

**FAITH AND NATIONALISM: MAU MAU AND CHRISTIANITY IN KIKUYULAND**

**BY**

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## **DECLARATION**

This is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other university

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This thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors

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## **DEDICATION**

To my late parents, Reverend Eshban Gitura and Nereah Njoki; to my late husband, Dr. George Stephen Gachihi; and to my children, Mweru, Njoki and Gakobo.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I am deeply indebted to many individuals and institutions that have assisted me in the preparation of this study. Foremost, my deepest appreciation goes to my supervisors, Professor Godfrey Muriuki and Professor Jesse Mugambi. It is through their unfailing counsel, patience, and above all, constructive criticism that I have been able to complete this study.

I further wish to thank the Deans' Committee, University of Nairobi, for generously availing research funds. This enabled me able to carry out field research over an extensive geographical region, and to produce a first draft of the thesis.

The staff of various libraries and archives went to great lengths to locate, and avail, the numerous materials I required for this study. Many thanks to the Kenya National Archives, the Anglican Church Archive at the ACK Guest House, Nairobi, PCEA Archive at St. Andrews Church, Nairobi, and the Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library at the University of Nairobi. I also wish to thank individuals who lent me their own, sometimes, rare books and manuscripts, or offered insights to this study in one way or other.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the nexus between faith and nationalism against the backdrop of the Mau Mau during the colonial period in Kenya. It argues that at the outset of the colonial rule, missionaries, in close association with colonial administrators became the primary agents in the advancement of European hegemony. In its vanguard role at cultural transformation, Christianity became the face of the new order, as missionaries moved with alacrity to package the faith as part of a superior alternative to the existing culture. This not only left for a perilously thin line between the Gospel message and the advocacy of western values, but also saw Christianity become a tool of colonial domination. The study, therefore, suggests that Christianity, by enjoining itself to the colonial endeavour, precipitated a coexistence that laid bare the paradoxes, and at times, contradictions, between the tenets of the Christian faith, and the ethos of colonial rule.

Moreover, the study argues that the perceived cohabitation between Christianity and temporal rule, the Bible and the Flag, coupled with cultural offensive deemed critical to actuating the new order, opened several fronts of conflict between the colonizers and the colonized. The study identifies these conflicts as having given form to the core issues that gave rise to, and influenced, the trajectories that African nationalism, including that of the Mau Mau, assumed. Yet, this study recognizes, and demonstrates, that Christianity, and the western values offered therein, were at the same time the most important influences in raising African elite that used their new skills to challenge colonial domination. In so doing, Christianity became a double-edged sword, which for this study, mirrors the duality and competing interests that characterizes faith and nationalism.

Further, the study, by centring the Kikuyu Christian community, historically considered an important part of the loyalist class, affirms the importance of the loyalist phenomenon to the understanding of the Mau Mau. Moreover, it posits that loyalism before, and during the Mau Mau, was a complex phenomenon that defies simplistic classification. The revolt had implicitly issued a challenge that required Christians to face up to their dual, and potentially, contradictory positions as subscribers to a faith intrinsically tied to colonial domination, and to the values of the colonizer. Yet Christians, like the rest of the colonial subjects, had suffered grave injustices. This study, therefore, views the rebellion as an affront not just to the values and assumptions of

the colonial state and its ally, the Christian Church, but also an interrogation of the commitment of the colonized to regaining their God-given right to freedom.

Finally, the study endeavours to demonstrate that the varied reactions by members of the Kikuyu Christian community towards the Mau Mau affirms that at one level, there was no simplistic polar division between anti-colonial nationalists and colonial collaborators. Conversely, the factors that drove loyalism were arguably, as varied as its composition. Thus, to be a loyalist did not necessarily mean taking sides with the government for clearly, there were other loyalties. The study, therefore, holds the view that branding Christians loyalists, without interrogating the factors that informed that loyalism, if such it was, is an injustice. Additionally, the study holds that the ambiguities and the paradoxes arising from the amorphous nature of loyalism were significant variables to the internecine nature that the revolt assumed.

All told, the study found that faith and nationalism are not virtues cast in black and white, but rather that they exhibit multiple shades. In colonial Kenya, this nexus was a subtle and multi-coded phenomenon that harboured within it competing interests and multiple positions, while raising important questions. Overall, this study incontrovertibly affirms that in Mau Mau's military "defeat" lay the blueprint for expanded political space for the colonised, and an impetus towards an African leadership in the church and state. It recommends that given the advanced age of the actors of the events at the centre of this study, scholars need to urgently redress the still muted history of loyalists in colonial Kenya.

This study was guided by two complementary theories- namely, the Modernization Theory, which is primarily a theory of social change, and the theory of Antidialogical Action, whose central characteristic is cultural invasion and its aftermath. The integrated use of the two theories underwrites the argument that in colonial Kenya, cultural invasion was the primary tool of social change with missionary Christianity playing a central role.

The research methodology adopted is qualitative and comprises three components; use of extant literature, archival data and oral interviews. Given the period and nature of the study, a purposive sampling method was used to identify informants. This was based on several criteria: age range,

religious affiliation, geographical location, and role during the Mau Mau. Using the snowballing method, qualitative data was collected from individual informants and to a lesser extent, through focused group discussions.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| AAC   | Anglican African Church                              |
| AC    | Anglican Church                                      |
| ACCS  | African Christian Churches and Schools               |
| ACK   | Anglican Church of Kenya                             |
| AIM   | African Inland Mission                               |
| AIPCA | African Independent Pentecostal Churches Association |
| CCK   | Christian Council of Kenya                           |
| CM    | Consolata Mission                                    |
| CMS   | Church Missionary Society                            |
| CSM   | Church of Scotland Mission                           |
| DEB   | District Education Board                             |
| EAA   | East African Association                             |
| GMS   | Gospel Mission Society                               |
| HGM   | Holy Ghost Mission                                   |
| IBEAC | Imperial British East Africa Company                 |
| IMC   | Institute of Missionaries of Consolata               |
| KA    | Kikuyu Association                                   |
| KAU   | Kenya African Union                                  |
| KCA   | Kikuyu Central Association                           |
| KISA  | Kikuyu Independent Schools Association               |
| KLP   | Kikuyu Loyal Patriots                                |
| KNA   | Kenya National Archives                              |
| LEGCO | Legislative Council                                  |
| MRA   | Moral Re-Armament                                    |
| NCCK  | National Christian Council of Kenya                  |
| NITD  | Native Industrial Training Depot                     |
| PCEA  | Presbyterian Church of East Africa                   |
| UMM   | United Methodist Mission                             |



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## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### Introduction

In 1952, the facade of a White Man's Country was rudely shattered in the orgy of violence that came to be known worldwide as Mau Mau. At the time, and even years later, the white fraternity in Kenya - settlers, administrators and missionaries alike-would not admit that Mau Mau had legitimate grievances, or that land and freedom, the axis on which the fighters had waged their war, constituted any real economic or political agenda. In the words of the Chief Native Commissioner, the gathering storm was simply, "a manifestation of the disease of politics."<sup>1</sup>

Phillip Mitchell, the governor on whose watch the simmering political discontent quickly degenerated into violence, was the quintessential colonial administrator. Kenya was his last station of call before retirement, and his administrative philosophy clearly reflected a man who was anxious to safeguard a long and illustrious career. In his view, the role of the administrator was that of guiding the African along the road to a higher civilization, while preserving the organic identity of society.<sup>2</sup> The ruler was, in addition, expected to promote the physical and spiritual well being of the ruled in return for the latter's deferential loyalty and obedience. As Berman aptly observes in this regard, the result was that the field administrator's treatment of the African was often a blend of moral exhortation and didactic tutelage, backed up by threats of punishment and coercion.<sup>3</sup>

Undoubtedly, such paternalism, coming from the highest administrator in the colony no less, only obfuscated the true extent of discontent on the ground. In Mitchell's case, and in spite of all indications that the colony was on the precipice of political turmoil, he had insisted that, while some consideration must be given to African views, this had to be done with the full knowledge that African nationalism was "an emotional movement rather than a rational policy led by the so

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Bruce Berman, "Bureaucracy and Incumbent Violence," in *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa*, Book 2, edited by Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, Oxford, James Currey, 1992, p.229.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp.238-239.

called educated men.”<sup>4</sup> He had gone on to disparage African leadership even further, describing it as that of men “with the sort of education our children have by the time they are twelve.”<sup>5</sup> Such views, only morally served to encourage those in the lower echelons of the administrative ladder to adopt similarly paternalistic tendencies towards their charges. Besides, this mindset entrenched the unfortunate belief among the administrators that they alone could identify the needs of the Africans and work in their best interest. It is not surprising, therefore, that the white man’s self-image, suffused with moral earnestness and self-righteousness, summed up the imperial ideal of “trusteeship” and “civilizing mission.”<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, when Mau Mau broke out, the colonial fraternity was quick to explain it away as a “terrorist convulsion,” a “diseased collective psychology,” and even as “a tribal frenzy where a few newly risen egotists had fomented trouble by manipulating society.”<sup>7</sup> Equally, terms, like “retrogression,” “debased,” and “black magic,” were freely used to affirm stereotype images of the ingrate African, unwilling or unable to appreciate virtues of benevolent colonialism. The missionary body, a critical component of this fraternity, joined the fray to deprecate what they saw as turpitude on the part of the Mau Mau fighters. They described the revolt as an irrational and atavistic bestial cult, whose aim was to wipe out Christianity and modern civilization in Kikuyuland, and kill those opposed to it.<sup>8</sup> Their collective fear was summed up in what Father Perlo, a Consolata priest in Nyeri, had graphically described in 1902 as a “state of things essentially deplorable, barbarous and inhuman.”<sup>9</sup>

Quite evidently, the colonial government, by presenting the Mau Mau to the world as a subversive tribal outbreak, had sought to exonerate itself from all blame, and instead, portray the revolt as a manifestation of Kikuyu failure to adjust to changes implicit in European colonisation. Even then, this depiction of the Kikuyu as retrogressive, even treacherous, was

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp.235-8.

<sup>7</sup> J. C Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau Mau*, Nairobi, Government Printer, 1954, p.15.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Walter Carey, *Crisis in Kenya: Christian Common Sense on Mau Mau and Colour Bar*, London, A.P Mowbray, 1953; and also T.F.C Bewes, *Kikuyu Conflict Mau Mau and the Christian Witness*, London, Highway Press, 1953.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in C. Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu, Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore*, Nyeri, Consolata Mission Press, 1933, p.257.

mired in contradictions. Indeed, a cursory glance at the longer colonial narrative affirms that administrators often routinely cast whole societies in a stereotype mould, which viewed linearly, harboured glaring inconsistencies. For the Kikuyu, this ranged from one of an irredeemable lot, averse to modernization, to one of an indefatigable, enlightened, and forward-looking people. At the turn of the century, for example, Francis Hall, the archetypal colonial administrator, had described the Kikuyu as,

...an exceedingly intractable tribe, too treacherous to be trusted to any extent, of cunning, distrustful and treacherous nature and accustomed to look upon strangers as enemies.<sup>10</sup>

While it is tempting to dismiss Hall's view of the Kikuyu as one stemming from ignorance, typical of early administrators towards local communities, his dim view of the Kikuyu was, nonetheless, not an isolated one. There were other views, however. For example, Routledge, a pioneer anthropologist in the colony, drew a very contrasting picture in his study of the Kikuyu. In his seminal work published in 1910, he had described the Kikuyu as "hardworking, intelligent and adaptable, peaceful and prolific."<sup>11</sup> These vastly differing assessments of the same society would suggest that either a radical transformation had taken place in the Kikuyu society in only a decade, or that Hall's view of the Kikuyu simply represented the default colonial premise of native backwardness.

As for the missionaries, they quite evidently could not agree in which basket to place the Kikuyu. While most had expressed misgivings at the "barbarism" that had often accompanied many of the pre-colonial customs and practices, they nonetheless singled out the society's "creativity" and "initiative" as having provided both form and content to the society's experience with missionaries and Christianity.<sup>12</sup> Even then, this they attributed not to the society's ingenuity, but to "the patient work of European Civilizing and Christianizing mission."<sup>13</sup> As such, Father

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.254.

<sup>11</sup> W.S Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People: The Kikuyu of British East Africa*, London, 1910, p.348.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Chapter 2 of D.P. Sandgren, *Christianity and the Kikuyu: Religious Divisions and Social Conflict*, New York, 1989.

<sup>13</sup> Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, op. cit., 258.

Cagnolo could confidently state in 1933 that the “Gikuyu humanity had, in thirty years, been raised from the state of rawest savagery” to that of a “much higher state of humanity, with better conditions of living in terms of lodgings, diet manners” and which now “bordered on the civilized.”<sup>14</sup>

The good reviews, however, only seemed to last while the Kikuyu did not ruffle too many feathers. As African nationalism began to find a footing in mid 1920s, and turn territorial in the next two decades, the old fears that the Kikuyu were indeed a treacherous lot resurfaced vigorously. Certainly, the more restive the Kikuyu grew in the inter-war years, the more the administrators decried in unison the society’s “retrogressive” ways. In this typical manner, Lambert, Provincial Administration’s most distinguished amateur anthropologist, had, in a letter to the Chief Native Commissioner in June 1942, argued that Kikuyu protest in the 1930s and 1940s should increasingly be seen as an indication of the tribe’s incapacity to adjust to strains of modernisation.<sup>15</sup> Lambert’s views, however, ignored a glaring fact; at the helm of the rising tide of this nationalism was a growing African elitist class, driven by exposure to, and appropriation of, a white man’s education. It was a class increasingly determined to use new skills and modern methods of political agitation as indeed Harry Thuku, and a few other political “agitators,” had begun to do in the 1920s. When the female circumcision controversy came to a head in 1929, giving fillip to cultural nationalism, the renewed outcry was that Kikuyu protests were indeed a manifestation of a tribe’s inability to adjust to strains of modernisation.

When the Mau Mau did eventually break out, the administrators, and missionaries too, predictably fell back on these carefully crafted narratives to argue that it was the Kikuyu, and not the colonial administrators, who were to blame for the breakdown of law and order in the colony. Settlers, the most threatened of the colonial lot raised the most clamours, declaring that the outbreak of violence was a clear indication that their presence in East Africa would be required, “for a very long time ahead” as “builders of a Christian civilization.”<sup>16</sup> Bishop Walter Carey, a

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> KNA DC/F1/4, Lambert to Provincial Commissioner, Central Province, 15th June 1943.

<sup>16</sup> Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity 1950-1975*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.24.

missionary of long-standing in the colony astoundingly asserted that it would take at least two hundred years before any African could be trusted to a position of leadership!<sup>17</sup>

Outside official circles, however, and in spite of intense and sustained British propaganda, the view that the revolt was a mindless, even random exhibition of depravity on the part of the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru, the peoples most affected by the revolt, was cautiously received and soon enough, contested from both within and outside of the colony. At the vanguard of these efforts were liberal members of the British Parliament, African observers and sympathisers to the nationalist cause, and later, the freedom fighters themselves. The latter maintained that it was the intransigence of the colonial government, and not the fighters' "atavistic disposition," as the British were wont to claim, that had precipitated the bloodshed.<sup>18</sup> The new narratives began to unfold even before the revolt had dissipated. They underpinned government's refusal to increase effective African political participation over the years as having fuelled Kikuyu militancy and secrecy that had culminated in violence.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, as the magnitude of the brutality of counter-insurgency began to filter to the outside world, the probity of the colonial rulers, and the high moral grounds they had hitherto assumed, came under renewed scrutiny. The result was that the "rebellion" began to gain hues of a "liberation movement," whose aim was "to win justice and freedom" from the British government.<sup>20</sup> In these new and definitely more sympathetic discourses, "terrorists" became "freedom fighters," and "counter-insurgency," "counter-terror." These counter-views to British propaganda were to become important building blocks for the later constructions of the Mau Mau as a bold and unprecedented stand against British brutality.<sup>21</sup>

This is quite evident in recent discourses of the Mau Mau. A new generation of Mau Mau literature has evidently gone to great lengths to demonstrate that in comparison to the freedom fighters, the British were the crueller, killing and incarcerating thousands of innocent members

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<sup>17</sup> Walter Carey, *op.cit.*, p.32.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Kibicho, *God and Revelation in African Context*, Nairobi, Acton Publishers, 2006, p.29.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, *op.cit.*, p.229.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.149.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Anthony Clayton, *The Killing Fields of Kenya 1952-1960*, Nairobi, Transafrica Press, 1976.

of the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru people. Elkins, for example, likens British counter-offensive during the Mau Mau to the Nazi Gulag. She refers to counter-insurgency as “incipient genocide,”<sup>22</sup> arguing that in late colonial Kenya, the British organised a “murderous campaign to eliminate the Kikuyu in the guise of counter-insurgency.”<sup>23</sup> Along similar lines, Anderson’s exhaustive study of Mau Mau fighters sent to the gallows under the Emergency regulations, offers ample evidence to demonstrate British cruelty. He notes,

...how grimly ironic it was, that the Kenyan colonial state, so utterly dismissive of the rights and humanity of the Mau Mau fighters, should so meticulously have documented their lives as it processed them towards the final, highest punishment under the law.<sup>24</sup>

Such works as these leave little doubt that both the colonial, and British governments, were culpable of rampant acts of extreme cruelty in the colony during the Emergency. In the meanwhile, these “new revelations” of British cruelty in the Kenya colony have provided fodder for the freedom fighters’ long and bruising battle with the British government for reparations.<sup>25</sup>

All told, the death knell of the colonial dream in Kenya arguably lay in the government’s failure to contain what was essentially an internal conflict, and turning instead to the British government to help quell the revolt. Subsequently, and in spite of its military defeat, one of the most remarkable results of the revolt was that in the short term, it heightened the perception in British Parliament that the colonial administration had lost control, and the settler community gone rogue. It is a perception that severely incapacitated any prospects of the self-rule that the settlers had been clamouring for. Even more devastatingly for settlers, it signalled the abrupt end of their colonial dream.

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<sup>22</sup> Caroline Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya*, London, Jonathan Cape, 2005, p.49.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> J. Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, London, Weidenfield and Nicholson, London, Orion Publishing Group, p.8.

<sup>25</sup> The Mau Mau filed a reparation case in the UK High Court in 2009. In June 2013, Britain acknowledged colonial era torture and publicly apologised for this torture. The British government has since offered reparations to just slightly over 5000 ex-freedom fighters while with many more left out have since instituted a separate case.



This context is important in gauging Harold McMillan's "wind of change" in reference to acceding to nationalist demands. While there is no gainsaying that a significant shift concerning the viability of British colonies had taken place in the post-World War 2 era, the suddenness with which that demise became a reality in Kenya was astounding, even to the bravest of settlers, not to mention hardened administrators. That a livid lot of Kenyan settlers should accuse the British government of betrayal for renegeing on the colonial dream was thus, not surprising at all. Old hands in the colony argued that pulling out of Kenya so soon after the Mau Mau was evidently not only a victory to the authors of the revolt, but also exposed the British to ridicule for tacitly admitting they had been hounded out of the colony by a rag tag army. As Branch wryly observes, "this was not how it was supposed to end. The British would have liked to imagine that their retreat from imperial grandeur was dignified and orderly."<sup>26</sup> As fate would have it, in Kenya, the death knell to this imperial grandeur was as quick as it was unexpected, thanks to Mau Mau. In the Kikuyu society, long simmering tensions came to a head with the outbreak of the revolt.

One of the most poignant of these tensions, and the subject of this study, was the challenge precipitated by the Mau Mau between Christianity and the call to nationalism. Like other revolts driven by the quest for liberation, liberation in this case being the opposite correlate of domination,<sup>27</sup> Mau Mau was not just challenging the values and assumptions of the colonial state, but also interrogating the commitment of the ruled to regaining what Boff, in a different but comparable context, describes as "man's God-given right to freedom."<sup>28</sup> Mau Mau was, therefore, in my view, a poignant reminder to the Kikuyu of her colonial burden, and that the overarching interests of the society lay not in the ostensible magnanimity of benevolent colonialism, but with those that would seek liberation. Hence, its outbreak generated renewed interest in the loyalist phenomenon.

Historically, the Kikuyu Christian community has always been considered an important part of the loyalist class. However, loyalism during the Mau Mau, as in the longer colonial narrative,

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counter-Insurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.5.

<sup>27</sup> Leonard Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology of Our Time*, London, SPCK, 1980, p.264.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.264.

was a complex phenomenon driven by many considerations. For a start, its amorphous nature spawned out glaring paradoxes in the Kikuyu society, paradoxes that became even more poignant, with the outbreak of the Mau Mau. This was primarily because both camps-loyalist and Mau Mau- shared many similarities; loyalists were invariably drawn from the same one-million strong members of the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru ethnic groups from which the rebellion sprang.<sup>29</sup> Even more pertinently, loyalists and Mau Mau hailed from the same families, clans and neighbourhoods as did those who were to become their bitter rivals.<sup>30</sup> This, therefore, meant that the line between the opposing factions remained fluid and often times artificial. Ambiguity thus becomes an important byword in this study, for the membership to either of the two camps was not necessarily pegged on the concerns of European administrators or the white farmers.<sup>31</sup> As some have argued, the story of the civil war was not of two distinct, pre-existing camps into battle. The critical question demanding explanation is why the Kikuyu society became split during the war.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed ambiguity is a useful place to begin to look at concerning why Mau Mau turned internecine. Lonsdale, in looking at the moral economy of the Mau Mau, aptly observes that Mau Mau's internal debates are more tragic and demanding of historical explanation, especially since they were grounded in a moral economy that the insurgents shared with the bitterest of their enemies, the Kikuyu loyalists who fought on the colonial side.<sup>33</sup> Quite clearly, the seed of civil war squarely lay in kinship. Yet, given that ambiguity is a hallmark of internecine wars, Mau Mau was just conforming to a well-known pattern. Indeed, the fluidity of the loyalist phenomenon as seen in the Mau Mau manifested the paradoxes that rise out of internecine conflicts.<sup>34</sup> Even then, the veracity of the view that the vast majority of the Kikuyu were at one time or another during the conflict both loyalist and Mau Mau, sometimes simultaneously, is one, that in my view, requires more critical interrogation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Branch, op.cit., p.2.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.209.

<sup>33</sup> John Lonsdale, "The moral Economy of Mau Mau: The problem," in Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley :Conflict in Kenya and Africa*, Book Two, *Violence and Ethnicity*, London, Oxford, 1992, p.266.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the work of Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*, Cambridge, 2006.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Nonetheless, beyond kinship, part of the shared moral economy, and root cause of the ambiguity, centred on a common colonial heritage critical to this study: the Christian faith. Indeed, this study contends that the cohabitation of Christianity and the colonial state, the Bible and the Flag, is pertinent to the ambiguities generated by the Mau Mau. The import of this cohabitation has been a subject of scrutiny by many scholars. A few examples suffice. Ngugi wa Thiong'o summarises the problem well, noting that "Christianity, whose basic doctrine was love and equality between men, was also an integral part of the social force-colonialism-which in Kenya, was built on the inequality and hatred between men, and the consequent subjugation of the black race by the white race."<sup>36</sup> He argues that the cohabitation laid bare "the contradiction inherent in colonialism and its ally the Christian Church."<sup>37</sup> To Ngugi, if Christianity was true to itself, it should have been more apparent to its bringers that it was a faith "inescapably at odds with the theoretical basis of colonialism."<sup>38</sup> Along similar lines, but in specific reference to the Mau Mau, Kibicho argues that the fighters, in taking on the "colonial oppressors," were only reasserting "their divinely given right of self determination in politics, culture, and religion which the white-supremacist colonialists and missionaries were denying them."<sup>39</sup>

Viewed against this backdrop, Mau Mau becomes not just an "act of aggression" against the colonial state, but also a direct challenge to a missionary endeavour perceived to have blessed and sanctified imperial domination as a positive experience.<sup>40</sup> The revolt implicitly laid bare the incongruity of the Bible and the Flag's cohabitation in a situation of subjugation. It was a poignant reminder that Christians, like the rest of the colonial subjects, were members of a society that had suffered deep colonial injustices, even as they subscribed to a faith closely identified with that rule. The symbolism of the Bible and the Flag thus engenders, in my mind, a weighty debate on the nexus between Christian faith and nationalism in colonial Kenya. One of the most important pillars in this debate is culture, for the imperial overlords had presented Christianity to the colonised as both a religion and a superior culture.

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Samuel Kibicho, *God and Revelation in an African Context*, Nairobi, Acton Publishers, 2006, p.123.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, chapter 5 of *God and Revelation*, op.cit.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, the relationship between Christianity and culture is yet another of the perennial problems that have endured since the beginning of Christianity.<sup>41</sup> The missionary fraternity in Kenya, by presenting western culture as an integral part of Christianity, and by extension, western civilization, turned the Christian faith to an important tool of colonial domination. As a result, one of the most enduring conflicts between the missions and their converts centred on culture. In fact, so controversial an issue did the place of culture in African Christianity become that in Kikuyu society, it precipitated a major contest between African nationalists and missionaries. The acrimonious debate that ensued from the female circumcision crisis, for example, precipitated a spectacular, if short-lived, fallout with the missions. It also emboldened cultural nationalists for it made it quite apparent that no subject was taboo any more.

Karanja has persuasively argued that the Kikuyu response to, and appropriation of, Christianity, derived its force and vitality from indigenous models and experiences. He attributes the dynamic nature of the society, its conflict-resolving mechanisms, and its desire to master and exercise power as the main features that shaped the society's response to Christianity.<sup>42</sup> This was no mean feat in view of the question of culture, for missionaries, in their bid to Christianize Africa, had first sought to rid the continent of her "pagan beliefs" and "primitive" traditions. In the footsteps of the great explorer and missionary, David Livingstone, missionaries had embarked on the evangelistic trail in the firm belief that "Dark Africa" would only be won to Christ once Christianity, and western civilization, were properly inculcated. In this spirit, Livingstone's 3Cs- Christianity, Commerce and Civilization- became, in the missionaries' agenda, inseparable and wholly good for the colonized. Besides, the zeal to implant Christianity and western heritage as the different faces of the same coin saw missionaries endeavour to create a clean board, a *tabula rasa* on which to paint their Christian story. It was an endeavour in which "Christ and the European culture became inseparable."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> J.N.K Mugambi, 'African Church Leadership: Between Christ, Cultures and Conflicts,' in *Responsible Leadership, Global and Contextual Ethical Perspectives*, edited by Christoph Stuckelberger and J.N.K Mugambi, Nairobi, Acton Publishers, 2009, p.195.

<sup>42</sup> John Karanja, *Founding an African Faith, Nairobi*, Uzima Press, 1999, p.1.

<sup>43</sup> Judith Bahemuka, "The Hidden Christ in African Traditional Religion" in *Jesus in African Christianity*, edited by J.N.K Mugambi & Laurenti Magesa, Nairobi, Initiative Publishers, p.101.

Firmly convinced of the nobility of their endeavour, most missions summarily dismissed African religious ideas, thought-forms and practices, believing that they held little relevance to the Christian message. They believed, instead, that their values were naturally superior.<sup>44</sup> Theologian John Walligo argues that the 19<sup>th</sup> century missionaries rejected any value in the traditional religious beliefs, despised many of the people's cultural values, and would not use them as a basis of Christian evangelization.<sup>45</sup> Mugambi, along a similar vein, notes that this historical development thrived on a theological assumption that was scripturally erroneous- that western culture was part of Christianity and that spreading the Christian faith to non-westerners entailed imparting western values.<sup>46</sup> In so doing, missionaries destroyed the psychological defences of their converts and hence played an essential role in the ideological thrust of western aggression.<sup>47</sup> These positions suggest, in my mind, an important synergy between culture and modernity, tradition and identity, as crucial variables that shaped both the growth and character of African Christianity, and African nationalism in colonial Kenya.

Nonetheless, in spite of this close identification between the “Civilizing” and “Christianizing” mission, the two major Christian traditions brought into the colony- Catholic and Protestant- approached the question of culture in remarkably different ways. The Catholic missions' strategy included building on what they deemed as usable from the African world milieu, as opposed to uprooting it altogether.<sup>48</sup> This approach was not wholly altruistic. Catholic missions were keenly aware that they were vying for influence and converts in a colony where the Protestant missions in general, and the Anglican Church in particular, held undue advantage due to its close ties to the political establishment.<sup>49</sup> The Catholic drawback, however, was recompensed by one advantage: unlike the Anglican Church, closely identified with the colonizer, the Catholic Church was safe from appearing to do things at the behest of the government. It exploited this distance to insinuate at every turn, how unlike it was to the supercilious colonizer, projecting her

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<sup>44</sup> Henry Okullu, *Church and State*, Nairobi, Uzima Press, 2003, p.53.

<sup>45</sup> J. Walligo, “African Christology in a Situation of Suffering” in *Jesus in African Christianity*, op. cit., p.101.

<sup>46</sup> J.N.K Mugambi, “Some Perspectives of Christianity in the Context of Modern Missionary Enterprise in East Africa with Special Reference to Kenya,” Master of Arts Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1977.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Stanley, *Bible and Flag*, op.cit., p.24.

<sup>48</sup> Kibicho, op.cit., p.53.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Jeff Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1996, p.43.

mission as one that had literally brought “Good News” to a people under colonial bondage. In a competitive, and at times, hostile environment, Catholic missions thus used their outsider status to inveigle themselves as friends and collaborators to the colonized.

The sacrament of the Holy Communion, central to the rituals of both the Catholics and Protestants, illustrates this difference in approach. On the one hand, the Catholic Fathers deliberately adopted the word *njohi*, to refer to the wine central to the ritual. In borrowing what they believed to be a term indisputably indigenous, they hoped that this crucial sacrament would resonate with the African faithful. The word, *njohi*, in the same context, however, was a complete anathema to the Protestant missions whose abhorrence of “native beer-drinking” was legendary. Protestant priests everywhere castigated it as a socially unacceptable vice, a sign of indolent living. They, therefore, opted for the word *ndibei*, as a reference specific to wine made from the vine tree and thus, ostensibly different to the native *njohi*. Did the terminologies matter? Amos Kiriro, an Anglican Lay Reader, argues not, pointing out that these were mere semantics that made little difference, other than betray the Protestant missions’ obsession with perception. He avers that the word, *ndibei*, was simply an attempt to sanitize the word *njohi*, but which nonetheless did not make the substance any less of *njohi*. He avers that the real aim was to portray *njohi* and its consumption as culturally primitive and, therefore, “unchristian.” Yet, as he also pointed out, missionaries were themselves wine drinkers of note and their castigating of native beer- drinking was thus simply a case of preaching water and literally drinking wine!<sup>50</sup>

Even more importantly, however, the rituals that surrounded the rite of the sacrament raised some culturally fundamental questions. Some scholars have pointed out that the symbolism of bread and wine had little cultural relevance to the Africans. Certainly, while bread and wine might have been daily fare for the white man, in African life and indeed Christianity, these elements only came as a new cultural and religious experience, given some Africans would taste bread and wine only at the Holy Communion.<sup>51</sup> It was a rite as alien as missionary teaching about a personal saviour or belief in personal salvation.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Oral interview, Amos Kiriro wa Kirani, ACK Guest House, Nairobi, June, 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Jesse Mugambi, *Christianity and African Culture*, Nairobi, Acton publishers, 2002, p.104.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

Speaking to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in March 1970, Ngugi made an impassioned plea for a relevant Gospel message, arguing that symbols are a direct representation of a people's values. He raised some culturally fundamental questions to the esteemed gathering:

Can the core of Christian faith find anchor in some of these symbols, or must the Christian faith be forever clothed in the joyless drab and dry European middle culture? Why is wine at Holy Communion more ceremoniously clean than “*njohi*?” These are not idle questions, for the symbols with which we choose to identify ourselves are important in expressing values held by community.<sup>53</sup>

Ngugi's largely rhetoric questions to the Assembly were a weighty reminder of the cultural neutering that had routinely accompanied seemingly harmless religious rites and practices packaged alongside the Gospel message. He strongly held that, Christianity, as projected by missionaries and often unquestioningly espoused by its followers, was a representation of much more than a faith; it was the cloak under which colonial domination had been made possible. He argued that even more disconcerting was the unashamed attempt to erase a people's culture under the guise of a new faith and a supposedly superior civilization.

These are the concerns that would lead African churches in later years to embrace “enculturation,” a term used to denote the continuous endeavour to make Christianity truly feel at home in the cultures of each people.<sup>54</sup> Enculturation served as a wake-up call, decrying the persistent notion that western culture was morally superior to African culture, and that western customs were consistent with Christian faith while African customs were not.<sup>55</sup> At its core was a message of liberation that in essence said Africans do not have to choose between being Christian and African, but can be both at the same time.<sup>56</sup> To address these concerns more

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<sup>53</sup> Kibicho, op. cit., p.125.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in J. Bahemuka, “The Hidden Christ in African Traditional Religion,” in *Jesus and African Christianity*, op.cit, p.4.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya*, London, C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd, 2009, p.71.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

systematically, from the 1990s, enculturation became an African agenda, and for the Catholic theologians, “a distinct theological project.” Indeed, the 1994 African Synod of Catholic Bishops adopted enculturation as one of its main themes.<sup>57</sup> In essence, therefore, independent churches in colonial Kenya were, arguably, ahead of their time in demonstrating that there should not be a contradiction between being Christian and African, making them trail blazers in enculturation. Their rise and proliferation in a colonial set up was a bold stand against the cultural strangulation that had become part of colonial domination.

In all, and in spite of the differences in approach, when the Mau Mau broke out, both the Catholic and Protestant missions quickly closed ranks to deprecate the revolt as anti-mission and anti-Christian. To the missionaries, Mau Mau was a clear manifestation of the “devil’s hand,” out to destroy the huge gains made by the church in Kikuyuland. Missionaries argued that in deliberately cultivating forms of Kikuyu religion, magical cults and elements of Christianity, Mau Mau was itself a grotesque and convoluted form of religion that many Kikuyu Christians staunchly opposed.<sup>58</sup> The religious factor in the Mau Mau subsequently became a fascinating subject to the observers of the Mau Mau. Welbourne, in a quick counter-attack of the Corfield Report, described the Mau Mau crisis as “in large part a phenomenon of religious strife.”<sup>59</sup> It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the interface between Christian faith and nationalism in colonial Kenya.

### **1.1 Statement of the Research Problem**

That there was close identification between the Missionary Church and the colonial state in Kenya, and that a good colonial subject was expected to be loyal to both, cannot be gainsaid. Missions were the most obvious face of the new order, and the popular perception among the ruled was that missions were at the vanguard of the advance of European hegemony.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> O.W Furley, “The Historiography of Mau Mau,” in *Politics and Nationalism in Colonial Kenya*, ed. B.A Ogot, Nairobi, EAPH, 1972, P.6.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.112.

<sup>60</sup> Haynes, op. cit., p.42.



Consequently, the outbreak of the Mau Mau posed a challenge to the Kikuyu Christian community. Christians were subscribers to a faith intrinsically tied to the values of the coloniser, and their own continued subjugation the direct result of the cohabitation of the colonial state and the missions. Yet, as Christians, to identify with radical nationalism was to support violence and to question the very foundation and legitimacy of the colonial state. Mau Mau thus precipitated a crisis that brought into sharp focus the incongruity of the egalitarian message of the Gospel, and that of the subjugation of people. Christianity had shaped African nationalism in many ways, yet was also an obstacle in its actualization. This discrepancy, this study argues, demonstrates the paradoxes inherent in faith and nationalism.

Furthermore, given the close identification of the church and the colonial state it has been easy, as Mau Mau historiography attests, to portray Christians as loyalists. Yet, the term “loyalist,” remains ambiguous and problematic: not everyone who was an opponent of the Mau Mau was a loyalist in the sense of taking sides with the colonial government. Nor did not supporting the Mau Mau automatically translate to supporting the government. Certainly, there were other loyalties, and the Kikuyu who opposed the Mau Mau did so for a variety of reasons, including their Christian faith, experience of insurgent violence and desire for revenge, past connections to the colonial regime, family or clan ties, notions of power and authority, and certainly the simple desire to survive the war.<sup>61</sup> What was the motivation of Kikuyu Christians? What was the object of their loyalty? Could a Christian support the cause of nationalism and remain loyal to their Christian faith? Were Christians who rejected the Mau Mau any less nationalistic? Were Christians who supported the Mau Mau any less committed to their Christian faith? Herein lay the challenge of faith and nationalism. How Kikuyu Christians resolved this challenge and the effect, if any, this had on the growth and identity of Christianity in Kikuyuland is the problem this study contends with.

### **Objectives of the study**

- To determine the pattern of the establishment of Christian missions, and the interface between Christianity and growth of nationalism in colonial Kenya.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.209.

- To analyse the making of a collaborative/loyalist class in the Kikuyu society.
- To analyse the role of the Revival Fellowship in African Christianity.
- To establish to what extent, if at all, the Mau Mau can be considered a war against Christianity.
- To examine the factors that determined Christians' response to the Mau Mau.
- To determine whether the Mau Mau was an internecine war.

### **Scope and limitation**

The study focuses on the interface between faith and nationalism in colonial Kenya, right from the implanting of Christianity among the Kikuyu, to the Mau Mau, and the consequences that this had for Kikuyu Christianity. The major emphasis lies in the interplay of the two fundamental concepts of Christian faith and nationalism with the Mau Mau as the backdrop of this examination. The study ends with post-Mau Mau rehabilitation efforts by both the church, and the colonial administration. For the purpose of the study, the Embu and Meru societies have been included as important locations, given their strong involvement with the Mau Mau. While strictly speaking, these communities are not Kikuyu, the story of the Mau Mau story is also their story, hence the justification in extending the study to them.

The study has taken an inordinately long period to complete, for which I take full responsibility. Indeed, the bulk of the work only ensued when funding was finally available from the Deans' Committee. Furthermore, one of my original supervisors left the University of Nairobi, necessitating a replacement. A reassessment of the study hence called for considerable reorganisation of the whole project. In addition, the study has gone on concurrently with my full teaching responsibilities.

Concerning the collection of oral data from the field, several observations are in order. The geographical area of the study was unwieldy, and the researcher had to enlist research assistants for the purpose of data collection. Field data collection was thus only possible through a sampling method. Further, to date, Mau Mau remains an emotive debate in Kenya, with many still unresolved issues affecting many actors and families. There is discernible despondency among the ex-freedom fighters. Old grudges, retribution and the clamour for compensation and

the frustration that has accompanied this process are still real issues that the Mau Mau researcher has to contend with. In addition, natural attrition, and the advanced age of first hand witnesses has certainly taken their toll on the quality of evidence from the actors, or firsthand witnesses to the events of the day.

### **Literature Review**

The assertion that “the Gikuyu were the angriest and most internally divided of the major ethnic groups in Kenya” needs no defending.<sup>62</sup> The historical reasons for this are adequately discussed in many works. Certainly, the divisiveness that the revolt quickly generated, delineating the society into the rather amorphous camps of Mau Mau or Loyalist, only underscores how deeply rooted, yet close to the surface, these divisions were. Indeed, the loyalist phenomenon, prior to, but especially during the Mau Mau, was arguably a generic term, a great coat under which lay such diverse groups as chiefs and headmen, Christians, Home Guards, the Tribal Police, and other loose groupings deemed opposed to the Mau Mau. This composite group has been immortalised in the colonial government’s official tribute to them, in the *History of Loyalists*.<sup>63</sup>

In a bid to win the war, the administration exploited these divisions through the deliberate policy of cultivating an African opposition. This feat was accomplished largely by arming vigilantes, styled as Home Guards. Their role was to protect villages from attack, and assist the police and the military in operations against the Mau Mau fighters.<sup>64</sup> That both camps often comprised the same people, same clans, and same families, only made bitterer the recriminations, an eventuality that undermined, and ultimately, destroyed the Mau Mau from within.

The British shaped the early discourse on the Mau Mau and missionaries were central to this exercise. Over the years, missionaries had not only had a long and close contact with the Kikuyu, but had maintained close links to the colonial establishment. When the Mau Mau broke out, they were quick to deprecate the revolt. None more than the missionary fraternity popularised the idea

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<sup>62</sup> Marshall Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs: History Memory and Politics*, Lynne Rienner, 1988, p.93.

<sup>63</sup> Government of Kenya, *History of Loyalists*, Nairobi, Government Printer, 1961.

<sup>64</sup> Branch, op.cit., p.11.

that the revolt was an evil assault on Christianity, while unfortunately placing little premium on the genesis of the violence itself. The missionary literature is thus revealing. While on the one hand some missionaries were sympathetic to the plight of the Kikuyu, there were, on the other, those who argued that Kikuyu troubles were of their own making. None of the two sides, however, thought that recourse to violence, as the Mau Mau had done, could be justified.

Bewes, the Church Missionary Society (hereafter CMS) Secretary for Africa during the Mau Mau epitomised this division. While conceding that “African grievances could not go unheeded forever,” he had gone on to argue that these grievances, particularly those related to land, had been exaggerated and distorted by troublemakers and by itself would never have created Mau Mau.<sup>65</sup> However, Bewes was among the first in the missionary community, to advocate for speedy remedial policies in Kikuyu country, of which, he argued, so many Christians, alongside the others, were unhappy about. In specific reference to the Mau Mau, he pointed out that though Christians shared the troubles of the tribe, they nonetheless, “cannot see salvation through politics and politicians.”<sup>66</sup> Bewes, in spite of his long years as a trusted friend of the Kikuyu, nonetheless did not come out clearly to show how the political problems facing the Kikuyu could be redressed. Clearly, he was as wary of African nationalism as the rest of the missionary fraternity.

Beecher’s major concern during the Mau Mau was what he called the “falling away” of Kikuyu Christians in face of the revolt. In his writings, he explained at length that behind all the nefarious plans of the artificers of the “Mau Mau terrorist uprising in Kenya,” was a long-range aim to refashion the whole of the social, economic and political patterning of the Kikuyu tribe. He advised that Christian counter-revolution to Mau Mau’s first priority should thus be to win back Christians who had “gone over to the other side...”<sup>67</sup> A clearly perturbed Beecher, however, also warned of the effects of long-held prejudices by the whites in the colony based on difference of colour, race and language. He argued that as long as this was allowed to go on, the Gospel message would remain alien to “indigenous people.” He admitted that serious lapses by

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<sup>65</sup> Bewes, *Kikuyu Conflict*, op.cit., p.43.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in O.W. Furley, “The Historiography of Mau Mau” in *Politics and Nationalism*, op.cit., p.114.

the church, and the white community at large had festered for too long, contributing to the eventual breakdown of law and order. Nonetheless, his views of the place of nationalism in Christianity were decidedly negative. He accused Kikuyu political leaders of attacking the church at every turn, and using violence for their own selfish reasons.<sup>68</sup> Beecher, as Head of the Anglican community in the colony, failed to show how constructive engagement could harness nationalism. Yet, this was the most pressing question of the day for the church.

Wiseman's *Kikuyu Martyrs* is an important, albeit brief, biographical work depicting Christians whose faith cost them their lives during the Mau Mau.<sup>69</sup> However, the ten profiles contained therein, and though clearly testimonies of great Christian faith, are a one-sided account. The standard reason given by the author in nearly all the profiles is that these Christians lost their lives because they would not partake of the Mau Mau oaths, or had opposed the movement in "other ways." The author is silent on what these other ways were, thus leaving it to conjecture. Yet, it is a well-established fact that many other Christians, equally threatened by the Mau Mau for adamantly rejecting the oath did not meet the same fate as these martyrs. Wiseman's work thus raises the question as to why the freedom fighters killed some and not others. Had Wiseman's "martyrs," perhaps, committed specific acts considered as betrayal by the Mau Mau as Kibicho, for example, suggests?<sup>70</sup> Wiseman, in portraying the Mau Mau fighters as merely cold-blooded murderers who needed no reason to kill, leaves a lacuna that requires further interrogation.

In three articles written in 1958, Leakey went to great lengths to explain the "bestial" nature of the Mau Mau, arguing that the rebellion was so dangerous because it offered a new faith through the manipulation of oath taking and magic. Leakey, the most prolific writer on the Mau Mau during its time, attempted to explain why so many "peace-loving Kikuyu" had turned into "fanatical murdering maniacs."<sup>71</sup> Born of missionary parents who had arrived in Kikuyuland at the turn of the century, Leakey was keen to demonstrate that, unlike other "ignorant" whites in the colony, he understood the genesis of the historical grievances of the Kikuyu. He explained

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> E.M Wiseman, *Kikuyu Martyrs*, London, Highway Press, 1958.

<sup>70</sup> Kibicho, *God and Revelation*, op.cit., p.149.

<sup>71</sup> L.S.B. Leakey, *Defeating Mau Mau*, London, Methuen Press, 1954, p.5.

that Mau Mau aims were to recover stolen lands, obtain self-government, destroy Christianity, restore ancient customs, drive out or subjugate foreigners, abolish soil conservation and increase secular education.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, in spite of his claims at being a Kikuyu “insider,” and an authority on the Kikuyu at that, Leakey only ended up watering down the legitimacy of these grievances, particularly those appertaining to land. The most enduring picture from his works is that of a people steeped in the intrigues of *ithaka*, land. In addition, the host of accusations against the Mau were a thinly disguised attempt to entrench the outside world image of the revolt as one fomented by a society unable to cope with modernity. He held up for inspection, this “warped” Kikuyu mentality, against “Christians’ steadfastness.”<sup>73</sup>

Overall, the missionary literature bore an instinctive tendency to discredit and anathematise the rebellion by drawing images and interpretations deliberately myopic of the Kenyan scene. This, unfortunately, became the foundation on which the British built a myth of the Mau Mau where Christianity and “Civilization” were under siege in Kikuyuland, and “Mau Mau” the culprit “that posed a direct threat to generations of labour in building a Gikuyu Christian community.”<sup>74</sup> This premier literature went along way in shaping the worldview of the rebellion as an utter aberration.

Ogot, in one of the earliest articles by an African scholar on the Mau Mau, describes the Kikuyu Christian community as “one of the most important groups of loyalists.”<sup>75</sup> He, however, also points out that it is a group largely ignored by historians, political scientists and writers of memoirs. Ogot argues that Kikuyu Christians were, by historical default, loyalists, given their faith, and perceived closeness to the colonial administration. The author is emphatic that as long as the many questions around loyalism remain unanswered, the study of the Mau Mau would continue to be lopsided and prejudicial to the many other groups who did not espouse its cause, by either showing indifference or even hostility to the movement.<sup>76</sup> We note, however, that Ogot’s decrying on the paucity of literature on loyalism was barely a decade into independence,

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs*, op.cit., p.41.

<sup>75</sup> B. A. Ogot, “Revolt of the Elders,” in *Politics and Nationalism*, op.cit., p.142.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.135.

and many studies have since addressed the subject. Yet, even then, there is no gainsaying that the bulk of attention has remained on the freedom fighters, not loyalists. Indeed, loyalists have continued to be peripheral players, or at best, accessory to the brutal end of the Empire, thereby perpetuating the view that they were no more than “despicable collaborators,” the term Odinga used in his seminal work, *Not Yet Uhuru*.<sup>77</sup> Thus, the sidelining of loyalists that Ogot raised decades ago remains pertinent to Mau Mau scholarship.

Rosberg and Nottingham’s study was the first important departure from the colonial myth of the Mau Mau.<sup>78</sup> In the authors’ own words, their work was intended as “an alternative interpretation of Mau Mau” in which “the origins of African politics and their patterns of development, politicization and mobilization take centre page.”<sup>79</sup> However, keen, as the authors were in portraying the Mau Mau as a logical culmination to this process, there is little, in their work, on loyalism. The only question raised and hardly answered, is why loyalists were out of sympathy with militant and radical nationalism. Loyalists, in this work, thus only come through as “comprising a few scattered groups of people, who were, for various reasons, out of sympathy with militant and radical nationalism.” In this group, the authors identify, “a large section of Christians who looked, at least in part, for religious not political solutions to their problems.”<sup>80</sup> The work thus leaves a huge lacuna as to what drove loyalism during the Mau Mau.

Greet Kershaw makes a fine distinction between the composite group of loyalists and that of the Kikuyu Christian community, arguing that if Christians were indeed loyalists, they were loyalists of a unique type and in many ways quite unlike the 25,000 strong enlisted in the Home Guard. Kershaw posits that a fundamental core of Christians, emboldened by the Revivalist message of salvation through “the blood of Christ and public confession of sin,” totally rejected the use of violence, refused to carry arms, preferring not to be involved in resistance action at all, convinced that men and women could receive temporal and eternal blessing under any regime.<sup>81</sup> She argues that revival Christians believed that Mau Mau was an evil and virulent disease,

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<sup>77</sup>Odinga Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru*, London, Heinemann, 1967, p.132.

<sup>78</sup> C.G Rosberg and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of “Mau Mau”*: *Nationalism in Kenya*, New York, Hoover Publications, 1966.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>81</sup> Greet Kershaw, *Mau Mau From Below*, East African Publishing House, 1977, p. 238.

against which the fight must take on the dimensions of a holy crusade. Kershaw describes the Christians who stood up to the Mau Mau as “the torch-bearers for the church through the dark and uncertain days of the Mau Mau,” a close description to that of Lipscomb who refers to them as “the skeleton of a building that must contain the future.”<sup>82</sup> Had these Christians, in choosing the pacifist path, subordinated their patriotic aspirations to their Christian faith? Were they any less loyal to the cause of nationalism? Kershaw’s work, in making these distinctions, affirms that loyalism was not a singular but a compound phenomenon, harbouring distinct sub-stratums. These groupings, at times nebulous, are important to loyalism, for they urge an interrogation of the object of loyalism.

Lovatt, in his work, makes a clear distinction between the role of the missions and that of Kikuyu Christians in the resistance to the Mau Mau. A Wildlife Warden, turned Field Intelligence Officer during the Mau Mau, Lovatt argues that the missions offered a far more effective resistance to Mau Mau than did the Kikuyu Christian community. He argues that a significant body of resistance to Mau Mau had its nucleus within the Christian missions that were dotted throughout Central Province.<sup>83</sup> He contends that most Christians resisted not out of loyalty to government, but because of “the degradation and depravity that epitomized the movement,” and the realization that “there could be no compromise between their faith and activities of Mau Mau.”<sup>84</sup> However, like several other works that classify Christians as loyalists, Lovatt barely examines the nature of this loyalty, even as he is emphatic that it was certainly not to the colonial government. This work is, in addition, virulent in its attack on the Kikuyu, where he terms a whole society ingrate to civilizing overtures.<sup>85</sup> In spite of it being a recent addition to Mau Mau literature, its whole tone echoes that of first generation colonial literature, portraying the revolt as a whole society’s failure to come to terms with benevolent colonialism.

Obadiah Kariuki’s autobiography offers important insights into the nature of Christian loyalty during the Mau Mau. This work is significant, for the author was not only a staunch revivalist

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<sup>82</sup> Cited in Clough, *op.cit.*, p.42.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> D. Lovatt, *Kenya, the Kikuyu and Mau Mau*, Sussex, Mawenzi Books, 2005, p.161.



and an ardent anti-Mau Mau crusader, but also the highest ranked African clergy in the Anglican Church at the time of the Mau Mau.<sup>86</sup> Besides, Kariuki's position invites interest for he was not just a senior clergy, but also a brother-in law to Jomo Kenyatta, long estranged to missionary Christianity and perceived by the whites in the colony as the spiritual leader of the Mau Mau. Quite contrary to what Lovatt postulates, Kariuki argues that Kikuyu Christians, in comparison to the missionaries, played a crucial role in defending the faith during the Mau Mau. He observes that once the revolt broke out, the situation went completely out of hand for those white missionaries who had been running the churches and the pastorates. Consequently, it was "up to us Africans to defend the faith with courage and even with our lives."<sup>87</sup> He compares the plight of revival Christians during the Mau Mau to that of Christ's disciples after his death, noting that in spite of the terror unleashed by the Mau Mau, revivalists stood firm. He writes; "we trembled exceedingly, yet very much. But He has also come to us too and our hearts are also glad."<sup>88</sup> From this work, one derives that it is not the fear, but the paradox of strength rising out of fear that gave remarkable strength to Christians who resisted the Mau Mau.

Karanja's argument, that the Church in Kikuyuland was witnessing devolution of church responsibilities from missionaries to African Christians well before the Mau Mau broke out, adds a new dimension to the debate.<sup>89</sup> It highlights the parallel growth of increasingly radical African nationalism and a growing African leadership in the church. This premise provokes thought as to how far, if at all, this devolution in the church, coupled with a movement of spiritual renewal that was the revival, might have influenced the direction of the church in face of the challenges posed by the Mau Mau. Why was the "less missionary church" not more accommodating of African nationalism? Indeed, what were the obstacles that faced the devolving church in relation to the quest for political self-determination?

The more recent works on the Mau Mau have re-appraised the role of loyalists. Most of the interpretation is based on a wealth of empirical data, including that hitherto inaccessible to public scrutiny. Elkins' work, in particular, is an important addition to the Mau Mau historiography, and

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<sup>86</sup> Obadiah Kariuki, *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya*, Nairobi, Uzima Press, 1985.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.63.

<sup>88</sup> Cited in Ogot, "Revolt of the Elders," op.cit., p.143.

<sup>89</sup> Karanja, op.cit., pp.217-224.

for this study, highlights Christians' role in the inter-play of events. The author specifically adduces evidence to show that prior to the State of Emergency, many detainees were, to varying degrees, practising Christians.<sup>90</sup> She argues that this was certainly true of Christians affiliated to the independent churches that had broken away from the western missions in the 1930s, and which "had been one of the hotbeds for the growth of the Mau Mau."<sup>91</sup> Elkins contends that many of the independent churches' followers believed that the tenets of Mau Mau, and those of Christianity, were not incompatible. This stand supports that made by Baur that Christians of the Gikuyu Independent Church felt justified in taking both oaths; that is, the first oath of allegiance to the movement and rejection of missionaries' western education, and the second by which one swore to use violence.<sup>92</sup>

Part of the evidence Elkins proffers is that the rebels had shrewd arguments why their beliefs did not contravene biblical tenets.<sup>93</sup> She notes, for example, that many of the political detainees were familiar with the Old Testament, and that their incarceration prompted them to interpret the Bible within the context of their tightening repression, likening themselves to the children of Israel.<sup>94</sup> For instance, they pointed out that the Bible, the ultimate source of authority for Christians, was itself replete with examples of faith and courage of God's people against oppression and bondage: the Jews in Babylonian captivity, in Pharaoh's bondage, or even under the Roman occupation. Was this not proof enough that God stood with the oppressed, not the oppressors, they asked? Elkins posits that such arguments concerning Christianity, as raised by Mau Mau detainees, created a brand of their own liberation theology.<sup>95</sup> She attempts to show how the detainees' faith in *Ngai*, God, sustained the nationalist dream amidst British atrocities during the Mau Mau.

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<sup>90</sup> Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*, op.cit., p.101.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.171.

<sup>92</sup> John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, Pauline publications, 1994, p.480.

<sup>93</sup> Oral Interview, Hudson Kimani, Othaya, April 2009 and Joseph Mugo, Mathakwaini, June 2009; also Wamuyu Gakuru, Nairobi, March 2008.

<sup>94</sup> Elkins, op.cit., p.229.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Branch's work is, to date, the most specific on loyalism during the Mau Mau.<sup>96</sup> The author argues that to explain comprehensively events in Kenya during the Mau Mau requires one to foreground loyalists. He stresses the centrality of ambiguity in loyalism to the interpretation of the revolt. Consequently, he argues that the most critical research question demanding explanation is why the Kikuyu society split in two during the war. At the same time, he endeavours to show that the reasons for loyalist participation in the conflict had little to do with the concerns of either the Europeans or the white farmers.<sup>97</sup>

However, to argue, as the author does, that loyalism cannot be explained within the ambit of pre-conflict Kikuyu society,<sup>98</sup> requires keener interrogation. The pre-Mau Mau colonial narrative on loyalism, in my view, fairly demonstrates that the creation of a collaborative class in what the author calls "pre-conflict Kikuyu society," was the result of carefully crafted administrative policies instituted at the advent of colonial rule. It was an effort geared towards co-opting classes, driven largely by self-preservation instincts, to consolidate and protect both property and power accumulated through the largesse of the rulers. This deliberate nurturing of a class with a stake in the status quo ultimately made it easy for the administration to rapidly form a bulwark against the Mau Mau, given that the structures were already in place. In all, however, Branch's work offers an interesting model that views the "civil war" in the Kikuyu society as one fuelled not by differences in the society, but the many similarities shared by both camps. The author clearly demonstrates that the ties that bound the two camps-loyalists and the rebels- were far more significant than those that separated them, hence, the ambiguous nature of the revolt.

Freedom fighters too have made an input, albeit in a limited way. Early works by the freedom fighters, notably that of J.M Kariuki, Waruhiu Itote, and Karari Njama, all, for example, portray the revolt as a rational response to colonial oppression. Christianity is villainously cast as the tool used by the colonialists to perpetuate that oppression. This, needless to say, was in radical contrast to what missionaries and the rest of the colonial fraternity had to say of the freedom fighters themselves, inexorably portrayed as cold, murderous fanatics with no known agenda.

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<sup>96</sup> Branch, op. cit.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.208.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.209.

J.M Kariuki, while regretting the violence meted against resisting Christians, maintains that it was unavoidable because Christians, like other loyalists, stood in the way of Kikuyu unity. He emphasizes that unity was the single most important factor, if the freedom struggle was to succeed.<sup>99</sup> He explains that the fighters were faced with great odds and thus had little choice but to adopt increasingly hard tactics against the colonial guns, armies, money and brains of the colonial government. Kariuki maintains that in the circumstances, “...not even Christianity could be allowed to interfere.”<sup>100</sup> He maintains that the stakes were too high; Christians were loyalists and loyalists were traitors, even worse than the enemy was.<sup>101</sup>

Most of the accounts by the freedom fighters, however, dwell largely on individual exploits. They hardly attempt to explain why, for example, Mau Mau turned internecine, an important question. This has left the fighters vulnerable to accusations of poor judgement concerning their strategies, perceived to have been more against their own people, while inflicting only minimal casualties on their real enemy. While Itote’s early publication served to encourage other fighters to follow suit, the majority of the accounts in the wake of his, simply documented their exploits as guerrilla fighters in the Mount Kenya and Nyandarua forests as stated above. This is true, for example, of the work of Gucu Gikonyo, Mohammed Mathu, and Ngugi Kabiru.<sup>102</sup> These three works, in particular, dwell on individual heroisms, with little attention to the ideological foundations of the revolt.<sup>103</sup>

In all, for this study, Mau Mau memoirs have given scant attention to the question of faith, whether their own faith, or the veracity of the accusation that their war was also one against Christianity. This is in spite of the fact that the religious factor in the Mau Mau has been one of the most scintillating aspects of the movement.<sup>104</sup> Indeed the works of Kinyatti and Githige have

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<sup>99</sup> Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, *Mau Mau Detainee*, London, Oxford University Press, 1963.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Gucu Gikonyo, *We Fought for Freedom*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1979; Mathu Mohammed, *The Urban Guerrilla*, Richmond, B.C, 1974; Ngugi Kabiro, *The Man in the Middle*, Richmond, B.C, 1973.

<sup>103</sup> Wunyambari Maloba, *Mau Mau and Kenya: An Analysis of a Peasant Revolt*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1993, p.16.

<sup>104</sup> Kibicho, *God and Revelation*, op.cit., p.159.

endeavoured to show that faith in *Ngai*, God, was critical to the overall success of the war.<sup>105</sup> This remains a significant lacuna in the ex-freedom fighters' own literature.

The Mau Mau war was arguably a quest for social justice. This review will, therefore, sample a few works that demonstrate the interface between religion and social justice in the context of the issues raised by this study. Okullu has passionately argued for social justice, portraying God as a God who is not only a vindicator of the oppressed but the judge of the oppressor.<sup>106</sup> He endeavours to show that while God's message may be good news to the captives, it is terribly bad news to the oppressor. His work, largely a commentary on social injustices in the post-colonial state, nonetheless, captures the ethos of the "liberating will of God."

In a yet another work, Okullu raises pertinent questions concerning the relationship between Church and State in what he calls "human development." He examines the role the church ought to play in fighting for "God given liberties" when they are violated by "whomsoever."<sup>107</sup> He argues that in the colonial setting, Church and State were merely the different faces of the same coin. How then was the liberating will of God to be interpreted by those under its yoke in a situation where for Christians to identify with nationalism was perceived to be questioning the very legitimacy of the colonial state? Yet, as he points out, Christianity had played a crucial role in paving the way for them to become the pioneers, even authors, of African nationalism. From Okullu's work, colonial domination and "the liberating will of God" emerge as two diametrically opposed concepts, yet in the colonial setting joined to the core. How then was faith and nationalism to coexist?

African theologians have similarly captured some of the paradoxes born of the Christian West's colonisation of Africa. A few examples suffice. Nyamiti argues that "Christians who fight against their oppression participate in Jesus' fight; they carry on with his work of liberation and

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<sup>105</sup> See Renison Githige, 'The Religious Factor in Mau Mau with Particular Reference to Mau Mau Oaths,' unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Nairobi, 1975; also Maina Kinyatti, (ed.), *Thunder From The Mountains: Mau Mau Patriotic Songs*, Zed Press, 1980.

<sup>106</sup> Henry Okullu, *Church and Politics in East Africa*, Nairobi, Uzima Press, 1974, p.12.

<sup>107</sup> Henry Okullu, *Church and State in Nation Building and Human Development*, Nairobi, Uzima Press, 1984, p.140.

identify themselves with the “the Black Messiah” and with “God’s will.” He adds, for good measure, that God is on the side of oppressed Christians fighting for their liberty.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, Magesa, in specific reference to the struggles for independence, is categorical that such struggles were “the concrete expression of the liberating will of God.”<sup>109</sup>

Gatu, Gitari and Mugambi, among others, have similarly addressed this most important question of social justice. Gatu, for instance, questions where the line may be drawn between the church playing a political role and exercising its prophetic and pastoral concerns in accordance with the dictates of the Holy Spirit.<sup>110</sup> He criticizes the idea of “Christian separation,” which in essence excludes Christians from the total fabric of life. He advocates instead, for a world where Christian participation in politics becomes “an accepted form of witness.”<sup>111</sup> Despite a colonial past in which “it was sinful for Christians to join in politics,”<sup>112</sup> Gatu is categorical that there is no contradiction whatsoever in being both a good Christian and a committed nationalist at the same time.<sup>113</sup> This is an important work. Gatu offers one, if not the best, persona of untroubled coexistence of his Christian faith and nationalism.

David Gitari enumerates the qualities of what he perceives as responsible church leadership. In so doing, he provides useful insights into church-state relations.<sup>114</sup> In Africa, he singles out Kenya as one of the few countries, other than South Africa, where church leaders have boldly taken up issues with those in authority. In particular, he criticises Christians’ “detachment” and little concern for the corrupt and sinful world around them to demonstrate some of the shortcomings of revival Christianity. He argues that during the freedom struggle “the brethren kept aloof from the politics of the day.”<sup>115</sup> Nonetheless, his work does not delve into the reasons behind his rather harsh view of revival Christianity, given the Revival’s central role in African Christianity. This issue has been taken up in Chapter 3 of this study.

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<sup>108</sup> Charles Nyamiti, “African Christologies Today” in *Jesus in African Christianity*, op.cit., p. 28.

<sup>109</sup> Laurenti Magesa, “Christ the Liberator in Africa Today,” in *Jesus in African Christianity*, op.cit., p.63.

<sup>110</sup> John Gatu, *Joyfully Christian, Truly African*, Nairobi, Acton Publishers, Nairobi, 2006, p.4.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> David Gitari, *Responsible Church Leadership*, Nairobi, Acton Publishers, 2005, p.13.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p.143.

Farther afield, Mbali, in specific reference to South Africa, argues that the strong involvement of the Church in politics was inevitable in a country that claimed to be a Christian country, yet perpetuated racism as a theological, biblical and God-ordained reality governing Afrikaners life and attitudes. He argues that the near-identification of white supremacy and Christianity, which remained unchallenged for many years and accounting for the rise of the militant churches, was shaped largely by the need to fight the de-humanizing process of apartheid. Mbali contends that black theological perspectives in South Africa have come into being from within the experience of oppression and the failure of Western theology to offer solutions to black man's problems.<sup>116</sup> In this respect, he concurs with Manas Buthelezi's summary of Black Theology in the South African situation as one where "...if the Gospel means anything at all, it must be to save the black man from his own blackness."<sup>117</sup>

Frostin, the Swiss theologian, argues that the church cannot be separated from the wider struggle in society. His emphasis, however, is on "the collective theology behind Church leadership, "contending that success against oppression is largely dependent on the involvement and determination of that leadership."<sup>118</sup> He singles out leaders, like Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak and Manas Buthelezi, as icons of exemplary church leadership at a critical time in the struggle against apartheid. He lauds Allan Boesak's acerbic criticism of the "warped theology" propagated by the racist Boers in South Africa in which "God is white and he votes for the Nationalists."<sup>119</sup>

In a very different setting, Cordell credits more the solidarity of the church as a body, rather than individual clergy, in forcing change in society.<sup>120</sup> He shows how the Evangelical Church, at a very critical time in the German Democratic Republic (GDR, set up in October 1949), marshalled opposition against a formidable foe, the communist state. He argues that this

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<sup>116</sup> Z. Mbali, *The Churches and Racism: A Black South African Perspective*, London, SCM Press, 1987, p.4.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> P. Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, Lund University Press, 1988, p.10.

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in Mbali, *op cit.*, p.193.

<sup>120</sup> G. Cordell, "Political Change in the GDR: The Role of the Evangelical Church," in *International Relations*, Vol. V, No. 2, Nov. 1990, p.161.

symbolized “a spirit of resistance that for too long had been subordinated to the idea that the state, regardless of its moral values, had to be obeyed at all times.”<sup>121</sup> In the case of the GDR, their wall, like the “wall of Jericho,” literally came crashing down freeing the East Germans from the shackles of communism.

In South American countries, too, Liberation Theology, with its preferential doctrine for the poor and the oppressed, has put religion in the spotlight as a powerful instrument of change. The abundance of studies from these countries, since the Bishops’ conferences at Medellin (1968) and Puebla (1975), testify to the dramatic reorientation that the church has undergone in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The widespread repression of the Church, and the populace at large by brutal military regimes, triggered some of the most dramatic responses from the Catholic Church with many such regimes brought tumbling down.

Mainwaring, Levine and Gutierrez, among other South American writers, dwell on the crucial role of the Church in forcing change in Latin American countries.<sup>122</sup> Mainwaring calls this, “a defensive reaction to new conditions.”<sup>123</sup> He argues that change in Latin America is deeply rooted in earlier movements.<sup>124</sup> Levine, on the other hand, shows how religion creates interests of its own, while also contending that values and social bonds, arising from religion, have independent consequences for politics.<sup>125</sup> Suffice it to say that this body of literature from South America affirms that religion is a dynamic force with very direct consequences in any society. It also demonstrates that religion can become irrelevant if it fails to reckon with the centrality of national interests in all aspects of interaction between peoples.<sup>126</sup> As Boff puts it, liberation theology entails specific social, political commitment to break with the situation of oppression.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> See, for example, G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, SCM Press, 1979.

<sup>123</sup> S. Mainwaring, *The Catholic Church in Brazil 1916-1985*, Stanford University Press, 1986.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> J. Levine, *Religion and Conflict in Latin America*, University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

<sup>126</sup> Jesse Mugambi, “Religion and Social Construction of Reality,” Inaugural Lecture, University of Nairobi, September 1996.

<sup>127</sup> Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, op. cit., p.264.



Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Joseph Benedict XIV, and since Emeritus), has weighed in on this important question.<sup>128</sup> In a homily on Church, Ecumenism and Politics, delivered to the Catholic members of the Bundestag in 1981, Ratzinger used the analogy of the Jews in Babylon to demonstrate the merit of tempering the quest for liberation with “the need to build and not destroy.” By using the Babylonian example, Ratzinger set out to illustrate that in the Jews’ persecution and exile was also to be found fundamental elements of “positive political ethos.”<sup>129</sup> He quotes prophet Jeremiah’s exhortation to the exiled Jews to maintain and strengthen what was good in that very state in which they were captive. He says, “...Seek the welfare of the city I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare will you find your own welfare.”<sup>130</sup> Further, using the example of first-century Christians, Ratzinger endeavours to show that while these Christians were not in any way a bunch of people fearful and submissive to authority, they were not unaware that there can be a right and duty of resistance on “conscientious grounds.” They nonetheless chose to fight amorality with morality; evil by determination to persist in what was good and not otherwise.<sup>131</sup> At the same time, by refusing to bow down when they ought to, because “it was against the will of God,” they clearly demonstrated that they recognized the limits of the state.<sup>132</sup> Ratzinger makes a powerful appeal to the reader that God calls upon His people to build- up and not destroy, and that “morality, doing good is true resistance, and only what is good can be a dramatic change to what is better.”<sup>133</sup> In this “Exile Motif,” he exhorts the sustaining of the aspiration towards a society, which would be consistent with the ideals of the exiles.<sup>134</sup> This position is indeed a weighty commentary on faith and nationalism and the crux of this study.

All told, this literature review points to at least three positions that were possible for Kikuyu Christians in relation to nationalism. In the “Nyamiti position,” it would have required them to identify with the nationalists fighting colonial oppression. In the “Ratzinger position,” they

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<sup>128</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, Middlegreen, Slough, St Paul Publications, 1988.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p.149.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> See Mugambi, “Inaugural lecture,” *op.cit.*

would be compelled to strengthen what was good in the state they were in, in this case the colonial state, in the realisation that “doing what is good is true resistance.” The third would be to adopt a neutral position concerning the struggle against injustice and exclusion as a colonized people, in effect separating the spiritual from the worldly. This study seeks to examine whither of the options the Kikuyu Christian community adopted.

This review sets the backdrop against which a bitter struggle between the Mau Mau freedom fighters on one hand, and the British and loyal Africans, on the other, was enacted. Where lay the identity of each? The white man had laid claim to a land that did not belong to him and now faced the bleak prospects of leaving his beloved White Man’s Country. Yet, the rebel and the Christian were brothers, destined to share the same land, the same ethnic and national identity and supplicating to, arguably, the same God. The potent symbol of blood, core to both the Christians and the freedom fighters, demonstrated the deep ties that inevitably bound the two. For the Mau Mau, the oath, with its potent ethnic symbolism, became the embodiment of Kikuyu identity and spirituality, imbuing its partakers with a strong sense of rebirth and renewal. Among Christians, especially fundamentalist Christians, in Christ’s blood they spoke of their own personal renewal and rebirth that called them to rise beyond tribal loyalties. It was one blood brotherhood against another, one sense of certainty against another.<sup>135</sup>

### **Justification of the Study**

The literature reviewed above is a good commentary as to why faith and nationalism are crucial to the understanding of our own societies. Furthermore, the resurgence of interest in both the Mau Mau, and religious history in African historiography, favours the timing of this study. As has been succinctly noted, the preoccupation of professional African history (as in the rest of the world) has in the last five decades or so been with the analysis of impersonal forces or large social structures, rather than with individuals and their private beliefs.<sup>136</sup> A casualty of this was the sidelining of religion, no longer highlighted as an active constituent of historical explanation, but merely seen instead as a background, part of the “illusionary obstacles to political unity or

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<sup>135</sup> Hastings, *A History of African Christianity*, op.cit, 21.

<sup>136</sup> Quoted in Karanja, Forward, *Founding an African Faith*, op.cit.

blind hindrances to economic progress rather than normal, rational, human preoccupations with ultimate purposes in life.”<sup>137</sup>

Yet, religion remains a crucial force in all human endeavours, an active constituent of historical inquiry and explanation. Events of global interest, such as the end of the Cold War, and the role of religion in breaking barriers of oppressive and reactionary regimes with a dramatic and often astounding domino effect has provided a fillip in this direction. In addition, the emergence of Black Theology in Africa, with the church supporting liberation wars, has truly been a watershed in African Christian history, illustrating the critical role of Christianity/religion in politics. In Kenya, the springing up of a myriad of Pentecostal churches and proliferation of charismatic movements in the more recent decades is a constant reminder that religion remains a crucial glue to societal concerns. It is my hope that this study, in a small way, contributes to this growing area of study.

Finally, the interest in this field of study was also driven by personal reasons. My own father was an Anglican priest in central Kenya during the Mau Mau. I was intrigued enough to want to find out how Christians in colonial Kenya, reconciled their own Christian faith with that of their innate sense of nationalism.

## **1.6 Theoretical Framework**

Due to their multiple and cumulative causes, revolts are by their very nature complex phenomena. Any attempt to explain them must, therefore, necessarily operate at many levels. Walton amply demonstrates this in his comparative study of the Huk rebellion in the Philippines, La Violencia in Colombia and the Mau Mau in Kenya.<sup>138</sup> He contends that these rebellions were far more than transient eruptions of parochial instances of localized, peasant rebelliousness, which is what the colonial regimes laboured to define them. He presents them, instead, as integral parts of “continuous struggles that began to take on definable features at the turn of the century, and definite ones by the 1920s. These struggles were in response to “social-economic

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> J. Walton, *Reluctant Rebels, Comparative studies of Revolution and Underdevelopment*, Columbia, N.Y, University press, 1984.

inequalities and dislocations, produced by the incorporation of local and largely pre-capitalist societies in the global economy.”<sup>139</sup> He posits that this involved the use of violence, typically as a defensive strategy, but evolved mainly as class-based political movement making equity claims on the state, and its developmental policies. It is when the state failed to respond, or indeed exacerbated the situation by ignoring those claims, that “a pitched struggle” ensued over the aims and beneficiaries of development, transforming the state and the society in fundamental, if not in diverse ways.<sup>140</sup> In a close manner, Maloba also endeavours to show that the uprising of 1952 in Kenya was an outcome of both state violence and African reaction and counter-violence.<sup>141</sup>

In building a framework for national revolts, Walton further attempts to demonstrate that revolutionary situations are the result of general conditions of underdevelopment. He argues that revolts are precipitated by conditions in which poverty and inequality come to be viewed as unacceptable rather than inevitable, and in which groups within a peripheral society (as the peasantry in colonial Kenya), consequently engage in political and violent struggle for alternative development.<sup>142</sup> Thus, in a broad sense, issues of underdevelopment necessarily underline studies of national revolts where the metropolitan thrives at the expense of its peripheral possessions. This was certainly true of Kenya, where poverty and inequality were the physical manifestations, deriving from long histories of grievances and protest attendant to the “misanthropic practices of colonialism.”<sup>143</sup> The disaffection manifested in a raft of grievances that included loss of land, forced labour, indigent wages, burdensome taxes, colour-bar (as racist policies were referred to in the colony), and the less tangible, but of great import, cultural disinheritance.

In addition, these policies manifestly exacerbated social differentiation in the colonial government’s efforts to create a middle class with a stake in the status quo, in return for its support of the colonial policies. Thus, by the time the Mau Mau broke out, the historical fault lines created along a class struggle were already deeply etched in the Kikuyu society. On the one

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p.143.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. p.169.

<sup>141</sup> Wunyambari Maloba, *Mau Mau and Kenya: An Analysis of a peasant Revolt*, Nairobi, EAPH, 1994, p.72.

<sup>142</sup> Walton, *Reluctant Rebels*, op.cit., p.5.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p.144.

hand was a thriving middle class not overly anxious for change through armed rebellion, while on the other was an indigent peasantry with nothing to lose. However, because a class struggle was not inevitably or necessarily limited to economic differentiation, the outbreak of the revolt played an important role in bringing to the fore other significant tensions in the Kikuyu society. In sum, the theory of peasant revolts, where national revolts are construed as fundamentally rural-based peasant wars, or agrarian revolution, is crucial to placing the Mau Mau in the context of past movements, as well as within the more recent national peasant revolutions in the third world.<sup>144</sup>

This study adopts two, but integrated theoretical frameworks- namely, the Modernization Theory, and the Theory of Antidialogical Action. The latter is examined here largely as propounded by Paulo Freire.<sup>145</sup> These two frameworks share a common denominator though: while the Modernization Theory is primarily a theory of social change, a central characteristic of the theory of Antidialogical Action is cultural invasion. In colonial Kenya, cultural invasion was, arguably, the primary tool of social change, with missionary Christianity playing a central role. Besides, the other fundamental characteristics of the theory of Antidialogical Action- namely, “conquest,” “divide and rule,” and “manipulation”- can be rightly viewed as part of the arsenal used by the invader to ensure continued colonial domination.

In the theory of Antidialogical Action, once a situation of oppression has been initiated (in our case colonialism), Anti-dialogue, becomes indispensable to its preservation. Cultural invasion serves the end of manipulation, which in turn serves the end of conquest, and conquest the end of domination. It is a conceptual framework within which,

The invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter’s potentialities; they impose their own views of the world upon those they invade, and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Maloba, op.cit., p.2.

<sup>145</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New Revised Edition, Penguin books, 1996, p. 133 (First published by Continuum Publishing company, 1970).

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

This is in complete contrast to Dialogical Action, or cultural synthesis, where the actors who come from the “other world” do so not as invaders, not to teach or transmit or give anything, but rather learn, with the people, about the people’s world.<sup>147</sup> The purpose of cultural synthesis is thus to serve the ends of organization, and organization the ends of liberation.<sup>148</sup>

Therefore, in Antidialogical Action, the starting point becomes the invader’s own world from which they enter the world they invade.<sup>149</sup> Because the invaders draw the thematic content of their action from their own values and ideologies, cultural invasion logically presumes the superiority of the invaders and the inferiority of the invaded.<sup>150</sup> Cultural invasion is thus an act of aggression, indeed an act of violence against the persons of the invaded culture in that they lose their originality, or face the threat of losing it.<sup>151</sup> Freire rightly contends that cultural action, as historical action, can only be appraised as an instrument for superseding the dominant and alienating culture. It is both a tool of domination as much as it is the result of domination making every authentic revolution a cultural revolution.<sup>152</sup>

Colonial domination, like most forms of domination, involved invasion. Indeed, domination was the logical progression emanating from that conquest.<sup>153</sup> In Kenya, missionaries, in close association with the colonial state, were the primary agents of this invasion, and while the stated objectives of each might not have been identical, both nevertheless shared a common ideal of advancing European hegemony.<sup>154</sup> Certainly, for missionaries, the starting point in the Gospel was “their own world” from which they “entered the world” of those, they had invaded. What is more, in comparison to the administrators, missionaries were much more specific in the change they sought among the colonized. The result of this missionary approach was that the line between the Gospel message and the cultural trappings of the Christian invaders became inseparable, an integral part of the Christian message. For the colonized, salvation, as it were,

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.,161.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.,p.161.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p.141.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p.133.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa*, op.cit., p.42.

was both in Christ, and in the acceptance of white culture.<sup>155</sup> It is not surprising that in Kikuyuland, to become a Christian, *muthomi*, was to imitate the ways of the white man.

While the intentions of the founding missionaries were undoubtedly noble, and in many ways truly altruistic, the two hats they donned- evangelistic and cultural - had its downside. By deliberately setting out to get the colonized to begin to respond to the values, the standards and the goals of the invaders, missionaries, arguably, became wilful agents in the ideological thrust of western colonial aggression.<sup>156</sup> Mbiti refers to missionaries as “de facto representatives of foreign cultural and political hegemony.”<sup>157</sup> Gatu, as Njenga, similarly argues with great certainty, that missionaries were not only agents of the foreign missions, but of their foreign governments, as well.<sup>158</sup> Elliot Kendall, in reference to the missionary enterprise, in like manner, argues that the first weakness emanating from this association was that the missionaries “were palpably in association with the overseas administrators and were part of the whole European invasion of Africa.”<sup>159</sup>

That there was cohabitation is not in doubt. Nevertheless, this troubled cohabitation, for that is what it was, exposed the underbelly of missionary Christianity. Furthermore, it raised serious theological and moral issues as Brian Stanley luminously shows in his seminal work, “The Bible and the Flag.” Even then, Stanley is evidently wary of the common perception that a “crude conspiracy” existed between the two. He advocates, instead “for an even-handed appraisal of the missionary relationship to colonialism,” even as he concedes that “the intimate linkage” between Christianity and the “supposedly self-evident advantages of western civilization,” exposed the Christian faith to attack.<sup>160</sup>

Other scholars have endeavoured to demonstrate that missionaries failed to grasp fully that religion is a social phenomenon, which is always to be fully blended with the way of life of individual communities. By confusing Christ with their western and religious heritage,

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<sup>155</sup> Basil Moore, *The Black Theology*, London, Oxford University Press, 1973, p.viii.

<sup>156</sup> Kibicho, op.cit.,p.134.

<sup>157</sup> Quoted in Haynes, op.cit., p42.

<sup>158</sup> Gatu, *Joyfully Christian*, op.cit., p.15.

<sup>159</sup> Quoted in Haynes, op.cit., p.53.

<sup>160</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, op.cit., p.184.

missionaries presented a Christianity that was no longer just a foreign religion, but also one that came fully clothed in foreign culture, the culture of its bearers.<sup>161</sup> Inevitably, therefore, Christianity remained a paradox to the colonized and de-cultured Africans. The portrayal of Christ by missionaries as a “Christ against culture became, in practice, a declaration of conflict between the culture of the missionary and that of the prospective converts.”<sup>162</sup> Indeed, Christ was not just confused with culture, but portrayed as against culture, in our case, the African culture. Thus, at the heart of the female circumcision crisis was a more profound protest by Kikuyu cultural nationalists, one against missionaries’ identification of Christianity and godliness on the one hand, and the Gikuyu culture with “paganism,” or “ungodliness, on the other.”<sup>163</sup>

The underlying contest was both religious and cultural, as Ngugi illustrates in his fictional work, “The River Between.”<sup>164</sup> By setting Christianity and traditional Kikuyu values in open confrontation, the standoff over female circumcision dictated that the emergent African nationalism in Central Kenya would in future contain a dominant streak of indigenous cultural assertion. That streak was implicitly antagonistic to Christianity, and became overtly and violently so during the anti colonial war of 1950s.<sup>165</sup> Karari Njama, the renowned Mau Mau freedom fighter, captured the essence of this disconnect well in his description of the Mau Mau as both a political and cultural protest, an attempt to provide an alternative to the cultural denigration that had accompanied colonial rule.<sup>166</sup> All these positions, in my view, are a fair representation of the relevance, to this study, of Antidialogical theory anchored on culture. Indeed, cultural invasion, the linchpin of this theory, is crucial to understanding why the Mau Mau “directed its especial hatred against Kikuyu Christians more than the missionaries. The former stood accused as traitors to tribal loyalty.”<sup>167</sup>

The modernization theory, on the other hand, directly bears on the outcomes of cultural invasion. The onset of colonial rule saw Africans embark on a long and contentious journey of the

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<sup>161</sup> Mugambi, “Inaugural lecture.”

<sup>162</sup> Mugambi, *Responsible church leadership*, op.cit.

<sup>163</sup> Quoted in Kibicho, op.cit, p.145.

<sup>164</sup> Wa Thiong’o, *The River Between*, Heinemann, 1965.

<sup>165</sup> Brian Stanley, op.cit., p.152.

<sup>166</sup> Quoted in Kibicho, op.cit., p.157-8.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p.154.



cohabitation of Africa's dual heritage: her traditional past and colonial modernity.<sup>168</sup> The tool of that change, the colonial state, with Christian missions an integral part, was inherently wrought with economic and political flaws, and thrived on weakened African institutions.<sup>169</sup> One of the major consequences was social upheaval, which brought in its wake "new social and economic problems calling for new solutions that were beyond the scope of traditional solutions."<sup>170</sup> The rise and development of modern African nationalism was born of this upheaval and was co-terminous with the development of the structure and culture of modernizing colonialism.<sup>171</sup> As it were, "the yeast of European change became the leaven of educated African nationalism."<sup>172</sup>

In addition, Christianity being the harbinger of that change, as shown in relation to Antidialogical theory above, became a double-edged sword. Its adherents "frequently turned out to be the articulators of nationalist protest in a way some of their missionary mentors had failed to anticipate."<sup>173</sup> The tension generated by the Mau Mau between Christian faith and Kikuyu patriotic identity, was therefore, essentially a manifestation of a clash of cultures, a collision of beliefs and ideals of a society in transition.

Yet, this theory, with its dialectic between tradition and modernity at the core of the old evolutionary myth, is not without its weakness. In particular, while the term, "modern," at its face value, should denote, "contemporary," when used in reference to the colonial experience, it acquires strong nuances of the term being a specific reference to the adoption of western ways. Further, it insinuates that Africans were a passive lot on whom modernization was bestowed, while they played little or no role in the transformation of their own societies, or even worse, attempted to block modernity at every turn. Yet, as Boahen demonstrates, many educated Africans hailed Europeans as the harbingers of the coming civilization and modernity.<sup>174</sup> What is more, these Africans themselves seized the opportunity and ran away with it, hence, for example, in certain parts of Kenya, the struggle for the school. Among its many results, an education not

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<sup>168</sup> G. Muriuki, "Background to politics and Nationalism in Central Kenya," in Ogot (ed.), op.cit., pp.15-6.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, p.16.

<sup>171</sup> Quoted in Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, op.cit., p 270.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, op.cit.

<sup>174</sup> Quoted in Haynes, op.cit., p. 42.

only enabled an elitist class to take vanguard positions in the development of African nationalism, but also manifestly became the gateway to prosperity.

Besides, the old modernist myth took as given that ethnicity was strongest among those who had changed the least. The logical progression of this argument was that ethnicity was, therefore, a retrogressive exhibition of primordial loyalties, a communal rejection of the modernization process. However, the outbreak of the Mau Mau put this to test, and found it wanting.<sup>175</sup> That this “atavistic,” “mass socio-pathology” that expressed itself in “violence and witchcraft” should manifest in the one community that had, arguably, witnessed the most rapid social change in the colony defied the modernist myth. This is precisely why the white fraternity in Kenya were at such a loss to explain the outbreak of the Mau Mau, and which they eventually put down to a manifestation of “abrupt collision of civilizations.”<sup>176</sup> Even then, this would not conform to the evolutionary myth of integration for a revolt they considered the very anti-thesis of modernization.

Berman and Lonsdale in interrogating this old modernist myth argue that it is a much-misunderstood concept. The authors attempt to show that ethnicity is a historical process to be studied in specific contexts, and not as a fixed condition or essence.<sup>177</sup> As such, ethnicity ceases to be “the vulgar condition of colonial thinking,” and emerges instead, as “an intellectually imaginative project of liberation that makes modern claims on behalf of civil rights.”<sup>178</sup> Hence, Kikuyu nationalism, “like any other,” is viewed in origin as “an intellectual response to social progress, a contest of moral knowledge” where the nationalist leaders were simply addressing the concerns that face nationalists everywhere.<sup>179</sup> This view of ethnic nationalism, as in large part a moral struggle with all the complexities of change, is indeed a radical departure from the earlier modernist claims of its retrogressive character. Berman makes a useful suggestion in this respect: ethnicity became an issue in African societies because previous identities and solidarities were

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<sup>175</sup> See, for example, Lonsdale and Berman, *Unhappy Valley*, op.cit., pp.315-317.

<sup>176</sup> J.C Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau Mau*, Government Printer, 1954.

<sup>177</sup> See Lonsdale, “Moral Economy of Mau Mau” in *Unhappy Valley*.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

being called to question, and ethnic identity provided a stable core of belonging and continuity in a world of increasing flux and conflict.<sup>180</sup>

All told, the Modernization Theory, with its challenges, helps raise, for this study, some critical questions: in repudiating the Mau Mau, were Christians going against the grain, or were they simply conforming to a modernization crisis that demanded a search for new coalitions and identities, outside of the traditional world milieu? Why had ethnic identity failed to provide a stable core of belonging and continuity with the past for Christians in the first place? Was it perhaps because Christianity, as propounded by the missionaries, was at odds with African culture? Indeed, how important was the dichotomy of conflicting class interests in the Kikuyu society as a measure of the forces at work in the Mau Mau? These and other questions only go to affirm that other histories can be produced by asking different questions of new evidence.<sup>181</sup>

In addition, while the outbreak of the Mau Mau certainly deepened the cleavage within Kikuyu society and precipitated a modernization crisis, it also brought to the fore many competing interests. Christian converts, “who rejected indigenous religious beliefs and practices and instead, embodied western modernity in their literacy, dress and occupation, can be said to have directly challenged concepts of cultural identity and community membership.”<sup>182</sup> To this extent, if the declaration of the State of the Emergency and the violence that followed is to be understood as a crisis of modernization, it must be “in a more exacting sense than the phrase is sometimes bandied.”<sup>183</sup> I would proffer that the Mau Mau marked the cusp of a modernization crisis; indeed, it was the implosion point of a crisis that long began with cultural invasion at the onset of colonialism.

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<sup>180</sup> Bruce Berman, “Ethnicity, Patronage and the African state: The politics of Uncivil nationalism,” in *African Affairs*, London, July 1998, p.10.

<sup>181</sup> J. Lonsdale, “The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,” op.cit., p.268.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Walton, *Reluctant Rebels*, op.cit., p.37.

## **Research Hypotheses**

This study will interrogate the following interrelated hypotheses:

- That the patterns of the establishment of missions had a direct bearing on the inculcation of Christian faith, and that formal education gave rise to an African elitist class that rose to the vanguard of African nationalism.
- That Christian missions, and the colonial administration, deliberately cultivated a collaborative/loyalist class with a stake in the status quo to serve colonial interests.
- That while the revival was a contentious force in Kikuyu Christianity, overall it was a force for the good and providential in face of the Mau Mau.
- That the Mau Mau saw in Christians quislings, and fought even more fiercely against them than they did the white man.
- That beyond considerations of their Christian faith, Kikuyu Christians' response to the Mau Mau was driven by other factors.
- That Mau Mau was a civil war.

## **Research Methodology**

This study is a qualitative research comprising three crucial components: extant literature, archival research and oral interviews.

The archival material was sourced from the following: The Anglican Church of Kenya Archive (hereafter ACK Archive), currently located at the ACK Guest House and Language Centre in Nairobi, the Kenya National Archives, KNA, and to a limited extent, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa Archive housed at St. Andrews Church, Nairobi. The ACK archive, in particular, holds a rich deposit of primary records from across former Anglican missions in the colony. For this study, this included missionary correspondence, sermons, annual reports, press cuttings, logbooks, and files on the Moral Re-Armament, the Revival Fellowship, and National Council of Churches of Kenya Deposit, (NCCCK). At the PCEA archive, however, at the time of collection of data for this study, the systematic cataloguing of the documents was ongoing and the use of this archive was thus limited. At the KNA, the following were consulted for this study: the

Church Missionary Society Deposit, (CMS Deposit), the District Annual Reports, the Provincial Annual Reports, and Log Books for the various missions in Central Province.

Given the period and nature of the study, a purposive sampling method was adopted in the collection of oral data. This was based on several criteria: geographical location of the informants, age range, religious affiliation, and role during the Mau Mau. The entry point was twofold; the researcher's prior knowledge of potential informants, having carried out a previous research on the Mau Mau, and the use of old networks, given that the researcher's own father was a teacher and an Anglican priest in many mission stations across Kikuyuland from the 1940s. These entry points enabled the researcher to identify initial key informants. The use of a snowball sampling method subsequently allowed the researcher to reach a representative sample of about a hundred interviewees. However, the material analysed for the study was eventually drawn from a core of fifty informants. The interviews were semi-structured, an approach that allowed for a wide-range discussion. Group discussion was used specifically to reconstruct events around the Lari massacre of 1953. Three assistant researchers were enlisted for this purpose.

## CHAPTER TWO

### AFRICAN NATIONALISM AND ITS INTERFACE WITH CHRISTIANITY

The interaction between Africans and Europeans, together with the new forces of social change introduced by the colonial state, provided a general setting for the development of early politics in Kenya.<sup>184</sup> Except for a handful of missionaries who had begun arriving at the coast from 1844, a sizeable number of the colonial cohort- administrators, traders, and soldiers alike- only began to arrive in moderate numbers in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. These numbers, however, steadily increased after the British declared a protectorate status in 1895, the same year that the Imperial British East Africa Company (hereafter IBEA) surrendered its charter. The building of the Uganda Railway, which commenced in August 1896, set the protectorate firmly on course as a settler colony.

By the turn of the 20th century, white presence in the protectorate had become more visible, as basic infrastructure, the most important of which was the completion of the rail in 1901 made the hitherto inaccessible interior viable. More and more white settlers were lured into the colony, with the irresistible incentives of cheap prime land, and readily available labour. Indeed, by 1920, Kenya possessed a white settler community more powerful than any in the continent, outside South Africa or Southern Rhodesia. While in proportion to the Africans, their numbers were not large- only about 12,500 amongst an indigenous population of some three million in 1925,<sup>185</sup> - their political influence far outweighed those numbers. By the time the protectorate attained full colony status in 1920, the settler community had become one to reckon with.

Missionaries keenly followed these developments. Using their coastal bases as the springboard, the turn of the century saw them launch a dramatic race inland, with the aim of securing as many strategic strongholds as possible. By the time the protectorate was transferred from Foreign Office to the Colonial Office in April 1905, several mission stations were well dotted across the land, and the clamour for the colony's wealth by the settlers, and its people's souls by the men of the cloth began in earnest. It would certainly be a distortion of historical facts for anyone to

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<sup>184</sup> John Lonsdale, "Some origins of Nationalism in East Africa," *Journal of African History*, 9(1), 1968, p.1.

<sup>185</sup> R.W Strayer, *The Making of Mission Communities in East Africa*, Nairobi, Heinemann, 1978, p.103.

dissociate the modern Christian missionary enterprise from the colonization in Africa South of the Sahara.<sup>186</sup>

However, as a precedent to creating a single, (if deeply divided) political and economic system out of the pre-existing societies, the “native tribes” had first to be “pacified.”<sup>187</sup> The last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in particular, witnessed great efforts to quell the resistances of what the colonial administrators had labelled “uncooperative societies.” The resisting communities, in turn, made determined counter-efforts to stave off what they viewed as encroachment on their sovereignty. Pax Britannica, or “enforcing the peace,” became the byword in the nascent colony, even while in reality it was a euphemistic term for what turned out to be a bloody and ruthless campaign. Indeed, expeditions were at times, mounted, even against unarmed communities, if only to “teach them a lesson.” Undoubtedly, to state that in most parts of the colony it was only through sheer force that the British were finally able to stamp their authority, is no exaggeration.

Resistance to colonial conquest was tempered with collaboration. This complicated even further the state of flux that many Kenyan societies had found themselves in, in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Maasai, for example, had suffered many troubles from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the most distracting of which was the recurring civil conflict in the Iloikop wars.<sup>188</sup> Their Nandi neighbours, who were on the rise in the same period, only compounded their woes through constant raids. To make matters worse, the last decade of the century saw the Maasai and their livestock ravaged by a series of natural calamities, chiefly, drought, locust infestations, and epidemics of pleuro- pneumonia and smallpox. This left them far more weakened than their mixed farming neighbours chiefly, the Kikuyu, the Kamba and the Nandi. True to the adage that “calamities do not come singly,” the Maasai were plunged into renewed conflict in 1892, this time a fratricidal war after the death of Laibon Mbatian. The self-serving interests of Lenana in allying himself with the British in a bid to secure the Laibonship over his brother and contender, Sendeiyo, played right into the hands of the British, who quickly employed the “divide and rule”

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<sup>186</sup>J.N.K Mugambi, *The Biblical Basis for Evangelism*, Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1987, p.81.

<sup>187</sup> Lonsdale, “*Some Origins*,” p.120.

<sup>188</sup> J. Lonsdale, “The Conquest State of Kenya, 1895-1905,” in *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa*, Book 1, eds. Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, London, James Currey, 1922, p.22.

tactic against the Maasai. The civil war effectively neutered what remained of the legendary prowess of the Maasai as fierce warriors.

In fact, not only did the Maasai find themselves hard-pressed to collaborate, but were also turned into a reservoir of mercenaries. As such, the administration used them to quell the stubborn Nandi, the resisting sections of the Kikuyu, the Kamba, and the many pockets of resistances that had simultaneously sprang up among the Luo, the Luhya and the Kisii. For their troubles, the Maasai were the beneficiaries of part of the war booty confiscated from the resisting communities, which they used to restock their depleted herds. Even then, these gallant warriors would never truly regain their reputation as the lords of the plains. Considered the hinge to Kenya's interior at the time of British incursion, the Maasai had definitely become distinctly rusty by the 1890s.<sup>189</sup>

In contrast, the Nandi, buoyed by their good fortunes and successful exploits against the Maasai in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, put up the most spirited and sustained of resistances against the new intruders. Indeed, although numerically one of the weakest groups the British in East Africa had to come to terms with, the Nandi put up stiffer and more protracted fight to preserve their independence than most of the large and in many cases, better-armed East African peoples.<sup>190</sup> Their bold and legendary confrontation with the British from 1895 to 1906 was favoured by many factors. These included a hilly terrain that enabled them to wage guerrilla warfare, a strong religious-cum-political leadership in the office of the Orkoiyot, a mixed pastoral and agricultural economy that ameliorated the ecological devastation that had ravaged eastern Africa in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and a strong age-old tradition of a disciplined standing army. The Orkoiyot was especially important in this matrix, for he was the glue that held Nandi resistance together, imbuing the warriors with a strong spirit of invincibility. With all these factors working to their advantage, the Nandi, for years, continued to disrupt the smooth laying of the Uganda Railway across their land with impunity, even as they fought off the establishment of administrative posts across their land. It is only after the treacherous murder

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>190</sup> A.T. Matson, "The Nandi Resistance to British Rule 1895-1906," Transafrica Historical Papers, No. 1, Nairobi, Transafrica publishers, 1974, p.5.



of their Orkoiyot, Koitalel Arap Samoei, by Colonel Meinertzhagen in 1906 at a purported peace meeting, that the intransigent Nandi spirit was finally broken.<sup>191</sup>

The Kamba reaction to colonial conquest from 1890 to 1901 was a mixed bag, characterized by pockets of resistance and of collaboration. For example, in 1895, Akamba warriors reportedly overrun the enemy camp at Mukuyuini in the Iveti region, “killing more than twenty of the enemy soldiers.”<sup>192</sup> Not many years later, Mbole wa Mathambayo, a puppet chief who had replaced yet another puppet chief, Masaku, signed the Treaty of Machakos, ceding Masaku District to the British. From their fortified base at Machakos, the British were then able to consolidate their military gains to mount large offensives against the larger Kamba region. In spite of the spirited resistance, the Kamba, soon enough realized that their bows and arrows were no match for British artillery, and faced “with the danger of annihilation,” they too eventually sued for peace.<sup>193</sup>

Equally, the imposition of British rule at the coast was met with open hostility.<sup>194</sup> One of the most remarkable of the resistances here was that of the Giriama, who were still a largely socially intact community at the onset of colonial rule. The Giriama totally refused to be co-opted as a reservoir for labour and would not co-operate in any way.<sup>195</sup> Although they fought with great courage and determination, they too were finally defeated and forced to sign the Treaty of Jilore. This led to their forceful transfer to a small land unit in an attempt to isolate them, reduce their internal sources of funds, and undermine their solidarity. Correspondingly, the Mazrui Resistance, also known as the Takaungu Rebellion of 1895-96, is noteworthy. In this resistance, Mbaruk Rashid, a contender for the leadership of the ruling Mazrui family employed hit- and -run tactics against the British.<sup>196</sup> Though the rebellion was largely a family affair and the

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid, p.12.

<sup>192</sup> Maina wa Kinyatti, *History of Resistance in Kenya: 1884-2002*, Mau Mau Research Centre, Jamaica, New York, 2008, p.7.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p8.

<sup>194</sup> See G.H Mungeam, *British Rule in Kenya 1895-1912: The Establishment of Administration in the East African Protectorate*, Oxford, 1966, chapter 2.

<sup>195</sup> B.A Ogot and J.A Kieran, eds. *Zamani: A Survey of East African History*, p. 257.

<sup>196</sup> Ogot and Kieran, op.cit., p.256.

confrontation short lived, the rebels managed to show their displeasure at the disregard with which the British held the Islamic succession laws to the Sheikdom.

One of the most striking aspects of the coastal resistances is that they sprang up in spite of the very long exposure of its inhabitants to foreigners from across the ocean. The coast, being a melting pot for more than two centuries before the arrival of British imperialism, would have been expected to be less hostile to new entrants. On the contrary, however, it is not just the hinterland Bantu communities, but also the urbane Mazrui, astute traders in their own right for centuries, who waged strong resistance against encroachment by the new entrants. The answer most probably lies in two factors: the strong Islamic influence, and the proximity of the Sultan in Zanzibar, which made the coastal peoples unwilling to welcome the white rulers and Christians at that. In any case, the fact that the Sultan was legally in control of the coast up to a ten -mile strip inland certainly emboldened the coastal communities to resist attempts to usurp his powers.

In western Kenya, the pattern of resistance and collaboration followed more or less similar patterns. Here, the main strategy employed by the British was first to co-opt Nabongo Mumia (1849-1949), the most readily visible ally. Mumia's great ambition in life was to assert and spread his power among the Luhya clans, as well as sections of the Luo. Like other colonial chiefs, Mumia expected the British to reward him handsomely for his loyalty through gifts and influence. He was not disappointed. The administrators helped him spread and consolidate his influence far beyond his expectations. In return, he was required to avail his own soldiers whom, together with the Maasai mercenaries, Ganda and Sudanese soldiers, joined the British expeditions against the Nandi, the Tiriki, the Sotik, the Luos of Ugenya Kager, Sakwa, Seme and Uyoma. The Bukusu and the Nyala suffered a similar fate, with many losing their lives and their treasured livestock, in addition to having their *bomas* razed to the ground.<sup>197</sup>

Nonetheless, although by 1907 many of the communities in western Kenya had been "pacified," the spirit of resistance here, as in other parts of the protectorate, did not die. Ogotu hypothesizes that the long history of resistance to established authority among the Luo, including the

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

“hardcore politics of opposition” evidenced in Bondo and in other parts of “Luo Nyanza” in the post-colonial state, have their roots in the ruthless quelling of these early resistances. He postulates that in addition, a strong nationalist spirit was fired by the example of the incarcerated hardcore Mau Mau detainees at the Mageta and adjacent islands. He avers that the cruelty meted to the detainees, but even more admirable, the resolve of their unbroken spirit, left an indelible mark on the locals, spurring dissenters in Luoland to remain unbowed in face of authority.<sup>198</sup>

As for Kikuyuland, scholars and administrators have amply demonstrated reactions to colonial incursion. Indeed, this early era remains one of the best documented. The records range from a motley collection of diaries, logbooks, official memos and other general and private correspondence by early administrators.<sup>199</sup> A few such examples suffice. One of the earliest, and perhaps most recorded of the early encounters is that of Lord Lugard’s men and Kikuyu warriors at Kiawariua, Fort Smith. Fort Smith was an important camp, purposely set up as a collection centre for victuals on the great transverse to western Kenya and Uganda. The history of this station is closely tied to that of Waiyaki Hinga, a *muthamaki*, prominent local leader, who had made a blood brotherhood pact with Lugard when he first arrived at Fort Smith in 1890. It is while Lugard had left the camp temporarily under the command of George Wilson, a former IBEA official, when Kikuyu warriors stormed it in 1891 in a bid to force Wilson to surrender and decamp. The clash led to heavy reprisals from the camp officials, and ultimately the capture and incarceration of Waiyaki Hinga himself.

The role of Waiyaki in the Kikuyu-IBEAC conflict has found its way in many historical annals and therefore, will only be used illustratively here. Muriuki, for example, portrays Waiyaki as a much-misunderstood character. He points out that to the IBEAC officials, Waiyaki was a “paramount Chief of the Wakikuyu” and indeed was treated accordingly. This is in spite of the fact that the Kikuyu, like most other pre-colonial Kenyan societies, did not have the institution of chief, a fact the British appeared ignorant of, or chose to disregard altogether. However, Waiyaki apparently took no pains to undecieve the officials, fully aware that having the white man on his

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<sup>198</sup> Oral Interview, G. Ogotu, Nairobi, 29/3/2010.

<sup>199</sup> See, for example, G.H. Mungeam, *British Rule in Kenya 1895-1912: The Establishment of Administration in the East African Protectorate*, Oxford, 1966; and also W. Hobley, *Kenya, From Chartered Company to Crown Colony*, London, Witherby, 1921.

land not only meant that he was strategically placed for trading with them, but that it would also enhance his position locally.<sup>200</sup> While being the owner of a large *ng'undu*, land, and strategically located at the frontier with the Maasai at Fort Smith, *Kihingo*, meant that Waiyaki wielded considerable power, it is doubtful that he had the authority, or the influence, to restrain the recalcitrant warriors determined to rout out the camp. After a series of what can only be described as unfortunate incidents, Waiyaki was singled out as the instigator of the woes behind Fort Smith, and in chains was marched to the coast under heavy armed escort in August 1892. Popular belief among the Kikuyu has it that his captors buried him alive in an unmarked grave in Kibwezi. His tragic story remains a legendary account of connivance between the British and local collaborators in the conquest of the natives. In Waiyaki's case, it was Kinyanjui wa Gathirimu, a lowly upstart, who, by ingratiating himself and taking sides with the British, undermined and betrayed Waiyaki. For his pains, he was made a colonial chief, rising to become a paramount chief in later years, a man of great wealth, but also one much resented by his own people.

The Waiyaki encounter was a precedent to many similar incidents throughout Kikuyuland. In Gaki, now Nyeri, the circle of violence continued under Colonel Meinertzhagen, by far the most notorious executor of Pax Britannica. From the battle of Tetu on December 2, 1902 that continued for sixteen days and which, "surprised all by its intensity and the astuteness of the Kikuyu warriors," to other offensives in Mathira, Gichugu and Ndia, all which were characterized by brutality and the wanton destruction of both lives and property.<sup>201</sup> Meinertzhagen graphically painted the gory scenes he had left in his wake in a religiously kept diary. In one such entry against the resisting peoples of Kihumbuini, in Fort Hall, he justified this bloody campaign by calling it a "pacification war," a "civilizing mission," and even a "Christian crusade."<sup>202</sup> He recorded thus:

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<sup>200</sup> Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu: 1500-1900*, Nairobi, OUP, 1974, pp 150-51.

<sup>201</sup> Kinyatti, *op.cit.*, p.16.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

I gave orders that every living thing should be killed without mercy. Every soul was either shot or bayoneted. We burned all huts and razed the bananas plantations to the ground.<sup>203</sup>

In other parts of Central Kenya, alliances of convenience were quickly cobbled. These ranged from Karuri wa Gakure's dalliances with John Boyes, the self styled "king of the Wakikuyu," also locally known as Karianjahi (eater of *njahi*), the exploits of Wangombe Ihura and Wambugu Mathangani, both of Nyeri, and those of Wangu wa Makeri, Karuri's protege in Murang'a. These alliances depict both the internal politics of a tribe grappling with a new social order, and the role that "friendlies" played in abetting the establishment of British rule in Kikuyuland. Some of these friendlies, like Mbuthia wa Kaguongo from Muruka (in what is South Murang'a District today, and the scene of one of the bloodiest encounters as recorded by Meinertzhagen), acted as the linkmen for the enforcers of British administration.<sup>204</sup>

Senior administrators like Francis Hall, a former IBEA company official, further meticulously preserved for posterity the history of resistance and collaboration. In numerous correspondences, Hall sent graphic details to his father, Edward Hall, of his many exploits in the colony. In one of his many letters, he wrote of the resisting peasants of Muruka and how, "we made a mess of all their villages."<sup>205</sup> His only regret was that the villagers would not directly confront them, thus giving him "no chance of trying my rockets." He regrets that though they were able to bring in 1000 goats and a load of grains, "we didn't manage to do much execution as the brutes wouldn't stand."<sup>206</sup> While these, and other gory tales, were routinely part of British efforts at "pacification," it is the sense of heroism with which they were executed, and chronicled, that makes a mockery of the concept of "Pax Britannica." Certainly, this phase is a study in irony at the grand concept of "enforcing British peace" to quell the "barbarism" and the perennial "warring of native tribes," yet, the accounts leave no doubt, where the real barbarism lay: with imperial intruders.

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<sup>203</sup> Richard Meinertzhagen, *Kenya Diary 1902-6*, Edinburg, Oliver and Boyd, 1957, p.51.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> See KNA/Reel 3/MISS/22, Letters of Francis George Hall to Lieutenant-Colonel Hall, 1894-1901.

<sup>206</sup> Hall Diary for February 1894.

In all, we can derive from this period a few important observations relevant to later nationalisms. First, the sheer number of resistances, and their wide distribution across the colony, is clear evidence that resistance to colonial conquest was not an isolated, but a regular phenomenon, a natural reaction to aggression.<sup>207</sup> Furthermore, inherent in these resistances was an innate consciousness of the right to sovereignty. Indeed, many of the resisting societies- such as the Nandi, the Taita, the Kamba, the Giriama, the Bukusu, the Kikuyu, among others- were not only seeking to preserve their physical space, but also their integrity as nations. In addition, it is quite apparent that consistently, the efforts of these societies were, in many cases, re-enforced by a religious ideology, usually through “prophets,” spirit mediums, seers or millenarian priests, who endeavoured to construct a sense of purpose and a common destiny for their people.<sup>208</sup> This is certainly true of the Nandi of the Kenya highlands, the Mekatilili- led rebellion at the coast, and further afield, the Maji Maji, and Abushiri rebellions in Tanganyika, among many others.

A study of the role of the leadership of these rebellions shows that their teachings and symbols often bore directly on the question of sovereignty and legitimacy.<sup>209</sup> Therefore, the use of religion in these early rebellions to stake claims on sovereignty and legitimacy was, arguably, an early example of collaboration of faith and nationalism at work. Furthermore, the resistances left no doubt that sovereignty, and legitimacy, are core ideals to the idea of nationalism. What’s more, that these early rebellions were more widespread than has been acknowledged in colonial chronicles is further proof that Africans had neither happily accepted colonialism, nor taken the conquest lying down.

This then puts to question the veracity of the long cherished Euro-centric claim that Africans considered the coming of colonial rule good fortune, that they thankfully embraced Pax Colonica as delivery from tyrannical leaders, hostile neighbours, civil wars and even cannibalism. On the

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<sup>207</sup> T.O. Ranger, “African initiatives and resistance in the face of partition and conquest,” in *General History of Africa: Africa under Colonial Domination*, VII, ed. Adu Boahen, UNESCO, 1985, Chapter 3.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> T.O Ranger, “African Reactions to the Imposition of Colonial Rule in East and Central Africa” in *Colonialism in Africa: 1870-1960*, eds. L.H Gann and P. Duigan, Vol. 1, pp.293-324.

contrary, as Basil Davidson, among others, has amply demonstrated, studies of resistance to colonial rule reveal that all societies had reasons to resist, some crucial interests or values to safeguard, and that this was inherent in all the resistances.<sup>210</sup> Davidson's observation is equally, in my view, applicable to the phenomenon of collaboration, for collaborators, like resisters, were arguably also driven by specific considerations, no matter how self-serving we may regard such considerations to have been. Furthermore, there is no gainsaying that, while conquest was undoubtedly hastened by collaboration, other factors well beyond the control of these societies were also at play.

All told, these first attempts by African societies to preserve their integrity, and the nature of the European penetration, had significant ramifications for the later development of African nationalism. Indeed, while nascent nationalism in Kenya only acquired a more visible form in the post-World War 1 period, these early and certainly unsavoury encounters with the imperial warlords, was the seedbed on which dissent was first sown. Hence, their crucial niche in Kenya's history. The nature and extent of each society's encounter with Pax Britannica would subsequently determine how soon, and prolific, that latent seed of nationalism would thrive. In any event, the British swiftly took the next step, which was to entrench their rule, with Christianity becoming an integral partner in this endeavour.

In 1844, Krapf, and in 1846, Rebmann of the CMS, reached Mombasa. The two subsequently made exploratory journeys inland into Kenya and Tanzania (Tanganyika then), to the south. In time, other missionaries were to follow, pioneering the Christianization of East Africa. This era of early missionary endeavours at the coast has been widely documented. We shall thus move straight to the factors that gave missionaries the impetus to shift emphasis from the coast to the interior, and the consequences that followed this decision.

For four decades since their arrival, missions at the coast were, without exception, riddled with many difficulties and setbacks. The Galla, who had been the great passion of Krapf's early work at the coast, had increasingly drifted from contact with Christianity, mainly because of the

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<sup>210</sup> A.B Davidson, "African Resistance and Rebellion Against the Imposition of British Rule" in *Emerging Themes of African History*, ed. T.O Ranger, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1968, pp.177-88.

assault by Islam. Similarly, Christianity, which had begun to flourish among the Miji Kenda also declined dramatically. The Wa-Digo, in particular, had turned to Islam in large numbers after the Mbaruk Rebellion of 1895. Furthermore, language continued to be a major hindrance, and in spite of the missionaries' commendable efforts to learn the local languages, and even translate, the New Testament and the catechism, for decades, language continued hamper the evangelization of the coastal people. Above all, however, it is disease, in particular the debilitating malaria that made many of the missions untenable, tragically cutting short the lives of many of the pioneers. Consequently, as the White Highlands began to open up, missions inevitably cast their eyes inland where the weather was not only more forgiving, but also many 'untouched' communities awaited.

The fortunes of the missions, however, did not dramatically change until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hitherto, the interior of the protectorate had remained largely a closed territory due to hostilities from recalcitrant communities, poor knowledge of its topography, unreliable transportation, and again like the coast, the language barrier. All these factors, and the high mortality rate that missionaries had suffered at the coast and its immediate hinterland, made it extremely difficult for the missions to press inland with any measure of success. However, two things worked in their favour at the turn of the century, dramatically changing their fortunes; the successful quelling of resistances, coupled with the completion of the railway in 1901. This ushered in a post-pacification phase, which allowed white settlers to move into the heart of the land. These two developments marked the start of a rapid process of social change, and a vast increase in social scale, for all but the most isolated Africans in the interior, with the attendant problems of social change.<sup>211</sup>

From the start, central Kenya, nestled in the much coveted and newly opened up white highlands was a prime target for all the major missions; not only was it home to a large and industrious agricultural population, but also strategically located at the very doorstep of the colonial seat of power, Nairobi. Indeed, the very first lands appropriated for white settlement lay in close vicinity of Nairobi, the new capital of the colony, built on the site of an earlier railway construction

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<sup>211</sup> Lonsdale, "*Some Origins*," op.cit p.120.



depot. Thus, to acquire a mission station in and around Nairobi was considered a strategic move that would offer missions a head start and a convenient base from which to make further forays inland. It, therefore, became a priority, nay a contest, for missions to acquire land here.

In this spirit, the CMS began its occupation of the Kikuyu country, founding its first station at Kihuruko (Kabete) in 1900.<sup>212</sup> Between 1900 and 1913, it had established seven stations in Kikuyuland. These were Kabete (1900), Weithaga (1903), Kahuhia (1906), Kabare (1910),<sup>213</sup> Kigari (1910), Mutira (1911) and Gathukiini (1913). Kabete, the oldest of the stations, held the esteemed position of the Mother Church, with Reverend McGregor, Mangereka to the Kikuyu, being the first missionary to arrive. Reverend and Mrs. Harry Leakey shortly followed, enabling McGregor to move into the heart of Kikuyuland at Weithaga, nestled on the foothills of the Aberdares in north Murang'a in 1903.<sup>214</sup>

The Anglican endeavour at establishing missions went hand in hand with the other established British missionary society, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland Mission (hereafter CSM). In fact, the CSM, *Kanitha wa Thigoci*, as the locals called it, was technically the first to open a station at Kikuyuland when the Reverend Thomas Watson, its inland pioneer, reached Kikuyu, a village outside Nairobi, from Ukambani in 1898. The locals named the centre, Thogoto, a corruption of the name of the founders D and H. Scott. Thogoto was to become famous for its hospital and school, while its most prominent pupil was Jomo Kenyatta. Johnstone Kamau, as he was then known, said he went to their school because he wanted to know how a piece of paper (a letter), could speak.<sup>215</sup> The CSM opened a second station at Tumutumu, Nyeri, in 1908 and most of its subsequent missionary work was to take place mainly among the Kikuyu. Of the Protestant missions, it is the CSM that would clash most heavily with the Kikuyu Central Association (hereafter KCA), over the female circumcision controversy when it came to a head in 1929. The third traditional body from England, the Methodists, United Methodist Mission, moved from the

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<sup>212</sup> Roland Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*, London, Longman, 1952, p.170.

<sup>213</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>214</sup> Karanja, op.cit., p.10.

<sup>215</sup> Baur, op. cit., p.254.

coast to the interior only in 1910, reportedly following a catechist from Golbanti, Meru. Consequently, Meru became the chief area of the church.<sup>216</sup>

The other major mission to Kenya was the American-British inter-denominational African Inland Mission (hereafter AIM), with its founders Peter Cameron Scott and Charles Hurlburt. The AIM was one of the first missions to venture past Kenya's coast, having built their first inland station among the Kamba in 1896. The work of the AIM, like those of other missions, had steadily declined at the coast. Equally, it had suffered many casualties among the Akamba. Indeed, by 1898, only one of the three founders was still alive. Like other missions, the AIM decided to forge inland, setting its headquarters at Kijabe on the southern edge of the Kikuyu escarpment, approximately 30 miles north- west of Nairobi.

However, unlike both the Protestant and Catholic missions, which, from the start, emphasised a theology of the whole person, the AIM adopted a very different approach. Sandgren's exhaustive study of AIM notes that its missionaries firmly believed that they had come to teach and convert, not to learn or to be taught. As a result, education and medicine for AIM were considered only a means to the desired end, which was Christian conversion.<sup>217</sup> In fact, the AIM considered the other missions' emphasis on ecumenical and social development as of secondary importance and a threat to evangelism.<sup>218</sup> As a result, at the AIM mission, few of her missionaries were trained teachers and rarely did any AIM school go beyond the second or third grade.<sup>219</sup> It is not surprising that when the female circumcision furore took centre-stage in the early 1930s, the AIM took the longest to recover, having made very little effort over the years to understand the cultural foundation of its followers.

Nonetheless, although Kijabe was at first used almost exclusively to evangelize the nearby Kikuyu and the Maasai, in time it became an important translation and service centre for missionaries. Here, language study was undertaken, a hospital, printing press, Bible College and

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>217</sup> D.P Sandgren, *Christianity and the Kikuyu: Religious Divisions and Social Conflict*, N.Y, Peter-Lang, 1989, p.20.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

a school for missionary children were also established. This heavy investment in a variety of services was very different from its original perspective that only Christian conversion mattered. Later on, the AIM would set up another station at Githumu and an outstation at Kinyona, both in southern Murang'a. It also established a third station at Mataara in Kiambu. As for Kijabe, in seventy odd years, it grew from Hulburt's humble house to several hundred buildings, and at one time was reportedly home to more than one hundred missionaries, making it then the largest mission station in the world.<sup>220</sup>

The fourth important protestant body was the Gospel Society Mission (hereafter GSM). Up to 1913, GSM was an affiliate of the AIM, establishing its missions in Kiambu at Kambui in 1902, Ng'enda in 1905, and Kihumbuini in Murang'a in 1913. One, Kihurani Gatundu, an African evangelist, started the Kihumbuini mission.<sup>221</sup> Interestingly, this locality became one of the earliest centres of independent movement in Kikuyuland, and when the Mau Mau broke out, a hotbed of its operations. By the outbreak of World War 1, Kikuyuland boasted of four major protestant missions with a combined fifteen stations.

Meanwhile, the Catholic missions, though greatly outnumbered, were quietly establishing their own stations in and around Nairobi, and deep in Kikuyuland. The Catholic endeavour in the interior was shared among three societies: the Holy Ghost Fathers, advancing from the coast towards Kikuyuland, the Mill Hill Missionaries, expanding from Uganda to Western Kenya, and the Consolata Fathers, settling around Mt Kenya.<sup>222</sup> Like their protestant counterparts, whose foundation was at the coast, the slow conversion there had convinced the Holy Ghost Missionaries, the predominant catholic missionaries at the time, that the future of the church lay in the interior. To this end, their missionary outreach followed the railway as it snaked inland, with a view to establishing a mission in the Kikuyu country. It is in this quest that the Holy Ghost Fathers, already established in Taita country, arrived in Nairobi to set up their first inland station in 1899 at Saint Austin's mission. The mission still stands, with many of its original

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Quoted in Karanja, op.cit., p.23.

buildings and church intact at the present site of Saint Mary's School at Msongari (*Muthangari*).<sup>223</sup>

Apart from evangelization, the Holy Ghost fathers were the first to introduce the coffee tree in Kenya, and subsequently established several coffee plantations around their missions from 1901. They were also the first to prepare and offer a Kikuyu catechism having made great effort to learn the Kikuyu language even while still at the coast. Other Catholic stations were subsequently founded in Tuthu, Chief Karuri's stronghold in Murang'a (1902), Limuru and Mathari (1903), Mangu near Thika in (1906), Riruta (1909), Kalimoni, Juja (1912), Meru (1911) and Rioki, Kiambu, (1913).<sup>224</sup>

The simultaneous arrival of missionaries and administrators, and the alienation of huge tracts of native lands by both, had a great influence on how the locals perceived the two colonial entities. The locals identified CMS with the British Establishment for obvious reasons. CMS was the mission of the ruling power, with virtually the whole administration subscribing to the Anglican faith. It is the proximity of the two that had lent the popular adage, "*gutiri muthungu na mubea*," there is no difference between the administrator and the missionary. Interestingly, the saying coined to reflect this duality, picked on the Catholic priest, *Mubea*, as the symbol of that duality.<sup>225</sup> Clearly, the details that made *mubea* any different from the white administrator was inconsequential to the ruled, even as the truth behind this perception has often been put to question. Oliver Roland, for example, points out that the "cynic" would be wrong to label the missionary enterprise for the years 1884-1904 as "merely an auxiliary arm of the imperialist expansion."<sup>226</sup> He has argued that there is no evidence from either of the two British territories in East Africa to suggest that this early convergence of interests was anything "more than a happy accident."<sup>227</sup> In a similar vein, Brian Stanley cautions against condemning the missionary

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<sup>223</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>224</sup> Oliver, *Missionary Factor*, op.cit., pp.168-71.

<sup>225</sup> Although it is difficult to pin down the origin of this saying, this had become popular wisdom by the 1920s, particularly with the beginnings of African nationalism; Also see oral Interview, Mbiti Kinyonga, Kithimu location, Embu, January 15, 2009.

<sup>226</sup> Oliver, op.cit., p.179.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

enterprise as a twin of colonialism, and advocates instead for an “even handed appraisal” of that enterprise in relation to colonialism.<sup>228</sup>

In the African mind, however, the duality was informed by empirical evidence all round. From the start, the locals had observed government’s efforts to delineate specific spheres of operation for the different mission bodies in a bid to minimize conflict between them. In this endeavour, the government had found it necessary to set out a ten-mile radius between the different missions to minimize squabbles over land and converts. Although this was meant to pre-empt potential conflicts between competing missions, it was also, to some extent, an effort to stem the careless regard with which many settlers (including missionaries), were handling indigenous inhabitants in matters of land.

Quite ironically, however, the government itself had not helped matters in this regard. Its raft of legislations, particularly those enacted from 1897-1915, had separated all land into two categories, native and crown, leaving African land tenure vulnerable to exploitation. The Crown Lands Ordinance of 1902, for example, had provided future Governors with far-reaching powers that would enable them to remove Africans from their native lands, and give those lands to Europeans at any time and any place.<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, with this Ordinance, Africans could no longer determine where to live, cultivate, hunt or pasture their flock. As has been noted of this legislation, it was a “provision which gave settlers an incentive to have their African neighbours moved.”<sup>230</sup> Even more unsettling, however, where a cultivated plot was surrounded by unoccupied land (a frequent occurrence in Kikuyuland), provision was made in the Ordinance for that “island” to be included in the grant to a European so as not create a patchwork of both native and crown land in the same area. Not just settlers benefited from this arrangement. Many missions were beneficiaries from these spaces of native land, and even with the government efforts to delineate mission spheres, the network of mission stations across the land in the years before World War 1 presented a confusing and uneven pattern.

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<sup>228</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, op.cit., p.18.

<sup>229</sup> Mwangi wa Githumo, Mwangi Wa- Githumo, *Land and Nationalism; The Impact of Land Expropriation and Land Grievances upon the Rise and Development of Nationalist Movements in Kenya: 1885-1939*, University Press of America, 1981, p. 201.

<sup>230</sup> Quoted in Wa Githumo, *Ibid*, p.201.

Furthermore, that many missions were no different from the settlers in their impatience to carve out for themselves huge tracts of land for commercial purpose cannot be gainsaid. For example, in 1903, the AIM, which had taken up land for occupation at Kijabe (as shown above), obtained a lease from the government for 1,796 acres. Several years later, the mission acquired another 665 additional freehold acres, giving the AIM mission in Kijabe a total of 2,461 acres.<sup>231</sup> Similarly, at CSM, Thogoto, Kiambu, some 3000 acres of agricultural estate was established and though it proved largely a commercial failure, it was recompensed by the fact that the earliest evangelistic progress occurred among the mission's numerous tenantry.<sup>232</sup>

The Catholic missions, too, followed a similar trend. For example, the Holy Ghost Mission (hereafter HGM) in Nairobi, and the Consolata Mission (hereafter CM), in Mathari, Nyeri, appropriated large tracts of land to set up income-generating enterprises, mainly coffee and tea growing, as well as for setting up schools and hospitals. However, deep-seated resentment against the manner in which some of these lands were lost has reverberated long after the missionaries left. In the Mathari case, for example, over three hundred squatters have sued the Catholic Diocese of Nyeri over 2,761 acres of land they claim was alienated from their forefathers between 1956 and 1965. In this sixty year-old case, the claimants argue that the land, which was handed to an Italian missionary centre by the colonial government, and which later passed it out to the Catholic church at independence, rightly belongs to their *Mbari* clan.<sup>233</sup>

To sustain, and make profit from these commercial enterprises, the missions, with few exceptions, embarked on the recruitment of cheap African labour, again in a manner not too different from that of the settlers. Welbourn's own analysis of missionary Christianity clearly indicates that whatever their theological outlook, missionaries were, in fact, involved in many other activities beyond the simple preaching of the gospel. Of the Catholics, he notes that they saw their "mission of civilization" as a necessary part of preaching of the Gospel. They, therefore, had no hesitation in establishing plantations, whose profits would support their

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<sup>231</sup> Sandgren, op.cit., p.32.

<sup>232</sup> Oliver, op.cit., p.172.

<sup>233</sup> See, for example, a newspaper report on the case at <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke>, 26 Feb2014, accessed March 3, 2014.

converts. Concerning the Presbyterians and Moravians, he argues that they too believed, perhaps even more intensely than the Catholics, that it was critical to create Christian communities that were economically self-supporting as a way of imparting in their members “the spiritual value of skilled and honest labour.”<sup>234</sup>

Ironically, mission bodies, all the same, were quick to castigate government’s policies on African labour. In direct reaction to Governor Northey’s severe labour circulars at the height of the labour crisis soon after the First World War, the Alliance of Churches issued a memorandum. In a joint communiqué, the churches challenged the justification commonly used by the settlers that the labour they recruited enabled, “the native to be brought into edifying contact with a superior civilization and be taught the dignity of labour.”<sup>235</sup> This was indeed double-faced, for missionaries’ own version, couched as “spiritual value of skilled and honest labour,” was not very different from that of the settlers. Save from lone voices in the missionary fraternity, there was, in fact, disconcertingly little difference in the approach to land and labour matters by both the missionaries and settler body.

One such dissenting voice was that of J.D Oldham, the first secretary of the Conference of Missionary Societies in Great Britain and North Ireland. In his “Memorandum on Native Affairs in East Africa,” he had summed up his field evidence by noting that an honest interpretation of trusteeship required first the reservation of sufficient land for the natives. This would ensure that, if they left the reserves to work for Europeans, they did so of their own free will and sold their labour on fair commercial terms. He had recommended, in addition, that a comprehensive and progressive policy on native education be effected.<sup>236</sup> Quite evidently, one of Oldham’s fears was that the “natives” would be reduced to chattels in the emotive issues of land and labour, while being made to contend with “philanthropic” enterprises thrust on them.

Ultimately, these two critical issues of land and labour, lying at the core of African livelihoods and indeed at the very soul of the society, were the most emotive and sustained of grievances

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<sup>234</sup> F.B Welbourn, *East African Rebels: A study of some Independent Churches*, London, 1961, p.249.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p.236.

among the Kikuyu. In the eyes of the natives, missions and government had become co-conspirators in the skimming off that characterised the colonial economy in Kenya. Because one of the two central questions in Mau Mau was land, the attacks on loyal Christians when the revolt broke out might well have been a manifestation of this disaffection with missionaries. To freedom fighters, missionaries represented a long and treacherous legacy.

Once mission outlay was complete, Christianity became the most important agent of social change for the colonized. David Livingstone, the great 19th century pioneer missionary, in advocating for the simultaneous implantation of Christianity, Commerce and Civilization, had sketched the road map to a Christian civilization in Africa. The approach became even more critical as the contradictions between the priorities, and the ideals of imperial trusteeship, and the clamour by the settler community to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-government, in addition to tuning the plantation economy to meet the rising demands of production for the world market became more apparent.<sup>237</sup> The “civilizing mission” thus became an important mantra for missionaries and other “humanitarians.” They were anxious to show, as Archdeacon W.E Owen of Nyanza mission, in another context had put it, “the only Christian justification for the Empire over backward peoples is that it may serve them, not exploit them.”<sup>238</sup> It is in this endeavour that the triad of Church, School and Hospital became the hallmark of virtually all Protestant and Catholic missions. These three became core to the evangelisation ministry. As for white man’s medicine, its “magic” became a most potent tool to lure Africans to Christianity. The Catholic White Fathers were especially convinced that medicine and evangelism, used hand in hand, could “unlock” the African mind, making it more receptive to the gospel, and freeing him from the grip of superstition, possession of evil spirits and witchcraft.<sup>239</sup>

This was definitely true of the protestant missions also. Bishop David Gitari’s own father, Samuel Mukuba, illustrates this approach well. By 1919, Mukuba was already active in mission service. A pioneer evangelist, Mukuba became famous in Embu and its environs for his fearless fight against the incapacitating witchcraft and superstition rife among the Embu. He strongly

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<sup>237</sup> Stanley, op.cit., p. 147.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Quoted in Welbourn, op.cit., p.271.



believed that the Aembu would only open up to evangelization once this burden of fear had been removed from them through education, and the use of modern medicine.<sup>240</sup> He was eventually proved right. As more and more natives sought medical intervention in the missions' dispensaries, they were increasingly exposed to Christianity, a development that led to exponential growth of the predominantly Anglican Christianity among the Embu. The healing ministry had become part of the essential message of Christianity, with Christ portrayed as the greatest physician of all.

If the white man's medicine had awed superstitious natives, it is the school, however, which became the most vital attraction for curious Africans. Missionaries strongly believed that the school, like the hospital, was a vital weapon for evangelization. The immediate benefit was that literacy would not only enable the converts to read the bible and the catechism for themselves, but would also help raise African catechists and evangelists. In fact, Livingstone had long suggested that the evangelization of Africa could hardly begin until it was in the hands of the Africans for "the missionary could only reach a few, the African many."<sup>241</sup> Thus, the translation of the bible into the various vernaculars became one of the earliest tasks undertaken by many missions, with the fast-paced Catholics producing a Kikuyu catechism as early as 1902. What the missionaries could not have foreseen was that their "gift of literacy" would ignite a great thirst for education, and that the struggle for the school would soon set the Kikuyu and the missions on a collision course. It is an irrefutable fact that literacy was the most important prerequisite to the rise of nationalism with dramatic consequences for the colonial edifice.

While no single factor can adequately explain the emergence of nationalism among the Kikuyu, the major issues at its root had already begun to emerge even before the First World War had ended. Of great import was that, the rapid development of Kenya into a solidly settler colony in the same period, inevitably tied the agenda for its budding nationalism to the main structures of settler colonialism. These structures had, over time, created the interrelated institutions governing land, labour and indirect rule on the Africans. Thus, the major political grievances among the Kikuyu- loss of land, burdensome taxes and labour polices, colour bar and lack of access to, or

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<sup>240</sup>Oral Interview, David Gitari, Embu, 28/1/2009.

<sup>241</sup> Welbourn, *Missionary Factor*, op.cit., p.271.

low-quality education- were all, largely firmly tied to the effects of these institutions on the society. Furthermore, because these grievances were essentially new problems, directly emanating from the colonial encounter, they required new skills and solutions beyond what the traditional institutions could offer.<sup>242</sup> This was even truer, in face of the fact that the traditional institutions were themselves under exceptional pressure and in real danger of imminent collapse. Nonetheless, in inadvertent compensation, the rapid spread of Christianity had simultaneously opened up new vistas and opportunities in the colony, generating, in the process, rapid social change that would help equip the colonized with some of the tools with which to manage this change. Education became the linchpin of these tools, and certainly the most imperative to the rise of African nationalism.

By the outbreak of the First World War, mission schools- most of which were rudimentary in nature, hence the label “bush schools” - had produced the first generation of literate Africans. Armed with the basic skills of reading, writing and simple arithmetic, the mission graduates, commonly referred to as “mission boys,” were not only empowered to read the Good Book for themselves, but were in a more advantageous position to appreciate both the overt and covert westernizing influences inherent in colonialism. For example, they were the first to take advantage of the new skills- such as the building of modernized houses, new standards of hygiene, growing of new crops- and even more importantly, seeking an education for their own children beyond what they themselves had received. The more gifted of these pupils were then able to enter the central schools in the outstations that by the early 1920s dotted the landscape. While some of these graduates went on to become teachers, catechists, extension officers, dressers in local dispensaries, record keepers on settler farms, among others, the more adventurous ones ventured into the urban areas, chiefly, Nairobi, to seek low cadre employment as junior clerks and messengers, meter readers, and other jobs that did not require refined skills. Nonetheless, at whatever level of education, its attainment provided a hitherto unknown mobility

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<sup>242</sup> Godfrey Muriuki, “Background to Politics and Nationalism in Central Kenya: The Traditional Social and Political Systems of Kenya Peoples” in *Hadith 4: Politics and Nationalism in Colonial Kenya*, ed. B.A Ogot, Nairobi, EAPH, 1972, p.16.

to those who had encountered its magic, spreading new ideas and values among the larger African population.<sup>243</sup>

Even more importantly, however, for this study, it is from this first generation of mission graduates that the pioneers of African nationalism arose. The exposure to westernizing influences, particularly western education, new values and Christianity, helped a small elite to seize the egalitarian message of the Bible to question the discriminatory nature of colonial practices, including those of their very mentors, the missionaries. Some of the “mission boys” began to demand that the government, rather than the missions, provide education. They argued that missionary education, with its emphasis on “character training” and the “dignity of manual labour,” was a ploy to keep Africans in menial jobs whose only purpose would be to serve their colonial masters better.

As Mburu points out, the local Christians, *athomi*, were the first to express resentment and objection to the unjustified domination of the white man.<sup>244</sup> This new generation of young African mission boys like Harry Thuku, a graduate of GMS Kambui, Jesse Kariuki, Perminus Githendu, and James Beuttah, who had stayed with reverend H.K Binns before World War 1 and had been baptized at Kisauni, were representative of the lot for whom “the mission gift of literacy brought the possibility of great power.”<sup>245</sup> In both central and western Kenya, the epicentre of early mission endeavours, mission boys soon became an alternative focus for political organization beyond the traditional influence of the elders.<sup>246</sup> In Kikuyuland, the rise to the vanguard of modern political organization by mission-trained literati illustrated the double-edged nature of missionary efforts. Yet, when cultural crisis hit African Christianity, as it did with the female circumcision crisis, mission graduates were, ironically, at the forefront of championing what they considered an important cultural rite of passage. Indeed, no phenomenon better symbolises the interface between culture, Christianity and colonialism, as does this question, which is revisited later in this chapter.

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<sup>243</sup> Oral Interview, Amos Kiriro, Nairobi, June 2008.

<sup>244</sup> John Mburu, “The Dissemination of Christianity in Nyeri District (1903-1963) with Special Reference to the Work of African Teachers and Evangelists,” M.A Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1975, p.2.

<sup>245</sup> Carl Rosberg and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of “Mau Mau:” Nationalism in Kenya*, N.Y, Hoover, 1966, p.57.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

The earliest political association in central Kenya was the Kikuyu Association (hereafter KA), formed in 1920 by Mbiyu Koinange, along with other chiefs in Kiambu District.<sup>247</sup> The association was primarily a lobbying forum for the return of the alienated Kikuyu lands, but also mounted resistance against further alienation of ancestral lands. In spite of its apparent political agenda, the membership of the association raised interesting questions: why would colonial chiefs, arguably the most easily identifiable benefactors of the colonial state, bite the very hand that fed them? Had these chiefs not accepted the colonial political structure under which they had achieved great power and status as the elite of the tribe? Indeed, were not these four great pillars of the Kikuyu Association in southern Kiambu- Philip James Karanja, Josiah Njonjo, Waruhiu Kung'u and Mbiyu Koinange- all landed men, owe their rise to power and privileged positions to the colonial largesse?

The answers to some of these questions partly lie in the nature of KA's grievances, which, on closer inspection, reveal the chiefs' stakes concerning land. It is also quite telling that land, which was at the core of the association's agenda, was also the most important cause of disaffection against these very chiefs in Kikuyuland. Quite evidently, some of the colonial chiefs had amassed land at the expense of some hapless clans, "Mbaris," in their jurisdiction. Besides, chiefs were the point men to whom the administration turned when it came to implementing government policies on land, labour and taxation. The case of Chief Luka Kahangara, and his role in the re-location of his people from their ancestral lands in Tigoni to Lari in the 1930s, is one of the best examples of the dicey mandates that faced colonial chiefs.<sup>248</sup> His gruesome end in the Lari Massacre of March 1953 epitomised the gravity of the land question in colonial Kenya. Besides, it was a testimony as to how far, and unforgiving the disgruntled over land matters were willing to go, in what they considered as collusion between chiefs and the administration. It was the groundswell of later violence in Kikuyuland.

Ironically, Koinange himself belonged to a *mbari* that he claimed had lost a great deal of land in

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<sup>247</sup> Greet Kershaw, *Mau Mau From Below*, EAEP, 1997, p.179.

<sup>248</sup> Group discussion, George Mage, Mwangi Njoroge, Charles Mbugua Munyuko, Isaac Mugoioyo, Gakobo Muchiri, Grace Ngugi Waweru, Rachel Wangechi and Julia Wamaitha, at Lari, Kiambu, January 2009.

the second wave of European settlement in southern Kiambu at the turn of the century. His own protracted struggle with the administration over these claims had yielded little over the years and because the chiefs hoped that their concerted efforts “could yield results where individual *mbaris* had failed,”<sup>249</sup> the other three chiefs considered Koinange the most suited to become the first chairman of the KA.

In spite of its limited membership, and even narrower agenda, the role of KA in the first stirrings of political consciousness cannot altogether be dismissed. This association of what Kershaw calls “the resistance of the elders,”<sup>250</sup> arose at a time when patterns of cleavage and conflict were beginning to crystallize within the Kikuyu society. By creating an association that sought to safeguard its own interests, KA sparked an important counter-debate that brought into sharp focus the plight of the truly aggrieved by the colonial policies in Kikuyuland, and these were not, by any stretch of imagination, the chiefs. The most crucial question then, as in later years, revolved around the alarming increase of the landless in Kikuyuland and the land-poor, those with only small strips of land that were economically unresponsive. Yet, these concerns were clearly secondary in all respects to the deliberations of the KA.<sup>251</sup> Carefully concealed at the bottom of their agitation, however, and that of the members of the more landed families, were concerns over the encroachment of their own land by *ahoi*, tenants.

Who were these *ahoi* and how did they shape the rising political concerns of the day? In the traditional/tribal setting, the *ahoi* were tenants allowed use of land by the landed. Wa Githumo, among others, has explored the principle of land tenancy more fully in his work on the interface of land and nationalism.<sup>252</sup> He points out that the word *muhoi* in Kikuyu language, and *Jadak* in Luo, referred to a client who had acquired cultivation rights without payment. He further explains that such a client acquired the right to use the land on the basis of friendship, marriage or land needs. If the *muhoi* or *Jadak* proved to be a good tenant, he could remain in the land allotted to him forever, on condition that there was continual use and occupation, otherwise one

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<sup>249</sup> Kershaw, *Mau Mau From Below*, op.cit., p.179.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., Chapter 6.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p.178.

<sup>252</sup> Wa Githumo, op.cit.

lost his “usufructuary rights.”<sup>253</sup> While like *Jadak*, a *muhoi* just enjoyed cultivation rights, and the owner could ask him to leave the land whenever he so wished, the generosity of the proprietor was usually extended. In fact, among the Kikuyu, a *muhoi* could request to become a *muthami*, immigrant, in which case if such a plea was successful he became as good as the owner of the land that he tilled.

However, with increased use of westernized concepts of land ownership and land rights in colonial Kenya, and with pressure beginning to bear on land, the practice of tenancy became increasingly untenable, prompting chiefs to raise concerns over their own lands. In KA’s case, the chiefs urged the administration to confirm ownership rights, even as the *ahoi* beseeched the government and the landowners to grant them certain rights to the lands they had tilled for years. This standoff not only heightened the tensions between the landless and the landed, but also brought into sharp focus the widening cleavage in society. Indeed, as Wanyoike postulates, KA was nothing but a club for a few privileged members of the society, not so much a political party as an interest group, which was born from the efforts of some elders to protect their land against attempts at internal alienation.<sup>254</sup>

This growing cleavage was about much more than economic mobility or the lack of it. It manifested a generational conflict, best captured by the tussles between Koinange and Harry Thuku over leadership in southern Kikuyuland. Thuku, a young, independent, and mission-educated Kikuyu with no pretensions to chiefly blood, rose to challenge the largely illiterate body of chiefs at every turn. He challenged KA, both on the nature of its grievances, which he described as selfish, as well as the modalities the association had adopted, including using missionaries as emissaries to the government. For Thuku, the way forward was to confront, not cajole, an intransigent administration. This abrasive government telephone operator at one point even hijacked the chiefs’ memorandum to White Hall, re-wording it in his own much bolder language and appropriating it as his own, much to the chagrin of the chiefs.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>254</sup> Quoted in Kershaw, op.cit., p.178.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

It is in this spirit that the then 24-year-old Harry Thuku<sup>256</sup> formed the Young Kikuyu Association in 1921 (hereafter YKA) from which the East African Association (hereafter EAA) would grow. Thuku deliberately adopted the word “young,” for his association to distinguish it from the conservative chiefs’ outfit, Kikuyu Association. He protested several government policies, including compulsory hut taxes and labour laws, and especially the *kipande* identity card system. Thuku planned to dramatize opposition to the *kipande* system by enlisting Africans all over Kenya in a concerted effort to throw away the metal *kipande* containers they were required to wear around their necks. Furthermore, he openly accused the colonial government of stealing Kikuyu land, and urged the Kikuyu not to work for the Europeans any longer. Missionaries were not spared. Thuku accused the fraternity of preaching the word of the devil, and expressed the hope that all the whites would leave Kenya.<sup>257</sup>

This raft of grievances saw Thuku embroiled in running battles with the colonial administration, the chiefs and missionaries too. This three-pronged battle led to talk in YKA of forming a more militant, more representative and politically aggressive East African Association to unite all tribes. Accordingly, the EAA transmuted from YKA with the aim of articulating this widening agenda, which included the souring of race relations, the recession, and the effects of the Asiatic Question. However, no sooner had the EAA found its feet than the government stepped in to nip Thuku’s budding political ambitions. Following an eruption of violence in March 1922 during a demonstration in Nairobi, which left 21 Africans dead and 28 wounded, the government used the incident to banish Thuku to Kismayu. Nonetheless, his early efforts at confronting the colonial administration were not altogether in vain; the government moderated its labour policy and announced a reduction in hut tax, the disbanding of government labour camps, and the end to active labour recruitment by the chiefs and the Provincial Administration.<sup>258</sup> Thuku’s exploits are revisited in a different context in this chapter.

Suffice it to state here that in a major sense, Thuku’s war with the administration espoused a larger war with the chiefs over supremacy. It points to a close connection between the

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<sup>256</sup> Robert E. Edgerton, *Mau Mau: An African Crucible*, London, I.B Tauris &Co Ltd, 1990, p.41.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> George Bennett, *Kenya: A Political History-the Colonial Period*, London, Oxford University Press, 1963, pp. 54-5.

establishment of missions and subsequent access to education, and the rise of nascent nationalism. Specifically, it shows that education, sometimes just a modicum of it, turned out to be a crucial tool in re-configuring the social balance between the young, and the old, thereby creating an alternative focus for power and political organization. Western education was the new *cause celebre*, the new *ituika*, the generational hand-over of the instruments of power. It became an important variable in the access to, and the creation of, both wealth and power for an emerging elitist class in the Kikuyu society.

By 1928, KA was on the wane, increasingly sidelined by the more vibrant politics of the newly created Kikuyu Central Association (hereafter KCA). Indeed, the Senior Commissioner for Central Province, R.W Hemstead, dismissed KA as a forum that could not claim to represent the people or even any considerable proportion of them.<sup>259</sup> Hemstead was voicing the obvious; KA's concern, as we have seen, was with the interests of the chiefs and headmen and had no pretensions of representing anyone but them. That the loyalty of its members lay firmly with the state, under whose largesse these chiefs had enjoyed both influence and affluence in the colony, was clear. Thus, when KA changed its name to the Kikuyu Loyal Patriots (hereafter KLP) in 1932, ostensibly, to avoid confusion with the KCA founded in 1924, it was merely putting a stamp on its loyalist status.

The disruptive effects of the war, and the deplorable labour policies formulated in the colony in its wake, proved crucial to the heightening of political consciousness. In particular, the Great War had especially eroded many of the economic gains that the settlers had painstakingly worked for in the two decades before the war. Nonetheless, the settlers had managed to consolidate their political power in the colony as evidenced by the actualization of the Legislative Council (hereafter LEGCO), which they had clamoured for, over the years. Furthermore, the global recession that followed the war with adverse affects on world prices of the colony's agricultural produce, and even more critically, the shortage of African labour, had forced the government to step in to shore up the settlers' dwindling economic fortunes.

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<sup>259</sup> KNA PC/CP8/5/1, Kikuyu Association, 1921-1931, letter of January 12, 1928.



To ameliorate the situation, Governor Edward Northey, issued the so-called “Northey Circulars” on labour recruitment, a move he felt was critical to the stabilization of the post-war situation. Northey, like the settlers, justified the coercion of African labour within the framework of what he termed as “civilizing mission,” in which “unproductive, idle natives” would be taught to cooperate.<sup>260</sup> Besides, the worthiness of the chiefs and headmen would henceforth be pegged against their effectiveness in the recruitment of that labour. To back up this recruitment, the obnoxious 1915 Native Registration Ordinance, more commonly referred to as *kipande*, was amended in 1920, compelling all males of 16 years and above to seek gainful employment. Because wage labour was often limited to the settled areas, this meant that the wage seekers would be uprooted from their reserves to work in settler farms, restricting them in their choice of where and when to work, if at all. This trend of internal migrant labour only complicated even further the social-economic flux of the colony, while accelerating the relatively new phenomenon of “squatterdom” in the settled areas. That the government should commit its resources and authority to help settlers out of what was virtually private venture, was good news for them. Conversely, it only aggravated the Africans, already resentful of the chiefs who were forcefully recruiting labour.

The other major determinant of the issues at the heart of early nationalism lay in the official change of status from that of the East African Protectorate to a Kenya Colony in 1920. The annexation of Kenya by the proclamation of 1920 received a strong endorsement from the European settlers who saw it as their best opportunity to press for autonomy, and become a truly, “White Man’s Country.” However, the colonized, not knowing what this change portended, viewed this development with much suspicion. They were naturally wary of new government directives, particularly those touching on the already sore matter of land. They argued that Kenya had been administered as a Crown Colony of the British Empire since 1895 under the name “East African Protectorate,” so, why had the British government now found it necessary to change the name and the political status of the protectorate? To the Kikuyu, having already lost so much of their prime land, suspicion was rife, that the change of status meant that even more land would be alienated and the already appropriated lost forever.

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<sup>260</sup> Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, “Crises of Accumulation, Coercion and the Colonial State,” in *Unhappy Valley*, op.cit., p.110.

As it turned out, these fears were not unfounded. The British government's decision to resettle the ex-soldiers of the First World War in the White Highlands was proof enough that a conspiracy was afoot. Governor Northey, looking for the slightest opportunity to expand European interests, moved with alacrity when the opportunity presented itself. The decision to resettle the ex-soldiers and their families (including the maimed), in prime lands on the White Highlands was that opportunity. The discharged Soldiers' Settlement Ordinance, a subsidiary of the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915 sealed the deal.<sup>261</sup> Through this scheme, Africans eventually lost a further total area of 4,560 square miles, land that was given out free of charge in 257 farms of 160 to 300 acres each, and 1,053 larger blocks offered on purchase on very easy terms.<sup>262</sup> The influx of new settlers into the colony compounded fears of the loss of even more land, and the attendant displacement of the rightful owners of the land with little chance of compensation.

Settlers, on their part, used the disruption caused by the war to justify their own radical agenda. The war had given them increased political influence that had culminated in their being granted the much clamoured for Legislative Council. One of the immediate measures pushed through the LEGCO was to reduce, with impunity, the already dismal African wages from 12 to 8 shillings a month. This came at a time when the government simultaneously raised African taxes from 12 to 16 shillings a year, the indigence of the labourers' wage, notwithstanding. The fiscal measures, needless to say, only aggravated an already sorry economic situation for the Africans. Apart from the question of taxes and penurious wages, the fact that chiefs were under the order to provide a certain number of girls to work for white settlers, thus placing such girls under the mercy of the settlers, did not help their cause with the locals.

All these grievances presented the Africans with a clearly defined enemy, and the Kikuyu, deeply aggrieved, began to raise their voices in anger against the colonial administration. The demobilized African soldiers, denied post-war benefits as their white comrades-at-war, and forced to watch as ex-British officers were rewarded with prime land, added to the volatility of

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<sup>261</sup> Wa Githumo, op.cit., p.271.

<sup>262</sup>Ibid.

colonial politics. African ex-soldiers had survived a savage war that was never their war in the first place. They had tasted the grapes of wrath, only to come back to the same old settler arrogance. Hemstead, commenting on the political impact of the returning of the African ex-soldiers noted the following:

Chiefly perhaps, they brought the knowledge that there were different kinds of white men than they had hitherto known; but they also brought back some idea of the power of organization. Combined with other causes, it is probable that the growth of native political associations and of native independence of thought really dates back from the war years.<sup>263</sup>

Harry Thuku embodied this post-war political organisation and the emerging frontiers of African nationalism as we saw earlier. The short-lived EAA, and the Kikuyu Central Association that followed in quick succession, typified the new *modus operandi*. Thuku himself claimed that his Association contained most of the educated Kikuyu, a claim most likely true, as they were concentrated in Nairobi.<sup>264</sup> In addition, Thuku certainly enjoyed huge popular support. Kenyatta, in a letter to the *Daily Worker* of January 1930, in London, recounted the mood in Kikuyuland at the inception of the EAA and the enthusiasm with which the Kikuyu had elected Thuku. He wrote:

Thuku was elected at a great meeting at Dagoretti where all the chiefs and headmen and many thousands of people authorized him to organize to defend the interests of African people.<sup>265</sup>

The Thuku we saw fighting the chiefs was an early example of the parting of ways between the missionaries and their former “mission boys,” a defiance that earned him much admiration from both the young and the old alike. Dr. Arthur noted this adulation with concern, reporting that, “In Fort Hall district, practically the whole of the younger generation of native Christians were solid

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<sup>263</sup> KNA DC/ NYI/9, Nyeri Political Record, Volume 1.

<sup>264</sup> Jeremy Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, London, Fontana, 1974, p.86.

<sup>265</sup> Quoted in Ojwando Abuor, *White Highlands No More*, Nairobi, Pan African Researchers, 1970, p.31.

for the agitator.”<sup>266</sup> It is not surprising that missionaries collated the crucial evidence that nailed Thuku in the wake of the so-called “Thuku riots.”

However, if the British thought incarcerating Thuku would resolve matters, they were dead wrong. His banishment only enhanced the political stature of the budding African nationalists. The demands to repeal the 1915 Crown Lands Ordinance, the abolition of the Native Registration Ordinance (*Kipande*), the call that missionaries should no longer represent African interests and that African wages be increased and taxes reduced, were taken up with renewed vigour in KCA, which had replaced Thuku’s organization in 1925.<sup>267</sup>

The importance of Thuku’s story is that it brilliantly set the stage for the epic showdown between KCA and missionaries over female circumcision. Indeed, his politics had ushered in an era in which positions hardened, as the fallout with the missionaries reached its nadir. This, in turn, set the stage for the radical politics of the post-World War 2 era. It is, therefore, intriguing that Thuku, one of the true pioneers of organized, modern political protest in Kenya<sup>268</sup> should have turned round to become “a pillar of the colonial and missionary establishment” in his post-exile years.<sup>269</sup>

What lay behind this radical shift of allegiances? While part of the answer appears to lie in the very missionary Christianity he had earlier opposed, in relation to its stand on Africans’ involvement in politics, there was certainly much more to it in “the new Thuku” who emerged from banishment in 1930. Indisputably, his eight years in detention had considerably mellowed him, as indeed his autobiography suggests.<sup>270</sup> In the various locales of his detention, Thuku’s minders had treated him well, allowing him broad freedoms and access to such tabloids as *East African Standard*, and *Observer*. He was even availed literature by Marcus Garvey, which he

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<sup>266</sup> Quoted in Rosberg and Nottingham, *Myth of Mau Mau*, p.49.

<sup>267</sup> Edgerton, op.cit., p.42.

<sup>268</sup> Samuel Kibicho, *God and Revelation in an African Context*, Nairobi, Acton publishers, 2006, p.140.

<sup>269</sup> Karari Njama and Donald Barnett, *Mau Mau from Within: Nationalism in Kenya*, N.Y Monthly Review Press, 1966, p.37.

<sup>270</sup> Harry Thuku (with Kenneth King) *Harry Thuku: An Autobiography*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1970.

reports to have found fascinating.<sup>271</sup> Furthermore, he was able to mingle freely with the local Somali population who inducted him into lucrative livestock trade, which earned him a tidy sum whilst still in detention. Besides, he had indulged in some farming activities, taking a keen interest in horse rearing and grooming. Thus, an entrepreneurial Thuku emerged from detention, as was manifested in the large-scale farming he immediately embarked on, becoming in time a big coffee farmer in his model farm aptly named, “Paradise.” Indeed, Thuku was at the frontline in defending, and demonstrating, the importance of soil conservation through terracing that the government was enforcing, at a time when this exercise had created a big political furore in central Kenya.

Another aspect that might explain the new Thuku is that as part of his ticket to freedom, he had made an undertaking that he would oppose the government in a constitutional manner only.<sup>272</sup> This he appears not to have found too difficult to fulfil as his re-emergence in politics show. In spite of his being elected president of KCA on his return, the disputes over money that was tearing KCA apart quickly set Thuku against his deputy, Jesse Kariuki. This spilled into a damaging court case, accompanied by street brawls between their supporters.<sup>273</sup> Thuku thereupon founded his own Kikuyu Provincial Association in 1935, claiming a virtue superior to that of the KCA because, as his friend Leakey put it, “he, a rich farmer, subscribed to good causes while KCA members, shiftless city-dwellers, lived off their party.”<sup>274</sup> Therefore, Thuku’s rise into the ranks of a propertied middle class might yet help explain the much toned down politician, and radically different from the Thuku of the “Thuku riots” of 1922.

Above all, Thuku’s transformation was most evident in the new eyes with which he regarded missionary Christianity on his return. For a start, Thuku took a keen interest in the activities of GMS, Kambui mission. For example, he expressed his great admiration of the work of Reverend W.P Knapp and his wife at the mission and was keen to be associated with them. Likewise, he cultivated a close friendship with McPherson and a Reverend Williamson of the Kambui

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> *Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau*, Cmnd. 1030, 1960, p.43.

<sup>273</sup> Lonsdale, “The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,” op. cit., p.401.

<sup>274</sup> KNA,PC/CP.8/5/6, Louis Leakey in Special Branch memorandum on the Kikuyu Provincial Association, 31 October 1939.

mission, contributing his time and finances to the welfare of the mission in his “great desire to further missionary activity in Kenya.”<sup>275</sup> For a man who had made a bold stand against missionaries in the early 1920s, and even accused them of “preaching the devil’s word,” this was a radical shift indeed. It is equally telling that when Thuku made a visit to Scotland in 1954, he had stayed with Reverend Williamson in his church in Aberdeenshire, and reports in his autobiography how amazed he was at the “joylessness” that seemed to pervade the Christian community there. In all, the Thuku we see during the Mau Mau was virtually indistinguishable from other Christian loyalist chiefs, especially Waruhiu Kung’u, who had become his great friend.<sup>276</sup> Their common stand against the Mau Mau testified to their like-mindedness.

Young Kikuyu literati, *athomi*, founded KCA in 1925, at Kahuhia in Murang’a. Kahuhia was one of the oldest CMS missions, having been established in 1903. Mindful of the existence of the Kikuyu Association in southern Kiambu, the “Fort Hall men” decided to call their new association, Central Kikuyu Association. They would change this only a few months later to Kikuyu Central Association, arguing that the new name was easier on the tongue and ear. The fact that the core body of the new organization comprised “Murang’a men” pointed to the deep regionalism afflicting the Kikuyu at a time when African nationalism was becoming more defined. While the “Kiambu men” believed that they represented the new frontier of modernity, the Murang’a men held their own, making a counter-claim that they were the true custodians of tribal orthodoxy. This contention would resurface vigorously during the Mau Mau. Even then, long before the Mau Mau was envisaged, missionaries and administrators seemed to favour moderate Kiambu leaders, expressing confidence that the progressive character of the leading chiefs and the established nature of its missions made Kiambu “a strong bulwark against subversive propaganda.”<sup>277</sup> Certainly, the close proximity of Kiambu to Nairobi made the district an important fulcrum of interest to both the colonial administration and to Kikuyu politics.

This centrality informed the tactical decision to shift KCA base to Nairobi in 1927. The aim was to capture a more centralized and strategic political arena that would include the larger Kikuyu

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<sup>275</sup> Harry Thuku: *An Autobiography*, op.cit., p.70.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> KNA DC/FH/3/2, Report of the Native Affairs Dept, 1929.

constituency, disgruntled Asians, and hopefully, a few sympathetic white voices. In a sense also, this shift from the heart of Kikuyuland to the more cosmopolitan Nairobi appears to have been an effort at rapprochement, a scaling down of the suspicion, competitiveness, and insularity that had led to strained relations between Kiambu and Fort Hall for years, and hurt Kikuyu politics. Furthermore, the decade marked a period when urban-based politics was becoming increasingly important for budding African nationalism. Nairobi was just emerging from its infamous “tin pot” mushroom township status, to becoming an important hub of settler power. Besides, the African locations, such as Pangani and Pumwani, which were teeming with a restless African population, offered a perfect political arena in which African political leaders could hone their apprenticeship. The founders of KCA, Joseph Kang’ethe, Jesse Kariuki, George Mugekenyi and Waiganjo Ndotono and later, James Beauttah, all typified this new breed of African politicians, who were converting themselves from rural to urban operatives.

Compared to the leadership of the KA, KCA leaders are described as having been right from the start, “incipient nationalists with a more militant approach to political change.”<sup>278</sup> In addition, their attitudes reflected a levelling egalitarianism, expressed in part through traditional values of the Kikuyu, even as they increasingly subscribed to modernity. This was clearly demonstrated in KCA’s unflinching position when it clashed with missionaries from 1929. It is not difficult, therefore, to see why KCA was viewed with suspicion and increasing hostility by both the colonial administration, and a patronizing missionary fraternity that claimed to represent African interests. Pioneer missionaries, like Canon E. Burns, Reverend Harry Leakey, Reverend John Arthur and J. H. Oldham in London, all voiced their concern over KCA’s rejection of non-African advocacy. However, the rejection of white advocacy was just one more piece of evidence that missionary authority no longer awed African nationalists. They had come of age. In any case, like Thuku before them, the KCA leaders were naturally just questioning a basic colonial assumption that could no longer be justified in the African eyes; that Africans were not capable of representing their own interests.

Jomo Kenyatta, whose name was first publicly linked with the political movement in early 1928,

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<sup>278</sup> Rosberg and Nottingham, *op.cit.*, p.86.

best exemplified this rejection of white advocacy. He had made it quite clear that paternalism, in whatever form, is what he most rejected in the Europeans' attitude towards Africans.<sup>279</sup> In his seminal work, *Facing Mount Kenya*, first published in 1938 in the aftermath of the querulous debate on female circumcision, Kenyatta had hit out strongly at the white man's "assumption of knowing the African's mind."<sup>280</sup> He had gone to great lengths to explain that there was a big difference between "living" among people and "knowing" them. He accused the white man in Kenya of merely living among the black people with little effort to understand them, noting that the white man's reliance on "authoritative books" to learn the mind of the African, and thereof purport to be an authority, had no merit whatsoever. He wrote of the white man:

With his preconceived ideas, mingled with prejudices, fails to achieve a more sympathetic and imaginative knowledge, a more human and inward appreciation of the living people, the pupils he teaches, the people he meets on the roads and watches in the gardens.<sup>281</sup>

Kenyatta further argued that consequently,

...the white man fails to understand the African with his instinctive tendencies [no doubt very much like his own], but trained from the earliest days to habitual ideas, inhibitions and forms of self-expression which have been handed down from one generation to another and which are foreign if not absurd, to the European in Africa."<sup>282</sup>

Indeed, Kenyatta lost no chance to suggest, cynically so, that missionaries were "the agents of imperialism, who teach Africans that they must tolerate all oppression and exploitation in order that they shall have a good home and better conditions in heaven when they die."<sup>283</sup> Although Kenyatta, at least in this particular argument, seemed to have been establishing a *prima facie*

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<sup>279</sup> Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p.144.

<sup>280</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Traditional Life of the Gikuyu*, East African Publishing House, Kenway Publishers, (this edition 1978), p.128.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*



case for the retention of female circumcision and other rites deemed important to the tribal lore, other evidence suggests that personally he did not advocate for the continuation of the practice. His prolonged stay in England, as much as his urbane nature, had opened him up to other values outside the traditional ones.

However, it is not just the missionaries, but also the administration that was equally unequivocal in rejecting KCA's advocacy. The old fear that education would only create a class of Africans who "desired to assume responsibility for which they were ill-equipped," was unfolding before their very eyes. Thus, without bothering to study the veracity of KCA's grievances, the colonial government quickly went on the offensive, accusing its leaders of "irresponsible agitation, intended to dupe the ignorant, rural Africans into believing the association represented their true interests."<sup>284</sup> Governor Grigg, was even harsher, dismissing KCA as "the pretensions of illiterate men posing as spokesmen for their people."<sup>285</sup> While on the one hand he would not even contemplate giving the KCA leaders an audience, evidence shows that he was quick to believe all sorts of accusations perpetrated against its leadership by the whites, including from the missionaries themselves. For example, commenting on Kenyatta and Joseph Kang'ethe's representation of the "Kikuyu Land Question" at the Hilton Young Commission of 1928, Grigg had out-and-out dismissed the views of the two as incompetent. Instead, he adopted in full the Native Commissioner's view on the matter. Writing in support of the recommendations, he stated:

I am informed by the Chief Native Commissioner that it was manifest that the two natives who appeared as representatives of the Kikuyu Central Association were incapable of understanding the provisions of the Bill or appreciating its application to any tribe or body of natives other than their own particular section of the Kikuyu. Their attitude appeared to him to be more unintelligent opposition to any arrangement which does not provide for their own unfettered control.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Bruce Berman "Bureaucracy and Incumbent Violence" in *Unhappy Valley*, op.cit., p.240.

<sup>285</sup> Quoted in Murray-Brown, op.cit p.109.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., p.109.

Grigg was even more unimpressed with KCAs efforts at launching a vernacular journal, *Muigwithania*, “Reconciler.” He complained of “baneful” influences from the Indians and religious “hysteria” as the driving force behind the journal.<sup>287</sup> In so doing, Grigg trashed what was clearly KCA’s proudest achievement that far. This he did even while others were describing the monthly collection of news, articles and homilies in the “flimsy but careful production, typical of similar Indian publications of the day,” as “an effort at opening a dialogue with the colonial authorities.”<sup>288</sup>

In spite of administrative efforts to stymie KCA’s political ambitions, *Muigwithania*, undoubtedly, proved a crucial vehicle in sensitizing Kikuyu masses in the increasingly politically charged inter-war atmosphere. It was also a major milestone in the maturing process, and growing independence, of the African nationalist spirit. It can be argued, therefore, that the administration, by dismissing leaders willing to use new methods of agitation and engage the administration, missed an excellent opportunity to harness nationalist energy through safer channels. Instead, by using a paternalistic and confrontational approach, the administration inadvertently goaded the colony towards political brinkmanship.

Yet, even as Grigg was busy dismissing KCAs efforts, the District Commissioner in Fort Hall was ironically painting a very different picture of the budding African nationalism. As the man on the ground, and presumably, therefore, the one with the more realistic picture, the DC noted that KCA included in its ranks, “a vast proportion of the more enlightened and progressive youth and wields an increasing influence on the council of elders.”<sup>289</sup> The conflicting appraisals of KCA characterised the often-wide variance in opinion between the top administrative hierarchy, and that on the ground. Berman, exploring this phenomenon, suggests that at the top were inherent administrative weaknesses and contradictions. He notes that,

The structure of the Administration, the attitudes and values of its personnel, and its position within the distinctive socio-economic and political structure of the colony

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Quoted in Rosberg and Nottingham, *Myth of Mau Mau*, op.cit., p.98-9.

resulted in the organizational processes characterized by rigidity, by inability to deal with internal or external change through minor incremental modifications of established practice.<sup>290</sup>

Indeed, this disconnect was a reflection of larger administrative hiccups in the colony. The refusal by the administration to see the usefulness of engaging the ruled in properly constituted forums was one of the more serious failures by a paternalistic administration. The obstacles put in KCA's path further manifested government's blinkers in failing to recognize the natural wish of a people to advance in all spheres, including politically. Instead, the administration, like the missionary body, clung stubbornly to the notion that they alone could identify and work in the best interests of the Africans. As Bishop Njenga succinctly put it, the white man in Kenya could not contemplate an independent thinking African, preferring instead, "a thinking African" sufficiently Anglicized to become a model subject.<sup>291</sup> African nationalists, particularly those that rose in the inter-war years, clearly demonstrated that they wanted to think for themselves and to decide what was good for the colonized. The emergence of cultural nationalism in the 1930s was a clear evidence of this. It was firmly tied to KCA, and the larger than life persona of Kenyatta, in spite of his absence from the colony.

Kenyatta became Secretary General of the Kikuyu Central Association and editor of *Muigwithania*, the party's newly inaugurated monthly journal in 1928. This important party position drew the then commonly known as Johnstone Kenyatta, into the vortex of KCA's operations, launching a long and illustrious political career in which he would straddle, like a colossus, the politics of KCA, KAU and later, Mau Mau. However, it is also in his wake as Secretary General of KCA that the bitterly contested female circumcision stand-off was enacted, stoking bitter and enduring divisions between the forces of Kikuyu cultural nationalism, on the one hand, and of protestant missions, on the other. Even more significantly, the KCA-missionary fallout marked the genesis of an even more acrimonious intra-societal struggle pitting Kikuyu nationalists against Kikuyu Christian fundamentalists. This is in spite of the fact that many of the Kikuyu nationalists were themselves professing Christians and beneficiaries of

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<sup>290</sup> Bruce Berman, "Incumbent Violence" op.cit., p. 231.

<sup>291</sup> Oral Interview, retired Bishop Peter Njenga, Nairobi, January 2010.

missionary education. Thus, Blundell's observation that "the real battle for the heart and soul of the Gikuyu was fought amongst them, and ended in defeat of the militant wing among them,"<sup>292</sup> is thought provoking. Nonetheless, it does not capture the ambiguous nature of that battle, for terms like "winners" or "losers" could hardly be applied with absolute legitimacy.

The female circumcision showdown was a battle of wills between the missionaries, sections of the Kikuyu, and the administration. However, it came in as a handy agenda for the KCA leaders, keen to test the political waters of the day. With the puritan and rigid CSM in the lead, and other protestant missions closely following suit in varying degrees of commitment, stern rules forbidding the age-old practice of female circumcision were introduced on pain of excommunication. The pressure on government to legislate against female circumcision had borne little fruit over the years, with missions repeatedly accusing the administration of failure to take strong deterrent measures. The major difference, however, between the churches and the administration seemed to lie more in the approach to the question than the principle behind it. This is because even with all its administrative blinkers, the government, to its credit, had realized early that female circumcision was a highly emotive issue and a potentially explosive one. The government's response to missionary pressure, while not wholly negative, was consequently tempered with caution. A meeting convened by the governor in 1926, for example, had decided that the custom was "of very ancient origin and it should not be interfered with."<sup>293</sup> It had advocated that attempts be made, instead, to persuade tribes to abandon "the more brutal forms and return to the more ancient and less brutal form."<sup>294</sup> It did promise, however, that in all districts "attempts made by individual natives to put down the practice would be supported in so far as the law allows."<sup>295</sup>

These measures were, for the missionaries, too little too late. In their view, the eradication of female circumcision was not only non-negotiable, but also long overdue. After all, the systematic teaching by the missions against the practice went back to 1906. That is the year, Dr. John W. Arthur had assumed control of the Kikuyu mission hospital, and having many opportunities in

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<sup>292</sup>Michael Blundell, *So Rough a Wind*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964, p.102.

<sup>293</sup> Murray-Brown, op.cit., p.136.

<sup>294</sup>Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> KNA DC/F14/3/2, "Church of Scotland Memorandum on Female Circumcision," December 1931.

maternal health care, had observed the “horrifying” and “evil” effects of “mutilation” that passed for female circumcision.<sup>296</sup> Also, Dr. Stanley F. Jones (1914-1924), who was then in charge of Kikuyu mission hospital, had pursued a vigorous campaign against the practice and was reportedly remarkably successful in influencing African Christians along this line.<sup>297</sup> The missions’ line of argument was as simple as it was uncompromising; female circumcision was unchristian, it was heathen, and it was needless mutilation. To Dr. Arthur, caught at the heart of the crisis, female circumcision was all these things and more. He argued that at stake was church discipline, an important Presbyterian ethos. For him, total abhorrence and complete shunning of the rite was, in this battle, a touchstone of Christian purity.

Suffice it to state here that the concerns over female circumcision were replicated in virtually all the protestant strongholds throughout central Kenya, as well as in Meru and Embu, areas where the practice was rife. At the GMS, Kambui, where special mention is in order, a huge furore arose when a young girl, a member of Kambui Mission, was forcibly circumcised, necessitating the mission to take the matter to court. Ultimately, the courts were unable to determine the case against the circumciser because there was no ordinance under which the courts could actually bring a penalty against the offender. The best the court could do, in this case, was to impose a fine under a Local Native Council Resolution, which it promptly did.<sup>298</sup> The failure of the courts to offer a more lasting solution was instructive. It was a clear message that customs are difficult, if not impossible to legislate against. In the case of female circumcision, it was not going to be through forceful decrees as in education, and reasoning-out of the matter, as Kenyatta unfailingly argued. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, too, captures the drama of this clash of cultures well, one where culture and modernity, clothed in Christian garb, confront each other over the ancient rite.<sup>299</sup>

The case for the retention of this rite became, for KCA, a political matter and the flagship of its political agenda. The wrangle gave KCA the opportunity to wage a campaign not just against missions, but also elitist Kikuyu elders of KA, and even the Local Native Council Members. Apart from arguing for its intrinsic value as a cultural rite, KCA also pointedly used the Bible to

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, London, Heinemann, 1965.

“prove” that nowhere was female circumcision prohibited or even referred to. The KCA leadership further argued that her members did not seek the rejection of Christianity, but wanted a Christian faith that did not reject the preservation of selected aspects of Kikuyu culture.

This cultural battle is belaboured here due to its import for this study. In KCA’s stand, we are able to see culture as one of the most important variables that shaped the interface of faith and nationalism in colonial Kenya. Missionaries were cultural invaders, demanding a total cultural transformation of the colonised societies. Their perceived allies in the fight were as vilified as they were. For example, even when, as in Koinange’s case, his stand against female circumcision was arguably a genuine effort at adopting a modern, progressive outlook for the society he was chief, in this issue he was vilified as a turncoat. Thus leaders like Koinange who were advocating for western education, even for girls, and the discarding of some of what they considered outmoded ancient customs, became fair targets for vilification. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the outbreak of *Muthirigu*.

In 1929 and to the great horror of the missionaries, the scurrilous dance *Muthirigu*, erupted at the Native Industrial and Technical Depot (hereafter NITD) at Kabete, and quickly swept through villages in Kikuyuland. The origins of the name *Muthirigu*, remain unclear, although it was thought to be the adaptation, or corruption of a Swahili dance *Mselego*, sang at the close of the *Ramadhan*,<sup>300</sup> the month-long religious fast. Certain of *muthirigu*’s characteristics, however, appear to have been borrowed from the “Kavirondo,” of western Kenya, especially the use of bells, *njingiri*, or pieces of metals, which were struck to the rhythm of the dance.<sup>301</sup> As sang by the Swahili, the dance was itself innocuous but in its new version, the Kikuyu kept supplying their own words vilifying the church, the missionaries, administration officials and, more pointedly, the Kikuyu Christian converts. The words of the stanzas were fluid, in most cases improvised according to locality and as new developments in the saga unfolded. Sandgren who has studied the *Muthirigu* extensively states that he was able to identify at least six versions of

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<sup>300</sup> KNA DC/F14/3/2 “Church of Scotland Memorandum on Female Circumcision,” Dec 1, 1931.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

the dance.<sup>302</sup> Hence, there was not one *Muthirigu*, but several versions of it. In nearly all cases, a number of stanzas were widely adopted often with vulgar and unprintable wording.<sup>303</sup>

Musa Gitau, the staunchest of Dr. Arthur's supporters in the crisis, had whole stanzas of *Muthirigu* devoted to him, vilified for supporting the missionaries.<sup>304</sup> Similarly, chiefs allied to KA especially Philip Karanja, Koinange and Josiah Njonjo were not spared. Throughout the crisis, they too had stood firmly loyal to both government and missions in spite of the onslaught from KCA. Thus, "in its most vituperative respect, the campaign had turned against loyal Christians rather than against Europeans."<sup>305</sup> This was an eerie foreboding of what would transpire when the Mau Mau eventually broke out.

Rosberg describes the *Muthirigu* as "an anthem of resistance, a powerful and emotive ballad."<sup>306</sup> Indeed, from a political perspective, it was not only a powerful incitement to disobedience to all constituted authority on the part of the young Kikuyu, but also a concerted effort to make legislation against female circumcision more difficult. Thus, although the administration banned the dance in early January 1930, the circumcision crisis had already taken a life of its own. The confrontation and defiance to wholesale missionary teaching was renewed in certain quarters, and only the severe penalties imposed eventually led to its demise.

In spite of his absence, Kenyatta, who had easily assumed the most recognizable face of KCA by the time the crisis reached its zenith, found himself in the eye of the storm. He had left for London in February 1929, armed with a petition to the Secretary of State that listed complaints KCA had been collating for the Ormsby-Gore Commission. KCA hoped that their man would get a hearing in spite of repeated warnings that theirs was "an unofficial body which cannot be regarded as representative of the whole Kikuyu tribe."<sup>307</sup> They were further warned that the

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<sup>302</sup> See for example, Sandgren, op.cit., p.175-182; and also Wanyoike, *An African Pastor*, op.cit., p.103.

<sup>303</sup> Lonsdale, "Moral Economy of Mau Mau," op.cit., pp. 388-396.

<sup>304</sup> Oral Interview, retired PCEA Moderator, John Gatu, Karen, Nairobi, May 2007.

<sup>305</sup> Murray-Brown, op.cit., p.138.

<sup>306</sup> Rosberg & Nottingham, op.cit., p123.

<sup>307</sup> Murray, op.cit., p.111.

secretary “would be unable to grant an interview to Mr. Johnstone Kenyatta should your association decide to send him to England.”<sup>308</sup>

Kenyatta and KCA were undaunted, and had ready answers for their detractors. However, torn between appearing a moderate and enlightened leader, but also a champion of the cultural rights of his people, Kenyatta sought the moderate path. In the short term, he argued that in fact, the church not KCA had provoked the row. He pointed out that KCA had no quarrel with the church, seeing that very many of its own members were Christians. He argued that nonetheless, it was wrong for the church to press for the abolition of the custom by a legislative action. In his brief return to Kenya in 1930, Kenyatta, who had been summoned before the elders of the Overseas Committee of the Church of Scotland, argued that, “for himself, he was opposed to the practice but the thing could only be done away with by education.”<sup>309</sup> He had in this spirit “humbly” warned the missionaries that, “any attempt to coerce my people by ‘force majeure’ will have the very opposite of the desired effect as it causes my people to attach accentuated importance to the maintenance of this custom.”<sup>310</sup> The missionaries, however, were not impressed with what they considered Kenyatta’s equivocal stand. They suspected that beneath the surface, Kenyatta sympathized more with the advocates of *irua*, circumcision, than he did with the missionary stand. In 1930, an exasperated Dr. Arthur described Kenyatta as ‘a man of guile’ who thought, “...he could take credit with the Mission and at the same time keep up his end with his people.”<sup>311</sup>

Years later after the publication of his anthropological work on the Kikuyu, missionaries used the text as all the evidence they required to ‘prove’ what they had always suspected was Kenyatta’s true stand on the issue. They pointed out that in this work, (they always doubted that he wrote “Facing Mount Kenya” himself), Kenyatta had betrayed his real feelings on the issue when he posited that:

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., p.140.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., p.146.



The real argument lies not in the defence of its surgical operation or its details, but in the understanding of a very important fact in the tribal psychology of the Kikuyu—namely, that this operation is still regarded as the very essence of an institution that has enormous educational, social, moral and religious implications, quite apart from the operation itself.<sup>312</sup>

Kenyatta further argued that,

The abolition of ‘*irua*’ will destroy the tribal symbol which identifies the age-groups, and prevent the Agikuyu from perpetuating that spirit of collectivism and national solidarity which they had been able to maintain from time in memorial.<sup>313</sup>

As for his own personal stand, Kenyatta stood by his early view that, “the thing could only be done away with education.” Quite evidently, Kenyatta was a man no longer worried about upsetting neither the missionary fraternity, nor one who any longer put too much premium on remaining a *bona fide* member of the CSM, or any other mainline mission for that matter. He had not only loosened his grip from missionary authority, but also without a doubt, come into his own as a politician.

Back in London, John Cook, and Kenyatta’s old employer at the Public Works Department in Nairobi, confirmed what the missionaries suspected of Kenyatta’s ways in the big city. He described Kenyatta’s lifestyle as that of a man who was not in “the habit of attending any place of worship,” but who often went to hear the “Atheist speakers” in Hyde Park.<sup>314</sup> As matters stood, Kenyatta had burnt his bridges; there was little chance of reconciling himself with his church on Dr Arthur’s terms. As his biographer argues, exposure in London, and his many travels in Europe and Russia had broadened his world and outlook by espousing too many new ideas, too many new influences, for the old missionary appeal to call him back. He had always been a rebel and Arthur’s paternalism quintessentially represented what he rejected most in the

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., p.133.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., p.130.

European attitude towards Africans.<sup>315</sup> Kenyatta's sojourn in Europe had made him world-savvy. He was prepared to confront the white man on his own terms.

What did the African leadership in the church, mainly elders, have to say on a question whose history had bedevilled missionary effort from the start? Seeking an amicable solution to what was undoubtedly for Christian elders, a very difficult question, the CSM had in March 1929 convened a conference at Tumutumu to seek an amicable solution. In spite of the attendance of nine of the most prominent European missionaries as observers, it is the forty Kikuyu elders representing the Alliance of Missions, who had formulated and passed several resolutions. The most important of these, and passed with only one dissenting voice, was that "female circumcision was an evil custom and should be abandoned by all Christians."<sup>316</sup> There was general agreement that all those submitting to the rite, or requiring their children to be submitted to it, be suspended by churches everywhere. Nonetheless, a minority of nine declared that they could not agree to this "at present, as their people would not consent," and they, therefore, advised the churches to go more slowly.<sup>317</sup> Clearly, missionary thinking, and that of Christian elders in the mainline churches, while not far apart did not lack its dissenters.

The axe had fallen. In the first month of these resolutions, an estimated ninety percent of the body of the Church was lost. In Chogoria, Meru, for example, membership fell from a hundred and twenty to fourteen almost overnight. Instead of being crushed by the news, Dr. Arthur triumphantly declared that the Chogoria Pentecostal and Revival had come! Throughout the AIM missions, even before it was decided in March 1930 to require a loyalty pledge from all adherents, the exodus from the missions had become a flood.<sup>318</sup> Nonetheless, although the churches were able to staunch the haemorrhage and attendance substantially recovered by 1931, deep and sustaining divisions had already scarred the church-body.

Overall, the female circumcision crisis became for KCA a political *cause celebre*. It became the most important of several tribal customs for which it lent its support in the rural areas. KCA

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., P.144

<sup>316</sup> Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit., p.117.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Quoted in Sandgren, op.cit., p.87.

argued that the threat to these customs was a threat to the overall culture of a tribe, which was in danger of being broken up. Kenyatta reiterated his stand that it was the church, not KCA, which had provoked the row, maintaining that KCA was not against the church. Though he did not personally support the practice, it was, as he had reported in Malinowski's class on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1935, "very important for the solidity of their social structure."<sup>319</sup>

The war between KCA and the missions led to important consequences, some immediate. First was the hardening of positions. For the missionaries, female circumcision was not just about the custom, but also the rites that went with it. They were convinced that the forces of "evil" were abroad, especially at times when these native rites were at their height. They argued that it was, therefore, necessary that Christianity and western culture be accepted as a corpus of belief to rout-out such practices. Indeed, in their book, female circumcision represented the worst of a set of barbaric customs. Therefore, we can surmise that, while the missionary body had launched a fight against a practice, in truth they were targeting much more than a rite; it was a whole array of societal values. Accordingly, KCA's effort to counter this must, likewise, be viewed as a counter-fight not just against a rite, but a spirited defence against cultural domination. Kenyatta on this score was right.

Furthermore, the alarming desertion of mission churches by Kikuyu Christians because of the fallout was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it led to cracks not just within missions, but also across missions. On the other hand, the crisis precipitated a shift in missionary thinking on the churches' future relations with its members. Protestant missions had given an ultimatum requiring every "paid up agent" of their churches to sign a declaration of support for the missions. They further threatened actual dismissal of teachers who refused to take the oath demanded by the church. In the short run, the ultimatum to discard the practice at the pain of expulsion cost CSM at Kikuyu Mission 90% of its communicants within the first month. Kijabe reported a loss of all but fifty of its six hundred adherents by 1930.<sup>320</sup> Tragically, at Kijabe also, a missionary woman, by the name Hulda Stumpf, became a victim. Stumpf of the A.I.M Kijabe died on January 1930, "after some men broke into her house at night and forcibly circumcised

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<sup>319</sup> Murray-Brown, *op.cit.*, p.189.

<sup>320</sup> Rosberg and Nottingham, *op.cit.*, p.124.

her.”<sup>321</sup> The two missions had not only obviously underestimated the import of the matter and the effects of their hard stance, but also clearly not anticipated the political mileage that some were determined to make out of the controversy.

By 1931, although loyal Christians were already trooping back to the churches, further cracks, in the missions, especially the Alliance that the protestant missions were working so hard to build, were unmistakable. For example, both the government and the CMS took issue with CSM’s harsh approach to the question, as the Governor insisted that attempts should be made instead to persuade tribes to abandon the more brutal forms instead of coercion. On his part, the Anglican bishop of Mombasa sent out a circular in November 1931, defining the future policy on the subject where “engagement,” rather than “confrontation,” was going to be the *modus operandi*. Curiously, the bishop passed the blame of the circumcision debacle onto the African church elders, stating that it was the insistence of the “African Church” on their abandoning of certain native customs as a condition of church membership that had led to secession among church and mission adherents.<sup>322</sup>

Indisputably, the crisis also created a paradigm shift in how the missions would relate with “African Christianity” in the future. It brought to the fore pertinent questions concerning the direction that African Christianity was going to take in the next two decades. One of these questions bore directly on the future of African education, given that the crisis had precipitated a major education crisis in areas where the practice was rife. Those who had seceded or had been expelled from church, those who had donated land to churches for schools, and those whose schools were closed down following the controversy, formed a corpus of evidence that made a strong case for removing education from the sole responsibility of missionaries. Although some scholars have argued that there is not enough evidence to support the argument that the Kikuyu Independent Schools’ Movement was a direct offshoot of the fallout with missions, there are certainly enough pointers that the controversy offered the occasion, if not the interest, in non-missionary sponsored education. Chapter 4 of this study deals at length with this. Undeniably

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<sup>321</sup> Wanyoike, op.cit., p.129.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., p.125.

though, the fallout certainly boosted the independent spirit that had begun to entrench itself across Kikuyuland, driven by, but not solely, this crisis.

Besides, and related to the above, the controversy holds an important place among the many factors that explain why central Kenya became a hotbed of militant politics. Subsumed under the cultural disaffection were a host of economic, social and political grievances that by 1930 had taken a definite form, and were being articulated in such political outfits as the KCA. While on the short term the crisis steeply eroded the painfully built-up trust between missions and its native adherents, on the long term, it was a providential hiatus that led to the growth of independency at many levels. In all, what had happened in the 1930s, between the missions and the KCA, had the hallmarks of incipient revolt against domination. The clamour for a less missionary and more government-sponsored education in Kikuyuland was only one manifestation of such rebellion.

That the Revival Movement came right on the heels of the female circumcision controversy raises an important possibility; were African Christians, through the revival, acting out the concerns, and mitigating the challenges, that the young Church was facing, including that of the role of culture in African Christianity? That is the story for the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### REVIVAL FELLOWSHIP AND THE RISE OF NATIONALISM IN KIKUYULAND

One of the most crucial developments in Kikuyu Christianity was the rise of the East African Revival Fellowship, also known as *Balokole*, Luganda for “saved ones.” Its arrival in the early 1930s coincided with the drawn-out quarrel between the Kikuyu Central Association and the missions over female circumcision, compounding the challenges facing the relatively young church in Kikuyuland. However, its full import for Christianity was only fully realized when the Mau Mau broke out, and the revivalists, in a test of fire, proved their mettle. This chapter examines the rise of the movement, its major tenets and interface with growth of nationalism in Kikuyuland.

While some contend that the Revival was a spontaneous movement within the protestant ranks in East Africa, others point to Uganda as its origin. It would appear, however, that its roots lay deep in the small CMS-sponsored mission at Gahini, Rwanda, then under the Diocese of the Church of Uganda.<sup>323</sup> The Rwanda Mission, under Dr. Algernon Stanley-Smith and Dr. Leonard Sharp, combined, like many early missions, a healing ministry with evangelization. For Gahini, however, the arrival of a third missionary, Joe Church, in December 1927, completely changed the scope and outlook of the mission. Church was not just a missionary and medical doctor, but also a fervent Keswick revivalist, profoundly influenced by the Moral Re-Armament Movement (hereafter MRA) that was causing ripples across Britain at the time.

The origins of the Keswick movement itself lay in the Moody-Sankey Revival of 1875 with emphasis in prayer, reverent Bible study, and “practical holiness.”<sup>324</sup> The MRA, on its part, was the brainchild of Dr Frank Buchman. The Oxford Group, as his work came to be known, was instituted as a response to the military re-arming that was going on in Europe in the build up to the Second World War. Its founders were firmly convinced that military re-arming alone would not solve the crisis in Europe. They argued, instead, that the problem was fundamentally a moral one, requiring a moral, not military, solution. Accordingly, the MRA was instituted as a moral and spiritual force to transform society, stressing conversion through confession, surrender

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<sup>323</sup> John Karanja, *Founding an African faith*, p.245.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*

and sharing.<sup>325</sup> Nonetheless, because the MRA rose at a time when communism was at its most threatening, and democracies under threat in Europe, it was increasingly viewed as a product of its time.

Dr. Paul Brodersen, the Dean of Copenhagen, was one of its early luminaries. He explained that the objective of the MRA were to “spearhead the great fight in our time between the spirit of Christ, and the spirit of selfish godless materialism.”<sup>326</sup> Along a similar vein, its founder, Buchman, in an article titled “Nations that will not think,” argued at length that the MRA was driven by the realization that,

The Communist and non-Communist have one fundamental weakness in common. They are not creating the new type of man. Consequently, both lack the one essential for creating a new world. But, there is a superior ideology which was giving men new motives and new character. It is the new thinking forged by living absolute moral standard, absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love.<sup>327</sup>

Buchman strongly defended the position that only a worldwide adoption of this “superior ideology” would deliver “the new statesmanship, a life commitment adequate to change the thinking, living and daring of the whole world.”<sup>328</sup> This urge to create the “new man” marked the ideological convergence between the tenets of the MRA and those of the revival. The revival would become a crucial, albeit controversial, movement in Kikuyu Christianity, and a rallying point for the church during the Mau Mau. The MRA, on the other hand, would find a niche in colonial politics, when sections of the administration allowed the use of its methods in the rehabilitation of detainees at the Athi River Detention Camp, with very controversial outcome.

Back in Gahini, Joe Church, though fully alive to the importance of the healing ministry to the fledgling church in Africa, nonetheless felt compelled to fulfil his burning mission in coming out to Africa. This was the urge to initiate a revival in the church from what he perceived to be its

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<sup>325</sup>Ibid.

<sup>326</sup>ACK Archive, MRA, 1952-1959, Press cutting, “Nations that will not Think,” by Frank N.D Buchman.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup>Ibid.

lukewarm state and slumber. He hoped to achieve this by invoking what he called “the terror of sin, and need for upright living.”<sup>329</sup>

The seed of the Revival in Eastern Africa was further nurtured through one, Simeon Nsibambi, a Ugandan landowner who claimed to have received a vision from God, instructing him to forsake all earthly things and seek out salvation. Nsibambi found that calling in the emerging revival spirit. Joe Church, in turn, found in Nsibambi a kindred soul, and the two harnessed their energies into first challenging the Ganda church from its “lukewarm state.”<sup>330</sup> It is Church, Nsibambi and two other African proselytes, William Nagenda and his wife Sarah, who organised the first revival convention at the Gahini station in 1931. Other prominent founders of the revival in East Africa, as remembered by their Kenyan brethren, were Bishop Festo Kivengere and Canon Matooi, both of Uganda.<sup>331</sup>

The first envoys of the movement arrived in Kenya in 1937 at the invitation of Joe’s brother, Howard Church, then based at the CMS mission at Kabete.<sup>332</sup> The maiden trip, comprising of Joe Church himself and seven African “brethren,” preached for several days to Christians around the Kikuyu mission. For their efforts, a small band of Christians, including one prominent Anglican clergy and later, first African Anglican bishop, Obadiah Kariuki, accepted the message of salvation after experiencing what he described as “a deep sense of salvation.”<sup>333</sup> Other Christians who accepted the revival message at the very outset were Canon Elijah Gacanja and Heshbon Mwangi of Murang’a, Tirus Kariuki, Silas Muchira and George Kimani, among others.<sup>334</sup> From Kabete, the revival quickly spread to the nearby outpost of Thogoto, near Nairobi, and on to the inner enclaves of Kikuyuland, with the converts becoming important conduits of its message. There is, therefore, no doubt that the revival movement in Kenya had clearly identifiable

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<sup>329</sup> E.N Wanyoike, *An African Pastor*, Nairobi, EAPH, 1974, p.15.

<sup>330</sup> Derek Peterson, “Wordy Women: Gender Trouble and Oral Politics of the East African Revival in Northern Kikuyuland,” *Journal of African History*, 42, 2001, p.470.

<sup>331</sup> Oral Interview, Reverend Edwin Maina King’aru, Muthure, Kiambu, 26/6/08.

<sup>332</sup> Karanja, op.cit., p.246.

<sup>333</sup> Obadiah Kariuki, *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya: An Autobiography, 1902-1978*, Nairobi, Uzima Press, 1985, pp.52-3.

<sup>334</sup> Oral Interview, Rev. Edwin Maina King’aru, op.cit.



founders, belying Beecher's contention that it is not possible to associate the beginnings of the revival movement in Kenya with any particular group.<sup>335</sup>

Towards the end of 1938, a second much larger team arrived from Rwanda, pitching camp this time round at the popular Pumwani CMS grounds in Nairobi. Pumwani, a hub of small African enterprise, was an ideal location for large gatherings, and the convention thus attracted a huge multi-ethnic crowd from far-flung corners of the colony. In what turned out to be a memorable crusade, described by some as electrifying and reminiscent of the Pentecostal phenomenon of the nascent Christian Church, many Christians turned to Christ, professing salvation.<sup>336</sup> In hosting this landmark convention, Pumwani became an important dispersal point for the revival, as did the length and breadth of the railway that cut across the colony. With the seed firmly sown in the Kenyan soil, the resultant band of *athomi a Ruanda*,<sup>337</sup> the adherents of Rwanda faith, as revival Christians became known in Kikuyuland, embarked on a venture that drew, in equal measure, admiration and concern. Nonetheless, missionaries remained particularly apprehensive that the movement would turn schismatic, to the detriment of the church in Kikuyuland.

From the outset, the revival elicited mixed reactions in many of the missions strung across Kikuyu country. In the Anglican strongholds, it stirred considerable excitement in the rather staid Anglican community. The doctrinally more rigid Presbyterians, however, received it more cautiously to begin with, and at times put up stiff resistance to it. According to Gatu, a fervent revivalist himself from the 1950s, in the short run, the Fellowship became a source of much wrangling in the Presbyterian Church, and it is not until 1950, two decades since its arrival, and only two years to the outbreak of the Mau Mau, did the revival make a breakthrough.<sup>338</sup> The Methodists, the AIM, and to a smaller extent, the theologically more fundamentalist AIC, similarly did not readily embrace the revival. The AIM, for example, felt that being a strict fundamentalist mission, they had no need of a revival.<sup>339</sup> The mission pointed out, rather self-righteously, that the Revival was good for Presbyterians and Anglicans "who smoked, took snuff

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<sup>335</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/7B, The Revival Movement, 1952-1956, Beecher to Dacon.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Kariuki, *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya*, op.cit., p.54.

<sup>338</sup> Oral Interview, retired PCEA Moderator, John Gatu, Karen, Nairobi, May, 2007.

<sup>339</sup> John Gatu, *Joyfully Christian, Truly African*, Nairobi, Acton Publishers, 2006, p.47.

and sometimes drunk alcohol, but not good AIM African converts.”<sup>340</sup> The mixed reactions to the revival thus in a way was a reflection of the endemic competition between the missions. There is no doubt, however, that it is in the Anglican community that the revival first found deep acceptance, most likely due to its Anglican roots in Rwanda.

What were the major tenets of the Revival, and to what extent did these tenets influence African Christianity in the two decades before the Mau Mau? In spite of the insistence by its members that the revival had no theology distinct from that found in the major historical churches, it is in fact its message, above its other features, which made the movement a new phenomenon in Kikuyu Christianity. At its heart lay the concept of personal salvation and public confession of sin. To gain membership to the Fellowship, one had to make what revivalists referred to as the “simple” gesture of “accepting Christ as a personal saviour and Lord, leading to daily salvation.”<sup>341</sup> This called for one to acknowledge, through public confession, that they had hitherto lived a life mired in sin, which now required a total change of heart and surrender of one’s life to Christ.<sup>342</sup> While crucifixion and the shed blood of Christ were the crucial symbols that made certain that forgiveness, these same symbols bound those thus cleansed to a strict code of conduct and high moral standards. Personal salvation was, undoubtedly, the pillar on which the revival stood.

However, though in itself not a new teaching, personal salvation had remained un-emphasised in a missionary Christianity more preoccupied with creating a Christian community that adhered to form and order, liturgical in nature. Indeed, before the arrival of the revival movement in Kenya, personal salvation, or the public confession of sin, was not a requisite to one being considered a good Christian. Missionaries were more concerned that the “heathens” should discard “their old sinful ways.” Therefore, the insistence by revivalists on the twin tenets as a prerequisite to one being a worthy Christian proved unsettling for many ordinary Christians, and even to missionaries. The latter were wary that the movement was tending towards exclusivity and even schism. This concern was implied in Archdeacon Bostock’s remarks, that the “message of the

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Oral Interview, Rev. Edwin Maina King’aru, Kiambu, 16/6/08.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

cross had far wider implication than personal salvation of individuals. <sup>343</sup> He had noted, in this regard that “...the mind has to be stretched to see the whole of life redeemed, and that means moving out from the relatively calm waters of personal devotion into an endless sea of service to community.”<sup>344</sup> David Gitari, lukewarm in his praise of the revival, describes it as an “inward looking spiritual movement concerned more about the kingdom to come rather than participating in the kingdom which Jesus came to inaugurate here on earth.” He observes that the brethren were more preoccupied with their own individual souls and showed little concern for the corrupt and sinful world around them, except to invite sinners to come out of the “sinking ship” and join the “life boat” of the brethren.<sup>345</sup>

Certainly, for the majority of ordinary Christians, this new emphasis on public confession and personal salvation through “cleansing in the blood of the lamb,” came as a new challenge. In addition, it pitted revival Christians against church elders, generating an acrimonious relationship especially in the early years of the movement. Indeed, it is a well known fact that even well into the 1940s, many church elders continued to view the revivalists with suspicion, even consternation, for what they termed as the brethren’s “tactless public confession of sin,” and their adoption of a “holier than thou attitude.”<sup>346</sup> Furthermore, revival Christians had assumed a high moral ground where “hidden sins” had to be openly confessed and costly restitution made.<sup>347</sup> This included sins of which the missionaries might often be unaware, but were apparently well known to the African community.<sup>348</sup> As the revivalists themselves happily reported,

After confession, stolen property has been restored, lies have been acknowledged, immorality and drunkenness have been brought into “the light” and confessed; reparation is made possible.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> ACK Archive, CC/1 Mt. Kenya Chaplaincy 1952-1955, General Correspondence.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Gitari, op.cit., p.143.

<sup>346</sup> Peterson, op.cit., p.472.

<sup>347</sup> E. Wanyoike, *An African Pastor*, Nairobi, EAPH, 1974, p.152.

<sup>348</sup> Quoted in Wanyoike, Ibid., p.52.

<sup>349</sup> Peterson, op.cit., p.472-6.

Public confession elicited a heated debate and caused a big furore in the Kikuyu Christian community. It is imperative, therefore, to examine briefly why this was the case. Some Christians argued that unrestrained, public confession was bound to generate both familial and church conflicts.<sup>350</sup> Spearheading this argument were many of the church elders who viewed revivalists as loud-mouthed Christians who broke church laws, refused elders' authority and publicized marital wrongs best kept private. Church elders further argued that the practice of public confession went against the Kikuyu practice of *kirira*, secret knowledge or counsel, where family matters were not subjected to public scrutiny,<sup>351</sup> *cia mucii ti como*.<sup>352</sup> The self-serving interest of the church elders in this argument was not hard to fathom. They viewed the revival as an affront to their own authority,

There were others, however, who argued that public confession was right at the centre of Kikuyu religious and cultural consciousness. This school of thought pointed out that the concept of "confession" and "cleansing" was deeply ingrained in the Kikuyu psyche, and that spiritual cleanliness could only be sought, and attained, after the "polluted" person had made a public confession, *gutahikio*. Indeed, in this act of cleansing through the blood of a sacrificial lamb, its proponents argued that the polluted person attained physical healing.

This line of argument appears to have had good backing from the ethnographic works of Routledge, Gathigira, Kabetu, Lambert, Leakey, among others. These works suggest that public confession was central to Kikuyu thinking and *gutahikio*, ritual cleansing, was both a familiar and welcome gesture.<sup>353</sup> Others, like Gatu, a self-proclaimed cultural champion, is of the view that public confession as viewed by the revivalists, and as intended in the cultural milieu, was not at odds. He argues that, "...there is a lamina phenomenon to confession which blends together the lowliness and sacredness of the act, and the homogeneity and comradeship that result from it."<sup>354</sup> Similarly, Burton Kibui Kigo, born c1900 at Mihuti in Mukurwe-ini, Nyeri recasts the very same

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<sup>350</sup> Karanja, op.cit., p.247; and also, Peterson, op.cit., p.485-6.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> See G. Barra, *1000 Kikuyu Proverbs*, London, MacMillan &Co, 1960.

<sup>353</sup> See, for example, the following works that describe this aspect. H.E Lambert, *The Kikuyu Social and Political Institutions*, London, OUP, 1966; also, M.N Kabetu, *Kirira Kia Agikuyu*, Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau, 1966; also W.S Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People: The Kikuyu of British East Africa*, London, 1910.

<sup>354</sup> Gatu, op.cit., p.45.

thought when he points out that many who joined the revival were attracted to it because it offered them the relief of unburdening themselves to a higher power, and being at peace with their neighbours.<sup>355</sup> Kibui captures well the dichotomy of personal salvation and public confession and restitution.

However, David Gitari, in reference to this aspect of the revival, suggests that it unsettled many because the “rigorist” approach adopted by revival Christians, generated antagonism.<sup>356</sup> He points out that the problem with public confession was that it allowed the “confessor” to make claims on issues that touched on other people’s lives. Because the “nature” of sins confessed at times had a co-perpetrator, the act of public confession acquired potential for causing much distress to individuals, families, and even the church-body. He argues that the most commonly confessed sins- adultery, theft, false witness and witchcraft- caused much apprehension because they often enjoined other parties. Gitari’s contention is that public confession, as practised by revival Christians, was not only harsh, but also failed to take into account social repercussions. He noted that, while there was little doubt that public confession was driven by a passion at true repentance, the whole concept, nevertheless, lacked a theologically argued out approach.<sup>357</sup> He suggested that this being a new development in the church, it had required a cautionary approach than was exercised by revivalists.<sup>358</sup>

Bishop Peter Njenga, on his part, argues that the revival “formula” for confession was, at times, “unreasoned,” a factor that caused a lot of ill- will and acrimony amongst Christians. He noted, for example, that the brethren were prone to being unreasonably judgemental, as an anecdote from his own experience as a revivalist illustrates. As a young and what he deemed, “progressive” Christian, he had decided to buy himself a “nylon” shirt, nylon being the fabric of choice at the time. He had attended one of the small group meetings, *gakundi*, the weekly gatherings common with revivalists proudly donning his shirt. No sooner had he arrived than the brethren stopped to look at him in puzzlement. His “crime,” as he light- heartedly recalls now,

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<sup>355</sup> Oral Interview, Burton Kigo, Mihuti, Nyeri, June 2009

<sup>356</sup> Oral Interview, David Gitari, Difathas, Embu, 28/1/ 2009.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

was that as a newly “saved” young man, investing in a nylon shirt, and one that “revealed his body” at that, was not only considered worldly by the brethren, but a sign of vanity and poor judgement on his part. The episode marked the end of his prized investment!<sup>359</sup>

For Amos Kiriro, the problem was simply that many of the revivalists were often too abrasive and intolerant of others. He recalled, for example, a popular refrain in fellowship meetings on suspicion that one had not quite confessed all their sins:

*Niuhithite mehia, ukoiga ni murata*  
*Muoyo waguurio, na gikuu kioneka*  
*Niukamenya ati mehia ti murata.*

A loose translation of this would be:

You have hidden sin, and called him “Friend”  
When eternal life is revealed and death exposed  
Then you shall know that sin is not a friend.<sup>360</sup>

Kiriro recalled that while a “good” confession would spontaneously elicit the Luganda chorus, *tukutendereza Yesu*, (We praise you Jesus) one that was “suspect” in the brethren’s eyes was met with “blank” or accusatory stares, for it was assumed the brethren was “hiding sin.” These examples illustrate why public confession became so controversial in African Christianity, separating “brethren” from the rest of the Christian community. Being a revivalist not only demanded a dramatic change of one’s lifestyle, but also “practical holiness” that had to be outwardly manifested in the Christians’ daily living as the evidence that one had become a “new creature.” Indeed, so controversial did public confession become that, at times, it was the cause of physical confrontation in some missions. It also acted as the trigger to other issues that had import for Kikuyu Christianity as the Tumutumu example will shortly illustrate.

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<sup>359</sup> Oral Interview, Peter Njenga, Nairobi, 26/1/2009.

<sup>360</sup> Oral Interview, Amos Kiriro, Nairobi, June 2008.

First, however, we shall examine the major features of the revival. The East African Revival Fellowship had some common features everywhere it was active. First were the small fellowship meetings and prayers held once a week and larger meetings held once or twice a fortnight, often on Sunday afternoons after the normal church service. In addition, larger meetings, or “conventions” as they came to be popularly known, were held at district level three or four times a year.<sup>361</sup> One important result of the exclusive nature of these fellowships marked by numerous little meetings and held in small groups in many places, was the rise of parallel leadership in the church. It is these small group meetings that led to revival Christians being referred to as *gakundi*, small group. This literal, but also in a sense, symbolic description, denoted the brethren’s preference for exclusive small groupings or fellowships.<sup>362</sup> Both missionaries and church elders took these parallel gatherings as a challenge to their authority. Suggestions were thus raised that the movement needed to be properly channelled into the church where there was more success in bringing the African people to respond to the Gospel message.<sup>363</sup>

Indeed, the exclusive nature of the revival became a bigger challenge than was originally envisaged, mainly due to the rise of this parallel leadership, but also segregation within the Christian community experienced everywhere the revival was strong. The developments at the Maseno mission, one of the oldest protestant missions in the colony, as well as one of the earliest centres of the revival, illustrates the point well. Here, the Luo brethren, seeking a Luo word for “fellowship” to describe their central experience of close, intimate fellowship meeting of a handful of brethren, settled for *lalruok*. This term, which literally means the “huddling together of thieves conspiring to commit a robbery,” led to the brethren in Luoland being referred to as “that gang.”<sup>364</sup> The revival in Nyanza became the cause of much rivalry, throwing up several factions. Reporting his concern to Bishop Beecher over the matter, Archdeacon Bostock in his annual report noted thus:

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<sup>361</sup> George Mambo, “The Revival Fellowship(Brethren) in Kenya,” in D. Barrett and Mambo et al(eds.), *Kenya Churches’ Handbook: The Development of Kenyan Christianity 1498-1973*, Kisumu, Evangel Publishing House, 1973, p.111.

<sup>362</sup> ACK Archive, C1/1, Revival Movement, 1952-1956.

<sup>363</sup> Wanyoike, op.cit., p.158.

<sup>364</sup> Mambo, “The Revival Fellowship in Kenya,” op.cit., p.111.

Whilst many joined Revival and were most active loosening the ties of the Church, another section saw the opportunity for obtaining a greater share of leadership by banding together to work for “Revival within the church.” They emphasized constitutional procedure and support for the church, and stressed the power of “the love for Christ, rather than His blood.”<sup>365</sup>

Bostock describes one faction, which was clearly aggressively critical of other Revival groups, as “probably less deeply spiritual and their motives mixed with those of jealousy and a desire for power.”<sup>366</sup> Nonetheless, this group appeared to be the one that enjoyed the sympathy of many church officials, given that the “real revivalists” faced accusations of being un-cooperative and lacking in loyalty to the church at that time in a variety of ways.

L.W Dacon, an Anglican missionary in Nyanza writing to Beecher in 1952, expressed concern that revivalism had created rifts in the church that might soon turn schismatic. He reported the following:

This movement came to Nyanza with the express object of winning members into its ranks. Although no one is satisfied with the status quo, it would be a positive untruth to declare that the church in Nyanza was in need of wholesale revival. Its very presence here seemed to indicate that it is an organization which is to replace the Anglican Church.<sup>367</sup>

Dacon further pointed out that the exclusive nature of the movement appeared to suggest, it was “a new sect which has come to stay.”<sup>368</sup> His evidence was that the members of the movement, in calling each other “brethren,” and by appealing all the time for people to declare themselves as such were discriminatory and judgemental. He noted, for example, that anyone who was not able to call himself, “brother” was regarded as the equivalent of a pagan and the brethren did not want to associate with him.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> ACK Archive C1/1, Archdeacon Dacon’s Report to CMS, p.2.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> ACK Archive, Revival Movement 1952-1956, Dacon to Beecher.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.



The situation at Maseno was aggravated by accusations of misuse of church finances, with the non-members of the revival complaining that the collection of large sums of money by the brethren, and the uncharitable neglect of church finances, ought to be corrected urgently.<sup>370</sup> Maseno is a good example where missionary fear over the revival encompassed more than a contest over church authority or anti-clericalism; it had increasingly become “a congregation within a congregation creating its own set of rules,”<sup>371</sup> and what’s more, deprived the church of vital resources.

The rivalry at Maseno had far-reaching results, directly contributing to the rise of the Church of Christ in Africa.<sup>372</sup> Reverend G. Hawes of Maseno mission blamed this splintering on the failure of the local church leadership in Nyanza, which he claimed had encouraged this separatism. In this regard, he noted that,

Leadership and authority, to a certain extent was passing out of the hands of the clergy into the hands of prominent laymen. There was a strong tendency amongst the revivalists to disregard the ministry and church authority generally. To a large extent, in some areas, such things as weddings and baptisms are still arranged by the “brethren,” often without consulting the padre if he happens not to be “in the revival”<sup>373</sup>

The wrangles at Maseno mirrored those in Kikuyuland, particularly concerning the relationship between church elders and revival adherents. Close to ten years after the first envoys had arrived from Rwanda, the simmering rivalry in Kikuyuland, as in Nyanza, manifested itself in the exclusiveness of *tukundi*, small groups, and rise of parallel leadership mentioned above. The revival movement, therefore, grew largely without support from the church elders in Kikuyu churches. At the Kabete mission, for instance, the elders, in an attempt to diffuse the acrimony generated by the revival had, as early as 1937, summoned the Rwanda preachers back to explain

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> ACK Archives, CMS General Correspondence, 1951-1952, Hawes to Beecher.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

“the motives for bringing such disruptive forces in the Kenyan church.”<sup>374</sup> In other missions, revivalists, in a fierce rivalry with the elders, faced such severe opposition that they were neither allowed to participate in normal church activities, nor the use of church buildings, forcing them to congregate under trees.<sup>375</sup> In some extreme cases, those who claimed to be “saved” were severely admonished or even ex-communicated altogether. It is, therefore, not just public confession of sin, but also the exclusive nature of the brethren that caused much uneasiness with the fellowship.

Consequently, in many ways, the revival was precisely how it viewed itself, a movement, often running parallel to structured church leadership. This meant that it grew without structured leadership, committees of management or written constitution.<sup>376</sup> Instead, the revival threw up natural leaders, more or less counsellors, advisors, and people of charismatic gifts, who expounded scriptures.<sup>377</sup> In consequence, years after its inception, many ordained church elders continued to shun the movement, perceiving it as an affront to their own authority.

The developments at Tumutumu in the 1940s are illustratively used here to demonstrate how the wrangling, centring on the role and authority of the church elders, influenced African Christianity at this mission. Because the majority of revival adherents at Tumutumu, as in most missions, were women, the revival debate quickly assumed gender dimensions. The elders, appalled by the Revivalists’ habit of meeting for hours after Sunday services and in weekly fellowship meetings to “loudly confess their sins, and testify to Christ’s salvation,”<sup>378</sup> banned the revivalists from meeting in church buildings altogether. Attempts were made to stop these Christians even from meeting in homes, a move that showed just how acrimonious the situation had become. This is why the revivalists, with the church precincts out of bounds, and banned from even contributing to discussions in church assemblies, moved outside, “there to continue their loud discourses under trees.”<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Wanyoike, op.cit, 153.

<sup>375</sup> Peterson, op.cit., p.480.

<sup>376</sup> John Gatu, op.cit., p.41.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Peterson, “Wordy Women,” p.480.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

Derek's study vividly captures the wrangles that accompanied the revival at Tumutumu, pitting revival Christians against the church elders. Here, male church elders exasperated by the activities of converts, mostly women, labelled the group "insane," accusing them of sexual and political delinquency, among other things.<sup>380</sup> By 1948, the situation had deteriorated to such alarming levels that the Kirk Session was compelled to appoint an investigating committee to look into the "chaos" arising from the revivalists' activities. In its findings, the committee criticized the revivalists on twenty-one counts, thirteen of which had to do with infractions against church rules. It reported that revivalists were known to meet in secret without the knowledge of the chiefs; they had failed to show respect to church leaders; had improvised new rules; refused to obey the laws of the land, and refused to accept benediction from the pastor at the end of the service, among others.<sup>381</sup>

These accusations only fuelled the brethren into defying the elders even more. It did not help that they accused the elders, in turn, of being unworthy of their positions of leadership for they had not publicly denounced their sins. Incensed by what they saw as insubordination to church authority, the elders widened the debate, claiming that revivalism was not about salvation at all, but was an obvious attempt to expose familial strife, decry gender disparity and a front to air other grievances of economic and political nature.<sup>382</sup>

The wrangling at Tumutumu is important to the understanding of the nuances of the movement. At one level, it spawned out a larger discourse, touching on the wider processes of social and economic change in Kikuyuland. Besides, just like the contemporaneously growing African nationalism, the revival offered a new arena, indeed a platform where people could argue out an array of religious, political and economic changes in society. It is in this sense that the debate at Tumutumu, moved beyond the "rhetoric of good and evil," to become "a dichotomous language of social criticism that made the revivalist theology an epistemology, a way of interpreting social conflict."<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., p.486.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., p.474.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., p.472.

Part of this dichotomous language of social criticism was interwoven in the accusations levelled against the elders at Tumutumu. They harboured an oblique resentment of a dominating male culture in society in general, and in church leadership in particular. The fact that the revival encouraged women to take up leadership roles, which they did not enjoy in the church, strongly suggests that gender parity was an important part of this discourse. Furthermore, it suggests why the revival appeared to attract more women than it did men everywhere. Revivalists put to good use the egalitarianism of the Gospel message where, “all were one in Christ,” and where “there was neither male nor female.” Clearly, underlying Tumutumu’s sometimes-violent debate over the Revival, were contending theories of gender.<sup>384</sup> Nonetheless, beyond the quest of gender parity, the revival became a place where Christians of many origins could experience the depths of fellowship of belonging to one Lord and Saviour. In a colonial setting, this message was even more poignant; the revival became a meeting point for Christians, both White and Black, a chance for them to experience something that united them.<sup>385</sup>

The revival was largely oral in its disposition. Indeed, one would venture that part of the “wordiness” of the women at Tumutumu, Kabete, Kahuhia, Embu, Kigari, Weithaga, and everywhere the revival had a stronghold, mirrored the power of the spoken word in African politics of the day. This is in spite of the fact that the magic of the written word was what had first attracted curious Africans to the missions, and literacy, the key that had opened the door to African nationalism. On the political scene, nationalists who had to contend with a society with limited literacy had used their oratory skills to drill their message into the minds of their listeners. The early nationalists had set the precedent. In Nyanza, for instance, *Piny Owacho*, “the country says,” had fired off the clamour for nationalism in the early 1920s, compelling the District Commissioner, Montgomery, to ask the Nyanza leaders in exasperation what it is “the country” wanted to tell the government.<sup>386</sup> Similarly, early nationalists in Kikuyuland, like Harry Thuku and Jomo Kenyatta, had put to good use their oratory skills to stoke the first stirrings of the nationalist spirit. Even *Muigwithania*, one of KCA’s journals, was built around

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid., p.484.

<sup>385</sup> Gatu, op.cit, p.18.

<sup>386</sup> Oginga Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru*, Nairobi, Heinemann, 1967, p.26.

the potency of the oral, debate and consensus, which would ideally lead to reconciliation, *kuigwithania*.

In the revival, the “wordiness” was manifested both through public confession, as seen elsewhere, and through the vigorous literal spreading of the word in the numerous fellowships, *ngwataniro*, as well as the numerous outdoor crusades and conventions held outside of the normal Sunday church services. From the start, revivalists had insisted on a simple presentation and approach to the Gospel, which they did by “distilling” to the core, the message of Christ’s salvation. Explaining why “orality” was a crucial feature of the revival movement, Wanyoike argues that the majority of barely literate Christians, already hampered by the formal and rigid structures of the missionary church, found the simplicity and “orality” of the revival exciting. He posits that part of the attraction to revivalism, in fact, lay in this simplicity, given that the church, built on form and order, “had remained a perpetual puzzle to the simple African mind.” Revival offered freedom from all these structures for finally “...none of these things had anything to do with acceptance by God! ...Nothing but the Blood of Jesus.”<sup>387</sup> To this extent, the revival fellowship remained informal, unstructured and group- led, with its adherents truly holding that nothing but the Blood of Jesus mattered.<sup>388</sup>

The “wordiness” of the revivalists served another practical purpose as Macpherson reports. He notes that in Kiambu, the “terror” of singing revivalists alarmed the church elders and their political opponents, the members of KCA. He posits that, indeed, the earliest of the Mau Mau oaths were administered against revival Christians from KCA’s underground headquarters at Chief Koinange’s homestead in Kiambu. Here, KCA elders began administering oaths against the Revival in 1948, while politicians pilloried revivalists for their wilful irresponsibility.<sup>389</sup> As argued elsewhere in this study, the oaths that first came to the government’s attention from the late 1940s ushered in a new chapter in Kikuyu nationalism. In an ironical twist, blood became the potent symbol around which both the revivalists and the nationalists put a claim to their legitimacy. While to the nationalists the shedding of their own blood was an ultimate price they

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<sup>387</sup> Wanyoike, op.cit., 165.

<sup>388</sup> Mambo, op. cit., 113.

<sup>389</sup> Quoted in Peterson, op.cit., p.486.

were willing to pay in return for freedom, to revival Christians, Christ, in shedding his own blood, had made the ultimate sacrifice, *igongona*, as a sufficient one-off atonement for sin. To them, therefore, the “repugnant oaths of goat’s blood and meat,” with their central symbolism of blood mixed with the “sacred” soil of the land served no purpose at all. The later Mau Mau oaths, therefore, were repudiated by revival Christians who declared, “...having taken the blood of Jesus, I cannot take any other blood.”<sup>390</sup>

That the revival grew at a critical period in Kenya’s own political growth is equally significant. The unfolding drama in the African political scene pitting KCA against missions, and coinciding with the arrival of the revival, roused Africans to the great possibility that they could shape not just their political, but also spiritual destiny. It is, therefore, important to note in this regard that missionaries’ fear of what the revival portended for Kikuyu Christianity cannot be entirely divorced from the political developments in the colony. Would the revival turn schismatic? Was it a blessing or would it slow down, or even reverse missionary gains in Kikuyuland altogether? These were not far-fetched considerations. It is imperative, therefore, that we briefly examine the import of the contemporaneous rise and growth of the revival and that of nationalism, particularly the cultural nationalism that dominated Kikuyu politics in the 1930s.

Just as African nationalism began to witness the emergence of leaders with a wide cross-section of appeal from the 1930s, so did African initiative in the mainline churches become more pronounced with the arrival of the revival. While the former was a quest for political space, and reassertion of cultural identity, the revival was, on the other hand, a quest to appropriate Christianity, live it fully, and turn it into a truly African faith.<sup>391</sup> Yet, even as the parallels between the factors that led to the rise of the two African-initiated movements are not difficult to see, the trajectory that each assumed was radically different, and eventually met at a point of conflict: that of the nationalist movement went down the path of radical politics, confrontation, and eventually, violence. The revival, on the other hand, in its advocacy of racial harmony and “oneness in Christ,” found itself at the receiving end of that violence when the Mau Mau broke out, its pacifist outlook notwithstanding.

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<sup>390</sup> Gatu, op.cit., p.42.

<sup>391</sup> Gatu, op.cit., p.18.

Nonetheless, the pattern of the growth of the two movements bore interesting similarities; the Revival had risen in a young church that had only celebrated its centenary in 1944. Yet, the period between the two wars had experienced a mass movement, which had brought thousands into the church. African nationalism, on its part, had incrementally grown from its ethnic enclaves in the 1920s and after the Second World War, assumed Kenya-wide stature. Even more significantly, for the Kikuyu, part of that growth boosted the proliferation of independent churches and schools, even more so after the fall-out over the female circumcision controversy from the early 1930s.

However, the European fraternity, including a large section of the missionary body, failed to appreciate the scale, or the significance, of the social and political concerns that had catalysed these two developments in the Kikuyu society at that particular time in the colony's history. With reference to the growth of territorial politics after the Second World War, missionaries, instead of seeing this development as one whose time had come, placed the blame squarely on nationalist leaders. One of the accusations made, for example, was that African nationalists viewed the church as an agent of imperialism and thus "inimical to the achievement of nationalist aspirations."<sup>392</sup> Beecher led from the front in this. He blamed a host of problems that were bedevilling the Kikuyu church to what he called "external features in the environment in which the church existed."<sup>393</sup> He singled out the ever-expanding nationalist space as "definitely antichristian."<sup>394</sup> At the same time, he linked the growth of "heretical, schismatic churches," and what he termed "neo - tribal religious movements" to the deteriorating political climate in the post-war era.<sup>395</sup> Beecher castigated these "sects and movements," which had broken away from the missionary bodies as adding no value to society. He argued that they had become mere parodies of low standards of conduct, while others had become fanatical in syncretism, mixing tribal religion with elements of Judaism and Islam, and "a blasphemous perversion of

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<sup>392</sup> ACK Archive, Revival Movement, 1952-1956, Beecher's address to a gathering of CMS missionaries in London, 1950.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

Christianity.”<sup>396</sup> He identified these as major problems riddling the church-body in Kenya, and which required “the bringers of the Christian faith themselves, and the Africans likewise, to take up the challenge of revitalized Christianity.”<sup>397</sup> To Beecher, the revival coming at the time it did was, therefore, a force for the general good, “a critical buffer and the answer provided by God to our need in the contemporary situation.”<sup>398</sup>

The contemporary situation that Beecher was referring to was not just the nominal Christianity that had attacked the church from within, but the heightened tensions in the colony as African nationalists raised the stakes, gunning not just for political and economic inclusion, but also total liberation from colonial rule. From that perspective, it becomes difficult to delink the shifting perceptions in missionary thinking concerning the revival to the rising political temperatures in the colony. After all, the effort to make Christianity truly indigenous was one crucial factor that accounts for the revival’s development, and one that raised important questions on the prospects of a still largely missionary church to African Christianity. There is no doubt, therefore, that missionaries were optimistic that the revival would act as the buffer to the discomfiting politics of heightened nationalism. The Provost’s live broadcast from the All Saints Cathedral in January 1953 summed up this hope:

If Christianity is to survive strongly alongside the rising tide of nationalism amongst Africans, it must become as African as it is European. It must rise above all nationality.<sup>399</sup>

One of the significant achievements of the revival, therefore, was that it forced a paradigmatic shift on the thinking of the missionaries. Indeed, the slow, but steady confidence it gained from missionaries, especially in relation to the colony’s racial dynamics in face of growing African nationalism, was nothing short of remarkable.

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/7B, Sermon by the Provost, All Saints Cathedral, January 4, 1953.



At the outset, however, most missionaries' position concerning the revival was ambivalent. Their greatest concern was that the revival, coming at a time of heightened political consciousness in the colony, held the potential to undermine legitimate church authority, and embolden the nationalist spirit as stated above. In addition, the revival raised misgivings in missionary circles that, it not only questioned the old assumptions of European superiority in the church, but also challenged their spiritual lives as well. Thus, while a few missionaries initially welcomed this fellowship, others looked upon it as presumptuous, and an affront to their authority. Therefore, like many African church elders, the majority of the missionaries initially remained wary of it.

There were exceptions, however, like Canon T.F.C Bewes, who, from the very onset, closely associated with the revival, believing that it held great potential for the church.<sup>400</sup> He not only passionately defended the movement against accusations that its message was doctrinally deviant, but also went to great lengths to show that there was nothing schismatic or even new in its doctrine. He described the revival as “just the message of salvation by which, years ago many of us came out of darkness into God’s wonderful light,” and as “a return to the Gospel of the Cross of Jesus,” the “rediscovery of the meaning of Calvary.”<sup>401</sup> He described it glowingly as “simply the most thrilling fellowship that I have ever met in my life, a fellowship that surpasses all barriers of colour and race, and where Europeans are finding a new joy and oneness with Africans, and have had to repent of their former attitude of superiority and pride.”<sup>402</sup> Bewes was so enthusiastic of the revival that he not only embraced the “brethren” wholeheartedly, but also urged fellow missionaries to rise above race or position in society. By describing the revival message as “the return to the simple Gospel of Christ,” Bewes inadvertently exposed the soft belly of a missionary Christianity that had drifted, perhaps even failed to adhere to the core of the Christian message, the message of salvation. Bewes, a beloved friend of Christians at the Weithaga mission where he had served for many years, acknowledged that there were “certain weaknesses” in the fibre of missionary Christianity that now required the “rediscovery of the meaning of Calvary.” His was truly an expression of great humility.

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<sup>400</sup> Bewes, *Kikuyu Conflict*, op.cit., p.48.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., p.50.

To this end, one of the most significant contributions of the revival to African Christianity is that it narrowed the racial bigotry rife even in church circles in the two decades before the Mau Mau. Bewes' long-held conviction that the revival was a force for the good became even stronger when the Mau Mau broke out. Asked briefly to return from London to help the Kikuyu Church find its feet amid the devastation of the Mau Mau, Bewes, then CMS Secretary, was even more convinced that Revival Christians were the key to the task of rebuilding the church in Kikuyu country.

There were a few other missionaries of like mind. Martin and Mary Kapon, a missionary couple at the Weithaga mission, were similarly persuaded that the revival's greatest "threat" lay not its supposed divisiveness as many missionaries feared, but in the joy of its call to "oneness in Christ." This, again, was a rebuttal to racial superiority. The Capons wrote of the revivalists around them being people who had been "delivered from the sin of hatred" and as men and women who "loved white Christians." They pointed out that the revivalists themselves insisted that theirs was an apostolic fellowship reaching out to all regardless of race, creed or gender.<sup>403</sup>

Njenga, however, argues that there was a simple reason why, initially, not too many missionaries embraced the revival. He pointed out that they, themselves, (missionaries), had no *uira*, personal testimony of salvation. As such, it would have been odd for them to embrace a movement whose core lay in the insistence on "personal salvation." He posits that Christians, especially revival converts, were dismayed that some of the missionaries continued to live lifestyles, which were "worldly" and which, in the revivalists' eyes fell short of Christian example.<sup>404</sup>

Samuel Munuhe, a committed Christian himself but who, nonetheless, left the church in 1942 to join the nationalist movement, echoes Njenga's contention. In his view, the white community in the colony could not readily embrace the revival. How could they, when it challenged their very lifestyles as Christians, he wondered. His view is that "...because revivalism was only concerned with the truth, it was difficult for whites to be genuinely part of it given the state of affairs in the

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<sup>403</sup> ACK Archive, CMS 1929-1952, General Correspondence File, News From Martin and Mary Capon, October, 1950.

<sup>404</sup> Oral Interview, Peter Njenga, Nairobi, 29 January 2009.

colony.” Munuhe suggested that African nationalism picked momentum after the outbreak of the Second World War because of overt colour bar everywhere, including in the church where it was rife. He opined that Africans had turned to radical politics, even violence, disillusioned by both the colonial government’s insensitivity to the plight of the Africans, especially after the big war, and a church that, sadly, had failed effectively to shield Africans from colonial excesses. He argued that a real revival in European Christian living would not have allowed them to continue dominating Africans. Munuhe would later join the Mau Mau and become an oath administrator. He, however, rejoined the church in 1967, becoming a church elder in PCEA Mihuti, in Nyeri in 1971.<sup>405</sup>

Ultimately, the importance of the revival concerning the race question in the colony is that it challenged the white community to confront their own failings. After all, they were the bringers of the Gospel message and keepers of a civilization they claimed was superior, as Negley Farson, a London based CMS missionary in a visit to Kenya in 1949 had strongly reminded them. Farson, in a highly publicised article had castigated the lifestyles of the white community while at the same time distinguishing between the good works of the missionaries from the lifestyles of the rest of the white community. He accused whites in Kenya of being poor examples to the natives. He wrote at length:

Am not criticizing the missions; am criticizing our own failure to live up to the Christian standard of life regardless of creed or mission. I think that, even while he is at the mission school, the average African begins to suspect that we do not live by the precepts that we so much preach about. Later he is sure of it. How could he help it? Eventually is the alarming conviction that we do not believe in the God that we are still trying to teach him to believe in. And from that, that we are trying to teach him to believe in many things that we do not believe in ourselves, and that we are doing it for our own good not his.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> Oral Interview, Samuel Mutundu Munuhe, Mihuti, Nyeri, 23/1/2009.

<sup>406</sup> Negley Farson, “Last Chance in Africa,” London, Gollancz, 1949.

Farson's was an indictment of the whites in the colony raising two pertinent issues. First, it brought to the fore the inherent contradictions between Christianity and colonial domination. Secondly, it questioned the legitimacy of packaging the Christian message as synonymous to the values of the white man, and even then, where clearly the white man himself showed little inclination to live up to those values. To Farson, this was a charade that demanded introspection and immediate redress. He challenged the whites in the colony to live the faith they preached, a good beginning being to discard their attitudes of racial superiority.

Beecher, in response to Farson's scathing observations was equivocal. First, he was quick to admit that there was clearly "the need for a revitalized Christianity amongst the European population."<sup>407</sup> He was, however, equally defensive. He pointed out that Farson's views had ignored "the very considerable advances which the church had made among the European population "in the recent past."<sup>408</sup> Nevertheless, in a private audience with a group of CMS missionaries in London in 1950, Beecher came down much harder on the European example in the colony. He admitted to these missionaries gathered to hear of "the latest news of the revival movement in the life of the church in Kenya,"<sup>409</sup> that the whites in Kenya had indeed not lived up to the expectations of Christian living, precisely Farson's point. He observed, however, that not all was lost, thanks to the revival. He paid glowing tribute to the movement whose work he described as not just an awakening call in the African church, but also to the Europeans in the colony, whose lifestyle "did not quite reflect the Christian virtues they preached."<sup>410</sup> Beecher while identifying the multiple triggers of revivalism in Kenya noted that the greatest problem lay in widespread nominalism, which "had attacked the church from within." He noted that too many church adherents (whom he called attendees) who professed Christianity were, several generations later, only nominal in their approach to their Christian faith. Consequently, the church was saddled with Christians whose commitment was "at best only lukewarm."<sup>411</sup> The admission acquitted Bewes' own, that missionaries could have done better.

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<sup>407</sup> ACK Archive, Revival Movement in Kenya, 1952-1956.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

Beecher attributed this widespread nominal living to a church that had long been associated with other “civilizing” ventures, primarily education and health. He explained that this had attracted all manner of people whose loyalty to Christianity was but a vehicle to achieving these benefits. He pointed out that, like many of the older churches the world-over; the young church in Kenya was already tending to overlook the necessity for the conversion of the church in each succeeding generation. The result was that as Christianity passed into the second and third generation, nominalism had increased within the ranks of those who, at least outwardly, professed and called themselves Christians.<sup>412</sup> He noted that this trend had persisted since the Gospel arrived in Kikuyuland, and had remained a worrying trend for the missionaries. Beecher’s lengthy but insightful analysis of the church in Kenya portrayed a bishop with a remarkable grasp of the church he was Head of, and the challenges to Christian growth in the colony. Although these views were clearly not meant for the ears of the colonised, not even that of the African Christian community, he was, nonetheless, categorical that the revival was “providential for Kikuyu Christianity.”<sup>413</sup>

Karanja’s own study of Kikuyu Christianity largely bears out Beecher’s concerns in connection to the root causes of nominalism in the Kikuyu Church. Like Beecher, Karanja shows that the outcome was outward conformity to religious beliefs and practices, but without full commitment to the central teaching of Christianity. Because of this, church going, over time, had become a mere formality with sacraments losing their special significance, hence the growth of nominalism in Christian living.<sup>414</sup>

Many more missionaries, however, remained unconvinced for long that the revival was for the good. These missionaries raised many concerns against the movement in the decade preceding the Mau Mau as the following examples, illustrate. Ralph Leech, writing to Beecher, complained that revivalism “entailed worldly meetings.”<sup>415</sup> He suggested that the revival was a mere front through which disgruntled members were seeking attention. Others, like Mary Smith, a lay missionary in Mombasa, expressed concern over the divisiveness that the movement had

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Karanja, *op.cit.*, p.245.

<sup>415</sup> ACK Archive, CMS General Correspondence 1952-1956, Ralph Leech to Beecher, March 1955.

occasioned in the church. Writing to Archdeacon Bostock, Smith, who describes her work in her correspondence as that of “teaching illiterate African women to read, write and take baptismal and pre-confirmation classes,”<sup>416</sup> complained that the main “Revival” group in Mombasa not only had refused to co-operate with those outside of it, but in fact worked in opposition to them. She noted that this was not a new thing, and that Revival Christians were, “in effect, a church within a church, with their own leaders, discipline, rules, funds and social security.”<sup>417</sup> Mary Smith, who requested that her letter be treated confidentially in “its entirety,” further accused revivalists of “extreme exclusiveness, antinominalism, unhelpful confession of sins, and public condemnation of all who will not join the group, lack of outreach to the pagans,” among a host of other failings.<sup>418</sup>

Even more worryingly for the church, however, some of the missionaries were convinced that the revival was a manifestation of yet more springing up of religious cults, the spiritual counterpart of political agitation with which they were allied. This concern was not just limited to the political developments in Kikuyuland, where radicalisation of nationalism was on the upsurge. The same concern was raised for Nyanza, for instance, where the revival, as we have seen elsewhere, gained a large following in the first two decades of its arrival.

That the revival became a contentious phenomenon in African Christianity is not in doubt at all. None more than J.C Carothers, the colony’s foremost psychologist, illustrates the extent of this contention, particularly in face of the outbreak of the Mau Mau. Carothers’ analysis of the movement led him to conclude the following:

A movement that has been proceeding for some years and seems to be gathering strength is a Christian revival by the people. Life is seen as a battlefield on which the powers of light and darkness are at war and with little hope of happiness in this world. The movement seems to have arisen, at least partly, as an expression of an urge to achieve equality with the Europeans. Here is a field, which the

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<sup>416</sup>ACK Archive, “Revival Movement,” op.cit.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

African may sometime be allowed to stand on equal terms, or even excel the Europeans.<sup>419</sup>

It is indeed puzzling, but not uncharacteristic of Carothers, to attribute the rise of the two movements, the Revival, and the Mau Mau, to practically the same factors. In both, he used the same framework, conjuring an image of a people caught in “anxiety,” “insecurity,” and what he called a “confluxual” situation. Concerning Mau Mau, he had argued that the authors of this “evil movement,” armed only with a modicum of westernization, had impinged on the countryside to exploit an anxious and “confluxual situation.”<sup>420</sup> He attributed this to the fact that the Kikuyu, like other pre-colonial African societies, had lived a life “constantly threatened by malevolent fears” which was in stark contrast to the white man whose whole life, “founded on concepts which are really Christian, could later in life build a balanced understanding of oneself and the world.”<sup>421</sup> To him, therefore, African nationalists’ only claim to leadership was “the prestige that attaches to some knowledge of European ways.”<sup>422</sup>

Concerning the revival, he underscored that the African was completely simple and single-track minded, and could, therefore, not discern that different situations called for different reactions, say that of religion or nationalism.<sup>423</sup> This explains his singular template for what were, by any stretch of imagination, two very different phenomena. In his mind, however, both were “vexing situations,” and the African, by his very nature, tended to exhibit “strange behaviour” when faced with a “vexing situation.”<sup>424</sup> Thus, Carothers, while expressing “the deepest sympathy with African aspirations” and while not doubting that revivalism might also be based on “genuine religious awe and conviction, could not help but recognize as a psychologist, the multiplicity of human motivation.”<sup>425</sup> Although he did not come out to clearly state what this “multiplicity of reasons” might entail, he, nonetheless, did suggest that the revivalists’ claim that “all were one in Christ,” was perhaps a wily plot to gain what he called “a foothold into the European citadel.”

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<sup>419</sup> J. C Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau Mau*, op.cit., p.11-12.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

He argued that, in a situation where most doors to the white man's world were firmly shut, the African had resorted to religion to claim parity with the white man, hence the revival. He termed this state of affairs "a sad commentary upon the affairs of Kenya." Perhaps to ameliorate what were certainly insalubrious views in the ears of the colonized, he apportioned responsibility, noting that the African was not all to blame for colonialism had caged him in a manner that had severely curtailed his options.<sup>426</sup>

Suffice it to state here that the religious tensions, and the multiplicity of their manifestations which Carothers attempted to portray, were in this context deliberately corrupted in racial jargon. As Njenga argues in reaction to Carothers' argument, religious tensions are part of the history of the race of the humankind and not peculiarly African. He notes, for example, that the Keswick revival in Europe was itself a manifestation of the tensions generated by the Industrial Revolution. Even the charismatic movements in Europe, he argues, were directly born of the stresses that had accompanied the Industrial Revolution, and to some extent, had influenced the concept of personal salvation.<sup>427</sup> He thus posits that in a like manner, Africans, through colonisation, had been exposed to rapid forces of social change and modernisation, but with very different outcomes, given the vastly different setting. Njenga posits that in the colonial situation, the colonizer had made deliberate efforts to first break down the traditional social order and institutions that had ensured societal stability in order to ease his own efforts at cultural affront. Furthermore, unlike in the Industrial Revolution where the upheaval was primarily economic, the colonized were reacting to a violent political and economic process that touched on all other aspects of their lives. To him, therefore, a movement like the revival was a product of its time.

Therefore, we can surmise concerning Carothers, that nowhere was he able to clearly "prove" that the African, faced with a "vexing" situation, was more "mentally unstable" than the European. On the contrary, Carothers failed to see the contradiction in his own argument when, on the one hand, he portrays the African as "simple and single track-minded," yet talks of "multiplicity of factors" driving him. Indeed, he deliberately failed to acknowledge that

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> Oral Interview, Peter Njenga, Nairobi, 29/6/2009.



manifestations of tensions generated by “revolutionary” circumstances were not peculiar to the Africans.

The final premise in this chapter briefly examines the factors behind the phenomenal growth of the revival in the 1940s, and the significance of its portentous growth in face of the Mau Mau. The revival enjoyed portentous growth from mid 1940s, having overcome many of the hurdles it had encountered in the early years, both in the African congregation and in the missionary ranks. In a decade critical, in many ways, to the religious and political developments in the colony, the revival made huge gains, especially in the Presbyterian and Methodist churches whose membership had not shown as much enthusiasm as the Anglicans had from the start.

The exponential growth of the revival in the 1940s is largely attributable to its dynamic evangelistic influence, manifested in its ability to organise huge annual conventions, entirely managed by African Christians themselves.<sup>428</sup> The first such countrywide convention was in 1947 at Kahuhia in Murang’a, where a reported 1,800 Christians attended.<sup>429</sup> The convention drew attendees from all corners of the colony, turning the convention into an inter-group where English, Kikuyu and Kiswahili were used. The meetings between the small groups, *tukundi*, and correspondence between them that had identified the great potential of enhancing the movement’s activities by reaching out to all corners of the colony, had clearly borne fruit. Indeed, the conventions were the culmination of the felt need for wider unity that had expressed itself in a desire for meeting and planned action. This, in turn, had prompted the formation of the first committee of fourteen which met in September 1947 where a decision to hold a convention in the following year “in order to deepen spiritual life,” was arrived at.<sup>430</sup> The Kagaari convention illustrates the organisational skills of the revival Christians at their best. Quoting from the Rural Dean’s report, Beecher gave a glowing account of the excellent organization that had gone into the huge Kagaari convention in Embu in 1948. He noted thus of the convention:

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<sup>428</sup> Karanja, op.cit., p.249.

<sup>429</sup>For a full list of revival conventions, see, Church of the Province of Kenya (CPK): “About the Anglican Church in Kenya: The Tenth Anniversary of the Church of the Province of Kenya,” Nairobi, 1980, p.4.

<sup>430</sup> Wanyoike, op.cit., p.157.

Invitations had been sent out to the Brethren in the Lord throughout Kenya saying that ‘those who seek revival’ and ‘long to be taught the words of life’ would meet at Kagaari from August 25th to 29th. A site was chosen at a village school on the green hills facing Mount Kenya, the sanction of the District Commissioner was obtained, and also permission sought to use the government rest camp nearby for European visitors to the convention. Directions were given to those attending; they were all to bring food, or send money with which food could be bought in advance, bring cooking and eating utensils and blankets and arrange their own transport.<sup>431</sup>

The meticulous planning, and the self-reliant nature of the revival at this point, is a clear indication it had come of age. Although the figures of attendance vary, with some showing that about 5,000 attended the Kagaari convention,<sup>432</sup> the pertinent point is that this, and other huge conventions from the late 1940s, was wholly funded, and organized, by the African Christians themselves. Their great success not only suggested a marked loosening of European domination in church, but also the awareness that economic independence translated to greater freedom in decision making. Indeed, each successful revival convention confirmed that economic self-sufficiency in the African church was a ticket to enjoying certain freedoms.

There were other major conventions, such as that held in Kabete in 1949, where a record 15,000 Christians attended. Another was at Thogoto, Kikuyu, in the following year with a similarly high attendance. Although Beecher himself expressed delight that these conventions were, “a masterpiece of organization,” he also noted that the most memorable thing was “the quiet working of the Holy Spirit in just exactly those ways in which our Lord promised His disciples that He would work.”<sup>433</sup> By the time the Mau Mau broke out, the revival had fully matured and been accepted as a regular phenomenon in African Christianity.

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<sup>431</sup> ACK Archive, Revival Movement 1952-56, op.cit.

<sup>432</sup> Mambo, op.cit., p. 113.

<sup>433</sup> ACK Archive, Revival Movement, op.cit.

In conclusion, several observations concerning the Revival Fellowship in Kikuyuland are in order. First, the very fact that there was a strong-felt need for revival in a relatively young church, and that this should have coincided with heightened political consciousness in the colony was significant. In a colony under the shadow of colour bar, the revivalist message, “all are one in Christ,” was a truly refreshing message. It negated, in principle, the subjugation of one people by another in whatever form. Indeed, as the revival irrefutably demonstrated, those missionaries who were keenly aware of the inherent contradictions between the Gospel message, and colonial rule, were the first to appreciate the crucial niche of the revival in Kikuyu Christianity. It became “the spirit breathing new life into the church itself,” in a time when, “many of us who gave but a hesitant welcome to the revival message must humbly confess that we were afraid of what it might bring in our own lives, so great was the challenge.”<sup>434</sup> Part of that fear lay in debunking the myth of “the purported holiness of the Europeans in general, and missionaries in particular.”<sup>435</sup> The revival message not only reinforced that of the nationalists’ own aspirations of freedom and equality, but also re-centred the question of cultural domination associated with colonialism in general, and missionary endeavour, in particular.

While efforts at loosening the church from the grips of missionary control, and cultural emancipation, might not have been a consciously intended objective of the revival, it was, nonetheless, a welcome one. Missionaries had presented Christianity in Africa as inseparable from the trappings of their own civilization, firmly persuaded that Christianity was not just a religion, but also a whole (and superior), way of life. Yet, as Welbourn ably argues, Africans responded out of their total culture to men who, whatever their intentions, are seen as closely identified with the whole culture of the west. In addition, despite the predominantly Christian emphasis of the presentation, they still shared with their compatriots many attitudes, which were not necessarily Christian in origin and may, indeed, belong essentially to the British, or French or American, rather than to the ‘Christian schema.’<sup>436</sup> Mugambi also demonstrates that the African response to missionary endeavour cannot be seen simply as a ‘religious’ response to a purely religious message, given that religion is a social phenomenon which is always to be found fully

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<sup>434</sup> Bewes, *op.cit.*, p.48.

<sup>435</sup> Gatu, *op.cit.*, p.42.

<sup>436</sup> F.B Welbourn, *East African Rebels*, London, SCM Press, 1961, p.177.

blended with the way of life of individuals and communities.<sup>437</sup> As such, though the revival brethren were uncompromising in their repudiation of everything in African culture that carried pagan associations, they also endeavoured to be truly autonomous of missionary control.<sup>438</sup> It is my contention that in seeking to appropriate Christianity and interpret it in a manner relevant to everyday Christian living, revivalists arguably, made a commendable effort at social construction of reality, in spite of the accusations by some that they were out of touch with reality. It was a no mean feat, as John Gatu, a cultural champion himself, points out in lauding the revivalists. He says,

When Church historians come to write the history of the Church in East Africa, I believe the East African Revival will appear as the shining example of Christianity becoming ‘indigenised,’ and the person of Jesus Christ becoming not so much a matter of history, but of the day-to-day experience of a Christian. For once Europeans and Africans were able to experience something which united them and discovered that colour need not separate us at all.<sup>439</sup>

Another important result, deriving from the rise and growth of the revival in African Christianity, was that it worked as a catalyst to indigenization in church leadership. The fact that the fellowship had no formal structures gave its members the opportunity to raise their own leaders within its ranks. This not only emboldened them in a wider quest for egalitarianism within the movement itself, but also on the general church leadership characterised, at the time, by a missionary stranglehold. Indeed, the participation of the lay people in the leadership of the revival proved to be a most important factor in revitalising the established church and enhanced independency.<sup>440</sup> In this way, lay participation in the church proved to be an important development that helped re-define African Christianity by challenging the “sterile bureaucracy and individualism of Western churchmanship which had had such a negative impact on African society.”<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> Mugambi, “Religion and Social Construction of Reality,” Inaugural Lecture,” op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>438</sup> Stanley, op.cit., p.154.

<sup>439</sup> Gatu, op.cit, p.18.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>441</sup> F.B. Welbourn, *East African Christian*, London, OUP, p.156.

In all, and with the benefit of hindsight, that the eventful journey of the revival spirit throughout East Africa also ended up being “a provision by God to meet the Mau Mau uprising,” is, for this study, significant. Bostock put this down to the brethren’s “dedication to Christ, which made them loyal to the government, and against all lawlessness and thuggery.”<sup>442</sup> Yet, as this chapter has endeavoured to show, the revival was not a benign movement. It not only used the gospel message to challenge the white man’s racial superiority in the colony, including that in the church itself, but also ruffled feathers in African Christianity itself by challenging Christians to appropriate, and literally live the gospel message. As for its role during the Mau Mau, Leslie Fisher, Home Secretary of the CMS, summarised it well:

...one of the lessons of revival is that through it the church is called to live dangerously. It may well prove to have been part of the providence of God that just as East Africa stands on the threshold of years of deadly peril, the Church has been stirred out of complacency and reformed for battle.<sup>443</sup>

There is no gainsaying that the revival considerably influenced church life and growth in East Africa.<sup>444</sup> The role of revival Christians in defending their faith during the Mau Mau had vindicated Fisher and all those who firmly believed that its presence in African Christianity was truly providential.

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<sup>442</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/7/7B, Bostock, “The Revival Movement in the African Churches,” p.2.

<sup>443</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/7B, The Revival Movement 1952-1956, op.cit.

<sup>444</sup> Dorothy Smoker, “Decision-Making in East African Revival Movement” in David B. Barrett, ed. *Initiatives in African Religion*, Nairobi, EAPH, 1971, p.96.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CHRISTIANITY; LOYALISM AND MAU MAU

It is no detraction from the achievements of the Army and the Kenya Police to state that the major share in the final overthrow of the Mau Mau fell to the tribal forces-the Tribal Police and the Guard. It was policy that it should be so; that, as soon as they should have been trained and equal to the task, the fighting in the reserves should be left to them that it might be demonstrated, for all to see, that Mau Mau had been rejected, spurned and finally thrown out by the tribesmen themselves.<sup>445</sup>

The gradual weakening, and eventual military defeat of the Mau Mau, was the culmination of many factors. One of the most definitive of these was the speed and ruthlessness with which counter-insurgency was mounted in Kikuyuland and other Mau Mau "infested" spots in the colony. Counter-insurgency, a euphemistic term for what, in real terms, was unparalleled counter-terror, was unleashed not just to the so-called "terrorists," but also to a largely hapless Kikuyu populace, deemed the brainchild of the rebellion. Whilst counter-insurgency encompassed a whole range of measures, its most obvious face was the military campaign that first contained Mau Mau and largely destroyed it by disenchantment, detention and death.<sup>446</sup> Ruth First simply describes it as "a combination of overkill and terror against the Land and Freedom Army and the civilian population at large."<sup>447</sup>

No single event better demonstrates the ruthlessness of counterinsurgency than the aftermaths of the "Lari Massacre" of March 26, 1953. On the fateful night, approximately 600 Mau Mau fighters attacked Chief Luka Kahangara's "boma" at Kanguyai village of Lari District, brutally murdering the chief, and leaving between 74 and 100 loyalists and their families dead of machete wounds or in huts set on fire.<sup>448</sup> In the aftermath of the grisly event, the colonial forces mounted a counter-massacre in which hundreds of Lari residents were rounded up, and scores shot in cold

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<sup>445</sup> *History of Loyalists*, Nairobi, Government Printer, 1961, p.79.

<sup>446</sup> Anthony Clayton, *The Killing Fields of Kenya 1952-1960: British Operations Against the Mau Mau*, Transafrica Press, 2006, p. 1.

<sup>447</sup> Quoted in Clayton, *op.cit.*

<sup>448</sup> Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.56.

blood for what the government described as complicity.<sup>449</sup> Eyewitnesses to this event, however, claim that many of those killed, or carted off to detention were mere victims who had had no hand in the massacre.<sup>450</sup> Others claim that a large number of those who faced government reprisal were, in fact, nowhere near the scene of the crime on that night.<sup>451</sup> Indeed, local residents, while not ruling out that there might have been a few collaborators in Lari, nevertheless hold that the perpetrators of this massacre that shocked the world had come from Githunguri, a suburb of Kiambu town. Whatever the true position, the counter-massacre horrified many, including the Governor's wife who felt compelled to intervene, sickened by the "madness" of the revenge killings that had gotten completely out of hand.<sup>452</sup> This counter-terror was clearly a warning to the Mau Mau and its civilian supporters as to how far the government was ready to go to contain Mau Mau. Indeed, intimidation of the civilian population continued to be widely used as a tool of war throughout the duration of the Mau Mau.<sup>453</sup>

Of the government strategies devised to defeat the Mau Mau, the most elaborate was, definitely, the creation of a Home Guard. In the context of Mau Mau, the term "loyalist" was used to denote a whole array of groupings and individuals. Central to its composition were members of the tribal police, chiefs, headmen, teachers, catechists, the Kikuyu Christian community, and others who in one way or another were deemed unsympathetic to the Mau Mau. Rosberg and Nottingham describe the lot as "people who for various reasons were out of sympathy with militant and radical nationalism."<sup>454</sup> Loyalists have also been described as Africans who took the side of the government and opposed the Mau Mau.<sup>455</sup> Further, loyalism can be viewed as the series of alliances forged between the Kikuyu opponents of the Mau Mau insurgency and the colonial government, albeit with unequal distribution of power.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> Group Interview, Charles Mbugua Munyuko, Isaac Mugoioyo, Charles Mage, Rachel Njoki and Gakobo Muchiri, Kambaa, Lari, January, 2009.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> Oral Interview, Charles Mbugua, Kambaa, Lari, January 2009.

<sup>453</sup> See, for example, Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: the Brutal End of Empire in Kenya*, London, Jonathan Cape, 2005.

<sup>454</sup> Carl Rosberg and John Nottingham, *The Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya*, New York, Praeger, 1966, p.294.

<sup>455</sup> Branch, op.cit., p.4.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., p.9.

The opponents of the Mau Mau were also those who did not share the values of the rebels, who rejected violence and armed struggle as a way forward, and those who questioned the moral basis of the claims made by the rebels to rights in land and access to property.<sup>457</sup> Given the varied groupings that made up the loyalist crowd, it is thus quite clear that to be a “loyalist” did not necessarily imply sympathy for colonial rule on the part of the Kikuyu opponents of the Mau Mau.<sup>458</sup> Indeed, the motivation of loyalists was, arguably, as varied as its composition. While some were in it out of genuine conviction that the movement was vile and had to be curbed at all costs, others saw in it the perfect forum to settle old scores and disputes over land, as well as other private or familial grudges. For others still, it was the perfect chance to line their pockets. Undoubtedly, loyalism was a multi-faceted affair with deep historical rooting, but also clearly driven by the immediate circumstances given rise by the Mau Mau.

In *History of Loyalists*,<sup>459</sup> the official handbook dedicated to those who stood with the government during the Mau Mau, loyalists are classified in two categories; first, are those who, from the very start, stood in opposition to the Mau Mau. In tribute, they are commended as "that brave and steadfast minority among the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru tribesmen which, at first an insignificant proportion, numerically stood out against the terrorists and remained loyal."<sup>460</sup> The second stream comprised "those who at first, misled by the specious promises of the Mau Mau oath, afterwards realized the full horror of the movement and had the courage to repent."<sup>461</sup> These confluent streams eventually merged to form a Home Guard, rallying in defence of their homes and villages, and reaching in Central Province a peak of 22,000 known as the Gikuyu Embu Meru Guard.<sup>462</sup> The Home Guard was, therefore, a product of what had started out as an amorphous cluster coalescing at the outbreak of the Mau Mau, and loosely termed Kikuyu Resistance Groups. By March 1953, these groupings had graduated into an official Guard, timed perfectly to coincide with the government's efforts to roll out villagisation as an official policy.

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<sup>457</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>458</sup>Ibid., p.9.

<sup>459</sup>*History of Loyalists*, op.cit.

<sup>460</sup>Ibid., p.4.

<sup>461</sup>Ibid.

<sup>462</sup>Ibid.



Once constituted, loyalists steadily infiltrated the Mau Mau, turning into a malignant force that eroded, and eventually reversed many of the early gains made by the freedom fighters. The high premium the government placed on the loyalists is quite apparent from its linchpin position in the multiple strategies devised to quell the Mau Mau. These included the onslaught by the loyalists in the reserves, the routing out of the freedom fighters by British forces (including loyalists) in the field, the rounding up of presumed Mau Mau sympathisers into detention camps, and the massive propaganda mounted as an official strategy to alienate the fighters, both physically and psychologically, from the rest of the society. These strategies, aided along by the fighters' own poor logistical preparedness, eventually led to the containment, and eventual military defeat of the Mau Mau. Accordingly, government's contention that the Mau Mau was vanquished by its very own was not a far-fetched one, given the central role played by loyalists. Indeed, loyalists were not only directly responsible for Mau Mau's implosion, but also exacerbated historical fissures in the already embattled society.

Once the revolt broke out, the several ad hoc and amorphous loose groupings that were given rise to by the Mau Mau created a completely new etymology that became part of the Mau Mau narrative, making an interesting commentary on loyalism. Terms like *kamandangati*, a corruption of "command guards," and mainly used among the Embu, was coined to denote those who covertly supported both the government and the Mau Mau at the same time.<sup>463</sup> A good number of Christians reportedly belonged to this camp, clandestinely supporting the movement while still associating themselves with the Christian faith. Ndwiga Giconi, an ardent Mau Mau freedom fighter with a claim to three oaths, posits that the roles of *kamandangati* were to provide security to the wives of the Mau Mau fighters, and to collect victuals and money with which to buy provisions for the fighters.<sup>464</sup> Some, of the ex-freedom fighters, however, differ, contending that the term was only used in specific reference to Mau Mau soldiers covertly operating from the reserves.<sup>465</sup> Similarly, the term, *komerera*, to "lie low," was coined to describe groupings of young men who claimed to be Mau Mau fighters but were, in actual fact, layabouts who spent their time lying low around the reserves harassing all and sundry. Along the same lines, the term,

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<sup>463</sup> Oral Interview, Nyaga Kamocere, Makengi, Embu, 12/1/2009.

<sup>464</sup> Oral Interview, Ndwiga Giconi, Kiangima, Kiereri Location, Embu, 14/1/2009.

<sup>465</sup> Oral Interview, Silas Ileri Ndavano, Ngimari Location, Embu, 25/ 1/2009.

*warurungana*, whose root word, *kururungana* means, "gathered in great numbers," was coined to refer to the Home Guards, as was the more unsavoury term, *njuna ndara*, bootlickers.<sup>466</sup>

Even the acronym, "Mau Mau," and which has over the years drawn many conjectures - a mishearing of *muma*, oath, or that it was a form of Kikuyu pig-Latin (known to all Kikuyu children) that transposed the words *uma uma*, meaning "out-out,"<sup>467</sup> is variously interpreted, depending on specific locations. One of the most common explanations was that the word was an extrapolation from the words, *maundu mau mau*, a phrase commonly used in areas where the Mau Mau was rife to mean "those very things that we have discussed and agreed upon."<sup>468</sup> Using such terminologies, Mau Mau supporters were able to converse freely without giving any secrets away, even in the presence of those hostile to the movement. Clearly, the politics of naming was as much part of the Mau Mau war as any other.<sup>469</sup>

Historically, the lot of the Kikuyu Christian community has always been lumped with that of the loyalists. There are several reasons for this: Christianity, and the attendant western values offered by the missionaries as an integral part of that faith had encouraged its followers into a cultural transformation, modelled on the values of the western tradition. Consequently, over time, the Kikuyu Christian community came to be associated with a wider set of values associated with Christianity. Formal education easily became the most visible and desired of these values. Even more significantly, for this study, formal western education became critically, the prerequisite to the rise and growth of African nationalism. This placed Christians, *athomi*, at the centre of a drama where faith and nationalism assumed a dichotomous relationship. Thus, missionary Christianity, the institution most associated with early formal education, became the seedbed that nurtured, simultaneously, a collaborative class, and an African nationalist class. Christianity and nationalism, in the colonial context, were, therefore, never mutually exclusive, but the different faces of the same coin, hence the dichotomy, as chapter 2 of this study has endeavoured to demonstrate.

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<sup>466</sup> Oral Interview, Njoki wa Kiburi, Mukurweini, Nyeri, 16/4/2009.

<sup>467</sup> See, for example, Robert Buijtenhuijs, *Mau Mau Twenty Years After: The Myth and the Survivors*, The Hague, Mouton, 1973, pp.180-3.

<sup>468</sup> Oral Interview, Naphtali Migwi, alias Captain Gicuiru, Manyatta, Embu, 2/2/2009.

<sup>469</sup> Branch, *op.cit.*, p.9.

The making of a collaborative class in Kenya goes back to the advent of colonialism. Among the principal new centres of power were chiefs and their agents, whose appointment by colonial administrators began long before the "pacification" process was completed. Olaibon Lenana of the Maasai, Nabongo Mumia, Kinyanjui Gathirimu of Kiambu, and Karuri wa Gakure in Murang'a were among the very first chiefs whose recruitment was part of a dual effort to establish a viable colonial administration, and to groom an African collaborative class to prop that administration. This recruitment was, in turn, part of a larger colonial policy popularly known as "Indirect Rule," inseparably associated with its chief proponent, Lord Lugard. Margery Perham describes indirect rule as "a system by which the tutelary power recognized existing African societies and assisted them to adapt themselves to functions of local government."<sup>470</sup> Ochieng, on the other hand, describes the system as entailing a policy that centred on the need for traditional authorities to play their role within the colonial setting.<sup>471</sup>

In Kenya, however, as in most of her other colonies in Africa, the British "failed" to identify a readily visible traditional authority with which to work. This failure stemmed from the fact that the early administrators equated the lack of centralized governments in pre-colonial African societies to lack of viable social and political institutions. It was an assumption based largely on ignorance of the acephalous nature of traditional societies whose power and authority was not centralized, but diffused in society's many components.<sup>472</sup> Among the interior societies at the dawn of colonialism in Kenya, only Nabongo Mumia's Wang'a kingdom in western Kenya came close to being described as centralized. The coast, however, had a semblance of well-organised dynastic entities, heavily influenced by the long economic and cultural ties with the Islamic and Asiatic world to the east.

Among the Kikuyu, as in most other pre-colonial societies, power and authority was dispersed through a number of counter-balancing segments instead of being concentrated in a single

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<sup>470</sup> Quoted in William Ochieng, "Colonial African Chiefs," in B.A. Ogot, (ed.) *Politics and Nationalism in Kenya*, EAPH, 1972, p.52.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

<sup>472</sup> Godfrey Muriuki, "Background to Politics and Nationalism" in B.A. Ogot, (ed.) *Politics and Nationalism in Kenya*, p.5.

central authority.<sup>473</sup> However, even in this ostensibly egalitarian set-up, there were men of means and outstanding leadership in the society, the so-called *athamaki*, as has been shown of Waiyaki Hinga elsewhere in this study. The *athamaki* were usually dominant leaders of an age-set and counsellors with substantial wealth and standing. Even then, this did not confer them much influence outside their own immediate communities. The early administrators refused to recognise these leaders, however, preferring instead to work with “fresh” leaders of their choice who had no prior authority over their people. This is how, for example, Chief Kinyanjui Gathirimu, Kiambu's leading early colonial chief, and a man who has been described as having had no traditional standing “but was merely a hunter without property,” rose to prominence.<sup>474</sup> Kinyanjui thus firmly fits in the category of “friendlies,” described by Muriuki as “that motley crowd of mercenaries who had served as porters, guides or *askari*.”<sup>475</sup> Friendlies were befittingly a malleable lot, executing colonial policies with much alacrity in return for state largesse.

While choices, such as that of Kinyanjui of Kiambu or Karuri wa Gakure of Murang’a undermined, even contradicted, the essence of indirect rule, that ideally was pegged on the use of the traditional authorities, the system proved useful in the grooming of a collaborative class. It, however, also put chiefs in a tricky situation in which they were forced to manage a juggling act between their own people, whose values and concepts of leadership were clear and unmistakably defined, with that of their colonial positions that they could maintain only by satisfying certain European values and demands. This often left chiefs estranged, or in direct conflict with their own people. Muriuki, for example, has noted that in the early years of the establishment of colonial rule, chiefs and their hangers-on, the notorious *njama*, flouted, with impunity, the traditional code of behaviour by harassing all and sundry.<sup>476</sup> Besides, because part of their responsibilities included maintenance of public order, recruitment of “communal labour,” hearing and determining petty native cases and for a brief period between 1902 and 1910

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<sup>473</sup> Robert Tignor, *The Colonial Transformation of Kenya; The Kamba, Kikuyu and Maasai from 1900 to 1939*, Princeton, 1976, p.46.

<sup>474</sup> Muriuki, “Background to Nationalism,” op.cit., p.7.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

collecting hut taxes,<sup>477</sup> chiefs were able to amass much wealth as well as vast, and often arbitrary, powers that put them at loggerheads with their own people.

In many ways, therefore, the creation of the institution of Chief remarkably changed the social/political dynamics of the Kikuyu society. In a very fundamental way, it also precipitated a modernization crisis in which an emergent collaborative class was to wield much power and accumulate, in the process, much wealth, without any traditional claim to power. Chiefs were able to achieve this without undue constraint because as government employees, they could serve without being unduly worried about popularity with their subjects. One consequence was that chiefs brazenly set out to feather their own nests, and not infrequently, at the expense of the very people they sought to govern.<sup>478</sup> Their new positions primarily demonstrated that access to power and wealth, which was part of the largesse associated with chieftainship, could be used as avenues to new modes of social mobility.

The divisions that characterised Kikuyu politics from the early 1920s were primarily a manifestation of an emerging cleavage in which a new generation of mission beneficiaries began to challenge the early recipients of state largesse, the chiefs. The wrangles that pitted young Harry Thuku against a small, landed clique of chiefs in Kiambu, revealed a model increasingly influenced by the redistributive powers of the state. Thuku himself would become a major beneficiary of these very same redistributive powers that were originally the preserve of colonial chiefs, but increasingly appropriated by a new class of Africans like himself whom the colonial government coveted to work with. Thuku's extreme shift from a fiery critic to one siding with the colonial government and the missionaries, after his Kismayu banishment, baffled many who had known and worked with him in earlier years. Ironically, the shift was most likely influenced by the very missionary Christianity he had earlier opposed, in relation to its stand on African's involvement in politics.<sup>479</sup> Men like Thuku personified patronage at its best, built and greatly consolidated through association with the colonial project.<sup>480</sup> Overt opposition to radical nationalism by staunch Christian chiefs like Waruhiu, or Josiah Njonjo, was a study on how

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<sup>477</sup>Quoted in Maloba, op.cit., p.27.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> Branch, op.cit., p.11.

influential members of the Kikuyu society's long association with Christianity and colonial patronage neutered their approach to nationalism.

In all, the institution of Chief, and the contests and debates spawned out of it in colonial Kenya, portrays a clique that was neither at ease with those they ruled, or those on whose behalf they ruled. It is, therefore, not surprising at all that the society's collective memory of their role is predominantly one of sell-outs. In fact, in the build-up to Mau Mau, chiefs had become the very embodiment of colonial repression. A description of Waruhiu Kung'u, the quintessential representative of Christian chiefs, demonstrates why as shown below:

The chief was at the sharp end of Kenya's increasingly polemical politics, a struggle between the 'have and have-nots,' in which he proudly and vigorously represented the interests of the Kikuyu landed, and Christian aristocracy. Such men as these were the gatekeepers of the colonial state, and they became used to wielding patronage and its auspices.<sup>481</sup>

This description of Waruhiu could very well be that of Thuku, Philip Karanja, or even Chief Josiah Njonjo, all Kiambu strongmen, lauded by the establishment as "pillars of society." With a subaltern class that increasingly linked their economic deprivation to the policies these men had helped craft, and enforce, on behalf of His Majesty's government, their elevated status and politics of exclusion made them marked men.

A second layer of Christian loyalism, defined this time by literacy and the adoption of Christian faith, and its attendant western values, followed that of the chiefs. A class of literate Africans had begun to "graduate" from mission schools soon after the First World War. This is the class that was at the vanguard of African nationalism. Though initially few in numbers, and only of modest formal learning, the ability of the mission graduates to secure employment from the early 1920s as low cadre civil servants, catechists, teachers, extension officers, compounders, among others, clearly demonstrated that with some education, wealth and even power, could be

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid., p.12.

accessed outside the indigenous mould. However, unlike chiefs whose prosperity was largely drawn from the largesse of their office, this stratum of Africans found its fortune at the mission doors.

Yet, before the First World War, few Kikuyu had taken a keen interest in mission education. Even those that had found themselves at the missions were usually only responding to individual crisis.<sup>482</sup> Karanja has amply demonstrated that Christianity in Kikuyuland remained a minority allegiance before the First World War. He shows that even then, only three categories of people remained in the missions for a considerable time; the very poor with nothing to lose and much to gain in terms of social status and economic resources, the fugitives from Kikuyu customs and traditions, and those sent by chiefs. This reluctance at apprenticeship manifested the deep cultural chasm between the demands central to the Gospel message and western values, in relation to time-honoured indigenous ways.<sup>483</sup>

The disagreements between the *athomi*, readers, and non-Christians, and soon enough between the *athomi* themselves and missionaries centring on Kikuyu customs, African grievances against colonial rule and African formal education, only served to further highlight the deep-seated dissatisfaction that missionary patronage had created. However, as literacy became the major prerequisite for joining this much-envied new breed of Africans whose power and wealth was independent of traditional grounding, or state patronage, the struggle for the school assumed dramatic proportions. The great thirst for education was, on the surface, a major fillip for Christianity in a colony where Church and School were inseparably a missionary endeavour. It is certainly true to note that it is formal education that became the “midwife” to yet another substratum in the colonial African society, a “comprador” class, this time with a stake in the status quo. Given its relatively privileged position, this class shunned sudden or unorthodox political change, favouring instead constitutional gradualism through which they could influence their fortune.

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<sup>482</sup> Karanja, op.cit., p.57.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

Maloba attributes the process of what he calls "individual land aggrandizement" in Kikuyuland to the rise of both the chiefs, (and the tribunal elders presiding over land cases) and to this new comprador class of salaried African employees. He endeavours to demonstrate how this process upset the traditional land rights and obligations as the *ahoi*, tenants-at-will, were increasingly no longer assured of their tenancy. He argues that as individualism set in, "rural tensions" in turn began to build up. Social upheaval was aggravated even more by the disintegration of the safety net that had previously cushioned the very disadvantaged in society, such as the *ahoi*, in the pre-colonial land tenure system, leading to a vicious circle of poverty. It did not help matters that the newly landed gentry's first move was to curtail the access of the *ahoi* to land, turning them into labourers without the benefit of the traditional squatter magnanimity.<sup>484</sup>

As this rural upheaval escalated and whole families and *mbaris*, clans, began to lose ancestral land to the moneyed gentry, quite often corruptly, myriad lengthy litigations over land became the order of the day, draining even further the scanty economic resources of the litigants, and compounding the desperation of the newly disinherited.<sup>485</sup> It is against this backdrop that many of the victims began to migrate to new frontiers. The journey to the Rift Valley, to many the "promised land," was quite evidently undertaken mainly by the *ahoi*, squatters, and the small landholders in the reserves. The Carter Commission estimates that by 1934, 110,000 Kikuyu had moved outside of their reserve. By 1948, 294,146, the equivalent of 28.65% of the Kikuyu population lay outside Kikuyuland.<sup>486</sup>

Among the Kikuyu, it is, therefore, a fact that the land tenure system was assaulted on two fronts; land lost to white settlement, and that lost to the newly landed gentry, with access to a cash economy. In his autobiography, Kaggia castigates this latter lot for what he calls their "caution and gradualism" approach to African nationalism. Kaggia, like most of the Mau Mau stalwarts, came from a penurious background as was evidenced by the family's absolute landlessness. He avers that among the Kikuyu, as indeed in other agrarian societies in Kenya, no

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<sup>484</sup> Maloba, op. cit., pp. 28-9.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid., p.28.



worse fate could befall a man than that of landlessness, the fate that had befallen his father for he was "a poor man who lived all his life outside his own district."<sup>487</sup>

Walter Rodney observes that under African conditions, anyone who went to school during the colonial period virtually became part of the elite because the numbers enjoying that privilege, even at the primary level, were so small.<sup>488</sup> He further argues that whereas educational systems are designed to function as props to a given society, in Africa, the colonial masters trained low-level cadre of administrators such as clerks, teachers, and railroad booking clerks, to specifically preserve colonial relations, and to keep the cogs in the wheels of colonialism well oiled. Certainly, this system did not allow them to make claims of parity with their colonial masters in spite of their education.<sup>489</sup> In essence, this meant that in spite of its elitist trappings, this stratum of Africans still found itself locked out of the centre of power because of colour and status as a colonized people.

This colonial mindset, turned unofficial policy, was the very anti-thesis of the self-declared "civilizing mission," touted by missionaries and the colonial administration as the primary reason for their presence in Dark Africa. Margery Perham, an archetypal colonial but also one who, nonetheless, liked to portray herself as a "friend" to the colonized, typified this mind-set. She contended, in one of her many treatises, that the colonial mission was to encourage, indeed create, a "constructive African leadership which can lead away from a tribal nationalism impossible of fulfilment."<sup>490</sup> She also argued that as far as the abilities of the educated African were concerned, the government needed a combination of strength and a sympathy, which reaches down in friendship to the individual level, and tries to remedy the pathological sense of inferiority, and the tragic inner conflicts of the educated.<sup>491</sup> This outlook, overtly condescending for one who claimed to speak as a "sincere friend to the African," summed up the unenviable position of "educated Africans" in the colony. Benevolent colonisers, like Perham, on the other hand, typified the myopia of rulers, caught in a quandary of the greatness they believed they

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<sup>487</sup> Bildad Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963; the Autobiography of Bildad Kaggia*, EAPH, 1975, p.76.

<sup>488</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Tanzania Publishing House, 1976, p.273.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/7B, Margery Perham to *The Times*, 23/4/53.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

represented, and what they felt was their duty to “uplift” their subjects without jeopardising their own position as colonial masters. How to juggle this was a feat that dogged the colonial masters throughout their seventy odd years in the Kenya colony.

Further, the colonial model, as represented by Perham, is an appropriate commentary on the contradictions that encouraged African nationalism, originally incubated in the lure of westernisation. Formal western education and Christianity became vital components to two diametrically opposed positions, that of the rise and consolidation of a loyalist class, and the growth and consolidation of an African nationalist class. Indeed, even while education, Christianity, wealth, and power were good indicators of the attributes of the loyalist class, they were no guarantee of access to real political power by its holders. In fact, in a sense, these very same “virtues” emasculated the would-be constitutionalists in comparison to those who had a proclivity for action over rhetoric. Among the many reasons that account for the outbreak of the Mau Mau, one of the more profound was that, one trajectory of nationalists was tired of the gradualist approach adopted by the more elitist class of nationalists. Besides, the marginalisation of this second layer of a “collaborative” class from the “centre of political power” reflected important competing positions that shaped both loyalism and nationalism in colonial Kenya. Indeed, this dichotomy, to a considerable extent, underlies the genesis of the multiplicity of reactions by the Kikuyu Christian community to the Mau Mau.

John Gatu’s story pertinently illustrates the co-habituating nature of Christian loyalism and nationalism arising from the processes discussed above. Gatu, a long serving clergy of the Presbyterian Church in Kenya, and one who scaled the heights to become its first indigenous Secretary General in 1964, and Moderator in 1979, explains his dual loyalties. Before his call to serve God, a call he answered by joining the then Limuru Theological College to train in ordained ministry in 1951, Gatu had already served in the Signal’s Department of the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. His senior, and rare position for an African then, had enabled him to travel widely, gaining useful insights into what he calls “the white man’s world and thinking.”<sup>492</sup> He notes that nevertheless, he suffered many injustices in the army where racial

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<sup>492</sup> Oral Interview, John Gatu, Karen, Nairobi, May 2007.

discrimination was the order of the day. This is in spite of the fact that "...we are all human beings equal in the sight of God."<sup>493</sup>

Furthermore, as an ex-soldier caught in the vortex of the radical African nationalism that characterised the post-war era in the colony, his experience in the army made it easy for him to identify with the activities of radical forces, keenly nationalistic. Gatu was among hundreds of ex-soldiers who radically influenced the post-war politics, including subversive acts that precipitated the Mau Mau. His individual effort included volunteering his services to *Mumenyereri*, the Kikuyu tabloid that championed Kikuyu land rights, among other things, and edited by Henry Mworira. A militant nationalist by then, Gatu, by his own admission, was not only among the first to take the "oath of unity" in 1949, but administered that very same oath that year and in 1950, barely a year before he joined the church ministry. He unequivocally maintains that the ideals behind the Mau Mau were justified and nationalistic, but the methodology was "perhaps wrong."<sup>494</sup>

The struggle for justice and fairness was, therefore, close to Gatu's heart from the start. He posits that this is why, as a committed but also discerning Christian, he felt compelled to make an independent stand away from his mentors, the missionaries, as far as nationalism was concerned. He argues that after all, the struggle for liberation from colonial domination had induced a crisis of credibility within the missionary agencies for they could not remain loyal to colonial authorities and at the same time support the aspirations of the colonial subjects.<sup>495</sup>

Gatu's story exemplifies patriotism at two levels; the first was at the ethnic level, in his case, the taking up an active political position as co-editor of *Mumenyereri*, and soon after by wilfully taking and administering the Mau Mau oath. The second lay in his belief that the ideals of the Mau Mau, as espoused in the demand for "land and freedom," were nationalistic in intention, albeit clad in an ethnic cloak. To him, there was no contradiction between the two positions as much as there was no contradiction between one being a good Christian and a true nationalist, a

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<sup>493</sup> Gatu, *Joyfully Christian*, op.cit., p.7.

<sup>494</sup> Oral Interview, John Gatu, May 2007.

<sup>495</sup> Gatu, *Joyfully Christian*, Forward, p. (ii.)

good Christian and an African proud of his culture at the same time.<sup>496</sup> These multiple stands by one of the most iconic churchmen in Kenya today, summarises the parallel, and complementary, strands that form the tapestry that is faith and nationalism. Gatu's long ministry in the church has been a testimony of his fidelity to the ideals of Christianity, nationalism and cultural pride, a stand clearly manifested in his considerable writings.

Nonetheless, in the colonial context, Gatu's total lack of ambivalence to faith and nationalism was the exception, rather than the rule for many Christians, socialised to believe that rulers were ordained from above. The predicament of many Christians was quite apparent in their ambiguous reaction at the outbreak of the Mau Mau, and faced with the conundrum of how the two might coexist without compromising their Christian values. This ambiguity is also the reason why, when the Mau Mau broke out, the colonial establishment unable to discern where Kikuyu loyalty lay, instituted draconian measures against the whole of the population, Christians included. Yet, this indiscriminate action also mortified many loyal Christians and missionaries, who felt government's parameters of measuring loyalty were wrong. Bewes, for example, pointed out that it was wrong to measure loyalty by military standards alone. He argued that other loyalties were at stake, and Christians who had rejected Mau Mau were not any less patriotic than those who had taken up arms. He argued:

It is sometimes difficult for the Kikuyu to understand the Government; it is also difficult for the Government to understand the Kikuyu and to learn to measure loyalty other than by military standards. Yet those whose first loyalty is to Jesus do not lag behind in true patriotism.<sup>497</sup>

Bewes' sentiments captured the essence of the multiplicity of factors that were at play concerning loyalism, especially during the Mau Mau. He nudges us to look beyond the reflexive tendency to view Christian loyalism as a betrayal of nationalist aspirations. As he put it, "...loyalty to Jesus," was not mutually exclusive to the love of one's country. Yet, for the fundamentalist Christians, that the love of country should not override, or contradict, their

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<sup>496</sup> See, for example, *Joyfully Christian*, Part 1.

<sup>497</sup> T.F.C Bewes, *Kikuyu Conflict: Mau Mau and the Christian Witness*, London Highway Press, 1953, p.69.

Christian values was neither in question. For those Christians who did not consider this a conflicting situation, their view of the Mau Mau was remarkably different.

The first casualties when the revolt broke out were the chiefs, headmen, members of the Tribal Police, as well as the first volunteers of what would soon become a Home Guard. Many examples abound; the murder of senior chief Waruhiu Kung'u on October 7th, 1952 was followed, in quick succession, by a spate of murders across the Kikuyu districts of Kiambu, Murang'a and Nyeri, as well as in the neighbouring districts of Embu and Meru. In Kiambu, on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1952, Headman Nderu reportedly vanished and was "never again to be seen."<sup>498</sup> In Nairobi, a popular city councillor, Tom Mbotela, similarly met a cruel death on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1952, while an attempted murder was made on another councillor, Muchohi Gikonyo. On 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1953 Chief Hinga of Kiambu, whom freedom fighters had attacked and wounded in an initial attack on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, was followed and assassinated in hospital.<sup>499</sup>

Many more murders that were blatant followed. In the heart of Kikuyuland, Chief Nderi Wang'ombe was "hacked to pieces" in a banana grove, along with one constable, only two days after operation Jock Scott.<sup>500</sup> The two government operatives were reportedly murdered by a crowd of about fifty "Kikuyu activists" as the chief attempted to break up an oath ceremony in Thegenge Location of Nyeri district.<sup>501</sup> While to the authorities Nderi had been murdered for his "courage and progressiveness," to the Mau Mau fighters, he was just another traitor whose fate, like that of Waruhiu before him, had long been sealed for "selling-out his own people."<sup>502</sup> Other murders reported across the land included that of Headman Luberio (Rubiro) of Aguthi Location, Headman Kabui in Embu district, and Chief Josina Kaini of Embu, among others. These government loyalists were some, among a large number, described by the colonial government as "fallen heroes" in the Government's official tribute.<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> KNA VQ/16/43 Central Province Annual Report, 1953; also see *History of Loyalists*, op.cit., chapter V.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> *History of Loyalists*, pp.19-21.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

<sup>502</sup> Oral Interview, Wamuyu Gakuru, April 2008.

<sup>503</sup> *History of Loyalists*, p.14.

As the tentacles spread alarmingly from government operatives to teachers in mission schools, evangelists, catechists, and attacks and the burning of missions and schools escalated, a pattern that suggested that the freedom fighters had now set their sights on the Christian community began to emerge. The church quickly raised the alarm. Archdeacon Langford-Smith at the Weithaga mission, and reporting of the situation in his Fort Hall jurisdiction, talked of threatening letters "pinned to dead animals" as the precursor to brutal murders. In one such report, he noted that a chief's "bodyguard" had been murdered in Njumbe.<sup>504</sup> He further reported that a headman and a chief had "barely survived," after paraffin-soaked logs were stacked around the headman's house where the chief was spending the night. In yet another incident, he reported that the Mau Mau had attacked a "young Makerere teacher" from near Githumu only a week before, and while the teacher had managed to escape, his pregnant wife, as well as his brother and sister were "shockingly beaten because they refused to take the oath."<sup>505</sup> Langford-Smith's report pointed to a dire situation for Christians in Fort Hall. In his words, what was afoot in Kikuyuland was a "monstrous movement that was anti-European, anti-government, and anti-Christian."<sup>506</sup> He construed that, "it is against this sad background that we must attempt to assess the life and witness of the African church here and of the CMS."<sup>507</sup> The poignant portrait of Chief Paulo Kiratu of Njumbe, in full uniform while holding a Bible aloft, was a rare picture of courage indeed.<sup>508</sup>

E. Cole in Embu echoed Langford-Smith in Murang'a. In a report on Mau Mau activities in Embu District for the month ending on 30.9.1953, Cole, a CMS schools' advisor, listed several serious Mau Mau- related incidents of arson and murder across Embu. He noted that on the night of 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1953, Anglican African Church (hereafter AAC), Kaithage, and AAC Kiriuri, both the school and church had been burnt down. On the same night, Mau Mau had attacked District Education Board School (hereafter DEB), Muvu, killing seven people. He further reported that on Friday, the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, a big oath-taking ceremony had taken place at AAC Kibogi (about five miles from Kigari), "where many church people were

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<sup>504</sup> ACK Archive, R/9, Mount Kenya Chaplaincy, 1935-1952, Langford to Beecher.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> Canon Bewes used the portrait as the cover shot for his small book, *Kikuyu Conflict and the Mau Mau Witness*. (See Appendix B)

affected."<sup>509</sup> In addition, on the night of 21<sup>st</sup> September, Ephantus Kiura, who until 1951 was an AAC teacher and later Headmaster of Salvation Army Manyatta, was killed, as was his brother's wife.<sup>510</sup>

Catherine Wangiri Mwaniki of Ndiuti location, Embu, and a Revival Christian since 1955, corroborated some of the incidents above, having been right in the vicinity. She affirmed how alarming the situation was in her location, as widespread cases of arson ravaged schools and churches. She noted, for example, that in 1953, Mau Mau had razed to the ground the school she attended, Kiangima. In spite of this seemingly wanton destruction of both lives and property, Wangiri, who describes the fighters as *itoi*, terrorists, nonetheless was of the view that Mau Mau were simply carrying out acts of revenge against specific missions and individuals. She explained that those who were attacked had either spoken out against Mau Mau, or had refused to take the oath and went round boasting of the fact, while others had done things the fighters considered injurious to their cause. According to Wangiri, some Christians had liaised with the administration to subvert the activities of the freedom fighters. For example, some teachers and catechists had insisted on keeping schools running in spite of orders from the Mau Mau not to do so. Such found themselves on the receiving end, accounting for the loss of lives and property.<sup>511</sup>

Karigi Gucoga, a Christian veterinary officer, was one such victim, reportedly murdered for insisting on carrying out his veterinarian services in spite of orders that all such activity must stop.<sup>512</sup> Similarly, Muceke Karukungu, a staunch Christian from Ena location in Embu, was killed for “cooperating” with the white man, as well as for being an active member of the Home Guard.<sup>513</sup> For Embu, by 1953, the pattern of murders and arson left no doubt that Christians and government officials were certainly on Mau Mau’s radar. A CMS circular describes eleven of

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<sup>509</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/7B, CMS Correspondence, Report by E. Cole, “Mau Mau Activities in Embu for Month Ending 30.9.1953.”

<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

<sup>511</sup> Oral Interview, Catherine Wangari, Ndiuti Location, Embu, 14/1/ 2009.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup> Oral Interview, Martha Warue, Ena Location, Embu, May 2009.

those killed in Embu in September 1953 alone as "loyal and faithful Christians, who even after torture, had refused to take the oath."<sup>514</sup>

The perception that Mau Mau had turned to be a fight against Christianity alarmed not just the church but also the administration. This is well illustrated in the District Annual Reports for 1952 and 1953 for Central Province, which tabulated figures of the murders, and attempted murders on teachers, Christians and catechists for that period. In Fort Hall and Meru districts alone, it indicates that twenty-seven teachers had been killed in the two years, and thirty-seven attacked. In addition, ten relatives of teachers are reported to have been killed, and fifty-seven schools destroyed and thirty looted. The official appraisal of this trend against schools, teachers and missions was that Mau Mau considered churches and schools among "the most serious enemies of the movement," hence their becoming principal targets.<sup>515</sup> Moreover, it had become increasingly clear by 1953 that the loyalty and influence of some very staunch Christian teachers was beginning to influence other members of society against the Mau Mau, thus the hard stance by Mau Mau fighters to deter such activities. The rest of the answer to the killing and destruction, according to this report, "lay in the intense regard with which the African tribes have for education as the key to everything."<sup>516</sup>

The Mau Mau oath was a key parameter of gauging Christian loyalty. For a start, the taking of the oath was used as a yardstick of loyalty, or lack of it, by the freedom fighters, the church and the government. The missions and the government held close positions concerning the oath: "a Mugikuyu has either taken the oath or he has not, and that is the touchstone to which all considerations should be brought, that is, has he or she taken the oath or not? ...Nothing more, nothing less."<sup>517</sup> The Mau Mau, on its part, was equally categorical that no one was exempt from the oath, and neither was fence sitting an option. As a result, many members of society were caught between a hard place and a rock. Furthermore, in the months leading up to the Declaration of the State of Emergency, and on an intensified scale after that, the battle-line was

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<sup>514</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/7B, CMS Correspondence on Mau Mau, September 1953.

<sup>515</sup> *History of Loyalists*, op.cit., p.81.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

<sup>517</sup> ACK Archive, CMS General Correspondence on Mau Mau, 1952-3.



clearly drawn, as the Mau Mau took matters in their hands, forcing thousands of Kikuyu to take the oath.

The oath administered to the masses prior to, and soon after the Declaration of the State of Emergency, was an oath dubbed "the oath of unity," *muuma wa uiguano*. It was also variously referred to as the "first degree oath," or the "fellow travellers oath."<sup>518</sup> This was by far the commonest, and the most widespread, but also the "mildest" of the many mutations that were to follow, including the deadly *muuma wa ngero*, the oath that sanctioned killing. However, it is the first oath, the oath of unity, which was the most crucial to the freedom fighters in terms of securing a critical support base for the movement. This became even more critical after the Declaration of the State of Emergency, with a Home Guard that had already begun to consolidate its gains. To the freedom fighters, therefore, the forceful administration of the oath onto some reluctant members of the community, and especially many individual Christians, was simply the price civilians had to pay for the freedom struggle.

Many Christians took the oath.<sup>519</sup> There are three possible explanations for the surprisingly high numbers (the administration put their figures at 90%), of those who "buckled" under threat.<sup>520</sup> The first revolved around the phenomenon that Kibicho calls "middle-of-the way believers in Christianity, Christians who were still close to many of their cultural and traditional beliefs."<sup>521</sup> Concerning these Christians, Kibicho argues that they were ambivalent in outlook in the sense that though they were firm members of the church, they nonetheless believed that there was nothing unchristian or ungodly in fighting for their rights.<sup>522</sup> They believed that the fight for justice and freedom was in accordance with the Bible, and that the Christian God was the same *Ngai* of the Gikuyu, the Creator-Father of all people.<sup>523</sup> To these Christians, their willingness to take the Mau Mau oath was an affirmation of their support for those ideals. Freedom fighters, in

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<sup>518</sup> For a fuller discussion of the Mau Mau oaths, see Renison Githige, "The Religious Factor in Mau Mau with Particular Reference to Mau Mau Oaths," MA dissertation, University of Nairobi, 1978.

<sup>519</sup> The majority of the Kikuyu, including Christians, took at least one oath under different circumstances.

<sup>520</sup> Bewes, Beecher, and other missionaries concurred with the government figures that indicated more the 90% of Kikuyu Christians had taken the oath.

<sup>521</sup> Kibicho, op.cit., p.155.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

a sense, were themselves “middle-of-the way believers” in that, their fight for their rights was also made in the name of God, *Ngai* of Gikuyu and Mumbi, but the same universal God. Muchunu Gachuki, a Mau Mau oath administrator, explains:

We had our own vows and commandments just like the Christians had their creeds. Beliefs comprised a great deal of our religion in the movement. We also had prayers in which we emphasized the unforgettable and bitter fact that we were praying to the God of Gikuyu and Mumbi who gave to us this country, a country that was now alienated by the foreigners.”<sup>524</sup>

As such, it may not be far-fetched to suggest that in such Christians, Mau Mau found kindred spirit. However, the adherents of Independent Churches and Schools seem to have related to the Mau Mau oaths in a different manner. Their long fealty to these institutions had inevitably coloured their nationalist outlook. Although the linkages between these institutions and the Mau Mau remain contentious, as discussed elsewhere in this study, a few observations concerning the oaths in relation to the Christians affiliated to these churches is pertinent.

It has been suggested by some scholars that the founding of Gikuyu Independent Schools and Churches was as much religious as they were cultural-political.<sup>525</sup> Furthermore, “the whole issue underlying the movement was one of colonial enslavement, hence their ethos of African right of self-determination in politics, culture, and religion.”<sup>526</sup> As such, it is difficult to divorce the aspirations of the adherents of these institutions to the struggle for justice and ultimately political liberation.<sup>527</sup> As for the Mau Mau oaths, there is evidence to suggest that an inordinately large number of independent churches and schools’ affiliates not only took the Mau Mau oath(s), but that some of the leaders of these institutions allowed their churches and schools to be used as centres for “subversion” and for oath ceremonies. Eighty-three year-old Mwangi Ndirangu of Kinyona location, chief Njiiri’s stronghold in Murang’a, and a

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<sup>524</sup> Quoted in Githige, op.cit., p. 67.

<sup>525</sup> See, for example, Kibicho, op.cit., p.145.

<sup>526</sup> Branch, op.cit., p.145.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

staunch member of independent church at Kinyona, was an oath administrator during the Mau Mau. Mwangi claims to having administered several of the oaths right in the precincts of what he calls his “nationalist church.” He explains that Njiiri’s virulent attacks on the Mau Mau whom he dismissed as “mere cockroaches and fools to imagine that the white man would ever leave,” only made many of the independent followers more determined to support the Mau Mau.<sup>528</sup> Such men as Mwangi represent a large number of independent movement followers who gave unstinting support to the Mau Mau.

There is yet another class of Christians turned freedom fighters. Karari Njama, a renowned Mau Mau freedom fighter, was a practising Christian when he joined the struggle. He explains the conflict he suffered in his mind after taking the first oath, even though he had done so voluntarily. For him, the conflict was one between the old and the new. As a reasonably well educated young man, (having gone up to form two at secondary school level), Karari explains that his mission- acquired education had trained him to look down on Gikuyu traditions and religion as mere superstitions, only fit for the uneducated and the old, certainly not for the progressives like him. He explains the turmoil in his soul on taking the oath:

As a Christian I had undergone a contrary faith, for the oath I had taken was mainly based on Kikuyu religion, belief and superstition. But the aims and objects presented by the society were so real and so essential to life that when compared with Christian faith, of which its preachers many times failed to practice what they preach the latter becomes strongly outweighed.<sup>529</sup>

While Karari appears, in his remarks, to want to justify his joining the ranks of the Mau Mau, his predicament poignantly captures yet another set of Christians with the certain awareness that they were saddled with a faith that was, in many ways, directly linked to the injustices of colonialism. His dilemma also highlights the cultural disconnect arising from association with a faith that had inculcated in him the unworthiness of his own customs and traditions, while

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<sup>528</sup> Oral Interview, Mwangi Ndirangu, Kinyona, Gatanga, 3/3/2009; also, Njuguna Mbote, Kigumo Location, 10/3/2009.

<sup>529</sup> D.L Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau From Within: Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya’s Peasant Revolt*, N.Y, 1966, p 21.

teaching him the superiority of those of his Christian master. Some discerning missionaries, however, had understood the dilemma that Karari endeavours to explain. As Hewitt's comments;

In the Kikuyu Country the African Christian has also to bear the charge of disloyalty and treachery to his people if he remains faithful to the church, but in his case he cannot help recognising that his people have some rights on their side—land-hunger, economic exploitation and all the effects of the white attitude of racial superiority. There is bound to be a certain conflict in his soul which needs recognition by those who would be rigorists.<sup>530</sup>

This conflict in Karari's soul made him a reluctant rebel. He was one among many Christians who gave in and took the oath out of "the simple desire to survive the war."<sup>531</sup> Many of these were nominal Christians, a phenomenon that might partly explain the high number of Christians who gave in to the Mau Mau.

The problem of nominal Christianity, and even outright falling away witnessed during the Mau Mau, had roots deeper than the immediate issues generated by the Mau Mau. Nominal Christianity was an old problem for the missionary church, where conversion to Christian faith usually meant denouncing traditional cultures and religious beliefs, and adopting new cultural norms that the missionaries had introduced.<sup>532</sup> By equating Christianity to western values, missionaries had in no small measure contributed to nominalism. Mugambi argues that, if Christianity had gone no further than "skin deep," the missionary approach was largely to blame.<sup>533</sup> He endeavours to show that the superficiality in the African understanding of Christianity thrived for a long time because African converts had gone along with the presupposition held by missionaries that Africans were incapable of articulating, in a sophisticated way, their understanding of theology and philosophy. Consequently, missionaries felt that they should act as spokes persons for Africans in theological and philosophical

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<sup>530</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/7B, G. Hewitt to Max Warren, "Church Discipline and the Mau Mau."

<sup>531</sup> Branch, op.cit., p.209.

<sup>532</sup> J.N.K Mugambi, *Christianity and African Culture*, Nairobi, Acton Publishers, 2002, p.106.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid.

matters.<sup>534</sup> He further argues that this superficiality did not mean that African converts were not genuine in their faith. Rather, it explains why Africans found it difficult to offer a rationale in support of Christianity in response to African criticism of the Christian faith as it was presented in the Modern Missionary Enterprise.<sup>535</sup> As a result, there was great inconsistency between the framework on which Africans carried out evangelization and the practical implementation of “the great commission to go into the world and preach the Gospel.”<sup>536</sup> This is precisely why the Revival was a crucial force to African Christianity prior to, and especially, during the Mau Mau. Through it, Christians were able to interpret the Word, as they understood it, while at the same time living that Word to a literal awakening of their own Christian living and testimony as well as that of the Church. Revival Christians refused to let missionaries be their mouthpiece, not unlike the independents had done.

How did the missionary fraternity interpret the toll that the Mau Mau had taken on the church? Some, like Warren, likened the “falling away” of Kikuyu Christians during the Mau Mau to that of “bewildered children,” arguing that large numbers had accepted baptism “as being no more in fact than the white man's magic and without any commitment to our Lord at all.”<sup>537</sup> Calderwood, similarly, warned that the outbreak of Mau Mau in 1952 was a repeat of what had happened in the 1930s when many mission churches had “emptied.” He described the Mau Mau as a movement that had been “carefully planned and built-up in post-war years and found very able leaders and Cassandra-like, the churches’ warnings of what was happening met a blind eye.”<sup>538</sup> To Calderwood, the large numbers lost were not to be mourned, for it was a purging of nominal Christianity. He argued that, as in cultural nationalism that had assaulted the church in the 1930s, the challenge posed by the Mau Mau would lead the church to the “reviving of the faith by which alone a church can truly live.”<sup>539</sup>

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

<sup>535</sup> J. N.K Mugambi, *The Biblical Basis for Evangelization*, Nairobi, OUP, 1989, p.17.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

<sup>537</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/7B, Warren to Hewitt, op.cit.

<sup>538</sup> Quoted in Lawrence Njoroge, *A Century of Catholic Endeavour: Holy Ghost and Consolata Missions in Kenya*, Nairobi, Pauline Publications, 2009, p.177.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid.

Other missionaries attributed the falling away of Kikuyu Christians in the face of the Mau Mau to "weak minds" that had led to "weak followers of the gospel." The Provost at the All Saints Cathedral during the Mau Mau was one such missionary. He contended that the real problem behind the falling away of Christians was that the truth of Christianity had had not had time to "penetrate minds which have never before indulged in abstract thought, and which have not associated religion and morality together."<sup>540</sup> The result was that "under the present vicious anti-Christian attack there had inevitably been some falling away."<sup>541</sup> The Provost, however, blamed the whites in the colony in equal measure, arguing that if the bane of the African was his "weak mind," then the European's was that he had patronised Christianity with "distant coldness." He admonished his white congregation that it was indeed fantastic to expect that Africans would follow with enthusiasm a religion that they themselves, the bringers, had not truly appropriated.

This is the thinking that led Carothers to give "scientific" credence to his explanation of the two phenomena, Christian revival and the Mau Mau, at the height of the Mau Mau in 1954. He contended that in both cases, the pressure of the modernising process, and the disruption caused by contact with an alien culture had created a "confluxual situation which the African was not well fitted to sustain."<sup>542</sup> However, where the provost had attributed the failings to "human weakness," Carothers attributed it to racial inferiority on the part of the Africans. Carothers was in good company of the likes of Walter Carey who argued that it would take at least another two hundred years before the African could be entrusted to a position of leadership. Perham, like Carothers, similarly sought to explain this "tragedy" of "falling away of Christian" by hacking back to the old colonial myth where all woes emanated from the consequence of imposing modern Europe upon primitive Africa. She argued at length that though the active or passive acceptance of Mau Mau by 90% of the Kikuyu had come as a profound shock to Kenya and all connected to it, the blame lay not with the beleaguered colonized but the colonisers.<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/7B, Sermon by Provost at the All Saints Cathedral, Nairobi, January 1953.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Carothers, op.cit., p.6.

<sup>543</sup> Margery Perham, *The Times*, 23/4/1953.

Yet, it is important to interrogate more closely the story these figures tell, for as has been aptly observed, statistics in their abstractness often distort the complex reality to which they refer.<sup>544</sup> For example, the figures posted for 1952/1953 of those who had taken the oath in Embu (over 90%), would suggest that the Mau Mau had a huge following. The government, however, argued that it was, in fact, misleading to view these figures as a vote of confidence in Mau Mau. It argued that the high figures were a mere reflection that the oath was considered an "insurance premium" against reprisals, and not a genuine sign of membership of the movement.<sup>545</sup> It is to be noted, however, that "insurance premium," the term used therein, was selectively used to suit particular purposes. When the situation warranted deprecating the support shown to the Mau Mau in the societies it was rife, reference to the oaths as "insurance premium" would be downplayed, and the figures used, instead, as incontrovertible evidence of the society's inherent disloyalty and atavistic tendencies. However, when it was expedient to downplay the impact of the Mau Mau on the society, these same figures were the evidence used to advance the argument that the Mau Mau had only intimidated a completely unwilling society into supporting its cause. Clearly, the reality on the ground was far more complex than some of the glib interpretations made of these figures.

The multiple issues emerging from loyalism are, to my mind, reflective of the multiple narratives that arise from the loyalist phenomenon in relation to the Christian community. Take the story that Albert Nyaga Githae- a teacher, a staunch Christian, and the district commissioner of the Boy Scouts in Embu during the Mau Mau- tells in relation to Christians and oath taking. Nyaga admits that he took one Mau Mau oath under pressure. Yet, as was attested to by his fellow villagers, Nyaga was openly anti-Mau Mau, and had even hired his own body guard on account of the many threats on his life. He recalls that the then education officer in Embu, J.A Fuller, under pressure from teachers fearful of their safety, had advised that they could take the oath, if threatened with death. They, however, had to report this matter to him immediately.<sup>546</sup> Men like Nyaga, and many like him, therefore, took the oath without any commitment at all to the Mau Mau. Their brief dalliance with the Mau Mau was indeed only an "insurance premium," and

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<sup>544</sup> This observation is attributed to Winston Churchill as quoted in Baur, op.cit., p.523.

<sup>545</sup> KNA DC/EBU/1/14, Embu District Annual Report, 1954.

<sup>546</sup> Oral Interview, Albert Nyaga Githae, Kavuvuti, Ena Location, Embu, 20/1/2009.

precisely why hundreds of Christians who had taken “insurance” began trooping back to the church to “repent” of an oath they had only recently partaken. No wonder missionaries in exasperation saw this as fickleness and lack of fidelity on the part of such Christians, hence the sentiment that this was “the purge that the church has been needing.”<sup>547</sup>

There is, however, yet another side to these figures. Government reports revealed that some 90% of the population in Central Province had taken the Mau Mau oath.<sup>548</sup> The East African Women’s League also used the same estimate, arguing that in some parts of the Kikuyu country at least 90% of the population had taken the oath.<sup>549</sup> The 1954 Annual Report for Embu had even higher figures, suggesting that the Mau Mau had overwhelmingly overrun Ndia and Gichugu. Of Ndia, the report made the claim that “one could say that the population was 100% behind the Mau Mau.” This “shocking figure” was attributed to Ndia’s close contact with Nairobi.<sup>550</sup> Nevertheless, the argument that links the high figures to Ndia’s geographical position is difficult to defend; Mbeere, sitting right next to Ndia and Gichugu, is recorded to have remained “impervious to the Mau Mau.”<sup>551</sup> Government explanation was that this was the result of the effectiveness of indoctrination against the Mau Mau, geographical and sociological reasons, and above all “government’s policy of supporting and rewarding the tribe.”<sup>552</sup> It further pointed out that this had successfully stimulated and maintained a healthy contempt for the Mau Mau throughout Mbeere country. This explanation is, however, mute on why the same had not been achieved in Ndia. The more likely explanation, in my view, lies in the fact that the colonial administration had over the years exploited the historical rivalry between the two communities. Mau Mau was the perfect opportunity to perpetuate this divide- and -rule approach against the Ndia and Mbeere peoples.

As for Kiambu, the dynamics that influenced loyalism were very different. The colonial administration considered Kiambu, “the least contaminated” of the Kikuyu districts and

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<sup>547</sup> See Kibicho, *op.cit.*, p.157.

<sup>548</sup> KNA, African Affairs, Central Province Annual Report, 1952, p.67.

<sup>549</sup> East African Women’s League Bulletin, Nairobi, February 1953.

<sup>550</sup> KNA/ DC/EBU/1/14, Embu District Annual Report, 1954.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*



missionaries, as well as the administrators, singled it out for commendation as a loyalist stronghold. It was noted of Kiambu that,

In many ways, the loyalty of the Kiambu and Kabete Christians stands highest in the whole of Kikuyu-land. Nearest to Nairobi, with social and political strains correspondingly greater, these good people have displayed qualities of Christian faithfulness, which are truly wonderful.<sup>553</sup>

Nonetheless, a closer look at Kiambu reveals several geographical and historical reasons that account for the self-serving loyalty. In comparison to the “rural districts,” Kiambu was literally at the doorsteps of the administrative seat of power, Nairobi, a fact that worked against the Mau Mau in several ways. For a start, it lay in the full glare of administrative and colonial forces. This meant that save for a few, but serious incidents such as Lari Massacre, Christians and the general population at large were not as physically threatened as the rest of the Kikuyu population residing deep in Kikuyu, Embu, Meru and the Rift Valley. Both Ndia and Gichugu, the two areas singled out as Mau Mau hotbeds, for example, bordered Mount Kenya, the nerve centre of the forest fighters. The inhabitants of these two rural districts were naturally more likely to be drawn into the activities of the Mau Mau. Besides, Ndia and Gichugu, long considered among the more traditional of Kikuyu districts, was touted as being more likely to have more affinity with a movement that appealed to ethnic symbolism, a contestable premise nevertheless.

Furthermore, the fact that Kiambu was where effective results of the loyalist build-up against Mau Mau were first felt, a logical outcome of the historical influence of its old loyalist class of chiefs and Christians, helped buffer the district against the extremities of the Mau Mau. Above all, however, economic considerations carried the day: Kiambu being the kitchen garden for Nairobi, its inhabitants were more likely to resent the disruption of their day-to-day activities, or forego their lucrative trade and employment in the city for an uncertain war. For most of its residents, therefore, it was largely business as usual for most of the duration of the Mau Mau. Indeed, as the Kiambu District Commissioner noted in what can only be regarded a back-handed

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<sup>553</sup>ACK Archive, CCK/R/7B, Mau Mau Memorandum, 1952.

compliment of its residents, "it would appear that the inhabitants of Kiambu District are more interested in intrigue and politics, trading and enriching themselves, than in active fighting."<sup>554</sup> The government maintained that the inhabitants of Kiambu District were, throughout the duration of the war, more interested in "trade, litigation, *fitina* (quarrels), and politics than in receiving the crown of martyrdom."<sup>555</sup>

Still in many ways, Kiambu remained a conundrum, virtually raising most of the Mau Mau high command even while only six percent of the gangs reportedly came from the district.<sup>556</sup> The administration defended the district, noting that there was little physical Mau Mau activity, and that most of the assassinations in Kiambu had, in fact, been carried out by Fort Hall gunmen.<sup>557</sup> Certainly, for Kiambu, government propaganda against the Mau Mau had made a serious dent on the credibility of the movement. Besides, economic considerations as has been noted above had clearly paid dividends. The net result was that Kiambu yielded high returns in terms of Christian loyalism during most of the Mau Mau.

Clearly then, the factors that dictated Christian loyalism during the Mau Mau were definitely influenced by the peculiar conditions prevailing in each of the different geographical areas. Indeed, the perception that Kiambu had played a peripheral role in the armed struggle would return to haunt post-colonial politics in Central Kenya. Accusations abounded that a coterie of "Kiambu men" were benefitting tremendously from state largesse. This perceived government favouritism of Kiambu did not go down well with the districts in the north- Murang'a, Nyeri, Kirinyaga and Embu- whose peoples felt that they had made the most sacrifices in the Mau Mau liberation struggle. They accused Kenyatta, a "Kiambu man," of rewarding loyalism.

By mid-1953, the fear that had gripped most of the areas affected by the Mau Mau had begun to dissipate. The rebels were increasingly put on the defensive as government forces rallied. Even more importantly, by the end of 1953, the Home Guard had formed a solid bulwark against the Mau Mau, allowing the civilian population more freedom of movement and choice concerning

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<sup>554</sup> *History of Loyalists*, p.34.

<sup>555</sup> KNA/ DC/KBU/1/44, Kiambu District Annual Report, 1953.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*

the revolt without undue fear of a backlash. The turning tide in favour of the administration was boosted even more with the start of villagisation. Hence, by the close of 1953, many of the reports right across Central Province were upbeat, affirming this shift in government favour. The reports noted that the civilian population had demonstrated a tremendous change in attitude through the year, and that "frightened and bewildered peasants have in many cases turned into confident not to say "cocksure" Kikuyu Guards."<sup>558</sup> Nor was the church left behind. Its reports indicated "encouraging signs in the churches and an increasing flow of persons who confess to having taken the oath and are asking for restoration to church membership."<sup>559</sup> It is in this renewed atmosphere of relative security that the government rolled out counter-oathing in August 1954.

Though counter-oathing as a government initiative was short lived, it was nonetheless a significant interlude in the history of Christianity and nationalism during the Mau Mau. That a government should feel constrained to put into place what quickly came to be viewed as dubious measures to counteract the effects of the revolt, was testimony that Mau Mau had indeed jolted the colonial administration despite all efforts to prove otherwise. The official position used to justify counter-oaths was that the forceful administration of the Mau Mau oath had created a formidable passive wing, even though there was no genuine sympathy for the movement. The purpose of counter-oaths was thus to cleanse and free the population from its crippling obligations, and to dissuade those who had not taken the oath not to do so. In addition to breaking the power of the Mau Mau oaths, the government hoped to net valuable information that would quickly help destroy the movement.

The only point of convergence between the church and the administration on this matter was that from a traditional viewpoint, oath taking was a familiar practice associated with all kinds of transactions among the Kikuyu and other African tribes, and that it was religiously regarded. Missionaries and a core of Christians who had resisted the oath from the very start looked upon the whole exercise with scorn and as a matter of spiritual and moral concern. Missionaries, in particular, argued that Mau Mau, in the first place, had violated all norms, and the oaths being

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<sup>558</sup> KNA /DCFH/1/32, Fort Hall Annual Report, 1953.

<sup>559</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/7B, Calderwood to Bostock, May 1953.

forced on the people were entirely against Kikuyu laws and customs. Such oaths were, therefore, not to be considered as culturally binding and a counter-oath would only legitimize what was already an illegitimate covenant. The detractors of counter-oathing further pointed out that traditional Kikuyu oaths (which were “drunk” not “taken”), were never administered by force, but was a “free responsible act” of a “free responsible man.”<sup>560</sup> Furthermore, it was noted, traditional oaths were only administered in broad daylight, never in secret, and never to women and children.<sup>561</sup> Contrary to these norms, the Mau Mau had not only used force to coerce the population into taking the oath, but also extended it to women and children. There were even reports that in a few cases, women had been allowed to administer the oath, a taboo in traditional customs. The detractors of the exercise argued that in the face of all these violations, counter-oaths would only undermine efforts to discredit a movement whose very life force was pegged to an illegitimate oath.

Leakey wrote at length on the violations of tradition that the Mau Mau oaths had made. He warned that the *Githathi* oath, the preferred counter-oath, was too solemn an oath, and its repercussions so feared that not many Kikuyu would be willing to swear on it. Leakey was referring to a solemn oath sworn on a *Githathi* stone, an oath-stone with seven holes in it, symbolizing the seven apertures of the human body. Traditionally, the *Githathi* ceremony always took place in broad daylight and with as many witnesses as possible. Breaking the oath meant death to the witness himself, and members of his family. Leakey further warned that, “even under pressure, no ordinary Kikuyu would dare report an oath to the police or his employer for to do so would be tantamount to breaking the oath and literally calling down upon himself, or upon members of his family, supernatural penalties.”<sup>562</sup> Leakey, who considered himself virtually a Kikuyu used “insider” status to advise the administration that the Kikuyu knew better than to divulge or renounce an oath, which is what the administration was now asking them to do.

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<sup>560</sup> Bewes, *Kikuyu Conflict*, p.56.

<sup>561</sup> L.S.B. Leakey, *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu*, London, Methuen, 1952, p.96.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid*, p. 96.

In fairness, the administration had recognized from the start that counter-oathing was littered with dangers and should be regarded as "palliative," rather than "a thorough purge."<sup>563</sup> These misgivings were well founded, as the initial efforts at counter-oaths would quickly prove. As a first step, the government required individuals to make a complete confession of all Mau Mau activity in front of a government appointed official. This would be recorded on a form, and had subsequently to be repeated in a public meeting, more popularly known as *baraza*. The next step was more critical. African elders, accompanied by chiefs, administered an oath on the *Githathi* stone, prohibiting people from participating in Mau Mau activities, and for those who had already partaken of the Mau Mau oath to renounce it.<sup>564</sup> This proved an uphill task. It has been noted, for example, that when elders came to Thika in mid-1953 to "curse" the Mau Mau, some two hundred persons were present but when the final ceremony to cleanse was being put into operation, "they had practically all disappeared."<sup>565</sup> To make matters worse, the Mau Mau stepped up a new counter-offensive in face of these efforts by the government. For example in Fort Hall, an assistant District Officer, Jerome Kihori, mandated with organizing a confession system was killed by the Mau Mau on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1953. After several months without much headway, and the exercise increasingly steeped in controversy, the government abandoned the exercise altogether. In its place, the public was encouraged to make a public confession while intensified screening was rolled out.<sup>566</sup>

The church, a strong critic of government's attempts at counter-oath, embarked on its own efforts at rehabilitating what it called "lapsed Christians," to becoming "penitents." To this end, a "confessional pipeline," akin to that which would be devised later for returning detainees was created. Still, the church was apprehensive that penance, rehabilitation and restitution, posed serious doctrinal questions. Where the government could simply afford to ask those who wished to renounce the Mau Mau to make a public confession, or take a counter-oath, the church felt it should be more concerned with establishing a state of "true penitence" for the lapsed. The insistence on true penitence turned to a larger theological debate, underscored by the argument that penance should primarily be a teaching instrument and not a tool for punishing fallen

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<sup>563</sup> KNA/ VQ/16/43, Central Province Annual Report, 1952.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid.

<sup>566</sup> Bewes, *Mau Mau Conflict*, op.cit., p.14.

Christians.<sup>567</sup> There were other snags; had the taking of the Mau Mau oath by Christians amounted to apostasy? Were the circumstances under which Christians had taken the oath-terror, torture, and threat of death- plausible mitigating factors in considering restitution to Christian fellowship? Who had the moral authority to "bind" and to "loose" under such circumstances? At a loss, missionaries sought precedents in church history.

Eventually, it boiled down to the understanding that no one who sincerely repented was beyond the mercy of God and the care of the church. Those concerned with rehabilitation also acknowledged that down the years, the church had modified the exceedingly rigorous discipline of the first period of its history and recognized its pastoral responsibility for the weaker as well as the stronger brethren.<sup>568</sup> It was further acknowledged that certain canonical laws permitted restoration of those who had lapsed, even without pressure, if they were truly penitent. Besides, there was the realisation that, "in the face of the horrors of imprisonment, torture or death, apostasy must be treated with greater leniency."<sup>569</sup> Missionaries used these precedents in their own sifting process to distinguish "who was on the Lord's side and prepared to stand with Him whatever happens."<sup>570</sup> Bewes, who had not a kind word for government's approach to the oath threw his sympathy with the penitents noting, "...it has not been easy, for they not only had to work out their attitude to Mau Mau, but to a government that has sponsored pagan oaths and condoned third degree methods."<sup>571</sup>

In all, this chapter has endeavoured to show that Mau Mau raised pertinent questions concerning Christianity and loyalism in a colonial context. While Christianity in Kenya had long been associated with loyalism, that Christians were, equally, at the vanguard, if not the authors of nationalism in Kenya, remains an indubitable fact. It would, therefore, be tenuous to argue that Christians were any less nationalistic simply on account of their being Christians, or that not supporting the Mau Mau, as some of them would not do, was necessarily a vote for the colonial government. Indeed that Christians shared the troubles of the tribe, and that the need for speedy

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<sup>567</sup> ACK Archives CCK/R/7B, M.A.C Warren to Hewitt.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

<sup>570</sup> ACK Archive, R/1/7B, Bewes to Beecher, April 1953.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid.

remedial policies “of which so many Christians alongside the others were unhappy about,”<sup>572</sup> should be a clear indication that loyalism in Kenya’s colonial narrative should not be viewed as being synonymous to servility. That said, however, it is equally important to add that loyalist history was riddled with many complexities as manifested by the multiplicity of factors that drove it, ranging from the self-serving to the truly altruistic. That balance is critical to the understanding of the Christian/loyalist phenomenon.

Therefore, given what one might view as a paradoxical relationship between Christianity, loyalism and nationalism, what the outbreak of the Mau Mau did was to highlight a dilemma in which Christians were caught between the “shackles” of a faith that made it difficult for them to support the demands of the Mau Mau, without compromising their Christian faith. Overall, the revolt forced Christians to look afresh at the tripod that was their Christian faith, loyalism, and nationalism. The outcome, reactions that were far from uniform, manifested the complexities of this triple legacy amidst a host of extenuating circumstances that the revolt had generated.

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<sup>572</sup> Bewes, *op.cit.*, p.16.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MAU MAU AND CHRISTIANITY

We wish to make it clear that there is no intention to condemn love of country, laudable nationalism, and the just attempt to air legitimate grievances.<sup>573</sup>

The initial reaction in missionary and government circles to the outbreak of the Mau Mau was to outrightly deprecate it as an atavistic movement, bent on destroying painstaking gains made in the colony. Accordingly, Bishop McCarthy's remarks on "laudable nationalism" were less likely an approval of Mau Mau's "brand" of nationalism, and more of reverse psychology that in essence said that missionaries understood the noble ideals of nationalism, even while they doubted whether the revolt was a just attempt to air legitimate grievances. This chapter primarily seeks to examine Mau Mau and Christianity on two levels; first by determining the historical links, if any, between Mau Mau and organised religion, specifically with the Independent Churches and Schools, and with the mission churches. The second is to "listen" to the freedom fighters concerning why a revolt, itself underpinned by a strong religious ethos, stood accused of waging war against Christianity and modernity. Were Christians indeed the primary targets of the Mau Mau as the missionaries all along claimed?

The rise of the Mau Mau has often been associated with the independent churches and schools that proliferated in parts of the colony from the early 1930s. The factors that led to their rise in central Kenya, as well as parts of the Rift valley that held large numbers of Kikuyu immigrants, has been adequately discussed in many works. Indeed, chapter two of this study substantially discusses this phenomenon in the larger context of the rise and growth of African nationalism. In this section, therefore, we shall limit our discussion to examining the veracity of the claims at linkages between the institutions given rise by the independent movement and the rise of the Mau Mau. The reasons for the inception, and ethos, of the Kenya Teachers' College, Githunguri, are central to the argument.

Kenya Teachers' College, Githunguri, (hereafter KTC) was established in January 1939. It was founded on the felt need to assuage the great thirst for education in Kikuyuland whetted, but unquenched, by the many mission schools dotting the countryside. Its founding underscored the determined efforts by the growing class of enlightened African nationalists to widen the literacy base in the colony, in the hope of loosening missionary stranglehold on education. The dismal

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<sup>573</sup> John J. McCarthy's Pastoral letter in *Missionary Annals*, Dublin, Rathmines, July 1954, p.4, as Quoted in Lawrence Njoroge, *A Century of Catholic Endeavour*, Nairobi, Pauline publications, 1999, p.168.



progression beyond elementary schooling shored their case. They argued that missionary monopoly on education had not only stifled growth, as was evidenced in the narrow curriculum offered in mission schools, but also suppressed any meaningful political expression within its ambit. This, they claimed, was a ploy to maintain a subservient African class, barely equipped to serve beyond colonial whims. According to Andrew Gatheca, one of the founders and Secretary of KTC, its inception was, in this spirit, aimed at training teachers in elementary, primary and secondary schools for every tribe throughout Kenya.<sup>574</sup> The college was, therefore not just a Kikuyu affair, but one determined to train teachers for all African schools in the colony.<sup>575</sup>

It is important to clarify, from the onset, that KTC itself was not a direct product of the independent churches and schools' movement. Its ethos, however, clearly reflected the independent spirit that had begun to entrench itself from the early 1930s, driven largely, but not solely, by the fall-out with the missions over female circumcision. This spirit had manifested itself in the will to establish Christian churches and schools that affirmed the cultural heritage of its followers, a move that in turn gave fillip to the growth of cultural nationalism. The Kikuyu Central Association was the most visible political body associated with the brand of nationalism arising from this dissent. Indeed, it is in KCA that structured defiance against missionary education first took definite form in the late 1920s, as chapter two of this study has endeavoured to show. Suffice it to state here that the same cultural defiance that underscored the female circumcision quarrel between missions and nationalists in 1929/30, was quite apparent at KTC as a place "to foster African culture in the students instead of de-Africanizing them like the mission and government schools."<sup>576</sup> According to its founders, KTC would produce a new kind of African who would be proud of his "African-ness," and one who could implant his pride in others as opposed to the brainwashed students the founders of KTC referred to as "slaves of colonialism."<sup>577</sup>

That the teacher trainees at KTC were among the most politically conscious in the colony at the time shows the seriousness of that intent. The return of Jomo Kenyatta from Britain late in 1946 heightened, even radicalised, this consciousness not just in KTC, but also in the wider post-war

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<sup>574</sup> Phylis Muraya, "The Kenya African Teacher's College- Githunguri 1939-1952," BA dissertation, University of Nairobi, 1972, p. 31.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid., p.32.

Ibid., p.48.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., p.49.

politics as Muraya's study of KTC demonstrates. Muraya contends, "...in the person of Kenyatta, the college and current politics became one."<sup>578</sup> Missionaries feared and resented Kenyatta in equal measure. Indeed, his anti-British, anti-missionary stance was a poorly kept secret. In his sojourn in Britain, he had lost no opportunity to castigate missionaries whom he referred to as "pretenders to philanthropy who purported to understand the African and, therefore, claim to be his spokesman."<sup>579</sup> Conversely, there was little love lost between Kenyatta and the missionaries. Indeed, his tenure at the helm of KTC, which greatly influenced the direction the college assumed, only made sourer these relations. The colonial authorities reacted to his influence by becoming even more hostile to the operations of the college, eventually using the outbreak of the Mau Mau to close it down altogether in 1953.

In no small measure, the colonial government's hostility towards KTC and eventual drastic action against it and other independent institutions at the outbreak of the Mau Mau, helped build a myth around it as a hotbed of the Mau Mau. However, the thrust of Muraya's argument is that though highly political in outlook, and though numerous political leaders' meetings were held on the college grounds under the cover of board of governors' meetings, KTC was never directly involved in militant politics. The author suggests that the best evidence of its nationalist ambitions lay in its conduciveness, which she argues, "provided excellent opportunity to meet, discuss and pass information without rousing suspicion."<sup>580</sup> This explanation, however, is in my view, rather ambivalent in that it blurs the line between what, and even more pertinently, in whose eyes certain activities were considered "subversive" and others "militant." For example, she argues that KTC was only more visible because of its high profile. At the same time, however, she notes that KTC "...was not by any means the only place where government thought subversion rife."<sup>581</sup> There appears to be a disconnect between the KTC that Muraya depicts as the epitome of organised African nationalistic endeavours, and yet not representative of militant politics of the day. Clearly, the line between subversion and militant nationalism was a thin one, not to mention subjective.

Indeed, it is in this subtle balance of "was it," or "was it not" subversive that might offer the best clues yet, of the linkages between the militancy of the politics that characterized the Mau Mau,

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<sup>578</sup> Ibid., p.74.

<sup>579</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, *op.cit.*, xviii.

<sup>580</sup> Muraya, *op.cit.*, p.101.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid.

and the “subversion” of independent churches and schools. While Muraya argues that it is difficult to prove independent institutions were used as military bases, or that they were centres of violence during Mau Mau, many ex-freedom fighters suggest a different story as is shown shortly here. On balance, however, the majority claim is that the institutions became a rallying point and spiritual sanctuary when the Mau Mau broke out. Even more significantly, some of the churches and schools became oathing centres, their disbandment at the outbreak of the Mau Mau, notwithstanding.<sup>582</sup>

Ninety-four year old Njuguna Mbote, for example, was quite categorical that Mau Mau had direct links with the independent church members whom he points out “...were also KCA followers.”<sup>583</sup> Mbote, a truck driver in Nairobi before and for a short time during the Mau Mau, explained that he was recruited as a member of the Mau Mau while still in Nairobi. Subsequently, he rose to serve as the organisation’s branch treasurer and oath organizer. Not only does he view the Mau Mau as a direct offshoot of the independent schools and churches, but in fact claims that he, along with other stalwarts of the Mau Mau, trained right in these churches.<sup>584</sup> Similarly, John Karanja, a Catholic catechist in the Kigumo location of Murang’a during the Mau Mau, contends that not only had the Mau Mau grown from the independent churches and schools, but also that some of their institutions were used as recruitment venues as well as centres for oathing ceremonies.<sup>585</sup> Karanja further claims that some of those who refused to take the oath were killed in “the safety” of these very churches.<sup>586</sup>

Mburu, however, is even more categorical that independent churches were centres of “subversion.” Nonetheless, he is quick to qualify that this subversion was clearly more pronounced in the lower cadre independent schools and churches. Discussing the role of the evangelists/elders in the dissemination of Christianity in Nyeri between 1903 and 1963, the author states that one such important role for independent schools was to “implant in the hearts of the African Christians the spirit of nationalism and independence.”<sup>587</sup> He argues that this left for a thin line between the agenda of the independent schools and that of political leaders,

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<sup>582</sup> Oral Interview, Njuguna Mbote, Kigumo Location, Murang’a, 10/3/2009.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid.

<sup>585</sup> James Ndung’u Mburu, “The Dissemination of Christianity in Nyeri District 1903-1963 with Special Reference to the Work of Teachers and Evangelists,” MA dissertation, University of Nairobi, 1975, p.235.

<sup>586</sup> Oral Interview, John Karanja, Kigumo Location, Murang’a, 23/1/2009.

<sup>587</sup> Mburu, op.cit., p. 9.

between what government saw as subversion, and what independent adherents considered nationalist.<sup>588</sup> Mburu's examination of these institutions clearly draws a much a closer linkage between the independent church movement and the rise of Mau Mau.

However, perhaps the best evidence yet affirming the critical thread running between the independent churches and the Mau Mau comes from none other than Johana Kunyiha who, for fifteen years, was the president of Kikuyu Independent Schools Association, KISA. In reference to the African Independent Pentecostal Church Association's activities, (hereafter AIPCA) Kunyiha notes that,

...AIPCA used the oath extensively in its institutions and activities. This was done to put 'spiritual force' to the struggle for independence.<sup>589</sup>

The Fort Hall Annual Report for 1952 shores up this position, noting that KISA itself had given "a good deal of trouble" throughout this year. The report is categorical that KISA was "closely linked with Mau Mau, and that oath taking was going on in the KISA schools," in spite of evidence being hard to come by. Nonetheless, it noted, "the results seen in the exodus of children from mission schools was obvious."<sup>590</sup>

Apart from clearly linking the AIPCA to radicalisation of African nationalism, and indeed Mau Mau, Kunyiha points out that the authors of the independent movement had only turned their backs on missionary Christianity, certainly not on God. As he put it, "...we have never said that we have nothing to do with God. We were anti-mission, not anti-God."<sup>591</sup> Being anti-mission, not anti-God, is an oft-quoted statement by the Mau Mau freedom fighters. Welbourn, likewise, supports this premise stating, "If they intended to be independent, they intended also to be Christian, and among their leaders were staunch opponents of the Mau Mau."<sup>592</sup> It is a premise that helps shed some light as to why many missions and schools bore the brunt of the fighters' wrath as shown in the previous chapter of this study.

Henry Mwangi, a resident of Kigumo in Murang'a, while supporting Kunyiha's argument, however, makes a clear distinction between the independent churches, and the African Christian Churches and Schools (hereafter ACC&S) that were widespread in his home area in Kigumo. He

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<sup>588</sup> Ibid.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., p.235.

<sup>590</sup> KNA/ DC/ FH/1/30, Fort Hall Annual Report, 1952, p.14.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>592</sup> F.B. Welbourn, *East African Rebel*, SCM Press ltd, London, 1961, p.133.

argues that, unlike the ACC&S who were “followers of white man’s Christianity,” in the independent churches “we were all for Mau Mau.”<sup>593</sup> He explains that their unstinting support for the Mau Mau was greatly influenced by the fact that “even Kenyatta, the most prominent African leader at the outbreak of the Mau Mau, supported it.”<sup>594</sup>

Mwangi’s explanation, however, rather simplistically attempts to rope Kenyatta onto Mau Mau purely because of his association with KTC. Indeed, the lionisation of Kenyatta’s tenure at KTC, retroactively at times, appears to be part of the myth building that thrust Kenyatta firmly as the spiritual head of the Mau Mau. For instance, Naphtali Migwi, known in Mau Mau circles as Captain Gicuri, and though not a Christian himself made the claim that, the great support the independent churches and schools enjoyed emanated from the fact that their leaders were closely associated with KCA’s leadership “who were the same leaders behind Mau Mau.”<sup>595</sup> Certainly, men like Gicuri were the tough ones, a subaltern class that would not accommodate a gradualist approach to nationalism.

Still, it would appear that freedom fighters of Gicuri’s calibre find comfort in identifying the Mau Mau with the more “sophisticated” nationalists, most likely to show that their revolt was not the unreasoned outfit it was touted to be. Consequently, men like Kenyatta, Mbiyu Koinange, James Beuttah, Gakaara Wanjau, Johanna Kuniya, among others, moulded in a blend of “Africanized Christianity” and nationalistic aspirations, have been “claimed” by the Mau Mau freedom fighters as their own. Yet, there is no gainsaying that, men like Kenyatta were keen to separate their brand of politics from that of the Mau Mau. At a public address in Nakuru in June 1952, and only a few months before KTC itself was closed down in November of the same year, Kenyatta emphatically stated that their best weapon for wresting freedom from colonial rule was not “with a stick, spear or club... but with our new means and that is our intelligence.”<sup>596</sup>

In all, KTC, in many ways, stood apart from the rest of the independent schools. It was home to a strand of radical nationalism, yet believing that “the pen was mightier than the sword.” Its graduates prided themselves in using the skills acquired to navigate the political headwaters. Apa Pant, the only Indian associated with the college, described KTC as a successful experiment, “the centre of a new Kenya where ideas, new experiences and a strong sense of vitality was

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<sup>593</sup> Oral Interview, Henry Mwangi Chege, Kigumo, 2/3/2009.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

<sup>595</sup> Oral Interview, Naphtali Migwi, Kianyangi Village, Manyatta, Embu, 7/1/ 2009.

<sup>596</sup> Quoted in Rawson Macharia, *The Truth About the Trial of Jomo Kenyatta*, Nairobi, Longman, 1991, p.2.

shared.”<sup>597</sup> The “vitality” was, in my view, a crucial part of the spiritual ethos that KTC bequeathed the spirit of the Mau Mau. Nonetheless, Beecher, and other church leaders like him, remained convinced that independent schools, and especially KTC, were breeding grounds for subversion and eventual violence. He was quite categorical that,

Mau Mau had at its service when the *coup d'état* was launched, the support of a whole generation of children who had been trained in the ‘nationalist’ schools and who were in increasing measure indoctrinated with the hatred which had grown into the Mau Mau movement.<sup>598</sup>

The drastic step to close all independent churches and schools in 1953 was informed by the certain belief that they were indeed breeding grounds for the Mau Mau. In one fell swoop, thousands of children attending these schools were left stranded. Nonetheless, the actual numbers affected by this move remained controversial. On the one hand, their sponsors projected huge numbers, undoubtedly to show how heartless government action had been. The government and the missions, on the other, sought to play down the numbers, mindful that they had closed down the schools in an already volatile political situation. One source in the Kikuyu press in 1953, for example, claimed that at the time of the ban, 46,000 children in Kikuyuland had been attending independent schools each day.<sup>599</sup> The government figures, on the other hand, indicated that the number stood at 13, 873.<sup>600</sup>

Missions quickly raised a counter-argument, disputing the figures given by the sponsors of these schools as grossly exaggerated with the aim of drawing public sympathy. The counter-figures that the government and missionaries proffered were based on those of the attendance in the Anglican schools. The line adopted in this argument was that independent schools were poorly funded and understaffed and, therefore, could not possibly make a claim to higher attendance than the much better equipped mission schools. To illustrate the point, a missionary report tabulated figures to show that the attendance in the four main Kikuyu districts of Kiambu, Fort Hall, South Nyeri and Embu stood between 25,000 and 30,000 at the outbreak of the Mau

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<sup>597</sup> Quoted in Muraya, op.cit., p.121.

<sup>598</sup> Quoted in Muraya, op.cit., pp. 81-2.

<sup>599</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/1 7B, Preliminary Draft, “The Independent Schools Among the Kikuyu,” p.2.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

Mau.<sup>601</sup> Furthermore, it showed that, going by the 1949 grants, independent schools had only received a small fraction of funding in comparison to mission schools, an indicator of its lower figures of attendance. In Kiambu alone, Anglican-sponsored schools had received a government grant of 66,600 shillings, while independent schools combined had received a paltry 11,620. In Fort Hall, in the same year, Anglican schools had received 132,418 shillings while the independent ones had only managed 21,123.<sup>602</sup> While the miserly funding was an indication of the low esteem with which the government held these schools, on the surface the missionary source appeared to have presented a credible argument concerning their low enrolment. However, that the missionary report had pegged its figures on what it called “known independent schools in central Kenya,”<sup>603</sup> is pertinent to the argument. This is because many independent schools remained unregistered, meaning that the numbers on paper and those on the ground were quite unmatched. Certainly, they were not as low as missionaries claimed them to be.<sup>604</sup>

The ban was enforced in 1953, and schools asked to choose new sponsors. Re-opening would subsequently only be allowed if their managers agreed to have their institutions affiliated to either the Protestant or the Catholic missions. In the event that the locals wanted neither the Protestant nor the Catholic sponsorship, the schools would then be placed under the direct management of District Education Boards. For example, in Kiambu, the District Commissioner’s report indicated that three schools in the district chose to be placed under missionary sponsorship, four under DEB management, while the others opted for closure. Overall, only thirty-three schools, out of an estimated one hundred and fifty eight, chose closure, a clear indication of how valued education had become.<sup>605</sup> This breakdown also suggests that the number of students in independent schools may indeed not have been as low as the missions and the government had projected. In fact, other studies have since proposed even higher figures than those the independents themselves had provided. Mburu, for one, maintains that at the time of the ban, AIPC had 60,000 pupils in the Central and Rift Valley provinces.<sup>606</sup>

Although the Mau Mau may not have been a direct offshoot of the independent movement, it nonetheless shared important ideological positions sprouted from the seed of nationalism that

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<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>604</sup> See, for example, KNA/ DC/FH/1/30, Fort hall Annual Report, 1952.

<sup>605</sup> KNA /DC/KBU/ Kiambu Annual Report, File 5.

<sup>606</sup> Mburu, op.cit., p. 14.

underscored independent institutions. From a cultural viewpoint, both exhibited a remarkable similarity in their unwavering pursuit of the right to self-determination in politics, culture, and religion. The District Commissioner, Kiambu, had recognized this spirit long before the Mau Mau was ever envisaged. Accordingly, he had cautioned on the potentially detrimental effect it was bound to have on the rule of law. He had noted the following:

I have no longer any doubts that the movement is primarily and consciously nationalistic...Africa for Africans and the elimination of the European is probably the star to which the young Kikuyu hitch their wagon.<sup>607</sup>

Furthermore, the independent institutions, like the Mau Mau, considered missionary endeavour inimical to the aspirations of the struggle. Lonsdale captures this connection well, observing that Mau Mau's theology seems to have come from the independent churches.<sup>608</sup> He specifically picks on the political *nyimbo*, songs, of the 1950s, which the British called "Mau Mau hymns," to illustrate that they were in effect, those of the independent church militants. He observes that the *nyimbo* popularized images not found in the old religion:

Belief in the old God, *Ngai*, the Jehovah of the Old Testament and a political Christ, anger against sorcery, all played a part, coloured by the civic religion of ethnic nationalism...the *nyimbo* were no more anti-Christian than those of any national church that enlists God on its side at a time of war.<sup>609</sup>

All told, and while this study argues that the spirit of the Independent movement fired that of the Mau Mau, to consider the latter a direct offshoot of the independent churches and schools' movement would be tenuous. Had this been the case, Mau Mau would most likely have been a more structured movement in terms of organization and ideology, reflective of such a background, instead of the much more "spontaneous" nature that characterised it.

It is thus surprising that Corfield did not find it contradictory to link, as he did, the Mau Mau directly to the independent schools and churches, and then draw the conclusion that the revolt was mindless violence and irrational response to modernity. As he himself had admitted earlier, although it was clear KISA schools had become the centres of subversion, there was "no concrete evidence" to support claims that these schools were being conducted in a manner

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<sup>607</sup> Quoted in Rosberg and Nottingham, *op.cit.*, p.145.

<sup>608</sup> Lonsdale, "Moral Economy," *op.cit.*, p.443.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*, p.443.



detrimental to the physical and moral welfare of the students.<sup>610</sup> Therefore, in linking the schools directly to Mau Mau, Corfield should have logically found that the rebellion was not only methodical in outlay, but also one that had incubated for a much longer period than the authorities were willing to admit. Moreover, the reason given by government, when it destroyed hundreds of documents and manuscripts belonging to KISA and AIPC after the ban, was that they were “political and seditious.”<sup>611</sup> This hardly fits into his description of a movement that was “an irrational response to modernity,” as he portrayed. His argument was, therefore, contradictory, a parallogism.

The proscription of the independent schools and churches created an immediate windfall for the Protestant and Catholic missions, bringing us to the second strand of Mau Mau linkages to organized religion. Like the displaced pupils of the closed independent schools, the closure of the churches left the members of these churches “orphaned.” Many trooped back to the mission churches. This, to some extent, re-aligned the dynamics of Mau Mau’s relations with mission churches and Christianity. On this score, the Catholic Church did very well for itself.

From the outset, both the Catholic and Protestant missions had strongly deprecated the Mau Mau and all it represented. Their common stand had only gone to affirm to freedom fighters, like Mbiti Kinyonga, the old adage, “*gutiri batiri na mubeberu*,”<sup>612</sup> there is no difference between the priest and the administrator. The Catholic Church, from the start, had sternly warned its members that any involvement with the Mau Mau, particularly partaking of its oaths, would automatically lead to ex-communication. In a letter addressed to all its adherents in May 1952, the bishop of Nyeri, Charles Cavarella, declared that the Mau Mau oath ran against the integrity of the Christian faith. He was unequivocal that no Catholic in his diocese should take the oath even “in face of sure death.”<sup>613</sup> True to his word, Cavarella went ahead and ex-communicated the many Catholics in his jurisdiction who had taken the Mau Mau oath.<sup>614</sup>

The uncompromising stand adopted by the Catholic Church was not anticipated. In comparison to the protestant churches, the Catholic Church was perceived to be the more sympathetic to the political aspirations of the colonized. Indeed, its missionary endeavour in the colony was, all

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<sup>610</sup> Muraya, op.cit., p.84.

<sup>611</sup> Mburu, op.cit., p.292.

<sup>612</sup> Oral Interview, Mbiti Kinyonga, Kithimu Location, Embu, 3/2/ 2009.

<sup>613</sup> Mburu, op.cit., p.237.

<sup>614</sup> Njoroge, op.cit., p.167.

through, one carefully couched to appear sympathetic to the lot of the colonized. This was quite unlike the Anglican Church, closely associated with the colonial rulers, and one which, as Bishop Njenga put it, was in a “grand conspiracy” with the colonial administration to ensure the success of colonial domination. This dual purpose in the Anglican approach had manifested itself in the protestant missions’ efforts to package Christian faith as part of the British cultural heritage, what Njenga described as “Anglicism.”<sup>615</sup> The Catholic Church, conversely, was far ahead in its unparalleled efforts to work within the African cultural milieu. So, why did it show little compassion to fighters whose stated mission was to recover what was stolen from them? The answer appears to lie in perception.

In his analysis of the Institute of the Missionaries of Consolata in Nyeri (hereafter IMC), Mburu examines why Consolata missionaries were perceived to be the more “lenient” and more “tolerant” towards African cultural values. He argues that, in comparison to the more “elitist” Protestant missions, the Catholic missions, like the independent churches, seemed to have found more appeal among the lower classes in society. He is of the view that the socially lower class of African converts resonated well with the backgrounds of the Catholic fathers, particularly those of Italian extract who were themselves largely drawn from the low stratum of the Italian society of peasant farming families. Indeed, he describes the IMC fathers as priests who belonged to a religious congregation in which “poverty and thrift were highly commendable.”<sup>616</sup> He offers this as the reason why they were able to act with tolerance and flexibility towards their African converts. Mburu states that the IMC Fathers fully exploited this social affinity to lure large numbers into their churches without undue worry of the “quality” of the converts.

Furthermore, the uncritical approach to recruitment by the Catholic Church appears to support another argument, that the low literacy level among the Catholic faithful was a direct consequence of this approach. Protestant missions, too, accused the Catholic Church of compromising on church laws and regulations to lure converts and even worse, of using “underhand” and even “unchristian” wiles that set a bad example to the colonized.<sup>617</sup> The warring between the two traditions left little doubt that the Protestants had always regarded themselves the superior of the two.

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<sup>615</sup> Oral Interview, Bishop Peter Njenga, Nairobi, 26/1/2009.

<sup>616</sup> Mburu, *op. cit.*, p.51.

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*

All said, however, the outbreak of Mau Mau paved way for the Catholic Church to make rich pickings from the disbanded independent churches and schools. Bishop John McCarthy, Vicar Apostolic of Zanzibar, writing in 1953 to Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi in Rome, informed him that in Kiambu district alone, the re-distribution of independent schools hugely favoured Catholic missions. He noted that the Catholic Church had acquired ten, the Protestants 4, and the District Education Board 4. Explaining the favourable outcome, he reported that,

The Independent Kikuyu Church, broken and dissolved by the Emergency had elected as a body to come over to the Catholic Church. Places where it was absolutely impossible for us to obtain a foothold or hearing in the past are now open to us...<sup>618</sup>

But, McCarthy's choice of the term, "elected as a body" was clearly an exaggeration, given that the redistribution was not as favourable for the Catholics in other Kikuyu districts. Even for Kiambu, Protestant missions disputed the figures touted by the Catholic Church. In any case, the fact that those who had joined the independent churches in the 1930s and 1940s had done so after de-camping mainly from Protestant mission churches, would quite probably mean that their old reasons for leaving in the first place still held. As a result, the Catholic Church, for reasons outlined above, would still most likely be the favoured destination, a place to feel relatively at home.

Moreover, there were other reasons why the Catholic Church became the preferred destination for independent Christians. When Mau Mau broke out, it had immediately embarked on elaborate social programmes in all its strongholds, offering material assistance to those that were being ignominiously herded into Mau Mau villages. The intervention was welcome relief to harassed communities, even more so because the Church of Scotland Mission, the other prevailing missionary body, required that its African adherents be trained to be self-reliant, whatever the circumstances. However, the "free" goods that the IMC was giving out were not as free as might have appeared. They were, instead, an important part of a well thought-out strategy to attract the recipients into church membership, now that their churches had been closed down. The other missions were especially sceptical that the IMC should give free things such as

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<sup>618</sup> Njoroge, op.cit., p.167.

clothes, foodstuffs and other things, and would ask for nothing in return.<sup>619</sup> They were quick to accuse IMC of ulterior motives in these social welfare programmes, but conveniently overlooked that they themselves had at one time or the other in the past used this same strategy to lure and keep converts.

The result of this standoff was that for the duration of the Mau Mau, this “Catholic approach” of using welfare to ameliorate suffering, but also gain new converts, pushed the Protestant/Catholic rivalry a notch higher. The renewed rivalry was not lost on the faithful, or even more importantly, the Mau Mau. For example, when the Protestant Christian Council of Kenya mounted a massive appeal to its British counterpart to help raise at least £50,000 to support the rehabilitation programme, the Catholic Church reacted sharply, fearing being outdone. Bishop McCarthy quickly asked Rome to make funds available to enable him “to attend to Mau Mau detainees and to the converts in the native reserve.”<sup>620</sup> He made a lengthy case, arguing that,

The Catholic Church must also prove in a practical manner that it is equally interested in their social and spiritual needs, else there is danger of losing thousands of Kikuyus. They, (the Protestants) are at their wits end to devise ways and means to prevent mass movement towards the Catholic Church. Hence the enclosed worldwide appeal launched by the British Council of Churches ostensibly to come to the aid of “a fear-ridden people” but in reality to set up Protestant mission social centres and churches.<sup>621</sup>

Against the backdrop of the Mau Mau, this bare-knuckled approach between the Anglican and the Catholic Church raised hackles even higher. For example, the Catholic Church lost no opportunity to project itself in good stead to beleaguered Kikuyu, intimating that it had little to do with the grievances of the colonized in the first place, and was certainly not responsible for the outbreak the Mau Mau. In Catholic’s favour was that, unlike the CSM and the CMS, it did not feel constrained to deny, at every turn, that their missions were extensions of the administration. As has been noted,

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<sup>619</sup> Mburu, op.cit., p.195.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid., p.179.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

The Irish Holy Ghost and the Italian Consolata has no need to prove that they were part of the British colonial mission. The Holy Ghost fathers... were always foreigners to the colonial rulers of East Africa.<sup>622</sup>

Accordingly, from its vantage position, and with the righteous wind on its back, the Catholic Church could afford to deprecate the Mau Mau while peppering this with magnanimous gestures to the Kikuyu society. Indeed, so bold did the Catholic Church become in its strategy that it had the temerity to call on the “failing Protestant rulers” to seek and redress the conditions that had given rise to the rebellion. It is in this context that Bishop McCarthy argued that indigenous peoples had suffered serious injustices for years.<sup>623</sup> He cautioned, to the gall of an administration striving to quell the revolt, that no blanket condemnation of a people’s effort to redress genuine grievances should be made. His comments on “laudable nationalism” and “the just attempt to air legitimate grievances” in reference to the on-goings in the colony were made against this background.<sup>624</sup> Undoubtedly, while it was a bold statement to make at the height of the Mau Mau, it was, nonetheless, also self-serving, given that the church had continued to make it quite clear to its adherents that any association with the Mau Mau would lead to immediate excommunication.

The warring of the missions exposed an unsavoury side that played on the tragedies of enormous proportions such as was the Mau Mau. For the Catholic Church, this was a new opportunity to make new forays into the large, but hitherto inaccessible, protestant strongholds. Indeed, Bishop McCarthy described Mau Mau as a “blessing in disguise” for the Catholic Church. In his report to Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi, he noted that,

The Kikuyu people were never so friendly; many Protestants are coming into the church and the Mau Mau adherents are giving up the fight and entering the church... they at last begin to distinguish between the ordinary European and government official.<sup>625</sup>

Of what import was this rivalry to the freedom fighters? Did it, in any way, influence or reinforce their perceptions of the missions, especially their using the war to further their own

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<sup>622</sup> Ibid., p.182.

<sup>623</sup> Njoroge, op.cit., p.168.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid, p.169.

agenda? Wamuyu Gakuru speaks on this.<sup>626</sup> Born in Mathira Division of Nyeri in 1934, and with a primary school education of up to standard 4, Wamuyu joined the Mau Mau movement in 1951. A baptised member of the Presbyterian Church at the outbreak of the Mau Mau, Wamuyu, was to grow through the ranks to become one of the few full-fledged women freedom fighters who took to the forest, serving in the Nyandarua and Mount Kenya battalion under the command of General China.<sup>627</sup> According to Wamuyu, her own Christian faith was a major impetus to her joining the ranks of the Mau Mau fighters. She was convinced that the whites were the transgressors and even worse, did not practice what they themselves taught concerning Christian faith. She argues that the white man had stolen the land, killed in the name of restoring security, discriminated against the African, and in the same breath talked about all being equal before God. As she put it, “the evils committed by the white man in God’s name were innumerable, and we never lost sight of that.”<sup>628</sup>

Furthermore, Wamuyu spoke of the many “hymns” composed by the freedom fighters deriding this hypocrisy. One such hymn, loosely translated, expresses scepticism against the Christian faith, and of the white man’s presence in the colony:

And Jesus, who do you say he is? Jesus is just a white man from Britain but they lie to us that he is the son of God. Have you not seen him right here with us, busy harvesting wheat and cabbage in Nyahururu? Well, he has to go back home now, because the price of cabbage has fallen... pray for our heroes in the forest...<sup>629</sup>

Miriam Ruguru, like Wamuyu, points at the contradictions that made illogical the coloniser’s representation of God. Ruguru’s quarrel with Christianity was based on the overt colour bar that was rife everywhere, including in the church. She questioned why, if all were equal before God as the missionaries never tired of teaching, all the top seats in the church were the preserve of the whites. Again, like Wamuyu, she questioned why the white man flouted, with such impunity, “his own commandments” yet blamed the freedom fighters for doing the same. She observes:

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<sup>626</sup> Oral Interview, Wamuyu Gakuru, Nairobi, 11/6/2008.

<sup>627</sup> Margaret Gachihi, “The Role of Women in the Mau Mau,” MA dissertation, University of Nairobi, 1986.

<sup>628</sup> Oral Interview, Wamuyu Gakuru, Nairobi, 11/6/2008.

<sup>629</sup> Oral Interview, Wamuyu Gakuru, Nairobi, 11/6/2008.

They told us you should not kill, yet they killed with impunity...They told us not to steal, yet they stole our land...<sup>630</sup>

To Ruguru, the white man had not even pretended to practice what he preached and, therefore, lacked the moral authority to rule, or tell others what to do. For seventy-five year-old Alice Wambui of Kigumo, Murang'a, and a staunch supporter of Mau Mau, hers was outright cynicism. Wambui, a Catholic then as now, observes that the white man's lifestyle discredited Christianity. She explained:

“Missionaries taught us that we should love one another, even those who oppress us... was this not self-serving? Why did they take our land, discriminate against us, even in God's house?”<sup>631</sup>

In spite of her derision of the white man's example, Wambui, nonetheless, admits that her support for the Mau Mau was driven by many considerations, including self-preservation. She noted that given choice, she would much rather have remained faithful to her Christian faith, arguing that Mau Mau's “legitimate cause” was overshadowed by the vicious methods adopted to recruit and to keep the membership. She adds that while many recruits went along with Mau Mau's bidding, they harboured deep grudges against its organizers. Giving her own example, she pointed out that even though the Mau Mau knew that she was a practising Christian, and did not want to take the oath, they, nonetheless, had forced her to take the oath, not once, but twice. She claims that she had little choice, for the consequences of not doing so in her locale were too terrible to contemplate. She observed that her dilemma was compounded by the fact that her own mother colluded with the Mau Mau to get her to take the oath. As she put, “...it is my own mother who betrayed me, and I was made to take the oath twice.”<sup>632</sup>

Wambui's story typifies that of some of the Christians in Kikuyuland who rode two horses. Such became actors on both sides, torn between their Christian faiths, yet alive to the danger that lay in defying the Mau Mau. For the likes of Wambui, her immediate concern was neither the merits of Christianity nor those of Mau Mau, but the sheer will to survive the war. Branch describes such people as Wambui as holding “soluble allegiances,” arguing that they were among the Kikuyu driven by “their personal experience of violence either towards loyalism or

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<sup>630</sup> Oral Interview, Miriam Ruguru, Kangaara, Kithimu Location, Embu, 5/2/2009.

<sup>631</sup> Oral Interview, Alice Wambui, Kigumo, 28/1/2009.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid.

insurgency.”<sup>633</sup> He notes that such “dealt with the currency of survival than ideology, lending the war its chief characteristic: ambiguity.”<sup>634</sup> This is a good summary of the quandary the Mau Mau put many Christians in Kikuyuland.

Indeed, for Bishop Gitari, the “currency of fear” that the Mau Mau dealt, was its biggest undoing. He argues that the freedom fighters could never justify some of the methods they employed against the population, certainly not the killing of teachers, evangelists, chiefs and the burning down of schools. He argues that the biggest weakness of the Mau Mau was that it eventually turned against its own people, adding, for good measure, that the commandment, “thou shall not kill,” applied equally to both the Mau Mau and its adversaries.<sup>635</sup> He further noted that the Mau Mau, in killing, ceded their moral high ground. His strong views against the strategies adopted by the Mau Mau are only equal to his strong misgivings of the colonial misadventure that had forced the fighters, in the first place, to take up arms. He singled out, by way of example, the way missionaries and the administrators had handled the land and race questions, as well as the inherent contradictions between the biblical teachings and the enslaving nature of colonialism. He pointed out that the scriptures do not support slavery or the superiority of one race over another, and therefore, the failings of colonial rule poisoned what would have otherwise been a great missionary venture in Kenya. As he put it, “missionaries did not let the scriptures speak to the contemporary situation.”

There was one other interesting observation by Gitari. To the question as to whether the shortcomings on the part of the church, or the state, in any way justified the violent actions of the freedom fighters, Gitari was equivocal: as far as Christians in society had failed to use their own knowledge and Christian faith to fight colonial oppression, one could find a rationale as to why violence became an attractive alternative. Gitari was, however, quick to add that peculiar circumstances must always be taken into account. He pointed out that in the Kenya colony case, there lacked “iconic African leadership” as was offered by the likes of Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther or Mahatma Gandhi in their respective times and countries. He noted there was a big void

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<sup>633</sup> Branch, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>635</sup> Oral Interview, David Gitari, Difatlas, Embu, 28/1/2009.



in the colony, and in a resigned tone pointed out that, “instead, we allowed people coming back from the Second World War to lead.”<sup>636</sup>

The other pertinent question this chapter raises centres on the accusations that the freedom fighters’ main targets were Christians, and Christianity. While the freedom fighters’ narratives in this regard are varied, one nonetheless finds a consistency that implies that Christians who suffered in Mau Mau’s hands had committed, in one way or another, an act prejudicial to the freedom fighters. A few such examples illustrate the point. Kihu Murage was arrested and detained for five years at the notorious Manyani Camp.<sup>637</sup> To him, to be a true Mau Mau sympathiser, one had to swear enmity with the white man. To be an active member called for much more, for it was the ultimate sacrifice. Murage, then a staunch member of independent church, noted that swearing enmity with the white man was not difficult. He claims that Christians affiliated to the missions are the ones who had a problem, for they still looked up to missionaries “in all ways,” even when they were at their mercy regarding whether they were retained as members of the church or not. It is the refusal to take the oath, and the frequent “acts of betrayal” against the Mau Mau that got Christians killed, he argued, not their Christian faith. Priscah Njeri, an ex-freedom fighter, and member of the independent church supports the view, arguing “...no Christian was killed for nothing.”<sup>638</sup> Gitu wa Kahengeri, a renowned freedom fighter and detainee, was likewise categorical concerning the fate of Christians in Mau Mau’s hands. He said, “...no person was killed because they were Christians; they were killed because they had betrayed the movement.”<sup>639</sup>

Therefore, what is one to make of the spate of the killings suffered by Christians, especially in 1953 and 1954? Were they all revenge killings? Embu, as noted in chapter 4 of this study, had suffered particularly heavy casualties of teachers and evangelists. Mbiti Kinyonga, an ex-freedom fighter, explains the phenomenon, arguing many of those killed in Embu were Christians who had “two mouths,” an expression he used in reference to Christians turned informants. Kinyonga notes that many of the attacks against Christians were retaliatory strikes against those the Mau Mau suspected had given out information detrimental to the fighters.<sup>640</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

<sup>637</sup> Oral Interview, Kihu Muragu, Kigumo, 2/3/2009.

<sup>638</sup> Oral Interview, Priscah Njeri, Kigumo, 23/1/2009.

<sup>639</sup> Oral Interview, Gitu wa Kahengeri, Berlin, Germany, 9/10/2010.

<sup>640</sup> Oral Interview, Mbiti Kinyonga, Kithimu Location, Embu, 3/2/2009.

Albert Nyaga Kana, who like Kinyonga used the term “two mouths” for Christian informants and other loyalists, emphasized that Christians and non-Christians alike, were attacked only when they were known to have colluded with the government against Mau Mau activities.<sup>641</sup> To Nyaga, informing on the Mau Mau to colonial authorities was never taken lightly. Similarly, “waverers,” especially those who recanted the oath, were equally in trouble with the Mau Mau, for they carried with them some of the vital secrets and operations of the movement.

Furthermore, as Selassio Njeru explained, the government soon began to segregate Christians who confessed to having taken the oath and swiftly took them to *ithamirio*, detention, like everybody else.<sup>642</sup> Consequently, others quickly learnt, and refused to take, or if they had already taken, to confess the oath. Many more who would not take the oath sought refuge in the missions. The Weithaga mission, one of the oldest in Kikuyuland, and Kabare mission, on the footsteps of Mount Kenya, were such shelters for Kikuyu Christians during the Mau Mau.<sup>643</sup> In Embu and its environs, many Christians who would not take the Mau Mau oath sought refuge at the Kigari mission. Kigari, thence, earned itself the name *iria ntune*, the Red Sea, symbolic of the safe haven the Red Sea became for fleeing Israelites. Ileri Ndavano was, however, not so charitable to these fleeing Christians recalling in mirth that such Christians ran to hide behind the white missionaries’ skirts. He described such Christians as a short-sighted lot who failed to see that the days of the white man in Kenya were numbered, and freedom all but won.<sup>644</sup>

Njeri’s narrative of imprisonment in Kamiti, Kajiado, and eventually, Kiharu prison, offers the drift of the freedom fighters’ reasoning concerning the fate of Christians.<sup>645</sup> She explained that given the odds facing the freedom fighters, there was little choice but to adopt an uncompromising approach. She argued that the Mau Mau could not afford to rationalize, saying, “...this one is a Christian and so it does not matter what they are up to.” On the contrary, the much easier option was to treat all those who refused to take the oath as sell-outs, and even to kill the more intransigent ones. Njeri recounted that in her locality, Kigumo, in Murang’a, the supporters of the Mau Mau were largely also followers of the African Christian Churches and Schools, or of the Independent Church, both of which had strong roots here and which, she

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<sup>641</sup> Oral Interview, Albert Nyaga Kana, Ndiuri, Embu, 3/2/2009/

<sup>642</sup> Oral Interview, SalessioNjeru, Nguiri, Embu, 4/2/2009.

<sup>643</sup> The author’s own father, Reverend Eshban Gitura Githinji served in both missions during the Mau Mau.

<sup>644</sup> Oral Interview, Ileri Ndavano, Ngimari, Embu, 6/2/2009.

<sup>645</sup> Oral Interview, Priscah Njeri, Kigumo Location, Murang’a, 23/1/2009.

reasons, “were already more associated with freedom struggle within their own churches.”<sup>646</sup> She points out that the fact that many simply went back to these churches after the struggle was evidence that many Mau Mau followers were never against Christian faith, as such.

Other ex-freedom fighters, in what appears to be in defence against accusations of the wanton killing of Christians, pointed out that there were many Christians who refused to take the oath but were, nevertheless, not harmed. However, to refuse the oath, to deride the movement and to inform on the Mau Mau, was to court trouble. The case of Hosea at Lari, in Kiambu, illustrates the point.<sup>647</sup> Hosea was a staunch Christian, well known throughout Lari. He was one of the few Christians who continued to preach freely even in the most dangerous of times without coming to any harm. Hosea’s apparent immunity lay in the fact that, never once was he publicly heard to speak a word against the Mau Mau. The Lari informants narrating Hosea’s story agreed that from the immunity Hosea enjoyed it was *mucene*, “loose talk,” that got Christians in trouble.<sup>648</sup> Kiarago Njoka concurs, noting that the fighters were not hard to please; “...just telling them (the fighters), that you prayed for them was enough to be in their good books.”<sup>649</sup>

The story of “Ganthon and Rebekah,” whose double murders only compares to that of Lari Massacre and the Ruck family in terms of the publicity it generated both locally and abroad, is anecdotal. This staunch revival Christian couple met their fate at their home in Njumbi, a village perched on the shoulders of Nyandarua, the Aberdare range of mountains. The locale was a well-known Mau Mau hotbed. Wiseman narrates that the two faithful Christians were murdered by the Mau Mau for “non-cooperation and for refusing to take the oath.”<sup>650</sup> However, it emerges that earlier in the day Rebekah had encountered “weary British policemen” who had stopped at the village. She had offered them tea, as “Christian charity.” While Wiseman suggests that it is this charity that cost the couple’s lives, to the Mau Mau fighters, to entertain “Johnnies,” as the Mau Mau called the young British soldiers hunting them down, was unimaginable, an act of betrayal. After all, who knows what else the couple might have divulged to the soldiers? Ganthon and Rebekah lie buried at the edge of a church plot in Njumbi.

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<sup>646</sup> Ibid.

<sup>647</sup> Oral Interview, Grace Ngugi Waweru, Muchiri Gakobo, Charles Mbugua Munyuko, and George Mage, Lari, January 2009.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid.

<sup>649</sup> Oral Interview, Kiarago Njoka, Ngimari Location, Embu, 2/2/2009.

<sup>650</sup> E.M. Wiseman, *Kikuyu Martyrs*, London, Highway Press, 1958.

Finally, we shall briefly examine here a second charge against the Mau Mau that is core to the concept of faith and nationalism. The British charged the Mau Mau with anti-Christian belief.<sup>651</sup> Lonsdale provides a useful framework within which we can evaluate the significance of this charge to the issues raised in this study. He argues that to accuse Mau Mau of anti-Christian belief raises two fundamental questions; the first is whether the idea of religious war stands to scrutiny stripped of its propaganda. The second is whether the conflict, if such it was, hinges on the nature of poverty and its remedies.<sup>652</sup> On both counts, Lonsdale's conclusion is a firm no. He argues that the new religions, like the old, were not systematic but heterodox; not systematically opposed, but overlapped, addressing different problems in human condition.<sup>653</sup> In addition, Lonsdale identifies not one, but three "Christianities" that were critical to the Mau Mau. These were, that of the Kikuyu establishment (largely Anglican and Presbyterian), Pentecostal Christianity, comprising the two Kikuyu Christianities of *Akurinu* and *Dini ya Yesu Kristu* (both of which the whites referred to as sects), and the revival that swept through the protestant churches of East Africa from the late 1930s.<sup>654</sup> He contends that Mau Mau's relation with each of these three Christianities was governed by the views of each on contract of civic virtue between rich and poor. Of the three, however, he dismisses two, the *dinis* and the revival, as having been hostile to the Mau Mau and, therefore, not politically helpful to the poor.<sup>655</sup> Furthermore, he argues that, none of the three main Kikuyu Christianities, nor the eclecticism of Mau Mau, possessed a concept of structural sin that might have demanded justice rather than patronage for the poor.<sup>656</sup> He maintains that this is why the violence of the Mau Mau shocked liberal reforms of property and labour law into motion, and the easing racial restrictions on market and political rights.

In spite of the fact that Lonsdale delimits Mau Mau's relationship with the three Christianities to that of class contestation, he nonetheless makes an interesting proposition concerning the Christianity of the Kikuyu establishment, as represented by the two denominations-Anglican and Presbyterian. He is of the view that, however vigorously the missionaries would deny, the Mau Mau owed much to this Christianity, arguing that Establishment Christianity was

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<sup>651</sup> Lonsdale, "Moral Economy," op.cit p.441.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid., p.441.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid, p.440.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid., p.444.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid., p.441.

worldly in belief and practice and conventionally Kikuyu in its estimate of wealth. As such, being a member was considered an entry-point to a well-paid job, and to judge by the growing number of Christian chiefs, to political office.<sup>657</sup> As a church that “preached salvation but encouraged improvement in all spheres that symbolized progress,”<sup>658</sup> Establishment Christianity opened all manner of possibilities to the Kikuyu society, he argues. Moreover, Lonsdale contends that it was natural for Establishment Christianity to be as materialist as the old religion, with the two enjoying an easy syncretism that missionaries deplored, while expecting of their adherents a purer dependence on Grace than their own.<sup>659</sup> Hence, the author suggests, it was hypocritical on the part of Establishment Christianity in its judgment on both the worldliness of its followers and the evil of Mau Mau. He terms this as misplaced, for it measured both against an ideal faith, not the one they had to live themselves.<sup>660</sup>

How does this framework speak to this study? The architects of the Mau Mau may not have conceptualised a sophisticated model of how they related to Lonsdale’s “three Christianities.” However, their voices as depicted in this chapter, satisfactorily demonstrates that they clearly understood that a church so steeped in the imperial agenda had not the moral authority to turn around and charge them, the fighters, of anti-Christian belief. To the Mau Mau, the cry for land and freedom was a cry of miscarried justice by a colonial state of which missionaries were an integral part. Violence had beckoned because of the colonial fraternity’s, and especially, Establishment Christianity’s “inability to enter the peasant world of personal misfortune.”<sup>661</sup> The conviction by the freedom fighters of the rightness of their cause gave them the moral ground. They believed that there was nothing unchristian, or ungodly, in fighting for justice and freedom. They had done their part and given their very best in the faith that “God helps a person when he is helping himself.”<sup>662</sup> Indeed, Kibicho proposes that Mau Mau were the better Christians in comparison to those condemning them, if only because they fought for justice and freedom!<sup>663</sup> Even zealous Christians, and anti-Mau Mau crusaders like Obadiah Kariuki, acknowledged that grave colonial injustices had been committed, and that their vehement opposition to the Mau

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<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.

<sup>662</sup> Kibicho, op.cit., p.153.

<sup>663</sup> Kibicho, op.cit., p.157.

Mau “did not blind us to the fact that we had been subjected to a reign of terror during colonial times and we had all suffered together, Christian or non-Christian.”<sup>664</sup> Therefore, to charge Mau Mau of anti-Christian belief is, in my view, to lay a mischarge. Missionary Christianity taught the power of the Word, but was, in fact, men of power in the world, “teaching Christianity while practising imperialism.”<sup>665</sup> This left them with little moral authority that would have allowed them to turn round and accuse the Mau Mau of anti-Christian belief.

Syncretism in the Mau Mau has further been used as evidence of its unchristian belief. It has also been viewed as a manifestation that her hopes were couched in a purposive, historical tradition that owed much to mission Christianity. It was primarily a political faith.<sup>666</sup> Freedom fighters were able to separate the Christian message from its bearers and use what served them in the Christian message and its symbolisms. Githige has argued at length, that the religious factor in the Mau Mau was largely, but not solely, based on traditional Kikuyu symbols, rituals and other practices.<sup>667</sup> Leakey, on his part, described Mau Mau as a religion exhibiting “a very strange blend of pseudo-Christianity and utter paganism.”<sup>668</sup> To Bewes, on the other hand, Mau Mau was a revival of “the old pagan religion adapted for political and national gods of the Mau Mau.”<sup>669</sup> Others yet viewed the revolt as a resurgence of the old pagan faith, reacting not only against western civilization, but also against a new religion that cannot and will not come to terms with it. I would venture, however, that the reason why whites in the colony, and especially missionaries, considered the revolt a manifestation of “the old pagan religion,” was that they could not countenance the idea of a revolt such as Mau Mau enjoining itself in any way to Christianity.

Indeed, Terence Ranger makes an interesting commentary concerning the efforts to associate Mau Mau with “the old pagan religion.” He argues that, by the time the revolt broke out, the Kikuyu were already a deeply Christianised society. Consequently, there could be no formal linkage between Mau Mau and traditional religion. Ranger further argues that the Kikuyu had been so profoundly influenced by missions and independent Christianity, that they had little but

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<sup>664</sup> Kariuki, *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya*, pp. 77-8

<sup>665</sup> Quoted in Lonsdale, “Moral Economy,” op.cit., p.442.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid., p. 443.

<sup>667</sup> Renison Githige, “The Religious Factor in Mau Mau With Particular Reference to Mau Mau Oaths,” MA Dissertation, University of Nairobi, 1978, p.13.

<sup>668</sup> L.S.B. Leakey, *Defeating Mau Mau Mau*, London, 1954, p.48.

<sup>669</sup> Bewes, *Kikuyu Conflict*, p.18.

the most marginal religious traditions to draw on, by the time Mau Mau came to existence.<sup>670</sup> However, Ranger appears to both generalise, and underestimate, Mau Mau's capacity and ingenuity in building an ideological base for their movement using both the old and the new.

Yet, the advantages of using the "old" even more than the "new" was not lost on fighters fighting a war against colonial oppression. While it is a fact that many of the freedom fighters, including a good number of its top leaders like Dedan Kimathi (a professing Presbyterian), Stanley Mathenge, Waruhiu Itote, Karari Njama, among others, were not shy to associate themselves with Christianity, they were, nonetheless, keen to use Christian symbols alongside the "old" in the form of traditional religious rituals. The daily prayers held facing Mount Kenya, the sacrifices under the sacred trees in the traditional Kikuyu way, the oaths, and hymns of resistance against colonial enslavement and the heroes of such resistance, all had a strong traditional flavour. Freedom fighters entreated *Ngai*, God, of Gikuyu and Mumbi daily, reminding Him in their prayers and songs that their victory would be His victory and their defeat His defeat.<sup>671</sup>

Thus, Mau Mau blended the old and the new by picking from Christianity and the Gikuyu traditional religion only those patterns and symbols that spoke to their situation. This, in my view, was an endeavour to build an ideological base for the movement. Indeed, reverting to tradition rituals arguably served a political purpose; it was a subtle message that said traditional religion was not of any less standing than Christianity, the faith of their adversary. In a sense, this was a throwback to cultural nationalism of the 1930s, which, arguably, made the Mau Mau, in this respect, as much a cultural protest as it was a liberation movement.

Moreover, the use of songs, *nyimbo*, dubbed "Mau Mau hymns," (because their lyrics were sung to Christian hymn tunes), can also be classified within the range of such attempts to build an ideological base. The songs served a multiple purpose; they refreshed politics in hymn tunes, a practical approach for a revolt whose membership was widely illiterate. They also engendered a feeling of solidarity and sought to legitimise the claims made on land, *Ndemi na Mathathi*, an age when all land belonged to the society.<sup>672</sup> They spoke of an idyllic past when each was their brother's keeper, a rallying call for solidarity as well as a jibe against loyalists who had thrown in

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<sup>670</sup> Quoted in Maloba, op.cit., p.198.

<sup>671</sup> Kibicho, op.cit., pp.158-9.

<sup>672</sup> See, for example, Maina wa Kinyatti, (ed.) *Thunder From the Mountain: Mau Mau Patriotic Songs*, Zed Press, 1980.

their lot with the “enemy.”<sup>673</sup> In addition, the songs were full of biblical-but Kikuyu-calls to good behaviour, eliciting the suggestion that they were a political manifesto, a throwback to those of the independent church militants.<sup>674</sup> As such, they were not any more anti-Christian than those of any national church that enlists God on its side in times of war.<sup>675</sup> Kinyatti’s study of these songs, in my view, satisfactorily demonstrates their ideological content and purpose.<sup>676</sup> Even the oaths, which the missionaries and many Kikuyu Christians abhorred, and which clearly remain a grey area in Mau Mau scholarship, nonetheless allow us a glimpse into their critical niche in the revolt as a core tool of war for the freedom fighters. Their primary purpose was to garner loyalty for the cause, as well as morph a religious ideology that would strengthen the peoples’ resolve and commitment to the movement. The passion they naturally aroused from the white community had a lot to do with the images they conjured of the occult, and which they, the whites, could only make a groping explanation of, from the little they could glean from outside. Lonsdale’s is perhaps the most succinct expression of the mystique behind the Mau Mau oaths when he argues that, “they were not any more anti-Christian than they were alternatives to it in a magical field that missionaries would not enter.”<sup>677</sup>

In constructing a religious ideology, Mau Mau simply joined a myriad of resistances across Africa where claims to sovereignty were counteracted, and at times out-rightly thwarted by religious ideology. This is true of the Maji Maji rebellion against the Germans in Tanganyika in 1905/6, the Mwari cult in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), the Chimurenga in Matabeleland that lasted from March to December 1896, among others. In Kenya, the Mumbo cult, the Nomiya Luo church of John Owalo, and even Masinde’s *dini*, are all pertinent examples of religious resistances that revived aspects of traditional religion and combined them with ideas borrowed from Christianity.<sup>678</sup> Their responses were an expression of religious creativity and cultural integration.<sup>679</sup> Mau Mau conformed to this framework, and to argue that it had no ideological base is, therefore, tenuous.

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<sup>673</sup> Oral Interview Wamuyu Gakuru, 11/6/2008.

<sup>674</sup> Lonsdale, op.cit., p.443.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid., p.443.

<sup>676</sup> Kinyatti, op.cit.

<sup>677</sup> Lonsdale, op.cit., p 442-3.

<sup>678</sup> Asare Opoku, “Religion in Africa During the Colonial Era,” in A. Adu Boahen, ed. *General History of Africa, Vol. II, Africa Under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, Heinemann, UNESCO, 1985, p. 516.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid, p.533.



We end where we began by making two, but related, conclusions derived from the two major issues set out at the beginning. First, the freedom fighters' quarrel with Christianity was primarily a projection of its disaffection with the bearers of its message, not necessarily the message itself. The evidence adduced shows that many of the freedom fighters had at one point or the other associated, or continued to associate themselves with Christian symbolisms. The syncretism that characterised the religious aspect of the Mau Mau supports this premise. Secondly, the missionary view, that it was not for nothing that Christians encountered harm, or that Christians were "marked men," does not contradict the first observation. On the contrary, it bolsters the view that freedom fighters saw in Christians, who overtly opposed the Mau Mau, as the face of the enemy. Therefore, Christians who suffered in the hands of the Mau Mau appear to have been largely those they deemed to have carried out treacherous acts. For example, that Christians had offered substantial information on the Mau Mau, especially in the initial days of the revolt, was an open secret. In fact, it was on record that those who informed the police and helped them with their task were nearly all Christians and knew that by doing so they would attract reprisals upon their own heads. As a result, the African Christian had to bear the charge of disloyalty and treachery to his people, if he remained faithful to the church.<sup>680</sup> These were wilful acts on the part of these Christians, driven by the conviction of their Christian faith, or in the belief that Mau Mau was truly evil and had to be curbed at all costs. The reprisals meted against such Christians were interpreted as an attack against the church and Christianity. Yet, it is a thought provoking observation that, had Mau Mau leaders ordered a general attack on the churches, or all Christians, surely the casualties would surely have been far greater. As it were, relatively few African clergy lost their lives.<sup>681</sup>

All told, the engagement between Mau Mau and Christianity was complex. It was certainly more complex than Archbishop Beecher's' graphic description of the engagement as "...warfare of ideologies, not of black against white, but of those who believe in things honest, pure, lovely, and of good report, against up surging of principalities, powers, world-rulers of this darkness, and spiritual hosts of wickedness."<sup>682</sup> Nor was the Mau Mau the simplistic religious concoction

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<sup>680</sup> ACK Archive CCK/12/1/7B, Memorandum No.7, Hewitt to Warren, 25/1/1953.

<sup>681</sup> Lonsdale, op.cit., p.447.

<sup>682</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/79, Mau Mau Memorandum, 1952-4.

some whites made it out to be, with Jomo as the central figure, and the Europeans as the devil. It was indeed a far more complex affair as this chapter has endeavoured to show.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REHABILITATION AND THE ONSET OF INDIGENIZATION**

By 1956, the active phase of the Mau Mau revolt had ended. The Central Province Annual Report for this year captures the Administration's general relief that Mau Mau had been reduced to two hundred and seventy two hunted men, struggling for survival and no longer a threat to life and property.<sup>683</sup> While the method used to arrive at such a definite figure is difficult to vouch for, given the vast arena in which the Mau Mau operated, there can be no doubt that three years after its onset, the tide had irreversibly turned against the freedom fighters. Indeed, the capture of Dedan Kimathi in November 1956 only marked the symbolic end of the Mau Mau, though the emergency regulations remained in force, and the State of Emergency not lifted until 1960.

With the military phase behind, both the administration, and the church, immediately embarked on rehabilitation programmes. This marked the onset of a reconstructive phase around the physical, familial and spiritual handicaps that had come with the rebellion. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the colonial administration had begun to institute fundamental changes in the socio-economic and political arena well before the revolt had been fully quelled. This chapter will examine the rehabilitation process on two, but complementary levels; the administrative, encompassing a raft of government-sponsored programmes on a wide-range of socio-economic and political concerns, and that by the church, aimed at strengthening and rehabilitating church membership, especially in the areas most affected by the Mau Mau. In tandem with rehabilitation, the post-Mau Mau era to 1960 saw the African church make remarkable gains in devolution from a missionary, to a more indigenized church leadership.

For the colonial administration, rehabilitation assumed three trajectories: re-construction, re-absorption, and re-settlement. These measures were rolled out as soon as the initiative had passed to government security forces, though rehabilitation had started a year earlier, with the War Council's drastic decision in June 1954 to implement villagisation throughout the Kikuyu reserves.<sup>684</sup> The idea of villagisation itself was borrowed from General Templar's experiment in Malaya, where the method of barbed-wire encircled villages had been effectively used as a tool

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<sup>683</sup> KNA /VQ /16/43, Central Province Annual Report 1956, p.1

<sup>684</sup> Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2005, p.235.

of war to suppress the communist threat in the early 1950s.<sup>685</sup> In the Kenya colony, after the unexpectedly strong show by the Mau Mau in the first two years of the revolt, the prevailing opinion in the administration was that the fighters were only able to hold out because they enjoyed the support of a well organised, and extensive, passive wing. Consequently, from 1954, the administration began to put into place draconian measures, aimed at dismantling the passive wing through intensified control of the Kikuyu rural population.

Nonetheless, while villagisation became the linchpin in countering civilian support for the Mau Mau, it also turned out to be one the most contentious political issues throughout its implementation phase and beyond. This is because, though the government gave assurances that the programme's purpose was to protect the Kikuyu from Mau Mau "terrorists," it soon became quite clear that there was a more fundamental objective, which was to contain the Kikuyu population. A report specific to Embu, enumerating the "many advantages" accruing from villagisation, gave away government's true intentions. The report highlighted the following:

First, there can be no doubt that the villages have enabled the government to impose close control over the population in a way which could never before have been contemplated. Secondly, they have provided an atmosphere of security in which the growth of anti-terrorist spirit has prospered. Thirdly, and as a result of anti-terrorist spirit, Mau Mau gangs have not only lost support of the population, but have been made to feel the consequences of raiding villages for arms and supplies.<sup>686</sup>

Quite clearly, these "advantages" if such they were, were heavily weighted in government's favour in the war against the Mau Mau. Incontrovertibly, the real intention was to create a watertight counter-insurgency strategy aimed at cutting off the rebels, while at the same time, punishing, or as the administration preferred to call it, "teaching a lesson" Mau Mau supporters. Therefore, faced with the serious problems of concealment of terrorists and supply of food to

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<sup>685</sup> Ibid.

<sup>686</sup> KNA /VQ /16/16/43, Central Province Annual Report, 1956.

them, and owing to the scattered nature of households, the administration began to place the inhabitants of these areas in “concentrated villages.” However, even as it expressed “regret” that the speedy implementation of the whole programme had led “somewhat to the detriment of the usual health measures,”<sup>687</sup> a cursory glance at the 1954 Annual Report for central province shows a government that had dropped all pretence at philanthropy and busy drumming up support for what was clearly an unwelcome programme.

The public outcry over the harsh and often crude methods used to herd the Kikuyu into villages was so huge, that the administration found it necessary to mount a vigorous campaign, extolling the virtues of the programme even before it had taken off. It is not just those directly affected who were outraged at the variance between government’s stated intentions concerning the implementation of villagisation and the reality on the ground. Liberal British parliamentarians took up the matter, decrying the colonial administration’s extreme and often inhuman measures in dealing with the general Kikuyu population. The administration, on its part, enumerated the major benefits that came with villagisation. It pointed out that the programme offered a “golden opportunity” to inculcate in the inhabitants sociological, agricultural and other aspects of adult education, “thus doing much to ensure that the Mau Mau era was rapidly succeeded by one in which there was respect for Government’s teachings.”<sup>688</sup> It singled out for praise the Red Cross workers and Community Development Officers for their noble work in “distributing milk and protein foods, thus restoring half-starved children.”<sup>689</sup> Nonetheless, these “noble intentions” did little to mollify the newly created villagers. For example, in Kiambaa and Ndumberi, two sub-locations of Kiambu district, there was so much resistance to villagisation that a form of oath was administered to the residents as a vow that they would get out of these villages within three months.<sup>690</sup>

Villages were clearly not natural to the lifestyles of their unwilling inhabitants, (Canon Bewes called villagisation “that horrible word!”). It forced families to abandon their farms and their other daily self-regulating schedules for an alien arrangement. The living spaces in the villages

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<sup>687</sup> KNA/ VQ//103 Central Province Annual Report, 1956.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid.

<sup>690</sup> KNA/ DC/KBU/1/45.

were crowded, and totally lacking in privacy. Furthermore, the unsanitary conditions that quite often posed serious health hazards to the inhabitants were simply appalling. Those who experienced life in the Mau Mau villages attest that they were often places of boundless stress and hunger, quite contrary to the boundless wherewithal and serenity that the government bragged of.

In addition, the unnatural setting of the villages posed a major headache even to the Administration. There was considerable alarm in administrative circles that their inauguration as a District-wide plan “so contrary to a tribe with individualistic rather than gregarious habits had to be carefully monitored.”<sup>691</sup> One of the fears expressed was the ever-present danger of these villages becoming “rural slums.” Nonetheless, and in spite of these hurdles, the government pressed on with the massive undertaking, hoping against all odds that they would become “acceptable in the long-term.”<sup>692</sup> Herein was an inadvertent admission that villagisation was not intended as temporary a measure as the administration had tried to project initially.

In introducing what was clearly a “revolutionary proposition to African ideas in Eastern Africa” while at the same time extolling its virtues, the administration revealed the unease of their undertaking.<sup>693</sup> Even more tellingly, the mixed signals over the true purpose of villagisation allude to the disquiet that the Mau Mau had occasioned on the carefully crafted plans for the colony’s future as a White Man’s Country. Indeed, herding whole populations into “Mau Mau villages” revealed the underbelly of an administration caught in a quandary of wanting to appear benevolent to its charges, while jealously guarding its paramount status, and long-range plans for its white residents at the same time. Elkins, in her study, exposes the deceit behind the concept of benevolence, insisting that the real face of British colonialism in Kenya was grim, inhuman, and riddled with hypocrisy. Accordingly, Elkins describes Mau Mau villages as simply one huge detention camp, a *Gulag*, for the whole of the rural Kikuyu population. She vividly describes the villages noting that,

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<sup>691</sup> KNA/ VQ/16/103, Central Province Annual Report, 1956, p.4.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid.

...they were surrounded by barbed wire and spiked trenches, heavily guarded by home guards and watch-towers, and routinized by sirens and daily forced labour.<sup>694</sup>

She argues that while the villages certainly helped the government to sever the supply lines to the forest, this was only one aspect of their broader functions.<sup>695</sup> She further notes:

Villages were all but detention in name meant to serve a dual purpose for the colonial government at a time when its men on the spot wondered how they were going to break hundreds of thousands of so-called lesser Mau Mau adherents, mostly women, children and the elderly.<sup>696</sup>

Undoubtedly, the government would have loved to incarcerate the thousands of Kikuyu who had admitted to having taken the oath. The impracticability of that option, however, led to the next best option, and that was to detain the Kikuyu in villages. Barely eighteen months after the administration rolled out the programme, in central province alone, 1,050, 899 Kikuyu had been removed from their scattered homesteads and herded into 804 villages consisting of some 230,000 huts. In Nyeri District alone, there were nearly 200 villages by December 1955.<sup>697</sup>

If villagisation was meant to cripple the operations of the Mau Mau, it certainly served its purpose, more so for the locales bordering Mount Kenya and the Aberdare from where most of the fighters operated. Karari Njama recalls the disastrous impact of villagisation on Mau Mau strategies, observing that, while fighters were still willing to persevere and continue to fight, more than half of the people in the reserve had become tired and only longed for peace. He notes that villagers had experienced “dreadful torture, collective punishments, disgraceful and

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<sup>694</sup> Elkins, *op.cit.*, p.237.

<sup>695</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>696</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>697</sup> KNA /VQ /16/103, Central Province Annual Report, 1956. Also, O.B.E Hughes, “Villages in Kikuyu Country,” in *Journal of African Administration*, H.M.S.O, London, Vol. VIII, No. 4, October 1956.

miserable life in the concentrated and unsanitary camps in which hunger and starvation was decreasing our population at Government's supervision."<sup>698</sup>

In all, concerning villages, while the shooting war might have all but ended by 1954, there is no doubt that this phase opened up a new war-front that involved the control of the minds and hearts of the Kikuyu. Taking the war beyond the military, to the civilian arena, is a clear indication that Mau Mau's legacy must similarly be judged beyond military outcomes alone.

Land consolidation was the second trajectory at rehabilitation. In Kikuyuland, land consolidation had started on a sporadic basis in the late 1940s. It was adopted by Hughes in Nyeri, in 1953, and by J. Pinney in Murang'a, in 1954. The outbreak of the Mau Mau had, however, slowed down the whole process, and eventually brought it to a complete halt, as the government trained all its energies on containing the Mau Mau. Furthermore, the declaration of State of Emergency had compounded the problem, as hundreds of repatriates from the Rift Valley, and even Uganda and Tanganyika, were unceremoniously dumped back into their home districts, places that they had long ceased to make any claims in terms of land holdings. For this, among other reasons related to the Mau Mau, further pilot consolidation schemes were only re-started in 1955 in Nyeri, Fort Hall and Kiambu.

In this second round, however, land consolidation was retaken up as part of the larger, and urgent, measures at rehabilitation. For one, the government was anxious to show that the restarted programmes were government-initiated, and in no way tied to the demands of the freedom fighters. This was a deliberate effort on government's part to "pull the rug" under the Mau Mau. Even more importantly, however, the urgency in the land reforms seen from 1955 was pegged to government's renewed efforts to crush the Mau Mau through the forfeiture of land belonging to "terrorists." It was a punitive measure, a body blow against the audacity of "terrorists" who had challenged the government over land and settler supremacy.

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<sup>698</sup> Donald Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau From Within: An Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt*, London, 1966, p.436.



However, unlike villagisation, the obvious benefits accruing from land consolidation made it an immediately popular initiative and a welcome diversion from the politics that had beleaguered the Kikuyu society for far too long. Certainly, for land-starved Kikuyu, no issue was more important, nor had caused as much intrigue as that of *ithaka*, land. Mau Mau freedom fighters had demonstrated this by taking up arms against those that had disinherited them. This is why land adjudication/consolidation caused much excitement, for receiving a deed to the land, which was at the heart of land consolidation, was the ultimate proof of individual ownership. As the government noted of Kiambu, but which was easily true of the three Kikuyu districts, “the realization that the land consolidation committees are now finally adjudicating on all claims, has caused the Kiambu Kikuyu to rise to the occasion magnificently.”<sup>699</sup> Kiambu was singled out for mention because it was in a unique position given its proximity to government’s administrative seat, Nairobi. Besides, a large number from its locations, such as Kiambaa, Dagoretti and Kikuyu, were employed or lived on their wits in Nairobi.<sup>700</sup> Hence, the prospects of land consolidation for Kiambu brought great hopes to its residents that this would not only increase individual enterprise, but also create new employment opportunities for workers who had little or no land of their own.

The actual process of land consolidation itself involved bringing scattered strips of land into single holdings and issuing registered freehold titles to individuals.<sup>701</sup> This was part of the Swynnerton Plan, a set of recommendations to intensify the development of African agriculture in Kenya as a direct response to the Emergency.<sup>702</sup> The colonial administration had commissioned, in 1953, R.J.M Swynnerton, the Assistant Director of Agriculture, to draw and oversee the programme. Swynnerton underscored the need to reverse former government policy so that the “able and energetic or rich Africans” would be able to acquire more land and “bad or poor farmers” less, creating a landed and land-poor class. He had rationalised this deliberate differentiation as “a normal step in the evolution of a country.”<sup>703</sup> The larger leaseholders would

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<sup>699</sup> KNA/ DC/KBU/1/45.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

<sup>701</sup> Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism*, London, Heinemann, 1975, p.52-3.

<sup>702</sup> R.J.M Swynnerton, *A Plan to Intensify the Development of Agriculture in Kenya*, Government Printer, Nairobi, 1955, p10.

<sup>703</sup> Leys op.cit., p.53.

then be able to enhance commercial agriculture by way of borrowing from commercial banks, or from the government on the strength and security of their titles.<sup>704</sup> It was a plan that held much promise, but also misgivings.

By 1957, the process of land consolidation had largely been completed in the three Kikuyu districts. It was quickly followed by the provision of extension services and credit, and even more importantly, the removal of the ban on African-grown coffee. These developments had dramatic results.<sup>705</sup> In Kiambu alone, by the end of 1957, virtually the whole district had been “fragment-gathered,” and 101,000 acres of new farms demarcated. Besides, the exercise yielded useful statistics; it showed, for example, that the average landholder in Kiambu owned 5.3 acres, and that the average number of separate pieces scattered round the District were eight.<sup>706</sup> From these figures, it was obvious that the economic and agricultural benefits of bringing all these strips together were tremendous. Indeed, the dramatic transformation that followed the programme was all the evidence required to confirm that land consolidation was indubitably a wonderful economic stimulus; the value of recorded output in the three Kikuyu Districts dramatically rose from 5.2 million pounds in 1955 to 14.0 million in 1964, coffee alone accounting for 55 per cent increase.<sup>707</sup> By the end of 1956, 14,000 acres were being “fragment-gathered each single week.”<sup>708</sup> So successful was the programme that in Kiambu District, the targets for its completion were brought forward from the originally contemplated 1959.

In spite of the dramatically positive economic indicators that came with land consolidation, its dimmer side as a “punishment” to the freedom fighters was glaring. For example, in Fort Hall, the Provincial Commissioner signed orders in respect of 581 parcels of land while 306 more were prepared for forfeiture in 1956 alone. The government noted in its report that, while the forfeiture of land did not deal a knockout blow to the Mau Mau rebellion which some had hoped, “it will undoubtedly have a salutary long term effect.”<sup>709</sup> Clearly, besides ameliorating the

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<sup>704</sup> Ibid.

<sup>705</sup> KNA/ DC /KBU/1/45.

<sup>706</sup> Ibid.

<sup>707</sup> Quoted in M.P.K Sorrenson, *Land Reform in Kikuyu Country: A Study in Government Policy*, London, OUP, 1970, p.171.

<sup>708</sup> KNA/ DC/KBU/1/45, Kiambu Annual Report, 1956.

<sup>709</sup> KNA/ DC/FH/1/35, Annual Report, 1956.

perennial discontent over land issues, political exigencies had fuelled the urgency witnessed in the land exercise from 1955. Initially, the promise of more land, or better land was used as a bait to prod the particularly “bad areas” towards more loyalty and less dissidence. In keeping with this strategy, land consolidation was thus first initiated in those areas that had been consistently loyal during the Mau Mau, and where there were outstanding loyal chiefs.<sup>710</sup> By rewarding such areas first, the government hoped first to consolidate the strong loyalist pockets, and then isolate the trouble making ones.

C.M Johnson, Special Commissioner for Central Province, and the officer responsible for negotiating Central Government approval of the programme was, indeed, clear on the political benefits the government hoped to reap from the programme. He made it quite apparent in 1955 that the intention of the scheme was to change the face of Kikuyuland and bring into being a middle class of Kikuyu farmers who “would be too busy on their land to worry about political agitation.”<sup>711</sup> Johnson was merely reinforcing an old colonial narrative with its roots in the 1920s; that the nurturing of a solid middle class population would act as a bulwark against political malcontents.

This carrot-and-stick approach was an overt effort not just to consolidate a loyalist class with a stake in the status quo, but also delineate the Mau Mau from non-Mau Mau zones as mentioned above. Consequently, by 1954, it was quite possible to distinguish between “good” and “bad” areas in Kikuyuland purely on basis of the pace of land consolidation. This way, specific areas could be rewarded or punished accordingly. For example, the clans and locations in the administration’s bad books ended up with not only less land holding, but also often land of a poorer quality. In Fort Hall, for instance, Kinyona and Ichichi locations were classified “good” while Rwathia, perched on the shoulders of the Aberdare was put down as “notoriously bad.” The government made it quite clear that these different ratings were a “heartening sign” to be used “in the foundation of plans for the long time development of the district and the loyal areas were always remembered first.”<sup>712</sup>

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<sup>710</sup> KNA /10/R/3 Emergency Press Cuttings.

<sup>711</sup> Sorrenson, op.cit., p.171.

<sup>712</sup> KNA/ DC/FH/1/33 Fort Hall Annual Report, 1954.

One of the parameters for delineating “good” and “bad” locations was pegged on the extent Mau Mau propaganda was perceived to have “dented” Christianity, or disrupted day-to-day operations in the given locations. This of course also meant that certain locations could be punished at will, given this rather subjective approach at judging loyalty. For example, while Kiambu District had remained generally calm for the duration of the Mau Mau, save for intermittent but serious incidences such as the Lari Massacre, Fort Hall and Nyeri, on the other hand, were put down as harbouring the worst of the “notoriously bad” zones. Government interpretation of this, as has been discussed elsewhere in this study, was that Kiambu had exhibited more loyalty to government, and that its people were more interested in getting on with business rather than pursuing some elusive nationalistic ideals. As a result, rehabilitation in Kiambu was fast-tracked and used as an incentive to the notorious districts to change their ways if they hoped to enjoy similar benefits.

We can surmise, at this point, that these two important rehabilitative measures - villagisation and land consolidation - were a significant commentary on the impact of the Mau Mau, even as it was militarily vanquished. In the aftermaths of the revolt, the colonial government was forced to acknowledge that cosmetic changes were not going to win the hearts and minds of a people the Government still insisted, “had brought the Emergency on themselves.”<sup>713</sup> In addition, land consolidation measures were further proof that, what the whites in Kenya had for long insisted were “imaginary grievances” were after all not imaginary at all. It was a belated realization that these problems could only continue to be ignored at the peril of the colonial interests in the colony. Crucially then, Mau Mau had forced the colonial power to finally acknowledge, as was evident in its rehabilitation programmes, that if there was to be any future for the white man in Kenya, then it could only be one that was inextricably tied to that of the Africans. For a revolt touted as “senseless” and “atavistic” only two years before these reforms, this was no mean achievement. The fighters might have lost the battle, certainly not the war.

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<sup>713</sup> KNA/ DC/KBU/1/45/1954.

Indeed, that the colonial administration was brought to a point where it acknowledged “the need to re-kindle hopes and enlist the support and interest of the people in their own future, this time to be achieved by legitimate means,”<sup>714</sup> is in my view, profound. It was incontrovertible evidence that the military loss the Mau Mau had suffered was tempered with important victories, as the views of Carey Francis, a renowned educationist and philanthropist but also an avid anti-Mau Mau crusader, illustrates. Carey Francis conceded that the principle behind the revolt, and the innate loyalty of a people under attack could not be faulted. Writing to a family member back in England, he had acknowledged as much when he wrote:

In my letter a year ago, I likened Mau Mau to a resistance movement. That is still to me the most revealing picture. Local Europeans are apt to marvel that Africans do not more actively fight Mau Mau. But had I been a Frenchman, even one who regarded *Maquis* as gangs of cut-throats and deplored their murders, I should not have given them away to the German police.<sup>715</sup>

Clearly, loyalty to a cause, and the determination to bring about change, which is what the Mau Mau had indisputably done, was a much-admired virtue even by the enemy. The revolt had forced the colonial regime to completely “re-configure” the colonial question in Kenya and in doing so, irrevocably “moved the centre,” paving way for a meaningful road map to independence. This is perhaps the most important of the Mau Mau legacies.

The third critical third trajectory in the rehabilitation process centred on Mau Mau detainees, and here the Church was to become a key player. Even before the military phase of the Mau Mau was over, the fate of thousands of Mau Mau detainees held in scores of camps across the colony called for urgent attention. To be sure, detention in the wake of the Mau Mau became a sore point for the colonial administration and the source of much furore in the British parliament. Many concerns needed to be addressed, not least the impact that the re-integration of detainees was likely to have on the rest of the society that was reverting to normalcy.

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<sup>714</sup> Ibid.

<sup>715</sup> KNA /10/R/3 Emergency Press Cuttings.

Nowhere were the churches' efforts more evident than in this "test of wills" for the minds and souls of the detainees. Where in the early years the popular notion had been that the Bible had paved way for the sword, the church, as if in affirmation, became truly an indispensable ally of the colonial administration in the matter of the rehabilitation of detainees. Its first task was to soften, if not break down, hardened detainees. Ways had to be devised to first turn detainees malleable, and then goad them towards a confession and eventually, denouncement of their "evil" ways. Indeed, confession became the *sine qua non* for a detainee's release, the critical first step on a mine-strewn administrative "pipeline" that drained back into the society. However, the church, keen not to be seen to be doing the government's "dirty work," adopted ingenious methods to portray its role as one that was rehabilitative, not punitive.

In a memorandum on the re-orientation of detainees, Reverend Howard Church had decried the vast sums the government was spending on punitive measures, but very little on the rehabilitation of the Kikuyu. In what one might consider as a rather extreme, even uncharitable comparison, Howard likened the Kikuyu to the Nazis, arguing that, "when the Mau Mau movement is smashed, the Kikuyu, like the Nazis after the fall of Hitler will be left with a dangerous vacuum."<sup>716</sup> To avert such a calamitous ending, Howard suggested that the Athi River Detention camp be used as the "first theatre of operation for the commandos."<sup>717</sup> What would be learnt there would subsequently be used as the basis for the rehabilitation of all Kikuyu.<sup>718</sup> This military-speak for a man of the cloth in reference to rehabilitation, shows the amount of ingenuity and propaganda that was invested in the exercise.

Indeed, with benefit of hindsight, the sheer effort and propaganda that the church invested in the rehabilitation of detainees was startlingly "worldly." The default premise, from which the church, as well as the administration proceeded, was that the Kikuyu were in the grip of an evil ideology, the Mau Mau. What they, therefore, now required was a "Christian ideology" to counteract this evil. For this to be achieved, however, it was critical that "loyal Kikuyu Christians" be given "ideological training" to counteract the evil ideology, and which then would

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<sup>716</sup> ACK Archive, CMS General Correspondence, 1952-1956.

<sup>717</sup> Ibid.

<sup>718</sup> Ibid.

enable them to operate as what was dubbed, “Christian commandos.” It is interesting to note that the terminologies used by the churchmen in this matter were clearly no different from what the colony’s psychologist, Carothers, would have used. It is in this context that the Moral Re-armament Movement (MRA) was looped into the rehabilitation of Mau Mau detainees with a very controversial outcome.

As a first step, the MRA proposed the preparation of a syllabus in the rehabilitation of the detainees. According to MRA officials, the syllabus would constantly be developed as new ideas of rehabilitation were incorporated. In addition, there would be a “constant outflow after training into spheres of operation both at Athi and in the Kikuyu reserve under the direction of Europeans.”<sup>719</sup> There were many other recommendations. For example, it was suggested that under Group Captain P. S Foss, frequent announcements be made in the camps using loudspeakers to drill into the detainees that:

- (i) they had been fooled.
- (ii) they were lost and forgotten.
- (iii) (that their families, their women, and their young people despised them.

The thinking behind this was that the incessant repetition of this propaganda would have the cumulative effect of breaking down the detainees. It was a method akin to government’s own massive propaganda in 1954, asking the forest fighters to abandon their cause because it was a “hopeless” one and they had “lost all support” of the rest of the Kikuyu. In a similar manner, the propaganda tailored to break the detainees by MRA was to be made “in Kikuyu, by Kikuyu voices in their tongue.” Nothing was left to chance. Microphones would be planted amongst the detainees to pick up discussion, and the knowledge obtained thereof be used to discipline individuals en masse.<sup>720</sup>

These covert preparations exposed a peculiar, even devious side of the church, quite inimical to its ethos. For example, the church proposed that the joint church-state operations should have only one visible player at the level of execution. The argument raised was that the issues involved concerned primarily attitudes of mind and were, therefore, basically spiritual.”<sup>721</sup> To this end, the

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<sup>719</sup> Ibid.

<sup>720</sup> Ibid.

<sup>721</sup> ACK Archive, General Correspondence on Mau Mau, 1952-56.

church leaders, both Catholic and Protestant, assured the administration of their fullest support towards the attainment of “a constructive policy conceived in this spirit.”<sup>722</sup> However, in so arguing, the church conveniently overlooked the fact that the colonial edifice itself, and the ills that had plagued the colonized stemmed, in the first place, from the colonizers’ own “attitudes of the mind.” Why had the church in the past not generated a “constructive policy” as they now planned to do with the detainees? The church’s claim to “spiritual responsibility” so late in the day and when so much suffering had already been occasioned was thus akin to closing the gates after the horse had bolted!

Nevertheless, having agreed on a joint operation, a flurry of planning between the Christian Council of Kenya and government leaders over rehabilitation began in 1954. There were two issues at hand; the first was how best the law enforcement agents, in conjunction with church leaders, could present a united front in handling the question of cleansing and anti-Mau Mau oaths. The second bore on “the more positive aspects of teaching and preaching against racial hatreds and the return to paganism and barbarism.”<sup>723</sup> The condition made by the church in respect to a joint operation, and as per an earlier agreement, was that these tasks be carried out “without making the church appear to be Government’s agents.”<sup>724</sup> To this end, several African clergy were recruited to lend the exercise more credibility as an “indigenous effort.”

This is how 1954/1955 saw some high level and confidential meetings between the Chief Secretary, the Chief Native Commissioner, the member of Law and Order or his representative and the Christian Council of Kenya, over the matter. Even then, unfortunate racial undertones still dogged the efforts. For example, the joint meeting made it patently clear that, “while obviously considerable secrecy must surround the meetings, there is, however, no objection in principle to African representatives of the church being present provided they are men of discretion who will not betray confidences.”<sup>725</sup> Unstated, but insinuated here, of course, was that not even the integrity of African clergy was assumed, hence the insistence “on men of discretion

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<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid.

<sup>725</sup> ACK Archive, CMS General Correspondence 1952-56, Meeting of Church and Government Leaders, 10/1/1953.



who will not betray confidences.” Indeed, as Bishop Njenga pithily notes, no African, however senior or “upright,” was beyond suspicion as far as the missionaries were concerned.<sup>726</sup>

This distrust came out clearly in the church’s role at rehabilitation. Asked to make a report on what the “African church” was doing to help Government fight the Mau Mau, Obadiah Kariuki, then Rural Dean and the highest ranking African clergy of the day, reported that they had, among other things, “sent on information whenever possible.”<sup>727</sup> He admitted that this had not been easy “as we are regarded as Europeans.”<sup>728</sup> Kariuki, and others like him, were in an unenviable position; they epitomised the tragedy of Christians caught between the obligations, and fidelity to their Christian faith, and those of the aspirations of the society of which they were members. While on the one hand they were “regarded as Europeans” by their own people, they were, on the other, not wholly embraced by those whose interests they purportedly served. It was the tragedy of a racial set up where colour bar and racial nuances remained pronounced to the very end.

The Right Reverend Ferguson Davie captured this dilemma well in his letter to Beecher when he observed that it was the kindly, good people, upon whom the Mau Mau had made attacks. The long-held consensus was that Christians had been targeted because of their faith, which would not allow them to support Mau Mau. Apparently, however, the bishop had received other opinions as to why Christians seemed to be the target of the Mau Mau, and that was that Africans did not understand the concept of kindness. Ferguson, in this letter, was thus trying to disabuse the bishop of this view by pushing his own view. He stated:

...This most emphatically does not mean, as your informant suggests, that Africans do not understand kindness. It means that to the perverted leaders of Mau Mau, any approach in friendship on the part of either Europeans or Africans,

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<sup>726</sup> Oral Interview, Bishop Peter Njenga, Nairobi, 26/1/2009.

<sup>727</sup> ACK Archive, Rural Deanery, Fort Hall, Minutes/ Agenda, notes by Rev Obadiah Kariuki, Rural Dean, AAC Weithaga.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid.

was a threat to exclusive nationalism, and was a thing to be liquidated before turning in on those who had treated them harshly.<sup>729</sup>

In Obadiah Kariuki's case, even the fact that he was a high-ranking clergy, an exemplary anti-Mau Mau crusader, and a revivalist at that, appears not to have mitigated this distrust. Being Kenyatta's brother-in-law did not help matters, for it left niggling doubts about his own position on African nationalism. His story poignantly illustrates the lot of one set of Christians in the colony.

Back to rehabilitation, the church, to its credit, was more alive to the inevitability of change in the colony than the administration was. It thus considered rehabilitation an urgent catalyst to this change. Explaining what rehabilitation entailed, Church Action Group chaired by Reverend D. Steel, and among its members the likes of Archdeacon Bostock, Langford-Smith, Carey Francis, among others, agreed that for healing to take place, there was first the need for "personal salvation." Church Action Group also spoke of the need for the "social Gospel," the message of Christ's kingship over the whole of life.<sup>730</sup> This, in my view, was a vindication of the timeliness of the revival message concerning racial parity, and of "oneness in Christ," first preached two decades before the Mau Mau. It was a message that had anchored the legitimacy of the nationalist agenda on social justice. Even then, the irony is that when Mau Mau broke out, revivalists were among the first to fall afoul of the movement, for they would subscribe to neither its tenets nor its methodology. As the Church Action Group on rehabilitation contended,

In a revolutionary world, revolutionary Christian thought and action are called for. We need a revival, which must begin with ourselves: to achieve anything, we must have a definitive objective and this is provided by a multi-racial society, and our mutual responsibility at interdependence. Only a definite programme of this kind can hope to capture world leadership. God has a plan for Kenya and it is for us to find out what His plan is.<sup>731</sup>

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<sup>729</sup>ACK Archive, CMS General Correspondence on Mau Mau, 1952-56.

<sup>730</sup>ACK Archive, CTEE, 1954-1958, S.A Morrison, General Secretary, Christian Council of Kenya, "What Does Rehabilitation Mean?"

<sup>731</sup> Ibid.

The church had more than a passing interest in the rehabilitation of detainees. In the initial days of the revolt's offensive, the administration, in a grim counter-offensive, had rounded up thousands of Kikuyu and thrown them into holding camps, chiefly, Langata and Kamiti. Others were hauled into proper detention camps, the main ones being Athi River Camp, Hola and Manyani. In the most notorious of these operations, Operation Anvil of March 24, 1954, many loyal Christians, some of the revival persuasion, had been netted in what the Kikuyu dubbed *kiungururia*, dragnet. It became subsequently extremely difficult for one to protest their innocence.<sup>732</sup> Minutes of the Christian Action Group of 1954 acknowledged this unfortunate state of affairs. The Chair, Reverend D. Steel, expressed deep concern with the manner that detention had been formulated and even graver, implemented. He expressed dismay at the many cases of wrongful detention, and of the slow pace at which detainees, both of "white" and "grey" categories were being released.<sup>733</sup>

The tags, "black," "grey" and "white" were used to denote the suspected level of detainees' involvement with the Mau Mau. Those classified "white," were simply suspects, since nothing incriminatory had been found against them. "Grey" was used for the "milder" of the Mau Mau criminals, or mere supporters. "Black," or *makara* (literally charcoal), on the other hand, was reserved for the hardcore detainees who would neither confess, denounce, or break down even under intensive interrogation, torture, threats of death or even actual deaths. The Hola Massacre of 1959 that riveted world attention was meted on the "charcoal," this last class of detainees. It was the epitome of the misuse of power, and the excessive and often illegal measures meted out to hardcore detainees about which Steel had raised concern.

The other area of concern by the Christian Action Group was the social impact of Operation Anvil. Steel had noted that the operation, which had been carried out with the express aim of reclaiming the full control over Nairobi by purging the city of nearly all Kikuyu, Embu and Meru living within its limits, had had traumatic results. Families had been separated, as men were carted off for more screening in Langata, while women were taken to different lines for

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<sup>732</sup> Oral Interview, Kihu Muragu, Kigumo Location, 2/3/2009.

<sup>733</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/1/7A, Christian Action Group, Minutes of Meeting held in Church House, 24/9/1954.

repatriation back to the reserves.<sup>734</sup> This immediate separation, and the longer separation of men from their homes for long periods of up to eight years once detained, was a terrible assault on the moral fabric of a society already in a state of flux. Indeed, both the church and the state fully realized that detention camps were definitely also breeding grounds for future trouble.<sup>735</sup>

Detention, therefore, posed a dilemma where on the one hand the church recognized the practical difficulties confronting the administration, including the need for detention camps in the first place. It, however, also felt that much of what was being meted on the detainees behind those barbed wires had no legal justification. One of the greatest concerns, and which was to be proved justified, was that there was real danger of officials becoming a law unto themselves as the following activities allegedly already in use attested:

- a) The illegal powers exercised by screening teams.
- b) The whipping of detainees in order to gain information.
- c) Evidence that many screening teams were unsatisfactory
- d) The payment of money to informers.
- e) The presumption that a detainee is guilty unless he can prove his innocence.
- f) The excessive powers of the Criminal Investigative Department.
- g) The breakdown of the administrative machinery as regards the setting up of the detention camps, the arranging for screening, and the release of those detainees who had confessed and wished to make good.<sup>736</sup>

These misgivings, raised with the administration, were a significant sign that it would not be business as usual in the colony. The period between 1954 and 1960 were, therefore, important years for African Christianity because the mission church's unusual reticence in openly collaborating with Government was in a sense a preparation of its own exit from the helm of church leadership. Nonetheless, the die-hard colonizers expressed the hope that it was not too late to put into place a "master plan" whereby "Mau Mau and its aftermaths would appear almost

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<sup>734</sup> Elkins, *op.cit.*, p.124.

<sup>735</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/1/7B, Minutes of Meeting held by CCK, 24/9/54.

<sup>736</sup> *Ibid.*

simple to deal with and overcome.”<sup>737</sup> However, for the more realistic ones and the church was such a one, the high noon of colonial rule had passed.

A concerted effort by the Church to rescue the many Christians “wrongly” incarcerated was quite evident from the appeals made to the commandant at Lang’ata, the main holding ground for those netted in Operation Anvil. The appeals were simultaneously sent to the Secretary of Defence, and to the Governor himself. In response to a dossier sponsored by Christian Churches and sent as an appeal for the release of detainees, a directive by the Secretary of Defence ordered that,

These persons be traced and released forthwith if found to have been placed in “grey” or “white” screening categories. If any are found in Langata camp they must be released without further screening unless anything is known to their detriment; the dossier supplied by church authorities must be considered sufficient in their favour.<sup>738</sup>

Of the forty-one member dossier sent to the detention authorities for consideration in 1954/55, none was female. This is in spite of the fact that hundreds of women were incarcerated in the holding camps of Langata and Kamiti during the same period. Elkins has attempted to explain this anomaly, arguing that going by the available statistics at the time of Operation Anvil, nearly three-quarters of the city’s African population of sixty thousand were Kikuyu, and most of these were men, along with some twenty thousand Kikuyu women and children.<sup>739</sup> However, after Anvil, the men were herded off for further screening, while women and children were taken to different detention lines for repatriation to the reserves.<sup>740</sup> It was quite logical, therefore, that the majority of those who ended up in proper detention camps were men. This also appears to be the reason why the “pipeline,” the term used to describe the “processing” of the detainees on to the various detention camps, and a similar process when repatriation back home began, came to be viewed a system for adult male suspects only.

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<sup>737</sup> Ibid.

<sup>738</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/1/7A, Release of Detainees Sponsored by Christian Churches, 21/7/1954.

<sup>739</sup> Quoted in Elkins, *op.cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>740</sup> Ibid.

The reality, however, was quite different. There were certainly many female detainees, and a good number of them in the holding camps were considered as hardcore as the men. Others were considered “too black” for repatriation, ending up in a proper detention camp. Such women were sent to the colony’s only female detention camp, Kamiti, which once built in 1953 became the place where the majority of women, totalling a few thousand, were all incarcerated.<sup>741</sup> This included a huge number of girls under the age of puberty. The “few thousand,” however, did not include the dozens of babies born of female detainees, many of whom had been in Kamiti for years.<sup>742</sup>

Furthermore, if the scores of women who ended up in detention camps were those truly deemed, hardcore, or “black” as they were commonly referred to, this could very well be the alternative explanation as to why the church dossier on “wrongly incarcerated members” did not reflect any women. It could well be that such hard-core women, *makara*, black, were in the eyes of the church not worth intervening for, a situation if confirmed, reflects poorly on the church. Indeed, the very fact that there were underage girls, and even nursing mothers in detention camps at all, should have been reason enough for the church to put pressure on the authorities to get them immediately released.

Nevertheless, while Kamiti was the official women detention camp, it is also possible that the number of women detained was much higher than acknowledged, given that the government constantly opened and closed at its discretion scores of other temporary Mau Mau camps and prisons. Mr. T. Askwith, charged with rehabilitation in Kikuyuland noted that, while the detention camps were for the hardcore, there was a further 8,000-9000 Mau Mau prisoners all over the country. Besides, there were numerous “transit camps” for Kikuyu who could not get employment, although there was nothing definite against them. Predictably, therefore, one of the most contentious debates around the Mau Mau has centred on the actual numbers that suffered detention. Archdeacon Bostock, who was at the forefront of efforts in the rehabilitation of the detainees, for example, made an open estimation of the numbers detained as having increased “to

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<sup>741</sup> Ibid., p.124.

<sup>742</sup> Elkins, op.cit., p.152.

50,000, to 80,000 and more.”<sup>743</sup> However, Elkins, in her extensive study on the subject argues that the British had provided misleading detention numbers, giving “daily average” figures, or net rather than gross which she puts to somewhere between 160,000 and 320,000.<sup>744</sup> While there is no doubt that the British offered depressed figures to counter the huge outcry detention had caused, it remains hard to tell, with any accuracy the toll, in terms of numbers, that the whole detention exercise took on Kenyans.

Many of the Christians on whose behalf the appeals were made by their sponsoring churches were well distributed in the two categories of “grey” and “white,” while a sizeable number were also “black.” This could mean one or all of these things; that the screening methods were so inefficient that many innocent Kikuyu were simply victims of a botched-up operation, or that being Kikuyu was in itself adequate evidence of one’s involvement in the Mau Mau, or in fact, that there were actually many Christians who had subscribed to the Mau Mau. This last category is of particular interest to us here, for such Christians would either have taken or administered the oath, or made wilful contribution of one kind or the other to the movement. In the event of any or all of these, they would have been properly labelled “grey” or “black.”

However, there is, also the possibility that some rode two horses, appearing to be loyal Christians, while in fact they were actively carrying out activities supportive of the operations of the Mau Mau. Records against those incarcerated appear to support this premise as a few such cases illustrate. Moses Ngugi, simply put down in the records as “Ngugi s/o Stephen,” was incarcerated in Manyani and labelled, “black.” The dossier sent in his favour by the P.C.E.A, his sponsoring church, indicated that he was not only a loyal Christian, but also a member of the revival.<sup>745</sup> Similarly, Shadrack Mwangi, son of Ndegwa, is shown to have been released on 25th July 1954. According to the church records, not only was he a revivalist but a church deacon as well. The church vouched for him as “most trustworthy.”<sup>746</sup>

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<sup>743</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/7B, P.G Bostock, “Notes about Rehabilitation after the Mau Mau Emergency.”

<sup>744</sup> Elkins, *op.cit.*, ix.

<sup>745</sup> KNA/ AH/5/31, Release of Detainees Sponsored by Christian Churches.

<sup>746</sup> *Ibid.*

Again, in the detention records, Jonathan Njoroge s/o Kariuki from Chura Division, Ngeca location of Kiambu, was classified “grey.” In the dossier seeking his release, he is described as a “prominent member of the church, a Sunday school teacher, and a member of the revivalist group who fulfils all church obligations including non-circumcision of female children.”<sup>747</sup> To strengthen Jonathan Njoroge’s case, the church underlined that he had received several threats from the Mau Mau but had “nonetheless stood firm.”<sup>748</sup> Ndei, s/o Mikari Karechu’s record shows that he was released on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1954, having been arrested on 1<sup>st</sup> May of the same year. Ndei, a teacher at the African Anglican Church School, Uthiru, is favourably described by his sponsoring church as “a loyalist who withstands Mau Mau fearlessly on an ideological front.”<sup>749</sup>

All these were ordinary Christians but caught in the intricate web that was the Mau Mau. The question, therefore, that inevitably arises is why so many Christians ended up in detention camps in the first place. From the extensive list of “wrongly incarcerated” Christians, I would venture two, somewhat dichotomous explanations. The first is that to be a revivalist appears to have been insurance from the church that one could not be a Mau Mau supporter, as the dossiers seeking the release of these Christians suggest. Chapter 3 on revival Christians in this study supports that this was a well-founded assumption. However, that there were also many “ordinary Christians,” in detention camps, mostly teachers, evangelists, and other medium graded professionals in Kikuyu society suggests that the Mau Mau, in fact, had a wider base of support than the strictly subaltern usually attributed to its membership. This view is bolstered by the fact Archdeacon Bostock, the chief church liaison person with prison authorities, appears not to have had too much trouble securing the release of the more educated Christian detainees like Ndei. It would appear that the detaining authorities were more inclined to believe that Mau Mau was for the lowly and illiterate, and gave the more educated cadre the benefit of the doubt.

The story of one, Dedan Kihato, a prosperous African trader in Nairobi is illuminating.<sup>750</sup> Kihato, whose rural home was Kahuti village, near Weithaga, the oldest mission in Fort Hall District, had been arrested alongside thousands of others in Operation Anvil. After screening at Manyani,

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<sup>747</sup> Ibid.

<sup>748</sup> Ibid

<sup>749</sup> Ibid.

<sup>750</sup> KNA/ AH/5/31, Release of Detainees Sponsored by Church, ID FH 625935-Dedan Kihato s/o Kanyoro.



Kihato was classified “white,” which in essence meant that there was no evidence against him. Consequently, Kihato was sent back to the Fort Hall Reception Centre, the holding ground for those from that district awaiting repatriation. On learning of his incarceration, the Anglican Church in Nairobi swiftly sought to have him not only released, but be allowed to continue living and conducting his business in Nairobi. This was contrary to the directives concerning those who had been netted.

Kihato’s case stands out because of the extraordinary interest the church took in his plight. Kihato was a well-known Nairobi resident, a wealthy man and proprietor of a large shop in Kaloleni, situated in the African location of the city. He also owned the house he lived in, on plot No. 5 in Bahati, a rare accomplishment not many African residents in the city could boast of then. What were Kihato’s connections with the church? In the dossier seeking his release, Kihato, a member of the Anglican Church in Eastlands, the general African location in Nairobi, is described as a man who had “consistently been a strong supporter of the church’s finances, both to his home church in Weithaga, Murang’a, and in Nairobi.”<sup>751</sup> This brief, written on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 1954, further noted that Kihato had, in the previous year, written out a cheque on one occasion for 100/= and given it to a Reverend N. Mweri.<sup>752</sup> In summary of his case, the church concluded that,

The espousing by Dedan Kihato of the cause of loyalty is beyond dispute to those who know him, though being a man of affluence he would clearly be the object of much attention by the Mau Mau. We have no evidence that he ever gave in to Mau Mau demands, and his associations made it abundantly clear that he is not one of them. The Church strongly recommends a re-consideration of his position.<sup>753</sup>

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<sup>751</sup> Ibid.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid.

It is edifying that in Kihato's case, it was the most senior African clergy, Reverend Obadiah Kariuki, the Assistant Bishop designate in 1955, and Canon Elijah Gachanja, the Rural Dean of Nairobi, who took up the initiative to push for his release and continued stay in Nairobi.

The authorities, on their part, were not impressed. In fact, they were less inclined to release these wealthier and more influential Christians, even as the church strongly vouched for them. In Kihato's case, the officer in charge of the then Nairobi Extra-Provincial District insisted that he required "further facts" before he could act. He pointed out that Kihato's proposed return to Nairobi could very well be "for the furtherance of his own personal interests only," and would only result in "one further Kikuyu business whereas it was the declared policy of Government to break the Kikuyu grip on the African business life in the city."<sup>754</sup> The Church and Government seemed to have been talking at cross-purposes. In Kihato's case, there was, nonetheless, one fundamental common ground: both the church and government were agreed that Kihato was a man of substantial means and standing in society. Depending on the angle one looked at the matter, he was a potentially useful ally to both parties. For the administration, keeping him incarcerated meant keeping him away from supporting the movement. The church, on the other hand, felt Kihato was "safer" on the church's side, a pragmatic view, for wealthy men were known to sponsor the Mau Mau, as Njenga Karume, in his autobiography, admits to having done.<sup>755</sup>

Kihato's case reveals yet another layer of the narratives given rise to by Mau Mau. In his case, it was one that marked emerging contests over power and influence in post- Mau Mau Kenya, with an eye on independence. The tug of war between the Church and the administration over Kihato, and the involvement of senior African clergy in his case, suggests two things; the alacrity with which the church moved to intervene in his favour, appears to have been related to his standing in the church, not least his financial generosity to church projects. Secondly, and more importantly, in the intervention of Kihato we begin to see marked re-alignment in church ranks, with the likes of Kariuki and Gachanja taking the lead in matters that touched on the churches in their African locations. In my view, this is a significant, but also a symbolic development that

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<sup>754</sup> Ibid.

<sup>755</sup> Njenga Karume, *Beyond Expectations: From Charcoal to Gold*, Nairobi, Kenway publications, 2009.

points to the beginnings of the handing of the baton from the likes of Beecher, Bostock, Bewes, and Langford-Smith, to the likes of Kariuki, Olang and Gachanja in a new dispensation. Christians like Dedan Kihato were, in this new scheme of things, literally and symbolically considered to be important building blocks of a growing African-dominated church leadership in the post Mau Mau era. There is no gainsaying that the wheels of indigenization in the church were considerably oiled by the rapid changes that the Mau Mau was already enforcing in the socio-economic and political arena in the colony. Indeed, I would venture, that Mau Mau was the catalyst that hastened the change of guard, not just on the political scene but in the church as well.

In the meantime, the Catholic Church was having its own troubles with the authorities over its detainees. Writing to the Chief Secretary at the end of 1954, the Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, reported that Archbishop McCarthy had been to see him (the Governor). Unlike the Protestant Christian Council of Kenya that had a long list of detainees they wanted considered for release, McCarthy brought to the governor's notice that he was vouching for only four detained Catholics. In his response, the Governor pointed out that in comparison, this was a very modest figure and that all efforts should, therefore, be made to enquire into their cases, and if nothing found against the four men, then they should be released forthwith. McCarthy also lodged a complaint with the Governor of the difficulty that Catholic priests were encountering in trying to get visiting rights to the detainees. On this count, the Governor directed that the Commandant at Mackinnon Road Camp and Manyani Camp, facilitate access without further delay.

McCarthy had further asked that the church be allowed to erect a temporary church in the precincts of the two camps, a suggestion that the Governor was quick to welcome. He noted that this would make rehabilitation work easier all round, especially in helping work out a mode of release of some of the "grey" detainees. Baring, subsequently, directed that all assistance be given to the bishop in this matter. However, not to appear partial, the governor hastened to add, "...exactly the same would of course apply to any Protestant mission that wished to do the same work."<sup>756</sup> We can only speculate as to why the Catholic Church was vouching for only four of

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<sup>756</sup> KNA /AH/5/31, Moral Re-Armament.

her members; was it perhaps that the church did not want to be seen to be interfering with the work of the government in dealing with the Mau Mau, preferring to let the long arm of the law take its course? Alternatively, was it that the Catholic faithful had less difficulty supporting Mau Mau than the Protestants and they were, therefore, rightly incarcerated, and as such difficult to vouch for? It was most likely a combination of both. The efforts by the church to “salvage” individual Christians from detention was an interesting commentary, given the mass expulsion it had exercised earlier concerning those who had caved in to Mau Mau demands, especially taking of the oath.

The multi-pronged approach at rehabilitation acquired a new trajectory with the entry of the Moral Re-Armament. The Moral Re-Armament, as indicated in chapter 3 of this study, was founded by Dr. N. D Buchman and rose at a time when the Communist ideology was at its most threatening to western democracies. However, the MRA was envisaged not just as an ideological counter-threat to communism only, but also as a force that would act as a middle path between communism and the excesses of western capitalism. The crux of Buchman’s message was that as it stood, Christian ideology was ill equipped to solve “new” problems of the day as was quite evident from the arms-build up that was going on in Europe, and the kind of violence that had broken out in spots like Kenya. The MRA was thus offering what it termed as a “new approach” through a “superior ideology,” to give men new motives and new character. MRA asserted that it was counting on this “new thinking forged by living absolute moral standards, absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love” to deliver results.<sup>757</sup> MRA was convinced that the use of its tenets was just what was required to rehabilitate hard-core Mau Mau detainees at the Athi River Detention Camp. However, unlike the relatively easy acceptance it had found in revival Christianity in Eastern Africa, its input in the rehabilitation process raised much furore.

From what came of this “experiment” in MRA’s rehabilitation efforts at the Athi River Detention Camp, its results were at best controversial and at worst, a disastrous experiment that cost valuable time and resources in the rehabilitation of the detainees. Besides, MRA’s involvement in the programme caused much division within the church circles. A letter to the *East African*

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<sup>757</sup>ACK Archive, MRA Correspondence, 1952-1959. Also, N.D Buchman, “Nations That Will not Think,” op.cit.

*Standard* of August 1956 captured this frustration over MRA's involvement in rehabilitation. For example, a Reuter report received in Nairobi claimed that efforts to convert hard-core "Mau Mau terrorists" at Athi River Detention Camp by Moral Re-Armament methods had been described by Kenya Government officials as "a complete waste of time and money."<sup>758</sup> Never one that had been eager to have MRA acquire a strong foothold in the colony, the church felt it had been vindicated.

Although the statement was quickly rebutted by the Rehabilitation Department of the Ministry of Community Development as one "that was neither authorized nor agreed upon by the ministry,"<sup>759</sup> it nonetheless shone a spotlight on the querulous politics around rehabilitation. It further reflected the disarray that the Mau Mau, and its aftermaths, had occasioned both in government and church circles. In justifying allowing MRA's participation in its rehabilitation efforts, the government reiterated, through the Rehabilitation Department, that religion had an important contribution to make in its rehabilitation programme. For this reason, "ample opportunity had been afforded the spiritual aspect of rehabilitation in all rehabilitation work in camps and prisons."<sup>760</sup> The furore over MRA's involvement at Athi River had been triggered by what MRA alleged was dismissal of its staff at the camp, while the Administration on its part, insisted that the change that had taken place at this camp was "an ordinary routine move to make fuller use of the camp and to speed up releases."<sup>761</sup> Clearly, none had faith in the efforts of the other.

Eventually, MRA's work at the Athi River camp was declared, both in government and missionary circles, largely a failure, and a campaign was mounted to have it discontinued. This triggered a blame game; MRA blamed government officials for placing hurdles in the way of its staff at the camp. In a sermon drawn from the MRA work at the Athi River camp, Reverend E. Raymond Silberbauer, Vicar of St. Marks Church in Nairobi, and an ardent supporter of MRA's work, claimed that it was "treachery" and "connivance" of those who had no faith in MRA that were responsible for the "limited success at the camp." Quoting Dr. Paul Broadsen, the Dean of

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<sup>758</sup> *East African Standard*, Reuter Report, 3.8.1956.

<sup>759</sup> ACK Archive, MRA Correspondence, op.cit.

<sup>760</sup> Ibid.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid.

Copenhagen's glowing tribute of MRA work as "an epic fight in our time between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of selfish godless materialism,"<sup>762</sup> Rev. Silberbauer maintained that the work at Athi River Camp was a "sword" that "had cut men to the heart, transforming some and infuriating others."<sup>763</sup>

The good Reverend accused the colonial administration of floundered policies in matters concerning rehabilitation. He argued, and here quite rightly in my view, that when the State of Emergency was declared, the Government's only policy was to detain Mau Mau suspects and herd them into camps with no clear idea as to what should happen in those camps. This, he pointed out, was in itself a reflection of lack of forward planning. He admonished the Administration for not learning from elsewhere, particularly from the experiences in Europe that had shown "you cannot change a man's thinking by detaining him, not even by much more vigorous methods!"<sup>764</sup> Silberbauer thus strongly argued that instead of vilifying the whole programme, it deserved accolades for having stepped in to fill a vacuum caused by "ineptitude on government's part."<sup>765</sup> He contended that if MRA was seen to be failing, it was because the government had deliberately "ambushed" it, and put it "on the spot" by giving it six months to prove its work at the camp. He further noted that instead of giving MRA "right of way," the government had denied it adequate staff, the right to stage plays and show films and even visits of people who might have helped. He concluded that he himself had been refused permission to go to the camp even after the commandant had invited him.<sup>766</sup>

It would appear, from this outpouring, that Raymond Silberbauer had an axe to grind over the matter. The whole tone of his sermon was bitter, critical, and even sceptical. He saw enemies everywhere, and in the Mau Mau case, the enemy were the communists, and the ineptitude of an administration. For example, without offering any evidence, he made the categorical statement that Mau Mau had been "powerfully sponsored by communists," and that the immediate danger in the colony was that "while we ease back with the closing of the Emergency [this was in 1956],

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<sup>762</sup> Ibid., Athi River Detention Camp, Sermon preached by the Rev. E. Raymond Silberbauer, M.A, Vicar of St. Mark's Church, Nairobi.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid.

<sup>764</sup> Ibid.

<sup>765</sup> Ibid.

<sup>766</sup> Ibid.

we will fail to see that a more insidious indoctrination of Africa will be undertaken.”<sup>767</sup> While this was a clever addition, seeing that MRA’s original intent was to counter communism in Europe, the communist connection with the Mau Mau was rather farfetched and remained unproven.

In my view, it is most probable that MRA’s obsession with communism in the Kenya case had a lot to do with its own failure at the Athi River rehabilitation. Instead of addressing the physical and spiritual handicaps facing the detainees, particularly their rehabilitation back into society, MRA went on a completely different tangent, creating a bogeyman- that of communist infiltration in the colony. The MRA had the perfect excuse for what it called “limited success” at the Athi River Camp; the devil was fighting back, and this was the “kick-back struggle” because of MRAs commitment to God’s plan and not to “humanly designed administrative plan.”<sup>768</sup>

Beecher took MRA head on. He out-rightly dismissed the outfit as a “humanist” and not necessarily a Christian one. He expressed fear that MRA’s emphasis on “humanism,” was an attempt at “the substitution of human philosophy for our most sacred faith.”<sup>769</sup> In extensive but confidential correspondence between himself and the exponents of MRA in Kenya, chiefly Reverend Martin Capon, Mr. and Mrs. A.W Hopcraft, Reverend Raymond Silberbauer, and one, Harland, Beecher made it plainly known that he did not believe that MRA was what the colony needed at that particular time. He was forthright in voicing his doubts that any good at all might come of MRA in the “delicate work” of rehabilitation.

A. W. Hopcraft, and other exponents of MRA, on the other hand tried to convince Beecher that MRA was being used by God to prepare the soil in the hearts of many, including those of alien cultures and religions for the coming of Christ, an argument Beecher unequivocally rejected. In what he termed “considered judgement” after studying both Rev. Peter Howard’s book on Frank Buchman and Buchman’s own views on MRA, which the proponents of the movement had asked him to do, Beecher, declared that he had found “little message of Christ.” What he had

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<sup>767</sup> Ibid.

<sup>768</sup> Ibid.

<sup>769</sup> ACK Archive, M/IG, MRA Correspondence, 1952-1959.

“fearfully found out” instead was that the whole tone of MRA appeared to be “undisguised hero worship of Frank Buchman.” He expressed his doubts that there were many sincere Christians who were also ardent supporters of MRA. His conclusion on the matter was that,

While wholly unable to support MRA as a system which indeed, I still consider humanist, I am fully alive to the very sincere Christian allegiance and practice of many who have been and still are, associated with it. While I shall always regard them with true Christian affection, I cannot lend support or encouragement to any MRA project.<sup>770</sup>

With these remarks, Beecher left no doubt of his dim view concerning MRA’s usefulness to rehabilitation, and indeed to Christianity in the colony. The whole debate, however, was not in vain. Clearly, the question of rehabilitation, and the debates it spawned, brought to the fore the serious setbacks that Kikuyu Christianity had suffered because of the events surrounding the Mau Mau, as well as the conflicting interests of other bodies that wanted to make their mark on African Christianity. The debate further brought out the urgent need for a sober approach towards rehabilitation and how the colony should be handled in the post- Mau Mau era. In an ironical twist, MRA, too, had inadvertently become a catalyst for devolution.

While it is true that the devolvement of church responsibilities in Kikuyuland had begun in moderate measures in the inter-war years, as Karanja has endeavoured to show, serious strides for its independency only began to bear fruit with the introspection by certain sections of the white community from mid-1950s.<sup>771</sup> The post- Mau Mau era significantly provided that opportunity. MRA’s involvement at rehabilitation, and the debates arising from sections of the white community thereof, was an important part to this development. For example, asked by the Beecher of his views on MRA and other possible sources for tackling the rehabilitation of the Mau Mau, Dr. Max Warren, Secretary General of the Church Missionary Society, and a trusted ally of Beecher on theological matters, adopted a surprisingly “revivalist” interpretation. While not entirely dismissive of MRA, he ventured that it was only possible to understand MRA, and

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<sup>770</sup> Ibid.

<sup>771</sup> See John Karanja, *op.cit.*, Chapter 7.



its potentialities, within the setting of western European and even then, in the context of the disillusionment of “Europe of the day.” He belaboured the point that the tools and mechanisms of solving the Mau Mau problem in Kenya had to be home-grown as opposed to using ideas superimposed from outside. Alluding to Christianity as practised in the West, he pointed out that,

There is very little radical self-criticism of the kind which in Christian theology could be said to lead to a deep conviction of sin, with the result that only in a most superficial way are people prepared to believe that God has the situation in control.<sup>772</sup>

Max Warren was a theologian of note with a fine grasp of his subject. His views on the matter inherently held a subtle, but nonetheless, voice of criticism of a missionary venture that had fallen short in showing leadership. Farson had made the same observations after visiting the colony in 1949. He had chided a white community that expected the colonised to uphold values that they themselves, the colonisers, had failed to uphold. Bostock, too, acknowledged that this is why, when the Mau Mau crisis got out of hand, a “humanist intervention” had found footing, and even appeared like a good idea at the time.

All told, such views as Warren’s, or those of Farson were a clear indication that the revival, which many white missionaries had expressed discomfort over, was still an important question to missionary Christianity. Revivalism, as shown elsewhere in this study, was about radical self-criticism. When it first began to make an impact in the 1930s, an alarmed Church had made frantic efforts to discover “wherein she had failed, and to go out to win this movement into her ranks.”<sup>773</sup> To its credit, however, the revival did not become a schismatic force in Christianity, though it did cause a stir, and many internal divisions, mainly over church leadership. It had challenged the notions and practices of equality and oneness in the church, while offering the church a chance to re-think and be more critical of its own theological interpretations.<sup>774</sup> This was precisely Max Warren’s point in relation to MRA: a church that was not introspective

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<sup>772</sup>ACK Archive, MRA Correspondence, 1952-1959, Warren to Beecher.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid.

<sup>774</sup> Oral Interview, Peter Njenga, Nairobi, 29/1 2009.

enough, and one that was too clergy-centred, would inevitably leave itself exposed to other ideologies that closely matched those the church itself had failed to nurture, hence MRA's influence in the local church. Noting that the church was altogether "too pedestrian in its approach," Warren conceded that,

It is easy to see how a movement of goodwill led by men of personality and conviction can on a substantially humanist basis rally a good deal of support.<sup>775</sup>

At the same time, however, he acknowledged that there were important lessons for the church in the MRA, noting that,

...the supreme lesson MRA had to offer the Church lay not in the techniques of evangelism, still less its philosophy. The great lesson was that it is a movement of laymen, which treats the layman as a responsible factor for evangelism and leaves him free to get on with the job."<sup>776</sup>

This is what Warren felt the missionary church had failed to do for so long, paralysed in the "tacit assumption on the part of bishops and clergy that the layman cannot be trusted unless he is under the strict control of some clergyman." He thus warned, "...until we are really prepared to inspire our laity to go ahead and leave them free to make some mistakes we are not going to cut some significant ice."<sup>777</sup> These sentiments, in essence, vindicated the revival. They were, in my view, wholly useful in moving forward the agenda of devolution.

Fortunately, Warren was preaching to the converted, for Beecher had all along viewed the revival as wholly useful to African Christianity. In it, he had seen not just an awakening of the African Church, but also a challenge to the Europeans in the colony over what he termed as their "exalted" lifestyles. While he understood all too clearly nominal Christian living, which had attacked the Church from within, had triggered revivalism, he was equally convinced that

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<sup>775</sup> ACK Archive, MRA Correspondence, 1952-1959.

<sup>776</sup> Ibid.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid.

important external factors were at play. Here, he had identified the ever-expanding nationalist spirit in Kenya, (which he thought was militantly anti-Christian), and the growth of heretical and schismatic churches as having given fillip to revivalism. Noting that he had no desire to engineer a head-on collision between MRA and the Church, although he was far from convinced that it could be avoided, he referred instead to the basics of biblical teachings. He surmised that, “the way to the achievement of the “moral graces” is the way so clearly marked out for us in the Acts of the Apostles and subsequent apostolic documents.”<sup>778</sup> Thus, in spite of MRAs rejection by the church as an effective tool of rehabilitation, it bears emphasizing that it gave impetus in the journey towards a more indigenized church.

The changes that were beginning to take definite form in the church complemented the wider political changes that were rapidly unfolding in the wake of Mau Mau. Many of these manifested themselves in the rehabilitation programmes we have discussed here. In the sense that Mau Mau widened, not closed, the already narrow gap between the missionary church and the colonial state, at least for the duration of the Mau Mau, the revolt, arguably, became a catalyst to these unfolding changes. Mau Mau had led the colony down a slippery path, and the wider colonial fraternity could no longer ignore the fact. Even rabid detractors of the Mau Mau, like Carey Francis, a man who gave little credit to government’s handling of the Mau Mau, nonetheless was clear that the pre-Mau Mau status quo could not hold. Writing at length to friends and family in December 1954 on the situation in the colony, he expressed the following sentiments:

Africans, and especially Kikuyu, are so often messed about, disregarded, treated as though they were of no account, not human beings at all. The worst cases are always those involving the lowest type of Europeans, but even the administration, harassed, overworked, surrounded by lies and treachery, confronted by a cunning and ruthless enemy, forced to use poor material, have deteriorated.<sup>779</sup>

The widening political space, which went in tandem with similar efforts in the church itself, was proof enough that liberation was gaining ground on both fronts as stated above. As Bostock aptly

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<sup>778</sup> ACK Archive, M/16, MRA Correspondence, 1952-1959.

<sup>779</sup> Ibid.

put it in the aftermath of the Mau Mau, "...the Diocese must demonstrate vividly that in Christ all barriers between man and man are done away with if it is to play its true role in Kenya."<sup>780</sup> Thus, in the immediate post- Mau Mau period, rehabilitation and up building of the church was done in the fairly certain knowledge that a Rubicon had been crossed, and that the destiny of the colonized would soon lie in their own hands.

In this spirit, the Anglican Church appointed Obadiah Kariuki and Festo Olang as the first local bishops at the height of the Mau Mau struggle in 1955. This appointment marked the beginning of the scaling down of missionary enterprise in the colony. Kariuki's profile had been built partly by his prominence as an anti- Mau Mau crusader. Indeed, Kariuki was the epitome of African Christians' resistance to the Mau Mau. In Wiseman's small book on Kikuyu martyrs,<sup>781</sup> Kariuki in a moving postscript titled "we who learned in danger," compares Kikuyu Christians' resistance to the Mau Mau to that of Christ's apostles who, in mortal danger after their master's death, had nonetheless kept the faith. He recalled, "...we trembled exceedingly, yes very, very, much. But He has come to us too, and our hearts are also glad."<sup>782</sup> In his autobiography, he indicates that in the sufferings of the Kikuyu Christian community, "...the blood of the martyrs too nourished the tree of freedom as any other."<sup>783</sup> He maintains that the church had played its dutiful role during the Mau Mau, and for that, contributed equally in the building up of the state's welfare.

The re-structuring of the Protestant Churches' leadership went hand in hand with pronounced strides in racial integration in the church itself. Part of this exercise involved the re-aligning of the Dioceses into more manageable units. It also saw considerable mergers of chaplaincies (catering for the white community), with pastorates, the administrative units covering several African churches in one jurisdiction. The merger of parishes meant that they would no longer be some parishes solely for Africans and others for Europeans. Nairobi, where colour bar was most visible, presented the best face for this integration as the CMS yearly bulletin for 1958 proudly showed:

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<sup>780</sup> ACK Archive, MSS/61/562, Annual Letter.

<sup>781</sup> Wiseman, op.cit.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>783</sup> Obadiah Kariuki, op. cit., pp.78-9.

The Diocese continues to make headway in the delicate matter of racial integration. The number of Africans attending the Cathedral in Nairobi grows and the Cathedral, St. Mark's Parklands and Karen have joined with the African pastorates of St. Stephen's and St. John's to form one Deanery.<sup>784</sup>

Further, the bulletin noted that the chaplaincies of Kiambu, Mount Kenya, and Nakuru were taking increasing responsibility of the spiritual welfare of the Africans working on the farms and similar developments were likely to take place shortly in the Eldoret and Kitale areas.<sup>785</sup>

This restructuring, and heightened indigenization of church leadership, was irrefutably one of the most positive developments for the protestant churches in the post-Mau Mau period. The ascendancy of African clergy to leadership positions in the church was a boon, received with great excitement everywhere and in very much the same tone as were the first African elected leaders emerging on the scene simultaneously. On a tour of the Western Aberdare Chaplaincy and Pastorate (which had expressed the desire to unite), it is reported that while bishop Kariuki was received "warmly" by the substantial settler population there, he had received "a tremendous ovation from the Africans" wherever he went.<sup>786</sup> Africans were certainly ready not just for *Uhuru*, independence, but also "*Uhuru*" in the church as well. In what was described as a most successful tour, the church's report acknowledged that indeed the spirit of independence was abroad:

With the spirit of nationalism that is abroad in Africa, there is tremendous significance in the fact that we now have two African assistant bishops in the Diocese. They still have to feel their way; for example, Bishop Kariuki has never visited the settled area before and Bishop Olang had never been into any Kikuyu reserve; but I believe their appointment will play an invaluable part in helping

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<sup>784</sup> ACK Archive, MSS/61/562, Annual Letter, 1958.

<sup>785</sup> Ibid.

<sup>786</sup> ACK Archive, CL/1 Annual Letter, 1955.

African Christians to realize that the Christian Gospel is wholly for them and not a foreign religion.<sup>787</sup>

No better words could summarize the complementary liberations – from a missionary to an indigenized African church and from a colonial to an independent African state. Mau Mau underwrote both developments.

As for the Presbyterian Church, 1956 was an important year, for it marked the amalgamation of the Kenyan Presbyterian Church, with the overseas Presbytery of the Church of Scotland. This gave birth to the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, PCEA. Like the Anglicans, and to a lesser extent, the Catholics, the PCEA church set out on an accelerated path towards a more Africanized church with Charles Muhoro Kareri becoming its first African moderator of the General Assembly in 1954. In 1964, John Gatu became its first indigenous Secretary- General and Moderator in 1979. Both Moderators were nationalists of note. The calibre of leadership of the PCEA was an interesting commentary of the connection between indigenization of church leadership and national politics. As it were, the wheel had turned full circle.

At the height of the Mau Mau, when a whole society was, in European eyes, guilty by association, a missionary had described Reverend Charles Muhoro Kareri to a colleague as “a sly old fox.” This was in reference to deep-seated suspicion by some of the missionaries that some men of the cloth might not have been as anti-Mau Mau as would have been expected of men of their calling. In Kareri’s case, it was a suspicion bolstered by a report made by the Nyeri District Commissioner, who had raised concern in 1955 that Muhoro “was not taking a vigorous lead in denouncing Mau Mau.”<sup>788</sup> Besides, Kareri’s old and close friendship with Kenyatta, as well as Eliud Mathu, both leading nationalists, tantalizingly suggested that there lay an ardent nationalist behind the man of collar. His biography suggests as much.<sup>789</sup> He refers to the Mau Mau freedom fighters favourably, stating, “...we have a great debt to the people who offered to be killed in

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<sup>787</sup> Ibid.

<sup>788</sup> Derek. R Peterson(ed.), *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri*, African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin, 2003, p.84.

<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

order that our country can be free<sup>790</sup> To some, therefore, Muhoro Kareri was running with the hares and hunting with the hounds! Like Gatu, Kareri, a man passionate about the place of African culture in Christianity, had not thrown out the baby with the birth waters.

In the Catholic Church, too, significant strides at indigenization were also taking place in tandem with those in the protestant churches. Njoroge's study of the Catholic endeavour in Kenya argues that the Mau Mau nationalist clamour for land and freedom, primarily directed at the colonial regime and its collaborators, had an important outcome of shaking the churches to re-examine their missionary position.<sup>791</sup> In his examination of the Spiritan mission in the colony, he notes that in the post- Mau Mau period, it intensified its efforts in recruiting indigenous people for the ministry. This was no mean achievement, given that there was not a single local priest in the Kenyan Spiritan mission before the Mau Mau rebellion. However, a young man from Githunguri, situated twenty-five miles west of Nairobi, a hotbed of Mau Mau nationalism and of historical significance as the location of the first indigenous teachers' college, KTC, was the only one priest training for priesthood in Tanganyika. On February 17, 1954, in the spacious grounds of Lioki mission, thousands of ecstatic Africans arrived to witness the ordination of this young man, John Njenga as the first Catholic Kikuyu priest.

Technically, however, there had been one other before him whose story epitomised the tragic consequences of the cultural clash that missionary Christianity had occasioned in the colony. The story of Paul Njoroge is still retold. In 1937, a young man from Limuru, which lies twenty-five miles northwest of Nairobi, had insisted on joining the priesthood. However, his ambition was met with great disapproval from a patriarchal society where a son was expected to perpetuate, through marriage, its lineage. For joining the mission to train as priest, Njoroge, a first son, was cut off by his father, who was, ironically himself, a practicing Catholic. Nevertheless, Njoroge was sent to train in Rome, alongside three other African aspirants to the priesthood. He was ordained in 1944 but sadly fell gravely ill, dying in Rome on April 21, 1944, the very same year of his ordination.<sup>792</sup> In a world milieu where people took seriously a father's displeasure with the

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<sup>790</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>791</sup> Njoroge, op.cit., p.199.

<sup>792</sup> Ibid., pp.196-97.

ways of his son, Njoroge's tragic death in a foreign land was viewed with great trepidation as *kirumi*, a father's curse. Spiritan efforts to train local clergy after this tragedy continued to produce painfully slow results. Thus, the decade of the 1940's saw just one other priest ordained, Njoroge, as did the 1950's with John Njenga's ordination.

One of the primary factors in the slow pace of indigenization in the Catholic Church was tied, to a large extent, to the celibacy vows demanded of its priests, and widely viewed as "un-African." There were, however, other issues. The Catholic Church in Kenya had always been in a unique position as a foreign church, but one not closely allied to the ruling power. It was, therefore, under considerably less pressure, compared to the Anglican Church, to succumb to the politics of the colony, including the clamour for indigenization. However, over the years, but more so during the Mau Mau, the Catholic Church, while acknowledging that indigenous people had legitimate grievances was also wary of antagonizing its host, the British. Instead, the Catholic Church fully exploited the Mau Mau- generated tensions to make in-roads to protestant strongholds as mentioned earlier in this chapter. This it had done by offering extensive social welfare, education, as well as spiritual refuge to hundreds of Protestant Christians who had been turned out of their churches for their alleged association with the Mau Mau. In these acts of "charity," and by distancing itself from blame over the calamitous outbreak of violence in the colony, the Catholic Church consolidated its gains throughout the critical years of the 1950s.

The Catholic church's efforts to recruit not only more African priests, but also to provide a more African face, was also quite evident even before Mau Mau had been fully quelled. These efforts bore fruit, and Maurice Michael Otunga, a priest from the Diocese of Kisumu was installed auxiliary bishop to that See in December 1956. Another feather in his cap was that he became the first African Catholic to be entrusted with a Diocese, the Diocese of Kisii in 1960. Otunga was to become Co-Adjutor Archbishop in 1969, and finally succeeded Archbishop John J. McCarthy in 1971. He was ordained Cardinal in 1973.<sup>793</sup>

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<sup>793</sup> Ibid., p.203.



One other effort at indigenization in the post- Mau Mau period deserves mention. This was the joint efforts by the Protestant missions- Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist- to have a common training programme for her clergy. For years, differences of weighty proportions had dictated that each of these major missions train their own clergy. The early efforts at an alliance of the Protestant missions in teaching and church discipline in the 1920s had only achieved limited success. Profound differences, and even rivalry, had hindered even a simple common service of worship from being devised. The only successful joint programme remained the inception of the Alliance High School in 1926.

However, brought together by the difficulties associated with the outbreak of Mau Mau, the three major protestant missions managed to shelf their doctrinal and disciplinary differences, a development that delightfully led to the birth of a united theological college. St. Paul's United Theological College was the fruit of these efforts. It opened its doors in 1955, with the three missions pooling their resources to run a three-year course for its clergy. In the years that followed, other protestant missions would join in the training programmes, producing the first crop of trained African church leaders. As the Persian representative to the Willingen Conference of 1954 put it at a time when many of the colonized African states were clamouring for freedom,

Our Christian task is to change a narrow-centred nationalism into a broad self-giving patriotism which is concerned with the true welfare of the people.<sup>794</sup>

These first African church leaders, each in their own way, believed they espoused a nationalistic outlook. In all, we therefore ask, had the church in colonial Kenya been faithful to that mandate? Had it truly managed to change narrow-centred nationalism to broad self-giving patriotism? If the answer was in the affirmative, was this not as important a contribution to the growth of African nationalism as any other was? Indeed as Bewes had rhetorically enquired when Christians became state victims on the suspicion of colluding with the Mau Mau, was it enough to judge loyalty by military standards alone? These and other questions lie at the heart of the interface between church and nationalism in colonial Kenya. That the church was concerned with

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<sup>794</sup> KNA, 10/R/3 Emergency Press Cuttings.

the true welfare of the people can never be doubted. However, it is equally important to note that this was welfare on the terms of its givers, governed by what they, the givers, patronisingly considered good to its beneficiaries. For example, when the Mau Mau broke out, missionaries, like the rest of the white fraternity, did not consider it as representing nationalism of whatever shade.

Yet, its outbreak clearly precipitated important changes both in the church and in the political establishment as this chapter has endeavoured to show. The tragedy was that it took a violent confrontation for the church in the colony to realize that God had a plan for Kenya, one that not only included, but also put at centre-stage, the colonized. To the freedom fighters who had taken up arms against the colonial rulers, the most critical element in this God's plan for Kenya was that they should get back their "stolen lands" and *Uhuru*, self-determination. To the missionaries, and the more liberal minded whites, "the plan" increasingly became a multi-racial arrangement, a political version, I would venture, of what the revivalists had described long before the Mau Mau was ever envisaged as "all being one under the cross." Max Warren offered a good illustration as to what this nexus entailed in the context of African nationalism:

Within what we call nationalism there burns not only evil passions but also aspirations which mount to heaven, and are surely recognized there. Love of country, love of race, love of tradition, these have been in the past and can be today the instruments through which all the glory of the nations can be brought into God's kingdom. And the Christian mission has one of the most important tasks; to review the relation of the Gospel to this undertaking.<sup>795</sup>

Getting the white man to concede that the Christian mission had the sacred duty "to review the relation of the Gospel to this undertaking," in the context of the Kenya colony was, in my view, truly a monumental legacy of the Mau Mau. Though viewed as "mindless atavism" by the whites in the colony, Mau Mau had proved beyond doubt that faith and nationalism need not be mutually exclusive.

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<sup>795</sup> ACK Archive, CCK/R/1/7B.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study set out to examine the interface between Christian faith and nationalism against the backdrop of the Mau Mau during the colonial period. The study was undertaken in the firm belief that the loyalist phenomenon in colonial Kenya remains understated, and that while part of this paucity is directly tied to the loyalists' own disinclination at telling their side of the story, the public default perception of their role has been decidedly negative. Yet, without foregrounding loyalists, the story of this critical period in Kenya's history, indeed that of the longer colonial narrative, remains a story half-told, to the detriment of scholarship. For this study, several conclusions arise from the tripod of Christianity, nationalism and loyalism which are at the core of this study.

The first revolves around culture and its significance to the interface between faith and nationalism. The study demonstrates that from the outset, missionaries in close association with colonial administrators used cultural invasion masked as "civilizing mission" as a critical prerequisite to colonial subjugation. Indeed, cultural change was the dipstick with which missionaries measured the level of the effectiveness of their evangelistic endeavours, and for the state, that of a "civilizing mission," in their endeavour to create a modern state. This study finds that, of the two, missionaries were the more keenly aware of the change they wanted to see in the colonised. They, therefore, combined with alacrity their missionary calling with their self-arrogated role as cultural emissaries, leaving a perilously thin line between the gospel message and the advocacy of western civilization. In presenting Christianity as a superior alternative to the existing culture, missionaries enjoined themselves to the colonial endeavour, where faith and culture became tools of domination. For this study, the use of culture as a tool of colonial domination by the white cohort in Kenya is a clear illustration of how the theory of Antidialogical Action applies to this study. Cultural action, as historical action, is appraised as an instrument for superseding the dominant and alienating culture. Culture, in this context, is viewed both as a tool of colonial domination, as much as it is a result of colonial domination,

making every authentic revolution a cultural revolution. This theory affirms that Mau Mau was not just a war of liberation, but one against cultural domination as well.

This study demonstrates that one of the most poignant reactions to attempts at cultural domination was the rise of African nationalism. It has argued that the co-habitation of Christian missions and the colonial state, and the synonymy of western culture and religious heritage, significantly contributed to the first stirrings of African nationalism. Christianity and missionary education, in empowering Africans in ways missionaries could not have foreseen thus became a double-edged sword, a transformative force that empowered its beneficiaries to engage with the tools of modern nationalism. With time, this translated into militant nationalism against political and cultural domination. The female circumcision crisis of the 1930s, for example, epitomised the dialectical outcomes that characterised the interface between faith and nationalism in colonial Kenya. Though western education was limited in many ways, it nonetheless opened the eyes of its beneficiaries to the contradictions inherent in the egalitarianism of the gospel message that missionaries preached, and that of colonial oppression. This study thus agrees with the position adopted by Norman Leys in reference to missionary Christianity that, if true to its mission, it would have realized it was inescapably at odds with the theoretical basis of colonialism.<sup>796</sup> It also bears out this study's hypothesis that the patterns of the establishment of missions had a direct bearing on the inculcation of Christian faith, and that formal education gave rise to an African elitist class that rose to be the vanguard of African nationalism.

The Mau Mau revolt underlies all the major issues discussed in this study. The study has argued that, while a convergence of global factors worked in favour of African nationalism in the post-World War II period, in Kenya, the single most important development that finally broke settler power and won the country's freedom was the Mau Mau. However, the study, by delving into the history of the rise and development of African nationalism, has also sought to demonstrate that, if the Mau Mau was the "forcing house" of the country's freedom, to borrow Lonsdale's term,<sup>797</sup> it is because it stood on the shoulders of the earlier struggles that began at the dawn of imperial domination. Indeed, to study the history of nationalism in Kenya is to affirm that it was

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<sup>796</sup>Quoted in Stanley, *op.cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>797</sup>Lonsdale, "*Moral Economy of Mau Mau*, *op.cit.*" p. 265.

a phenomenon born of the upheaval occasioned by the structure and culture of modernizing influences. From its nascent development in the 1920s, to its territorial dimensions in the inter-war years and culminating in the Mau Mau, the seventy odd years of British rule leaves no doubt that modernizing colonialism was a midwife to modern nationalism. Consequently, this study arrives at the conclusion that to view the Mau Mau as a mere manifestation of atavism, while in fact it was in many ways a product of these very same forces of modernizing influences, would be simplistic and to miss the point. This premise confirms the pertinence of the modernization theory for this study.

Concerning the Revival Fellowship, a few conclusions are drawn. The first revolves around its core message of personal salvation and “oneness in Christ.” This study has demonstrated that this was a message that harboured multiple narratives. Inherent in it was an important social message that essentially challenged the assumptions of racial superiority in the colony, including that in the church. This study posits that the revival, in using the Gospel as a subtle challenge to European supremacy in the colony, laid bare the contradictions between the subjugation of a people, a natural outcome of colonial domination, with that of the egalitarianism of the Gospel message. As such, this study views the revival’s relevance to nationalism as lying in not only challenging Christian nominalism, but also European dominance over the church and state. Hence, an important contribution of this study to scholarship is that it debunks the myth that the revival was a movement wholly indifferent to the social and political concerns of the day. This position, to some extent, agrees with that of Derek Peterson who links the movement to wider processes of social and economic change in Kikuyuland.<sup>798</sup> Smoker, too, alludes to this involvement, pointing out that the revival brethren made great attempts to make one family of people of diverse tribes, cultures, and creeds,<sup>799</sup> while encouraging a warm spirit of confidentiality that was the context of decision-making.<sup>800</sup> These characteristics illustrate, in my mind that the brethren were not merely concerned with the afterlife, as some scholars have viewed them, but that they were also committed to the establishment of an egalitarian lifestyle in the here and now. In appropriating the gospel message and literally living it, the revivalists,

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<sup>798</sup> Derek Peterson, “Wordy Women,” op.cit., p.489.

<sup>799</sup> Dorothy Smoker, “Decision-making in East African Revival Movement Groups,” in David B. Barret, (ed.), *African Initiatives in Religion*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1971, p.106.

<sup>800</sup> *Ibid.*, p.108.

undoubtedly, brought something of value to African Christianity. As Smoker aptly observes, “... something which has been lost from Western Christianity has been initiated, re-introduced and is once again being demonstrated in this part of Africa, making it worthwhile for all of us to listen to.”<sup>801</sup> This affirms yet another of this study’s hypothesis that though contentious in African Christianity overall the revival was a force for the good.

In addition, the revival, coming as it did at the height of cultural nationalism was providential in two ways; first, it served as a bulwark against cultural nationalism that had assaulted African Christianity from the 1930s. At the same time, the revival, in initiating a digression from the traditional society where elders no longer held the last word, and the views of the younger members of less seniority were listened to and taken on their merit,<sup>802</sup> suggests willingness to replace it with ideas that were more modern than what it had rejected from the cultural milieu. This presented an interesting dual narrative, dialectical in nature. Similarly, this study finds that the revival was, undoubtedly, at its most providential in preparing the church for the battle with the Mau Mau. Revival Christians raised the most courageous African opposition to the revolt. There was one blood brotherhood against another, one sense of certainty against another.<sup>803</sup> Equally, it confirms this study’s hypothesis that in the face of the Mau Mau, the revival was a providential force for African Christianity.

At the core of this study lies the loyalist phenomenon with which the Kikuyu Christian community are historically associated. The study has argued that the multiplicity of factors that drove loyalism prior to, but especially during the Mau Mau, and the fact that there could be no simplistic polar division between the Mau Mau and the loyalist camp, created a nebulous ground that generated an amorphous relationship between the two. One consequence of this was that it exacerbated the internecine cleavages that the insurgency assumed. This validates the hypothesis held by this study that the Mau Mau exhibited some characteristics of a civil war. Furthermore, the study draws the conclusion that loyalism, like nationalism, was not a singular, but a compound phenomenon. In addition, while the study explicitly agrees with the view that loyalists

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<sup>801</sup> Ibid.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid., p.106.

<sup>803</sup> Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity, 1950-1975*, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.101.

are critical to the understanding of the Mau Mau, not least to its moral economy,<sup>804</sup> it nonetheless holds the view that to brand Christians “loyalists” without qualifying the nature of that loyalty is unhelpful to scholarship. Thus, the study firmly holds that the question, “loyal to whom or what?” is critical to the understanding of the examination of the tripod of Christianity, nationalism and loyalism in colonial Kenya. On balance, this study finds that the loyalist phenomenon crucially demonstrates the multi-coded nature that characterises the interface between faith and nationalism.

In regard to independent churches and schools, a significant finding is that on balance, the ethos of these institutions reveal an early grasp of cultural nationalism in Warren’s sense of “love of country,” “love of race,” and “love of tradition.” This ethos resonated well with Mau Mau’s own where, though the freedom fighters’ anger was primarily against the British, they were even angrier with the Christian Kikuyu whom they perceived to have divided the tribe by their allegiance to a foreign religion.<sup>805</sup> For this study, this offers a rationale as to why Christians bore the brunt of the Mau Mau, and why the revolt assumed dimensions of a civil war. Again, like the independent church followers, the freedom fighters were categorical that they were anti-mission, not anti-God. Seen against this light, the claim by the freedom fighters that it was not the Christian faith, but the colonial face that it represented that they were up in arms against gains plausibility. The freedom fighters’ stance explains why many sought to reconcile themselves to Christianity, as soon as they had laid their arms down.

The second important question concerning independent churches and schools is whether these institutions were breeding grounds for the Mau Mau. This study finds that this remains a nebulous area that requires further scholarly inquiry. On the other hand, and undoubtedly, this study holds that independent churches and schools, in playing a pivotal role in disentangling Christianity from western culture that was the bane of Protestant and Catholic Christianity, gave fillip to the Mau Mau’s cultural and liberation war against the colonisers. Overall, in appropriating Christianity on their own terms, independent churches and schools exhibited a

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<sup>804</sup> See, for example, Lonsdale, ‘*Moral Economy of Mau Mau*,’ op.cit.

<sup>805</sup> Bewes, *Kikuyu Conflict*, op.cit., p.52.

cultural defiance that disproved the perception that faith and nationalism in colonial Kenya were mutually exclusive.

Finally, but most importantly, this study's original contribution is summed up in the categorical stand that in Mau Mau's military "defeat" lay the blueprint to expanded political space for the colonised and an impetus towards an African leadership in the church. All evidence adduced in this study incontrovertibly affirms that the rapid changes on the political landscape in Kenya, as well as in the church, were certainly not a happenstance and that the Mau Mau underwrote both. Thus to peg Mau Mau's success on its military performance alone, this study finds, would be a grave injustice to the gallant efforts of the Mau Mau freedom fighters.

By looking at the meaning of the symbolic edifice of the cathedral at Murang'a town, the monumental legacy of the Mau Mau and the debates that swirl around faith and nationalism is encapsulated. Two events in the immediate post- Mau Mau period illustrate the point. The first was the laying of the foundation stone of St. James and All Martyrs in Murang'a town by His Grace, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in May 1955. Only two months later, the first two African bishops, Obadiah Kariuki and Festo Olang, were consecrated at the All Saints Cathedral, Nairobi, both as assistant bishops. Barely a year later would Maurice Otunga be ordained as the first African auxiliary Catholic bishop in Kenya. The consecration of the Cathedral at Murang'a was, in many ways, symbolic of the ambiguities that riddle the memorialisation of the Mau Mau as a liberation struggle. The second, the consecration of the first African bishops, was a cusp in the history of Christianity in Kenya, setting the church firmly on the road to indigenized leadership and putting to rest the oft-repeated question in the African congregation, "when shall we have an African bishop?"

The Cathedral, built between 1955 and 1958, has been described as "one of the precious few public monuments to Kikuyu civil war of 1950s, albeit an uncomfortable one."<sup>806</sup> While the church was built largely through private subscription, with the bulk of the finances coming from well-wishers in Britain, it nonetheless also received keen logistical support from the Provincial

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<sup>806</sup> Branch, *op.cit.*, p.210.



Administration. Obadiah Kariuki, the first bishop to take up residence at the cathedral, described the construction work as one carried out in the spirit of “forced harambee,” a term coined by the founding father of the nation, Jomo Kenyatta, literally meaning, “pulling together,” or self-help.<sup>807</sup> Because the forced labour was none other than that of Mau Mau detainees, St. James and all Martyrs can aptly be described as the church that the Mau Mau built. It captures well the ironies of the war, and stands as a symbolic edifice to faith and nationalism.

In addition, the cathedral is home to a series of striking murals, the work of renowned Tanzanian artist, Elimo Njau.<sup>808</sup> Njau, who was commissioned in 1958 to cover the church walls with indigenous Christian iconography, painted five Christian scenes that portray Jesus and his ministry in an African context. The black Christ in his paintings was a protest against missionary presentation of Jesus as a white man, while presenting Satan as a black man.<sup>809</sup> Such imagery, Njau argued, had the effect of making Africans hate themselves, and associate themselves with evil and with hell.<sup>810</sup> The symbolic space of the murals thus resonates well with this study’s contention that, the denigration of African culture by the colonisers was a critical variable in the shaping of the trajectories that Christianity and nationalism assumed in colonial Kenya. To a nation on the verge of independence, scenes of a black Christ in African surroundings, in a church dedicated to Christian martyrs of the Mau Mau freedom war, was truly heart-warming: it not only acclaimed the universality of the Gospel message, but also affirmed that Christ speaks to all cultures with the same egalitarian message.<sup>811</sup> The murals appropriately reflect Njau’s own interpretation of art as a visual or tangible expression of God’s living presence in man and his community.<sup>812</sup>

Furthermore, the church at Murang’a was built “in the memory of all those of all races who lost their lives in the course of duty as loyal citizens, whether in the fighting services or in civilian

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<sup>807</sup> Kariuki, op.cit., p.71.

<sup>808</sup> See Appendix D of this study.

<sup>809</sup> J.N.K Mugambi, *Critiques of Christianity in African Literature*, Nairobi, East African Educational Publishers, 1992, p.17.

<sup>810</sup> Ibid.

<sup>811</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>812</sup> Elimo Njau, ‘Artists and Society: Some Comments,’ in G.J. Wanjohi and G.W. Wanjohi (eds.), *Social and Religious Concerns of East African: A Wajibu Anthology*, Series II, Africa, Vol. 10, Nairobi, Pauline Publications, 2005, pp. 22-30.

occupations.”<sup>813</sup> At the side entrance to the church compound is a small iron- wrought gate, whose central features are a musket and a Cross. These two symbols, the one of war and the other, the most recognisable sign of the Christian faith, fittingly summarise the painful memories associated with the Mau Mau war on both sides of the divide. The Mau Mau had used the gun to force change in the colony, while the Church, a representation of colonial domination in the eyes of the freedom fighters, had withstood the worst of this assault.

Yet, the interface between faith and nationalism, as this study has belaboured to show, is one underlined with multiple narratives as the plaque at the cathedral suggests. The plaque, in memorialising the loyal citizens as having “been murdered during the national liberation in Kenya,” superlatively captures the ambiguities inherent in these narratives. The depiction of Mau Mau fighters as simultaneously murderers and national liberators, encapsulates the paradoxes that dog the liberation war that was the Mau Mau.<sup>814</sup> Here was a post-Mau Mau church celebrating Christian loyalists- both in the category of those who had fallen to the terrorists, and “...those brave few who had remained steadfast throughout and contributed as much to the defeat of the Mau Mau by their example and inspiration to others as did the tribal forces in the field.”<sup>815</sup> Loyalty to the Christian faith and loyalty to country for the nationalists stand on the same platform. Loyalists are only celebrated because there was a war of liberation in the first place. As such, the physical and symbolic space of the cathedral consummately offers an apt summary of the paradoxes that dogged the liberation struggle.

For Christian fundamentalists, like Obadiah Kariuki, national liberation was the joint effort of those who stood firm in their faith as much as those who took up arms. In his autobiography, he describes Christians who resisted the Mau Mau as having made an important contribution to the peace of this country noting that, “their blood nourished the tree of freedom as much as any other.”<sup>816</sup> This echoes the “exile motif” alluded to elsewhere in this study, where the Jews in

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<sup>813</sup>Quoted in KNA MSS/124/26, Appeal Committee, the Fort Hall Memorial Church Fund, ‘The Foundations Have Been Laid: Help Us to Complete the Building,’ 1955.

<sup>814</sup> I owe this insight to some observations by Daniel Branch’s conclusion in, *Defeating Mau Mau*, op.cit.

<sup>815</sup>*History of Loyalists*, Nairobi, Government Printer, p.4.

<sup>816</sup> Kariuki, op.cit., pp. 78-9.

Babylonian exile were exhorted to build rather than destroy. Kariuki, in lauding Christians' role during the Mau Mau, portrays a people called to build, not destroy.

This study, therefore, finds that faith and nationalism are not virtues cast in black and white, but rather that they exhibit multiple shades. The Mau Mau not only raised the profile of the race question in the colony, but left it in no doubt that the liberation sought was not just political, but in all spheres, the church included.

More than sixty years since its outbreak, Mau Mau's legacy remains contested for the post-colonial state, and its public memorialisation riddled in conflict. The appropriation of its memory for selfish gains has left its actors, now at an advanced age, disillusioned at what they see as a betrayal of their cause by consecutive rulers and the elite of the land. It behoves scholars to urgently listen and document firsthand accounts-both from the loyalists and the freedom fighters-for that window will soon close. This is even more so of the loyalists whose voice, in spite of the resurgence of interest by scholars and the public at large, remains muted.

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Gatu John, Nairobi, 14/4/2007, retired PCEA Moderator, 83 years.  
Gatu Muchingu, Kigumo/Murang'a, 10/1/2009.  
Giconi Ndwiga, Kiereri/Embu, 14/1/2009, ex-Mau Mau freedom fighter, 81 years.  
Gitari David, Difathas/Embu, 28/1/2009, retired Bishop of the Anglican Church, 72 years.  
Kabatha Amos, Kabare/Kirinyaga, 16/1/2011, retired Anglican Church elder, 97 years.  
Kahengeri Gitu, Berlin/Germany, 9/10/2010, ex-Mau Mau freedom fighter/detainee, 81 years.  
Kamocere Nyaga, Makengi/Embu, 3/2/2009, farmer, 77 years.  
Kana Nyaga, Ndiuri/Embu, 3/2/2009, farmer, 77 years.  
Karanja John, Kigumo/Murang'a, 5/2/2009 retired Catholic Church catechist, 72 years.  
Kiburi Njoki, Mukurweini/Nyeri, 16/4/2009, farmer, 84 years.  
Kiguta Muchangi, Tumutum/Nyeri, June 2009, Revival Christian, 84 years.  
Kigo Burton Kibue, Mihuti/Nyeri, 2/4/2009, 89 years.  
Kimani Hudson, Othaya/Nyeri, 8/4/2009, farmer, 79 years.  
Kinyonga Mbiti, Kithimu/Embu, 10/1/2009, 74 years.  
Kiriro Amos, Nairobi, 3/6/2008, retired Anglican Church of Kenya Lay Reader, 82 years.  
Kungu Isaack, Ruchu/Murang'a, 3/2/2009, retired teacher, 82 years.  
Mage George, Lari/Kiambu, 9/1/2009, farmer, 87 years.  
Maina Edwin King'aru, Muthure/Kiambu, 26/6/2008, retired Anglican priest, 90 years.  
Maitha Niceta, Kevote/Embu, 12/1/2009, farmer, 81 years.  
Mbote Njuguna, Kigumo/Murang'a, 10/3/2009, ex-Mau Mau freedom fighter, 94 years.  
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Mwangi Beatrice, Kigumo/Murang'a, 24/1/2009, farmer.  
Mwangi Njoroge, Lari/Kiambu, 9/1/2009, farmer, 80 years.  
Mwaniki Catherine Wangiri, Kiangima/Embu, 18/1/2009, retired teacher, 68 years.  
Ndirangu Edward Njoroge, Thogoto/Kiambu, retired PCEA priest, 90 years.  
Ndavano Ireri, Ngimari/Embu, 25/1/2009, farmer, 70 years.  
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Njeri Priscah, Kigumo/Murang'a, 23/1/2009, ex- Mau Mau freedom fighter, 73 years.  
Njeru Lilian Wairimu, Kabare/Kirinyaga, retired Mothers Union leader, 95 years.  
Njeru Salessio Peter, Manyatta/Embu, 4/2/2009, farmer, 70 years.

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Ogutu Gilbert, Nairobi, 23/3/2010, Lecturer, University of Nairobi, 69 years.  
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**APPENDIX A: TWO OF THE EARLY MISSION CHURCHES IN THEIR ORIGINAL FORM**



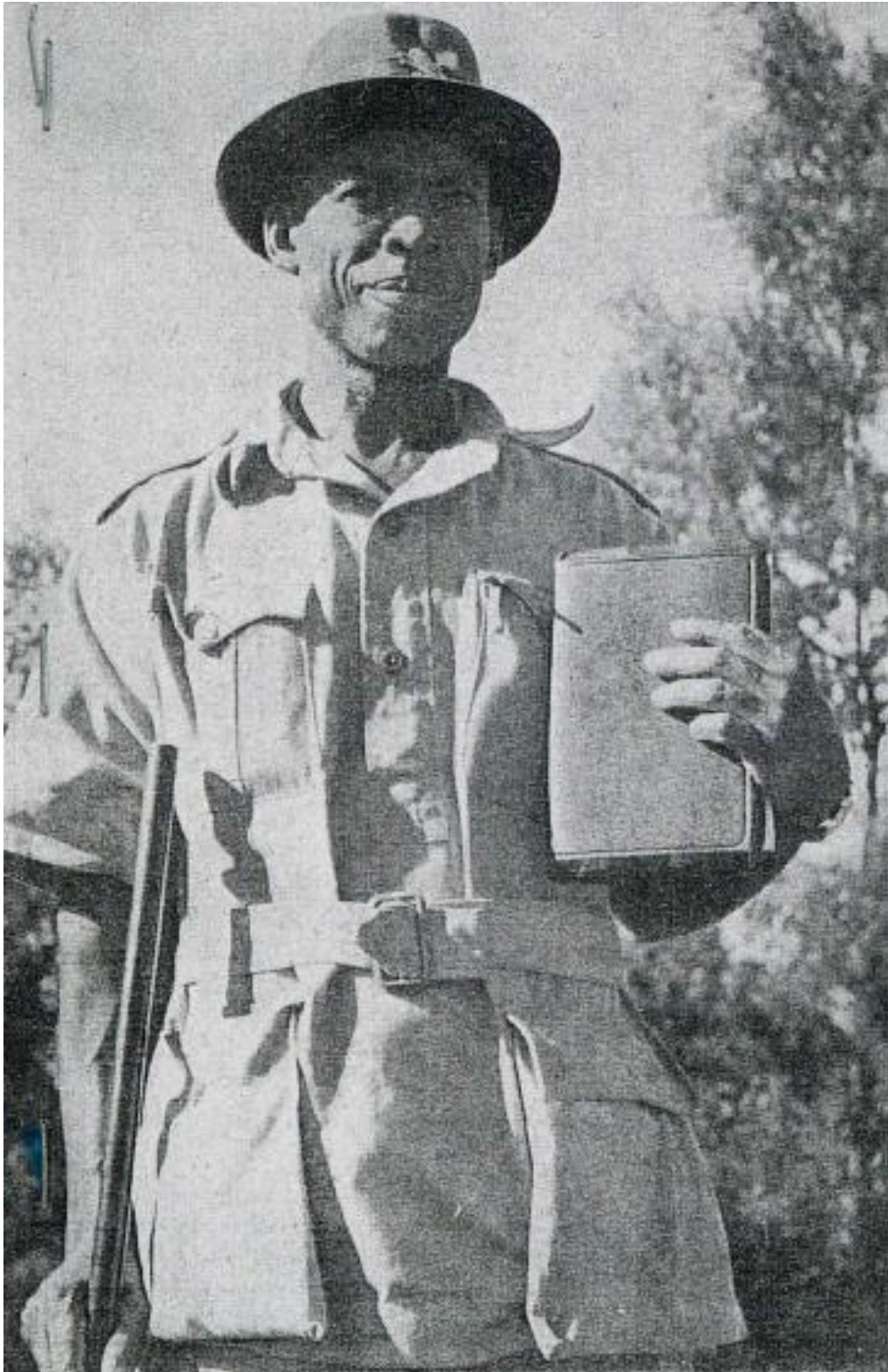
Source: Courtesy of St. Austin's Church, Msongari



Source: Courtesy of St Andrews Church, Kabare



**APPENDIX B: CHIEF PAULO KIRATU OF NJUMBI, MURANG'A**



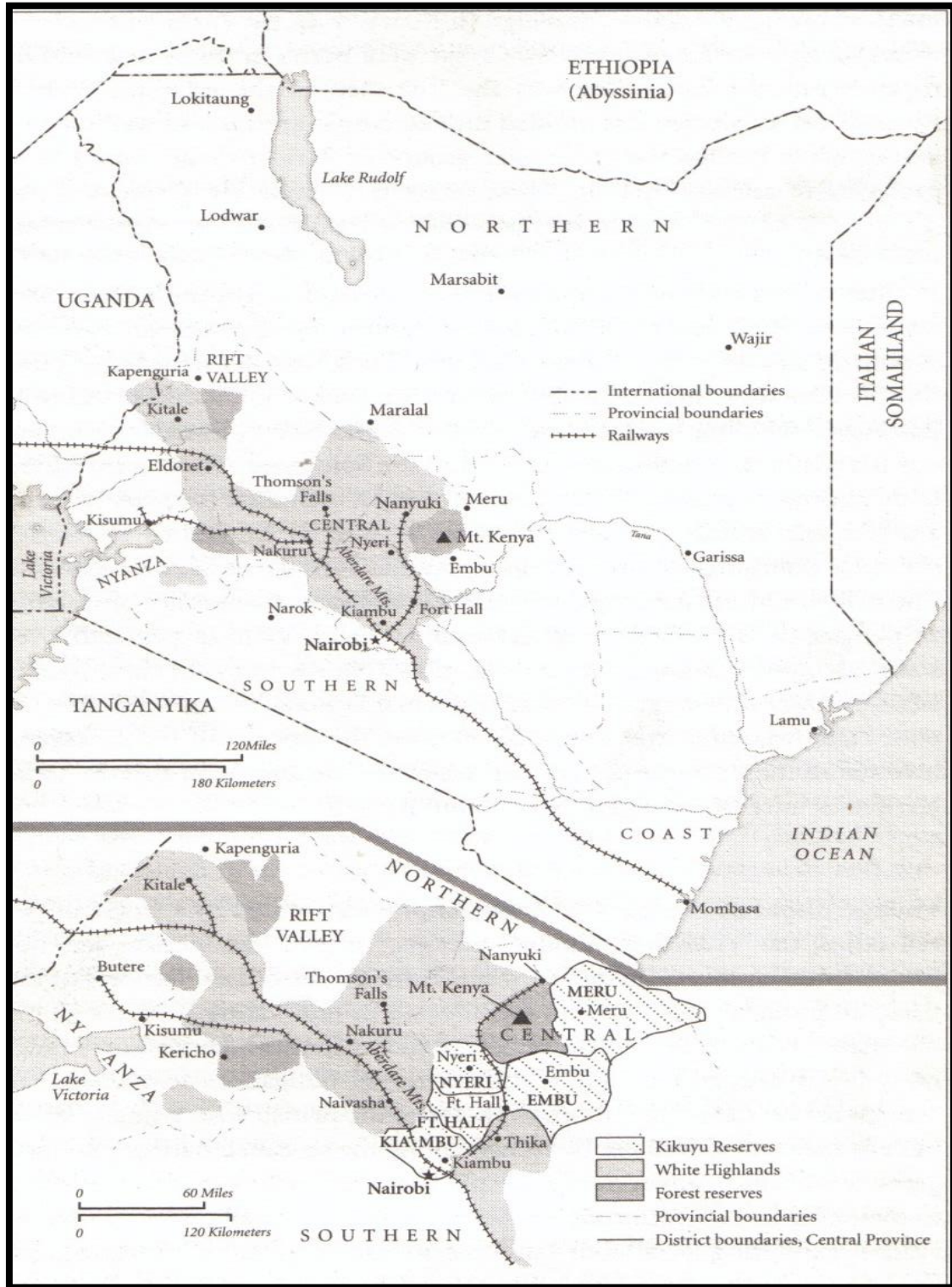
Source: Bewes (1953)



**APPENDIX C: MURALS BY ELIMO NJAU AT ST. JAMES AND ALL MARTYRS CHURCH, MURANG'A TOWN**

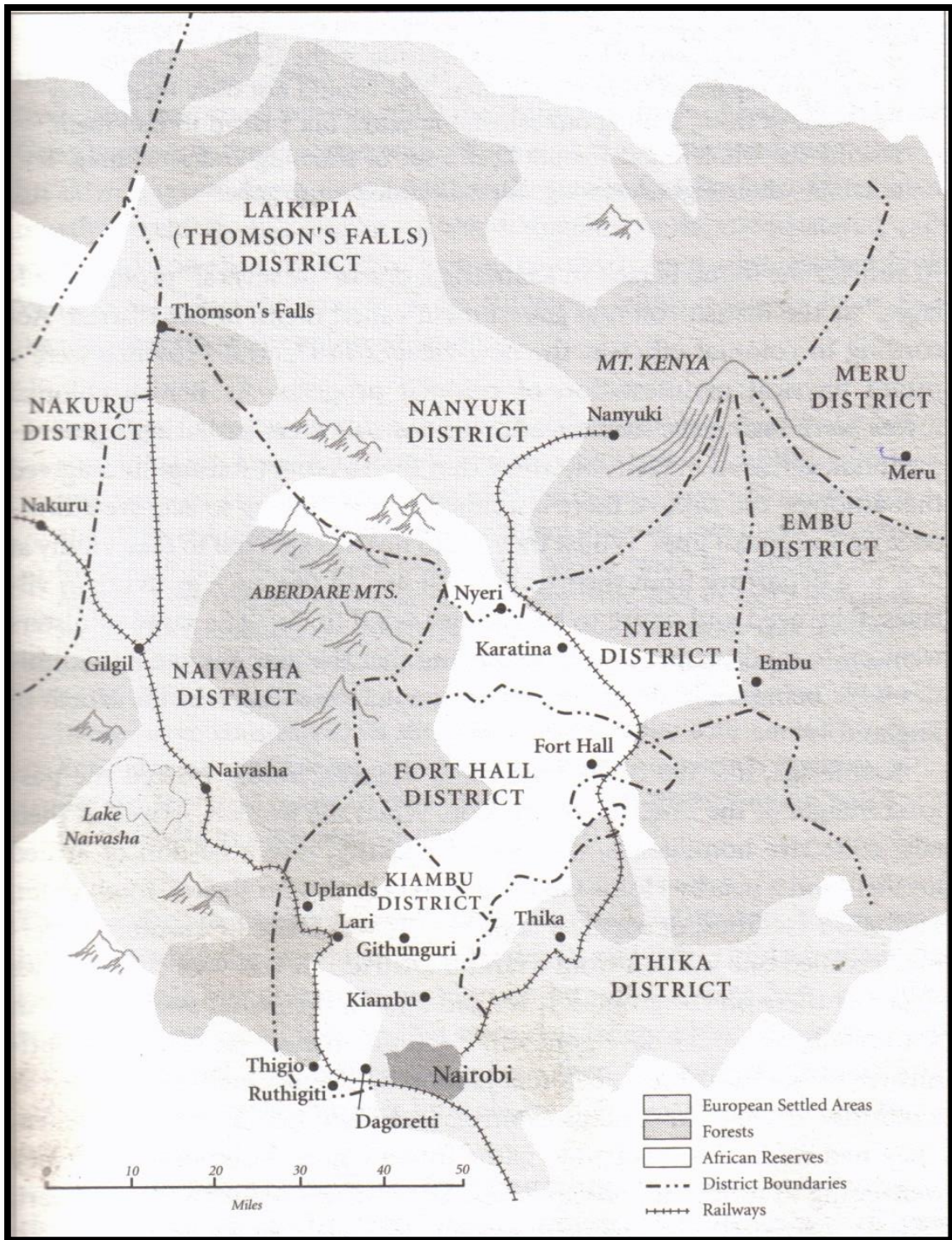


Source: Courtesy of St. James and ALL Martyrs Church, Murang'a town.



Map 1: Kenya with Kikuyu Reserves and the White Highlands Inset (Adapted from Elkins, 2005, p.6)





Map 2: Areas of Central Kenya Affected by the Mau Mau (Adapted from Elkins, 2005, p.239)