preservation.

The antagonism between the Home Guards (loyalists and collaborators) on the one hand and the Mau Mau supporters, on the other, is deep-rooted. It is often expressed even today, whenever matters relating to the Mau Mau are discussed, raising issues over the “gainers” and the “losers” in the struggle. The sensitive issue of compensation due to ex-Mau Mau fighters and their families also comes up in those discussions.

3.8 The Role of Chief M’Tuerandu wa M’Kirera (*Machuguma*): 1895-1997

By virtue of their position, Chiefs had a lot of influence over the local people. As a policy, they were supposed to enforce all the government programmes without question. However, there were some among them who sympathized with nationalist cause and support secretly. The brave among them made their views known to the authorities, when they were convinced that the government policy being proposed or pursued was not in the best interest of their people.

Chief Gideon M’Tuerandu was born in Katheri sub-location in 1895. In 1937 he was appointed by the colonial Government into the Local African Native Council (LANC). The role of the Council was to assist the colonial District Commissioners in the administration of the African people in a particular region. In 1942, he was appointed the Chief of Abothuguchi Location which in those days stretched beyond the boundaries of today’s Central Imenti Sub-county. The whole area was virtually under-developed then.¹⁶⁸

Chief M’Tuerandu, popularly known as “*Machuguma*”, was a strong-willed and unique personality in several ways. He was far-sighted, development-oriented and a very effective administrator, guided by modernity in all aspects in order to accelerate development. His forceful enforcement of development projects, his practical, hands-on approach to development earned him the nick-name “*Machuguma*”, which literally means “one who uses the force of the traditional club (*ncuguma*) to get the work done”. During Chief Machuguma’s decade of administration (1942-1953) Abothuguchi Location witnessed phenomenal development in virtually all sectors, in the modern sense of the term. This included construction of a network of roads and bridges as well as the building of schools, churches, health facilities, commercial centres and markets. It also included the

¹⁶⁸ Chief Machuguma’s family records, through his Son James Kimonye, whom the author interviewed about the life and times of the Chief.

introduction of modern agricultural practices (such as dairy cattle), opening up new areas for settlement, social reforms and human resource development. He was instrumental in encouraging the otherwise idle but able-bodied young men to get conscripted into the Kenya Police, Tribal Police (Administration Police) and the King's African Rifles (KAR). Among the beneficiaries was General Ruku whom the Chief recommended for recruitment into KAR. Many of those young men who got jobs in the Armed Forces and other government departments, through the Chief's encouragement, had their life styles and those of their families changed fundamentally for the better, through exposure to the modern (western) way of life. He also ensured that all school-age children were enrolled in school, instead of wasting their valuable time looking after livestock.¹⁶⁹

However, Chief "Machuguma", with all his good intentions for the advancement of people as was always his style of administration, appeared to have rubbed the colonial administration the wrong way. This happened after the Declaration of the State of Emergency in 1952 when he opposed the allocation of very small plots of land for the construction of communal villages for Africans to create buffer zones (*Special Areas*) between the forests and the area reserved for rural communities. He also opposed mass screening of all the people of Abothuguchi Location to establish the extent of the Mau Mau oathing in the area. The Chief's argument was that if one house caught fire in the crowded villages it would burn the whole village and exterminate the entire community. He also argued that the planned mass screening of suspects was unfair as it would subject many innocent people to unnecessary harassment and suffering of women and children.¹⁷⁰

Eventually, the colonial administration took heed of the Chief's protests and increased the area and the spacing between the houses. The planned mass screening was also suspended. Unfortunately, little did the Chief know that a conspiracy had already been hatched against him by "some powerful individuals" in government envious of his unmatched development record in the area under his jurisdiction. The conspirators wanted him removed from the position of Chief by falsely accusing him of being "sympathetic to the Mau Mau movement". The Chief was arrested and detained at Mbeu Detention Camp from 1953-1955.

¹⁶⁹ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Nchiru Shrine in August 2014

¹⁷⁰ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Nchiru Shrine in August 2014

After detention ex-Chief “*Machuguma*”, in recognition and appreciation of his wide past experience in public administration, was popularly nominated to serve the public as Chairman for various committees and boards of schools and other institutions in the area. He continued serving in those committees and boards voluntarily until his retirement from public life, but always remained a rich reservoir of wise counsel on developmental and related matters concerning the region in general and Abothuguchi in particular. Chief “*Machuguma*” died peacefully at his home in Katheri on 24th November 1997.¹⁷¹ The role of Chief “*Machuguma*” is highlighted as an example of the support Mau Mau received (secretly) from some of the senior officials in the colonial administration who were sympathetic to its cause and the future of their fellow Africans. The researcher interviewed Paramount Chief Moses Marete in order to seek his views on the role of the colonial chiefs during the Mau Mau struggle. The Chief confirmed that:

There were some individuals in the colonial government service, including chiefs, who sympathized with Mau Mau. However, their greatest challenge was how to balance their loyalty between the government and Mau Mau. Somehow, they managed it but at great risk to their careers if discovered. Their argument was that Mau Mau were our own people and therefore, there was no reason for killing them.¹⁷²

3.9 Conclusion

The introduction of colonial rule in Meru, together with the spread of Christianity and western education disrupted with the tradition way of life. The political, socio-cultural economic and age-group governance structures were weakened.

Forceful alienation of part of Meru land in Buuri area for European settlement disrupted the traditional livestock-keeping. Soil conservation reforms and other agrarian programmes as, as well as restriction on the growing of coffee and other cash crops were opposed by Africans. The clan based and age-set structures were no longer as effective as they used to be during the pre-colonial period. Traditionally, nomination to leadership positions at all levels was based strictly on consensus following extensive consultations. This changed under colonial administration where chiefs and other colonial agents were arbitrarily appointed, without the consultation or involvement of the elders. Consequently some

¹⁷¹ Interview with the late Chief’s son James Kimonye at the Chief’s home on 22.12.2012.

¹⁷² Interview with Paramount Chief Moses Marete in Meru Town on 15.11.2014

undeserving individuals got appointed to those powerful positions. Being anxious to demonstrate their loyalty to the colonial master, the appointees proved oppressive and unfair to fellow Africans. This drew resentment and resistance from the Africans.

Meru District was regarded as the reservoir for cheap male labour for the railway line and European settler farms in the Rift Valley and other areas outside Meru. The disruption of socio-economic and cultural structures forced many young warriors to leave Meru in search of wage-employment in the European farms and urban centres. While outside Meru, they interacted with non-Merus and got exposed to new influences including political radicalism.

Urban life and the arrival of ex-second world war soldiers who felt discriminated against, considering the many benefits enjoyed by their former colleagues the white ex-service men, prepared the ground for the emergence of “radical elements” who championed resistance to colonial rule. Those radical elements were referred to as “*Miuni*” or “*Mikondi*” in the Kimeru language, meaning the “care-free or daring ones”. They were readily accommodated in the “*Kamanda*” dance, which was effectively used by Mau Mau to spread the Movement’s radicalism and anti-colonial sentiments through songs with coded messages.

Jomo Kenyatta’s first visit to Meru in 1948 was well received and strengthened the Kikuyu-Meru unity and support for the Mau Mau Movement against the colonial rule. The fact that the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru had similar grievances against the colonial administration made it easier for them to join hands in Mau Mau to fight a common enemy. His second visit in 1961, after his release from detention, helped to strengthen the Meru-Kikuyu bond even further.

The factors that influenced and sustained the Ameru’s participation in Mau Mau can therefore be traced back to the Meru people’s suspicion of the white man’s real intentions during the introduction of the colonial rule, the spread of Christianity and western education. All those and other changes that were introduced during the colonial rule interfered with the Ameru traditional way of life; hence the resistance to colonial rule through the Mau Mau Movement in which the Ameru fully participated up to the end.

CHAPTER FOUR.

4.0 - THE AMERU WOMEN IN THE MAU MAU: 1945-1965

4.1 – Introduction

This chapter discusses the role of the Ameru women in the Mau Mau struggle. It was therefore considered important to seek the views of some of the senior women Mau Mau leaders themselves on the women's participation in the struggle. For this purpose therefore, the researcher interviewed Mukami Kimathi (wife of Field Dedan Kimathi) and Field Marshal Muthoni Kirima at Dedan Kimathi University of Science and Technology, Nyeri. They confirmed women's participation in Mau Mau as follows:

Women from Kikuyu, Meru and Embu communities participated in Mau Mau. Those were very difficult times particularly for women. Although the number of women involved in actual fighting alongside men in the forest, was considerably smaller, they played their part well. Women played other very important roles both within and outside the forest that helped to sustain Mau Mau throughout the struggle period. They were the main link between the forest fighters and their supporters in the reserves. They collected and smuggled food, medicines, arms and ammunition, clothing and other necessities to the forest fighters. They formed very effective intelligence networks in the reserves and between the reserves and the forests, on which Mau Mau fighters depended for planning their operations. They also played a very important role as mothers and heads of the families in the absence of their husbands and sons who, traditionally, would have played that role.¹⁷³

They concluded the interview with the Kikuyu saying that, “*mbaara ndiri mwago*” which they explained to mean “war is never a joking matter”. They added that women and children suffered most particularly in the hands of the cruel Home Guards in the Emergency villages.

In this chapter, we shall consider the role of the Ameru women in the resistance to the colonial rule from the early protests of the 1930s and 1940s and through the 1950s, the main focus being on their role during the Mau Mau struggle.

4.2 Early Protests by the Ameru Women

Early protests by the Ameru women against colonial injustices appeared in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1934, thousands of Abothuguchi women (in Central Imenti) mobilized themselves and marched to the colonial administrative station in Meru

¹⁷³ The Interview took place on 18.2.2011 during the special celebrations to mark the 54th Anniversary of Dedan Kimathi's death on 18.2.1957.

Town to demand the exhumation of corpses which had been buried in accordance with an Order under the Native Authority Ordinance but against the Ameru customs. According to the protesting women, this desecration had led to the failure of rains and subsequent famine that ravaged their “country”¹⁷⁴. In 1939, Igembe women (from Nyambene area), pressed by economic hardships and what they saw as sheer exploitation, looted an Indian store in Maua Town in protest against its owner whom they felt was not giving them a fair price.¹⁷⁵ In 1949, women from Igoji (in South Imenti) protested against the introduction of soil conservation programme. This protest was believed to have been politically instigated in view of the increasing anti-colonial rule sentiments prevailing in the region then¹⁷⁶. The above-cited examples show that even in those early days, Meru women did not merely look on when they felt that injustices were being perpetrated against them under the colonial administration. Instead, they mobilized themselves quickly and took what they considered the necessary action under the circumstances, as a corporate group, to save the situation. They had to assert their position, as women, without having to depend on men to do so on their behalf. Such determination was to be demonstrated later during the Mau Mau struggle for independence.

4.3 Personal and Eye-witness Accounts (as narrated to the Researcher).

From the early protests of the 1930s and 1940s, and through the entire Emergency period (1952-1960), women played a very important part in the resistance efforts against the colonial rule. Their efforts were intensified during the Mau Mau struggle and the various key roles that they played helped to sustain the movement. The following therefore is a summary of individual accounts given by some of the Meru women who were actively involved in Mau Mau and who were interviewed for this study. Some of their male counter-parts were also interviewed to give their views on the role of women in the struggle.

Naomi Kathure from Katheri went to school up to Standard Two and was actively involved in Mau Mau operations. During the interview she stated as follows, on condition of strict confidentiality:

¹⁷⁴ KNA: DC/MRU/1/1/2, *Meru Annual Report*, 1934.

¹⁷⁵ H.E. Lambert, “Kikuyu Social and Political Institutions”, London (1956) pg 100) and
KNA:DC/MRU/1/1/4, *Meru Annual Report*, 1939.

¹⁷⁶ KNA:DC/MRU/1/1/4, *Meru Annual Report*, 1949

Those were very difficult days. The first requirement was for one to take the Mau Mau oath of secrecy. It was difficult to trust anybody 100%. We operated between the reserve and the forest from where Mau Mau freedom fighters were operating. We smuggled food, warm clothing, cigarettes and medicines. I remember one drug commonly referred to as “MB” was particularly popular with Mau Mau fighters. We obtained our supplies from our trusted contacts, who were also Mau Mau operatives and working in dispensaries or the main hospitals at Meru Town, Nkubu or Muujwa.¹⁷⁷

She concluded by stating that their role was a very risky undertaking but they had to do their best in compliance with the Mau Mau Oath. She insisted that her real name should not be revealed for personal security reasons.

Lucy Kagwiria from Kathiranga village whose father was a Mau Mau freedom fighter, narrated her experience as a Mau Mau agent as follows:

To avoid detection by the government agents, we operated a relay system whereby smuggled supplies were passed through several trusted operatives, all of whom had taken Mau Mau oath like myself. The last person who finally delivered the smuggled goods (*Mirigo*) to the agreed contact point in the forest had to return to the reserve through a different route. It was strictly forbidden for Mau Mau agents to use the same route twice; we always used a different route. If, for whatever reason, the forest fighters failed to collect the smuggled supplies at the agreed time, they were never collected but abandoned altogether. This was a precautionary measure to avoid falling into the trap, incase the secret plan was discovered and the government agents laid an ambush.¹⁷⁸

She added that she had to take special precautionary measures because her father being a forest fighter himself the family was under suspicion. She also requested for anonymity for security reasons.

Susana Mukami from Githongo, whose elder brother was a Mau Mau freedom fighter, was hesitant to talk at the beginning, but she gradually opened up, after having been assured of strict confidentiality:

I went to school up to Standard Four, but dropped out during the second term. We were forcefully oathed by four strange bearded men as we were returning home from our *shamba* in Kibirchia towards the end of 1952. We were oathed at a place locally known as “*Kathaka-Kauru*” (the evil bush). We were with my mother and my two aunties. I was very frightened at the beginning but, after my mother’s assurance of safety on condition of absolute silence I gained confidence. We were firmly instructed never to tell anybody about that incident. I used to deliver secret messages from my brother and his fellow Mau Mau fighters to the identified persons in our village. I also used to read letters and draft replies for them, since I knew how to read and write in Kimeru¹⁷⁹.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Naomi Kathure (79years) at Katheri on 5.3.2014

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Lucy Kagwiria at Katheri on 5.3.2014

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Susana Mukami at Katheri on 5.3.2014

She concluded by explaining that for the fear of being caught by the government secret agent she never told anybody about those secret letters, not even the members of the family. She was afraid of the consequences of breaching the Mau Mau Oath.

Rebeka Karuta from Kithirune gave the following account of her experience as a secret Mau Mau operative:

We used to operate in the company of a male counterpart who was a former police man and a Mau Mau sharp shooter (*muntu wa shabaa*). He always carried a loaded pistol hidden under his clothes. When out on a special mission, he sometimes dressed like a woman and that is why we gave him a female nick-name “*Cio-Kiuria*”. We used to attend dances with him and as we did so, we gathered intelligence which we passed on to the fighters at the designated contact points, which were often changed to avoid detection by government agents. One day in 1954, he disappeared suddenly, but I continued with intelligence work, as he had given me sufficient coaching to operate on my own. It was a very risky undertaking but God is great; I was never caught. I was also involved in providing intelligence reports that facilitated Mau Mau attack on Kamurita market in 1954, where several people were killed including Karuri and Stefano. Several others were seriously wounded¹⁸⁰.

She also requested that her identity should not be revealed for security reasons, as families and relatives of the victims are still bitter about what happened to their loved ones during the State of Emergency.

Ex-Mau Mau freedom fighter Kibiti (M’Ikiara wa M’Mukindia - 85 years) sounded a very disappointed man. In an interview at his home near Kithaku market in Katheri on 5.01.2014, he spoke with a lot of bitterness and disappointment about his experience in the forest as a Mau Mau freedom fighter. He also recalled his mother’s suffering in the hands of the Home Guards who tortured her trying to extract information on her son’s whereabouts. She stood her ground and completely refused to betray him. Kibiti began his account with a Kimeru saying that: “*Ntikwenda kuriikanua maruru jakuruka*” meaning, “I do not want to be reminded of the suffering that we went through in the forest during the Mau Mau struggle and we got nothing for it in the end”. However, he philosophically added that, “*gutibu butoonwa; nitwagererie ouria twombaga*” meaning, “anyway, there is nothing that

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Rebecca Karuta (82 years) at Katheri on 5.3.2014. (Accounts on *cio-Kiuria* and Kamurita Market attack were corroborated by another informant Marangu M’Inoti from Kithirune where Kamurita Market is located)

has not been seen; we played our part the best way we could at the time”, and continued with the narrative:

There were very few women involved in the actual fighting in the forest. In a group of about 20 to 30 fighters we had two or three women handling the weapons. We depended to a large extent on women agents and supporters who were the majority in the Mau Mau intelligence networks outside the forest. They provided us with the much-needed supplies of arms and ammunition as well as other weapons like “pangas”. They also brought us food, clothing, cigarettes and medicines. Women were also the key players in our intelligence network in the reserves, and the main link between the forest fighters and the reserves. I have a lot of respect for my mother. If it were not for her resilience and determination to protect me and my fellow fighters while in the forest we could not have survived for as long as we did. Government forces were really determined to eliminate me in particular, at all costs. Despite all the harassment and suffering she underwent in the hands of the cruel Government agents she never gave in. Instead, she defiantly told the government agents: “You will never get my son”. She always knew where we were hiding while outside the forest and provided us with food and warm clothing, which were brought to us through her secret women connections. Those were really difficult times for us but somehow, some of us survived. It is very disappointing to us that the independence government has forgotten us, ex-freedom fighters. The compensation being talked about these days has not reached some of us.¹⁸¹

Kibiti’s mother, commonly known as “Ng’ino-Kibiti wa M’Mukindia”, was greatly admired by the villagers for her bravery in protecting her son and fellow freedom fighters. Throughout the interview Kibiti was cautious and alert to any slight movement around where we were. Upon noticing anybody approaching us, he suddenly changed the topic of conversation to something completely different, until the intruder left us.

Esther Karwirwa, originally from Katheri, migrated with her parents to Kibirichia (Buuri sub-county) when she was about 10 years old. She related how they used to operate with an older lady known as Ng’ino-Kithui. Both of them were Mau Mau operatives at Kiamiogo Emergency village (*Mutaene*) at Karima-ka-Ng’ombe during 1954-1955. She gave the following account of her experience:

I clearly remember that unique woman because of her dressing style. Ng’ino-Kithui usually used to wear a heavy olive-green military coat commonly used by old men. She used to join old men (especially Kathekia and M’Mwithimbu wa Kiuura) and young boys to graze livestock out in the field. She also carried a spear like them. I also used to keep her company, but our main mission was to deliver food and other supplies to the forest fighters hidden in the bushes surrounding the Kamarai watering point. We also used

¹⁸¹ Interview with ex-Mau mau freedom fighter Kibiti wa M’Mukindia on 5.1.2014

to gather intelligence from the Government agents at the chief's camp about any planned "forest ambush" (*Nkabo ya Mwitu*) and pass it on to the fighters. This would enable them leave the forest several days before and return after the ambush had ended. We would instruct the boys accompanying us to carry extra food supplies, enough for their lunch and the rest for the Mau Mau fighters. At mid-day when animals were assembled at the watering point we would quickly take the food to the fighters at the secret hide-out. The arrangement worked out smoothly for some time, but ended suddenly. After betrayal by some disgruntled elements within the Mau Mau network, the hide-out was attacked in an ambush by the government forces in 1955. Some of the fighters escaped but their leader, Mathiu was Kithithira, was killed and his body put on public display at the Kiamiogo police post. We abandoned our activities for a while but I resumed my intelligence work after moving to Kibirichia Emergency village within the neighbourhood¹⁸².

One memorable incident illustrates the Home Guards' brutality of this period. One cold morning in 1955, a severely tortured Mau Mau suspect, Ayub wa M'Ringishu, was brought from the Kibirichia Police Post to his house handicuffed and under heavy escort by armed Home Guards under the command of a white officer. The entire Kiamiogo village was hurriedly gathered to witness the Home Guards demonstrate their power in the fight against Mau Mau. The suspect was accused of being the Mau Mau treasurer with huge amounts of money allegedly hidden in his house. At gun-point, he was forced to dig and ransack every corner of the house but no money was found. The embarrassed white officer ordered the Home Guards to bring the suspect out in front of the frightened villagers. He ordered the handcuffs removed and announced that he had set the suspect free but on one condition. The condition was that the freed suspect was to run as fast as he could across the field that separated the village and the nearby hill (*Kirima gia Kibere*) to the east. The suspect started running as ordered but, having covered a distance of about 200 yards, the Home Guards were ordered to open fire at him. Sensing danger and having been a long distance runner, the suspect increased speed, avoiding the bullets, changed direction and ran into a nearby depression where he disappeared into the thick bushes. The villagers gathered courage and cheered him on as he escaped, which greatly angered the white officer. The white officer's secret plan was to shoot and kill the suspect while running and then justifying the killing by accusing him of trying to escape from the lawful custody. Such excuses were often used during the Emergency period to justify the extra-judicial killing of many Mau Mau suspects. The white officer immediately ordered the Home Guards to beat up everybody forcing them back into their houses and imposed a curfew restricting any movement into or out of the village for a whole week. This was meant to carefully monitor and curtail any contact between the Mau Mau and the villagers who might be sympathetic to the escaped suspect and his colleagues.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Interview with Esther Karwiwa at Katheri on 7.3.2014. (The researcher was also a resident of Kiamiogo Emergency Village during the whole of 1955).

¹⁸³ This account was collaborated by Kaaria Mwithimbu at Katheri 7.3.2014, as he was present when the incident occurred.

Gladys Karuthu from Kianthumbi village, Katheri, spent about six months in the forest but left to take care of her two children when her husband was killed in an ambush. She continued her activities as a Mau Mau agent and gave the following account on how children were coached to keep Mau Mau secrets and report on any strangers seen in the village:

Women played a key role in coaching children on how to keep Mau Mau secrets and report on any strangers seen around. Family survival in those dark days depended on how well such secrets were kept because it was difficult to know whom to trust. Government secret agents planted were everywhere in the villages. Children were carefully drilled to always respond to questions from strangers with “I don’t know” (*Ntiji*), “I have not see anybody” (*Gutiwe ndiroona*) or “I have not heard anything” (*Gutiu ndirraigua*), depending on how the question was phrased. Use of children was a very effective tool in Mau Mau intelligence network. While not in school, boys used to play with old motor vehicle or bicycle wheel rims (*Ming’erere*), pushing them with hooked strong wire pieces, as they raced against each other along the village paths. Upon noticing the presence of strangers in the village, they would rub the hooked wire against the metal rim to produce a special sharp sound as they raced. The sound was a special message signaling the presence of strangers (usually government agents) in the area. Any Mau Mau meetings or oathing sessions in progress would stop immediately and all traces erased. Those present would quickly disperse in different directions to avoid detection.¹⁸⁴

Sister Jane Kathambi, a retired nurse from Marathi area in Githongo, talked about Mau Mau secrets in the nursing profession. She worked in some of the few medical facilities in Meru during the Emergency. She had taken the Mau Mau oath and operated as an agent at her place of work. She was very cautious about everything she said regarding her work in the medical profession:

This is a very sensitive matter. I would not like either my name or that of the places where I worked to be revealed. During my time, the nursing profession had been secretly infiltrated by the Mau Mau agents, particularly women. They were strategically stationed to carry out Mau Mau instructions as directed. Some of the instructions were to “*treat*” (save) any patients under their care, who were known to be Mau Mau members or their supporters. They were to “*handle*” (eliminate) patients who were known to be members or agents of the colonial forces. Particularly targeted were those individuals known to have tortured, killed, captured, betrayed or in any other way mistreated Mau Mau members, families or their supporters. Such individuals and their families were branded “*Judas*” or “enemies of the people” (*Akunyaniri*). Families of those who were mysteriously eliminated in those medical institution are still bitter and keen to

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Glays Karuthu at Katheri on 7.3.2014

know the truth about what happened to their loved ones. Mau Mau agents were also instructed to steal the much needed medical supplies and arrange to have them secretly smuggled to the freedom fighters in the forest I played my part as instructed¹⁸⁵.

Julia Kanyoni, from Nkiriiri village in Katheri, was a Mau Mau operative in the intelligence network. She gave the following account on how she once participated in the stealing of guns from the “*Johnnies*” during a traditional circumcision dance ceremony in the village. “*Johnnies*” were the young British soldiers brought to Kenya to participate in the fight against the Mau Mau.

It was sometime in 1954. I was participating with other young people in a traditional dance (*Authi*) on the eve of the circumcision ceremony. We were dancing at the home of Mzee Nkuubi wa M’Raing’oni at Kathiritine (Kirima-kia-Aathi), Nkiriiri village. It was in late afternoon. The circumcision ceremony was for one of his sons called Igundu. Four excited “*Johnnies*” joined us with their guns slung on their shoulders and the “gun mouths” facing down for safety, incase any of the guns went off accidentally. They had come from the nearby military camp at Katheri Primary School (*Kithamburu*). There was a lot of excitement all around as more villagers joined in the dance curious to see young white men participating in an African traditional dance. We danced till late in the evening. As the “*Johnnies*” retraced their way back to their camp through the banana plantations me and three other girls “volunteered” to guide them. This was as per the Mau Mau plan. One of the key dancers and leader of the team that had brought the circumciser home (*Nthaka ya Mutaani*) was a senior Mau Mau agent from the nearby Kianthumbi village. He was our leader and co-ordinator, but was later killed by government forces in an ambush. Instead of showing them the most direct route back to their camp, we lured them into a secluded place on the banks of Kathita River in the neighborhood. All their guns and ammunition were taken away by male Mau Mau fighters who were lying in ambush at the spot. However, the young “*Johnnies*” were released unharmed and returned to their camp minus their weapons. We also vanished. The following day, government forces mounted a massive search for the stolen guns, but they were never recovered. That was the last time “*Johnnies*” were ever seen wandering in the villages without being accompanied by African Home Guards¹⁸⁶.

Maria Karegi, who originally came from Mwirang’ombe village in Katheri, gave the following account on how “*Johnnies*” were poisoned at their camp:

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Sister Jane Kathambi at Katheri on 8.3.2014

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Julia Kanyoni at Meru town on 8.3.2014

On arrival in Katheri area in early 1953, “*Johnnies*” initially camped at a spot then locally known as “*Namba Mugwanja*”(Number Seven) in Mwirang’ombe village, overlooking Kathita River, about two kilometers from Katheri Home Guards Post at the junction of Katheri-Kithaku and Katheri-Kathiranga Roads. The place changed the name to “*Kambi ya Manjooni*” (*Johnnies’ Camp*). Sometime in the middle of 1953 there were rumours that some *Johnnies* at the camp had died mysteriously. The Camp was suddenly dismantled and relocated to the Katheri Primary School (Kithamburu) compound.¹⁸⁷

According to Karegi, the following is the truth about the incident. Soon upon their arrival in Katheri the *Johnnies* teamed up with African colonial government agents to teach “these bloody Mau Mau terrorists a lesson”. They got involved in massive torture of villagers, mainly women, who were often rounded up and taken to the Chief’s camp at Katheri. This was in a determined effort to extract as much information as possible regarding the whereabouts of their husbands, sons, brothers and other male relatives. They were also required, at great pain, to confirm whether they were members or supporters of Mau Mau.

At the height of all this inhuman treatment on women, a Mau Mau decision was made under oath to take revenge (*Kuriyia*). All women Mau Mau supporters in the village, myself included, were instructed to collect ripe bananas, put poison in some of them and give them to the older boys to sell to the “*Johnnies*” at the camp. The boys were under strict instructions never to taste those bananas. That is how some of those *Johnnies* who ate the poisoned bananas met their death.¹⁸⁸

Stefano M’Nkarichia (mid-80s) is a former Home Guard who was working at Katheri Home Guards Post in 1955-1956. He gave an eye-witness account of the following unusual incident in which a woman by the name Cio-Kimuru, the wife of the Katheri area Headman (*Arumeni Gakindia*) M’Mukindia was M’Ikibuthu, reprimanded the Home Guards on duty in public. The term “*Arumeni*” was the Kimeru pronunciation of the word “Headman” and “*Gakindia*” was the short form for M’Mukindia, commonly used by the villagers. Stefano was one of the Home Guards on that particular day:

One early morning in 1956, we were hurriedly summoned to the camp and assembled around the open lorry which had just been driven into the Camp. The white D.O. called *Murunyu* was in-charge. At the back of the lorry were two dead bodies of Mau Mau freedom fighters without clothes on. They

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Maria Karegi at Katheri on 8.3.2014

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Maria Karegi at Katheri on 8.3.2014

were identified as those of *General Kagia* (M'Ikiugu wa Kamuuru) and a colleague who had been killed in an ambush. Their naked bodies were removed and taken to the ear-marked spot in front of the Camp's gate for public viewing. As was the practice those days, all the villagers (men, women and children) were forced to view the bodies the whole day. At some point during the body viewing, Cio-Kimuru surprised the gathered crowd of frightened but silent onlookers. Screaming at us (Home Guards) using some unprintable phrases in the Kimeru language, ordered us to cover the bodies. She firmly insisted that we do so immediately, as a matter of common decency in accordance with Kimeru culture regarding dead bodies of the grown-ups, in the presence of children. We dutifully complied with her "orders" and covered the bodies with some old sisal sacks, leaving only the faces exposed.¹⁸⁹

Stafano explained that those orders were unusual as Home Guards were not supposed to receive any orders from a civilian. However, under those exceptional circumstances they had to comply with her instructions out of respect for her husband who was one of their bosses, being the powerful Headman for the area. After Kagia's death, a song was composed in memory of his heroic deeds during the struggle. It stated, "*Kagia Mwano Kamuuru aitirie Ithangune na maru*," meaning that "Kagia son of Kamuuru climbed Ithangune Hill on his knees" to join other freedom fighters.

Marion Nkirote is from Kathiranga village. She was a hardcore Mau Mau operative in the area between Katheri and Kibirichia until she was betrayed and arrested by government agents. After interrogation at Katheri and Kibirichia Chief's Camps, she was eventually released for lack of evidence. She gave the following account:

I really don't want to say much about those days, especially the torture I went through during interrogation after arrest. Those Home Guards were really cruel especially to women suspects. They behaved more like wild animals than human beings. Mau Mau were very cautious in their operations. Before attacking a selected target, women Mau Mau agents were sent out in advance to survey the area and gather intelligence and report back to the "co-ordinator" (*Rugaagu kana Mukuna-Ruku*). In particular we were instructed to spy and report on the presence of government agents, general attitude of the people in the area towards Mau Mau, alternative access and escape routes. Sometimes intended attacks were abruptly called off at the last minute. At other times, Mau Mau would attack a different target from the one originally intended. These tactics were meant to confuse and destabilize government plans for an ambush. I was a member of the women teams that spied in preparation for the attacks on Kamurita and Kibirichia markets.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Stefano M'Nkarichia at Katheri on 5.01.2014.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Marion Nkirote at Katheri on 9.3.2014. Her account was corroborated by another informant Marangu wa M'Inoti

The informant explained that Mau Mau fighters took other precautionary measures for their survival and women played a key role in the process:

When food supplies were delivered to the agreed contact points in the forest, the delivering agent was required to taste the food first before handing it over. This was to confirm that food was not poisoned. After delivery of the items, agents never used the same route on their way back home. They always used a different exit route. As a further precautionary measure, they would carry a load of fire-wood (*nku*) or animal feed (*iria*). They would meet small girls accompanied by older women (also Mau Mau agents) at an agreed point at the edge of the forest (*Lainine*) who would help them to carry part of the load home. The informant explained that the term “*iria*” referred to the traditional animal feed comprising soft vegetation collected from the forest. It included soft vines, shrubs and leafy branches from selected trees edible by domestic animals. Traditionally, it was a common practice from Meru women to move into the forests in small groups to fetch firewood and livestock feed on special days in a week, locally known as “*ntuku cia kuuna nku*”. The arrangement continued for a while without raising any suspicions. However, upon discovery by the government agents, it was abandoned immediately and other alternative secret methods were devised¹⁹¹.

The informant further explained another role played by the women Mau Mau agents. They used to deliver Mau Mau letters to the targets identified for warning, punishment or elimination:

The letters were written in red signifying the dire consequences to the named targets and their families. The message would read “*tukanyua chai na kiongo giaku muthenya muna*”, meaning “We shall drink tea using your head on a certain day”. Women agents would secretly monitor the targets’ movements on a regular basis until the intended mission was accomplished. Those were not empty threats as most of the targets or their families were often eliminated or their property destroyed.

The informant also recalled part of the then popular “*Kaajo*” dance by the *Kibaabu* age-group warriors which stated as follows:

Translation:

Kimeru:

“*Nteto cia kwaria ndinacio,
Baria tukwira bariku?
Nteto cia kwaria ndinacio,
Neka ngukira Mumbaya.
Ni kathigunku tukurea,
Ka muntu-o-nthuki-e-Kibabu*”¹⁹²

“I have something important to say,
But where are those who need to be told?
I have something important to say,
But I am afraid of the Mbaya age-group.
We are enjoying a Christmas party,
For our Kibaabu age-mate”.

Solomon M’Rimberia wa M’Kaari (*aka Mbujuria or Muntu-o-Kaari*) from Katheri was a gifted traditional poet and soloist (*Kitharia*). Some of his popular compositions were used in conveying coded Mau Mau messages during the *Kaajo*

¹⁹¹ Interview with Marion Nkirote

¹⁹² Interview with Marion Nkirote

dances. One such song stated that, “*Bibi bukwona ti itharia; itharia bietire Murangi*”. This means that, “the dancers that you see here are not the champions; the real champions went into the forest to fight for freedom”. Another song, specifically addressing the secret colonial government agents stated as follows, “*Nigwe umbaragia kambarie, ndikwaja Kaajo muthenya*”. This means that, “Since you are the one of betrays Mau Mau to the white man, go now and report that I have danced *Kaajo* in broad day-light”. A special song was also composed by his age-mates in his praise which stated that “*Mbujuria Mwano M’Kaari, ni Kirongoti(Kiongozi) kia Mbabaabu*”. The song meant that “Mbujuria son of M’Kaari is the undisputed leader of the Mbabaabu/Kibaabu age-group. This age-group, though junior in age to the *Mbaya* age-group, also participated in the Maa Mau struggle.¹⁹³

The moral of the song cited above under Note 189 is that, under the State of Emergency, people found themselves in a big dilemma. The *Mbaya* age-group was divided as some supported Mau Mau and others were on the side of the Home Guards. It was therefore difficult to know whom to trust. The advisable thing to do therefore was to always be very cautious about what you say, to whom and where you say it. Reference to Christmas was meant to conceal the real purpose of the season’s parties when some of them were turned into secret Mau Mau Oath-taking sessions¹⁹⁴. Mbujuria, the famous traditional “*Kitharia*” was very influential in the socio-political circles and the messages contained in his songs were taken very seriously by the villagers. The songs appealed to them and influenced some of their actions at that time.

4.4 Involvement of the Ameru Women in Actual Fighting

Information gathered from various sources indicates that relatively fewer women were involved in actual fighting in the forest. Majority of them were involved in other non-combat roles that were also key to the sustenance and survival of the Mau Mau movement, both in the forests and the reserves. When asked why very few women were included in the top Mau Mau leadership positions, General Nkungi responded by quoting a Kimeru proverb that, “*Mwinire ukimwarairia muka*

¹⁹³ Interview with M’Ringera wa Mutaritho of Mbaya age-group at Katheri on 10.3.2014.(The researcher also knew Muntu-o-Kaari personally)

¹⁹⁴ Interview with M’Ringera wa Mutaritho.

nuogaaru nyingi”. This means a woman belongs to several “homes”. When circumstances force her to leave one home for another, she shifts her allegiance from the former “home” to the new one. In that particular context “home” referred to the “Mau Mau” and “the loyalist camps”, respectively. That was therefore one of the reasons why Mau Mau limited and carefully controlled women access of women into the top leadership positions, except in very exceptional and rare cases. Traditionally, Ameru women could marry into several families at different times in their life time and change their allegiance accordingly.¹⁹⁵

The following Ameru women, among them two Generals, are some of those identified by informants as having been involved in actual fighting during the Mau Mau¹⁹⁶.

- General Kithonjo (aka Charity)
- General Nkobia (Jacinta Kabika wife of *Mwariama*)
- Kathambi (PA to *Baimungi*)
- Julia Karuki (PA to *General Kula –Twende*)
- Ka-White (from Kianthumbi village)
- Kathuni wa Mathiu (from Katheri)
- Cio-Mubea (Daughter of Muthigari from Kianthumbi)
- Karegi (from Kithirune)
- Wanjiru (*Baimungi*’s Kikuyu wife)

The following are summarized profiles of the two women Mau Mau Generals listed above:

General Kithonjo (aka Charity)

According to information provided by *General Nkungi*, *General Kithonjo* hailed from South Imenti. In addition to her involvement in actual fighting when the need arose, she was one of the key strategists who coordinated the provision of arms and ammunition, medicines, food and clothing. She also provided reliable intelligence details on which Mau Mau fighters based their secret operations. Her involvement in actual combat, her role to other roles earned her promotion to the rank of “*General*”. In addition her role in the provision of supplies, particularly

¹⁹⁵ Interview with M’Ringera wa Mutaritho

¹⁹⁶ Interviews with several ex-Mau Mau freedom fighters who knew some of the named women fighters personally.

food, earned her the nick-name “*Mureri Wetu*” meaning “provider of our food supplies” or “the one who feeds us”.

Several songs were composed in her praise, one of which went as follows:

Kimeru:

“*Tugukinya Mutatine,*
Nitwatirimanire na
Munene wetu General Kithonjo,
Niwe wari Mureri wetu”.¹⁹⁷

Translation:

“When we reached Mutatine,
We met our Leader,
General Kithonjo,
She was our Provider”

General Nkobia (Jacinta Kabika wife of Mwariama)

Jacinta Kabika was born in 1940 at Nkinyang'a village near Kangata, Igembe South, Nyambene area, Meru County. In mid-1950s while still at school, she together with her parents and other neighbours, were oathed by Mau Mau agents who had visited their home one night pretending to be miraa traders. Being a Catholic, Jacinta was frightened of going to confess the incident to the Catholic Priest. She instead decided to abandon schooling and concentrate on grazing her father's goats together with her age-mates. She and other girls were recruited and became Mau Mau scouts in the village. They collected food and gathered intelligence which they secretly delivered to Mau Mau in the forest as instructed.

Mwariama's Widow



Mrs Jainta Kabika Mwariama (*General Nkobia*) at her Timau home in Buuri

Source : The Star – Edition of 19th October 2010

Eventually, Jacinta excelled in her scouting work and made friends with some Policemen at the nearby Muthaara Police Station, to the extent that she and fellow scouts used to be sent by Mau Mau agents to buy bullets from those Policemen, as per her own admission in an interview:

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Eliud Mutwiri at Meru Town on 30.8.2013

Some of the Policemen who had taken the oath would organize in such a way that when out on patrol, they would fire a few bullets into the forest pretending they were doing so (shooting) at Mau Mau. Then back at the Police Station they would hide many bullets which would at night be handed over to the scouts like me, upon payment of the agreed sum of money. I was extremely trusted by the Mau Mau leader and the Policemen who sold the bullets to me. I knew even some CID fellows and they could not believe that a girl of my age could be involved in such organisations as the hated Mau Mau.¹⁹⁸

It was during her involvement in Mau Mau activities while still in her teens that Jacinta got betrothed to Mwariama. She eventually married him after his first wife was snatched away by the Home Guards while he was in the forest. Jacinta joined Mwariama in the forest immediately after marriage.

While in the forest Jacinta got involved in making home –made guns with fellow fighters. She was promoted and given the forest name and title “*General Nkobia*” (General Hat). She was always armed with a loaded pistol which she later surrendered at Ruring’u Stadium, Nyeri, in 1963. This was during the ceremony organized for the official handing-over of Mau Mau arms to Kenyatta’s Government. Jacinta currently lives on their 15-acre piece of land that was allocated to Mwariama by the Kenyatta Government in Kiambogo village, Timau area, Buuri sub-county, Meru County¹⁹⁹.

Other Ameru women involved in actual fighting, though of lower ranks, included the following:

Julia Karuki (PA to General Kula-Twende)

In 1954, General *Kula-Twende* and four colleagues were killed in an ambush in Mt. Kenya forest and their bodies put on public display at Katheri Home Guards Post. Among the dead was a woman identified as Julia Karuki who was said to be the personal Assistant to the General. According to an ex-Home Guard who took part in the ambush that killed them, the woman fell next to the general fighting, with her loaded pistol still in her right hand. That is why her body was placed next to that of the General during the public display.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Jacinta Kabika as recorded in David Njagi’s “The Last Mau Mau Field Marshals-Kenya’s Freedom War 1952-1963 and Beyond” (1993) pp 12-13

¹⁹⁹ Interview with ex-Chief Kinoti of Timau Location ,Nanyuki on 12.11.2013

Kathambi (PA to Baimungi)

On 26th January 1965, Government forces invaded Field Marshal Baimungi's Mt. Kenya Forest Camp at Kionyo in Uruku area, South Imenti. The Government's initial intention was to capture Baimungi on a false allegation that he had defied Government orders for him and his group to leave the forest.

When Government forces fired at the Camp Kathambi, who was also armed, is said to have urged Baimungi "not to surrender to some stupid policemen". When Baimungi fired back in self-defence he, together with Generals Chui and Gakengere, were shot and killed. Both Kathambi and another freedom fighter shot their way through and managed to escape.²⁰⁰

According to General Nkungi, the few Mau Mau women involved in actual fighting were very effective. The practice was that a small group of women, carefully selected from among the younger ones who had basic literacy, were trained in the application of various combat tactics. Such tactics included the handling of small weapons such as pistols, pocket knives for hand-to-hand combat, and the usage of pieces of rope or wire (about one-metre long) for strangling opponents in secret places without arousing any suspicion. They were also trained on how to spray hot pepper into their opponent's eyes to facilitate quick escape, in case of a surprise invasion by the enemy. They were also trained on how to unload guns, remove the bullets, hide them in their long hair covered with a head-cloth (*gitambaa kia mutwe*) and eventually smuggle them to designated secret contact points inside the forests, bushy hill-sides or forested riversides. They were also trained on how to operate as double agents between Mau Mau and government agents²⁰¹.

According to David Anderson, "women managed to establish effective and efficient intelligence networks that were utilized to the advantage of the freedom fighters. It was easier for women to quietly return to their homes after accomplishing their secret missions in the forest without attracting the Home Guards attention. By the end of January 1953, there were reckoned to be a total of **7,600** Home Guard recruits (in the then Central Province) comprising: **1,083** in Meru; **1,000** in Embu; **2,333** in Nyeri; **1,387** in Muranga; and **1,863** in Kiambu".²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Narrated by the ADC to Baimungi known as "Rweni" (Lightening) who also managed to escape during the shoot-out.

²⁰¹ Interview with General Nkungi at Meru Town on 9.11.2013

²⁰² David Anderson, "Histories of the Hanged"-Britains's dirty War in Kenya and the End of the Empire" (2005)p. 124

4.5 Significance of Circumcision Rite in Ameru Culture and its Role in Mau Mau Struggle.

Traditionally, circumcision for both male and female was one of the key pillars in the culture of the Meru people. It was central to all aspects and stages of life in the community socially, culturally, economically and politically, as well as in all matters relating to religion, military and governance structures. Any Mumeru who did not undergo this compulsory traditional rite (a very rare omission if it happened at all) was never recognized as an adult. Such a person was regarded as “a mere child” irrespective of the age. Upon discovery of this “unusual omission”, the culprit had to undergo the rite compulsorily and immediately. Circumcision rite has always been a very sensitive matter among the Ameru. Many songs were composed to ridicule the uncircumcised and to praise the virtues of the rite through the generations. There was a common saying that, “*Mutaane nija D.C.*” meaning that, “A circumcised man was equivalent to a colonial District Commissioner in terms of authority; his action or decision was not subject to question by anybody”²⁰³.

Under the colonial rule, various attempts were made from the 1920s to ban female circumcision in Meru. Those initial attempts were made by the colonial administration with the support of missionaries, particularly those from the Methodist and PCEA Churches, but without much success. The majority of the people, except the early Christian convertees who were a small minority anyway, were opposed to the ban. It was viewed as an assault on a very important aspect of the Meru culture by the white man in collusion with the missionaries and a few misguided African convertees into the white man’s religion. However, the Independent Church and ardent supporters of the Mau Mau movement came on the side of the majority and opposed the ban.²⁰⁴

It was against this background that in 1956, the colonial administration made a more determined attempt to ban female circumcision in Meru. Unlike the previous attempts, this latest move was the most significant as it coincided with the State of Emergency during which some draconian measures were introduced against the Africans. The ban was announced by the then Meru District Commissioner J.A. Cumber in Meru-Town to the Meru Local Native Council Assembly in March 1956.

²⁰³ Group discussions with Njuri Ncheke Elders at the Nchiru Shrine.

²⁰⁴ Njuri Ncheke Minutes –Female Circumcision By-Laws Min.No.57/56

However, being aware of the likely resentment and opposition to the ban by Africans, the DC approached the issue rather cautiously, as he stated that:

“The Governor’s recent decision to create a Meru Land Unit, apart from the Kikuyu Land Unit, meant that the Meru people had now gained independence from the Kikuyu. He suggested that in appreciation of the Government’s gesture, Meru should express appreciation and affirm cooperation with Government by accepting the ban on women circumcision. By doing so, Meru would be setting a good example to other tribes in Kenya who persist in the enforcement of this iniquitous tribal tradition”.²⁰⁵

A further precautionary measure was taken as follows:

The Government also prohibited the ban on female circumcision from being publicized in either the vernacular press or Meru-language broadcasts for fear that it would incite further unrest in areas of Mau Mau activity.²⁰⁶

The Mau Mau, with support from the Independent Church, took full advantage of the Government ban and mobilized women to stage protests against it. Girls who defied the ban and went ahead to have the rite performed on them were praised for their courage. They were given the name “*Ngaitana*” a Kimeru term meaning “I will circumcise myself”. They were also given other names such as “*Cio-Ngaitana*” and “*Cio-Mwiruthi*” (those who used the modern razor blade instead of the traditional tool-*Kirunya*). Their act of defiance and courage was accorded special significance similar to what happened regarding Mau Mau rebellion “when Africans were often tortured and even killed by Government personnel for their defiance”²⁰⁷. To protect their parents from punishment for defying a Government order and allowing their daughters to undergo circumcision, girls were advised that when arrested they should “claim before the area Headman, elders and the African Court personnel that they had circumcised themselves”²⁰⁸. That way, they indirectly circumvented the Government ban and also spared their parents the punishment. The girl’s defiance endeared them to the Mau Mau movement. “Any form of defiance to colonial rule was most welcome by Mau Mau as it served to strengthen their cause”²⁰⁹.

²⁰⁵ KNA/DC/MRU/1/1/13, *Meru District Annual Report for 1957*

²⁰⁶ KNA/DC/MRU/1/1/12/1, *Meru District Annual Report for 1956*

²⁰⁷ Thomas, Lynn M. “*Ngaintana (I will circumcise myself)-The Gender and Generational Politics of the 1956 Ban on Clitoridectomy in Meru*”. pp343-344)

²⁰⁸ Thomas, Lynn M. “*Ngaintana*”

²⁰⁹ Thomas, Lynn M. “*Ngaintana*”

4.6 Role of Ameru Women as Family Heads: Mama Angelika’s Example.

In Ameru culture, the man was traditionally the head of the family. Whenever major family decisions were being made, including settlement of debts (*kurea marandu*), payment of dowry (*ruraacio*)²¹⁰ or settlement of family disputes (*kugiita magamba*) the head of the family had to be physically present. In the event that he was not alive, he was represented by the eldest son. In case the son was a young child, he had to be accompanied by an uncle or the grandfather and the mother (widow) with clan elders as witnesses²¹¹.

However, under the State of Emergency the whole system was disrupted. With many men having joined the forest fighters, others in detention camps and others killed, women were forced by the prevailing circumstances to take up the challenging role of family headship on their own. Those were very difficult times for women as Government brutality targeted particularly the families of Mau Mau fighters and their suspected supporters. Their properties were destroyed and schooling for their children disrupted, with many of them dropping out of school altogether. Women also suffered under forced communal labour and “forest ambush” (*nkabo ya mwitu*) measures introduced by the Government. These measures were aimed at isolating and further weakening the Mau Mau fighters still struggling for their survival in the forest²¹². The example of Mama Angelika (Mother of the Meru Senator, Kiraitu Murungi) illustrates some of the challenges and suffering Meru women went through as they played the role of family heads, in the absence of their husbands, during the Emergency period.

Following the Declaration of the State of Emergency in 1952, Mama Angelika’s husband Daniel joined the Mau Mau fighters in the Mt. Kenya forest. Angelika and other villagers were subsequently herded to the Home Guards Camp at Kionyo, in South Imenti, where they were closely monitored. Nobody would risk going back home to the village because they could be shot on sight on the orders of the colonial forces. Women in particular suffered in those Camps. Angelika carried her little son, Kiraitu, on her back for four years at the Home Guards Camp. Some people advised her to abandon her son and get married again, but she flatly refused to heed their unsolicited advice. Despite the torture she underwent at the Camp in the hands of the cruel Home Guards for four years, she never abandoned her child. Neither did she abandon her husband Daniel who was in the forest and later while under incarceration. However, Daniel was among the Mau Mau freedom fighters

²¹⁰ Njuri Ncheke reiterated the traditional bride price (Minute No.6/60 of 20-11-60)

²¹¹ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Nchiru Shrine

²¹² Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Nchiru Shrine

who left the forest in 1956. He was immediately arrested, interrogated and locked up at Meru Prison on allegation of having committed murder. But, after four months of incarceration, Daniel was acquitted for lack of evidence. While he was away, and his wife Angelika and little son Kiraitu were detained at the Camp, the Home Guards had burnt down their home and completely destroyed all the property, including the domestic animals.

Life in the fortified Emergency villages was deliberately made very difficult. The colonial forces launched the cruel and torturous screening process for those individuals suspected to be Mau Mau themselves or supporters of the Movement. The process involved bringing in specially coached government collaborators to “identify” the hardcore Mau Mau members and their supporters from among the villagers at the Camp. Those collaborators were known as “*Nkunia*” or “*Tukunia*” (sacks) a name derived from the gunny bags that they used to cover their heads, in order to hide their true identities when identifying Mau Mau suspects. Some of the suspects were identified falsely due to jealousy or personal grudges for various reasons as they were directed by the Government agents to do. Villagers were screened and subsequently classified into three categories, namely: the hardcore “*makara*” (black charcoal), “*grey*” and “*white*”. Mama Angelika was among those who knew a great deal about Mau Mau, by virtue of her husband Daniel being a Mau Mau freedom fighter himself. She completely refused to reveal any information which would betray the Mau Mau movement, despite the severe torture that she underwent in the hands of the cruel Home Guards²¹³.

4.7. The Ameru Women’s Songs of Protest

In the Meru culture, songs were traditionally used as a powerful tool of communication. It was through songs that messages of praise, encouragement, warning, reprimand, war, peace, land boundaries, marriage, conservation of natural resources, religion and other aspects of the community’s life were communicated at public gatherings. Such messages were usually coded through traditional parables and references some of which ordinary members of the audience and non-Meru found difficult to fully understand without the assistance of competent interpreters familiar with Meru culture. There is a Kimeru saying that, “*Cia Aka Imenyagwa*

²¹³ Peter Kagwanja with Humprey Ringera “Kiraitu Murungi – An Odyssey in the Kenyan Politics”(2012)p.12.

ciaraara,” meaning that, “The deep wisdom and full implications of women’s counsel are only realized the day after”. Even today, women generally constitute the majority in social, political, religious and other public gatherings where they also sing and dance. Their songs always convey a message or messages usually relating to the occasion. They may also take the opportunity to air their views on a matter of great concern to them. A social gathering of Ameru women would look odd without some song and dance to make the occasion lively. During the State of Emergency, Ameru women effectively used this traditional method of communication to protest against the oppressive colonial rule, as illustrated in the following examples;²¹⁴

4.7.1 Protests Against the Ban on Female Circumcision.(FGM)

After the March 1956 Government announcement banning female circumcision in Meru, the District Commissioner directed Njuri Ncheke elders to immediately convene a special meeting to endorse the Government order and announce it to the public in all parts of Meru District.

On 7th April 1956, the Njuri Ncheke held a special meeting at the Nchiru Shrine, and abolished female circumcision in compliance with the Government Order²¹⁵. Subsequently, Chiefs convened public meetings where the Njuri Ncheke Elders present were supposed to deliver the message to the people. At one such meeting in Upper Abothuguchi, Ndiguine who had attended the Njuri meeting at Nchiru, was invited by the area Chief to convey “*a special Njuri message*” to the gathering. After the message was publicly announced, the women present immediately started grumbling loudly, as a sign of their disapproval of the message. They vowed to continue supporting the traditionally recognized practice, which the Mau Mau also supported and vowed to strongly oppose the Njuri directive in its entirety. Immediately, women directed their anger at Ndiguine through the following song, conveying a coded traditional threat and warning him of dire consequences for daring to cross the boundary (*kuuna rwego rwa mutaani*)²¹⁶.

The song was popularized throughout the Abothuguchi Location and beyond, in the “*Kigaru*” (the traditional women’s dance) as follows:

²¹⁴ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Nchiru Shrine

²¹⁶ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke elders M’Ringera wa Mutaritho and Muntuo-wa-Biugi at Three Steers Hotel ,Meru Town

Kimeru:
“*Kaania-i-i,*
Kaania Ndiguine,
Atikaune rwego rwa Mutaani”

Translation:
“Send a stern warning to Ndiguine
Not to cross the bouri;
Otherwise he will face the full
consequences of his naughty actions”.

The embarrassed Ndiguine took the cue from the loaded warning and henceforth stopped conveying the unpopular message, which was going contrary to the deep-rooted Kimeru socio-cultural traditions. The song was widely and deliberately popularized to drive the point home.²¹⁷

It is important to note that Ameru women protests against the ban on female circumcision marked the first time ever that any decision by the Njuri Ncheke elders was questioned or defied by anybody in the Kimeru culture as far as anyone could remember. The ban was enforced by the district officers, chiefs, headmen, home guards and Njuri Ncheke elders. Offenders were charged in African Courts for contravention of the Njuri Ncheke Order, authorized under Section 17(a) of African Court Ordinance 65/51. The fines imposed on the “offenders” ranged from Ksh.50 to Kshs. 400 which was a lot of money in those days, and sentences ranged from one to six months in detention camps with hard labour²¹⁸. The women’s defiance was a clear demonstration of their determination to put their point across to both the Njuri Ncheke elders and the colonial government.

²¹⁷ Ndiguine was a Njuri Ncheke elder from Kithirune, Abothuguchi Location

²¹⁸ Meru County Council Minutes-Female Circumcision by-Laws. Min. No. 57/56 Res.No.12/56

4.7.2 Protests Against Unethical Practices

A song of protest against some unethical practices that were allegedly taking place at the Muujwa Catholic Mission, went as follows:

<i>Kimeru</i>	Translation
“ <i>Ntikira-i-i,</i>	“ I shall not keep quiet.
<i>Ntikira nkauga,</i>	I must speak out,
<i>Buria ndoonere-e-,</i>	And expose what I saw,
<i>Muujwa Kirombero</i> ” ²¹⁹	At Muujwa Mission”.

According to confidential sources (which cannot be revealed for security reasons at the request of the respondent) the alleged “unethical practices” related to the killing of Sister Eugenia, a white Nun, during the Mau Mau attack on the Muujwa Mission on the night of 28.9.1953. She is alleged to have recognized some of the attackers and she had to be killed also to conceal evidence.²²⁰

4.7.3 Protests Directed at “Murunyu”, the White DO

In most of their songs, women directed their anger at “Murunyu”, the white DO, at Katheri Home Guards Post. In particular, they protested against forced communal labour, forest ambush (*nkabo ya mwitu*) and general harassment of women on allegation of being Mau Mau suspects. The songs were deliberately worded with a view to provoking and influencing some remedial action by the authorities. To achieve their objective, women took full advantage of every communal function to intensify their protests through songs in the presence of Government agents, as per the following examples:

a) Protest Against Forced Labour.

<i>Kimeru:</i>	Translation;
“ <i>Murunyu-i-i-i,</i>	“Murunyu, take over
<i>Jukia umenyeere,</i>	And do the work yourself.
<i>Ndikunogua-a,</i>	I am tired of all this harassment;
<i>Igwitia na kwinama,</i>	Being pushed up and down,
<i>Kinyagwe-i-i,</i>	Even you, <i>Murunyu</i>
<i>Jukia umenyeere</i> ” ²²¹ .	Take over and do it yourself”,

²¹⁹ Discussions with the researcher’s mother Zipporah Kajuju Ndubai

²²⁰ Harry Hilton, “Kenya-The Mau Mau Mountain” (1985)

²²¹ Interview with Cio-Baine of Kiruja age-group

(b) Protest Against Forest Ambush.

Kimeru:

“*Murunyu neerwe,*

Nkabo ya Mwitu ntikumienda.

Murunyu neerwe,

Uume bwa Nkuru ni kwitha nkingo”,²²²

Translation:

‘Let *Murunyu* be told, in no uncertain terms, I am fed up with the forest ambush. Let him also be told that, The Tortoise’s wisdom lies in hiding its neck, a tactical strategy for survival”

The significance of this warning is based on an old Kimeru proverb used to convey the message that: “The apparent slowness of the women of this particular age group (*Mugito*) like that of a tortoise, is a tactical strategy for survival. Despite their looking elderly, slow and weak, they are in possession of a deadly secret weapon which can be unleashed against the enemy, when necessary, with deadly results”²²³.

c) Protest Against General Harassment.

Kimeru

1. “*Murunyu werwa uthikiire;*

Kiria uwitia Mbaya ukanjukia.

Translation:

1. “Murunyu, you are advised to listen very carefully. If you continue provoking the Mbaya age-group, you will face the full consequences of your naughty actions.

2. *Ntienja-i-i, ntienja mwana umwe*

Na uria ungi atwire Murangine”²²⁴.

2. I will not care for one child, while the other one (Mau Mau forest fighter) is still suffering in the Mt. Kenya bamboo forest”.

According to the informants’ accounts Murunyu received full briefing from his African agents and Special Branch officer on a daily basis. It is generally believed that the mounting pressure exerted by women through their songs influenced the eventual removal of the white DO and his replacement with an African. In 1958, “*Murunyu*” was replaced by Jeremiah Gitau Kiereini the first African DO to be posted at Katheri Home Guards Post (*Kambi ya Murunyu*).

²²² Discussions with researcher’s mother Zipporah Kajuju Ndubai.

²²³ Discussions with researcher’s mother Zipporah Kajuju Ndubai.

²²⁴ The best known champion women soloists in Abothuguchi Location included Cio-Kiruthu, Cio-Mbogo (mother of former PS John Gituma), Ngino-Nkando and Ngino-Ntibuka wa M’Remebere. The Mbaya age-group is the one that constituted the “engine” of the Mau Mau Movement, being the core component of the freedom fighters.

Kiereini later rose through the ranks and became Chief Secretary and Head of Public Service in the Government of the Republic of Kenya.

4.7.4 Special Songs Conveying Coded Mau Mau Messages

Women Mau Mau agents also used another clever method of conveying secret messages through songs and special style of dressing. They wore dresses with a special design or mark on them, as a sign that they had an important message to convey to the members of the secret movement. Upon noticing the presence of such agents during social functions, a female soloist would alert others in a coded message through the following song:

Translation

<i>Kimeru</i>	“When you are called by a woman
“Wetwa-i-i,	wearing a special dress,you must respond
<i>Wetwa witike;</i>	and strickly comply with all her instructions
<i>Nugwitwa-i-</i>	accordingly”.
<i>Muka uri marinda”²²⁵.</i>	

4.8 The Ameru Women also Fought in Self-defence

During the period 1957-1958, there emerged a group of fake Mau Mau freedom fighters locally nick-named “*tupeenja*” or “*mpeenja*”, meaning, “shave me or cut my hair”. They usually grew long hair and beards to look like true Mau Mau fighters. They used to hide on the edge of Mt. Kenya forest bordering the special area, which separated the forest from the villages in the reserves. They ambushed women while going into the forest to collect fire wood and animal feed, and demanded to be shaved, hence the nickname. The demand for a hair cut was a mere excuse or cover-up. Their real motive was to harass women in order to discredit the true Mau Mau freedom fighters and stir hatred by the villagers towards them. These criminal elements had indirect support and encouragement from the colonial administration, as a strategy to isolate and further weaken the remaining Mau Mau fighters still in the forest. However, the strategy failed and eventually fizzled out when women organized themselves and attacked them with “*pangas*” in self-defence, as they also started moving in larger groups into the forest for firewood and animal feed collection²²⁶.

²²⁵ The Mbaya age-group is the one that constituted the “engine” of the Mau Mau Movement, being the core component of the freedom fighters.

²²⁶ Group discussion with Cio-Baine and Cio-Mwebia, women of the Kiruuja and Mbaya age-groups, respectively.

4.9 Conclusion

Basically, Mau Mau was a top secret movement of people who went to war with no weapons worthy mentioning in the traditional concept of war, except their determination to win back their freedom and land from the colonial oppressors. Being essentially a guerilla warfare,Mau Mau operations in Meru region were concentrated mainly in the Mt. Kenya and Nyambene forests. They had a lot of support particularly from women in the reserves. However,their strongest unifying factor was the Mau Mau oath,that all the Movement's supporters had to take at various levels of commitment up to a maximum of “Seven Oaths”.

The Ameru women were deeply involved in Mau Mau. They played important roles in various ways which helped to sustain and ensure the success of the movement, despite the various challenges that they faced. In the forests, although only a small number of women were involved in actual combat, they played their part effectively with two of them rising to the rank of “*General*”. The majority of women Mau Mau supporters operated in the reserves forming a vital link between the forest fighters and their supporters in the reserves. Women ensured that the forest fighters were provided with essential supplies like food, clothing and medicine. They also stole arms and ammunition which they smuggled into the forest.

Ameru women were also involved in the Mau Mau intelligence networks upon which the Movement’s operations depended for sustenance and success. In the absence of their husbands, women effectively assumed the role of family heads, a role traditionally played by men in the Meru culture. Using Kimeru traditional songs with coded messages, women managed to mobilise people to protest against the excesses of colonial administration with notable success as some of those oppressive measures were either relaxed or stopped altogether. The removal of the White DO from Katheri Home Guards Post and his replacement with an African was a case in point²²⁷. The story of the Mau Mau struggle in the Meru region cannot be complete without recognizing the very important roles played by Ameru women, which helped to sustain the Movement for as long as it lasted. As pointed out in this Chapter, the issue of female circumcision featured to a significant extent as a factor in the Mau Mau struggle in the Mau Mau struggle. However, despite the importance

²²⁷ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke elders who knew both Murunyu and Jeremiah Gitau Kiereini while serving at Katheri Home Guards Post

attached to it in the Kimeru culture traditionally, female circumcision is today an outdated and primitive practice which has no place in the modern world. It has been overtaken by events in times and should therefore be abandoned completely. Unfortunately, a few families are still practising it secretly and they should be discouraged by every means possible. There is no convincing justification for it either in Meru or indeed anywhere else in the modern world.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 IMPACT OF THE MAU MAU ON THE AMERU COMMUNITY

5.1 Introduction

The emergence and spread of the Mau Mau movement, Ameru's participation in it and the colonial Government's measures to fight against it, all combined, had a far-reaching impact on the Ameru politically, socio-culturally, economically and educationally as highlighted in the following paragraphs.

5.2 The Political Impact

During the Emergency period (1952-1960) and the subsequent years, political awareness in Meru increased considerably. When Africans were allowed to participate in the Legislative Council (Legco) the then "Parliament" controlled by the European settlers under the Governor, Meru was represented. The first Meru representative in Legco was Stanley M'Ikiara wa Kathurima (from Kithirune), who was nominated by the Governor in 1955.

In 1957, Kathurima was succeeded by Bernard Mate (from Mwimbi), who was nominated by Njuri Ncheke on 15.5.1956 to contest the Legco seat and was subsequently elected to represent the then Central Province until 1958²²⁸. Mate was popularly referred to as "*Bwana Mate wa Mwimbi*". Due to his popularity among the Ameru as a politician at that time, a special song was composed in his praise stating as follows: "*Turiirwa nitwendane ni Bwana Mate wa Mwimbi, Kaboorio ikauna watho*". This means that, "we are advised by our respected leader Mate that we Africans should unite but the Home Guards, being traitors, are disobeying his order, thus betraying us". The term "*Bwana*" had a special significance in colonial Kenya. It was used to refer to all Europeans meaning "*Master*", to emphasize the white man's superiority over the Africans. Female Europeans were referred to as "*Memsahib*", a term drawn from one of the Indian sub-continent languages to mean "*Lady*". Male Africans, irrespective of their age, were referred to as "*boy*", pronounced in Kimeru as "*mpooli*" meaning "a domestic boy-servant". It emphasized the African's inferior status and servitude to the white man. Nothing irritated a Mumeru warrior more than being referred to as "*mpooli*", particularly by a white female or child. Sometimes the Mumeru would say "*ugampethia mpooli yaku*"

²²⁸ *Njuri Ncheke Minutes of dated 15.5.1956*

meaning “do not make or treat me as your servant”²²⁹. Considering the term an insult to them, some of the warriors even abandoned wage employment altogether and returned home in meru and refused to work for a whiteman stating that “*kwandikwa ti guciawwa*”, meaning that “wage-employment is not comparable to the family blood-bond which you cannot cut off at will whatever happens”. Such radical elements among the Ameru warriors would later become readily available for recruitment into Mau Mau movement alongside the ex-second world war soldiers to fight the whiteman.²³⁰

In the period immediately preceding the declaration of the State of Emergency in 1952, Mau Mau oathing was intensified and accompanied by a strong wave of radicalism. Such radicalism was captured in the following Kimeru song: “*Ninkwaria nthuurwe, mwaria jonthe atigutuura. Mwaria nkanya nija mugaa atithuurika*”. This means that, “although some people may dislike me, I shall always speak out the truth. Even if it may result in my premature demise, I shall speak out all the same. One who speaks the truth is like a medicineman; it is not possible for everybody to dislike him’.

Mate, a former teacher at both Meru School and the neighbouring Meru Government Teachers Training College, commonly known simply as “GTTC”, was highly respected and adored throughout the Meru Region. He was the most educated man in Meru then. To annoy the “*Mzungu*” for his arrogance, the Ameru deliberately chose to refer to their popular leader, as “*Bwana Mate*’. They wanted to make a political point that even an African was capable of rising to the position of “Master” and leader of his people, without the white man’s assistance or approval. Accordingly, Mate was popularly known as “*Bwana Mate wa Mwimbi*”, hence the popular song cited above.²³¹

From 1958-1961, Mate represented Central Province north, comprising the then Meru and Nanyuki Districts. From 1961-1963, he was joined by Jackson H. Angaine (from Miriga-Mieru) and they both represented Meru District. Mate was appointed a Cabinet Minister in charge of Social Services in the coalition Government which KANU refused to join until Kenyatta was released from

²²⁹ Group discussion with some the Njuri Ncheke Elders who worked on the European settlers farms

²³⁰ Interview with General Nkungi who later became actively involved in KADU politics after leaving the forest.

²³¹ Interview with General Nkungi

detention. At that time, politically Meru was a predominantly KANU zone, like the rest of Central Province. Upon acceptance of a Cabinet post, Mate was regarded politically as being on the KADU side headed by Ronald Ngala and therefore opposed to Kenyatta. He subsequently lost his Cabinet post to Angaine who was appointed Minister in charge of Lands and Settlement in Kenyatta's KANU Government. At the time of switching his political allegiance from KANU to KADU, Mate made two famous statements that are still remembered and quoted during political conversations even today. He said, "*Uhuru na Ntharano*", meaning that, "Time has come for freedom and grabbing what is legitimately yours and firmly holding onto it". The other one was, "*About turn. Mubiira jukugarukana*", meaning that, "About turn. The football team (player) has switched sides". He was advising the Ameru to change their political allegiance from KANU to KADU. But, unfortunately for Mate, this did not happen. Throughout Kenyatta's administration (1963-1978), Meru remained strongly a KANU zone, with women constituting the largest group of KANU supporters, the ruling party. Despite losing the Cabinet post, Mate remained a popular leaders throughout the larger Meru region. Following the death of Simon Kamunde, MP for South Imenti, Mate was elected to represent the area, despite the fact that he hailed from Nithi constituency. From 1961 and throughout Kenyatta's administration Meru was always represented in the Government at Cabinet level. On 19.8.1961 the Governor Sir Patrick Renison addressed a special Njuri Ncheke meeting at the Meru DC's office and praised them for their support for the Government.²³² During the Lancaster House Conference held in London to negotiate Kenya's Independence, Njuri Ncheke was recognized and invited to send a representative to London. Subsequently, Julius M'Mworia wa M'Rinyiru was nominated and joined the KANU and KADU delegations at Lancaster House.

The killing of Field Marshal Baimungi by the KANU Government forces on 26.1.1965 caused a lot of concern and disappointment in Meru in general and his Upper Abothuguchi (his home area) in particular. Regarding Baimungi's killing, P. Kagwanja and H. Ringera, in their book, "*Kiraitu Murungi: An Odyssey in Kenyan Politics*", have stated as follows:

²³² *Njuri Ncheke Minutes dated 19.8.1961*

At Independence, Meru experienced the nastiest conflict between the Uhuru Government and ex-Mau Mau leaders. As Independence drew nearer, Field Marshal Baimungi mobilized other Mau Mau freedom fighters in Meru to demand for more power, recognition and status in the Kenyatta Government. A disillusioned Baimungi rejected Kenyatta's offer of land and returned to the forest with his troops to fight the new Government. (He) was killed in combat at Kionyo in 1965.²³³

On the morning of 26.1.1965, tension was mounting in Meru Town, as news of Baimungi's death spread fast, indicating that his body was already at the Meru Police Station. Small groups of curious but frightened onlookers started gathering near the main entrance to the Police Station, conversing in whispers. Mwariama emerged from the nearby Blue Bridge Hotel (then a popular meeting place) and walked towards the Police Station followed by a large crowd. Upon entering the Police Station and identifying Baimungi's body, the enraged Mwariama shouted, hurling unprintable insults in the Kimeru language at the Police officers on duty, accusing them of "*Killing my brother, Muntu-o-M'Ikandi*". He became violent and threatened to burn down the Police Station. However, he was quickly restrained by the Police Officers and driven away in a Police Land-Rover. The gathered crowd was quickly dispersed and the gate closed. As people slowly moved away they started grumbling, accusing the Police of killing Baimungi.²³⁴

Baimungi Surrenders Arms To The Government



On 27th December 1963, Baimungi (4th from left) led his troops in surrendering their arms to the Government of Kenya at Kinoru Stadium, Meru Town. The Government was represented by Senior Cabinet Ministers Jackson Angaine and Mbiyu Koinange (in the centre of the picture). Source: Baimungi's Family Records

The Government explanation of the circumstances surrounding Baimungi's killing was received with a lot of suspicion, leading to the advancement of various

²³³ P. Kagwanja and H. Ringera, "Kiraitu Murungi: An Odyssey in Kenyan Politics", Published by Kenway Publications, East African Education Publishers Ltd (2012)p.16

²³⁴ Discussion with ex- mau Mau Freedom Fighters from Mweereru Village, Baimungi's home in Katheri

theories. One such theory advanced by the ex-Mau Mau fighters from Katheri who knew Baimungi well, and whom the researcher interviewed in the course of this study, states as follows:

Kenyatta's Government ordered all Mau Mau freedom fighters to leave the forest and surrender their weapons to the Government, now that the Independence they were fighting for has been won. In compliance with the Government order, Baimungi led his group of freedom fighters with their weapons to Kinoru Stadium, Meru Town, on 27.12.1963. They were received by two Cabinet Ministers Mbiyu Koinange and Jackson H. Angaine to whom they surrendered their weapons (a total of 120 guns according to Baimungi's family sources). Baimungi and his group were later invited by Kenyatta to his Gatundu home where he promised them 10,000 acres of land (Monroe Farm) in Timau, which they had identified and selected for allocation. Kenyatta also gave Baimungi a Land-Rover Reg. No. KFF 660 and seven miniature national flags—two for his official use and five (one each) for use by his five generals. It was in pursuit of this land that promise Baimungi was betrayed and killed under unclear circumstances; hence the bitterness.²³⁵

The Abothuguchi people and Katheri in particular were enraged by the killing of Baimungi, whom they regarded as their undisputed hero. In protest against the Government's action, songs were composed in praise of Baimungi whose killing they saw as a Government betrayal of its own people. One of the songs stated that: "*Katheri gati Mwathi, noburia nkoro ikwenda*", meaning, "We, Katheri people, do not allow ourselves to be dictated upon by anybody; we act only in accordance with the wishes of our hearts". Another song stated that, "*Katheri kwaba-Baimungi, Nthaka ikeethagua na ruchiu*", meaning, "In Katheri, Baimungi's home area, warriors lift their swords as a sign of greetings as a sign of defiance to authority"²³⁶. Another song, in memory of Baimungi's heroism stated that, "*Baimungi aitirie Murangi, atiga rukeenke na Ng'ina*", meaning that, "Driven by patriotism, Baimungi abandoned his dear family (a very young baby and its mother) and chose to enter the forest to fight for his country's freedom"²³⁷. Traditionally, Abothuguchi people in general and Katheri in particular were well-known for their war-like tendencies. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mau Mau activities were more intensified in the area. Politically, the impact of Mau Mau can

²³⁵ Photographs are available showing Baimungi handing-over weapons at Kinoru Stadium in Meru and later his visit to Kenyatta's Gatundu home.

²³⁶ Mbujuria (M'Rimberia wa M'Kaari) of Kibaabu age group from Katheri was the most notable champion Kaajo dance soloist (Muringi wa Kaajo) of the time.

²³⁷ Discussion with Mbujuria's age-mates

be viewed as having served as a catalyst. It re-kindled the war-like tendencies traditionally associated with Abothuguchi people who gave the movement overwhelming support in Meru. They used it as a vehicle to express their grievances against the colonial rule and fighters from other parts of Meru joined them in the fight for a common cause.

According to colonial records of 1924 on Meru people's response to colonial administration, Abothuguchi was described as "the largest and most unruly Divisions of Imenti"²³⁸. However, following Baimungi's killing, Kenyatta's Government managed to cool down the tempers and control the politically delicate situation in the area, before it deteriorated into open confrontation. Unfortunately, Baimwangi's family lived in abject poverty without any assistance from the Government .Before her death on 20.7.2014 his widow, Evangeline Muthoni (in her 90s) and her family had written a letter to the Kenya Government dated 26.3.2014, appealing for compensation for Baimungi's (120) guns believed to be held by the Government in the custody of the National Museums of Kenya²³⁹.

Baimungi's Widow



The late Mrs Evangeline Muthoni Baimungi
at her Katheri home,Mwereeru village, in Central
Imenti sub-county,Meru County

Source : The Star – Edition of 19th October 2010

According to the information gathered from ex-Mau Mau freedom fighters interviewed for this study, most of them remain a most disappointed lot. They blame the post-Independence Governments for not fulfilling their promises of compensation to them in recognition of their role in the struggle for the country's independence. They feel neglected and short-changed when they see their former opponents during the struggle (the ex-Home Guards and their families) faring much

²³⁸ Jeffrey A. Fadiman, "When we Began, There were Witchmen: An Oral History from Mt. Kenya"(1993) University of California Press, p.304

²³⁹ The Researcher was shown a copy of the said letter in confidence

better economically than themselves. They are increasingly losing all hope for any meaningful Government assistance in view of the fact that most of their colleagues in the struggle have died. The few that are remaining are living in abject poverty, aging and in poor health. They did not have much faith in the British Government's compensation that was being so much talked about in recent times.

5.3 The Socio-Cultural Impact

The declaration of the State of emergency seriously disrupted the socio-cultural way of the Meru generally. The Meru traditional system of governance was based on age-group "Nthuki" arrangement, where the two main age-groups "Kiruka" and "Ntiba" took over leadership roles alternately after every 12-15 years. The handing-over ceremony was known as "Ntwiko" (cutting off one age-group from leadership and replacing it with another). The last "Ntwiko" ceremony in Meru was held in 1952 in Ntakira village, near Meru Town. Since then, leadership was effectively taken over by powerful Chiefs appointed by the colonial administration to enforce Government's wishes over the people.²⁴⁰

The much hated mass villagisation programme, which was forcefully introduced by the colonial administration in 1954, also seriously disrupted the community's socio-cultural way of life and impoverished them. Barnett and Karari Njama, in their book, "*Mau Mau from Within*" state the following about the mass villagisation programme:

Though our fighters were still willing to persevere and continue to fight, more than half of the people in the Reserves had become tired and longed only for peace. They had experienced dreadful torture, collective punishments, disgraceful and miserable life in the concentrated and insanitary camps in which hunger and starvation was decreasing our population at Government supervision.²⁴¹

In Meru, the villagisation programme was introduced at Nchiru (Kambi-e-M'Imathiu) in Tigania West; Ruirii, Gakurine, Kambiti, Munithu and Kinoru in North Imenti; Katheri, Githongo, Kithirune, Kibirichia and Kiirua in Abothuguchi, Centrral Imenti; and Kionyo in South Imenti. Traditionally, villages in Meru were based on clans but, under the new programme, people from different clans were lumped together in one village. Life in the new congested villages was completely

²⁴⁰ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke elders

²⁴¹ Barnett and Karari Njama, "*Mau Mau from Within*" p.436

different from what local people were traditionally used to. One such village at Katheri Market was named “*Rwaka*” meaning “women only”, due to the absence of male family heads. Children in that village were brought up by single mothers, since their husbands were either in the forest as freedom fighters, in detention camps or had died in the struggle. These new villages commonly referred to as “Emergency Villages” (*Miraba ya Manjinisi*), were predominantly occupied by women and children. Women were often forced to participate in the weekly communal labour programmes and “forest ambushes” (*Nkabo ya Mwitu*) under the supervision of Home Guards (*Kaboorio*). Mainly through songs, Meru Women strongly protested against this “forced participation” and the programme was abandoned.²⁴²

The villagisation programme resulted into a new family arrangement dominated by single mother parent-hood in most of the families. Consequently, the living conditions in the congested villages encouraged negative practices including loose moral behaviour, contrary to the respected traditional norms and practices. During the socio-culture gatherings, such as circumcision ceremonies, Meru youth were given traditional guidance and counseling on how to manage their lives. However, all this was disrupted during the Emergency period.²⁴³

Following the capture of Dedan Kimathi and subsequently hanging on 18.2.1957, the colonial administration progressively relaxed the strict rules governing the Emergency villages. Curfew hours were reduced, women were allowed to collect firewood from the forest and food from the “special area”. This was a one-mile wide zone created between Mt.Kenya forest and the reserve, to prevent Mau Mau fighters from accessing the villages for assistance. The area had been declared a no-man’s land into which access was restricted.²⁴⁴

The Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation, in collaboration with the Government’s Department of Community Development, introduced community development programmes for women and girls. They were taught cockery, dress-making, basic hygiene, health and home-care skills. They were also introduced to basic literacy and some modern dance classes commonly known as “*Mbechu*”. The ban on social gatherings and traditional dances was lifted. All these measures were

²⁴² Interview with Julia Kanyoni and Maria Karegi on 8.3.2016

²⁴³ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Nchiru Shrine

²⁴⁴ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke Elders at Nchiru Shrine

aimed at gradually rehabilitating the people, particularly the women who were incharge of the families in the absence of the men. Over-all,these measures introduced new changes which had a long-lasting impact on the socio-cultural way of life of the Meru community which are felt even today paarticularaly in education, health,social welfare and other aspects of modern way of life.²⁴⁵

5.4 The Economic Impact

Traditionally, land has always played a central role in the Meru culture. It was communally owned and protected through the clan system, for the common benefit of the whole community. All the community's activities revolved around the land. Even the Mau Mau movement revolved around the issue of the African land which had been forcibly alienated by the white man and for which they fought to reclaim. Land was the most important factor of production on which the people based their economic activities to earn their livelihood, survival and advancement. Under the state of Emergency the situation changed. Following the adoption of the East African Royal Commission Report (1953-1955) Recommendations, the Land Consolidation Programme was introduced in Meru in 1956. It covered first the areas considered "loyal", which were under the outstanding Chiefs considered to be most loyal to the Government.

The main idea behind this policy was to create a "loyalist class", through a "reward and punishment" approach to land allocation. The policy was effectively applied to reward the loyalists and to punish the "terrorists" who comprised the Mau Mau freedom fighters and their families. The "loyalists" were rewarded with larger and more fertile land holdings than what they owned before the Emergency. The ex-Mau Mau freedom fighters and their families lost even what they owned before joining the freedom struggle, as more often their land was confiscated as a punishment and allocated to the loyalists. Land consolidation committees at the local level comprised the area Chief or Headman (as Chairman), the local Land Registrar and local elders chosen on the basis of their proven loyalty to the Government. Under such an arrangement, ex-Mau Mau and their families had no chance of getting a fair deal. The Land Consolidation Programme was intended to improve agriculture in the African sector. But it ended up creating a class of "landed gentry",

²⁴⁵ Further Interview with Julia Kanyoni and Maria Karegi on 8.3.2016

who became more economically empowered and strong freedom fighters of the Government. At the same time ex-Mau-Mau freedom fighters and their families became landless and continued to suffer in poverty and for most of those surviving today the situation has increasingly worsened.²⁴⁶

During the period 1946-1952, people living close to Mt.Kenya forest were allowed by the Forestry Department to engage in controlled shifting cultivation in the designated areas of the forest. They were allowed to grow seasonal crops (maize, beans, vegetables, potatoes and onions) for specified periods, as they tended for trees at the same time. At the end of the specified period they would shift to another area to allow the trees they were taking care of to grow into a forest. The arrangement was based on a formal contract between the Forestry Department and the temporary farmers. The farmers had to sign or thumb-print the Agreement Document (*Gukinya Kirore*) depending on the level of their basic literacy. That is how the programme acquired the local name “*Kirore*” by which it was commonly known. It became operational in Muchiene and Mutwaru areas of Mt.Kenya forest in Central Imenti and part of North Imenti (Thege). Many farmers became wealthy from participation in the programme, but all this came to an end with the declaration of the State of Emergency. However, although the programme was partially revived after Emergency, it was not as popular and economically lucrative as it was before.²⁴⁷

The end of Emergency ushered in the opportunity for Africans to engage in a variety of commercial activities. They included the growing of cash crops, in addition to coffee which had been preserved for a few selected African farmers who were known supporters of the colonial administration. The new activities included the keeping of grade cattle, replacing the traditional ones that were of inferior quality. The cash crops included pyrethrum (in Kibirichia area), onions, English potatoes and a wide variety of cereals that were offered for sale at the local markets mainly Nkubu in South Imenti and Gakoromone in Meru Town and others found their way to the markets outside Meru. Other enterprising individuals opened small retail shops, tea shops and butcheries at their local market centres. A few ventured into local transport business.

²⁴⁶ Interview with ex-Mau Mau freedom fighter Kibiti at his Kithaku home in Katheri

²⁴⁷ Interview with M’Ringera wa Murariitho who participated in Muchiene and Mutwaru forest schemes.

Despite the small scale commercial activities at the local level, there were still serious challenges caused by landlessness and lack of employment opportunities. This forced the youth in particular, to move into urban centres outside Meru in search of wage employment. With the increasing number of youth, particularly the educated ones, the rural- urban migration trend intensified, with the diminishing size of land available per family, over the years. With additional income from the cited agricultural and commercial activities, as well wage employment, people were able to gradually improve their standard of living and to educate their children. Over all, the suffering that the Meru people went through during the Emergency stimulated their involvement in various economic activitess which propelled them to higher levels of development which has continued expanding and diversifying to-date.²⁴⁸

5.5 The Educational Impact

During the period under consideration expansion of education occurred in Meru with missionaries playing a leading role. The PCEA Church concentrated in South Imenti, with the Catholic and Methodist Churches working in the rest of Meru County. The Independent Church also re-built some of its churches that were destroyed by the colonial administration at the beginning of the Emergency. The type of education that was offered in the Indepent Church Schools, went beyond what was offered in the mission schools. It enhanced the level of literacy and employment opportunities particularly in the academic and clerical sectors. It also created awareness, stirred nationalistic feelings and ideas among the local people, which enabled them to actively participate in political development of their country. Independent schools “were determined to sharpen their pupils and make them equal to the Europeans.²⁴⁹

Adult learning centres were also introduced in the community centres operated by the Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization in conjunction with the Government’s Community Development Department. These programmes were introduced in the areas where villagisation programme had been operational during the State of Emergency. The programmes involved mainly women and girls, who

²⁴⁸ Group discussion with Njuri Nchekere Elders particularly those involved in commercial activities.

²⁴⁹ Mary C. Mwiandi, “The Role of African Evangelists and Teachers in the Development of Western Education and Christianity in Nithi Division of Meru District of Kenya:1907 – 1960:MA Thesis, University of Nairobi (1993)p.192.

were offered various courses such as home-care, modern dances, hygiene and general domestic improvement. A local term was coined to describe the women who championed these programmes. They were commonly referred to as the “*Mbechu Women*” which was derived from a dance that was popularized during those gatherings in order to attract more women to join the programmes. Women enjoyed those dances to break the dull life in the Emergency villages.

Expansion was also witnessed in post-primary education. The Methodist Church-sponsored Kaaga Girls School was expanded into a secondary school to accommodate more girls from Meru and the neighbouring districts. In 1956 two boys secondary schools Nkubu High School (for Catholics) and Meru School (for Protestants and others) were established in Meru. Tertiary institutions for various technical courses were also established in various parts of Meru. They included Meru Teachers Training College at Kaaga, Gitoro Technical Training Institute near Makutano (Meru Town), Kaguru Agricultural Training Institute in South Imenti and Maua Medical Training Institute in Igembe sponsored by the Methodist Church.²⁵⁰

The Mau Mau struggle for independence stimulated the urge for further education among the Ameru, making it a top priority for children, in order to enhance their future prospects for employment. One of the Mau Mau songs popularized in the early 1950s stated as follows: “*Kithomo nikiega Aciari ba twana; Thomithieni twana twite London*” meaning, “Parents, education is good; educate your children to enable them advance all the way to London.”²⁵¹ London was then very highly regarded as the headquarters of the white man where all the good things, especially education, came from. Makerere, in Kampala Uganda, was also mentioned in some of the songs. It was then considered the home of modern education in this part of Africa. In Meru, the word “*Makerere*” was taken to mean education itself. Any institution of higher learning was known as “*Makerere*”; hence the question often asked, “Which *Makerere* are you going to or coming from?” The main idea behind the Mau Mau song in praise of education was the realization that with good education Africans would be able to fight the white man and eventually drive him out of Kenya, in the event the armed struggle failed to do so. The Mau Mau believed that education was the white man’s secret weapon behind his success

²⁵⁰ *Official Records at the Meru County Offices*

²⁵¹ *Personal eye-witness account*

in ruling over Africans and taking their own land. In this respect, the long-lasting impact of the Ameru's participation in the Mau Mau struggle is the stimulation and urge for advancement through education.²⁵²

5.6 Disappointment of the ex- Mau Mau Freedom Fighters

During the Mau Mau conflict in Meru there emerged three groups which were broadly categorized as the terrorists (*Imaramari*), the loyalists (*Kaboorio/Thirikari*) and the opportunists (*Ireere-the Bats*).²⁵³

The terrorists comprised the actual Mau Mau fighters, their agents, families and supporters. The loyalists comprised the hated Home Guards (*Kaboorio*), the much feared special branch (*Tujeru*), other government employees (*Thirikari*), their families and supporters. The opportunists comprised all those individuals who alternated their support between the two opposing sides, depending on the prevailing circumstances at a given time that were most favourable to them in terms of individual survival and personal benefit. They always swam with the current in order to make the best out of both worlds for themselves and their families and friends. The pseudo gangs (Mau Mau turn-coats) who emerged during the final days of the Mau Mau conflict fell into the latter category.²⁵⁴

Upon attainment of independence, particularly in the early days, the three groups joined together in the general euphoria of celebrations to welcome the newly-won "Uhuru" through song and dance. Temporarily, they appeared to have "forgotten" their antagonism during the struggle. They all anxiously looked forward to a new dawn of a brighter future, with freedom and unlimited opportunities for self-determination under an African Government. However, as the mass euphoria gradually ebbed away the reality began to emerge. The ex-Mau Mau freedom fighters began to realize that they had been short-changed. Bitterness started creeping in among them, with the killing of Baimungi by the independence government forces forming a bitter point of reference. They also realized that most of the senior appointments and other opportunities available in Government went to their former opponents, the loyalists, their families and friends. They ended up doing generally well for themselves economically. On the other hand, the ex-Mau Mau fighters and their families and relatives, who had lost heavily during the

²⁵²Interviews with General Nkungi, Kibiti and other ex-freedom fighters.

²⁵³Interviews with General Nkungi, Kibiti and other ex-freedom fighters.

²⁵⁴Interviews with General Nkungi, Kibiti and other ex-freedom fighters.

struggle, continued wallowing in poverty, nursing false hopes and unfulfilled empty promises from the Government. They became disillusioned.²⁵⁵

The bitterness, particularly between the ex-Mau Mau fighters and ex-loyalists is deep-rooted even today. One instance was cited by informants in Katheri arearecently, long after the end of Emergency. An ex-freedom fighter flatly refused his daughter to marry into the family of a prominent ex-loyalist who was notorious for torturing Mau Mau suspects. The said ex-freedom fighter had suffered merciless torture in the hands of this particular loyalist at the Katheri Home Guards Post in 1954. He never forgot the incident and never forgave the torturer. When informed about the proposed marriage he became very angry, refused the dowry (*Ruracio*) and vowed never to have anything to do with the proposal for as long as he lived. He vowed that if the process ever continued against his wishes as the father of the bride, he would curse all those involved.²⁵⁶

Unless justice is done soon and seen to be done to appropriately compensate the surviving Mau Mau freedom fighters, their fallen colleagues and their families, this deep-rooted bitterness will persist for a long time to come. The recently announced compensation to about 5000 ex-Mau Mau freedom fighters by the British Government as elicited more controversies among the various groups of ex-freedom fighters citing unfairness and corruption in addition other thorny issues surrounding the whole matter. The compensation issue was pursued by the Mau Mau Veterans' Association (MMWVA).²⁵⁷

5.7 Conclusion

The Meru's participation in Mau Mau had a long –lasting impact on the political, socio-cultural, economic and educational aspects of the community's way of life. Politically, their awareness increased thus enabling them to participate more effectively in national politics. The community has been represented at Cabinet level in all the successive Governments since independence. However, the suspicious killing of Field Marshal Baimungi by the Government forces still remains a controversial point within the community, particularly in his home area. The

²⁵⁵ Interviews with General Nkungi, Kibiti and other ex-freedom fighters.

²⁵⁶ Interview with a close neighbor who knows both families well (but name withheld on request for security reasons)

²⁵⁷ Interview with Mwai wa Muthigi-Secretary General of MMWVA on 11.2.2014.

surviving ex -Mau Mau freedom fighters interviewed are still very bitter with the Government for not paying them any compensation for their role in the struggle for the country's independence.

Socio-culturally, the traditional structures were seriously disrupted. The governance system based on the two main age-groups (*Kiruka* and *Ntiba*) with leadership alternating between them every 12-15 years is no longer operational. The traditional ceremony (*Ntwiko*) during which leadership officially passed from one age-group to the other was last held in 1952. Njuri Ncheke, the traditional government for the entire Meru community, was seriously infiltrated and compromised through the appointment of influential colonial Chiefs into the top levels of its leadership. Such appointments meant that Njuri was "require" to make decisions favourable to the Government. That "requirement" was camouflaged under the commonly used phrase that "*Njuri always supports the Government of the day*".²⁵⁸ The age-group system based on circumcision ceremonies and counselling conducted during specified seasons, with each age-group being given a name was disrupted during the Emergency period and is no longer functional. Individual families now make independent decisions on their children's rite of passage to adulthood. Despite the attempts made by the Churches with Government support to ban female circumcision at different times over the years since the 1920s the practice has not been completely eradicated as it is still practiced in some parts of Meru.²⁵⁹

Opportunities for economic advancement in Meru have improved considerably since the end of Emergency. Following the introduction of land consolidation programme and the issuance of title deeds to individual owners, most of the land is no longer communally owned. This has enhanced commercial utilization of the land in a variety of economically productive ways. However, with land allocation under the Land Consolidation Programme, the loyalists gained more while the ex-Mau Mau freedom fighters became the overall losers. This has remained a source of deep bitterness between the two sides. With mounting pressure on land and limited job opportunities in the rural areas, rural-urban migration among the youth in search of wage-employment has continued over the years.

²⁵⁸ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke elders at Nchiru Shrine

²⁵⁹ Group discussion with Njuri Ncheke elders at Nchiru Shrine

Educationally, the environment has also changed considerably for the better since the end of Emergency. With the expansion of educational facilities at primary, secondary, tertiary and higher levels, opportunities for learning and interaction have continued to increase. As more Meru children have continued to move out of the district, non-Meru children have been coming to Meru for educational purposes. Such opportunities, which were not available during the pre-Emergency period, are both healthy and mutually beneficial in line with the emerging trends in the modern world, which is increasingly becoming a “global village” as a result of rapid technological advancement.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 CONCLUSION

The aims and objectives of this study were: to investigate the factors that influenced and sustained the Ameru community's participation in the Mau Mau struggle for Kenya's independence; to examine the role of the Ameru women in the struggle; and to assess the impact of Mau Mau Movement on the Ameru community.

In their struggle against the oppressive colonial administration, the Ameru used all means then available to them including weapons and songs. Through the traditional songs they conveyed coded messages that effectively mobilized and sustained people's support for the Mau Mau cause. Those songs, which were appropriately tailored to suit each particular occasion, greatly helped to boost the people's morale and determination to win, even at the most difficult times during the struggle. As illustrated through the traditional songs cited in this study, the Ameru's mistrust of the white man's intentions did not emerge suddenly during the post-second world war period leading to the declaration of the State of Emergency in 1952. It started way back following the introduction of the colonial rule in Meru land in 1908 and continued to grow over the years, as other factors came into play during the colonial era. In one of the early songs, the Ameru warriors addressing the Kiama Elders stated that, "Kiama Elders, we have scrutinized through the underground window and confirmed that the white man is not a God". Another song stated that, "Abothuguchi people beware, the white man has camped at Kambakia". These two songs illustrate the mistrust with which Ameru viewed the white man and his intentions. Since his arrival in the region.

The introduction of colonial rule in Meru, alienation of part of Meru land (Buuri area) for European settlement, arrival of missionaries with the spread of Christianity and western education, Meru warriors' participation in the two world wars (1914-1918 and 1939-1945, respectively), exposure to foreign cultures and the erosion of the Meru traditional way of life –all are important factors in this narrative. They had far-reaching effects on the Meru politically, socially, culturally, economically and educationally. The political radicalism and agitation championed by the ex-second world war soldiers served as a major catalyst, upon which the Mau Mau movement depended for support. The ex-soldiers frustration resulted from lack of opportunities for self-advancement after the war, when their white counterparts

were better treated and handsomely rewarded by the same colonial government. The white ex-soldiers were given large tracts of land in the “White Highlands” with generous financial assistance to develop it, in addition to other benefits including a generous pension. On the other hand, African ex-soldiers were ignored. However, a few lucky ones managed to find employment on those farms as labourers and livestock herders earning meager wages. It was not surprising therefore that Mau Mau Movement found ready and willing supporters in this group of frustrated African ex-soldiers.

Looked at from the Mau Mau perspective, colonial rule was a brutal foreign illegality, based on forcible alienation of African land and subjecting the Africans to a life of servitude and denial of their rights given to them by their God (*Murungu/Mwene-Nyaga*). It had therefore to be fought and removed at all costs. According to some of the informants, this was the basis of the Kiswahili interpretation of the expression “Mau Mau” to mean “Mzungu Arudi Ulaya, Mwaafrika Apate Uhuru”.

During the colonial rule, Meru was for a long time regarded as a reservoir for cheap male labour for the railway line and European settler farms all meant to benefit the white man only. While working away from home, the young men interacted with non-Merus and got exposed to the political awareness and radicalism that was taking root in those places, particularly among the Kikuyu fellow workers. Upon their return home they introduced that political awareness and radicalism in Meru. The factors that influenced the Ameru’s participation in Mau Mau can therefore be traced back to the introduction of the colonial rule in the Meru region which destroyed the community’s traditional way of life and the community’s response to those changes.

The fact that the Kikuyu and Embu communities had similar grievances to the Ameru’s and that the three communities were neighbours geographically with a common historical and cultural background, made it easier for them to become close allies in the Mau Mau struggle. Jomo Kenyatta’s visit to Meru in August 1948 as President of KAU and again in 1961 after his release from detention, greatly helped to strengthen the alliance between the three communities who later came to be referred to as the GEMA (Gikuyu, Embu, and Meru Association) group.

The Ameru actively participated in the Mau Mau struggle right from the early days.

In late 1940s M'Ikiara was Nyonta (who later became *General Ruku*), using his earlier contacts in Ethiopia, smuggled arms from that country and hid them in secret caves in Mt. Kenya forest, in preparation for the struggle against the colonial rule in Kenya. He is also the one who invited Kenyatta to that crucial first meeting with the Ameru leaders at Kibirichia. According to the records, approximately 1827 Mau Mau freedom fighters of Meru origin entered the forest during the period October 1952-December 1956. Among the Ameru fighters who rose to senior ranks were: two Field Marshals; one Assistant Field Marshal; 25 Generals (including two women). There were others in the ranks of brigadiers, colonels, majors and captains.²⁶⁰

The Ameru women actively participated in the struggle, with two of them rising to the senior rank of “*General*”. Although relatively fewer women, compared to the men, participated in the actual combat, majority of them played other very important roles that helped to sustain the Movement. Those roles included early mass protests against colonial rule in the 1930s and 1940s which served as examples and source of encouragement as to what women could do in the struggle. Those roles included the smuggling and delivery of arms and ammunition, food, clothing and medicines to the forest fighters; caring for the wounded in secret hideouts; agents attached to medical institutions to organize the stealing of medicines, attending to admitted or out-patient fellow Mau Mau agents and to secretly eliminate all known government supporters seeking medical care from those facilities; surveillance on and identification of targets for Mau Mau attack; intelligence network and serving as the main link between the forest fighters and their supporters in the reserves. Women also played a key role as family heads in the absence of their male counterparts. They participated in the forced communal labour and forest ambushes measures deliberately meant to isolate and weaken the Mau Mau, leading to their eventual defeat. However, following intensified women protests through songs, some of those measures were relaxed and eventually abandoned altogether. Over-all, women played a key role in sustaining the Mau Mau Movement for the entire period of its active existence. When political

²⁶⁰ Refer to Appendix 1- List of Mau Mau Freedom Fighters from the Ameru Community.

activities were officially allowed after the state of Emergency was declared officially ended in 1960, women constituted the largest majority of KANU supporters, but men constituted the majority in the top leadership positions.

The Mau Mau Movement, the Ameru's participation in it and the various measures that were introduced by the colonial administration to deal with the situation, had a long-lasting impact on the various aspects of the Meru community's way of life. Political consciousness increased, eventually leading to the community's active participation in national politics. In 1955 Stanley M'Ikiara wa Kathurima became the first Mumeru to be nominated by the Governor to the LegCo. He was succeeded by Bernard Mate, through an election, from 1958-1961. From 1961-1963, Mate was joined by Jackson H. Angaine as Ameru's representatives. Mate became the first Mumeru Cabinet Minister and was succeeded by Angaine. Since that time, and throughout Kenyatta's administration, Ameru community was always represented in Government at Cabinet level. Initially, the ex-Mau Mau freedom fighters had high hopes and expectations for a suitable and adequate reward by the independence Government for their role in the struggle for the country's independence. However, as their hopes and expectations were not fulfilled, it became the cause of their bitterness and disappointment which have remained so to date. The government's lack of tangible action in their favour makes them feel greatly cheated particularly when they see that their former opponents (Home Guards and other loyalists) have greatly benefitted from the Government and are doing much better in life, while they (ex-Mau Mau fighters) and their families are still wallowing in poverty under the independence they fought for. Some of them have even bitterly wondered whether all the personal sacrifice and suffering that they endured in the forests and detention camps was really worthy it.

Socio-culturally, the impact is still felt in several aspects of the community's way of life. The traditional supreme influence of the Njuri Ncheke Council was diluted considerably through the appointment of powerful colonial Chiefs into its leadership as chairmen. The Chiefs were required to influence Njuri Ncheke from within so that its decisions could reflect the wishes of the colonial administration. This was particularly the case with regard to the 1956 Government ban on female circumcision in Meru, when Njuri was directed to pass a resolution in support of the District Commissioner's announcement of the ban. In the fight against Mau Mau, Njuri was divided between those who supported the Government (including the

Chiefs) and those who secretly supported Mau Mau. Such differences still resurface whenever Mau Mau issues come up for discussion. Mau Mau and the Independent Church actively opposed the ban on female circumcision. Whereas the practice is no longer as wide-spread as it used to be in the past, there are a few parts of Meru where it is still practised, but secretly.

The traditional handing-over of leadership (*Ntwiko*) between the two alternating age-groups (*Kiruka*) and (*Ntiba*) is no longer practiced. It was last held in 1952 at the start of the State of Emergency. Since that time the formal grouping and naming of age-groups has been considerably watered down.

The single-parent family headship that emerged during the State of Emergency is still in existence within some families, with women taking full charge of the family's affairs. Today there are more women involved in commercial activities to support their families, a practice that emerged out of the difficult circumstances created by the State of Emergency, where women became the sole bread winners in the absence of their male counterparts.

Economically, the impact is also felt in several aspects of the community's life. The introduction of land consolidation programme ushered in major changes on land ownership and utilization for enhanced economic development. This has greatly stimulated various economic activities in which more Meru people are involved than before. Although there are some parts of Meru where land is still communally-owned, most of the rest is under individual ownership with title deeds. Currently Government plans are under way to issue individual title deeds to cover the remaining part of the County. Due to increased pressure on land, some people have migrated and acquired land outside Meru where they have settled; this includes Rift Valley, Nairobi and Mombasa. Outsiders have also acquired land in Meru where they have settled and engage in various types of businesses and other economic activities. Since the end of Emergency, involvement of Meru people in commercial activities has grown considerably both within and outside Meru County. Educationally, the main impact was felt in the expansion of educational facilities at primary, secondary, tertiary and higher levels. The suffering that Meru people went through during the State of Emergency motivated them to struggle even more in order to improve the future of their children through education, both within and outside Meru. Indeed, the urge for further education continued gathering momentum during the post-Emergency period.

In the course of this study, it has become apparent that further research into the Ameru's participation in the Mau Mau, is urgently needed now before the available information disappears altogether. The urgency is necessitated by the fact that the small number of the *Mbaya* age-group still surviving is fast disappearing through death due to old age and poor health challenges. This is the generation that participated most actively in Mau Mau and are therefore in possession of valuable eye –witness accounts and other information on the Movement. There is need to rerecord and preserve as much of this part of Kenya's rich history for posterity.

Regretably, the following prominent members of this age-group (all in their 90s) died recently within one year: General Nkungi (Japhlet Thambu King'ua) from South Imenti (died on 7.4.2014); Robert M'Mukindia from Gikune village, Githongo, Central Imenti (on 27.4.2014); General Mengo (M'Muraa wa Nkunga) from Mburene village, Katheri, Central Imenti (May 2014) and Mrs. Evangeline Muthoni Baimungi from Mwereeru village, Katheri, Central Imenti (on 20.7.2014). In 2015, two other prominent personalities and highly knowledgeable elders from the area (both were interviewed for this study) also died.

They are Hon. Julius Muthamia, the first Senator for Meru (1963-1966), former Assistant Minister and Njuri Ncheke Chairman for Central Imenti (died on 6.10.2015) and Paramount Chief Moses Marete, former long-serving Secretary General and Senior Advisor for Njuri Ncheke Supreme Council of the Ameru Elders. (Died on 1.7.2015).

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3. Eliud Mutwiri, at Meru Town on 30.08.2013
4. Esther Karwirwa (82 yrs) at Katheri on 7.3.2014
5. Field Marshal Muthoni Kirima, at Dedan Kimathi University of Science and Technology,Nyeri,on 18.02.2011.
6. General Nkungi (Japhlet Thambu King'ua) (90 years), at Nchiru and Meru Town on 9.11.2013.
7. Geoffrey Kithinji Ruku (64years) General Ruku's son, at Meru Town on 10.01.2014.
8. Gerald Ngeera M'Rwigi (late 70s) at Ruiga village on 3.06.2014
9. Gladys Karuthu (79yrs) at Katheri on 7.3.2014
10. Hon. Julius Muthamia (82 years) first Senator for Meru at Meru Town on 4.10.2014
11. James Kimonye (chief Machuguma's son) at Meru on 22.12.2012
12. Julia Kanyoni (84yrs) at Meru Town on 8.3.2014
13. Kaaria Gikooma (late 70s) at Katheri Market on 3.06.2014
14. Kibiti (M'Ikiara wa M'Mukindia- 85years) at his home near Kithaku market in Katheri, on 5.01.2014.
15. Lucy Kagwiria(78yrs) at Katheri on 5.3.2014
16. M'Imathiu M'Rintari (72yrs) at Nanyuki Town on 12.11.2013 and Meru Town on 13.11.2013.
17. M'Ringera wa Mutariitho (M'Mwambia) (late 80s) at Meru Town on 4.10.2014.
18. M'Rukunga (in his 80s) at his Ruiga home on 21.11.2014
19. Mama Mukami Kimathi (wife of Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi), at Dedan Kimathi University of Science and Technology,Nyeri,on 18.02.2011.
20. Marangu M'Inoti (late 70s), at Meru Town on 13.09.2014.
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22. Marion Nkirote (85yrs) at katheri on 9.3.2014

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8.0 APPENDIX : QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Personal particulars: State your name, age (Optional) and what you are doing currently for a living.
2. Having explained the purpose of this study to you, would you like to participate in this interview? Would you like your name to be revealed as a source of this information?
3. Were you a member of the Mau Mau movement and, if so, since when and how did you become a member?
4. What reasons made you join Mau Mau and what were the requirements for one to become a member of Mau Mau?
5. What were the aims of the Mau Mau movement and how were they to be achieved?
6. Why did the Meru community participate in the Mau Mau movement?
7. What role/ roles did you personally play in the Mau Mau? Are there any of your former fellow freedom fighters still alive today? If so, what are their names and whom among them would you recommend that I talk to? What name and rank, if any, were you given while in the Mau Mau movement?
8. Who were your senior leaders in the Mau Mau? What happened to them? Are any of them still alive today?
9. What role, if any, did Njuri Ncheke play in the Mau Mau movement?
10. What was the relationship between the Meru, Kikuyu and Embu peoples before, during and after the Mau Mau struggle for “Uhuru”?
11. How did the Mau Mau fighters acquire their arms and other necessities for use in the struggle?
12. How did the Mau Mau fighters in the forest liaise with their supporters in the reserves and towns? How did they gather intelligence about the Government operations to enable them plan their strategies accordingly?
13. Were there any women involved in the Mau Mau movement? If so, what role/roles did they play? Can you name any of them?
14. What problems/challenges did the Mau Mau freedom fighters face in the forest and how did they handle them?

15. Were there any rules, laws or code of conduct governing the Mau Mau freedom fighters? If so, what were they? How were those individuals who breached the code of conduct treated?
16. What were your expectations, as Mau Mau freedom fighters, upon winning the “Uhuru” for which you were fighting?
17. Are you personally satisfied with the treatment that the ex- Mau Mau freedom fighters and their families received under the independence Government? If not, why?
18. What would you suggest the Government should do in order to address the problems currently facing the ex- Mau Mau freedom fighters and their descendants?
19. As an ex- Mau Mau freedom fighter, what are your views about the relationship between the former Home Guards and other colonial government agents on the one hand, and the ex-Mau Mau freedom fighters, on the other?
20. Looking back to the State of Emergency of the 1950s what impact did the Mau Mau movement have on the Meru community? Do you think the community gained or lost by participating in the Mau Mau struggle for Kenya’s independence?
21. In conclusion, do you have any other comments/observations that you may wish to make regarding the Mau Mau movement, and the Meru community’s participation in it?