

THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR IN MAU MAU
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO
MAU MAU OATHS

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RENISON MUCHIRI | GITHIGE

A thesis submitted in part fulfilment for the
Degree of Master of Arts in the
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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and
has not been presented for a degree
in any other University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Renison M. Githige', written over a solid horizontal line.

.....
RENISON M. GITHIGE

This thesis has been submitted for
examination with my approval as

University Supervisor

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sam G. Kibicho".

DR. S.G. KIBICHO

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S U M M A R Y

Mau Mau was a nationalist movement which spread in Central and Rift Valley areas of Kenya between 1948 and 1956. The aim of the movement was to fight against colonialism. The movement had a strong religious factor which was expressed in various beliefs and practices, including songs, prayers and oaths. This study addresses itself to this religious factor, with special reference to Mau Mau oaths. The oaths were used in the movement so as to initiate members as well as to strengthen their commitment to the liberation struggle.

The organisation and format of the study is quite simple due to the nature of the work covered. In the first chapter, some views on the Mau Mau movement are analysed. Most of the material in this chapter is collected from written work. Three views are looked at. First is the view that Mau Mau was a religion; second is the view that Mau Mau was more of a nationalist movement; and finally is the view that Mau Mau was a syncretist movement. Each of the views is discussed here in the way that it relates to the religious factor in the Mau Mau movement. Chapter one ends with an assertion that there was a religious factor in the movement, a factor whose nature and significance has not been thoroughly investigated. After the first chapter, the study narrows down to the question of Mau Mau oaths.

Chapter two looks at three somewhat isolated issues of the movement and each of them is shown to be connected

to Mau Mau oaths. The first part deals with the possible origins of the name 'Mau Mau'. The second part deals with the initial target or aim of the movement, and the third part looks at the religious factor in Mau Mau ideology.

Chapter three explores the nature and religious significance of traditional Kikuyu oaths and curses. The ceremonies are described and some examples given where possible. This chapter gives the basic background information which is useful in a study of Mau Mau oaths. An attempt is made to show the link between the traditional oaths and curses on the one hand, and the Mau Mau oaths on the other.

Chapter four surveys the two main oaths used by the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA). The first oath is seen to have been syncretistic. The second oath is seen to have been of a similar nature to traditional Kikuyu oaths. The relationship between the second KCA oath and the first Mau Mau oath is here examined.

Chapters five and six concentrate on the two main Mau Mau oaths, the oath of unity and the oath of war. In these two chapters, great emphasis is laid on the description of the nature of each oath. An analysis of the symbols and rituals in each ceremony is attempted. The ways in which these two oaths differed from traditional oaths are also explained.

The concluding chapter analyzes the relationship between the nature of Mau Mau oaths, KCA oaths and

traditional Kikuyu oaths. The effects of Mau Mau oaths on the movement are also explained. And finally, the questions raised at the start of the study are here looked at in line with the conclusions which have been reached at the end of each chapter.

The study ends with an appendix in which some of the Mau Mau songs quoted in this study are written in full. Both the Kikuyu version of the songs (as sung by informants) and the English translations (by the writer) are given.

ABBREVIATIONS

KCA	=	Kikuyu Central Association
KAU	-	Kenya African Union
YKA	-	Young Kikuyu Association
EAA	-	East African Association
P.C.E.A.	-	Presbyterian Church of East Africa
E.A.L.B.	-	East African Literature Bureau
NA	-	Kenya National Archives
EAPH	-	East African Publishing House
O.U.P.	-	Oxford University Press

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INTRODUCTION

Before I set out on this research, I thought that it was possible for me to investigate the nature and significance of most of the religious aspects contained in the Mau Mau Movement. At that time, I had only read Barnett's book, Mau Mau From Within in which there is a strong argument to the effect that there was a strong religious factor in the movement. The major aim of my research was to investigate whether there was evidence of a religious factor in the movement as well as the actual nature of that religious factor.

But when I entered into actual fieldwork, I found out that the task before me was too wide to be covered thoroughly in a field research of six months. I therefore decided, with the help of my supervisor, Dr. Kibicho, to narrow down the task and only cover the religious factor in Mau Mau oaths alone. I had to put aside all the other aspects contained in the religious factor in the Mau Mau Movement including the Mau Mau conception of God, the Mau Mau songs and prayers, Mau Mau seers and prophets, Mau Mau ceremonies as well as the role of christianity in the movement. My choice of oaths was based on my own conviction that the oaths had a very vital role to play in the movement, a conviction that was confirmed by field research. I also chose the oaths because no detailed study has been

carried out on Mau Mau oaths so far.

I carried out most of my fieldwork research between August 1976 and January 1977. The fieldwork took place in Murang'a, Kiambu, Nyeri and Nyandarua Districts, but most of my informants were to be found more easily in Nyandarua District where the ex-Mau Mau freedom fighters have been resettled in large numbers. Fewer persons were contacted in the other three districts.

The method I used in my fieldwork was mainly interview, and all my interviews were taped and the tapes preserved. I conducted the interview sessions at nights because this was the only time that the informants were available. In each session, I had groups of three to ten persons together. The sessions took place in the home of one of the informants, most preferably the one who had good relations with the neighbours. He was also the person who aided me in selecting and calling together the other informants.

I did not know my informants to start with. What I did was that I contacted friends who knew the famous ex-Mau Mau freedom fighters. These friends took me to the homes of the informant, and if the informant was willing to help, he called together some other informants and introduced me to them. This way, I was able to arrange for the first interview session. After this first session, the present informants selected other informants and brought them to the next session,

a few weeks later. In this way, I was able to work from several centres. I had three centres in Nyandarua, two in Murang'a, two in Nyeri and two in Nairobi and Kiambu. Towards the end of the fieldwork, I narrowed down the number of informants and I was left with the key informants.

In my field research, the main problem that I faced was one of choosing the reliable informants. Before I had decided on group interviews, I had faced the problem of knowing whether or not an informant was an ex-freedom fighter as he claimed to have been. I decided on group interview when I discovered that one of my very first informants, who had told me that he had been a Brigadier in the forest, had actually not entered the forest. It is true today that many Kikuyu claim that they fought in the Mau Mau war. Yet some of them did not. Further, no one today accepts that he was a loyalist homeguard against the Mau Mau movement. And neither does anyone declare freely that he surrendered and aided the government in the hunt for forest freedom fighters. Many of those who boast of having been Mau Mau no doubt belonged to the above categories of surrenderers and loyalist homeguards. Many of the Mau Mau did not continue with the struggle to the very end. Some were detained, some were arrested while most surrendered and became loyalists. Today, most of the Kikuyu who were loyalists and those who surrendered are ready to come forward and give information

on how the Mau Mau war was fought. This is the greatest problem a researcher faces. The problem was greatly reduced in this particular research by the group interview technique.

It should, however, be stated here that the above problem has led to a lot of misinformation on the Mau Mau Movement. Our present government has had to deal with the same issue. As one informant stated, "Today, it is hard for the government to do anything for the ex-Mau Mau freedom fighters because when they are called together, many who did not fight come forward. When the government gives a piece of land for the ex-freedom fighters, it is allocated to some who did not fight."¹ This problem started at the end of the war. Waruhiu writes that after independence in 1963, the freedom fighters were asked to come out of the forest by the new government. Waruhiu states at length that:

*Men and women, bearing various ranks and titles, came out in large numbers, carrying imported and homemade guns, clothes and other personal belongings; and bringing their sheep and cattle with them. Many of the local Nyeri people who had come to watch the ceremony were astounded to see, among those claiming to be forest fighters, people who had been their neighbours up until a few days before.*²

I must also admit here that the literature covered in this study is inadequate, first because there is little relevant material written on the religious factor in the

movement, and also because much that has been written is the work of persons who were not part of the movement. My main aim was to carry out a field research and bring out the ideas of the actual freedom fighters. It is therefore clear that some of the details which may be of particular concern to people like historians are only slightly touched upon here.

The Aims of the Study:

It is my contention here that the views presented to us by some of the writers on the Mau Mau Movement do not give an adequate treatment of the religious factor in the movement. These views are covered in the next chapter. They are inadequate in the sense that they do not give a proper and thorough treatment of the traditional Kikuyu beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols in the way that these traditional elements were used in the Mau Mau Movement. The place and role of these elements in the movement has not been properly presented in the views. It is in the area of Mau Mau oaths that these traditional elements were mainly contained. A study of these oaths gives us a wider knowledge of these traditional elements.

A major concern of this study is to answer various questions that can be raised with reference to Mau Mau oaths in general and to the religious elements in the oaths in particular. Of particular importance is a description of the nature and content of Mau Mau oath ceremonies, with particular emphasis on the nature

of the rituals and symbols contained in the oath ceremonies. The writer has not come across any other literature which has addressed itself mainly to this area of the movement.

This study also looks at the question of the origins of Mau Mau oaths. In this area, emphasis has been laid on the relationship between Mau Mau oaths and the oaths that were there among the Kikuyu before Mau Mau. These other oaths included the traditional Kikuyu forms of oaths and the oaths of the KCA, both of which are carefully looked into here.

Thirdly, it is the intention of the writer to analyze the religious significance of the rituals and symbols contained in the oath ceremonies. An important question in this area is whether the religious factor in the oaths can be termed as either African traditional, christian, syncretistic or a new religion. It is only after understanding the religious factor that we may be able to answer this question.

A study of the relationship between Mau Mau oaths, KCA oaths and traditional Kikuyu oaths, also helps us to see the deviations and disparities that Mau Mau and KCA oaths contained as compared to the nature of the traditional oaths.

An attempt is also made in this study to assess the role played by the Mau Mau oaths towards either the development, or hindrance of the development, of Kenyan nationalism during colonial times. In this case,

a study of the effects of Mau Mau oaths has been attempted.

Finally, I must state here that a thorough research needs to be carried out on the other aspects contained in the religious factor in the movement. These aspects have been mentioned above. It is mainly after such a research has been done that a complete assessment of the religious factor in the Mau Mau movement can be made. The present study only addresses itself to just one aspect of the religious factor, the oaths.

The Basic Findings:

After carefully studying the Mau Mau oaths, the KCA oaths and the traditional Kikuyu oaths, various findings have been observed. First, there is evidence in the oaths to show that there was indeed a religious factor in the Mau Mau movement. This religious factor was largely, but not solely, based on traditional Kikuyu beliefs and practices. Christian elements were also contained in the religious factor, but as far as Mau Mau oaths were concerned, there was very little syncretism of both christian and traditional elements.

Secondly, this study reaches the conclusion that Mau Mau oaths were an adaptation of traditional Kikuyu oaths. These traditional oaths were first applied by the KCA, before the Mau Mau movement. Both the KCA and Mau Mau oaths however differed in various ways from the traditional oaths. But these deviations from traditional oaths were more in Mau Mau oaths than in KCA

oaths. It is also observed here that these deviations were deliberately made by the oath organisers and administrators when they found it necessary to do so.

Thirdly, the study of the effects of Mau Mau oaths shows that to a great extent, the beliefs underlying the oaths strengthened the people's unity and commitment to the movement. No doubt there were people who took Mau Mau oaths and yet did not share these traditional beliefs e.g. some christians. But many of them were also instructed during the ceremony and they were made to understand that the cause of the movement was a just one.

Finally, this study of oaths has shown that there was no 'religion' of Mau Mau. What was there was the adaptation of various aspects of Kikuyu traditional beliefs and practices. These aspects comprised a strong religious factor in the Mau Mau movement.

In my own opinion therefore, this study is important in several respects. First, there is here a description and analysis of the nature and significance of oaths among the Kikuyu, both in traditional society and in the twentieth century. The relationship between traditional Kikuyu oaths on the one hand, and KCA and Mau Mau oaths on the other hand is shown. Such a detailed study has not been done so far. Secondly, this study has emphasised the adaptability of traditional Kikuyu symbols and rituals to a national crisis situation in the Mau Mau movement. This greatly helps us to understand the role of Mau Mau oaths in the movement.

Thirdly, this study is greatly useful in trying to answer the question as to whether Mau Mau was a 'religion' or a nationalist movement. The study asserts that there was indeed a religious factor in the movement, a factor which greatly influenced the people's commitment to the movement. The factor cannot, however, be defined purely as a religion of its kind. Finally, there is here, a description of the Mau Mau oaths by the Mau Mau themselves which in itself is an important achievement of this study.

FOOTNOTES

1. Njoroge Kagunda: Interview, Nyandarua, 20.11.76.
2. Itoto, T.: Mau Mau General, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967, p.253. The incidence took place at Ruring'u Stadium, Nyeri.

CHAPTER 1

VIEWS ON MAU MAU

Much has been written about the Mau Mau movement, especially with regards to its causes, background and effects. Most of these details will not be concentrated upon here. But it should be noted here that after reading some of the literature on the movement, the writer noticed that three interpretations have been made about the movement. It will be found in this chapter that some of these interpretations were made by some European writers even before the Mau Mau war was over. Each of the three interpretations is closely discussed, and the examples of some of the writers who held each view will also be given.

MAU MAU AS A RELIGION

The group of writers who viewed Mau Mau as a sort of religion was among the first lot to study the Mau Mau movement. This group concentrated on the ceremonies, rituals and other practises of the freedom fighters. The presence of these aspects in the movement led these writers to conclude that Mau Mau was mainly, though not solely, a religion. Some of the religious practises which they cited as prominent in the movement were oaths, prayers and songs. But while some of the writers in this category saw in the movement a revival of the Kikuyu traditional religious beliefs and practises, others saw in the movement a syncretist religion that was similar to the religious sects that had mushroomed in Kenya in the thirties.

In emphasizing the idea that Mau Mau was a religion, the writers in this category underestimated the fact that Mau Mau was a nationalist political movement. Some of their ideas are briefly discussed below.

The person who championed most the view that Mau Mau was a religion was L.S.B. Leakey. Leakey had spent many years studying the Kikuyu people, their language and culture. He was the white man who was chosen as an interpreter during the famous Kapenguria trial in which the first people arrested for organising Mau Mau were tried. One of the accused persons in that trial, Bildad Kaggia, describes Leakey as "a 'Mzungu' who had demonstrated his animosity against the Kikuyu and particularly against Mau Mau."¹ It was however this Leakey who tried more than any other white man to get at the roots of the Kikuyu traditional society in an attempt to answer the many questions that troubled the white population in Kenya with reference to the Mau Mau movement.

In answering the question 'what was Mau Mau?', Leakey suggested that, "Mau Mau, while to some extent synonymous with" earlier political parties, "was in fact a religion and that it owed its successes to this fact more than to anything else at all."² He added that "it was this new religion, of which the oath ceremony formed only a small part that was the force which was turning thousands of peace loving Kikuyu into murderous fanatics."³ According to Leakey, Mau Mau was a religious doctrine of utter wickedness that was

introduced by the leaders of the movement so as to deceive the masses. Here, we find that Leakey saw Mau Mau as a religion. But he called it a 'new' religion that was not there in traditional Kikuyu society. By showing it as a 'new' and 'wicked' religion, Leakey aimed at showing both the Kikuyu and the Europeans that it was necessary to fight against Mau Mau.

Leakey blamed the leaders of the Kikuyu Central Association, for creating this religion. He argued that these leaders created the religion due to their dissatisfaction with missionary christianity. In this light, Leakey viewed what he termed as 'Mau-Mauism' as an independent church that was comparable to 'communism', which he also saw as a religion.⁴ He therefore accused the KCA leaders of their inability to adjust to modernism, and he argued strongly that "It is probably because the speed of progress has been too rapid that it has made a part of the population unbalanced in their outlook and thus paved the way for movements like Mau Mau, in the hands of an unscrupulous few."⁵

Leakey found that there was evidence of a religious dimension in the Mau Mau movement. In this study, concentration will be laid on one aspect of this religious factor, the Mau Mau oaths. It will, however, be found that the religious factor in Mau Mau oaths was not something new to the Kikuyu society, but was based on the traditional Kikuyu symbols, rituals and other practices.

On the other hand, Leakey emphasised the fact that KCA leaders were to blame for the Mau Mau movement. But he failed to stress that had it not been for the evils of colonialism, the movement would not have started at all. Finally, Leakey alluded to progress which was not there in the black sector of the society. The Mau Mau were fighting for their rightful share of this progress which had been denied them by settler government.

Leakey also noted that Mau Mau as a religion, was a "very strange blend of pseudo-christianity and utter paganism."⁶ This point should be kept in mind because, as it will be seen later, Mau Mau oaths did not contain such a blend. However, other religious aspects in Mau Mau, such as prayers and songs, which will not be covered in this study, contained some christian elements. These other religious aspects are equally important in a consideration of the significance of the religious factor in the Mau Mau movement.

In trying to decipher the complex nature of Mau Mau as a religion, Leakey came up with the idea that while KCA leaders tried hard to oppose christianity in its onslaught on traditional customs, these leaders realized that,

*if they could set up a religion which would fulfill the need for a faith, and fill the vacuum, they could achieve much that they had never achieved before ... People, once they have a faith, will fight for that faith and die for it ... And so the religion of Mau Mau was born.*⁷

Another interesting issue that Leakey raised was one of the relationship that existed between the KCA, the Independent Schools and Churches, and Mau Mau. Leakey observed that they had some connection with each other.⁸ In this study of Mau Mau oaths, it will be seen that this idea was correct to a great extent.

Included in the 'Mau Mau religion', Leakey recorded such aspects as oaths, prayers and songs, as well as a creed dedicated to the "true children of Mumbi and Gikuyu, the Eve and Adam of the tribe."⁹ It was a creed that affirmed faith in God, Ngai, and his chosen Mau Mau leaders.

Finally, in his advice to the christian churches and to the colonial government, Leakey proposed several cures for the Mau Mau movement. These cures also reveal to us the kind of view that Leakey held on the movement. He warned them that "very serious consideration must also be given to the fact that 'Mau Mau' became a religion and that other beliefs must now be made available to take the place of Mau-Mauism."¹⁰ Leakey doubted whether the missionary churches could solve this problem, and he therefore suggested instead, that the best solution would be that of encouraging the growth of more independent churches among the Africans. In Leakey's view, these independent churches, which would be guided by white leaders, would, he hoped, attract most of the people who were following Mau Mau. As Leakey states, many such churches had been started by Africans, but

the move had been frustrated by the Europeans. Leakey therefore suggested that if some of these independent churches had been helped and advised, "instead of being shunned and attacked, Mau Mau as a religion could never have obtained the hold it did."¹¹

To end this section on Leakey, it should be stated here that though we might differ with Leakey in his interpretation of the Mau Mau movement, nonetheless we should commend him for having seriously considered the religious factor in the movement. Leakey's work is of interest here because Leakey showed that there indeed was evidence of a religious factor in the movement. He did not, however, study critically and objectively the origin and actual nature of the aspects which he found in what he called Mau Mau 'religion'. But Leakey was not the only person who saw evidence of a religious factor in the movement.

Writing in 1953, Bewes described Mau Mau as a revival of the old 'pagan' religion, and he found that this religion was adapted for political and national goals in the Mau Mau movement. He stated at length that:

*Until recently, many people thought that old kikuyu religion was a back number, outmoded either by christianity or by western materialism. The Mau Mau movement has suddenly shocked the world into the realisation that pagan religion is still very deeply ingrained and can be adapted to political and national aims. It is no longer irrelevant to study the old kikuyu religion since Mau Mau are deliberately trying to revive it.*¹²

Bowes therefore observed that there was a religious factor in the movement and that this religious factor had something to do with the traditional Kikuyu religion. The relationship between the traditional Kikuyu religion and the religious factor in the Mau Mau movement will be carefully looked at here, with special emphasis on the Mau Mau oaths.

Stoneham, on the other hand, was inclined to think that "Mau Mau has some particular meaning connected with the early religion and tradition of the tribe, and in some form the society has existed since long before the white man was seen in Kikuyuland."¹³ Here we notice that although Stoneham found the evidence of some form of religion in the movement, nonetheless he went a bit too far in guessing that Mau Mau was there long before colonialism and that the religion of that 'old' Mau Mau was revived as the religion of the Mau Mau movement of the 1950s. It should be stated here that contrary to Stoneham, there never was Mau Mau before colonialism among the Kikuyu. But it will be found that the religious aspects in the movement were there among the Kikuyu even before the start of the colonial period.

Corfield also emphasized the view that Mau Mau had some religious dimension. In his report to the colonial government on Mau Mau, Corfield argued that Mau Mau "was the evolutionary child of the first subversive Kikuyu political organisation, the Kikuyu Association."¹⁴ He defined Mau Mau as a "pseudo-religious cult" of the golden age, a cult, whose exploitation gave Mau Mau

"the false cloak of a religion."¹⁵ Like those writers cited before, Corfield saw the evidence of a religious factor in the Mau Mau movement.

Majdalany and Welbourn also noticed the presence of the religious factor in the movement, but in their interpretations, they referred to this factor as a 'tribal manifestation' which portrayed a return to 'tribalism' and 'paganism!'.¹⁶

Carothers went even further in his explanation of the movement. He saw in Mau Mau, the revival of the 'old Kikuyu paganism' and he saw this revival as a negative response to modernisation. In his view, the Mau Mau were trying to 'turn the clock backward' to the golden age before the white men came, an age which Carothers described as having been full of plagues, pestilences and death.¹⁷ Carothers thought that the Mau Mau movement was the symptom of a sick society, a society in which men tended "to turn from the ways of God to those of Satan and to find perverted pleasure in a reversal of the religious rituals."¹⁸ Carothers saw this sickness as being both spiritual and psychological. He viewed Mau Mau as a sickness that resulted from the failure of the Kikuyu to adjust to modernisation. In this sense, Carothers thought that Mau Mau arose "from the development of an anxious conflictual situation in people who, from contact with alien culture, has lost the supportive and constraining influences of their own culture, yet had not lost their magic modes of thinking."¹⁹

Like Leakey, Carothers suggested various methods that could be used to 'cure' the society from the 'sickness' of Mau Mau. He requested the government to increase the rate of villagisation, to speed the process of christianisation and to make the people 'confess' the oaths. In line with these measures, Carothers helped to organise oath-cleansing ceremonies. In a later part of this study, a discussion of these cleansing ceremonies will be attempted.

The views of Carothers on Mau Mau were also expressed by the Sociological Committee that was set up by the government to investigate the sociological causes underlying Mau Mau. The committee was led by Harry Thuku and Leakey, and its special advisor was Carothers. The committee advised the government that, "To overcome this obsession, mere argument and persuasion is not enough, and an attack must be made on (the) feelings and emotions."²⁰ The argument implied in this decision of the committee was that Mau Mau was a sin, an evil, and a corrupted pagan religion that had to be confessed. Those persons who possessed this obsession had to be isolated in detention camps so as not to contaminate the other people. Detention was intended to take the patients through many screening camps on their journey home and also to prepare them for reabsorption into 'normal' life. This whole process came to be termed 'rehabilitation'.

A closely similar view to that of Carothers was

viewed the movement as a primitive movement that was opposed to western civilization. They also saw it as a product of the Kikuyu peoples' failure to adapt to the demands of western civilization.

Through the writings of persons such as the ones quoted here, the attitude spread among many white people, both in Kenya and abroad, that Mau Mau was not basically born out of social, economic, political and cultural-religious grievances. Instead, the idea was preached that Mau Mau was born out of a "perverted nationalism and a sort of nostalgia for barbarism."²⁴ And those who admitted that Mau Mau was the result of social, economic, political and cultural-religious grievances narrowed the movement down to a tribal organization.²⁵

The colonial government's view on Mau Mau was greatly influenced by writings and utterances such as the ones quoted on the previous pages. The government felt that there was indeed enough reason to arrest and to detain many Kikuyu for being suspected as Mau Mau. The first and most pronounced official statement on Mau Mau was uttered by the prosecutor during the famous Kapenguria trial in which some leaders of the Kenya African Union - (KAU), were accused of organizing Mau Mau. He said:

Looking at Mau Mau quite dispassionately and quite objectively, there can be no one who can say that it does not do the most appalling criminal things and that it appears to be a purely barbarous movement, negative in every

*it does and accompanied by circumstances of revolting savagery.*²⁵

MAU MAU AS A NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

A second group of writers has emphasised the fact that Mau Mau was a nationalist movement. But as will be seen here below, some writers have referred to the nationalism in Mau Mau as Kenyan nationalism, while others have referred to it as Kikuyu tribalism.

In seeing Mau Mau as a Kenyan nationalist movement, emphasis is laid on the grievances of the Kenyan Africans from the time that the white men came, to the time of Mau Mau. Writers in this category have traced the development of Kenyan nationalism through the period of the political associations that were prevalent in Kenya from the early twenties. The associations, like the East African Association and the Kikuyu Central Association are seen by these writers as forming part of an evolutionary process in the development of nationalism. The Mau Mau movement is then viewed as the peak in the development of national consciousness in Kenya.

By emphasizing the nationalist nature of the Mau Mau movement, less importance is laid on the movements' religious aspects. As an example, the songs, prayers and oaths of the movement are viewed only as tools of the movement. A disregard is here evident of the fact that some of these aspects including the oaths, songs and prayers had a deep religious significance. The oaths

in particular are seen as a tool of unity. The writers in this category show little effort in trying to understand that the religious aspects contained in the movement were being viewed by most Mau Mau as necessary, if the goal of unity and freedom was to be achieved. Two of the writers in this category are Rosberg and Nottingham.

The two writers have stated that Mau Mau was the climax of nationalism in Kenya. This nationalism started mainly in the 1920s and it was centred mainly, but not solely, in Central Kenya.²⁷ As evidence for this, the two writers have stated that there was a continuity in the leadership of all earlier political associations and that this leadership continued till the time of Mau Mau. The two writers have therefore concluded that "Mau Mau was indeed an integral part of an ongoing, rationally conceived nationalist movement."²⁸

Rosberg and Nottingham have also discussed the contribution of independent schools and churches to the development of 'cultural nationalism'. Though the issue cannot be discussed here, nonetheless it should be noted that the relationship of these independent schools and churches to Mau Mau in general and to the religious factor in Mau Mau in particular, is of some concern in this study.

In their study of Mau Mau oaths as a tool of unity, Rosberg and Nottingham did not go deep enough to decipher the nature and actual origin of these oaths. However,

the book was written as a historical text and was not intended to cover the religious factor in the Mau Mau movement. Much use will be made of the book in this study.

Venys has presented us with a view of Mau Mau that is closely similar to that of Rosberg and Nottingham. He has argued that Mau Mau was an unplanned spontaneous uprising which had a political nature.²⁹ Venys saw Mau Mau as probably an offspring of KAU or KCA. He emphasized the grievances of these earlier political associations and claimed that they were the same for Mau Mau. In this light, he saw Mau Mau as a product of social, economic and political ills which were aggravated by British measures against the movement.³⁰

It is important to notice here that Africans had voiced their grievances in Kenya for many years before the Mau Mau movement. They had done this in associations which started in 1919. Yet these earlier associations had not grown into anything close to the Mau Mau movement. These associations had not established a unity and a commitment to the movement of liberation, such as that which was to be observed in Mau Mau. It was mainly in Mau Mau oaths that such unity and commitment were encouraged. This shows that the oaths, which formed only one aspect of the religious factor in the Mau Mau movement, had a vital role in the start of the Mau Mau movement. It also goes further to show that the movement was more complex than what we would call a nationalist

movement. It can be said that though the aims and goals of the movement were nationalistic, nonetheless these goals would have hardly been achieved at that time without the application of such aspects as Mau Mau oaths. In these oaths, the masses were instructed in political matters and were united in a common task of fighting against colonialism. The role of these oaths cannot be ignored in any study of the Mau Mau movement. Venys himself saw evidence of a religious factor in the Mau Mau movement, but he argued that it was "too hypothetical to be given much credence."³¹

It should also be noted here that despite the above two works which assert that Mau Mau was a Kenyan nationalist movement, some historians today, such as the ones cited below have expressed doubts as to whether Mau Mau represented Kenyan nationalism. These contemporary historians have tended to look at Mau Mau as a purely Kikuyu affair. Haina wa Kinyatti has expressed the views of some of these historians.³²

As Haina has stated, these contemporary historians have interpreted Mau Mau as a primitive Kikuyu movement and as a tribal organization. They have described the nationalism in Mau Mau as Kikuyu nationalism and have argued that this nationalism is opposed to Kenyan nationalism. They have mainly argued that the movement was not a Kenyan nationalist movement because the songs, oaths and other rituals in the movement were typically those of the Kikuyu, Luo and Meru. They have also

argued that the movement did not spread outside Central Kenya. Some of their arguments can be cited here.

Ochieng is quoted by Maina as having stated that "Mau Mau was definitely not a nationalist movement ... It is therefore important to correctly evaluate Mau Mau as primarily a Kikuyu affair."³³ This view that Mau Mau was not a Kenyan nationalist movement is also expressed by Ogot. After studying Mau Mau hymns, Ogot strongly asserted that, "In conclusion, I would like to state that what emerges from a study of these hymns is a strong sense of Kikuyu nationalism as opposed to Kenya African Nationalism."³⁴ No doubt some Mau Mau songs lead to Ogot's interpretation, but we cannot consider only such songs alone, as Ogot does.

The view of Mau Mau as a purely Kikuyu affair is not supported by the evidence which is given in this study. Even the songs of Mau Mau, which the writer of this work has collected, do not wholly support Ogot's conclusion. No doubt the Mau Mau movement was concentrated among the Kikuyu but the wider goal of the movement was a unity of all Kenyan peoples in an endeavour to get rid of colonial rule. Before such wider unity could be achieved, a unity of all the Kikuyu people had to be fostered first. This is where the function of oaths came in. This unity of the Kikuyu people, that was to act as a first step towards Kenyan unity, has been wrongly conceived of as the final end result of the movement. The major goal of the movement has been

clearly stated by Mathu:

*Our principle aim was to foster an ironclad unity among the people of Central Kenya and all other Africans whose support could be won ... so that we might take action as a single body to achieve our national objectives.*³⁵

In emphasizing his own opinion, Maina argues that the idea that the movement was less nationalistic, due to its having been based in Central Kenya, does not hold, for nowhere in the world did a revolutionary movement start with the whole population. It is the most politically conscious sector of the society which starts the revolution and then brings in the rest. This was the case with Mau Mau. Its oaths were first of all intended to make all the Kikuyu people conscious and aware of the fact that they could free Kenya from colonial rule. The oaths were intended to foster complete unity among the people involved. The idea that the symbols and rituals present in these oaths made the oaths opposed to Kenyan nationalism is incorrect. The advantages and disadvantages of Mau Mau oaths, as well as the influence of these oaths upon the development of Kenyan nationalism will be briefly looked at in this study so as to clarify some of the above generalisations. But the view taken in this study is that Mau Mau was a nationalist movement and that the nationalism in Mau Mau was closely linked with a strong religious factor in the movement.

MAU MAU AS A SYNCRETIST MOVEMENT

The views put down at the beginning of this chapter have been shown to indicate that there was evidence of a religious factor in the Mau Mau movement. But some of the interpretations they gave on Mau Mau were aimed at showing that the movement was barbarous, atavistic and evil. The rituals in the movement were seen as evidence of the fact that Mau Mau was atavistic.

The second group of writers discussed above show Mau Mau as a nationalist movement but while some termed it as 'Kenyan nationalism', others termed it as 'Kikuyu nationalism'. This nationalist view argues that the religious factor in the movement, especially the oaths, was detrimental to the nationalist causes of the movement.³⁶ Their reason for suggesting this was because the oaths, songs and even prayers of Mau Mau were basically those of the Kikuyu society and as such, these aspects restricted the organisational basis of the movement to Central Kenya. What needs to be stressed here is the fact that the symbols, rituals, songs and prayers used in the movement, which were mainly Kikuyu, were regarded by the Mau Mau as the only means available for establishing a firm unity among the members of the movement.

The third view of Mau Mau combines the elements contained in the two views discussed so far. This view suggests that Mau Mau was a nationalist movement which was syncretist in nature, and that the movement contained a syncretist religion. Barnett and Njama have argued at

length in support of this view.³⁷ Barnett has argued that the ideology of Mau Mau was syncretistic in nature in that the Mau Mau did not only fight for the retention of some traditional values, but also fought hard in demand of some western cultural aspects like formal education. The author has also argued that the religious factor in the Mau Mau movement was syncretistic in that it had elements of both christianity and Kikuyu traditional religion. A deeper examination of these ideas is necessary here.

Barnett and Njama's book is the most comprehensive literature produced so far with regards to the religious factor in the Mau Mau movement. Barnett, the author, uses the oral evidence of Njama, a freedom fighter, and he comes up with the conclusion stated above, that Mau Mau was a syncretist movement. He calls it syncretistic because he saw in it both elements of traditional Kikuyu culture and religion as well as those of western culture and religion. The book supports the view of Rosberg and Nottingham that Mau Mau was a nationalist movement, but Barnett goes further to show that there also was syncretism in the movement. The author closely looks at some aspects of the religious factors in the movement, like oaths, songs and prayers as well as belief and trust in God, and he considers them to have been important to the movement. By relating the nationalistic and the religious aspects of the movement, the author is partly able to explain the unique response of the kikuyu to colonialism.

But although the author went deeper than all the others discussed here in showing the evidence of the presence of a religious factor in the movement, nonetheless he did not assess the particular significance of the traditional Kikuyu rituals and symbols that characterised most of the religious aspects in the Mau Mau movement. The author did not also go deep enough to assess whether or not the rituals and symbols in the movement were part of the traditional Kikuyu beliefs and practices. As an example, the author did not explain the deviations that Mau Mau oaths contained as compared to the traditional Kikuyu oaths. It will be shown in this study that the religious factor in Mau Mau was partly syncretistic. But although most aspects of the religious factor will not be covered here, a study of the Mau Mau oaths reveals that the oaths were to a great extent based on traditional Kikuyu beliefs and practices related to oaths. However, it will also be shown that the Mau Mau oaths contained various deviations from traditional Kikuyu oaths. An attempt will be made to account for these deviations.

In writing his book, Barnett expected to present "the hopes, fears, frustrations and expectations of a people whose actions and outlook on life have been shaped in large measures by the double-edged sword of tradition and colonial rule."³⁸ The 'double-edged sword' referred to here may also partly explain why the Mau Mau movement was syncretistic in nature. With regards to the religious factor in the movement, the author has argued that the religious factor "contained a syncretic

quality with various aspects of Old Testament christianity found interwoven with their Kikuyu counterparts."³⁹ An important point which Barnett observed was that though the religious factor in Mau Mau was of a syncretic quality, nonetheless the religious factor was largely framed in terms of traditional beliefs and concepts of the Kikuyu.⁴⁰ This point, that Kikuyu traditional elements were predominant in the religious factor in Mau Mau, will be greatly emphasized in the following chapters. It will be seen, for example, that Mau Mau oaths did not contain the kind of syncretism described above. The oaths contained only the rituals and symbols that were mainly traditionally used by the Kikuyu. It is to these rituals and symbols that a great part of the present study is directed.

It was not however in oaths alone that there was an emphasis of traditional Kikuyu religious elements. Traditional Kikuyu beliefs and practices were also emphasised in the Mau Mau conception of God, in their prayers, as well as in their other ceremonies. In expressing this fact, Kibicho states that the Mau Mau "held daily morning and evening prayers and made sacrifices to God under sacred trees in the traditional Kikuyu way. They faced Mount Kenya when they prayed, again according to Kikuyu tradition."⁴¹

In trying to explain the presence of traditional elements in the Mau Mau movement, Barnett saw these elements as 'continuities' of traditional Kikuyu

religion into the present. Barnett has stated at length that:

*The magico-religious beliefs prevalent within the ranks of the guerilla fighters, therefore, and the widespread acceptance of the legitimate military role and prophetic powers of the 'mundumugo', are best understood as continuities in traditional Kikuyu culture.*⁴²

This idea of 'continuity' is also brought out by Kibicho whose whole thesis discusses the 'Radical Continuity of the Kikuyu Conception of God into and through christianity'.⁴³

In this study of Mau Mau oaths, the writer has found it incorrect to state that the concept of 'syncretism' best describes the Mau Mau movement in general and the religious factor in the movement in particular. In Barnett's book, we find that this syncretism which existed in some aspects of the movement, caused strains and conflicts in the minds of some freedom fighters. Karari Njama himself, a christian and a freedom fighter, described the effect of the Mau Mau oath on himself as follows, "As a christian I had undergone a contrary faith, for the oath I had taken was mainly based on Kikuyu religion, belief and superstition."⁴⁴ It is correct to state here that those freedom fighters who were educated and who had gone through the teachings of christian missions were mainly the ones who underwent most strains in their attempt to adhere to the duties of the movement

which each member had to perform. Yet even they adhered strongly to the movement.

It should be emphasized here that three conclusions can be arrived at from the views discussed so far. First is the idea that there is enough evidence of a religious factor in the Mau Mau movement. Included in this factor were aspects such as oaths, prayers, sacrifices, prophecy, songs, belief in God, and other religious practices. Secondly, the religious aspects cited have been shown to contain both christian and Kikuyu traditional elements. The combination of the two has been referred to as syncretism. And thirdly, there is the observation that the traditional Kikuyu elements were to a great extent predominant in the religious factor in the movement. The assessment of the above remarks as well as the examination of the significance of the religious factor in the movement will form a great part of this work. The study will concentrate especially on Mau Mau oaths, which comprised one of the main aspects of the religious factor.

In concluding this chapter, it will be necessary to state some of the ideas which have been cited by living ex-freedom fighters in reference to the religious factor in the movement.

Elsie Mukami, the wife of Dedan Kimathi, the acknowledged leader of the forest freedom fighters, had this to say:

The freedom fighters were highly religious people. They knew and prayed to the God of Kikuyu and Mumbi. They had their own Kikuyu

commandments. Christianity did not bring any new conversion to the Kikuyu. Neither did it bring a new creed or a new code of ethics. The Kikuyu had their own. And the freedom fighters followed the beliefs and commandments which their forefathers had followed for long.⁴⁵

Another informant, Muchunu Gachuki, who was an oath administrator at the time of Mau Mau had this to say:

Religion consists of vows and commandments. People who have no sacred vows cannot be said to be religious. The Mau Mau had vows and commandments just like the Christians have their 'creeds'. Our 'creeds' in Mau Mau were organized in accordance with those of KCA which existed before Mau Mau. The 'creeds' used in KCA were in turn based mainly on the traditional beliefs of the Kikuyu. As such, the Mau Mau did not create any beliefs. They relied on those which had been there among the Kikuyu for long. Those beliefs and commandments comprised a great deal of our religion in the movement. We also had prayers in which we continuously emphasized the unforgettable and bitter fact that, "We are praying to the God of Kikuyu and Mumbi, who gave to us this country, a country that was alienated by white foreigners."⁴⁶

FOOTNOTES

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7. Ibid. p.17.
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25. Ibid. p.43. (Quotes Brockway, F. Why Mau Mau, p.2.)
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27. Ibid. p.(xvii) in the introduction.
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34. Ogot, B.A., "Politics, Culture and Music in Central Kenya: A Study of Mau Mau Hymns." Paper presented to the Historical Association of Kenya, Annual General Conference, August 1976, p.10.
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43. kibicho, op.cit.
44. Barnett and Njama, op.cit. p.202.
45. Mrs. Elsie Mukani wife of Dedan Kimathi, Interview, Njabini, 14.10.73. (She is currently a converted member of the PCEA Church there).
46. Mr. Muchunu Gachuki, Interview, Nyori, 25.12.76. (He is at present a member of the Independent Church at Ihuririo, Othaya, in which he was baptised 'Muchunu'.)

THE ORIGINS OF THE NAME MAU MAU, THE INITIAL
AIM AND THE IDEOLOGY OF THE MOVEMENT

The Name 'Mau Mau'

Since the middle of this century, the name 'Mau Mau' has been used to refer to the revolutionary movement that struggled so hard against colonialism in Kenya in the years 1950-1956. It is the intention of the writer to show here that when the name was coined, it had no meaning among the Kikuyu for whom it was applied, and even today, the meaning of the name remains a matter of controversy. It is also the intention here to trace the possible origins of the name, its date of appearance, the names that the freedom fighters used to refer to themselves, as well as the name that should be used to refer to the movement today. In this section, it will be found that the origin of the name Mau Mau is important for this study because the name was at first used in connection with activities at an oath-taking ceremony.

The research information that the writer has been able to gather points to the fact that 'Mau Mau' as a name was forged by the European community and administration in Kenya to refer to those blacks, especially Kikuyu who were anti-government and whose intention was to put an end to colonial rule. The same name was applied to the whole movement of liberation. But the white people started using this name as a form of abuse directed to the freedom fighters. The aim of the white people who

used the name was to show the Kikuyu society that they should not side with the so called 'Mau Mau' because the 'Mau Mau' were 'criminals' and 'wrongdoers'. The whites also used the name as evidence with which to convince the British government that the movement was a bad one and should be crushed. The name 'Mau Mau' did not therefore start from among the freedom fighters themselves. As Padmore states, "The very term 'Mau Mau' was invented by the settler press to discredit the Africans and justify the white man's legalised terror against a once peaceful and long suffering people."¹

Many authors and commentators on the Mau Mau movement have tried to formulate theories as to the origin of the name, but no satisfactory theory has been produced.

Barnett records many theories of the origin of the name and he concludes that the name 'is a misnomer'.² Barnett records one of the theories which suggests that children may have been the makers of the name during their talking. He notes that children among the Kikuyu say "uma uma!", meaning 'get out, get out', and that from this anagram, 'Mau Mau' may have originated as a warning sounded by children to freedom fighters. Secondly, Barnett notes that the murmurs of "mumumumu" during oath-taking ceremonies may have been overheard by outsiders and these outsiders may have heard as if the murmuring sounded as 'mau mau'. Thirdly, Barnett suggests that the name 'Mau Mau' could also have been used as an abbreviation for "Mzungu Arudi Uingereza, Mwafrika Apate

Uhuru", which means 'Europeans have to go back home so that Africans can become free.'³ But none of the above names has been mentioned to me by my informants as a possible root of the name Mau Mau.

Stoneham himself suggested that though the name is not related to the Mau Hills in Kenya, nonetheless the name "has some particular meaning connected with the early religion and traditions of the tribe, and in some form, the society has existed long before the first white man was seen in Kikuyuland."⁴ Stoneham tried to trace the meaning of the name from among the Kikuyu themselves and he arrived at the conclusion that, "what gods they had before they migrated we do not know; perhaps Mau Mau was one of them."⁵ Stoneham therefore thought it was probable that if Europeans attended one of the Kikuyu ceremonies under a tree, he would hear the words "Mau Mau." Stoneham then concluded that "if Mau Mau is as old as the Kikuyu tribe, it is only recently that it has assumed the principles of a murderous political society."⁶ It will be seen below that these ideas of Stoneham are incorrect.

The literature written by freedom fighters shows clearly that the name originated from among the whites in Kenya. The only exception here is Wachanga, who is quoted as showing that children were responsible for the origin of the name, which they used as a code word or anagram.⁷ But this claim is not supported by other freedom fighters. It is hardly likely that children

had anything to do with the movement at such an early date, knowing that the movement was secret. This raises doubts as to whether Wachanga himself, who claims to have been a freedom fighter, was the one who supplied such information to the editor, or whether the information he gave was correctly used by Whittier.

Kaggia says that the words 'Mau Mau' started to appear in the press after a meeting was surprised by the police in Naivasha.⁸ It was in this meeting, he says, that one guard noticed the police coming to the meeting, and the guard shouted to his comrades to 'get out', hence using the words 'uma uma!'. But the guard used the children's anagrams so that what he indeed shouted was 'Mau Mau!'. It is important to note here that the oath ceremony, which Kaggia refers to as a meeting, was connected to the root of the name; and further, that Naivasha may have been the source area of the name. This idea is supported by Kariuki who says that the name arose from an oathing ceremony which was conducted one evening at Naivasha. Kariuki states that the guard at the ceremony had been instructed by his comrades to shout 'Mau 'mau!' as an anagram to mean 'uma uma!', in case he saw the enemies coming. Kariuki says that when the police came to the scene, they only heard 'Mau Mau', and then found the paraphernalia of an oathing ceremony. The police then reported back to their headquarter that all they heard was 'mau mau' but that they found no one on the scene. Kariuki concludes that

"From then on, the oath of unity was given the name 'Mau Mau'."⁹

It is however very unlikely that the paraphernalia of the ceremony would have been left behind at such an early date. But Kariuki implies that the oath ceremony and the area of Naivasha may have been connected with the origins of the name.

Njoroge Kagunda, who was an acknowledged leader of the KCA in Rift Valley and Western Kenya, and a man who was one of the earliest directors of Mau Mau oaths had this to say in reference to the origin of the name Mau Mau:

We had called together all KCA and KAU leaders from Kisii, Olenguruone and Naivasha areas. Our work was to oath all the workers in the settlers' farms and one such ceremony took place on a ground in the reeds around Lake Naivasha. All the workers in the area had attended. But the government discovered, through a man named Ferminus Kiritu,¹⁰ that we had a meeting. During this particular ceremony, we slaughtered and ate eight goats. The police besieged the area during the day and decided not to attack then for they hoped that our leaders would attend the meeting at night. When we knew we were besieged, we held our meeting early in the day. Some of the workers in the meeting had come with their masters' fishing boats with the excuse that they were coming to fish on the lake. It was their boats that we used to escape in the evening. We landed at the farm of a white man called Nyathole.

The police attacked the area of meeting when we had already left. But all they found were heaps of bones. They did not know how we escaped. But Kiritu had warned them before that "these people eat 'nau mau mau mau', i.e. in such a hurry that you cannot catch them. The white men who were present with Kiritu used this name 'Mau Mau' to describe the nature of the freedom fighters, when these whites went to report back in their head-quarter. That was some time around 1948.¹¹

From the above information, it is clear that the name was first used to refer to the manner in which the freedom fighters had eaten during this particular oath ceremony. Njeroge is, however, not the only one who has noted that the name had its source in Naivasha, during an oathing ceremony, and that Kiritu was in a way implicated.¹² It is also most probable that the squatters from Rift Valley, western and Nyanza areas were connected with the oathing ceremony referred to above. It is probable too that Permenas Kiritu was the man who first spoke the name to the whites, who in turn started using it. There is enough literary evidence to support the above probabilities.

Rosberg and Nottingham associate Permenas Kiritu with the use of the name Mau Mau. They state that:

Permenas Kiritu, an English-speaking shopkeeper, later head of the Loyalist & Torchbearers Association in the area during the emergency, and the person to whom many African sources ascribe the first public use of the words, gave evidence that he had known of the existence of the Mau

*Mau Association since 1948.*¹³

It should be noted here that the charges in the above case to which Permenas was giving evidence were those of giving a KCA oath and not a Mau Mau oath. This implies that the so called 'Mau Mau Movement' was there even before it acquired that name. The movement of liberation did not begin with Mau Mau.

Kariuki also records having been told that Permenas Kiritu of Rift Valley, a protestant christian of the Africa Inland Church, Kijabe, when he heard of the movement, began to preach against it, calling it anti-christian and childish.¹⁴ Kiritu's loyalty is also recorded by Leakey.¹⁵

It can then be concluded here that there is strong oral and literary evidence in support of the theory that Mau Mau as a name had its origin in the white sector in Kenya, and that Kiritu, a loyalist, was greatly connected with the root of the name. Also, the name was associated with a society whose only evidence available at that time was the oath ceremonies. The oath ceremony as such contributed much in the making up of the opinions about the movement, by the settlers and the administrators. The name Mau Mau was, however, used as a term of abuse and degradation. It was used to show that the members of the movement were greedy eaters, evil doers and anti-government. The name itself had no correct reference to or meaning among the people to whom it was applied. And the name cannot be said to refer correctly to the

nature of Mau Mau oath ceremonies.

The date in which the name Mau Mau was coined can hardly be known. Njoroge Kagunda dates the first use of the name between 1946 and 1948.¹⁶ Mukami Kimathi dates it in 1948.¹⁷ Most writers claim that 1948 was the date when the name was first used.¹⁸

But the first official usage of the name took place in 1950.¹⁹ It can be stated here that though instances of oathings had been reported before 1948, this date has been cited by most informants as the date when the name Mau Mau started being used. Further, the name was first used in reference to activities that had been performed in oath ceremonies, and these oaths were directed by mainly the KCA and KAU leaders. It will become clear in this study that the leaders of KCA and KAU were greatly involved with the emergence of the movement that came to be known as Mau Mau. They were also involved in the organisation and direction of the first Mau Mau oaths.

Research evidence reveals that the freedom fighters themselves did not use the name Mau Mau to refer to themselves. This finding is contrary to what some writers have stated before.²⁰ The names that freedom fighters used are briefly summarised below.

The freedom fighters used the name "Uiguanu wa Muingi" meaning the 'Unity of the People'. The unity referred to here was the unity of all the people who had taken the Mau Mau oaths. In many of their prayers, the freedom fighters asked God to help them to maintain this unity.

Another name that they used was 'Gikuyu and Mumbi'. These two personalities are believed to have been the ancestral founders of the Kikuyu nation. In calling themselves by this name, the freedom fighters referred to two things. In the songs of the freedom fighters, the name Gikuyu and Mumbi mainly referred to the unity of all the descendants of Gikuyu and Mumbi. But in prayers, the names Gikuyu and Mumbi referred to the first Kikuyu ancestors to whom God gave the land. In some cases, however, the two meanings of the name could be found in either prayers or songs. By calling themselves 'Gikuyu and Mumbi' or 'children of Gikuyu and Mumbi', the freedom fighters meant that the movement was for all the Kikuyu people, both men and women. However, members of other ethnic societies like Meru and Embu were also included in the above name. It should be noted here that all those people who refused to take Mau Mau oaths and who collaborated with the government were regarded by the freedom fighters as traitors of their own people.

Another name used by freedom fighters was 'Ageri ngero', meaning 'those who do grievous damage'. This name was only used to refer to the actual forest fighters who had the permission to kill or loot in the name of the movement. This permission was granted only to those people who had taken the Mau Mau oath of war, the 'ngero oath'.

Freedom fighters also referred to themselves as

'Ihii cia Mutitu', which can be literary translated as 'the Uncircumcised Forest Dwellers'.²¹ This name was also used in reference to the forest fighters alone. But the loyalists also used the name as an abuse to the fighters. Among the Kikuyu, a 'kihii' is a big, but uncircumcised boy. The word 'kihii' was used by loyalists in reference to forest fighters whose activities were considered similar to those of boys. Such activities included the killing of animals and removing their eyes. But when forest fighters used the name 'kihii' to refer to themselves, they meant that the life they were living was similar to that of uncircumcised boys, because, like boys, they did not have any property like land. Among the Kikuyu, property, especially land, was mostly acquired by a man after he was circumcised. This was the time that the man began preparations for marriage.²² The forest fighters also used the name 'ihii' to show their youth, vitality and strength.

The forest fighters were also referred to as 'ujamba cia ita', a name which generally meant 'warriors' in the traditional Kikuyu society.

Out of the above names, the name that was mostly used by all the members of the Mau Mau movement was 'Gikuyu and Mumbi'. The movement as a whole was referred to as 'The Household of Gikuyu and Mumbi' i.e. "Nyumba ya Gikuyu na Mumbi." The name represented the forest freedom fighters, the spies as well as the passive supporters among the masses at home. The name was also

the only one that had appeared in the songs and oath ceremonies of the freedom fighters before the fighters had entered the forest. But should this name be used today to refer to the movement?

Surprisingly, most ex-freedom fighters today feel that the name Mau Mau should be retained but that attitudes to the name should be changed. They claim that one of the reasons that constantly motivated them to fight so courageously was to show the whites that the freedom fighters did not deserve to be abused by the name 'Mau Mau'. The freedom fighters themselves did not possess the bad qualities that were associated with that name. The forest fighters also wanted to prove to the white people that what they called 'Mau Mau' were a force to reckon with.

The ex-freedom fighters also insist that the name 'Gikuyu and Kurubi' should not be maintained because many people who belonged to the movement at first fell back and turned against the movement. When the writer asked them the name that should be used for the movement, two informants expressed these views:

Mau Mau as a name should be retained, but it should be highly praised, and the earlier attitudes to it should be made positive. The name should not be abandoned because it is the only remaining sign of the people who were abused, killed, detained and jailed by colonialists in the struggle for freedom. But after all the abuses, blessings came down upon us in form of victory. These

*blessings cleansed the abuses contained in the name Mau Mau. The name Mau Mau should therefore be retained as a name of victory.*²³

Another informant expressed the feeling that:

*The name should be preserved today because it means the 'saviour' of this country from colonialism. The whole world today knows that it was the 'Mau Mau' who fought for freedom in Kenya. The name has now acquired a glorious meaning which should be celebrated. We should retain the name so that we can always remember to beseech God as we promised to do after victory.*²⁴

In the study therefore, the name Mau Mau will be used to refer to both the people who fought against colonialism in the movement, and also refer to the movement itself. In this sense, I wholly agree with Barnett and my informants that the name is difficult to avoid using.²⁵ In any case, it is unnecessary to avoid using the name.

The Initial Aim of Mau Mau

Perhaps the most forgotten aspect of the Mau Mau movement is its initial aim of expelling the white man from Kenya on one single day. The aim was to massacre most of the whites, especially those who occupied large farms on the highlands and those who held government positions. The rest who would survive the onslaught would be left so insecure that they would pack up and go home. The failure to understand this initial aim has probably led many people, among them writers, to refer to the movement as an unplanned and spontaneous uprising by the peasants. On the contrary,

research evidence reveals that the movement was carefully planned, and that these plans were kept secret even to the majority of the Kikuyu rural population. To a great extent, it was the failure of this initial target that paved the way for the movement's becoming engaged in a prolonged war. The fact that the movement spread to all the Kikuyu population, among whom the Horn and Sabu were included, and the fact that peculiar Mau Mau oaths appeared, were partly the consequences of the failure of this initial aim. Also, the divisions that arose among the Kikuyu themselves, as well as the drift by many Kikuyu into the forests to conduct guerilla attacks were also not unrelated to the failure of this initial target.

The material day has been referred to by some people as 'The Day of Iron Swords',²⁵ and by others as "the Great Itwika".²⁷ The initial aim of the Mau Mau is of importance in this paper when we consider the fact that the first intention behind the original Mau Mau oaths, the Oath of Unity and the Warrior or "ngero" oath, was to unite all the black people who were employed on the settlers' farms and in government offices as well as all the black people who had any dealings with the white man. Among the people to be oathed were also all those who were held in high respect among the Kikuyu, especially the leaders. But great care was taken not to reveal the secret plans to the government-employed local administration, in-

cluding the chiefs and headmen.

The original aim was one of conducting a 'coup de etat' during which most of the white men would be massacred by their own employees who outnumbered them greatly. All those people who were expected to carry out the massacre were given both the oath of unity and the oath of war. Their neighbours and relatives were only given the first oath of unity so that they would passively participate in the massacre. This they could do by not revealing the secrets to the whites or to other blacks. It is important to note here that these plans were organised and directed by both KCA and KAU militants though not all the members of these associations knew the secret plans. This move came as a consequence of the failure by the earlier constitutional associations, to free the country from colonialism.

The Mau Mau oaths, which contained many rules in form of vows, were at first intended to make that particular day a success. On this particular day,²⁸ the oathed warriors would rise up and take over the government functions. As stated earlier, this coup was compared to the traditional "Itwika" ceremony in which the new generation was handed over the social, political and religious authority by the elder generation. In the case of the Mau Mau, however, the handing over was intended to be in form of a battle because the white men who held authority were not considered the rightful rulers. The main wish and prayer by the blacks was that

"if God willed, freedom would come after the success of that day."²⁹ Unfortunately, the colonial government discovered this initial aim even before the plans could be finalised. The government did all it could to make the plans fail. Various reasons have been attributed to the failure of the plans.

First, some of the oathed people confessed the oaths. Most of the earliest people to confess the oaths were christians, especially catholics during their weekly confessions. The churches then alerted the government, which in turn started arresting all those people who were mentioned in connection with the giving and taking of the oaths. At that early stage in the movement, the oaths were referred to as WCA oaths.

Secondly, some Kikuyu seers and traditional diviner-doctors prohibited the people from performing their functions according to the laid down plans. The seers and diviner-doctors advised the people that massacres should be carried out from time to time and from place to place. The seers and diviner-doctors convinced many people that a one day massacre would fail. The strong spirit of success which was imprinted on every person during the oath, was therefore weakened in some people due to their adherence to the advice of the seers and diviner-doctors.³⁰

We learn from this initial aim of the Mau Mau that the movement's first plan was to concentrate their activities

on the white-occupied areas, and to try as much as possible to avoid the spread of war to the rural areas. In the light of this, we gather that the Mau Mau oaths spread first in the White Highlands, and that only later, when the initial plans failed, did the mass oaths penetrate deep into the Kikuyu reserves.

We also learn here that the initial aim of the movement was seen by the Kikuyu as a time of 'itwika', when the warriors would take over the power from the whites. Traditionally among the Kikuyu, there were two ruling generations which operated alternately, the Maina and the Mwangi.³¹ In traditional practice, the 'njama ya itwika', i.e. 'the special council of the handing over ceremony' rose up and celebrated throughout Kikuyuland as a sign that the new generation was ready to take over authority from the retiring generation. The Mau Mau initial aim was to force the British government to hand over power to the black people.

The plan stipulated that during the coup, the white men who had forcefully taken over power from the Mwangi generation, would be in like manner forced to hand the same power over to the Maina generation. It should be noted here that the handing over of power from the Mwangi generation to the Maina generation failed to materialise in the years 1924-1932.³² The Mau Mau war was therefore greatly conceived of by the Kikuyu as a war by the Maina generation who wanted to get their rightful authority from the white men. Such a view was

very easily understood by the Kikuyu of that time.

The idea that the Mau Mau initial aim would mark the start of Maina rule was strengthened by the fact that the normal preparations for a traditional handing over ceremony had failed in around 1930 as shown above. A short account of this last handing over ceremony which aborted will be given here. It should be remembered that these activities were very fresh in the minds of the Mau Mau in the middle of this century.

The elders of the Mwangi generation recollected in Nyeri (Gaki) and started celebrating the handing over ceremony (Itwika). They scoured the whole area, collecting all their fellow Mwangis until they arrived in Murang'a (Metumi), where they joined the Mwangi from Murang'a. They all toured the two districts, eating goats in all the homes of the men of the Maina generation. These goats acted as inducements by the Maina generation to the Mwangi, so that the Mwangi would advise them on matters related to ruling and other social and religious functions. The two groups reached Kiambu (Kabete) where they were similarly entertained with much feasting and they were welcome to bed with the wives of the Mwangi from Kiambu. When celebrations were completed, the whole group started together on their way back to Nyeri where the actual handing over ceremony was to take place. On their way back, they collected representatives of the Maina generation who would receive authority on behalf of their generation.

But when they all arrived at Thika, a member of the Nyeri-Murang'a group started this song:

*"When we cross the Chania River
Anyone from Kabete should know
that we are going to the central
home of sorcery."*

This threat of sorcery by a greedy man scared off the Kiambu people who returned to their homes and started to prepare their own handing over ceremony. The Nyeri-Murang'a people went home joyfully, knowing that the Kiambu people would not consume their goats and would not sleep in their wives' beds.

The Nyeri-Murang'a people sung the following song:

*"Kabete people you are fools
You slaughtered fat heifers for us
And allowed us to enjoy your
wives' breasts." 33*

The colonial government prohibited the actual performance of the handing over ceremony, either at Nyeri or at Kiambu. It is therefore easy to understand from the above accounts and comments why the Mau Mau war was at first conceived of as an assertion by the Maina generation of their right to take over power from the Mwangi generation. Taking over from the Mwangi meant taking over from the whites who had dethroned the Mwangi. It will be shown later how the Maina generation, that was most responsible for the Mau Mau war, saw themselves as "iregi," "the revolters", against the rule of whites.

The ruling generation according to the Kikuyu is the rightful controller of all properties including land. The idea of getting back the land from the whites was also a strong aim of the Mau Mau. The traditional

idea that land ownership was a sign of authority was strongly emphasized by the Mau Mau. One of their songs stated that:

*"Since the very beginning Kikuyu
have ruled
Through their ancestral lands
And he-goats with bells
And gardens full of bananas."*³⁴

The Mwangi generation lost both authority and land to the British colonial government. Also, the British government employed the members of the Mwangi generation who were fully grown up when the British came. Many men of the Mwangi generation became chiefs and headmen in colonial times. It was these collaborators who were kept in the dark with regards to the initial plan of the Mau Mau.

Various authors also record that the initial intention of the Mau Mau was of an immediate and wholesale massacre of whites. But the authors have only mentioned it in passing. Delf records that such a rumour was there in Murang'a as early as 1947.³⁵ Leakey writes about an original Mau Mau "intention of a wholesale attack on the European population,"³⁶ and he states elsewhere that the loyalists led to the failure of the plan.³⁷ Venys writes that "On July 10th (1952) Sir Phillip Mitchell the governor, claimed that the target of Mau Mau Organisation was to overturn the government within nine months,"³⁸ and he argues that Mau Mau activities intensified at the beginning of 1953.

As shown below, the failure of this plan greatly influenced the developments within the Mau Mau movement.

Some time around 1950, according to Muchunu Gachuki, the government learnt about the initial plan of Mau Mau. By then, the name Mau Mau was in common usage. But when the Mau Mau learnt that their plans had leaked, and that their two oaths had been confessed, the decision was taken by the high ranking officials of KAU and KCA to start planning for a war. This planning for a war could not have been done before total unity of the Kikuyu, both in rural areas and the reserves as well as those in urban centres had been attained. The only means available for achieving unity was the oath. The practice involved oathing of all available men, women and children, and instructing them on the need to fight for land and freedom. It should be mentioned here that prior to this decision of embarking on a long war, the oath of war, in its sixth vow, prohibited the recipients of the oath from revealing the secrets to women and children. But when the need to oath all people arose, this rule was eliminated and the oath itself was given to women and children. Further, with the confession of the original Mau Mau oaths, other new versions of those oaths were formulated to replace them, and the people who had taken the confessed oaths were made to take the new versions. This was mainly how peculiar oaths started to appear. Many oathing centres started and many oath administrators were recruited. The aim behind these mass oaths was to recruit and instruct as many people as possible before

war broke up.

A second observation is that as early as 1950, many freedom fighters had started to associate the church with the failure of the initial plan of Mau Mau. They claim it was through the church that their secrets reached the government and that the church aided the government to recruit spies from among the Mau Mau followers. These spies became the first loyalists who were against the movement. Most of these loyalists sided with the government in declaring Mau Mau a bad thing, an evil movement, and a sin against God. The word confession in its christian meaning of repentance shows clearly that taking a Mau Mau oath was regarded by many white and black christians as a sin. Many government officials regarded it as a crime.

The first loyalists to appear were those who revealed the first Mau Mau oaths to the government. These ones greatly contributed to the failure of the Mau Mau plan. These loyalists acquired the name Homeguards, and the Mau Mau later referred to them as "Kamatimu".³⁹ The first homeguards were employed by the government and they got government protection against freedom fighters. The first cruel acts by the Mau Mau were directed to such loyalists.

The failure of the original target also led to the need to oathe all the available Kikuyu. The idea was not to make them fighters, but they were expected to be passive Mau Mau, to help the freedom fighters who

may be in need of help, and to hide the fighters in case of danger. These instructions were given during the oath ceremonies. The passive masses acquired from the government the name of the Rural Passive Wing System.

Another group that also arose at the same time were the "komerera", the 'hidiers'.⁴⁰ These were the people who, when the initial plan failed, expected an immediate end of the Mau Mau war. They had taken either one or both Mau Mau oaths. They ran away from their homes and hid in local bushes in anticipation of a quick end of the war. However, when war continued for long, many more people became "komerera" as a result of other factors such as the fear of entering into the forest.

At first, all those people who entered forest had begun by hiding in local bushes like the "komerera". As said before, these were the people who had been mentioned in connection with the first oaths. Among them were Kimathi and Mathenge, the two main leaders of the forest fighters. But when dangers in local bushes increased, and when the need to train more fighters arose, these people entered into the forests and only came home for foods at night. It should be stated here that entrance into the forest was not at first planned by the Mau Mau. It was a consequence of the failure of the initial aim of the movement.

In concluding this section then, we find that around 1950, many Kikuyu people had agreed to take Mau Mau oaths. At that time, the major aim was the unity

of the 'house of Gikuyu and Mumbi', a unity that was emphasized in oaths. We also find that when the initial plan failed, the Mau Mau movement began to take a new shape. Groups arose as seen above. Many acts of arson directed to both whites and loyalists occurred. And most important of all Mau Mau oaths spread to more people and new versions of the earlier Mau Mau oaths started, both to cater for the needs of the war and to compensate for the confessed oaths.

The Significance of Land in Mau Mau Ideology

The two main demands of the Mau Mau were freedom and land which were expressed as "wiyathi witu na ithaka ciitu" i.e. 'our freedom and our lands'. But whereas 'land' had been an issue in the development of Kenyan nationalism for more than thirty years before Mau Mau, the concept of freedom became emphasized only in the Mau Mau movement.

In their earlier political protests, the Kenyan blacks demanded for better wages, less taxation, representation in the Legislative Assembly, return of alienated lands and for higher education. The concept of freedom was used in the Mau Mau movement to represent the right of the black people to have all these things that they had demanded for so long from the colonizers.

Among the Kikuyu, however, the question of land was the greatest issue in the development of nationalism. The Kikuyu Association of 1920 had requested the colonial government to stop more land alienations and to issue

land rights to the people in the reserves. The KCA went a bit further and requested the colonial government to compensate the Africans for their alienated lands. When the Mau Mau movement started, the major demand of the movement was that the alienated lands be returned to their black owners. The idea behind this demand was that alienated lands could only be attained after the expulsion of the white men. We therefore find that in the ideology of Mau Mau, the concept of land was a more sensitive issue than that of freedom. The Kikuyu especially could not conceive the idea of self-rule without land, because for them, land ownership was one of the qualities of a prosperous man who could manage to control all his family and the use of all the land that the family possessed.

The following section surveys the significance of land among the Kikuyu, with special emphasis on their traditional beliefs about land. Land is a significant aspect in this paper because it was used as an important symbol in Mau Mau oaths. It will be seen that the traditional beliefs about land were very clear in the minds of the freedom fighters, and that land as a symbol was an important element of the religious factor in the movement. Land was represented by the presence of soil in the Mau Mau oaths. More emphasis will however be given to the concept of freedom, although both aspects of the ideology were conceived of as inseparable in the Mau Mau movement.

The unity of the two elements in Mau Mau ideology has been expressed in various ways by freedom fighters. One informant had this to say:

*When we took the oath, we had been deprived of our rights. We had no lands, no goats, no cows, and we worked as squatters on the white men's farms. We used the word 'wiyathi' to represent our right to own these things. Members of KCA at first thought that they could get land before freedom, that they could live with the white men. But they failed. We in Mau Mau decided to expel the white men out of our lands so that we could have rights to our lands and the products grown there.*⁴²

The same unity in Mau Mau ideology was also expressed in one of the Mau Mau songs:

*We shall never, ever keep quiet
So long as we have nowhere to
cultivate
And a freedom of our own
In this country of ours, Kenya.*⁴³

This song emphasizes that the main goal of the movement was freedom and land for all Kenyan blacks and not only for the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru who formed the bulk of the Mau Mau movement. This nationalist aspect in Mau Mau ideology will be referred to now and again in this study.

The unity between the aspects of land and freedom in the Mau Mau ideology was also emphasised by Kimathi, a significant leader of the forest fighters. He is quoted as having stated that:

*I do not lead rebels, but I lead Africans who want their self government and land. My people want to live in a better world than they found when they were born. I lead them because God never created any nation to be ruled by another nation forever.*⁴⁴

In the section below, the significance of land is discussed because land was one of the main symbols contained in Mau Mau oath ceremonies. An understanding of the significance of land to the Kikuyu will greatly help us to grasp its meaning as a symbol in the oaths.

The Kikuyu believe strongly that they got their land from God, "Ngai", also referred to as "Mwenenyaga". One of their myths of creation expresses the belief that Ngai called Gikuyu, the ancestor of all Kikuyu, and took him to the top of Mount Kenya. He showed Gikuyu all the land between Mountains Kenya, Aberdares, Gong Hills and Kilimambogo. Gikuyu was given this land to be used by him and all his descendants.⁴⁵ It should be noted here that this myth has been believed in by the Kikuyu for a long time. The myth has acted as a reminder to them that the land that "Ngai" gave to them is their own right, a divine gift which no other human being should pester with. The presence of this land acts as a sign of God's revelation to the Kikuyu ancestors and of His daily guidance to them, because He hears their cries whenever they turn to him 'facing Mount Kenya'. The statement that best expresses the Kikuyu gratitude to God for His gift of land states that "God gave the

kikuyu a good land that never lacks yields, water, or new pastures; therefore, the Kikuyu should praise God always for being so generous to them."⁴⁶

This belief that Kikuyu got their land as a gift from "Ngai" was strong in the minds of the Mau Mau, and the belief encouraged them to fight for these lands. They fought for these lands with the belief that God was with them wherever they were because the land they were fighting for was His gift to them. They fought with the belief that "God helps men who are in the process of helping themselves" (Ngai ateithagia witeithitie). At the start of the Mau Mau war, the Mau Mau made a declaration to the effect that:

*Tukuhuthira kihooto,
kihooto kiarema tunuithire hinya,
ha warema tuikirie Mwenenyaga.*

meaning

*We are going to fight with appeal to justice
If it fails we shall use force
And if force fails, we shall take the case
to God.*⁴⁷

It should, however, be understood here that the concept of land had a double meaning to the Mau Mau. On the one hand, land referred to the traditional Kikuyu lands. But on a wider level, land referred to the whole country of Kenya. We find mostly that in Mau Mau songs and prayers, the idea of Kikuyu lands was developed to one of the whole of Kenya, and the Mau Mau started to refer to the country as a gift of "Ngai", not to the Kikuyu alone, but to all the Black people of Kenya.

A few examples of verses which illustrate each of the two meanings of land are given here below.

In reference to land as the traditional Kikuyu lands, the Mau Mau sang:

*This land of ours Kikuyu
God blessed it to us
And declared that we shall never depart from it.*⁴⁸

Another song expresses the same sentiment that:

*Gikuyu was called by Mwenenyaga
And was taken to the top of Mount Kenya
He was told, "All the land that you can see,
I have given to you for your descendants."*⁴⁹

The two examples above express the same beliefs contained in the creation myth mentioned earlier, namely, that God provided the land. This is clear evidence that the Mau Mau were conscious of the traditional Kikuyu beliefs about land.

On the other hand, the concept of land in the Mau Mau movement was used in reference to the country of Kenya. The idea that it was the same God who gave the whole land of Kenya as a divine gift and as a right to all Kenyan blacks is expressed in the verses below:

*God gave us this soil
Since long, long, ago,
The land of Kenya
Which is now grabbed and kept
By the white children.*⁵⁰

We also find the same sentiment in the song:

*If Kikuyu you were asked,
What would you say?
I would reply that Kenya is ours
Left to us by Mwenenyaga.*⁵¹

The above examples show clearly that in their references to land, the Mau Mau not only meant the traditional Kikuyu lands but also the whole of Kenya. Of great significance is the fact that the belief in God as the giver of these lands to all Kenyan blacks is very clear. This belief is emphatic of the traditional Kikuyu concept of one universal God. It is the failure to recognise that the cry for land by the Mau Mau was a nationalist aspect that has led some people to claim that the Kikuyu should not have fought for land because their total alienated land was 'infinitesimal' as compared, for example, to the Maasai alienated lands.⁵²

No one expresses the deep significance of land to the Kikuyu better than Kenyatta when he states that "the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwell in or on it."⁵³ He elaborates this point further and emphasizes that "the harmony and stability of the African's mode of life, in political, social, religious and economic organisations was based on land, which was, and still is, the soul of the people."⁵⁴ Kenyatta cautioned the colonisers and advised them to consider the significance of land among the Kikuyu:

... to anyone who wants to understand Kikuyu problems, nothing is more important than a correct grasp of the question of land tenure. For it is the key to the people's life, it secures for them that peaceful tillage of the soil which supplies their material needs and enables them to perform their magic and traditional ceremonies in undisturbed serenity,

*facing Mount Kenya.*⁵⁵

The Mau Mau movement arose partly because of the failure of the British government to take notice of advices like the one of Kenyatta, which had been voiced for half a century by the Africans. Senior Chief Koinange of Kiambu, who was an ardent supporter of KCA had advised the British government on the seriousness of land alienation. He stated that:

*When someone steals your ox, it is killed and roasted and eaten. One can forget. When someone steals your land, especially if nearby, one can never forget. It is always there, its trees which were dear friends, its little streams. It is a bitter presence.*⁵⁶

It is clear from our discussion above that the traditional Kikuyu beliefs related to land were very much expressed by the Mau Mau. It is a strong assertion in this study that these traditional beliefs related to land formed a very significant aspect of the religious factor in the Mau Mau movement. The significance of land in the traditional religion of the Kikuyu, which has been emphasized in this section, similarly became a major aspect in the religious activities of the Mau Mau movement. The traditional Kikuyu beliefs related to land played a great role in the oaths and other religious practices of the movement. Some of the practices in which the Mau Mau used soil as a symbol are given below.

In some of their prayers, the Mau Mau prayed while standing, holding a damp ball of soil to the navel with the left hand, holding a knife high with the right hand,

and facing Mount Kenya.⁵⁷ Soil, held on the navel, was symbolic of the main source of livelihood. It is the soil upon which all things depend. Men feed on foods grown on the soil, men live on the soil and when they die, they are buried in the soil. In the above prayer, the navel is symbolic of the passage through which an unborn infant receives its supply of food from the mother. In the prayer also, the knife was used as a symbol of war. To the Mau Mau, this war was a just war which was intended to help them regain their main source of livelihood. The prayer was one directed to God who gave to them the land. In the prayer, they asked God to help them fight for this land. The significance of land in Mau Mau prayers cannot however be exhausted here for lack of space.

Land as a symbol was also a significant element in Mau Mau oaths. In almost all Mau Mau oaths, the symbol of soil was present. Where there was no soil as a symbol in the oath ceremony, there were instead the products which are grown on the soil. As we shall see in the next chapter, soil was a very significant symbol in the traditional oaths of the Kikuyu. Also, the KCA used soil in their oaths.

It has been slightly shown above that soil was regarded as highly sacred by the Kikuyu in traditional society. When soil was used in an oath ceremony, the recipient of the oath normally sipped the contents in the oath which included soil. In such an oath, a person swore to the

effect that he will do what he had sworn to do. In the oath, the recipient invoked a curse on himself to the effect that, 'If I do not obey what I have sworn, may this soil (or these foods) consume me.' The recipient then sipped the contents in the ceremony. It should be mentioned here that soil as a symbol of land, and as the main source of livelihood, was used in Mau Mau oaths in an apparently similar way that it had been used in traditional Kikuyu oaths.

Mau Mau oaths were intended to increase the people's consciousness of the fact that the white men had to leave the lands they held to the black people. The oaths also increased the people's commitment to the cause of the struggle for land and freedom. When used in the ceremony, soil as a symbol was intended to make the oath more binding and long lasting. It will be shown in the next chapter that swearing while using soil in the ceremony was regarded by the Kikuyu as an everlasting oath.

Most of the people who either refused to take Mau Mau oaths or who confessed the oaths to the government were severely dealt with by the Mau Mau if they were caught. The reason for such a punishment was explained to me by one informant, "It was "thahu" (defilement, uncleanness) for any Kikuyu to refuse to fight for our God-given land. When a man refused to do so, we did not wait for the effect of "thahu" to kill him. Instead, we killed him so that he may not reveal more secrets and cause the deaths of other Mau Mau."⁵⁸ In this statement there is the suggestion

that the effect of a broken oath is "thahu" on the victim. The concept of "thahu" and its relationship to the oath in general, and to the symbols of the oath in particular will be clarified in the following chapter. Emphasis will also be laid on the Mau Mau adaptations of traditional beliefs and practices, e.g. killing a person rather than waiting for the effect of the oath to do so.

We also find that when a freedom fighter was about to die, he made sure that he put soil in his mouth, or held it firmly with his palms. This was also followed with a curse by the dying person to all traitors against the Mau Mau, a curse to the effect that, "may this soil and the foods grown thereon consume the traitors." At other times, a dying Mau Mau uttered the words "For this I die", and he held soil in his palms. The practice of putting soil in the mouth by the dying Mau Mau led some people to accuse the Mau Mau of eating soil. This was, however, not the case as the following song illustrates:

*When Matenjagwo was dying
He put soil in his mouth and said
"I have died as a great Kikuyu warrior;"⁵⁹*

In another song, the Mau Mau sang:

*I will be buried in this earth while holding
soil in my hand
Gripping tightly this country of Kenya.⁶⁰*

Many more Mau Mau practices could be cited in which land was used as a symbol. The significance of soil in the beliefs and practices of the Kikuyu, and the traditional

Kikuyu beliefs related to land, continued into the Mau Mau movement. The Mau Mau fought hard with the conviction that "God will surely hear our cries because we are fighting for the thing (land) that He gave us."

In concluding this section, we should emphasize the fact that land, which was an important aspect of Mau Mau ideology, and which was also a continuing demand in the development of Kenyan nationalism, had a strong significance in the religious beliefs and practices of the Mau Mau. This religious factor contained in Mau Mau nationalism shows us that the statement that "Nationalism, particularly in Africa, is a religious as well as a political force",⁶¹ is wholly right with regards to the Mau Mau movement. The rest of this study addresses itself to the nature and significance of Mau Mau oaths among the Kikuyu. The traditional Kikuyu oaths will first be briefly discussed, before moving on to the KCA oaths and finally to the Mau Mau oaths.

FOOTNOTES

1. Padmore, G., "Behind Mau Mau". In Phylon: Fourth Quarter, 1953, vol.XIV, No.4, pp.355-372; see also Venys, op.cit., pp.4-5. Many informants have also supported this view, including Muchumu Gachuki, interview, Nyeri, 25.12.76, Njoroge Kagunda, interview, Nyandarua, 10.12.76, Mukami Kimathi, interview, 21.11.76 etc.
2. Barnett and Njama, Mau Mau From Within, p.55.
3. Ibid. pp.53-55.
4. Stoneham, C.T., Mau Mau, op.cit. p.23.
5. Ibid. p.24.
6. Ibid. p.27
7. Whittier, R. (ed.), The Swords of Kirinyaga: The Fight for Land and Freedom, by H.K. Wachanga, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau (E.A.L.B.), 1975, pp. 18-19.
8. Kaggia, B., Roots of Freedom, p.115.
9. Kariuki, J.M., Mau Mau Detainee, London: Oxford University Press (O.U.P), 1963, pp.23-24.
10. Any attempts to get Permenas Kiritu were in vain. An informant has been searching for him. The writer learnt that Kiritu lives either in Lari or Kijabe Mission, and that he was a married man but he no longer lives with his family. He was a famous loyalist at the time of Mau Mau and most people remember having heard his name.
11. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 7.9.76.
12. Elsie Mukami, Macharia Kirubi, Mugo Ngobia, Kamau Wng'ondou all record that the name was used in reference to the manner in which the people had eaten meat during this ceremony. Muchunu said that the name was used first to signify 'fast and greedy eating.'
13. Rosberg and Nottingham, The Myth of Mau Mau, p.332.
14. Kariuki, J.M., op.cit. p.24.
15. Leakey, L.S.B. Defeating Mau Mau, p.111.
16. Njoroge Kagunda, Ibid.
17. Mukami Kimathi, Ibid.

13. Venys, op.cit. p.5 records the date of 1948; Corfield, op.cit. p.64 records the same date; Also Delf, G., Jomo Kenyatta: Towards Truth about 'The Light of Kenya', New York: Doubleday, 1961, p.150, records the same date of 1948.
 19. Barnett and Njama, op.cit. p.51.
 20. Leakey, L.S.B., Defeating Mau Mau, p.82. Also, Whittier, R. in his book uses the name Mau Mau for the freedom fighters and he shows wrongly that the freedom fighters used the name to refer to themselves.
 21. See glossary for the word "ihii".
 22. Mugo Ngobia, Macharia Kirubi, Kamau Wang'ondou, Interviews, 23.10.76.
 23. Kamau Wang'ondou, Interview, Nyandarua, 15.10.76.
 24. Muchunu Gachuki, Interview, Nyeri, 25.12.76.
 25. Barnett and Njama, op.cit. pp.53-55.
 26. Muchunu Gachuki, Macharia Gichingiri, Chaura Thumi, Reuben Maina and Nyanja Tangaria, all in interviews in Nyeri, Dec. 1976. All of them supported the name 'Day of Long Swords' as was said by Muchunu.
 27. For example, some of the informants who referred to the day as "itwika" were Joel Kariuki, Mugo Ngobia and Chege Gathogo, Interviews, Nyandarua, September - December 1976. The "itwika" was the traditional Kikuyu handing over ceremony of the religious, social, political and military authority from one generation to the next. For details on "itwika", see Kenyatta, J., Facing Mount Kenya, London: Secker and Warburg, 1938., pp.109, 189-196; also Kabetu, M.N., Kirira Kia Ukikuyu: The Kikuyu Customs and Traditions, Nairobi: E.A.L.B., 1966, p.39; and Muriuki, G., A History of the Kikuyu: 1500 - 1960, Nairobi:O.U.P., 1974, pp.23-24.
- (N.B: Most of the material in this section is drawn from interviews with the above informants on foot-notes 1 and 2.)
28. Joel Kariuki, Ibid, dates the day on January 3rd 1953, but it is hard to tell whether these plans were finalised to the extent of appointing an actual day.
 29. Muchunu Gachuki, Interviews, op.cit.
 30. Ibid.

31. For further details on Mwangi and Maina generations, see Kenyatta, J., Facing Mount Kenya, pp.189-200.
32. Ibid. p.196 attributes the failure of the normal "itwaika" ceremony to the government which banned the celebrations.
33. The account is made up of extracts from various interviews with Njoroge Kagunda, Jonah Kabae, Wakomo Kibiri, Muchunu Gachuki and Reuben Maina, Interviews, Sept. 1976 - Jan. 1977.
34. A verse in the Mau Mau Song "I will strike at our enemy." (Ngaringaranga thu ciitu) (See Appendix number 4)
35. Delf, G., Jomo Kenyatta, p.149.
36. Leakey, L.S.B., Mau Mau and The Kikuyu, p.112.
37. Leakey, L.S.B., Defeating Mau Mau, p.42.
38. Venys, L., A History of the Mau Mau..., pp.30, 42,45.
39. The "Kamatimu" as a name means 'Spearmen.' "Itimu" means 'Spear'. These people were called "Kamatimu" because they carried spears as a weapon. It was told to the writer that they pierced dead bodies of Mau Mau with the spears. They also speared the floors of houses, claiming they were looking for hidden ammunition. They also destroyed peoples' utensils in the process. The name "Kamatimu" was therefore descriptive of the groups' bad activities. Many Mau Mau songs reveal their hatred for "Kamatimu". (See Appendix numbers 14, 15)
40. 'Komerera', see glossary.
41. Muchunu Gachuki, Chaura Thumi, Reuben Maina, Njoroge Kagunda: Interviews, op.cit.
42. Mugo Ngobia, Interview, Nyandarua, 28.10.76.
43. In the Mau Mau Song "When we were detained." (Na riria ithui twathamirio). (See Appendix number 5)
44. Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit. p.299, (Quotes Kimathi Papers, EFI/3/3/620.)
45. For the full details of this myth, see Kenyatta, J. Facing Mount Kenya, p.3ff.
46. McPherson, R. "Muthomere wa Gikuyu", nd. np., as quoted repeatedly and strongly by Mukami Kimathi, Interview, Nyandarua, 21.11.76.

47. Mukami Kimathi, Ibid.; also Njoroge Kagunda, Nyandarua Interviews, Nov. 1976.
48. In the Mau Mau Song "This land of ours Kikuyu." (Bururi uyu witu Gikuyu). (See Appendix 2)
49. In the Mau Mau Song "Gikuyu was lifted by Mwenenyaga." (Gikuyu ni oirwo ni Mwenenyaga). (See Appendix 7)
50. In the Mau Mau Song "Remember always, Young man." (Ngwenda Uririkanage Kamwana). (See Appendix 6)
51. In the Mau Mau Song "We wept for Kenyatta." (Twariragira Kenyatta). (See Appendix 3)
52. Leakey, L.S.B., Defeating Mau Mau, pp.22-23.
53. Kenyatta, J., Facing Mount Kenya, p.21.
54. Ibid. p.213.
55. Ibid. p.(xxi). References to Kikuyu land tenure can also be seen in ibid. p.20ff., also in Leakey, L.S.B., Defeating Mau Mau, p.65.
56. Barnett and Njama, op.cit. p.74.
57. Chaura Thumi, Interview, Nyori, Dec. 1976.
58. Gachamba Waimiri, Interview, Murang'a, Jan. 1977.
59. In the Mau Mau Song "Parents do not be worried." (Aciari tigai kamaka). (See Appendix number 9)
60. In the Mau Mau Song "Remember always, Young man." (op.cit.)
61. Delf, G., op.cit. p.163. Similar remarks can be seen in Barnett and Njama, op.cit. pp.200-201.

TRADITIONAL OATHS AMONG THE KIKUYU

This chapter deals with Kikuyu traditional oaths. The traditional oaths are considered important in this study because they help us to understand the origin, the nature and the religious significance of Mau Mau oaths. The view held in the study is that there is an apparent similarity between the nature of Kikuyu traditional oaths and Mau Mau oaths. But before looking at the traditional oaths, it would be necessary first to define the concepts of "mugiro", "kirumi", and "thabu", because the Kikuyu beliefs in the effects of oaths were to a great extent based upon their beliefs in the powers underlying these three concepts.

"Mugiro", "Kirumi", and "Thabu"

"Mugiro" is a Kikuyu word which primarily means a 'prohibition'. In his dictionary, Benson describes it as "a ban, ritual prohibition, deilement, taboo; something forbidden under threat of deilement."¹ We notice here that Benson equates "mugiro" with "taboo". But in daily usage, "mugiro" refers to a ban or a prohibition, directed to a specific object or act, which some or all people in the society are not supposed to have or to do. In this sense, "mugiro" is a rule set up for members in the society. If a person breaks such a rule, several consequences may follow. He may fall sick or die, his animals may die, and his family may also be affected. But such ailments, if detected and diagnosed early, could

be cured by a diviner-doctor by means of a purification ceremony. However, "mugiro" cannot be correctly termed defilement, even though the violation of a "mugiro" could cause defilement.

In relationship to oaths, we find that "mugiro" is any act that the person taking an oath has been prohibited to do, and this prohibition is announced by the administrator of that oath. The aim of such an oath is to make the person swear ritually that he will not act contrary to the prohibition. In other oaths, a person who has been accused of having broken a prohibition swears in defence that he is innocent. In swearing, a man binds himself to the effect that he will keep the promises he has made in the oath.

"Kirumi" is another Kikuyu word which is derived from the verb "ruma", which means 'abuse'. Benson describes it as a "ban imposed by an ancestor on his descendants."² According to the Kikuyu, to 'leave a curse' means to 'announce a prohibition', especially when the person who did it has died. We see here that a curse is also sometimes announced as a kind of prohibition and in this case it is similar to a "mugiro". But in most cases, a curse is directed to relatives because it is mainly they who can be affected by the curse. "Mugiro" is broader because it is in most cases a rule affecting more people who may not necessarily have blood relationship with each other.

If a person in a family prohibits the family members from using an object e.g. from eating the fruits of a

specific tree, this prohibition becomes a kind of "mugiro" to those people. But if the person who uttered the prohibition happened to die before recalling that prohibition, i.e. before blessing the tree he had banned, the prohibition becomes an everlasting one, and acquires the meaning of a curse. Such a curse only affects the members of that family who are aware of it. A person who is not aware of such a curse cannot be affected. This was, however, rare in traditional society because all members of a family were constantly reminded about the curses by their seniors. It was a common practice among the Kikuyu that a dying person was requested to recall the curses he had uttered during his lifetime. But in most cases, a man uttered the curses because of some ill-treatments that he had been given, in most cases by close relatives.

Among the Kikuyu, the "Ethaga" clan members were greatly feared because the curses they pronounced were very effective. Their words were feared because they could pray for rain and it would fall.³ The Ethaga clan members were called by other people to prohibit the use of certain things or even to pronounce prohibitions against some activities. They were also used to pronounce curses on unknown criminals. Gathigira gives an illustration of such a curse:

The man who has stolen the property of so and so, or the man who has done such and such a thing, may his livers loosen, may his hands wither! If he tries to eat, may he be unable to eat. May he be unable to drink water, may

*the water loathe him. And may he set with the sun.*⁴

An important point to note here is that in both "magiro" and "kirumi", the spoken word is significant because it causes an effect even after the death of the speaker.

Once a prohibited act is done, whether the prohibition is a "magiro" or a "kirumi", this act brings "thahu" on the doer, for whom the act was prohibited. In other words, a person's acts which contravene a "magiro" or "kirumi" make the doer get "thahu". This "thahu" enters the person, and may cause sickness to him. In this broad sense therefore, "thahu" can be seen as the consequence of an act, performed in contravention of a "kirumi" or "magiro". It is believed by the Mikuyu that "thahu" enters the body of the person who breaks a prohibition and this "thahu" may lead to one or many misfortunes. Mostly, the victim may "wither away" in sickness, and this is called "guthahu". In common usage, the word "thahu" is derived from "guthahu". But "guthahu" can be also termed as general deterioration in a person's well-being. His health may weaken, his flocks may die and get lost, his children may die and even his crops may fail to yield. These are all seen as the effects of "thahu". If the "thahu" is detected early, it can be cleansed by the diviner-doctor in a ceremony called "adahiho", i.e. 'ritual vomiting ceremony'.

But we also find that a person may invoke a curse on himself during an oath. In taking an oath, a person

may swear as follows, "If I do not obey these rules, may this soil kill me." The last part of the statement is a curse directed to the self. In such an oath as the one above, soil is one of the symbols with which the person swears. In the swearing statement above, there is both a prohibition i.e. 'not to break the rules', and a curse, i.e. 'may this soil kill me'. The meaning of the curse is that the soil and its products, which the person feeds on daily, should bring "thahu" to him if he ever breaks the prohibition. Such an oath, in which a man invokes a curse on himself by swearing with the products of the soil becomes an everlasting oath because the man must of necessity feed on those products. Most Mau Mau oaths made use of soil and its products.

The above Kikuyu traditional concepts of "kirumi", "augiro" and "thahu" were very pronounced in the ceremonies performed by the Mau Mau. At the time of death, a freedom fighter tried hard and gripped soil with his hands as he died, and he announced a curse to his betrayers in the following manner; "May the person who betrayed me be killed (or consumed) by this soil."³ Such an utterance became a true curse with the death of the freedom fighter. We shall find out later that the Mau Mau mounted animals on trees and these were intended to be curses directed to their enemies. The writer was also told that after the Lari massacre, many Kikuyu were arrested in connection with the incident, and that the homeguard loyalists aided the government in its arrests. Those

arrested were hanged at Githunguri. On their way to death, they uttered the following curses to their comrades: "May any member of our movement who happens to marry or get married to a homeguard die like us!"⁷ In one of their songs also, the Mau Mau recalled an old curse:

*Our people, Waiyaki died and left a curse on us
Never to sell this land of ours
And you are giving it away freely.*⁸

I noted earlier on that Benson equates "mugiro" with taboo. But is this equation correct? My study of the meaning of 'taboo' shows that this equation is incorrect.

Scholars have given theories on taboo and some of them will be briefly sketched below. Freud saw taboo as connected to neuroses. He saw taboo as a result of psychological conditions. He argues that taboo originated from ambivalent social attitudes out of which men established prohibitions. For Freud, the basis of taboo is a forbidden action, for which there exists a strong unconscious inclination.⁹ Among the kikuyu, such prohibitions were established by society for the individuals to follow, and each member of the society was aware that such prohibitions existed.

Other scholars give a sociological interpretation of taboo and claim that the taboos that are present in a society tend to be related to objects and actions that are significant for the social order and as such, taboos act as part of social control.¹⁰ In this sense, taboo

can correctly be equated with "mugiro", but cannot be equated with "thahu" because "thahu" is a consequence of "mugiro" that has been contravened.

Radin associates the development of the concept of taboo with the priests and shamans in a society, and he argues that they develop these rules so that they may gain from the work of curing and cleansing those who break the rules.¹¹ But we find among the Kikuyu that whereas the diviner-doctors gain from the ceremonial purifications that they perform on all people who have "thahu", nonetheless these doctors are not the formulators of the prohibitions. Instead, it is the society that is said to have formulated the prohibitions, so as to govern the activities of each member. As we can see then, the term taboo cannot be equated with the Kikuyu term "thahu".

The scholar who comes closest to the Kikuyu concepts of "mugiro" and "thahu" in his definition of taboo is Radcliffe-Brown. He calls taboo a 'ritual avoidance', or a 'ritual prohibition', and he says that the meaning of the term cannot be universalised. He argues that after a prohibition is broken, the status of the victim gets disturbed and this leads to some degree of misfortune.¹² This misfortune may fall on him alone or even affect his family and his property. This is closely similar to the situation among the Kikuyu. Radcliffe-Brown also notes correctly that taboos symbolise social relationships and function as a moral code of the society. Among the Kikuyu the fear of "thahu" acts as a check so that people

do not contravene the moral values. The concept of "thahu" however cannot be equated with taboo.

The concept of taboo can be equated with "mugiro" in a way because both of them stand for prohibitions. In line with this, we can argue that "thahu" can be termed as the effect of a broken taboo, in as much as "thahu" is an effect of a broken "mugiro".

According to Gathigira, "thahu" is anything that harms the person who does it.¹³ He equates "thahu" with "mugiro" but we have observed above that "thahu" is the consequence of a broken "mugiro". Kenyatta also uses the word 'taboo'.¹⁴ But Hobley noticed correctly that "thahu" results from actions that are performed in contravention of a prohibition or a curse.¹⁵ Hobley, however, associated "thahu" with the curse of ancestors alone and argued that a person curses by invoking the powers of ancestors. This is not the case among the Kikuyu. Instead we find that "thahu" results from an ancestor's curse only if that ancestor pronounced the prohibition when he was alive. In the act of pronouncing the prohibition or curse, there is no reference to ancestors whatsoever. Hobley perhaps thought of ancestors' curses because among the Kikuyu, the curse mostly functions among the relatives of the deceased.

Among the Kikuyu, a man can also contract "thahu" from other people or objects unknowingly, and the effect of this kind of "thahu" may be seen in form of sickness. The cause of the "thahu" is the action of coming into contact with a

person who has "thahu" or an object which has been prohibited. In this case also, we find that "thahu" is a consequence of man's actions against a prohibition. The possibility that a person may get "thahu" unknowingly necessitates ceremonial purification of persons even when they may not be aware of having broken any prohibitions. As such, we find that "thahu" affects the person who gets it unknowingly, and it also affects the one who, after breaking a prohibition, keeps his action secret. If a person confesses that he has acted contrary to a prohibition, he is purified and the "thahu" inside him is removed. "Thahu" could therefore be said to have many sources, in contrast to a curse which only comes in form of the spoken word. Even a curse itself is one cause of "thahu".

It is true to say that "thahu" acted as a basis of morality among the Kikuyu. This is because to a great extent, "thahu" controlled the behaviour of persons in the society. Rules in the society were defined in terms of "thahu". One of my informants emphasized this point:

It was normally said that the government of the Kikuyu people was based on "thahu". This was somehow true because there was an extent to which a youth could not go in his approach to the elders. Women too had to observe their relationships with men. "Thahu" created boundaries for all men, women and children. If a person over-stepped these boundaries, he got "thahu", and had to pay a fine to those

whom he had wronged, and then get cleansed by a diviner-doctor. In most cases, however, a man wronged those who were senior to him. The person who was wronged usually stated what he wanted as payment. The elders decided the fine. The victim was then helped by his family and his agemates to pay the fine.¹⁶

To sum up this section, it would be good to state again that "thahu" was the consequence of either a contravened "mugiro" or "kirumi". It should, however, be noted that the "thahu" resulting from a broken "mugiro" could be purified, and such a "mugiro" could also be stopped from operating. But whereas the effects of a broken "kirumi" could be purified, the "kirumi" itself remained, because it was believed to be everlasting. One informant expressed this fact when he stated that "there was no permanent cure for an established curse."¹⁷

The kikuyu have many prohibitions but they cannot be dealt with here.¹⁸ These prohibitions cannot, however, be referred to as "thahu" because "thahu" comes in when they are broken.

The Connection Between Thahu and the Oath

The connection between "thahu" and the oath was expressed to me by some of my informants as follows:

In an oathing ceremony, there are three things which bring "thahu" to the recipient of the oath. One source is the curses pronounced by the administrator of the oath. He curses the recipient if he ever breaks the rules he had sworn in or if he had lied in the oath. The second source is the contents used in the oath

ceremony, called "nigerwa". These were mainly foods mixed with soil, blood and even milk. The recipient of the oath invoked curses on himself if he ever contravenes the oath e.g. "If I ever steal, may this food kill me." The third source of "thahu" is the vows that the recipient himself takes and the articles he swears with. The recipient sips some of the contents in the oath to symbolise eating. It means that since the person feeds, and has been feeding on the foods, he must abide by the vows he has taken under oath. If he fails to do so, his curse on himself, as well as the curses from the oath administrator, would kill him.¹⁹

Another informant expressed the relationship as follows:

By acting contrary to the oath, a person gets "thahu" because he has broken a rule set up by his agemates. As an example, in the Mau Mau movement, we all saw ourselves as members of the same age-grade. All of us were equal. During our first oath, each man swore in front of the others. We cursed all the people who broke our rules and this we did in a ceremony in which we "struck the he-goat", in the traditional manner of cursing the enemy. We cursed the enemy to the effect that "may he die!" But later on during the war, we found out that we had to kill our betrayers rather than wait for the effect of the oath to kill them.²⁰

Among the Kikuyu, it was said that people 'drunk' the oath, (nunyua muuma) rather than that they 'ate the oath'. But there was no actual drinking during the ceremony. All that there was was the sipping of a

liquid, and at times spitting it out; or biting at a piece of meat which was used in the ceremony. The reason given for calling the action 'drinking' is that this was the traditional way of expressing the act of taking an oath. The mention of drinking during an oath suggests that something is taken in by the oath-taker, and this is nothing other than the oath. During the ritual-vomiting ceremony of cleansing a person from "thahu", the word used was "tahika" i.e. "vomit". It suggests that the person being cleansed vomits out the illness, and this illness vomited out is a result of "thahu". Yet nothing is vomited out. In the same way, 'drinking the oath' is symbolic of taking in the oath, while 'vomiting' is symbolic of "thahu" removal.

But it should be noted that if a person does not contravene the oath, "thahu" does not affect him. "Thahu" only affects the person who acts contrary to what he has sworn in an oath. Again here, we see "thahu" as a consequence of man's actions. But the oath ceremony could sometimes be prepared in such a way that some of its contents included objects prohibited by society. The use of such objects, even in an oath, would bring "thahu" to the recipient of the oath. This "thahu" would affect the person only if he contravened the oath. However, taking an oath in which some prohibited objects and acts are present makes the effect of such an oath stronger.

Examples of Kikuyu Traditional Oaths and Curses

Among the Kikuyu, "muuma" means a solemn oath taken in a ritual ceremony before the elders. But there were

other casual forms of swearing among the Kikuyu which did not involve a ceremony. In such forms of swearing, a person swore with the source of "thahu" closest to him. In most cases, this source of "thahu" was a person with whom the swearing person could not go to bed with, for such an act would bring "thahu" on both. A man swore with the daughter of his age-mate, called "kaana ka murikawe"; a woman swore with her father or with his clothes, because they would bring "thahu" to her if she touched them; a daughter swore with her father, because playing sex with him would bring "thahu"; and similarly, a boy swore with his mother.

If two men quarrelled, and one of them swore in the words "I swear with my mother that I will beat you", this acted as a sign that the two men would fight. In such a case, the first man to swear was caught by the bystanders in a bid to stop the fight. Such a form of swearing cannot be correctly termed 'oath' because it is not solemn and it does not involve a ceremony. But such forms of swearing aided people in judging who among two people was a liar, because a person could not swear falsely. Some of the traditional Kikuyu oaths will be dealt with below, to help us understand the true meaning of "muuna".

"Kuringa Thenge" (Striking the He-goat in an Oath)

In traditional Kikuyu society, the he-goat, called "thenge" was used in many ceremonies. It was the animal that was used in oathing ceremonies as well as in cursing ceremonies. When another animal was used in a ceremony instead of "thenge", the animal was referred to as "thenge".

A female animal was, however, never used in an oath ceremony, and neither were female animals used in any other major ceremonies. "thenge" belongs to the class of animals collectively called "aburi" i.e. goats, and the sheep are here included. In some traditional oaths where "thenge" was not used, other objects were used in its place, and they were also referred to as "thenge". Such objects included a sun-dried pot and a stone called "githatni".

"Kuringa thenge" can be literally translated as to 'strike the he-goat', and this act was performed in an oath ceremony. The person taking this oath was made to break the bones of the 'thenge' with seven blows. With each blow, the person uttered the statements he was swearing in. The case recorded below will help to explain the actual ceremony.

In the case recorded by Kibetu,¹ two men are unable to satisfy the elders as to who among them was a liar in a case involving goats. One of them had accused the other that he had his goats while the other had claimed that this was false. The elders asked them to take an oath by 'striking the he-goat'. The two men were asked to castrate all their male animals before taking the oath so that the animals do not mate during the time that the men were oath bound, because such mating would bring "thaha" on the animals. The two men and their families were also required to abstain from sex for the same reason. Each one of the oath takers produced

two goats to be eaten by the elders who officiated during the ceremony. After eating the meat, the elders mounted a "thenge". They first tied the goat with a rope around its neck and then they hanged it on a branch of a tree such that the goat died slowly. The elders then called upon the two contestants to come forward and strike the "thenge".

The first person to swear was the one who brought the charges forward. In the ceremony, he struck the goat seven times after each clause that he swore in. At the end of each clause, he invoked a curse on himself to the effect that, "If I am lying that so and so has refused with so many of my goats, may this "thenge" kill me. May my bones be broken in this same manner". After this, the accused also struck the "thenge" in a similar manner and he invoked a similar curse on himself to the effect that, "If I owe so and so any goats, may this "thenge" kill me." Both persons taking the oath also invoked curses directed to the home where the disputed goats might be.

It was a strong belief among the Kikuyu that the liar in such a ceremony would be affected by the "thahu" which comes from the curses he invoked upon himself, as well as the curses from the elders. In such a case as the one above, the effect of "thahu" was expected to occur before seven years were over. If either of the two persons died or became seriously sick before the seven years were over, he was considered the liar, for it was said that the sickness or death was a result of "thahu" which

he contracted from the oath. But if none of the two men was affected by "thahu" for the period of seven years, it was concluded that there was no case to be answered by the accused, and the matter was dropped.

An interesting finding here is the use of number seven. The Kikuyu refer to it as "mugwanja muuru" i.e. the "ominous seven". The Kikuyu believe that the number seven is a sign of ill luck or misfortune. Doing an act seven times or possessing seven objects, animals etc. is believed to bring "thahu" on both the person and his property. When the number was used in an oath ceremony, it was believed that the number would increase the seriousness of the effect of such an oath.

"Kuringa Githathi" (Striking the "Githathi" in an Oath)

"Githathi" is a roundish stone with one big hole through its centre, and seven other small holes on the sides of the big hole. All the holes are drilled through the stone. The stone was used in an oath to curse an unknown criminal, mainly a murderer. The stone was used in an oath by a member of the Ethaga clan, and he did it on behalf of the clan whose member had been killed. The act of using the stone in an oath was referred to as "kuringa githathi" i.e. striking the "githathi", in the same way as striking the "thenge".

The stone is placed on sticks cut from a plant called "mugere". It was believed that when the sticks of the plant were used in an oath or cursing ceremony, the effect of the curse increased. The significance of

"mugere" will be elaborated in chapter four. In this particular case, the "mugere" sticks were used as mounts on which the stone was placed. The person to 'strike' the stone did so when he was naked. The act of striking the "githathi" is symbolised by the act of passing a piece of grass stem through each hole. As the person is passing the grass stem through each hole, he invokes curses to the unknown murderer in the following manner; "May this oath kill the murderer. If he ever eats food, may this oath consume him. If he ever sleeps in a house, may this oath consume him. If he ever steps on the soil, may this oath consume him."²² The same curses were also directed to the family and the relatives of the murderer.

In the above example, we find that the "githathi" is equated with both the "thease" and the "oath". All of them are equated in the curses. They all are considered equally capable of consuming the criminal, by death, and at times by sickness. In this sense, it is correct to say that striking a "thease" and striking the "githathi" are equivalent to 'drinking an oath'. All of them are actions which involve prohibitions and curses. They are actions performed in a ceremony of invoking curses as well as in a ceremony of announcing prohibitions. The person who is cursed may die, or he may get sick as a consequence of "thaha".

Using the "Ngata"²³ of the Elephant in an Oath

In some traditional cases dealing with theft, the "ngata" of an elephant was used as a symbol in swearing,

and the "ngata" was referred to as "thenge". If a man was accused of theft, and he denied the charge, he was asked to swear in a ceremony so as to prove his innocence. In taking this oath, the accused used "migere" sticks just as in the "githathi" oath. He passed each stick through the hole in the "ngata", and he did this seven times, invoking curses on himself in the process. The words he used were, "If I have stolen the property of so and so, may this oath kill me." The elders administering the oath would also curse him with the words, "May the oath kill the liar." As stated above, the effect of the above oath could either kill the victim directly, or it could bring "thahu" in form of sickness on him.

In this oath, we find a similarity between the functions of the "ngata", and the "thenge" in an oath. Their effect on the victim is the same. None of them was believed to cause death or "thahu" on a person except when they were used as symbols of swearing and cursing. Striking the "thenge", or breaking its bones, passing some "migere" sticks through the holes of a "githathi" stone, and 'drinking' an oath, when they are performed and accompanied by prohibitions and curses, they cause "thahu" to the offender and the effect of this "thahu" was either death or sickness. It does not matter whether the offender is the one who pronounces the prohibitions and invokes curses on himself or whether someone else does it in place of him.

It should be stated here that the above three forms

of oaths, which correctly come under the term "kuringa thenge", were performed by men alone. Women did not perform them. Instead, women had their own form of cursing in a simple oath. In this form of cursing, there was no ceremony. A woman smashed the cooking pot while at the same time invoking curses on her victim, mainly a thief.²⁴ In daily life, breaking a cooking pot was believed to bring "thahu" on a whole household. And when such a "thahu" bringing object or act was present as a symbol in a ceremony, the effect of the ceremony became more serious. However, women rarely performed these activities of swearing and cursing. Instead, their husbands or relatives did it for them.

Several points can be summarised in reference to the examples already given. First, we can conclude that the main symbols used in the cursing ceremonies were generally referred to as "thenge". Secondly, the curses which were pronounced in the ceremonies were believed either to kill the victim directly or to bring "thahu" and hence sickness to him. Thirdly, the forms of oath described so far, were the ones which dealt with crimes committed in the past e.g. murder or theft. This does not mean that there were no oaths which dealt with future actions e.g. prohibiting an action. The best example of a future oriented oath was the warriors' oath.

Warriors' Oath

The warriors' oath was given to the young men, who were newly circumcised, so as to introduce them to the

class of junior warriors. The oath was taken by the junior warriors under the command of a senior warrior. An animal was killed and its blood was used to bless the weapons of the junior warriors. This was done by sprinkling the weapons with the blood of the ceremonial animal. Then the senior warrior administering the ceremony directed them to say the warriors' resolution which ran as follows:

*We brandish our spears, which is the symbol of our courageous and fighting spirit, never to retreat or abandon our hope, or run away from our comrades. If ever we shall make a decision, nothing will change us, and even if the heaven should hold over us a threat to fall and crash us, we shall take our spears and prop it. And if there seem to be a unity between the heaven and the earth to destroy us, we shall sink the bottom part of our spear on the earth, preventing them from uniting; thus keeping the two entities, the earth and the sky, though together, apart. Our faith and our decision never changing shall act as balance.*²⁵

This form of oath, contrary to the other three, tried to encourage or prohibit some actions in the future rather than curse people who performed actions in the past. We shall later come to see that many oaths were of this nature. Also, this oath differs from the others in that it has no time limit. The other oaths had a period during which the effect of the oath could be expected. This oath was expected to last for as long as a man was a warrior.

The Oath taken in a Case Involving Sorcery

If a man was accused of having bewitched another man and having caused his death, and the accused denied

the charge, he was asked to take an oath. The oath he took was more elaborate than the ones given above. In this oath, the action of striking the "thenge" was absent. The following explanation and example were given to me by one informant:²⁶

The accused person was required to contribute two goats, one for the officiating elders to eat, and the other one to be used in the ceremony. The ceremony was conducted at a place where many paths crossed, i.e. where many people passed. The 'chest meat' of the goat was carefully removed, starting from the tongue and ending at the sex organs, which were included. It was a thin strip of meat. A hole was made at the bottom part of the meat, and the oath taker inserted his penis into this hole. He held the meat close to his body, from his sex organs to his neck. He was naked. Seven elders sat facing him, each holding his 'staff of office' (muthigi). One of them conducted the ceremony.

The recipient of the oath chanted the following statement: "If I happen to know what ate so and so, may this oath kill me." He then bit a piece of the chest meat and swallowed. Then the elders replied in unison, "May the oath consume the liar." The recipient continued, "If I know any type of harmful witchcraft, may this oath kill me." The elders repeated their curse as above. The process was repeated for all other curses. After the curses, each of the elders took the staffs of the others, held them together with his, and passed them around the head of the recipient seven times, each time dropping them all on the ground and repeating the same curses.

When the ceremony was completed, the oathed person was taken to the home of one of the elders, where he was guarded for seven days, so that he might not try to be cleansed by a diviner-doctor. He was released after the seven days because the effect of the oath on him could not be averted any longer. If such a man was a criminal, he got sick and died before seven years were over.

The example given to me by the above informant and which I relate below is of particular interest here because it occurred after the Mau Mau movement:

Nyambura Gichunja accused Waimiri that she saw him going round her house some time after the death of her husband Gichunja. She therefore suspected that he was performing some witchcraft, and that he could have also been responsible for the death of her husband. Waimiri denied the accusation, and he was asked by Mukunyi, Gichunja's brother to take an oath and prove his innocence. Waimiri took the above oath at the bridge of Mathioya River. After he took the oath, he was taken to Gitugi Chief's Camp where he was guarded for seven days. Then he was released. That was in 1957. Seven years elapsed, but nothing happened to Waimiri. In 1964, Waimiri accused Mukunyi, Gichunja's brother, in the Kangema court of law. The charge was that he, Mukunyi, and his brother's wife, Nyambura, had defamed Waimiri's name by accusing him of sorcery, and they had made Waimiri take an oath which had proved him innocent. Waimiri won the case.

Attention is drawn to several aspects of the above form of oath. First is the presence of the chest meat,

called "nyama ya githuri". The chest meat was a very important feature in the second Mau Mau oath, the "B' Batuai" oath. The chest meat in the above oath was used as a symbol, similar to "thenge". Secondly, the curses in the above oath were pronounced by the elder and repeated by the oath taker to ensure that the curses were correctly spelt out. This was also the case in Mau Mau oaths. Thirdly, we find greater application of the number seven in this oath than in the cases dealt with before. The significance of this number will be elaborated later. And finally, the oath was taken in the daytime and in the presence of senior elders. These points will help us understand the nature of Mau Mau oaths.

The Oath in a Pregnancy Case

When a mother noticed that her daughter was pregnant, she asked the daughter to name the man who was responsible. The mother reported the matter to her husband, who in turn reported it to the father of the accused man. If the accused man denied having impregnated the girl, a case was arranged and the senior elders listened to the charges and the defence. However, if the elders found the man guilty, and at the same time the man continued to deny the charge, he was asked to take an oath and to swear that he was not the one who impreg the girl. But before such an oath could be taken, the two affected families must have tried all ways possible to reach a compromise. The oath was taken as the last resort. The girl herself did not take the oath.

The accused man produced one goat. It was slaughtered, and its heart was carefully removed. The tip of the heart was carefully inserted into the vagina of the pregnant girl. This was done by the senior elders officiating in the ceremony. Then they gave the heart to the accused. He bit and chewed pieces of meat from the tip of the heart. As he did so, he invoked curses on himself to the effect that "If I have ever slept with this girl and played sex with her, may this oath kill me." If the man had played sex with the girl, and even if that was not the time the girl got pregnant, the man could not take the oath. The seriousness of this oath made some innocent men admit to the charges so as to avoid taking the oath. If the man took the oath when he was guilty, he either became seriously sick or even died before seven months were over.²⁷

It should be noted here that among the Kikuyu, touching another person's sex organs was believed to bring "thahu". In the above oath, the heart got defiled after it was inserted into the vagina. The man who consumed such a heart brought "thahu" on himself and his belongings if he was guilty. The man therefore either died or became seriously sick as an outcome of the curses he invoked on himself. As in the above cases therefore, we notice that the effect of the oath on an offender is a consequence mainly of the curses that he invokes on himself in an oath. As such, we can rightly state that a person who dies or gets sick due to the effect of an

oath can be said to be partly responsible for these misfortunes.

Oath of the Soil: Taken in a Case Involving Land Ownership

If a man tried to deprive another man of his piece of land, or if two men disputed among themselves each claiming the ownership of a certain piece of land, the senior elders tried their best to resolve the dispute. But if all the judicial channels were exhausted, and compromise not yet reached, the two disputants were called upon to take the oath of the soil. One example of such an oath is given below.²⁸

Each of the disputants produced a goat which the senior elders slaughtered. Soil was got from the piece of land in question, preferably from the centre of the piece of land. A hole was dug in the ground on the same piece of land and a banana leaf was spread in the hole. The soil was put in the banana leaf and it was mixed with the blood of the goats. The content was stirred. Each of the disputants squatted near the contents, and, under the supervision of the elders, slowly sipped the liquid content. Before each sip, the oath recipient invoked a curse on himself; "If this piece of land is not mine; and if it be not true that my neighbour is so and so, and that nobody else has a share in this land, may this soil kill me." The elders then uttered their curse, "May this oath kill the liar." The liar in such an oath was expected to get sick and die before seven years were over.

One example of the above type of oath was given

to me as follows:

Jairus Gachuhi and Kagwaini Kimotho had a dispute over the ownership of a plot of land at Githunguri in Murang'a. This was a few years prior to land demarcation in 1958. The two men could not agree between themselves, and the elders decided that the two men should take an oath. Jairus refused to take the oath, giving the reason that he was a christian. In place of him, his elder brother, Kirobi, took the oath described above. After several years, Kirobi fell sick and died. For the time he was sick, Kirobi remained indoors. When his relatives found that he was going to die, and that the death would be attributed to the effect of the oath, they decided to burn his hut after he died so that Kirobi would be said to have died when the hut burnt down. It is now known that Kirobi had died a few days before his hut burnt down. Yet his hut was only a few yards away from that of Jairus, and Jairus did not shout for help when the hut was burning. Jairus still holds to the disputed land, despite the fact that people have known that Kirobi died from the effect of the oath. Kagwaini lived to his old age and died this year, 1976.

This oath ceremony differs from the oaths dealt with above in that in this ceremony, there is the use of banana leaves into which the articles to be used in the oath were put. The use of banana leaves during ceremonies was a common practice in traditional Kikuyu society. The Kikuyu had a purification ceremony in which the paraphernalia were arranged in manner similar to that of this oath ceremony. In chapters five and six, we shall see that the Mau Mau

used parts of the banana stem in their oathing ceremonies. It is also clear from the above example that the oath was taken in an attempt to reconcile the people involved in a land dispute. The examples cited before were also used as attempts to reconcile two or more people. The Mau Mau regarded their oaths as a major tool of unity, in their attempt to get the whites to restore land and freedom to the black people of Kenya.

Another significant feature in the above oath was the use of soil. Among the Kikuyu, swearing with soil was taken very seriously. An oath, in which soil was included as a symbol, was considered as an everlasting oath as has been stated before. Men live on the soil and they feed on products grown on the soil. In an oath ceremony where soil was used as a symbol, a person swore to the effect that he was speaking the truth. He also invoked curses on himself to the effect that "If I have lied, may this soil and its products consume me." This swearing implied that if the oath taker was lying, or if he happened to contravene the oath, the effect of the oath would either kill him directly or bring "thahu" and sickness to him. The effect of the oath was believed to come from the symbol used in swearing. In this particular example, soil was the symbol used in swearing and it was believed that soil and its products would bring death or "thahu" upon the person who contravened an oath. In reference to the symbols used in the other oaths, we can

then say that both soil and 'thenge' served similar functions in an oath ceremony.

According to the Kikuyu, the use of soil in an oath symbolised the divine gift which comes from Ngai, for Ngai was believed to be the giver of soil to the Kikuyu. In emphasizing the significance of soil in an oath, one informant had this to say:

During land disputes between clans, the clans' leaders took a soil oath in which they swore, "That truly this land, marked by this boundary which I was shown by my father, is ours by right, we of "Ambui" clan, And we shall not release it to anybody just because we have no power or material strength. We shall hold on to it because we have the strength of justice which comes from God, who gave this land to us."²⁹

As to the significance of the soil when used in an oath, the same informant argued that "soil is our life, our food and our grave. Whoever eats food from the soil and at the same time contravenes a soil oath causes his own death. He eats himself to death because by swearing with soil, a man swears with particles of the bodies of his dead relatives."³⁰ Another informant put it more clearly that, "An oath in which soil was used was very dreadful because soil is an everlasting symbol. Soil is the symbolic mother of all people and swearing with soil was regarded as tantamount to swearing with ones mother. Swearing with soil means swearing with something that is highly susceptible to "thahu".³¹ Kenyatta emphasizes the same point when he states that "an everlasting oath

is to swear by the soil."³²

Before concluding this section on traditional Kikuyu oaths, we need to quote one example of an oath which was taken in a case involving land dispute. The oath was taken in Liambu in 1952 at a time when the Mau Mau oathings were at their height. Only an outline of the ceremony is recorded.

"A Mumba Oath Ceremony"³³

The ceremony was conducted on March 27th 1952 during a land case concerning three people. All of them had to take the oath. The oath was taken in front of senior elders but all women spectated. The ceremony went through the following stages:

- (a) The chest bone of the goat which was a piece of meat running from the neck to the stomach, was tied round the neck of each litigant as a necklace with "a special type of grass" such that the grass connected the two ends of the meat.
- (b) For each litigant, there was a bundle of sticks, representing the elders' staffs of office (mithigi), the bundle was passed around the head of each litigant and then thrown over his head to the opposite side.
- (c) Each litigant ate bits of roasted meat and as he did so, he repeated a formula.
- (d) Each litigant drank the blood of the goat mixed with soil from the land in dispute. The blood and soil were contained in a banana stem which was scooped to form a one foot trough. He

repeated the formula.

- (e) Each litigant held the eye of the goat and pricked it with a thorn from a special plant. He then sipped the liquid from the eye.
- (f) The litigant pierced the stomach of the goat which he was sitting on. He pricked it with a bundle of seven thorns from a "special plant."
- (g) The litigant then broke the chest bone of the goat which was hanging on his neck. He used his hands to break the bone. After breaking it, an elder removed it and the person stood up having completed the ceremony.

In relationship to the forms of oaths described in the early part of this chapter, this oath seems more elaborated and complicated. The oath contains more symbols and rituals than the oaths dealt with before. It should be pointed out here that the presence of all these rituals and symbols in one oathing ceremony was, as evidence shows, a common feature of Mau Mau oaths. The fact that the above ceremony took place at a time when Mau Mau oathings were at their height may help us to understand this oath in the context of Mau Mau oaths. The interpretation of this oath will therefore be understood in chapters five and six which deal with Mau Mau oaths.

Relationship between Traditional Kikuyu Oaths and Mau Mau Oaths

The view held in this paper is that there are many areas of similarity between the traditional Kikuyu oaths and Mau Mau oaths. This does not, however, mean that there

were no contrasts between them.

A close analysis of the traditional Kikuyu oaths and the Mau Mau oaths leads us to the conclusion that the Mau Mau oaths were to a great extent based on the traditional Kikuyu oaths. Some points of agreement will be outlined below, but they will be elaborated upon when we come to look at the nature of Mau Mau oaths.

We notice first that most of the oaths discussed in the early part of this chapter concerned activities that occurred in the past e.g. pregnancy, theft and murder. The function of the oaths was to ensure that justice was arrived at. In these oaths, a man called upon the power of the oath to kill him if he was guilty. This he did by invoking a curse on himself. We found that in swearing, a person first declared the act that he claimed not to have done. He then invoked a curse on himself in which he stated the penalty he expected to receive if he was guilty. This was not, however, the case in the warriors' oath. As we found out, the warriors' oath was not concerned with past activities, but with the future conduct of the person who took the oath. In the oath, a warrior swore to the effect that he would remain loyal and faithful to his duties as a warrior. This oath aimed at ensuring that the warrior would be committed to his task in the future. The functions of this warriors' oath resembled those of Mau Mau oaths.

We then make the observation here that Mau Mau oaths contained the symbols and rituals that were

there in traditional Kikuyu oaths. However, the Mau Mau oaths aimed at ensuring that the recipient of the oath remained loyal and committed to the vows he took in the oath. These vows reveal the goals of the movement. In the Mau Mau oaths therefore, the functions of the traditional Kikuyu oaths were adapted to encourage and to ensure commitment to the movement.

Secondly, we should note that the spoken words in an oath were considered as very significant in the ceremony. These words contained a swearing statement or declaration, which in some cases was a vow, as well as a curse directed to the recipient of the oath. The aim of the oath was implied in the swearing statement, while the effect of the oath was emphasized in the curse. Any activity performed by a person in contravention of an oath he had taken brought "thahu" or death to him. To make the oath effective, the swearing statements or the vows, as well as the curses had to be spelt out correctly in the ceremony. Similarly, the rituals in the ceremony had to be performed according to the formula laid down by the senior elders.

Thirdly, we have also found that in some oaths, some objects were used and some activities performed which were believed to bring "thahu" in form of sickness when they were used or performed in daily life. Such objects or actions are 'prohibited'. But when some of these objects or actions were present in an oath ceremony, they strengthened the effect of that oath, by

increasing the "thahu" element in the oath. It is therefore true to say that the greater the "thahu" that some of these objects and actions can bring on their own when they are used or performed, the more effective is the oath in which the vows and curses are uttered while using these objects and performing these activities. In the Mau Mau oaths, more objects and actions of this nature were used to strengthen the effectiveness of the oaths.

In such oaths as the Mau Mau oaths, the sources of "thahu" and death included the curses that the recipient of the oath invoked on himself, the curses directed to him by the oath administrator, as well as some of the objects and actions present in the ceremony, which strengthened the seriousness of the oath. But the effect of the oath only fell upon the person who contravened the oath.

Fourthly, it has been observed before that traditional oaths were administered by the senior elders in the society. In cases of oaths which dealt with major issues like murder, only the elders were present in the ceremony. In less serious oaths, the public was invited to witness the ceremony. We shall come to see that in the Mau Mau movement, there were both private and public oaths. At the beginning of the movement, the oaths were administered by elderly members of KCA. But when it became necessary to aathe many young men so that they could join the war, persons other than the elders were initiated as oath administrators. Young men were also initiated as oath administrators when it became necessary

to have strong men as administrators who could escape with less difficulty if the centre of the oath administration was attacked by the enemy. We shall see later that such deviations from the nature and content of traditional oaths were evident in Mau Mau oaths but they occurred out of necessity.

Fifthly, I have indicated that in traditional Kikuyu oaths, there was a close similarity in the functions of the symbols used. Such symbols included the "thenge", "mota", "ituthai", soil, the heart and the chestmeat of a goat. A person swore by these symbols in the oath. Also, the ritual activities connected with the above symbols in traditional oaths were similar. Striking the "thenge", passing grass stems through the holes of the "githathi" or through the hole of a "ngata", sipping some soil solvent, biting the heart of the goat or the chestmeat, were all symbolic acts of invoking "thauu" to consume the person who contravened the declarations made in the oath. Each Mau Mau oath ceremony contained many of these symbols and rituals in other, contrary to past traditional oaths in which there were only a few symbols and rituals.

In traditional oaths, the curses emphasized the fact that the oath would kill the liar. In Mau Mau oaths, as will be seen, the curse was the same as that of traditional oaths. But the Mau Mau did not wait for the effect of the oath to kill the person who contravened the vows he had made. The Mau Mau killed him instead. It is in this light that we should understand the Mau Mau acts of

arson against the loyalist homeguards, and against those people who refused to take the oaths. Whether a man was killed by the effect of the oath or whether the Mau Mau killed him is less important here. More important is the basic traditional Kikuyu belief that a person who contravened his declarations in an oath received the penalty of death or of serious sickness. This penalty was defined in the oath by a curse to the effect that "May this oath kill me." In Mau Mau oaths, however, the person taking the oath was warned that he would be killed by the Mau Mau if he violated the oath.

Another important point to note in line with the above is that in traditional Kikuyu society, no person was forced to take an oath. If a man refused to take an oath, it was assumed that he was guilty, and he had to comply with the judgement of the elders. But no man could refuse to take an oath and at the same time refuse to meet the fine decided upon by the elders. Looking at Mau Mau, we find that it was a movement which was intended to restore the rights of the black people to their land and freedom. This was a just cause to fight for. Any Kikuyu who refused to fight for this justice, and the first sign of this refusal was a rejection of Mau Mau oaths, was regarded as guilty by the Mau Mau and he was punished. As one informant put it, "there was no reason as to why a Kikuyu, who refused to take the Mau Mau oath or who contravened the vows of the oath could not be punished or forced to take the oath."³⁴ In dealing with Mau Mau

oaths, we shall see more reasons that led to forced oaths.

Finally, we noted earlier on that there was an extensive use of the 'ominous' number, 'seven' in traditional Kikuyu oaths. We have found out that the number of times a symbolic act was performed in an oath was mainly seven. Further, the period in which the effect of the oath was considered operative could be seven days, seven months, seven seasons or seven years.³⁵ Seven as a unit was believed to be a cause of "thahu" among the Kikuyu. In the examples of oaths discussed in this chapter, we observe that in cases of serious disputes, more severe oaths were given. The seriousness of the dispute, therefore, greatly determined the nature of the oath to be taken. Serious and controversial disputes included those that involved death and land ownership.

The degree of severeness of the effect of an oath could be told from various things, including the number of "thahu" bringing objects used in the oath, the number and seriousness of the curses proclaimed in the oath, and the period in which the effect of the oath was considered operative. The more severe the oath, the longer the time during which its effect could be expected. For minor disputes, a less severe oath was used, and the period in which the effect of this oath was expected was shorter. For pregnancy oaths, the period was seven months. But for major disputes, a more severe oath was used, and its effect could be expected to occur in a longer period. For land disputes, the effect of the oath used could be

expected to occur as much as seven years later.

This leads to the conclusion that the more severe the oath, the longer would its effect be operative, and the more serious would this effect be. In the light of this conclusion, we notice that Mau Mau oaths were used so as to unite and to bind together the Kikuyu people for as long as the struggle for land and freedom would last. These Mau Mau oaths were therefore organised in such a way that their effect would be considered long lasting. This partly explains why Mau Mau oaths were more severe and more elaborate than traditional Kikuyu oaths.

In concluding this chapter, it should be repeated here that soil was a very significant symbol in the Mau Mau oaths. It has been explained earlier that an oath in which soil was used as a symbol was believed to be everlasting. In the Mau Mau oaths, a person swore while using soil and he started his vows with the statement, "I swear before God and before this movement ...". The power behind such an oath was believed by most people to be God, the source of all justice, and the giver of all human rights to all men. In the traditional oaths discussed here, we have noted the fact that the functions of the symbols used in them, including "thenge", "ngata", soil and chestmeat were similar. The oaths, in which these objects were used, were taken with the belief that God would punish the offender. The effect of the oath was believed to be a sign of supernatural penalty.³⁶

This belief, that the power behind an oath was God, is an important indication of the religious significance of the oaths. This religious significance of oaths is rooted in the traditional Kikuyu beliefs and practices. These beliefs and practices to a great extent were present in the Mau Mau oaths in the middle of this century. The examples of oaths cited earlier on in this chapter, and ones which took place just before and even after the Mau Mau movement show clearly that the traditional Kikuyu beliefs and practices related to oaths had continued up to the middle of this century. Most of the Kikuyu who took Mau Mau oaths were aware of these beliefs and these beliefs greatly influenced their loyalty to the movement.

The fact, however, that Mau Mau oaths differed in various ways from the traditional Kikuyu oaths cannot altogether be dismissed. Some of these deviations and variations were evident in the nature of oaths that were used by the KCA. In its organisation, KCA used oaths, which, to a great extent were of a similar nature to the oaths discussed in this chapter. These KCA oaths as it will be seen in the next chapter, had their roots in the traditional oathing practices of the Kikuyu.

FOOTNOTES

1. Benson, T.G., Kikuyu-English Dictionary, (Ed.) Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, p.112.
2. Ibid. p.409.
3. Wanjau, G., Mihiriga ya Agikuyu, Nairobi: Gakaara Publishing Service, 1960, p.40ff. for characteristics of the "Ethaga" clan. Also see glossary.
4. Gathigira, S.K., Miikarire ya Agikuyu, Nairobi: CMS, 1942, p.77.
5. For this ceremony, see Kabetu, M.N., Kirira Kia Ugikuyu, Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau, 1966, p.53f. (There is also another purification ceremony called "kurutwo kigau").
6. Chege Gathogo, Interview, Nyandarua, 28.10.76. See also the songs quoted in last chapter with reference to soil.
7. Joel Kariuki, Interviews, Nyandarua, 28.10.76.
8. In the Mau Mau Song "This land of ours Gikuyu." (Bururi uyu wiitu Gikuyu) see appendix 2.
9. Freud, S.G., Totem and Taboo, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950, p.70ff. One of Freud's examples is incesttaboo.
10. Howels, W., The Heathens: Primitive man and His Religions, New York: Doubleday, 1962, p.45.
11. Radin, Paul, Primitive Religion: Its nature and origin, New York: Dover Publications, 1937, p.177ff. In line with what Hobley had written, that "thahu" among the Kikuyu was created by the class of medicine-men - see Hobley, C.W.G., "Kikuyu Customs and Beliefs", In Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Vol.40, 1910, pp.428-452, especially p.429.
12. Radcliffe-Brown, A.R., Structure and Function in Primitive Society, London: Cohen and West, 1952, p.133f.
13. Gathigira, S.K., op.cit., p.74.
14. Kenyatta, J., Facing Mount Kenya, p.3-4, 236-237.
15. Hobley, C.W.G., op.cit., p.423.
16. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, Nyandarua, 28.10.76.

17. Kamau Wang'ondu, Interview, Nyandarua, 28.10.76.
18. Lists of such prohibitions are recorded by Gathigira, op.cit. p.75 (records about 27 of them): Kabetu, op.cit. pp.105-109 records 38 of them; and Hobley, op.cit. pp.439-450 records about 50 of them.
19. Chege Gathogo, Interview, Nyandarua, 20.11.76.
20. Njoroge Kagunda, op.cit. Interview.
21. Kabetu, M.N., op.cit., pp.96-98.
22. Extracts from Gathigira, op.cit., p.77, Benson Muchiri, Interviews, Murang'a, August - September, 1976. Reference to this type of oath can also be seen in Kenyatta, J. Facing Mount Kenya, pp.244-245; Cagnolo, C., The Akikuyu: Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore, Nyeri: The Mission Printing School, 1933, p.152. (Translated by V.M. Pick).
23. "Ngata" is a small bone at the back of the neck (called 'the first cervical vertebra) used as an oath symbol. The word "ngata" is here used for the sake of simplicity.
24. Women cursed victims if they were greatly angered e.g. if someone stole their property or if they were bewitched by other enemies. For very serious offences, women also cursed their husbands. This was, however, rare because a curse by a woman e.g. by the breaking of a pot was believed to affect all the family and not the particular offender alone.
25. Kenyatta, J., Facing Mount Kenya, pp.198-199.
26. Benson Muchiri, Interviews, op.cit., This example was confirmed by Kinyita, Mukunyi's son, Interview, Murang'a, 20.12.76. A more elaborate form of this oath is recorded by Kabetu, op.cit., pp.96-100.
27. Benson Muchiri, Interviews, op.cit., Kabetu also records a similar type of oath, op.cit., p.101, and Cagnolo, op.cit., p.153 records a similar type of oath.
28. The description of the oath as well as the example were given by Benson Muchiri, Interviews, op.cit.
29. Mukami Kimathi, Interview, Nyandarua, 22.11.76.
30. Ibid.
31. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, Nairobi, 15.9.76.
32. Kenyatta, J., Facing Mount Kenya, p.21.

33. The Kenya National Archives, File Number KNA/DC/KBU/7/1 (Anon) for all details and photographs of this oath.
34. Kamau Wang'ondou, Interview, Nairobi: September 1976.
35. The Kikuyu had a seasonal calendar they counted their years according to seasons. Two seasons were reckoned as one year.
36. The same idea is noted by Leaky, L.S.B., Defeating Mau Mau, p.98.

CHAPTER IV

THE OATHS OF THE KIKUYU CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

Before discussing the Mau Mau oaths, it is necessary first to deal with the KCA oaths because the Mau Mau oaths were to some extent of similar nature to the KCA oaths. In this chapter, various points will be emphasized. It will be found that KCA was a nationalist political association in which oaths were used for the initiation of members as well as for maintaining allegiance to the association. These oaths used by KCA were based mainly on traditional Kikuyu symbols and rituals especially those that were related to the traditional Kikuyu oaths. The first KCA oath was syncretistic in nature, containing both christian and Kikuyu traditional symbols. The second KCA oath contained no such syncretism. Instead, it contained only traditional symbols.

This second KCA oath became the first Mau Mau oath of unity. The Mau Mau version of the oath was however more complex and contained more deviations from the traditional oaths than the second KCA oath. However, the emphasis here is that though these KCA and Mau Mau oaths contained various deviations from the traditional oaths, nonetheless the oaths were to a great extent based on the beliefs, symbols and rituals underlying the traditional Kikuyu oaths.

The development of nationalism among the Kikuyu people will not be surveyed here but it should be mentioned that the oaths were mainly intended to inculcate in people a feeling of unity and a sense of commitment, and also to make them understand the need to support the

political associations. As this nationalism developed, the oaths were elaborated so as to serve many other functions. Further, the oaths became more traditional in nature. In other words, more and more symbols and rituals related to traditional oaths were included in these latter oaths, to make the oaths more effective.

Through the study of KCA and Mau Mau oaths, we find that the Mau Mau movement was the peak of a long chain of political developments in which the symbols and rituals of traditional Kikuyu religion were used. The Mau Mau oaths were developed from the KCA oaths which in turn were developed from traditional Kikuyu oaths. Before dealing with the KCA oaths, a brief survey of the development of KCA is necessary.

Before the KCA was formed, other political associations had been started but had declined. They included the East African Association, the Kikuyu Association and the Young Kikuyu Association.¹ The KCA was a direct successor to the Young Kikuyu Association, and it was started by persons such as Joseph Kang'ethe, George Ndegwa and James Reuttah. The KCA demanded representation in the Legco, the abolition of the Wagon's Hut Tax and the increase of African Education. They demanded that title deeds be issued for the lands owned by Africans to avoid future alienation. They also demanded that Africans be left free to maintain their good tribal customs.² Of great significance in this study is the fact that KCA as a political association was also a supporter of traditional

Kikuyu culture. There is ample evidence to support this point and some of the reasons will be cited below.

First, it has been mentioned above that KCA preferred selective social change as regards the Kikuyu traditional customs and beliefs. They wanted to maintain the good aspects of Kikuyu culture.³ In this issue, they opposed some of the teachings of missionaries especially the idea that the traditional customs were 'pagan' and 'bad'. The KCA expressed their grievances through both the new values and the traditional ones. They felt it was necessary to reject those aspects of the new culture that did not suit them. Rosberg and Nottingham have noted that the members of KCA "were groping for an ideology that would bring the Kikuyu into the modern world without abandoning their independence, both politically and also in social and cultural terms."⁴ As such, what KCA wanted was freedom to select for themselves the good aspects of both the traditional and the modern culture.

Secondly, we also find that the demands of KCA reflect their support for traditional culture. As an example, they demanded an elected and educated Paramount Chief who could rule them in accordance with tribal customs.⁵ We also notice that the association required that all its members had to be married men as well as heads of families.⁶ This was one of the main qualifications of an elder in traditional Kikuyu society. The requirement in KCA that they elect an educated Chief goes further to show that KCA was in favour of syncretism of the good aspects of traditional

and modern cultures.

Thirdly, the syncretism in KCA was also evident in their prayers. These prayers were observed in the independent churches that they started in the 1920s in Kikuyuland. As one informant put it,

Our prayers in the KCA were similar in content to the christian prayers. But our prayers were led by persons who were qualified to lead traditional prayers among the kikuyu. Such people were members of "Aceera" and "Agaciku" clans.⁷ Members of the "Anjiru" clan could not be allowed to lead our prayers because they are famous for sorcery. The "Ethaga" clan members could not also lead our prayers for they were believed to bewitch people by simply speaking. We believed that such people would bring "thahu" to our prayers.⁸

Fourthly, the stand taken by KCA during the female circumcision controversy in the late 1920s points to the same fact that KCA was in favour of the maintenance of the valuable aspects of traditional Kikuyu culture. Details of the controversy will not be given here.⁹ But it should be understood that KCA was opposed to the missionaries in their attempt to stop the custom of female circumcision. The stand of KCA with regards to the controversy was clearly stated by Rev. Dr. Arthur who associated KCA with all the people who favoured the maintenance of the custom. The Reverend is quoted as having stated that:

I gave reasons why both circumcision and KCA must go. There could be no discussion. It

*was an order. The church had made its laws: it would not go back. The KCA had made the law the test of the allegiance of its followers: it had joined issue with the church and therefore they must now choose the church or the KCA.*¹⁰

The major result of the controversy was the starting of independent churches among the Kikuyu. These churches were started mainly, so as to welcome all those people who preferred to leave the missionary churches rather than abandon the custom of female circumcision. Another effect of the controversy was that the Kikuyu population was divided into two. Some supported the missionary churches and were referred to as the "Kiroro", meaning 'finger print'.¹¹ Others supported KCA and called themselves "Karing'a", meaning 'pure Kikuyu'.¹² These distinctions continued to exist among the Kikuyu up to the time of the Mau Mau movement.

Some leaders of the KCA were also directly responsible for the running of the independent schools that started roughly at the same time as the churches. These schools and churches became major centres of political education among the Kikuyu. It was partly in these schools that some people were secretly told about the aims of KCA. More important here, however, was the fact that the schools and churches were used by KCA as centres for oathing ceremonies up to the time of the Mau Mau movement. The close relationship that existed between KCA and the independent schools and churches has been cited by many informants such as the ones cited below.¹³

- (a) "The KCA oaths and early Mau Mau oaths were given in the independent churches and schools."
- (b) "The people who started the independent churches had political motives besides the religious ones."
- (c) "Members of the independent churches and schools were secretly instructed in political matters up to the time that the Mau Mau Movement started."
- (d) "It was the churches and schools that became centres of Mau Mau oaths. The leaders of the oaths were distributed from these centres. That was why the government banned them all."

In concluding this section, we need to note here that it was mainly in the oaths of KCA that we are able to see KCA as a champion of traditional Kikuyu customs and beliefs. KCA used oaths in the recruitment of its followers and in maintaining their allegiance to the association. These oaths were therefore used by KCA for political ends.

The First KCA Oath: 'Bible and Soil Oath'

It is still not known for certain when the first KCA oath was started. Rosberg and Nottingham have dated the oath in the year 1926,¹⁴ about two years after the start of KCA. Whittier has dated the oath back in 1919.¹⁵ The oath however could not have existed in 1919 for we know that KCA itself was formed in 1924, and none of the associations before KCA used any oaths. Informants have dated the oath in 1924, the same year that KCA was formed. Njoroge Kagunda says that he was given the oath by

Joseph Kang'ethe.¹⁷ It is therefore possible that the KCA oath was started immediately after the association was formed and the oath was first taken by the leaders of the association such as the ones mentioned above. This first oath continued up to the end of the decade. Kenyatta took this oath before he went to London to present KCA grievances in 1923.¹⁸ The oath was given to more people during the years of the female circumcision controversy, a time when KCA gained many followers.

The oath was taken in the offices of the KCA and was referred to as 'muuna wa KCA', meaning 'the oath of KCA'. Variuki calls it 'muuna wa cuba', meaning 'the bottle oath', and he gives no reasons for calling it so.¹⁹ Informants have claimed no 'knowledge of that name. In the present study, the oath is referred to as the 'Bible and Soil' oath because the 'Bible' and the 'Soil' were the two symbols used in the oath. The name 'KCA oath' alone cannot be used because KCA had two oaths, and because both oaths were referred to by the same name of 'KCA oath'. In this study, the oath has been referred to as 'the first KCA oath'.

In this oath, the Bible and the Soil were held each with one hand. The soil was dampened and made into a ball. There was no rule as to which hand held either the soil or the Bible. While some people took the oath with the Bible in the left hand and the soil in the right hand, others took it with the Bible in the right hand and the soil in the left.

The oath was first given to the leaders of KCA who had to be heads of families, and it was given by the founder members of KCA, Joseph Kang'ethe and George Ndegwa. The oath was aimed at strengthening the loyalty of the KCA members. At first the oath was not given to all members but to leaders alone. The vows that each person swore indicate that the oath was given to persons who were already accepted as KCA members. Examples of these vows will be briefly given below.

Njoroge Kagunda, who was a KCA leader in the Rift Valley and Nyanza Provinces in the 1930s and 40s took the KCA oath in 1924. Ndegwa administered the oath to him. He was made to swear in the following manner:

He repeated the following vows after the administrator:

Administrator: *If you ever reveal, or confess, or betray our people,*

Njoroge: *Except the thief or the robber,*

Administrator: *If you ever see a person who can make our nation suffer,*

Njoroge: *I will not spend a night before revealing to our people about the presence of such a man. And if I do these things, may this oath kill me.²⁰*

James Beuttah took the same oath in the same year. He swore after the administrator with the following vows:

I will be loyal to this association of KCA.

I will obey all the rules of the association.

I will never collaborate with the enemy. I

will never betray our association to the enemy.

I will contribute generously for the association.

I will never sell land to a foreigner. And if I do these things, may God kill me.²¹

As can be seen above, the vows changed from person to person, depending on the responsibilities that a person had in the association. Some people also took the KCA oath twice, each time using the same symbols but swearing with new vows. As an example, Kenyatta took the KCA 'Bible and Soil' oath in 1938 before he went to London. He swore before KCA members to the effect that he "would remain true to his people even when he was abroad; that he would never forget what he was sent for; and that he would never forsake the customs of his people."²²

The above vows show that the oath was not intended to initiate a person into KCA, but rather to strengthen his loyalty to the association. Rosberg and Nottingham record that a person swore to remain loyal to KCA, and also to Kikuyuland, to serve the people faithfully, to contribute for the association, and to look after peoples' money.²³ Similar vows were recorded by Kaggia and Corfield,²⁴ but Corfield wrongly attributed the oath to the Kikuyu Association of 1919. As has been stated before, the Kikuyu Association did not use any oath. The significance of the above oath can be found from an analysis of the two symbols used in the oath, the Bible and the Soil.

With the coming of christianity and the christianisation of the Kikuyu people, the Bible was introduced as the symbol of swearing in lawcourts. It is a sacred book to the christians, and swearing with it means swearing in God's name. Many of the early KCA members were people who had received some western education and were also

people who belonged to the christian churches. Most of the leaders were baptised. To those blacks who were genuinely converted into the christian faith, the Bible was a highly sacred book. It was because those educated people comprised the greater part of KCA that the Bible was used in the first KCA oath. One informant has argued that "the Bible was present in the oath to represent the christian form of swearing that was being used in our law-courts. Most of our leaders were christians."²⁵ Wanyoike also notes correctly that "the use of the Bible was brought in by leaders who had a mission background and knowledge of local Native Council swearing."²⁶

But as stated before, the circumcision controversy in 1923 led many Kikuyu to break away from the missions and to form their own independent churches and schools. These churches and schools were fully supported by KCA. But this break did not mark an end to the use of the Bible in the KCA oath. As one informant argued, the Bible continued being used as a symbol in the oath, after the formation of independent churches because:

*The independent churches that started were christian churches and they used the Bible as their sacred book. The Bible continued to be used as a symbol in the oath to represent a symbol of swearing by those of us in KCA who became members of the independent churches. These churches were indeed KCA churches and their members were supported by KCA in running them.*²⁷

As stated before, the Bible was only an effective symbol of swearing when it was used by those people who were converted to christianity and who believed it was a Holy Book. To such people, swearing falsely in such an oath was a sin against God. But there were many more people, who, though educated, were not committed christians, or who did not strongly believe in the sacredness of the Bible. There were also some who were not christians at all. For them, the Bible was meaningless as a symbol of swearing. Here below we find several opinions as to the effectiveness of the Bible as a symbol of swearing, with particular reference to the first 100 oath.

One informant argued that the Bible was included in the first 100 oath not because of any intrinsic value that it had as a traditional symbol of swearing. Instead, he insisted that, "we used the Bible because of its meaning to those who were christians among us. The Bible was not a traditional symbol of swearing."²⁰ It has been stated above that the Bible was not a meaningful symbol of swearing when used by those who were not committed christians. This view is supported by such evidence.

In referring to the christian form of swearing whereby the Bible is used as a symbol, Kenyatta states that "It can be definitely said that this form of oath has no meaning at all to the Africans. It has no binding force, total or religious."²¹ However, Kenyatta here disregarded the fact that the Bible had a deep religious and moral significance among those Africans who were devout

christians.

In expressing his opinion on the use of the Bible as a symbol in an oath, Kagia states at length that:

Since the Wazungu²⁰ had no faith in their own Bible, teaching a Bible oath could have no meaning to the Kikuyu who were daily losing their faith in the christian preachers and the upholders of christian beliefs. It was the tribal traditional oath that could be meaningful to Africans.⁵¹

Kagia, however, generalises incorrectly that all "Wazungu" had no faith in the Bible and that the Bible oath could have no meaning to the Kikuyu. As stated earlier, the Bible was a meaning to the devout christians, be they black or white. The opinion of Kagia is however clear, that the Bible was not very effective as a symbol of swearing among many Africans. He suggests that the traditional symbols were more meaningful. It was these traditional symbols that featured greatly in the oaths that came after the first BIA oath.

Finally, I need to mention here that to those christians who were only nominal christians and not devout christians, swearing with the Bible was meaningless. In our accounts today, many christians are only swearing with the Bible that they would not speak lies in court.

Today, of late, lie to the court. During the Mau Mau movement, many Kikuyu who purported to have been christians were asked to swear with the Bible to the effect that they were not liars. Such people swore falsely using the Bible, because to them, the Bible was not the sacred symbol

it is supposed to be. Karari, for example, admits that he swore with the Bible that he wasn't a Mau Mau. Yet he was lying, for we know that he was.³² In some cases, the colonial government in Kenya allowed the Kikuyu to decide some controversies on the basis of traditional oaths rather than having such people go to court.³³ This shows an understanding by the colonial government of the effectiveness of traditional Kikuyu oaths. The examples of traditional oaths which were cited in the last chapter took place in the middle of this century.

At the time of the first KCA oath the devout christians among the Kikuyu were few. For the majority the Bible could not have been effective as a symbol of swearing with. The ineffectiveness of this first oath was realised quite early by the KCA, and another oath was introduced. As one informant put it, "The first oath was dropped because it failed to make our members loyal to the association. Some of the members sided with the government when the issue of circumcision heated up."³⁴

However, the presence of the Bible in the first KCA oath is of vital interest here because it shows us beyond doubt that KCA, besides being a champion of Kikuyu culture, was also at first in favour of syncretism between the traditional elements and the christian and western elements. We shall notice that this syncretism in KCA was to decline slowly as the movement of liberation developed to include more and more of the uneducated people. The presence of the Bible also shows us that KCA members

felt the need of a religious factor in the inculcation of loyalty among its members. This religious factor continued to play a major role in the development of nationalism among the Kikuyu. As this nationalism developed, more and more emphasis was laid on traditional symbols in oaths, hence making the religious factor more traditional in nature. One such symbol was soil.

The significance of soil among the Kikuyu was emphasized in the last chapter. It was stated that soil is regarded as a right given by God to the Kikuyu. Depriving a man of his land is unjust. It was also stated earlier that soil was considered the spiritual and material food of the Kikuyu people, and that swearing with soil meant swearing with a highly sacred symbol. Lying in an oath that used soil as a symbol was feared by the Kikuyu, mainly because it entailed supernatural penalty.

In the first RCA oath, a person swore while holding a damp ball of soil next to his navel. The navel is the remnant of the umbilical cord which connects a mother to a baby in the womb. It is through the navel that the unborn baby receives its nourishment from the mother. Holding soil next to the navel is symbolic of feeding because soil represents the foods that grow on it. In the RCA oath, a person swore in the name of God, "Ngai", who was represented by the two symbols of soil and the Bible.

Soil was meaningful in the above oath to all those Kikuyu who regarded it as highly sacred. One informant

stated that "even a christian cannot swear falsely while using soil because soil is an everlasting symbol of our divine right."³⁵ This was stated by a converted christian. For those christians who took the first KCA oath, swearing with soil was a highly sacred ritual also.

In the first KCA oath, emphasis was not placed on the killing nature of the symbols but rather on the curse that God would punish the liar. In traditional oaths, it was shown that a person swore to the effect that, "may this soil kill me if I lie." This meant that if he lied, the soil and its products which he feeds on, would cause death or illness on him. But in the first KCA oath, the effect of soil on the liar was implied in the curse; "may Ngai kill me." It should be stated here that soil continued to be an outstanding feature in all oaths that were devised after the first KCA oath. The traditional kikuyu beliefs and practices related to soil and other symbols comprised one of the major aspects of the religious factor in the liberation movement.

In concluding this section on the first KCA oath, we need to emphasize again that the oath was syncretistic. It was partly christian because most of the early founders of KCA were educated and were at least nominal christians. They were baptised.³⁶ But the oath was also traditional in that no unmarried persons could take it and neither could women. It was also traditional because it used a sacred symbol among the kikuyu, soil. Yet the oath differed from the traditional kikuyu oaths in various ways.

First, the oath lacked some important traditional symbols and rituals such as the use of the number seven. The oath also used the Bible, a symbol that was not traditional. The oath also was paid for. Members who took the oath paid sixty-two shillings and fifty cents. In traditional oaths, a man only produced two goats to be used in the oathing ceremony. It will be seen later that the oaths that were used after the first KCA oath deviated more and more from traditional oaths.

It was mainly the first KCA oath that assured KCA leaders that loyalty to the association could be inculcated by using oaths that contained highly sacred and feared symbols. Some such symbols were used in the second KCA oath.

The Second KCA Oath

Literary evidence supports the view that the second KCA oath started around 1930.³⁷ But informants have claimed that the oath started during the circumcision crisis of 1928-1929.³⁸ They have argued that during the crisis, many Kikuyu supported the government and the missionaries in opposition to the practice of female circumcision. Some of those supporters were KCA members. The KCA branded all supporters of the government as "kirore". But KCA leaders felt the need of another oath because some of the people who had taken the first KCA oath had violated it. Most of them were christians. The new oath was administered in homes of elders as well as in KCA offices, just like the first KCA oath. In this oath, vows similar to those of the

first oath were taken, but the symbols and rituals in the oath were different from those of the first oath. When this oath started, only a few people took it. But during the second world war, the oath was made more complex in nature and was taken by more people. As such, the oath had two phases, both of which will be described below. 33

The first phase of the second KCA oath was taken in secret and the particular home or office where the ceremony took place was guarded by spies of the KCA who were not armed. When the oath ceremony was to take place in a home, an arch was constructed at the entrance to the home. The arch was not there at the entrance of an office, in which an oath ceremony was taking place.

The arch was made of banana stems and sugarcane as well as arrowroot stems planted on each side of the entrance. The leaves of the banana stems on one side of the entrance were joined with those of the stems on the other side such that the leaves completed the top part of the arch. Such an arch was not unfamiliar in the Kikuyu society at that time because it was also used to indicate to a stranger the home where a ceremony or a party was taking place e.g. wedding parties. Similar stems are planted even today at places where social gatherings take place during functions such as wedding ceremonies, parties and political rallies. The arch used by KCA could not have been suspected as a sign of an oath-taking ceremony. But the significance of the arch to the ceremony was far deeper than this as will be shown

in a later part of this chapter.

In preparation for the ceremony, a male ram was slaughtered. Its blood was collected and put into a half calabash, the main traditional container for serving foods and drinks among the Kikuyu. The stomach contents of the animal were removed and thrown away to a place far from the home where the ceremony was to take place. The rest of the meat of the animal was eaten by the officiating elders and leaders in the ceremony. In the same half calabash, small samples of traditional Kikuyu foods were put and mixed with the blood. These foods included yams, arrowroots, bananas, meat, sweet potatoes . Cereals were not included here.

The oath was taken by one person at a time. The taker of the oath passed through the arch and went straight into the house where the oath was to be taken. In the house, he was greeted by the oath administrator and by other elders and leaders of KCA who were present so as to witness the ceremony. The oath administrator held the half calabash, with its contents, with the left hand and he held a "mugere"⁴⁰ stick with the right hand. One end of the stick was chewed in such a way that it looked like a brush. With this brush, the oath administrator stirred the contents in the half calabash.

The person taking the oath stood in front of the oath administrator. He had all his clothes on. In taking the oath, the recipient was made to sip the contents in the half calabash from the "mugere" brush which the oath-

administrator was holding. As he stirred the contents, he repeated vows after the administrator. One informant described the ceremony:

The administrator stirred the contents in the half calabash seven times for each vow that he read. Then he fed me with the contents from the brush of a "muyere" stick. Before I sipped the contents, I repeated the vow after him. After I had sipped, he invoked a curse on me to the effect that "may this oath kill you if you disobey any of these rules."⁴¹

The vows given in this oath were similar to those contained in the first KCA oath. As it was explained earlier, a person vowed to remain loyal to KCA and to support KCA in all its goals and activities.

In this early phase of the second KCA oath, we notice several points. First, we see that the Bible and the soil, which were the two main symbols of the first KCA oath, were absent in the second oath. But soil as a symbol was replaced by the traditional Kikuyu foods which grow on the soil, and by the meat and blood of an animal, which animal that feeds on the products of the soil.

Unlike the first KCA oath, this oath contained the goat and blood of a goat, symbols that were common in some traditional Kikuyu oaths. Like traditional Kikuyu oaths, the second KCA oath was not given to youths or to women. It was given to older leaders of KCA. No one was forced to take it. Few people took this oath at this early date.

An analysis of the rituals and symbols contained in this phase of the oath will be covered in connection with the second phase of the second KCA oath. But it should be emphasized here that the first phase of the oath was only given to a few people who were already leaders of KCA. Like the first KCA oath, the second oath in its first phase was not intended to initiate persons into the KCA. It was intended to be an oath of loyalty and allegiance. But the oath was developed into a second phase after KCA was banned in 1940, and in this phase, the oath served the function of initiating persons into KCA.

This second phase of the second KCA oath could be referred to as the third KCA oath. But on closer observation of the rituals and symbols in the oath, we find that they were similar to those of the first phase. The main difference was in that the second phase of the oath was intended to serve more functions than the first, as will become clear in the vows that were sworn in. Informants have claimed that the oath was the same.⁴²

It would be important here to understand the circumstances under which the oath developed into a second phase. First, KCA was banned in 1940 immediately after the start of the second world war. Some of the KCA leaders were also detained. But KCA continued to operate as an underground movement. The oath developed into a second phase with the aim of keeping KCA as a secret movement, and initiating more members into the association.

With the ban of KCA also, the leaders found out that it would take them too long to achieve their rights

through constitutional means only. They started thinking more on lines of uniting many people in a struggle for freedom. The second phase of the oath was intended to unite many people in KCA. Many of these people had to be recruited from the rural areas.

The second phase of the oath started to spread just before the second world war came to an end. Mosberg and Nottingham have stated that the oath was devised by the KCA leaders when they came from detention, towards the end of the second world war.⁴³ Whereas the date suggested by the two authors is correct, nonetheless the authors were wrong in saying that the oath was devised by KCA leaders when they left detention. One informant has argued that:

When the second world war broke out KCA was proscribed and many of our leaders were detained. While they were in detention, some of them were converted into loyalists and were made to surrender and denounce the second oath of KCA. One of them was Joseph Kang'ethe. When those leaders at home learnt about this surrender, they decided to alter the oath and to make it more secret and more binding. It was this new version of the oath that was given to the KCA leaders when they came from detention at the end of the second world war. It was this oath also that Kenyatta took on the very day he arrived from London in 1946. Each of the released KCA leaders was oathed in his own house on the day he left detention.⁴⁴

According to the same informant, the oath started in Kiambu, in the home of the late Senior Chief Koinange.

Beuttah added that the oath spread from Kiambu to Githunguri College from where the oath administrators were distributed to other local centres.¹⁵

The preparations for the ceremony started with the slaughtering of a ram. This ram was contributed by the person who was to take the oath. When it was slaughtered, its blood was collected in a small trough of about one foot in length. The trough was made from the stem of the ordinary banana plant. Into the blood in the trough, samples of the main traditional foods of the Kikuyu were put. These were the same foods used in the first phase of the oath.

A piece of the chest meat of the goat was also removed for use in the ceremony. A brush, made from the "mugere" shrub was also prepared for stirring the contents in the trough.

The oath was taken indoors like in the first phase. A similar arch was present at the entrance of the home. Each recipient of the oath entered the area of the ceremony alone. When he entered, he met the oath administrator and other elders. One informant explained the procedure:

The oath administrator held the trough with the left hand. The recipient of the oath held a "mugere" brush with his right hand and the meat with the left hand. The oath administrator read the vows and the recipient repeated them after him. For each vow, the recipient stirred the contents in the trough once. He concluded each vow by invoking a curse on himself to the effect that "may these foods consume me." Having sworn with each vow, the recipient sipped the contents of the trough from the brush and

took a bite from the piece of meat. After all the vows, the administrator took the brush, and with it, he used the contents in the trough to mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of the recipient. This was the end of the ceremony.⁴⁶

The vows contained in the oath differed from one recipient to the other. Persons who were leaders swore with more vows than the other people. It is clear, for example, from the vows listed below that the last two vows were only sworn by persons who were leaders and who were qualified to oath the other people. The following list of vows has been collected from three informants.⁴⁷

- (a) If I ever know or see anyone who could bring trouble upon my nation from the coloniser, and if I hide this information, may these gods loath me. (maliothame si ied). May this oath kill me.
- (b) Except for the thief or robber, if I ever reveal anything about any one of us, may these gods loath me. May this oath kill me.
- (c) If I am called at any time to assist my people, and I refuse, may these gods loath me. May this oath kill me.
- (d) If I disobey my leaders, may these gods loath me, may this oath kill me.
- (e) If I ever conceal or steal anything belonging to one of us, may these gods loath me. May this oath kill me.
- (f) If I ever add anything of my own to the procedure of this ceremony, may these gods loath me.

- (c) me. May this oath kill me.
- (d) If I ever subtract anything from the procedure in this ceremony, may these fooks loath me. May this oath kill me.

A similar oath as this KCA oath has been recorded in varying details by Corfield and he states that it took place in 1959.⁴⁰ It should be noted that the oath he records was a "au tau" oath, which, as we shall see, was very similar to this phase of the second KCA oath.

At this point, various comments can be made with reference to the second KCA oath, in its first and second phases. First we note that it was in the first and second phases of the oath that an arch was introduced at the entrance to the ground on which the ceremony was to take place. There was no arch in the first KCA oath. The significance of the arch is of particular interest here. In traditional Muya society, an arch, similar to the one described in this oath, was constructed at the entrance to the field where the great ceremonial dance, called "matuano", was held on the eve of the circumcision ceremony. Each initiate passed through the arch and was blessed by the elders and his parents as he entered the dancing ground. Several interpretations can be cited with reference to the meaning of the arch.

Tonyatta has argued that "the arch is considered as a gateway through which the ancestral spirits can be harmonised with the "irua" (initiation ceremony of circumcision) and appeased so as not to bring any misfortune

on the ceremony in which the ceremonial council offers sacrifices to the God "Ngai".⁴⁹ Whereas this interpretation suits the circumcision ceremony, nonetheless it does not suit the oath ceremony because in the oath ceremony, the idea of appeasing the ancestors so that they may not bring misfortune on the ceremony is absent. It should be noted here that in the Mau Mau movement, the traditional veneration of ancestors was deliberately stopped by the freedom fighters.

Kabetu has stated that the arch was made at the entrance to the home where the circumcision ceremony was to take place, and that the arch was made of hanging plants which were intended to touch each entrant to the home so that he may not enter the ceremonial home with any kinds of ills.⁵⁰ In this sense, the arch acted as part of the process of cleansing the initiate before he was circumcised. The arch was also symbolic of a passage through which the initiates passed during their period of transition from boyhood to manhood. It was with this deeper meaning that the arch was used in KCA oaths and Mau Mau oaths. As one informant has stated, "The second KCA oath was one of initiation into the association. All who passed through the arch and took the oath were free to know the secrets and the activities of the association."⁵¹

But we also find that in traditional Kikuyu society, the arch was absent in the "usaka guild" circumcision ceremony.⁵² It was only present in the ceremonies of the "Mikuyu guild". What can be said here is that the second

KCA oath, by its emphasis on the arch as a symbol of passage, was devised in line with traditional symbols and rituals of the Kikuyu. This was in contrast to the first KCA oath which was syncretistic. It would be necessary to note here that the arch was absent in all the traditional forms of oaths that have been discussed in the last chapter.

The arch in the KCA oath was therefore symbolic of a passage from one status to another, and persons who entered and took the oath were accepted as true members of KCA. However, not all former KCA members took this oath, especially in its second phase. Also, many people took this second phase of the oath so as to become members of KCA, in contrast to the first KCA oath. It should be noted that before the second KCA oath, there was no initiation ceremony into the KCA.

The second point we can make in reference to the second KCA oath is related to the vows. Like the vows in the traditional Kikuyu oaths, and also in the first KCA oath, the vows in the second KCA oath had to be pronounced correctly by each person taking the oath. This was done with the guidance of the oath administrator. The need to spell out the vows correctly was indicated in the second phase of the second KCA oath whereby KCA leaders swore never to add anything of their own or to subtract anything from the procedure of the ceremony. In this procedure, the vows were included. The vows taken in an oath acted as rules of conduct to the person taking the oath. Such a person had to know all the rules

correctly so that he could abide by them. For an oath to be effective, the vows in the oath had to be spelled out correctly to each recipient. In the Mau Mau oaths the vows were repeated time and again in the ceremony.

We notice further that in phase two of the second KCA oath, the question of land was not included in the vows. In both the first KCA oath and the first phase of the second oath, there was a vow prohibiting oath recipients from selling land to foreigners. It is true that by 1940 - 1944, when the second phase of the oath started, there was a general acceptance by most people among the Kikuyu who took the KCA oath that KCA was the association that was fighting for the return of alienated lands. The question of land was continued in the first Mau Mau oath of unity, an oath which was apparently similar to the second KCA oath.

The curses in the oath indicated the effect of the oath upon the person who contravened the vows in the oath. The curse was invoked to the effect that "May this oath kill me. May these foods loath me." This curse was invoked by the recipient of the oath at the same time as he sipped the oath contents in the ceremony, including meat and the contents in the trough or half calabash. Sipping is here symbolic of actual feeding. The meaning of the curse is that if the recipient of the oath contravened the vows he took in the oath, the foods he had eaten and he continued to eat would cause an adverse effect on him in the form of serious sickness or death. This was the expected effect of the oath upon the person

correctly so that he could abide by them. For an oath to be effective, the vows in the oath had to be spelled out correctly to each recipient. In the Mau Mau oaths the vows were repeated time and again in the ceremony.

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who contravened the vows. It may be questioned whether the people who took the second KCA oath really believed that death or sickness would follow if they contravened the vows they had sworn in. One informant argued that "I knew and believed that swearing falsely or breaking the rules of an oath was a sin against God and would bring "thahu" upon me."⁵³ This view is correct considering the fact that the second KCA oath was voluntarily taken.

Persons who did not believe in the effectiveness of such an oath would not have taken it. One of the Christians who took the Hau Hau oaths commented, "I did not have to believe that the effect of the oath was death. But I believed that acting in contravention of an oath was wrong either in Christianity or in Kikuyu traditions."⁵⁴ It should be here stated that the effect of the second KCA oath was stated as a curse similar to the effects of traditional oaths.

In connection with the above, we also note that the second KCA oath, unlike the first oath, contained the meat of a goat. This was not the first oath, among the oaths studied here, to contain this symbol. The oath in a case of sorcery and the "muuma" oath ceremony described in the last chapter contained this symbol. But in the KCA oath, the meat that was used was a piece of the chest meat of the goat. The piece of meat was held in the left hand and was bitten at the end of each vow. In the last chapter, it was also shown that the goat (thonge) was the main animal used in traditional Kikuyu oathing and cursing ceremonies, and that when

other symbols or animals were used in an oath ceremony, they were similarly referred to as "thenge". "Thenge" was therefore the most significant symbol of swearing. In the above KCA oath, the meat of the "thenge" represented the traditional Kikuyu symbol of swearing. The significance of this meat will be discussed in depth in chapter seven.

It is also important to note here that the second KCA oath, unlike the first, contained the use of the number seven. In this KCA oath, the contents in the half calabash or trough were stirred seven times. In the last chapter, we saw that the number seven was believed to be an ominous number in traditional Kikuyu society. The number was used in traditional oaths and curses, whereby a ritual act was performed seven times. This performance was believed to increase the effectiveness of the oath. The significance of the number in traditional oaths was also discussed. However, the significance of the number for the KCA oath will also be dealt with fully in chapter seven in connection with the lau lau oaths in which there was more use of that number.

Another important symbol contained in the second KCA oath was the cross sign. This sign was not there in the first KCA oath. In the second KCA oath, the sign of the cross was marked on the forehead of the recipient of the oath. The sign was marked using the "mugere" brush, and was made with the contents of the oath. It was the cross sign that concluded the ceremony.

Some authors have asserted that the cross sign

used in the oaths of KCA and Mau Mau was adapted from christianity. Barnett has claimed that the sign was a christian symbol.⁵⁵ Its presence in the oath was quoted by Barnett as evidence that the oath was syncretistic. Leakey also held the view that the cross sign used in the oath was a christian symbol. He stated that, "Occasionally ... the people taking the oath were marked with a cross upon their foreheads in imitation of baptism, but it was a cross made in blood."⁵⁶ The first question that comes into ones mind is why the first KCA oath, which was indeed syncretistic, did not contain the sign of the cross. This raises doubts as to whether the cross sign used in the oath was an imitation of christian baptism.

The cross sign was not new among the Kikuyu. On various occasions, the sign was used in ceremonies. As one informant argued:

When a boy was several years old, he underwent the ceremony of second birth which was intended to cleanse him from all the "thahu" he may have acquired since birth. To conclude this ceremony, a cross sign was marked on the boy's forehead. Secondly, when the boy got circumcised, a similar sign was marked on the initiate's head to conclude the ceremony. In both these two occasions, "ira", a white powder, was used to mark the sign.⁵⁷

In the above two cases, the sign of the cross was symbolic of cleansing "thahu" from a person. This idea is supported by the fact that the cross sign was marked with "ira" on the forehead of each person who underwent the traditional "thahu" cleansing ceremony, called "ndanikio" i.e. 'ritual

vomiting of "thabu".⁵⁸ The cross was marked at the end of the ceremony. But as shown below, the sign of the cross used in the oaths of KCA and Mau Mau was not symbolic of cleansing.

In another sense, the sign of the cross was used in traditional society as a form of wish or prayer. When a man was brewing beer, he first put water into the brewing calabash, (called ndua). Then he put into it some honey and some "miratina".⁵⁹ He then placed the gourd near the fire. At this point, he took cold ash from the sides of the hearth and with it, he marked a cross sign on the gourd and uttered the following statement, "ihite ihite na ire, ero raru na mbu", meaning, "may the beer ferment early before the guinea fowls wake up, such that whoever takes one horn of the wine he may scream out of drunkenness." This statement was a form of a wish or prayer that the beer may ferment quickly and become a strong and very intoxicating beer.⁶⁰

From the above two examples, we can here conclude that the cross sign served more than one function in traditional Kikuyu society. It was this traditional sign that was adapted into the oaths of Mau Mau and KCA. In these oaths, the sign served a new function altogether. It was used as a symbol of initiation into the secret associations. This function of the traditional Kikuyu sign which was used in the oaths is similar to the function of the sign of the cross in christian baptism. In baptism, the sign was symbolic of a new birth into a new community. So was it in KCA and Mau Mau. But it should be understood that though the functions of the sign were similar in

baptism and in the KCA oaths, nonetheless the sign itself was a traditional Kikuyu symbol, although some christians who took the oath may have seen the cross as a christian symbol. It should also be mentioned here that the symbol was not used in traditional oaths. The cross sign would have had no function in those oaths. There will be further discussion on the cross sign in the concluding chapter.

Another point that can be made here in reference to the second KCA oath is that the second phase of the oath was an elaboration of the first oath. But in its second phase, the oath was given to more people than in the first phase. Yet even in the second phase, the oath was much in line with the traditional rules concerning oaths among the Kikuyu. The oath was not given to youths and women, and the oath was voluntary. The second KCA oath however differed from traditional rules of oaths in that this oath was secret. It was taken in front of elders and senior KCA leaders. In the next chapter, it will be seen that more and more rules concerning the traditional oaths were broken in Mau Mau oaths. These deviations occurred when it became absolutely necessary to give the oath to women and children.

In comparing the first KCA oath with the second, we find that the first oath can be described as syncretistic in nature. But to a great extent, the second oath was traditional. It contained symbols and rituals that were present in traditional oaths. It was this second KCA oath that was adapted to become the first Mau Mau oath.

The Second KCA Oath and Mau Mau Oaths

As has been shown in the vows of the second KCA oath, the oath was one of loyalty to the KCA. But when the need for mass unity was found necessary by KCA and KAU, there developed, from this second KCA oath, an oath of unity. This was the first Mau Mau oath. In this Mau Mau oath of unity, the trough which was used in the second phase of the second KCA oath was dropped. Instead, a larger trough was used, to enable more people to take the oath at the same time. The contents put into the trough of the second KCA oath were included in the Mau Mau oath of unity. But more contents were added and more vows included to make the oath more militant. There is enough evidence to show that there was a close relationship between the second KCA oath, especially in its second phase, and the first Mau Mau oath.

The second KCA oath was of the same nature and intention as the Mau Mau oaths. This is true considering the fact that similar symbols were used. The trough which was used in the second phase of the second KCA oath was also used in the first Mau Mau oath. Also, the half calabash which was used in the first phase of the second KCA oath was later used in the second Mau Mau oath.

Barnett noted that the first Mau Mau oath was like an initiation ceremony into the KCA and that the oath made a person both a member of the Mau Mau movement and a newly born member of the tribe.³¹ Kibicho also saw the close relationship between the second KCA oath

and the first Mau Mau oath. He wrote that, "The KCA oath of allegiance was adapted to become the Mau Mau oath of initiation, allegiance and unity."⁶² From the above references, we can conclude here that KCA was greatly connected with the start of the Mau Mau movement. Yet this view is still a controversial one.

Mariuki writes that the Corfield's report was wrong in its emphasis on the relationship between KCA, MAU, and Mau Mau.⁶³ He especially opposes the idea in the report that Mau Mau was a direct offspring of KCA. Kaggia supports the same view of Mariuki and he gives very many reasons as to why Mau Mau cannot be called an offspring of KCA.⁶⁴ Of great importance here is Kaggia's assertion that KCA used a christian oath in its organization. He is here referring to the first KCA oath, which, as we saw, was replaced by a more traditional oath. From the evidence we gather in the second KCA oath and the first Mau Mau oath, there was a close relationship between KCA and Mau Mau. This was noted again by Kibicho when he wrote that Mau Mau was "radically transformed KCA."⁶⁵ Wittke also noted that at the beginning, Mau Mau was called KCA.⁶⁶ Finally, it should be noted that most people who were arrested by the colonial government before the declaration of emergency in 1952 were accused of taking or giving a KCA oath.⁶⁷ Yet the oaths they were accused of taking and giving were Mau Mau oaths. It is therefore not true to say that "Although a quite naturally most ex-officials of KCA took the new oath, (in reference to the

first Mau Mau oath) it had nothing to do with KCA or the old KCA oath."

Both Kariuki and Kagia support the view that Mau Mau was an offspring of KAU, rather than of KCA. It is necessary here to point out briefly the relationship that was there between KCA and KAU.

The assertion that KCA had no programme for changing the status quo or even for attaining independence has been objected to by most informants on KCA. They stress the fact that KCA had the intentions of changing the status quo but that the government imposed heavy restrictions on the KCA to stop it from mobilising the masses. As an example, it has been stated earlier that the government banned KCA in 1940. As one informant put it:

When KCA was banned, it continued as an underground movement. Some of its leaders were detained. And some of its members joined KAU secretly. They continued as KAU members until the time of Mau Mau. During the Mau Mau war, no person was arrested for being a member of KCA alone, but for being a member of KAU. Even the Mau Mau movement did not kill KCA. We can say that in a wider meaning, KAU and Mau Mau were children of KCA. 69

Leakey also emphasizes the same point that when KCA was banned, its members filed behind KAU and that they continued their activities there. Leakey observed that to an extent, the two associations became synonymous. 70 However, it should be noted here that not all former KCA members joined KAU, when KAU started in 1941. Yet KAU

started in the same year that the detained KCA leaders were released.⁷¹ On release, those members were introduced to the new association. They were also given the second phase of the second KCA oath. This shows that both KAU and KCA continued to co-exist for some time before the Mau Mau war. The relationship between KAU, KCA and Mau Mau oaths will become clearer in the next chapter.

The close relationship that was there between KCA members and KAU created various problems related to the KCA oaths. KAU did not use an oath in its organisation at first. The members in it were young as compared to the older KCA members. The KCA members in KAU supported the idea that youths should be oathed. This idea raised many problems in connection with the rules that were followed in the KCA oaths. Women and young men were not allowed to take KCA oaths. On the other hand, the inter-ethnic nature of KAU made it more difficult to spread the oath among KAU members. Further, we noted that KCA oaths were not enforced on any person, These rules, which were in line with traditional Kikuyu rules that governed oaths, had to be altered if the oaths were to be given to the young militants in KAU. But some KCA members were opposed to the alterations in these rules. The conservative persons in KCA had to be convinced that the rules and restrictions in the KCA oaths were incompatible with a mass movement of unity. When these differences were resolved, the first Mau Mau oath was given.

Karing'a, KCA, and Mau Mau

It was shown earlier on in this chapter that after

circumcision controversy in 1953, there developed a strong feeling among the KCA members that they were "kikuyu karing'a" as opposed to the pro-government group, "kiriro". A clear understanding of the meaning of "karing'a" in KCA is important at this stage. The views of some informants in this issue will be outlined below.

Ajorobe asserted that "karing'a" means pure and that "kikuyu karing'a" refers to a 'pure kikuyu' i.e. "kikuyu biu". As he stated, "but most the time 'karing'a' is used to refer to all those people who had taken the KCA oath and who knew the secrets of the association."⁷² Another informant traced the name "karing'a" to the traditions of the kikuyu:

In Kikuyu traditional society, the name "karing'a" was used to distinguish the people of the kikuyu guild from those of Masai guild. But the KCA members used the name at first to refer to all those people who opposed the government on the circumcision controversy. Later on during the second KCA oath, the name was used to refer to all those who had taken the KCA oath. When Mau Mau started, the name was used to refer to all people who took and accepted the Mau Mau oath. The Mau Mau referred to themselves as "kikuyu karing'a".⁷³

Another informant related this to a:

The kikuyu pure and the Masai of Masai guild were all united together in one ceremony in the first Mau Mau oath. It was then that the name "karing'a" got a wider meaning. Both types of kikuyu people shared in one ceremony. From then on they continued

*to share in the same ceremonies and the same prayers in the Mau Mau movement.*⁷⁴

As it is shown above, the name "Karing'a" changed its meaning, from that of referring to the pure Kikuyu as distinct from those of Masai, Kallii, to that of all persons who opposed the government and took the oaths as distinct from the loyalists. These new distinctions were further emphasised in the song:

*I am a Kikuyu Karing'a
I cannot change my ceremonies and my religion
so as to follow a white man and become like
him.*⁷⁵

It can thus be stated here that the term "Karing'a" had a deep religious meaning in Kikuyu traditional society because the distinctions it defined were religious. In KKA and Mau Mau also, the name was used in reference to the people who took oaths and performed other religious ceremonies together. "Karing'a is a Kikuyu name having stated that "Karing'a" was a pure Kikuyu religion even though we did not reject Christianity."⁷⁶

The name "Karing'a" was later used in the Mau Mau movement to refer to all those people who were referred to as "Mau Mau". As one informant asserted, "Karing'a meant all those of us who prayed, ate, fought and died together, united as children of Uhuru and Mombi. It was this "Uhuru Karing'a" that was branded Mau Mau."⁷⁷

FOOTNOTES

1. For the details on these associations, see Rosberg and Nottingham, The Myth of Mau Mau, pp.33-44.
2. See Delf, G., Jomo Kenyatta, p.72; Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit. pp.93-94 for the grievances of KCA.
3. Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit. p.113.
4. Ibid. p.87.
5. Ibid. p.99.
6. Ibid.
7. The "Accera" and "Agaciku" clansmen were famous for their good behaviour and for their lack of involvement in witchcraft. They often led traditional prayer ceremonies among the Kikuyu. For more details, see Wanjau, G., Mihiriga ya Agikuyu, pp.35-40.
8. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, Nyandarua, 20.11.76.
9. On the issue of female circumcision controversy, see Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit. pp.119f; Kenyatta, J., Facing Mount Kenya, Chapter 6; Waruiru, C., Female Initiation Controversy at CSM Tumutumu: 1912-1937, B.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1971.
10. Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit. p.120.
11. "Kirore" means fingerprint. The people who sided with the missionaries in the circumcision controversy were given this name by the other Kikuyu, because they signed (by fingerprints) some documents which were brought by missionaries to indicate that they were in favour of the abolition of female initiation, Njoroge Kagunda, Ibid.
12. See Kibicho, S.G., The Kikuyu Conception of God, pp.260f; Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit. pp.127f, for more on "Karing'a" and "Kirore".
13. Nyandarua Interviews, 23.10.76. The persons as listed in the text are (a) Njoroge Kagunda, (b) Kamau Wang'ondu (c) Mugo Ngobia (d) Macharia Kirubi. Six more informants present in the interviews supported the ideas.
14. Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit., pp.97, 245-246.
15. Whittier, R., The Swords of Kirinyaga, p.2.
16. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, Nyandarua, 7.9.76.
17. James Beuttah, Interview by Wanjohi Kaburi, Dec. 1976.

18. Njoroge Kagunda, op.cit., interview.
19. Kariuki, J.M., Mau Mau Detainee, p.18.
20. Njoroge Kagunda, op.cit., interview.
21. James Beuttah, op.cit., interview.
22. Njoroge Kagunda, op.cit., interview.
23. Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit., p.97. 245-246.
24. Kaggia, B., Roots of Freedom, p.93; Corfield, F.D., Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau, p.164.
25. Njoroge Kagunda, op.cit., interview.
26. Wanyoike, E.N., An African Pastor: The Life and Work of the Reverend Wanyoike Kamawe 1888-1970. Nairobi: E.A.P.E., 1974, p.177.
27. Njoroge Kagunda, op.cit., interview.
28. Ibid.
29. Kenyatta, J., op.cit., p.225.
30. 'Wazungu' is a general Swahili word for 'Europeans.'
31. Kaggia, op.cit., p.192.
32. Barnett and Njama, Mau Mau From Within, p.136.
33. See the case of an oath during an accusation of sorcery as cited in chapter three of this text. Also see Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit., p.245.
34. Njoroge Kagunda, op.cit., interview.
35. Elsie Mukami Kimathi, Nyandarua interview, 22.11.76.
36. Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit., p.245, Kibicho, S.G. op.cit., p.253.
37. Venys, L., A History of the Mau Mau Movement, p.12, Corfield, op.cit., pp.163-164.
38. Njoroge Kagunda, op.cit., interviews; Gatabaki Mundati, Interviews, Kiambu, Dec. 1976.
39. Unless where indicated, most of the details on this oath come from Njoroge Kagunda in various interviews between Sept. 1976 and January 1977.
40. The "mugere" stick was got from a shrub and was used as a symbol for cursing unknown thieves and as a

symbol in oath ceremonies. It was also used as a symbol of placing a prohibition or a ban on something. See glossary.

41. Richard Githaiga, Interviews, Nairobi, February, 1977.
42. Njoroge Kagunda, Daniel Kang'ori, James Beuttah, Kamau Wang'ondū, interviews, op.cit.
43. Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit., p.246.
44. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 7.9.76.
45. James Beuttah, op.cit., interviews. These local centres were mainly the former independent schools.
46. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 7.9.76. These details of the oath were also supported by D. Kang'ori, Interviews, Murang'a, Aug. 1976, Kamau Wang'ondū, Nyandarua Interviews; Richard Githaiga, op.cit., interviews.
47. Njoroge Kagunda, James Beuttah and David Kang'ori, all of whom were KCA leaders, op.cit., interviews.
48. Corfield, op.cit., p.85.
49. Kenyatta, J., Facing Mount Kenya, pp.139-140. (Bracket nine).
50. Kabetu, M.N., Kirira Kia Ugikuyu, p.26.
51. Richard Githaiga, interview, op.cit.
52. Kabetu, op.cit., p.78-79. Also see distinctions between the Kikuyu of Maasai guild and those who were regarded as of pure Kikuyu guild in the same book pp.74-77.
53. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 15.9.76.
54. Elsie Mukami, Interview, 21.11.76.
55. Barrett and Njama, op.cit., p.60.
56. Leakey, I.S.B., Defeating Mau Mau, p.50.
57. Mugo Ngobia, Interview, Nyandarua, 20.11.76. Also Njoroge Kagunda, interviews, op.cit.
58. Kabetu, M.N., op.cit., p.55.
59. "Muratina" are large fruits of a tree called "Muratina". They are processed and used provide yeast for brewing traditional liquor.

60. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 20.11.76.
61. Barnett and Njama, op.cit., p.59.
62. Kibicho, S.G., op.cit., p.267.
63. Kariuki, J.M., op.cit., p.18ff.
64. Kaggia, B., op.cit., p.19ff.
65. Kibicho, S.G., Ibid.
66. Whittier, R., op.cit., p.19.
67. Njoroge was first arrested at the end of 1948.
68. Kariuki, J.M., p.27. (Erackets mine)
69. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 28.10.76.
70. Leakey, L.S.B., Defeating Mau Mau, p.33.
71. Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit.
72. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 20.11.76. It should be noted that purity among the Kikuyu had nothing to do with racialism.
73. Macharia Kirubi, Interview, 20.11.76.
74. Macharia Gichingiri, Interview, Nyeri, 23.12.76.
75. Reuben Maina, Interview, Nyeri, 25.12.76.
76. Whittier, R., op.cit., p.2.
77. Mukami Kimathi, Interview, 21.11.76.

THE FIRST MAU MAU OATH: THE OATH OF UNITYGeneral Remarks on Mau Mau Oaths

In chapter three, we surveyed the nature and significance of traditional forms of oaths among the Kikuyu. And in the last chapter, it was shown that the KCA used oaths of loyalty and allegiance which were to a great extent based on the traditional rituals, symbols and beliefs related to oaths among the Kikuyu. An attempt was also made to show some of the ways in which the KCA oaths differed from the nature and rules of traditional Kikuyu oaths. In the following two chapters, the two main Mau Mau oaths, the oath of unity, and the oath of war, will be discussed. However, several remarks need to be emphasised first.

From the information that the writer has gathered from informants, it comes out as a fact that there were initially only two Mau Mau oaths, the oath of unity, and the oath of war, which was called the "B Batuni" oath. Many other types of oaths were however present in the Mau Mau movement, but these others arose as variations of the above two oaths. These variations arose due to circumstances that were inevitable.

It will become clear in this chapter that the first Mau Mau oath, the oath of unity, was in many ways similar to the second KCA oath. It will be explained here that the similarity between these two oaths is one of the main reasons for arguing that the KCA was greatly involved with the start of Mau Mau oaths. The first Mau Mau oath, like the second KCA oath before it, will be studied in the light of

traditional Kikuyu forms of oaths. This first oath will be shown to differ in various ways from the traditional ways of administering oaths, and these deviations will also be discussed. Emphasis will be laid on the fact that the effectiveness of the Mau Mau oath of unity and the oath of war, greatly helped to educate the masses in political matters and that the oaths greatly helped in the development of nationalism. It was mainly the effectiveness of Mau Mau oaths that made the Mau Mau war possible on the part of the Kikuyu.

Barnett¹ as well as most informants have agreed that the oaths were the first evidence to be cited in relation to the secret association that was called Mau Mau. In chapter two, we saw that the name Mau in itself was most likely used initially to describe the manner in which people had eaten during an oath giving ceremony and that the name was later used to refer to the participants in the oath giving ceremonies and also to refer to their movement.

It should be mentioned here that the exact nature of the original Mau Mau oaths is hard to tell today due mainly to the variations which were made on these earlier oaths in an attempt to maintain secrecy. Some of the symbols and rituals which were contained in the earlier oaths were dropped and replaced with new ones in an attempt to make the oaths more binding. In this study, an attempt is made to decipher from informants the initial nature of Mau Mau oaths, and where necessary, the variations of these oaths have been given.

Our main concern however will be with the nature and religious significance of the oaths and great emphasis will be laid on the symbols and rituals contained in the ceremonies. We should be aware of the warning by Rosberg and Gottscham that "it is part of the myth of Mau Mau to fail to distinguish between the form and meaning of the oath", and that, "Preoccupation with the ritual and traditional aspects of the oath-taking procedure obscured the deeper significance of the oath as an organisational weapon in a context of mass mobilisation"² But these rituals and symbols of the movement's oaths are the most misinterpreted elements and the main aim here is to show the nature of the oaths as well as their significance from the point of view of the people who took them. Nonetheless the nationalistic functions of the oaths cannot be overlooked because this was a basic contribution of the oaths to the Mau Mau movement.

It has been stated above that there were initially two Mau Mau oaths. It is necessary to understand this because various authors have tended to show that there were more than two. Leakey and Corfield have recorded at least seven kinds of oaths.³ Such an over-estimation probably arose from the fact that a person could take the same oath for as long a time as necessary and hence a person may refer to the oaths as different oaths. The informant explained the confusion:

There were only two Mau Mau oaths. All the others were variations of the two, but with different paraphernalia and different vows. As an example, my first task in the movement

was to recruit young men and take them secretly to the oath ceremony. Each time I took a person whom it was hard to convince of the significance of the oath, I had to take the oath before him and pretend I had not taken the oath before. I took the first oath more than ten times, and I took the second oath more than four times.⁴

In reference to variations that were made on an oath, the informant explained that:

Each time we knew that the government had discovered the nature of our oath through confessions, we altered the oath a bit by adding more vows and more symbols. We then re-oathed the people in the specific locality where confessions were done. This new version of the oath did not however spread to other unaffected areas.⁵

It is also important to note here that variations of the "ritual" oath occurred because with every new promotion, a freedom fighter was made to take the oath again. But this time the oath contained more vows so as to make the person committed to the new responsibilities. We shall see in the next chapter that the 'leaders' oath' was of this nature. We can however say that if a freedom fighter took an oath each time on promotion, then it is possible to tell the degree of a person's involvement in the movement, by both counting the number of oathing ceremonies that he had attended and by counting the varieties of the "ritual" oath that he had taken as a result of increased responsibilities. There were however people who took many oaths as a result of confessions rather than as a result of increased responsibilities.

Out of the two original Mau Mau oaths, there arose many oaths which were severe and which can be shown to have been non-traditional among the Kikuyu. Some of these variations arose due to unavoidable factors. Two such factors can be mentioned here. As has been noted above, when the original oaths leaked to the government through confessions, the need was felt to formulate new oaths, using other symbols and rituals. Secondly, when the government started oath-cleansing ceremonies, the Mau Mau were forced to formulate other oaths and to give them to the cleansed persons and their neighbours. It will be seen here that a confessed oath or a cleansed oath is less binding. In general, however, it should be noted that the development of 'severe' oaths was at first a direct response to the government activities against Mau Mau. Such government activities included screening and ceremonial oath cleansing.

Another aspect which should be mentioned at this stage is the relationship that was there between Mau Mau oaths and circumcision as an initiation ceremony among the Kikuyu. Some writers have compared the oath with initiation⁶ and it would be good to know the sense in which this comparison arises. In one sense, Mau Mau oaths could be said to resemble initiation rites. There were several rites of passage among the Kikuyu, including the rite of second birth and the circumcision initiation ceremonies.⁷ Mau Mau oaths can only be said to resemble initiation rites in the sense that the recipient of the oath was initiated into the community of all those people

who were fighting for land and freedom, the community that was branded 'Mau Mau'. This idea is supported by the fact that some administrators of the "B Satuni" oath, like Mwachani Gachani, started the ceremony with the following statement directed to the recipient of the oath, "You are now entering "B Satuni", the council of the people whose work is to perform acts of grievous harm." (Uratonya "B Satuni", Kiama ia ageri ngero). This statement, which was spoken at the time that the recipient was passing through an area, shows that the ceremony was initiational. In the first Mau Mau oath, the ceremony acted as an initiation of all Ki'uyu people of both Mwasai and Kikuyu circumcision guilds, men and women, aimed at uniting them into one community that could share in the same ceremonies.

It is important to note here that as an initiation ceremony, the oath tried to eliminate some traditional Ki'uyu customs that prohibited the communal sharing of some ceremonies and activities between men and women and between persons of different circumcision guilds. The ceremonies and activities performed by the Mau Mau could not have been successful if these traditional prohibitions were observed.

It could also be mentioned here that the Mau Mau oath ceremony contained evidence of some Kikuyu initiation ceremonies. There was an arch through which the oath recipients passed. There also was a sign of the cross. These symbols were there in traditional circumcision ceremonies. The fact, however, is that though the oath contained evidence of circumcision, it cannot be compared directly with

the circumcising ceremony. Both of them however are forms of initiation. The fact that Mau Mau talked of the oath as circumcision (kurua) should be seen as a method of keeping the oath secret. For instance, if a group of Mau Mau was met by a new-comer and they wanted to know if he had taken the oath, they asked him what his name was. If he had taken the oath, he replied "I am a pure Kikuyu and I am circumcised in the name of such and such an elder."⁹ Circumcision here referred to taking the oath.

It is clearly then that Mau Mau oaths were in one sense initiatory. The first oath initiated men and women into the movement, while the second oath initiated men and women into the 'council of fighters'. It is mainly in this sense that we can call the oath an initiation ceremony.

Another aspect of Mau Mau oaths that needs consideration is the one related to the role of the oaths in fostering unity. As discussed in chapter one that Mau Mau oaths have been shown to have hindered the unity of all Kenyans in the war of liberation and the reason that has been given is that Mau Mau oaths were basically Kikuyu in nature. Such a view underestimates the role of the oaths in the development of nationalism. This role of oaths can be seen in the relationship that was there between UAF, UAF, and Mau Mau oaths. The argument held in this study is that both UAF and UAF were nationalistic political associations whose main aim was to unite most Kenyans to their demands for self-government and land. Both associations greatly advocated constitutional means

to that end. But some members of these associations realised that constitutional means would take too long to achieve their goal of freedom. That was the time that some of these members decided that a war was inevitable. They decided to apply oaths so as to unite as many people as possible and to make them committed to the task of fighting against the white man. As such, the Mau Mau oaths were decided upon by members of the two nationalist associations, and the functions of the oaths were intended to be nationalistic. While it was mainly some members of KCA who organised and supervised the oaths, it was the younger and more militant KAU members who took the oaths and started the war.

It was also shown in the last chapter that the first KCA oath was given in offices of the KCA but that the second KCA oath was mainly given in the homes of senior elders. It was particularly in the home of Senior Chief Koinange that the first Mau Mau oath was started. As one informant explained,

We in KCA decided to select a house and call it 'Moo' (Mau), where the goats could come and dine. It was in the home of Senior Chief Koinange. People from all around came there for parties, but we gave them the first oath. Some elders however started to complain about the lateness of their daughters in the dances. So we shifted the arena of the oath to the Kenya Teachers Training College, Githunguri. We also shifted the arena because we learnt that the government had received word about our activities from a spy called Gatheca. It was, however, from Githunguri that the oath was distributed to other centres in

*Kikuyuland.*¹⁰

From the above information, it is clear that KCA leders like Hjoroge were involved in the start of Mau Mau oaths. The involvement of KCA with Mau Mau oaths is also evident in the Olenguruone affair which will be outlined below.

It is important to note here that the hand of KCA was there in Olenguruone, where an oath, similar to the first Mau Mau oath in nature and purposes was first applied. The successful application of this oath at Olenguruone was one of the main reasons that finally convinced the conservative members of KCA that a mass oath of unity was necessary. It has been recorded that all men, women and children at Olenguruone had taken the oath in 1946, a date which coincides very closely with the date in which the first Mau Mau oath started.¹¹ The Olenguruone settlement is of some interest here if we are to understand the activities of the KCA at the time Mau Mau oaths started.¹²

In 1934, some people were moved out of Lari in northern Kiambu so as to give room to white settlers. The Olenguruone settlement was created so as to cater for all those Kiuyu who were evicted from their clan lands. The government allocated them land at Olenguruone on lease basis, but the Kiuyu insisted that the land given to them was freehold and that it was given to them to compensate for the clan lands they had lost. The government, however, went further and started to control the use of the land by restricting the number of livestock to be kept, by enforcing the digging of terraces and by prohibiting the

growth of some crops like maize. These rules were established after the people had settled at Olenguruone for one year.

So as to demand their right over the land, a right similar to the one they had over their former clan lands, the people of Olenguruone decided to hold a united front. In order to attain unity, they adopted the oath in about 1944. In their petitions to the government, they demanded either to be granted land rights or to be returned home. They refused to comply with government rules and they were given eviction orders in 1947. They refused to quit. On refusal, some were forcefully taken to the dry Yatta Plateau, while most of their leaders were imprisoned in Nakuru in 1949. All their properties were either burnt or confiscated. During transportation, the Olenguruone people sang songs in which their true feelings were expressed. It is from the songs they sang that we learn of the involvement of both KCA and KAU members in the Olenguruone activities. In one of their songs, they sang that,

*A telegram was sent
From Githunguri,
To inquire whether
We had arrived safely.¹³*

In this song Kenyatta, who was a member of both KAU and the underground KCA, was the one who sent the telegram from Githunguri. It should also be noted here that the songs which the Olenguruone people sang were nationalistic. Rosberg and Nottingham have commented at length that:

*As they travelled, they sang the Olenguruone songs ... and raised the Maasai place name of Olenguruone into a national symbol of sacrifice and martyrdom. They also brought with them a tradition of unity and defiance of government on the part of men, women and children, all of whom had been oathed and stood firm.*¹⁴

These Olenguruone songs later became Mau Mau songs.

Of great importance here is the Olenguruone oath which was intended to unite all the people on the settlement. It was an oath of unity. We learn that after the conviction of the Olenguruone people, the Mau Mau oaths, especially the oath of unity, were passed up.¹⁵ It is a suggestion here that it was partly due to the success of the Olenguruone oath in uniting the people that KAS and KCA leaders were convinced about the need for the application of oaths for mass mobilisation. The nationalistic nature of the Olenguruone oath was evident in the first Mau Mau oath.

Though the actual procedure of the Olenguruone oath is hard to tell, nonetheless the contents used in the oath ceremony indicate that the oath was in many ways similar to the first Mau Mau oath and the second KCA oath. The oath contained blood, the heart and chest meat of a goat, and there was an arch at the entrance of the arena. The oath was highly secret, and it was given to all men, women and children. They swore never to sell land to the whites and never to co-operate with them. Like the first Mau Mau oath, the Olenguruone oath was an oath of unity,

not of me.¹

Besides the case of Alan Moore, there is also ample evidence to the effect that the "oaths" arose as a further step in the development of rationalism, a nationalism that was greatly championed by the ACP members. The aim of the oaths was to unite as many people as possible and to get them committed to the liberation movement.

Edward Smith, who was a young ACP member, has explained that:

All started to register, make enquiries and to educate them in politics. In our meetings, all the comrades that I remember should be asked to place their hands upon their hearts during an oath and their names were recorded in a book. I remember we were the first to fill the book in Guyana. It was the beginning of the ACP's work here.¹⁷

Another ACP militant, who was involved in administrative affairs, writes that:

As youths in Guyana, I felt there was need for rules and commandments to follow, just like the Christians had. We agreed to follow the rules which were given to us. These rules were written for 24 hours. The oaths were taken on our territorial allegiance and we believed that we were Leninists. All who agreed to take the oaths became administrators.¹⁸

It is clear from these accounts that the "oaths" were taken as a part of the ACP's early work.

Another ACP militant, who was involved in administrative affairs, writes that:

It was in 1964, when the ACP was first formed, that we started to take oaths to start with.¹⁹

oaths with the purpose of uniting as many people as possible. Yet not all the members of both associations took the oaths. The oaths were organised mainly by those who felt desperate of constitutional nationalism. The decision to give mass oaths however had far reaching repercussions.

The Problems Encountered before the Giving of the First Mau Mau Oath

The decision to give oaths to all the people, including women and children, raised two major problems. The first problem concerned the fee for the oath and the second problem was related to the Kikuyu traditional customs governing the giving of oaths. Some ICA members opposed the giving of a free oath, while some senior Kikuyu elders opposed the oaths on the grounds that the oaths contravened the traditional rules which prohibited the giving of oaths to women and children. The two problems were interrelated and they were solved together. The solution to these problems greatly led to the possibility that Mau Mau oaths had to contravene some rules that were observed among the Kikuyu in their daily life in general and also to deviate from the traditional rules related to oaths in particular. This agreement was reached after a prolonged controversy. The organisers of Mau Mau oaths found that there was no alternative except to break the traditional customs and rules. The information below is selected from a first hand account by a person who participated in the discussions.²⁰

There were many prohibitions among the Kikuyu which prevented women and children from taking oaths and which also prevented them from doing some of the activities that

were involved in an oath. As examples, it was a traditional prohibition among the Kikuyu that women should not eat in the presence of men. Mainly, women were prohibited from eating meat in the presence of men. It was said that the women should not show men the food which was in their mouth (kuonia aruho matamko). It was also a traditional prohibition that men and women should not show each other the secret parts of their bodies. Women and even children were also forbidden from touching the garments of older men, especially if those men were in-laws. Another prohibition was that women could not pass near a place where men were slaughtering an animal, especially if the animal was for a particular ceremony. There were many more prohibitions related to the contacts between men and women. It was a traditional belief that "thabo" was the entrance whenever these prohibitions were overlooked, and it was the job of diviner-doctors to cleanse people from such "thabo", in the traditional ceremony of purification (arapilio).

When the need to unite the Kikuyu by using the oath was felt by some leaders of I.A. and C.A, questions arose as to what would be done to overcome the traditional prohibitions which barred women and children from doing the activities involved in the oath ceremony or which prohibited them from taking an oath. (It was shown in the last chapter that the oaths of I.A. were not given to women and youth). If the oaths were to be given to them, this would have meant that the above mentioned prohibitions

had to be overlooked. This is what happened in the case of Mau Mau oaths. The giving of the oath to women and children was necessary if they were going to help in the liberation war. It was also necessary that the prohibition which held that women should not eat in the presence of men be broken because once the war was started, the people saw the possibility that both men and women would be arrested and put together in temporary enclosures while awaiting imprisonment. If this were to happen, the women would find it hard to feed in the presence of their fellow men. It became clear then that for the Mau Mau movement to succeed, need was felt to break these traditional prohibitions.

But it was hard to break these earlier prohibitions in a whole society by word of mouth. It was especially difficult for a man to convince his wives and his children that these earlier traditions and prohibitions had to be abandoned for the sake of unity. As such, need was felt that the customs be broken by the masses, and the best time to do so was in an oath-taking ceremony. This was one of the primary goals of the first Mau Mau oath. Both men, women and children were called upon secretly to attend the ceremony, without prior knowledge of what was happening.

The first Mau Mau oath was intended to be a mass oath of unity. In this oath, there had to be meat and other traditional Kikuyu foods. In taking the oath, the participants, both men, women and youths, were to eat the foods and the meat in front of each other. All the participants consumed parts of the same piece of meat and sipped

the contents of the oath from the same container. In the same oath also, a skin strip from the ceremonial goat was used to surround all the participants together so that they touched each other, body to body, when taking the oath.

It is clear from the account above that it was mainly for the sake of unity that women and children were given the Mau Mau oaths, an act which was contrary to Kikuyu traditional practices. It was felt by the organisers of the oath that the strict adherence to the traditional prohibitions and the adherence to the traditional "thahu" purification ceremonies resultant from the breaking of the prohibitions, were to have some serious adverse effects on the movement of liberation.

Once the earlier prohibitions were broken, they were replaced by new ones which the oath recipients swore to observe. The new prohibitions were the vows contained in the oath as well as the rules given to the oath takers after they had taken the oath.

A mass breaking of prohibitions was not a totally new thing in Kikuyu history. We have the legend that in the past, women ruled the Kikuyu society and that their rule was very harsh. At the time, the men performed all the duties which are today performed by the women. Though the story cannot be given here in full, it should be noted that the men of the time swore secretly to overthrow the rule of women and they planned to do this at a time when most of the women leaders were pregnant. When the men succeeded in dethroning the women, they decided to change

all the traditions and prohibitions that the women had established during their rule. One of the prohibitions forbade men from commanding women. Once the overthrowal of the women's rule was successful, the men established their own government system, based on new prohibitions. Most of the new prohibitions were directed to the behaviour of women in their relationship to men. The new prohibitions forbade women from talking rudely to men, and from going so close as to touch an older man's garment. Men had sworn never again to be ruled by women. The generation that succeeded in overthrowing the women's rule was named "Iregi", the revolters.²¹

It was the new prohibitions that governed the social, economic, political and ethical institutions of the Kikuyu up to the time of the Mau Mau movement. It was these new prohibitions that were broken in the first Mau Mau oath so as to allow the Kikuyu to unite together in a bid to overthrow the rule of the white men.

Another reason that necessitated the giving of the oath to women and children was the fact that the Mau Mau movement was planned to work on secret plans and all the activities of the movement had to be kept secret. The Kikuyu have for long accepted the fact that women and children cannot be trusted to maintain secrets. This is emphasised in the Kikuyu proverbs which state that "muici na kihii akenaga o kiarua" and "muici na mutumia akenaga o akua", meaning, "one who goes stealing together with an uncircumcised boy gets relieved only when the boy gets circumcised", and "one who goes stealing together with

a woman gets relieved only with the death of the woman." The only way the men could trust their women and children to maintain secrets at the time of Mau Mau was by giving them an oath prohibiting them from revealing any secrets. The oath ceremony was the first secret that all participants swore to keep.

Finally, the women and children had to be oathed because they were expected to assist the freedom movement. Most important, however, was the fact that they had to be oathed so that they might not enquire as to where their husbands and fathers went at night when most Mau Mau activities took place. They had to take the oath so as to assist the movement with foods, clothings and other facilities. They had to take the oath also so that they might not scream or cause alarm when they saw the fighters, some of whom might be their fathers, either hiding in bushes or being chased by the enemy. The oath ceremony was used as a medium of instruction to them, aimed at showing them how to conduct themselves during the war.

It is then clear as to why the question of oathing women and children was treated by some ECA and KAU members as a question of great importance. It was very necessary that women and children be oathed, although such an act was contrary to traditional Kikuyu customs that governed oaths and other social relations. Once the oath of unity was taken, the Mau Mau movement came into full swing, acquiring members who were fully committed. But before the women and children could be given the oath, another problem

had to be solved. This problem was related to the fee for the oath.

We observed in chapter three that in most cases, a man who took an oath in traditional Kikuyu society was required to contribute two goats. At the time of KCA, oaths were given, and the people who took them contributed sixty-two shillings and fifty cents, and a goat. It was not required of such a man to pay any more money if he took another oath of the same association. When the decision was reached that a mass oath of unity was to be given, many KCA members insisted that those who were to take the oath should contribute the same amount. It must be understood that sixty-two shillings and fifty cents was a lot of money at that time, considering the fact that the amount of money a man could earn was as little as twenty shillings a month. Most people had no jobs. The working fathers were the sole supporters of their families. The decision by KCA members that people pay for the oath should be looked at with these economic hardships in mind. It should be remembered that the oath of unity was regarded as a KCA oath, and was similar in many respects to the second KCA oath. The KCA members therefore had a cause to demand that people pay for the oath because they too had paid for the oath. But the young KAU militants, who had little source of income, felt that KCA members were creating an unnecessary barrier to unity. One of the KCA leaders explained at length how this problem was solved:

We in KCA refused the introduction of a free

oath because we had paid when we took it. On refusal, Kenyatta called us all, as branch chairmen, to attend a meeting at Githunguri, in the Kenya African Teachers College. That was about 1946 and KCA was an underground movement, working within KAU. In the meeting, Kenyatta told us that Musa Thuo, a seer from an independent church, had prophesied that we of KCA should go and catch a living antelope without shedding its blood, and that only after this would our controversies be solved. But this was a trick by Kenyatta because there was no such a prophecy. We hired six cars and went to the area around Lake Naivasha where the antelopes were in plenty. We were twenty six in number. We chased after one antelope for a whole morning, but every time we tried to catch it, it attacked us with its long horns. At mid-day, when all of us were tired, James Beuttah told us to go home and request permission that we be allowed to cut the legs of the animal. We went back and met Kenyatta who told us not to return to Naivasha. He called us into a room where there was a cat and he told us to kill it instead. We argued that we could kill it, but that it would scratch some of us before it died. Kenyatta then explained to us that the cat and the antelope were comparable to the white men in Kenya, whom we needed to fight. He told us that though the whites were outnumbered, they would fight back and kill some of us. He warned us that we in KCA were old men who could not fight. So he asked us to allow our youths in KAU to join with us in a free oath for all. We agreed, and the oath was first taken by a man called Kibunja in front of us.

*We also agreed then that Kenyatta should join KAU leadership, which he did in 1947.*²²

But the problem of the fee for the oath was never solved completely because each person who took an oath was asked to contribute whatever he had. Some rich men paid up to seven hundred shillings while other people paid only five shillings.²³ Most people paid nothing, but they swore in the oath to the effect that, "I shall pay sixty-two shillings and fifty cents when I get it." We should understand that one man could not afford to pay all the money and the goats for his wives and children.

The solutions to the above problems by KCA and KAU members paved the way for the administration of the first Mau Mau oath, the oath of unity.

The Recruitment of Oath Takers

The methods used to recruit people who were to take the first Mau Mau oath indicate that there was no prior intention of forcing people to take the oath. Instead, great pain and care was taken to trick and to persuade people to take the oath. The use of force to make people take the oath was a late development and we shall see the circumstances that led to this. It is necessary here that we observe some of the methods used to collect some informants to go and take the first oath.²⁴

- (a) "An agemate came and told me that one of our friends had caught a rabbit. He asked me to go with him and help our friend to slaughter it. When we went, we found many people in the compound. There was no rabbit and no friend."
- (b) "My elder brother asked me to help him take one of his rams to an old man who had bought it."

We arrived there late in the evening. On arrival, we found the home guarded and we were led to an inner room. We used our lamb in the ceremony."

- (c) "I arrived home from Nairobi and my agetates came to greet me. They decided that we should go around seeing the countryside. They took me to many places. On our way back in the evening, we arrived at a river valley where there was a thick bush. We came to a clearing where the ceremony was taking place."
- (d) "My friends requested me to go with them and attend a dance in a far off place. But there was no dance except an oathing ceremony."
- (e) "A boy of my age asked me to take him to the bush in the evening where he had set up a snare. But there was no snare."
- (f) "A friend of mine asked me to go and help him extract honey from one of his beehives, but we went to an oathing ceremony instead."
- (g) "Some women asked me to help them take foods and firewood to another woman who had given birth. We entered another home on the way to collect other women. But we found there was an oathing ceremony. We were taking the foods and firewood there for use in the ceremony."
- (h) "My women friends in the church asked me to attend prayers with them in a nearby home. All of us were converted. We met many women guards there who directed us to the room where men were administering an oath."
- (i) "My brother asked me to help take a goat to one of his in-laws in the evening. We found the ceremony going on there."

From the above examples, it is clear that the main idea was persuasion and trickery. The principle followed was based on the Kikuyu proverb which states that, "gutiri goma itari muohi", meaning, "even demons have their friends." All people have friends who know their likes and dislikes. In the above methods, a person's likes were used to trick him to go to the place of the ceremony. Relatives, in-laws and even girlfriends were used to recruit persons to attend the ceremony. Young men and women were tricked with dances and parties, old men were tricked with beer parties, women were tricked with visits, christians were tricked with prayer services and young boys were tricked with hunting. A person's friend was also used to persuade him to take the oath once they got to the place of the ceremony. Yet, even with all the endeavours to trick and to persuade, some people refused to take the oath. Such people were mainly killed because they already knew too much about the oaths. But their friends who had called them were asked to sign a 'book of the dead' on their behalf.²⁵ The book contained the names of all the persons who were killed by the Mau Mau for refusing to take oaths.

In general, it was the educated people, who also purported to be christians, who refused to take the oaths on the grounds that such practices were 'pagan'. Also among the refusers were some traditionalist elders who claimed that the oaths were not traditional because women and children took them.²⁶ Kagia supports the idea that the uneducated people were the first to heed the 'radical gospel' of the oaths.²⁷ Wanweya refers to all those who refused to

take the oaths as "anti-oath diehards."²⁸

It is a general observation that in one family, it was rare for the children and the wives to refuse to take the oath if their fathers or family heads had done it. The leaders of families were the first people to be oathed. But some family heads refused to take oaths. In such cases, their wives and children were called to come and see them die. Such wives and children in most cases agreed to take oaths for they knew the consequences.

At first, some people were excluded from the oaths. These were mainly elders and loyalist administrators. It was they who were later collected by force to go and take the oaths. If force had been used on such people at first, the government would have been alerted earlier, even before the movement had acquired a mass following. But it should be noted here that attempts were made to the effect that no man who arrived at the arena for the ceremony, either by being taken there by force or by trickery, or by accident, refused to take the oath and survived.

Yet there were few respected elders who refused to take the oaths and at the same time survived, without government protection. These were respected people, who could not be expected to betray the movement. Such people could be trusted to keep their mouths shut. One couple can be cited as an example.

"The couple were the only two people who did not take the oath in a whole village. They were both committed christians. They did not object to the freedom fighters' use of the crops in their gardens. They did not report

*to the government whenever they saw freedom fighters hiding in their gardens. Mau Mau spies were kept on them all the time. They had nothing to do with either the Mau Mau or the colonial government. All that they wanted was peace."*²⁹

The couple survived during the whole time of the Mau Mau war. It becomes clear then that the greatest enemy of the movement was the person who betrayed the movement to the government and who refused to co-operate with the movement, whether the person had taken the oath or not. A person who took the oath and acted contrary to the oath was regarded as no better than a loyalist. Both of them received the same treatment from the Mau Mau.

Later on in the movement, however, it became necessary to force people to take oaths. At this time, there were many dangers resulting from betrayal and there was little time for trickery and persuasion.

It is with the above methods of recruitment in mind that we should consider the reason as to why Mau Mau oaths did not spread to other societies in Kenya except the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru. It is also in the same light that we should try and evaluate the accusation that the movement was tribal because its oaths did not spread to the other societies. We should note that at first, there was the intention of giving the same Kikuyu oath to people of other ethnic societies but it was found that the oath would have been meaningless to them for the rituals and symbols were basically Kikuyu.³⁰ This idea was changed, and instead, there was the intention of making the other societies

formulate their oaths that were traditional to their societies.³¹ The problem however was that the Kikuyu could not be convinced that the other people were united with them, unless all of them took the same oath together. We have seen above that the Kikuyu did not even trust their fellow Kikuyu unless they were sure that these fellow Kikuyu had taken the oath. As such, those from other societies who took oaths were the ones who had very close friends among the Kikuyu. They were expected to bring in their friends from their societies in the same way.

The difficulties of spreading the oath to other societies can be understood in the light of the methods used to collect people for oathing. Such methods could only function among people who knew each other very well. The Kikuyu could not use the methods so easily on members of other societies. Yet the methods had to be used so as to maintain secrecy. The hope of the Kikuyu leaders was that if secrecy was maintained, the other societies would have been assimilated into the movement.³² But the oaths leaked to the government at an early period of the movement, and the government applied strong measures to restrict the Kikuyu to their reserves and villages. The government measures greatly hindered the spread of the oaths and of the movement to many other blacks. Restrictions of this nature by the government were not new because since the 1919 East African Association, the government had remained aware of the need to limit the development of territorial nationalism.

Time and Procedure of the Oath

Most informants have argued that the first Mau Mau

oath started at the end of 1945 and that it became a mass oath at the end of 1947. Before 1947, the oath was restricted to a few KCA members only. Literary evidence supports the idea that the oath started between 1947 and 1948.³³ When exactly the oath started, we do not know for sure. But a date between 1945 and 1947 would be correct. When the oath started, it was referred to as a KCA oath in some ceremonies. But once it became a mass oath and spread to rural areas, it acquired local names such as "karibania" i.e. 'unifier', a name that was used in Central Nyandarua.³⁴ The local names were used so as to make the oath secret in every locality. For convenience, the oath will be referred to as the 'First Mau Mau Oath' or the 'Oath of Unity'.

The oath ceremony took place either in a clearing in the bush or in a house. The particular area where the ceremony took place has been referred to here as the arena. At the entrance into the arena, an arch was constructed. (see picture of the arch on next sheet). If the arena was in a house, the arch was constructed just inside the homestead gate. If the arena was in the bushes, the arch was constructed at the entrance into the clearing, a clearing which was surrounded by a fence. The cleared ground was little. An arch of this nature was regarded as an aspect of great ceremonial significance among the Kikuyu especially during the circumcision ceremony when the arch of similar nature was constructed at the entrance into the ceremonial homestead. All circumcision candidates passed through the arch before circumcision. In the same way, recipients of

the first Mau Mau oath passed through the arch.

The arch that was constructed in arenas of the first Mau Mau oath differed in height from place to place. When many people were to take the oath, and when the arena was large, an arch of about six or seven feet high was constructed. The width in either case was about four feet. On each side of the arch, a banana stem with its leaves acted as the supporting pole. The two poles were connected at the top with creeping plants like the bean plants and potato vines as well as creeping grasses. These creepers also acted as the roofing material of the arena. The roof of the arena and also of the arch also contained strips of goatskin such that the roofing was a kind of a net. Sugar-cane stems and arrow root stems were also planted on each side of the arch. It was the work of senior elders to prepare for and to instruct the builders of this arch, for it was they who know the materials to be used.³⁵

The floor of the arena was lined with intestines of goats, which were stretched to make seven lines. An oath taker crossed these seven lines on his way from the arch to the centre of the arena where the actual swearing took place. The wall surrounding the arena was made of dry banana leaves. But on the inside of the wall, a strip of goatskin was used to surround the place where the oath takers stood. At the centre of the arena, two pieces of meat were placed on green banana leaves. One of the pieces was the meat extracted from the chest of the goat, and the other was a piece extracted from the rear part of the goat, close to the goat's sex organs. In this case, the goat used

was a male goat, referred to as "thenge".

On the ground at the centre of the arena, a container was placed. In it, a mixture of the goat's blood, with soil, milk, sweet potatoes, bananas, yams and cereals, all of which were regarded as basic foods among the Kikuyu, were put. If the oath was being given to one person at a time, the container used was a half calabash. But if many people were taking the oath together, the container used was a trough made from a banana stem.

Before an oath taker passed through the arch, he first removed any kind of metallic objects that he had on his body, including money. At the entrance into the arena, he was met by the oath administrator who was dressed in long white robes like the ones which were worn by the pastors of some independent churches. Inside the arch also were guards who had swords. They stood outside the skin strip. Their work was to instruct the oath takers on where to stand or go.

Once the oath taker was in the arena, the administrator of the oath passed a necklace through his head so that the necklace rested on the oath taker's shoulders. The necklace was made of different types of grasses which were coiled around. With the necklace on, the recipient crossed seven lines of intestines slowly, one at a time. As he crossed the lines, he swore as he was directed by the oath administrator. After crossing the seventh line of intestines, the recipient reached the centre of the arena, where the other oath contents were placed. But when many people were taking the oath at the same time, they were

all made to swear with all the seven rows before finally crossing all the lines of intestines to the centre.

The arena of the oath was arranged in such a way that by facing the oath administrator, the oath takers were facing the direction of Mount Kenya. When the recipient and the administrator got to the centre of the arena, the administrator held the chest meat with his right hand and the rear meat with the left hand. He dictated each vow to the recipient, who repeated the vow after him. If many people were taking the oath together, they chorused the vow together. Then the administrator brought each piece of meat to the recipient's mouth, starting with the chest meat. The recipient bit each piece of meat, chewed it and swallowed it. This process was repeated for all the seven vows. Where more than one person was taking the oath, the administrator made them all bite each piece of meat after each vow, before proceeding to the next vow.

During the third round of swearing, the administrator lifted high the contents in the half calabash or trough and uttered words of blessings. If the contents were in a half calabash, he held this container with his left hand and handed it over to the recipient of the oath who welcomed the container with both hands. But if it was a trough, the administrator lifted it carefully with both hands and gave it to the line of recipients after he had blessed it. They all held it together in front of them. In both cases, the administrator stirred the contents with the two pieces of meat, now held together, with his right hand. He then dipped the pieces of meat into the reddish contents and then made the recipient sip the

liquid from the meat and swallow it. With each sip, the recipient repeated the same vows again. After all the vows had been repeated, the oath administrator took the container and passed it round the head or heads of the recipient(s) seven times, at the same time cursing all those who might contravene the vows.

To conclude the ceremony, the oath administrator dipped his pointing finger into the contents of the trough or half calabash, and marked a cross sign on the forehead of each recipient. Then he removed the grass necklace from the neck of the recipient. After this, the recipient was led by one of the guards into another enclosure or room at the back, so that he neither crossed back over the lines of intestines nor went back through the arch.

As shown above, the vows in this oath were dictated by the oath administrator while the recipient of the oath repeated after him. Various statements were used to introduce the vows in the oath. Some oath administrators began the vows as follows; "I speak the truth and swear before God and before this gathering that...." This was the most common manner of starting the vows. But some administrators introduced the vows as follows; "We had our lands, but they were taken away by force. We used to drink milk but nowadays we do not. We used to eat meat, but we no longer do so...." Then the vows would follow.

Each vow was concluded with a curse to the effect that,

If I do not do what I have sworn to do,

*May this oath kill me,
 May these foods loathe me,
 May God kill me.*

Here below is a list of the common vows that were uttered in the first Mau Mau oath. Though the phrasing of the vows differed from place to place, the message contained in them was the same. In most cases, each vow was elaborated very carefully, as can be seen in the first vow below.

1. "If I, so and so, ever see a person of this movement, the movement that is preparing to fight for land and freedom, if I ever see him chased by the enemy, and if he happens to pass near me, if I either scream at him or alert anybody that I have seen him, may this oath kill me, may these foods loathe me, may God kill me."
2. "If I am ever sent anywhere for the sake of this movement, and I refuse to go, may this oath kill me, may these foods loathe me, may God kill me."
3. "If I am called, whether in the daytime or at night, and I refuse to respond, may this oath kill me, may these foods loathe me, may God kill me."
4. "If I ever turn against this movement, or reveal its secrets to anybody, or if I ever spy on any one of us, may this oath kill me, may these foods loathe me, may God kill me."
5. "If I ever sell land to the enemy or to any white man, may this oath kill me, may these foods loathe me, may God kill me."
6. "If I am met by a member of this movement who is in need of help, and if there is anything

I can do to help him, and I refuse to do so, may this oath kill me, may these foods loathe me, may God kill me."

7. "If I refuse to contribute for this movement, with money, food or clothing, if I have them and I refuse to part with them, may this oath kill me, may these foods loathe me, may God kill me."

Each recipient swore with the above vows three times in the same ceremony. A person swore with the vows as he crossed the seven lines of intestines. He swore with the vows as he bit at the two pieces of meat, and he did the same as he sipped the contents in the half calabash or trough. It was common as shown above that the vows were spoken in different ways but the message in the vows was the same. Kaggia records correctly that the oath "vowed unity, a readiness to do anything for the advancement of the movement, never to sell land, and the brotherhood of all the members."³⁶

Some remarks can be made with regard to the nature of the above oath, especially in its relationship to the oaths of KCA and to those prevalent in the traditional Kikuyu society.

Unlike the second KCA oath and the traditional oaths, the first Mau Mau oath was administered to women and children. Further, we note that the first Mau Mau oath was forced on all persons who were called upon, but who refused to take it. The main reasons behind each of the two variations present in the first Mau Mau oath have been explained with some detail at the start of this chapter.

Unlike the KCA oath and the traditional Kikuyu oaths, the oath taker in the first Mau Mau oath was required to remove all metallic objects on his body whose origin was thought to be European. In other words, all metallic objects that had come with the white men were not allowed in this oath. Shoes which were made with nails were removed. The reasons given for this was that these things were not traditionally used by the Kikuyu and that they were brought to us only for decorating our bodies. This idea was expanded to show that Africans had their traditional decorations which were abused by the white men.³⁷ But this reason is hardly convincing. We should note that in traditional society, there were many other goods, some of them metallic, that the Kikuyu used e.g. beads. Some of these were worn even when a traditional oath was being administered. Some of these goods had come to the Kikuyu through their trade with their neighbours, especially the Kamba. And these goods which the Kikuyu had previously owned were not prohibited in the first Mau Mau oath. Secondly, the reason given above is not convincing enough because some other foreign materials that had been brought by the white men were not prohibited in the oath. These included clothes. Though a man could not take the oath with money in his pockets, we note that the oath administrators required the oath taker to contribute some money in the end. But it should be understood that these goods were removed for the purpose of the ceremony only. The writer has not come across any traditional

Kikuyu ceremony where foreign goods were forbidden. But as one diviner-doctor argued, "The European goods were not fit to be in our oath ceremony because we were taking the oath to fight against the owners of those things. We had our things to use."³⁸ It can be said here that in a complex subject as the one of Mau Mau, there are some things that will remain understood. The removal of some metallic objects during an oath ceremony is probably one of them.

The grass necklace which was placed on the shoulders of the recipient was of little significance in this oath. There was not one activity which was performed by using the necklace in the oath. The necklace was not present in the KCA oaths but a similar necklace was present in the traditional oath of soil as seen in chapter three.³⁹ In this traditional oath, the grass necklace was connected to a piece of the chestbone in such a way that the bone formed a part of the necklace. The participant in the oath was asked to break the bone while at the same time cursing himself. By breaking the bone, the oath taker removed the necklace because the bone was a part of that necklace. But such an activity was not present in the first Mau Mau oath and the necklace used in the oath had no chestbone to be broken. We also observe here that the necklace was used when only one man was taking the oath. When many people were taking the oath together, they did not wear any necklace.

Like some of the traditional and KCA oaths, the first Mau Mau oath contained foods that were basic in

traditional Kikuyu society. In traditional and KCA oaths, these foods acted as symbols of swearing with. In the first Mau Mau oath, a person swore while symbolically feeding on the foods. He cursed himself to the effect that, "If I disobey these vows, may these foods loathe me." In traditional oaths, there was a belief that if a person swore falsely and at the same time used these foods as a symbol in the oath, these foods would either kill him or cause serious sickness to him because they are the foods that he had been eating and that he would continue eating. Some of the people who took Mau Mau oaths stated that they believed that swearing falsely with the food as a symbol would bring "thahu" to them, which would in turn lead to serious misfortune or even death.⁴⁰ In the first Mau Mau oath however, more foods were included than in any other former oaths. Milk from a cow was a new element in the Mau Mau oath. A new dimension which was present in the first Mau Mau oath was that the people who took the oath were assured that the foods they were eating as symbols were the foods that the Kikuyu had been deprived of as a result of colonisation. These foods were their right and the oath asked them to be committed to the fight for this right. Those who may not have believed that the foods in the oath would loathe them if they contravened the vows, were assured that the cause of the fight was just and that false swearing or contravening an oath taken for a just cause was wrong. This was the stand taken by some Christians, as one of them stated, "I believed the cause was just and that the oath was intended for a just cause. The foods did

not matter to me."⁴¹

The significance of the arch has been dealt with in reference to the second KCA oath. It was indicated that a similar arch was present in the traditional Kikuyu circumcision ceremony. But the arch in the first Mau Mau oath had more elements than the arch in the KCA oath. Potato vines and a strip of the goat's skin were not there in the arch of the second KCA oath, but they were there in the arch of the first Mau Mau oath. In emphasizing the importance of the arch, one informant argued that, "the arch in the Mau Mau oath was an indication that the arena was a ceremonial ground in which only members of the movement were allowed in. No person who passed through the arch refused to take the oath and survived."⁴² In the above sense, passing through the arch symbolised a passage which welcomed a person into a new society.

We should note here that the practice of planting banana stems and arrowroot stems still persists today. People plant them at the entrance to the places where wedding ceremonies or other public functions are taking place. However, they are mainly planted today for decorative purposes and also to act as a sign to everyone that an important ceremony is going on there.

There was more usage of the auspicious number seven in this oath than in any other oath covered here so far. The lines of intestines which the oattakers crossed were seven. Each recipient of the oath swore with seven vows. The contents of the oath were passed round the recipient's head seven times. We saw in chapter three that

the more activities an oath contained in which the use of the number 'seven' was involved, the more effective was the oath believed to be. In reference to all the oaths, one oath administrator explained that "the number 'seven' was a Kiluya sign of misfortune. The presence of the number in the oath emphasized the seriousness of the curse upon the person who contravened the oath."⁴³ The significance of this number will be elaborated further in the second Mau Mau oath where most of the activities were performed seven times.

The trough in the above Mau Mau oath was a modification of the half calabash which was used in the first phase of the second KCA oath. The trough used in the second phase of the second KCA oath, as well as in the traditional soil oath quoted in chapter three, was shorter than the one used in the first Mau Mau oath. The modification of the trough in the first Mau Mau oath was done so as to allow more people to take the oath at the same time by queuing along the trough. We shall see in the next chapter that the big trough was not used in the second Mau Mau oath, but that instead, the half calabash was again used. This was because the second Mau Mau oath was taken by one person at a time.

The act of facing Mount Kenya was observed during the oath-taking ceremony in the first days of the first Mau Mau oath. This was not the case with either the traditional oaths or the KCA oaths. The act itself was fully observed during traditional prayers and other ceremonies to God in the Kiluya society. In the Mau Mau oath ceremony, there

was a prayer to God by the administrator. He asked God to bless the people in the ceremony and to help them remain committed. The oath administrator did not speak the prayer loudly. During the ceremony, the people faced Mount Kenya as an expression of their attitude to God in prayer.⁴⁴ This attitude was also expressed in almost all Mau Mau prayers and other ceremonies in which they faced Mount Kenya.

The chest meat used in the above oath was similar to that which was used in the second KCA oath. In both oaths, part of the meat was first eaten by recipients of the oath while the other part was used like a spoon to feed them with the contents of the oath. In some traditional oaths, a similar meat was used. In the first Mau Mau oath however, the chest meat was used together with the tail meat (githita) which was cut from the back of the goat, near its tail. In the second Mau Mau oath, it will be seen that the chest meat and the 'tail meat' were used as one combined piece of meat which was referred to as the 'chest meat' (nyama ya githuri). It is in the second Mau Mau oath that the full significance of the chest can be understood.

In the last chapter, an attempt was made to show the meaning of the cross sign when it was used in an oath. In the second KCA oath, the sign was marked with a brush made from the "mugere" plant. But in the first Mau Mau oath, it was marked by the administrator with his finger. We saw in the last chapter that the cross sign was marked as a conclusion of the ceremony in the second KCA oath. But in the first Mau Mau oath, the cross sign was at times

used as a symbol of initiation into the movement. It was used to signify that the person had gone through all the rituals. Small children who could not go through the whole oathing ceremony were marked with the cross sign alone as an indication that they too were members of the movement. Sleeping children were also similarly marked. Mothers who took the oath when they were pregnant had the cross sign marked on their naked stomachs as a sign that even the unborn ones had been oathed. As explained in the last chapter, the sign used in the oaths was not meant to signify a christian symbol but a traditional kikuyu symbol. In the Mau Mau movement, it was used in the oaths as a sign of initiation. This will be elaborated in the last chapter.

The method of swearing in the first Mau Mau oath was very much similar to that of KCA and traditional oaths. But in the Mau Mau oath, the vows were strictly seven. The vows in the first Mau Mau oath show that the recipient of the oath was expected to be a supporter of the movement. The vows in the oath also show that the recipient did not qualify as a fighter after taking this oath. He could not perform harmful acts in the name of the movement. The first oath made a person a passive supporter of the movement. The vows also prohibited him from revealing the secrets of the movement. In the second Mau Mau oath, the vows were intended to make the recipient a committed fighter who could be sent anywhere to do anything for the sake of the movement.

A Variation of the First Mau Mau Oath

When the state of emergency was declared in 1952, many people were arrested and imprisoned. Some of those who went to prison had not taken the first Mau Mau oath. It was found hard for the people who had taken the oath to identify such un oathed people and to give them the oath of unity in jail. The oath that was given in jails was a simple variation of the first Mau Mau oath. One person described the jail form of the oath as follows:

In jail, we had a secret committee in each dormitory. It was the work of this committee to interview each newcomer and to know whether he had taken the oath or not. If he had not, he was made to take the oath. The interview started with the question, "who are you"? Those who had taken the oath normally replied correctly, "I am a Kikuyu Karing'a, and I was circumcised in the home of such and such an elder." Those who had not taken the oath replied by giving their actual names.

In this oath, we used the beef which we were given to cook for our food. If food was cooked for us, we refused to eat it so that we would be allowed to cook for ourselves. We mixed the beef with soil, milk and other foods as well as wild fruits like the brambles. These comprised the contents of the oath. We put the contents into carefully prepared banana barks which were dry. There was no actual arena for the oath. The same contents were used to oathe the people in all the dormitories. The vows in our oath were similar to those of the Mau Mau oath. We called the oath "muuma wa ng'ombe", i.e. 'oath of beef'.⁴⁵

It is clear from the above description that the oath arose out of the need to oath people in jails where the actual contents of the first Mau Mau oath were not available and where there was no security. Another informant explained the reason for the oath as follows:

We gave the oath in jails so as to obey the vows with which we had sworn in the "B Batuni" oath to the effect that "we shall never eat, or stay together, with a person who has not taken the oath." The oath that we gave in jail freed us from the above curse and also united us all together. But we gave them the oath in jails with the hope that we shall give them the proper oath when our jail terms ended. All those who left jail early were served with letters to take to their local oathing centres. In the letters, we requested local administrators to give them a proper oath. ⁴⁶

It should however be stated here that few people went to jail without having taken the first Mau Mau oath. Also, few people, if any, refused to take the oath in jail and survived. Those who refused to take it were killed on the same night secretly. A man was choked with many blankets until he died. At such times, all the people in the halls would sing loudly so that the guards outside would not detect what was happening. The victim was then covered carefully in his bed. It was hard to detect the killer because the corpse had no marks on it.

Oath Cleansing Ceremonies

The first Mau Mau oath leaked to the government at an early period and the government adopted strong measures

to overcome the effects of the oath on the people. In the government circles, there was a clear understanding that the oaths used by the Mau Mau were considered by many people as highly ceremonial. The measures that the government adopted were based on advices of people like L.S.B. Leakey who was regarded as an expert in Native Affairs. He suggested to the government that the oaths could only be overcome by performing cleansing ceremonies on the oathed persons.⁴⁷ Leakey also suggested that the christian churches be used to persuade the people to accept christianity on the basis that this would free them from the effects of the oaths they had taken.

In line with these advices, the government also started to use traditional cursing ceremonies in which a "thenge" was beaten in a ceremony of cursing the Mau Mau. It should be noted here that though we have few details of these ceremonies, nonetheless we are able to understand through them that the government was aware that traditional Kikuyu ceremonies were still adhered to by the Kikuyu, at the time of the Mau Mau movement.

While the government was conducting cleansing ceremonies, the churches were preaching to all its members who were suspected of having taken the Mau Mau oaths. Wanyoike records a declaration of loyalty which was recited in the church as follows:

I declare before God and these people: I whole heartedly say that I shall never have any connection with the Mau Mau or any other association which may be against Her Majesty's Government and the good order of the country,

*or which may stand against the country. I shall remain true to this declaration and pray that God may help me to maintain it.*⁴⁸

Many of the people who were arrested for being Mau Mau refused to reveal the Mau Mau oaths because they feared the effects of the oath, and because they also feared that they would be killed by the Mau Mau. The government held cleansing ceremonies on all who refused to reveal the oaths for fear of its effect. It will be seen here that the people's response to these ceremonies differed.

The cleansing ceremonies were conducted by the traditional Kikuyu diviner-doctors whom the government employed for that work. They acquired the name 'On Her Majesty's Witchdoctors.'⁴⁹ But due to their activities against Mau Mau, these traditional diviner-doctors became one target of the Mau Mau. Many had their tools of work confiscated at that time. Their traditional services were prohibited by the Mau Mau in the rural areas. But there were some traditional diviner-doctors who remained loyal to the movement. Such loyal ones were used in the forest to purify the Mau Mau from any "thahu" they may have received and were also used as officiators in some ceremonies.⁵⁰ Others were used to bless the hideouts where some fighters lodged, and even to supply some fighters with protective charms.⁵¹ But on the whole, there was a decrease in the traditional practices of the diviner-doctors during the Mau Mau war. In their place, a class of seers and prophets arose, whose role in the Mau Mau war was paramount. Prophecy in the Mau Mau movement is a strong

religious aspect, but we cannot go deep into it here for lack of space.

Examples of oathcleansing ceremonies are hard to come across because most people who were cleansed cannot freely admit that they were cleansed. Wachanga has, however, given us one example in brief.⁵² He records simply that the ceremony was conducted by the traditional Kikuyu diviner-doctors and that the diviner-doctors used their traditional tools of work to do so (miano). They also used cleansing water which was extracted from herbs like arrowroots and contained in leaves of bananas. The diviner-doctor told the person who was being cleansed that if he had taken a Mau Mau oath, the oath would go out of his 'mind and out of his 'heart'. The diviner-doctor then asked the cleansed person to confess the oath.

People reacted differently to both the christian and the traditional methods of cleansing that were used. Some of the people refused to be cleansed at all. Others refused to reveal the oaths. Others agreed to be purified and even to reveal the oaths. Others still agreed to be purified, but they refused to reveal the oaths correctly. As one informant declared, "The confessions were not correct. We had our own appointed teachers who showed the local women what to say if they were asked to reveal the oaths."⁵³ Karari himself admits that when he was arrested, he was not cleansed, and that instead, he swore with the Bible as a christian, that he was not a Mau Mau.⁵⁴ Some of the people who were cleansed remained loyal to the movement.⁵⁵

We then note that the measures which were taken were not completely successful in making the people reveal the oaths. Another author has commented in general on the futility of some of the cleansing ceremonies, with reference to both the traditional and the Mau Mau oaths:

*Once taken, it followed that an oath was irrevocable. There was no possibility of mental reservation or 'de-oathing' ceremonies, the only effect of which was to confuse the people with one further variety of fear. Certainly, few felt that the ceremonies absolved them and their families from the evils to follow the renunciation of their original oath.*⁵⁶

It should also be noted that whereas some people revealed the oaths just to escape government punishment, others revealed with the belief that Jesus could overcome all guilt.

It should be made clear here that those who agreed to be purified and to confess the oaths correctly endangered their lives for they were hunted down by the Mau Mau. If they were caught, attempts were made to give them another oath, but this time, they were oathed with a different variation of the same oath that they had confessed. In the new version of the oath, more vows and more paraphernalia were included. In the new version of the oath, for example, a person was made to swear to the effect that he would never be cleansed again. If a cleansed person, however, refused to take another oath, he was killed by the Mau Mau. On the other hand, the government either killed or imprisoned some of the people who refused to reveal the oaths. The safest way was for a person to agree to reveal the oath

but instead, do it incorrectly. It was, however, hard for a person to conceal his cleansing because cleansing ceremonies took place in public and in broad daylight.⁵⁷

The above efforts by both government and the churches in an attempt to defeat the Mau Mau movement had several major repercussions for the movement. We note that it was partly due to these measures that the Mau Mau movement involved itself with some atrocious activities directed to the people who obeyed the government measures against the oath. Some effects of the cleansing and confession ceremonies will be briefly outlined below.

First, the Mau Mau felt a need to warn all those people who had confessed the oaths, as well as all those who had become loyalists. The warning was in form of a curse which was conducted in the nature of the traditional cursing ceremony cited in chapter three. But instead of beating the "thenge" in the process of cursing, the Mau Mau mutilated an animal like a dog or cat and hung it on trees or posts where the enemy or victim would easily see it. Here below is a description of such a practice:

We decided to 'beat the "thenge" against all those people who had confessed our secrets to the government. Each Mau Mau leader of a ridge was sent to go and kill a cat or a dog, which we referred to as "thenge" in the ceremony, and to mount it by hanging it on a tall post. The animal was also mainly an animal of ill luck in our society. More than one animal could be hung on the same post. Attached to the same post was a warning written

in big red letters to the effect that, "whoever is going round preaching that we have a plan of freeing our country from slavery by chasing away or killing the white man; and in so doing degrading and endangering our movement of unity, may this "thenge" kill him. May he also know that we know who he is and that we are able to kill him."⁵⁸

From the above example, it is easy to understand why many of the people who revealed Mau Mau oaths turned to the government for protection, and in so doing, became the famous loyalists.(kamatimu). People did not stop revealing the oaths however despite warnings of the above nature.

Another effect of the government measures was that the Mau Mau completely lost hope of ever achieving their goal in a kind of a coup de' etat. They started to think more in terms of a long term war. This in turn led to the need for oathing more people with the oath of war, the "B Batuni oath". Prior to the oath cleansings, only few people had taken this second oath. After public confessions had increased, it was felt that a large military force was required, and the oath of recruitment was hence accelerated. Many restrictions which had been placed on the second oath were removed. Further, new versions of the confessed oaths were devised, and the confessed people were re-oathed.

Finally, the confessions of the first Mau Mau oath accelerated the formation of groups that became a very important feature of the Mau Mau movement. All those people

who were mentioned to the government in connection with the giving or taking of oaths started to hide in the local bushes during the day and only return to their homes in the nights. They returned home at nights so as to oathe more people. While in the local bushes, they started to train themselves on the conduct of guerilla warfare. When the government started hunting them down, they retreated away from the local bushes and started entering the forests. Some of the earliest forest entrants included the two famous Mau Mau leaders, Kimathi and Mathenge. The forest entrants started spending more and more of their times in the forests, only coming to the reserves to collect food and other necessities. These people became the true forest fighters. But others continued to hide in the local bushes as well as in marshy swamps. These became the 'hidiers', called "komerera". Both of the above groups depended very much on the support of the rural masses, for food and other essentials. These rural masses, comprising mainly of children and women, constituted the 'Passive Wing System'. However, the formation of these groups was more complicated than this.

With the spread of the first Mau Mau oath, Mau Mau as a movement acquired a mass following, achieving a greater unity than had ever been achieved by any other political association in Colonial Kenya. Once war was eminent, the oath of war, which had for some time co-existed with the oath of unity, was given to more people. To this second oath we now turn.

FOOTNOTES

1. Barnett and Njama, Mau Mau From Within, p.53ff.
2. Ibid. p.353.
3. Leakey, L.S.B., Defeating Mau Mau, p.77, Corfield, F.D., Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau, p.168.
4. Kamau Wang'ondy, Interview, 28.10.76.
5. Ibid.
6. E.G. Barnett and Njama, op.cit., p.56ff.
7. See details of rites of passage in Kabetu, M.N. Kirira Kia Ugikuyu, p.11ff; 24ff.
8. Muchunu Gachuki, Interview, 25.12.76.
9. Mugo Ngobia, Interview, 21.11.76.
10. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 7.9.76.
11. Rosberg and Nottingham, The Myth of Mau Mau, p.259.
12. For references to the Olenguruone settlement, See Kenya National Archives, File Nos. KNA/PC/CP.9/36/2 (1943-1951); KNA/LND/17; LND/29; Rosberg and Nottingham have also recorded the details of the settlement, op.cit. pp.254-259.
13. In the Mau Mau song "pray on, beseech Truly"(Hoyai ma, thaithai ma). See the Olenguruone songs in Appendix numbers 10, 12, 13.
14. Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit., p.253.
15. Ibid. p.259.
16. See the reference to Olenguruone oath by Whittier, R., The Swords of Kirinyaga, p.4.
17. Elsie Mukami Kimathi, Interview, 22.11.76.
18. Muchunu Gachuki, op.cit., interviews.
19. Kariuki, J.M., Mau Mau Detainee, p. 20. The above two informants also support this.
20. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, Sept. - Dec. 1976.
21. The story of the rule of women and their overthrowal by men has been cited by informants including Njoroge Kagunda, Kamau Wang'ondy and Mukami Kimathi. Kenyatta also records the rule of women, Facing Mount Kenya, pp.6-8.
22. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 7.9.76.

23. Wamweya, J., Freedom Fighter, Nairobi: EAPH, 1971, p.53.
24. Interviews of (a) Macharia Gicingiri, 23.12.76; (b) Joseph Kariuki, 28.10.76; (c) Mugo Ngobia, 28.10.76; (d) Chege Gathogo, 28.10.76; (e) Macharia Kirubi, 28.10.76; (f) Richard Githaiga, 15.1.77 (g) Wambui Njau, 28.10.76; (h) Mukuhi Njoroge, 28.10.76; (i) Benson Muchiri, 20.8.76.
25. Kamau Wang'ondou, Nyandarua Interview, 22.10.76.
26. David Kang'ori, Murang'a Interview, Feb. 1977.
27. Kaggia, B., Roots of Freedom, p.65.
28. Wamweya, J., op.cit., p.521.
29. Benson Muchiri, Interview, 20.8.76. The couple mentioned here are Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Wanjau of Gitugi Village, Murang'a.
30. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 7.9.76.
31. Leaky, L.S.B., records this intention, Defeating Mau Mau, p.107.
32. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, op.cit., David Kang'ori, Interview, op.cit.
33. Delf, G., Jomo Kenyatta, pp.150-151 (1947-1948); Venys L. op.cit., p.4 (1948); Corfield, op.cit., pp.77-80 (1950).
34. Chege Gathogo, Interviews, op.cit.
35. This description of the arena was made by Kamau Wang'ondou, Interviews, op.cit.
36. Kaggia, B., op.cit., p.107; The vows presented here in this oath are extracted from interviews especially in Nyandarua and Nyeri.
37. Richard Githaiga, Interview; Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 7.9.76.
38. Jonah Kabae, Interview, Murang'a, April 1977.
39. See "Muuma oath ceremony" recorded here in chapter three.
40. This belief was expressed by many informants, including Mukami Kimathi, Muthoni Njau, Chege Gathogo, Benson Muchiri and Kamau Wang'ondou.
41. Reverend Hesbon Mwangi, Interview by Wanjiru Tiara, May 1977.

42. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 28.10.76.
43. Muchunu Gachuki, Interviews, op.cit.
44. Ibid.
45. Benson Muchiri, Interview, 28.8.76.
46. Kamau Wang'ondy, Interview, 28.10.76.
47. Leakey, L.S.B., Defeating Mau Mau, pp.83-85.
48. Wanyoike, E.N., An African Pastor, p.195.
49. Venys, op.cit. p.29.
50. Barnett and Njama, op.cit., p.233.
51. Jonah Kabae used to do this, Interviews, April, 1977.
52. Whittier, R., op.cit., p.14. Further references on cleansing, see Kenya National Archives, File No. KNA/DC/KBU/1/43; p.1-4.
53. Kariuki Joseph, Interview, 28.10.76.
54. Barnett, op.cit., p.136.
55. Ibid., also notes this point.
56. Gatheru, Mugo, Child of Two Worlds, New York, 1965, p.177. However, Mugo does not consider the fact that in traditional Kikuyu society, a cleansing ceremony could free a victim from the effects of an oath, if the victim changed his mind and pleaded guilty after he had taken the oath.
57. Leakey, L.S.B., Defeating Mau Mau, p.99.
58. Muchunu Gachuki, op.cit., interviews.

THE SECOND MAU MAU OATH: "B BATUNI" OR "NGERO OATH"

Research findings reveal that the second Mau Mau oath started much earlier than the date recorded by some authors. George Delf dates the oath in the middle of 1952, just before the arrest of some KAU leaders like Kenyatta.¹ Rosberg and Nottingham also record that the oath was brought into Kiambu in the middle of 1952, "by the dispossessed of the Rift Valley", and the two authors saw some relationship between the occurrence of the Lari² massacre and the start of the "B Batuni" oath.³ Rosberg and Nottingham partly attribute the start of the oath to the people who came back to Kikuyuland from the Rift Valley. Most of these people had come from the Olenguruone Settlement. But although the Olenguruone people may have had a hand in the starting of the oath, nonetheless they were not the actual formulators and administrators of that oath. This view is supported by various reasons.

First, if we argue that the Rift Valley people started the oath on their arrival from the Rift Valley, then it means that the oath started much earlier than 1952, because the people started to come back home as early as 1946. Secondly, we saw in the last chapter that the Olenguruone people did not have an oath of war like "B Batuni", and that what they had was an oath of unity and loyalty. The Olenguruone oath was much similar to both the second KCA oath and the first Mau Mau oath. It is hardly likely then that these people were the originators of the second Mau Mau oath as has been suggested by Rosberg and

Nottingham.

An earlier date for the second Mau Mau oath is most likely in view of the fact that by 1952, many people had entered into the forest as fighters and they had already taken the "B Batuni" oath. By 1952, the "B Batuni" oath had been opened to the public. But the Mau Mau leaders, especially those of KAU and KCA, had taken the oath much earlier.

Oral evidence supports the idea that the oath was in existence since 1948, and that before 1950, the oath was only being given to a few people, mainly leaders who were expected to recruit the fighters. Also, many Mau Mau claim that they took the oath much earlier than 1952. Njoroge Kagunda claims he took the oath in 1948, Muchunu Gachuki took it in 1949, while Kimathi, his wife, and General Mathenge had all taken the oath by 1950.⁴ The above information is correct if we consider the fact that Njoroge himself was arrested and detained as an agitator at the end of 1948 and by then he had already taken the second Mau Mau oath. Secondly, we found out in chapter two that the name Mau Mau was started due to the evidence that was related to the "B Batuni" oath ceremony, and we saw that this particular ceremony had taken place in about 1948. We should note further that before 1950, the oath was in existence, and at that time, the oath was only being given to those selected people who were expected to carry out grievous harm (ngero) and disasters upon the white men. This was one initial aim of the oath. In other words, all those people who were expected to take

part in the 'coup de' etat' on the 'Day of Long Swords', had been given the "B Batuni" oath. The oath was intended to strengthen their commitment to the struggle. It can then be concluded that the second Mau Mau oath was most probably in use by 1948, but that it became an oath of many people in 1950 when the decision of a war was taken by the Mau Mau leaders, after they found out that the target of a one day 'coup' had been discovered by the government. It was the failure of this target that led the Mau Mau to decide on a long war and to give the oath of war to many more people.

The "B Batuni" oath was an oath of war, and was only given to those people who could fight. The oath was at first given to all those people who had contacts with the whites, including the clerks, cooks, farm labourers and other employees. The idea was that these people would massacre as many whites as possible in a single coup. All the people who took this oath were permitted to perform aggressive acts and to effect grievous harm (ngero) upon the enemy, hence the oath was also called "ngero oath". No person who had not taken this oath was allowed to perform these "ngero" in the name of the liberation movement.

But we should note here that after 1950, the oath was also given to all those people who were expected to enter the forest as fighters. The oath became one of recruiting forest fighters, and no person was allowed to enter the forest or to engage in the war in any way if he had not taken this oath. Further, all those people whom the forest fighters had contacts with at home were also

oathed, including food suppliers and porters. In the early years of the war, the oath was only given to those people who could fight, and these were between twenty and thirty years of age. Younger and older people were not expected to fight. No two brothers were allowed to enter the forest together. Later on, however, when more fighters were needed, and when dangers of staying in the reserves increased, these restrictions were dropped. Older men and even young boys were allowed to join the forest fighters, and they were given the "B Batuni" oath.

The need for more fighters was at one time so acute that the Mau Mau even asked local leaders to circumcise young boys and send them into the forest. As one person explained,"

*"We measured the height of the boys with a rifle. If he was as tall as the rifle, we sent him for circumcision after which he took the Mau Mau oath of war and entered the forest. No uncircumcised person could be allowed into the forest. All the persons who got circumcised at this time acquired the agegrade name of 'Riika Ria Rifle' (The Rifle Agegrade)."*⁵

The name that was used for the oath in the forest was "muuma wa ageri ngero", (oath for the people who would perform acts of grievous harm). Tawaya calls it the 'oath of the perpetrators of crime',⁶ but the word crime is not the best translation of "ngero". In this study, "ngero" has been translated as 'grievous harm', which also is a very weak translation. For the Mau Mau, "ngero" included all the activities that were performed against the enemy,

including killing. But mainly in the rural areas, the name used for the oath was "B Batuni". "Batuni" was the Kikuyu version of the word 'platoon', or 'Batallion'. The letter 'B' was inserted in the name to signify that this oath was the second Mau Mau oath, hence the first oath could be called 'A'.⁷ Those who took the second Mau Mau oath were first required to have taken the first oath.

The "B Batuni" oath was in fact the oath that greatly helped to recruit and to organise fighting batalions in the Mau Mau war. It was this oath that was being taken in the ceremony from which the name Mau Mau was coined. It was the highest form of Mau Mau oaths, as one informant explained:

*"B Batuni" came to mean Mau Mau and Mau Mau was defined in terms of the oath. No person was allowed to perform the acts that Mau Mau performed, if he had not taken the oath. And we had sworn to the effect that we would kill all those people who had taken this oath, and yet refused to perform the acts that we planned.*⁸

The oath was therefore regarded as a strong measure of initiating and recruiting the fighters. In the ceremony, the function of the oath was emphasized by the very first statement which the oath administrator uttered to the recipient of the oath, i.e. "Uratonya B Batuni, kiama kia ageri ngero" (You are now entering "B Batuni", the council of the people whose work is to perform acts of grievous harm).

The actual arena where the oath ceremony took place was called "kiambo", (set up). The arena was constructed

in the same manner as that of the first Mau Mau oath. But at most ceremonies of the "B Batuni" oath, the lines of intestines that were present at the arena of the first oath were excluded, and in their place, strips of goat skin (called "ngwaro") were used. The strips were used to surround the arena and they were also tied loosely around each oath taker from his waist to his neck. The strips were also spread across the roof of the arena so that they made part of the network of the roofing materials. The strips were also connected to the materials that made part of the arch at the entrance of the arena.

The arch that was used in this ceremony was similar to the one that was used in the first oath. It should be stated again here that the people who took this second oath were people who had taken the first oath, and in most cases, they knew that they were going to take another oath. Most people did not know that they were going to take an oath when they were called to take the first Mau Mau oath as we have seen in the last chapter. However, those people who were called to take the first Mau Mau oath later on during the war had a rough idea that they were going to take the oath. Such people had heard through rumours about the oaths. To a person who had not heard about the oaths before, the sight of the arch at the entrance to the arena was terrifying.

In most cases, the animal that was used for the ceremony in the second Mau Mau oath was the "thenge". No colour was discriminated against, as in traditional Kikuyu ceremonies in which only an animal of one colour could be

used. In some Mau Mau oath ceremonies, however, a ram was referred to as "thenge". Whichever of the two animals was used, it had to be mature and healthy, and it had to be a male.

The animal was slaughtered at some distance away from the site chosen for the arena. It was slaughtered by elders who had a standing experience in slaughtering. Blood from the animal was collected in a half calabash. The skin of the goat was cut into strips, (ngwaro). The chest meat of the goat was carefully removed. The "ngata" of the goat as well as its eyes were also removed. The rest of the meat was eaten on the spot.

It should be understood here that the chest meat referred to above (nyama ya githuri) was of some special significance to the ceremony. The meat was a thin strip whose upper part consisted of the tongue of the goat. The strip ran down the front side of the goat. The neck muscles did not form part of the chest meat. The meat ran down and broadened at the chest of the goat where it included strips of meat from the two 'shoulders' of the goat. The stomach muscles of the goat were not included, but the muscle just outside the stomach wall was included. No bone was included in the meat. Then the strip was removed as far down as the goats' testicles which formed the lowest part of the meat. The whole piece of meat was referred to as 'chest meat'. At times the strip of meat used was narrower than the one described above, especially if the meat had been used for many ceremonies, in which case it had shrunk.

A hole was made at the lower part of the meat, just above the goat's testicles. The person taking the oath fixed his penis into this hole so that the goat's testicles fell downwards just on top of his own. Then the man held the rest of the meat on the front part of his body up to the neck with the shoulder strips of the meat hanging back over his shoulders in such a way that he seemed to 'wear' the strip of meat. After the recipient of the oath had put on the strip of meat to swear with, he was warned by the oath administrator to the effect that, "You are now entering "B Batuni", the council of the people who perform acts of grievous harm". A cross sign was then marked on his face by the oath administrator who used a "mugere" brush and the contents in the half calabash. Various types of Kikuyu foods made part of the contents in the half calabash. After putting on the chest meat, the recipient of the oath, now at the centre of the arena, was made to sit on a stool, with his legs wide apart. He was naked, and he faced in the direction of Mount Kenya. In describing the chest meat, Wamweya states that he was "handed a strip of meat two feet in length and two inches in breadth with a slit near the lower end."⁹

In swearing, a man bit at the part of the chest meat just next to his mouth, and this is the part of the goat which the Kikuyu refer to as "ikengeto". It is a fatty piece of meat. For each vow a person swore with, he bit the meat once, chewed it and swallowed. It should be pointed out here that in an oath ceremony, all the recipients of the oath used the same chest meat, because each

person took the oath alone.

When women were taking the above oath, a similar chest meat was used, But the meat that the women used had two more holes made on the upper part of it in such a way that a woman fixed her breasts into these holes. The lower part of the meat was passed between her feet such that she sat on part of the meat when taking the oath. When women were taking the oath, the person who administered the oath was a man, but the guards were mainly women.

Some of the contents which were put into a half calabash were also used in the ceremony. The contents were placed on the front right side of the oath taker, but within reach of his right hand. In the half calabash, the basic foods of the Kikuyu, including blood, milk, roots and cereals were mixed together to form a reddish brown mixture. As one informant argued, the foods that the Kikuyu had not been using were not included here because "other peoples' foods would not have been effective for we did not believe that they would affect us if we swore with them. We used the foods that our people had eaten for long and which they continued to eat."¹⁰

It was the contents in the half calabash that the oath taker stirred seven times for each vow. He concluded the vow by sipping some of the contents from a "augere" stick which he was using for stirring. This was not the case in the first Mau Mau oath whereby those who took the oath sipped the contents from the stick which was held by the administrator. After a person had used the chest meat and the half calabash contents in swearing, he then turned

to the "ngata" of the goat.

As it was mentioned in chapter three, the "ngata" is a small roundish bone at the back of the neck. A hole runs through its centre. The head of the goat was first removed before the bone could be removed. In the ceremony, the bone was placed on two pegs in front of the oath taker. It was tied to the two sticks in a slanting position such that the hole faced the oath taker. In swearing, a person passed a "mugere" stick through the hole of the "ngata" and he did this seven times for each vow, such that the end of the vow coincided with the seventh time in which the "mugere" stick was passed through the "ngata". A different "mugere" stick was used for each vow, and each stick was pushed through to the other side of the hole at the end of the vow. However, cases have been reported of some oath administrators who made the oath recipients to place their penis in the hole of the "ngata" when swearing, but such cases were rare.¹¹ After a person had used the "ngata" in swearing, he turned to the eye of the goat.

The goat's eye was placed near the "ngata" and was mounted on a sharp stick which was planted on the ground. In swearing with the eye of the goat, the oath taker used seven sharp thorns made from "mugere" sticks. With each vow concluded, the oath taker pricked the eye of the goat once, and he did this slightly so as not to pierce the eye completely. He put aside the thorn and took another one. He repeated the process for six vows.

But with the conclusion of the seventh and last vow, he pierced through the eye and concluded all the vows with a final cursing statement, "May this oath kill me. If I disobey these vows, may I be pierced like this (ndiroturika uu)".

There is no reason to doubt that more symbols and rituals were used in this oath, like those in the oath that Barnett records.¹² But the chest meat, the half calabash contents, the "ngata" and the eye of the goat were the most commonly used symbols in the "B Batuni" oath. In concluding the ceremony, the administrator took a "mugere" stick, stirred the contents in the half calabash with it, and marked a cross sign on the forehead of the oath taker. He also uttered blessings to the oath taker, to the effect that he should remain a brave warrior. He also cursed the oath taker in case he contravened the vows he had sworn in.

The vows in the "B Batuni" oath were repeated after the oath administrator. The administrator started the ceremony by warning the recipient that he was entering the council of those people whose work was to perform acts of grievous harm (kiama kia ageri ngero). The administrator then directed the oath taker to swear to the effect that he would speak the truth before God and before the congregation of the movement (muingi). The person was then made to swear with the vows recorded below. It should be remembered that each time the oath taker swore with a different symbol, he repeated the same vows.¹³

1. He swore never to reveal the secrets of the oath to any person, never to reveal any secrets of the movement, or reveal any activities performed by the members of the movement.
2. He swore never to refuse to go whenever he would be sent to perform any activity. He swore that he would rather die than fail to strike a target that was within reach. He swore to the effect that "If we decide to kill so and so, such that each one of us will carry a part of the victims body for burial, I shall not hesitate to do so. If I ever see the enemy and save its life or if I refuse to say that I have seen such a person, may this oath kill me."
3. The person swore never to refuse to respond if he was called, either in the daytime or at night. He swore never to refuse to answer a call, even if he had a corpse which he was preparing to bury at home.
4. He swore that after performing an activity for which he had been sent, he would tell no one about the act, except the council that had sent him. He would only say to them, "the work is finished."
5. The person swore never to call anything his own during the war. He swore that he would consider and respect all properties as belonging to the whole movement. He swore never to steal from any other member and he also promised to use only the things he needed as a fighter.
6. He swore that he would never leave behind any gun or ammunitions which he would come

across, and that he would take the greatest care for the weapons he possessed.

7. He swore never to have contacts with the enemy e.g. inter-marriage. (This vow later on developed to one which was directed against the homeguards. The Mau Mau had declared that they would never inter-marry with the families of homeguards and that they would never take food together with them or associate with them in any way).

Each of the above vows was concluded with the self-cursing statement to the effect that, "May this "thenge" kill me, may this oath kill me, may Ngai kill me." The vows in this oath were also strictly seven, but in later versions of the same oath, we find evidence of the presence of more than seven vows.

Several points should be noted in reference to the ceremony of the second Mau Mau oath. First it was compulsory that the recipient of the oath took it when he was naked. Various reasons have been given as to why it was necessary that people took the oath when naked, considering the fact that the Kikuyu regard it as greatly shameful for anybody to reveal his or her sex organs. Among the Kikuyu, the members of the "Lthaga" clan performed cursing ceremonies when naked. One such ceremony, in which the "githathi" stone was used was described in chapter three. It was believed that nakedness increased the effect of the curse. As for nakedness in the second Mau Mau oath, one informant explained that:

Our nakedness during the ceremony was a sign

*that we were completely committed to the task that was before us. We cursed ourselves in the ceremony and we emphasized our readiness to die other than break the vows. Swearing and cursing oneself when naked was the highest form of oath that we could take. We had placed all jokes and all respect aside and we were all ready to fight and to obey the vows we took.*¹⁴

Another informant argued that it was necessary that people took the oath when naked because the chest meat used in the ceremony was raw and had blood.¹⁵ In this sense, nakedness in the ceremony was intended to be a security measure because if a person took the oath with his clothes on, the clothes would be soiled with blood. The same informant also gave the reason that nakedness in the ceremony was necessitated further by the fact that a man was required to place his penis in the hole on the lower part of the meat while a woman was required to place her breasts in the two holes on the upper part of the meat. This would not have been possible if the oath taker had the clothes on. Finally, another informant also gave the reason that, "we tried our best to see that no uncircumcised person entered the war because we expected an uncircumcised person to be irresponsible and cowardly. In the ceremony of the "B Batuni" oath, we checked whether a person was circumcised or not."¹⁶ It was for these reasons that the oath was taken naked.

A second comment to be made here is that the second Mau Mau oath differed in various ways from the first Mau

Mau oath. Unlike the first oath, the above oath had vows that were militant. The vows in the above oath talked about damages and other atrocious acts to be performed by the oathed. The first oath had no such militant vows. The second oath was taken by people when they were naked unlike the first oath where the swearing person only removed the metallic objects that he had on him.

Unlike the first oath also, the second oath contained a long strip of the chest meat of the goat. The first oath contained only a small piece of that meat, which was held by the oath taker with his hand. There were also more contents in the second oath than in the first. There was the "ngata" of the goat, as well as the eyes and the skin strips of the same goat. Further, the second oath was only taken mainly by the people who were actually involved in the war while the first oath was taken by all people. The first oath made a person a member of the movement, while the second oath qualified the person as a fighter. The first oath was given to many people at a time, in which case a longer trough was necessary, while the second oath was given to one person at a time, in which case the contents were put into a half calabash.

As shown here below, the second Mau Mau oath had many variations during the Mau Mau movement. In these variations, more vows were added, and in some cases, more symbols and rituals. The new versions of the oath were given to persons who were assigned new tasks and responsibilities during the war. With each new responsibility he got, a person was required to take the second oath again

and to swear that he would perform his new duties. Also, new versions of the same oath appeared at the time of the war as a result of oath confessions. A quick look at some of these variations will help us to understand why it was necessary for a person to take the oath again.

Variations of the 'B Batuni' Oath

In the last chapter, it was explained that the confusion as to the number of Mau Mau oaths that were there can be cleared if we understand that Mau Mau oaths were basically two and that there were variations of each oath. In the "B Batuni" oath, some of the variations included the "pot-oath", the oath for initiating oath administrators, the leaders' oath, and the general oath of duty. The first two examples will be elaborated here.

The Pot Oath (Muuma wa Nyungu)

The Mau Mau 'pot-oath' can be looked at in line with some of the traditional Kikuyu practices related to pots. In traditional Kikuyu society, the pot was used by women as a symbol with which they cursed their victims.¹⁷ The victims she cursed were the people who might have angered her. If a woman was badly treated by her husband, and that woman knew that the husband was wrong, she persevered for quite a time to see if the husband would improve. Such mistreatments included abuses and beatings. The wives who mainly suffered such ill-treatments were the barren ones, and in many cases, the husbands mistreated them so that they might return to their families. In her defence, such a woman cursed her husband in his presence and she used the pot as a symbol in so doing. Widows

also did the same thing if they were angered by unknown persons. If a widow found out that her crops in the garden had been stolen, or if she had an enemy in the society, she cursed him in the same manner.

In performing the curse, a woman deliberately dropped a cooking pot and broke it, at the same time uttering curses to her victim to the effect that, "May this pot loathe you (ungirorio ni ino)." The pot here was symbolic of the foods that were cooked in it. By using a pot in the curse as a symbol, a woman cursed the man with all the foods that the pot cooked.¹⁸

In the case of the woman who cursed her husband in his presence, it was so serious a curse that the husband was obliged to purify the whole family ceremoniously (ndahikio), to avert the consequences of the "thahu" that would follow from the breaking of the pot by the woman. The fear of such a curse led many men to avoid provoking their wives to extremes. The "thahu" that resulted when a pot was broken was also emphasized in traditional Kikuyu practice which required that if a pot broke when a woman was mashing food in it, all the food and pot had to be thrown away from the homestead. It was "thahu" for a pot break in this manner and it was believed that this "thahu" would affect the people if they ate the food that was cooked in such a pot.¹⁹

It must be kept in mind here that the cooking pot was considered as a highly important object in traditional Kikuyu society, especially to women who used it daily. It was such a pot which was adopted as a symbol in

giving women an oath which was a variation of the "B Batuni" oath. One informant explained how she took the oath:

I was asked to sit on a small pot that was turned upside down. I was naked. A string from the "mugere" shrub was tied around my waist. I was made to insert the lower end of the chest meat string into my vagina while my breasts were inserted into the two holes on the upper end of the meat. I was first made to swear when biting this meat. The oath administrator was a man and he had a stick (muiko) which he held with his right hand. I also held the same stick with my right hand. With this stick, we both stirred some oath contents which were put into another pot on the ground between us. In the pot were foods, including meat, milk and the blood of a goat. I was also asked to swear when sipping some of these contents from the stick. There were similar vows to those I had taken in the "B Batuni" oath.²⁰

The informant explained further that the oath was given in her home area because some people had confessed the original oath of "B Batuni". If a new version of the oath was not given, some of the people who had taken the confessed oath, or who had witnessed the confessions would have slackened in their loyalty to the movement. As another informant explained:

The oath started late during the Mau Mau movement, and it was a result of many confessions of the original oath. The oath mainly spread in rural areas where most oath confessions and oath cleansing ceremonies were taking

place. The pot was used in the oath because most of the people who were in rural areas were women, and the pot was of daily use to them. Using the traditional basic foods and using the pot that cooked those foods made such an oath appear horrible to women. Most of all, they feared breaking the oath because the act of sitting on a pot as they did in the ceremony was believed to result in "thahu".²¹

In elaborating the significance of the oath, and the reason as to why men did not take this oath, the same informant explained that:

Only women took this oath. The oath had a chest meat alright, but the "ngata" and the eyes which were in the original "B Batuni" were not here. There was a pot in this oath which was not there in the initial oath of "B Batuni". The pot which was used in this oath was the small pot which the Kikuyu call "nduma tuimwo", meaning "The pot that does not allow us to be given food." Among the Kikuyu, this pot was used only to cook small amounts of food on the side of the main fire, even when a big pot was on the firestones. If a person visited a home and the woman in the home wanted to explain to the visitor that there was no food, she simply commented, "In this house, we only cooked with the pot of "nduma tuimwo".

Men did not feed on the food that was cooked in this small pot, for this was considered "thahu". Only women and children ate the food cooked in it. This was partly the reason why the pot was used in a women's oath.²²

In commenting on the oath above, we need to note the fact

that the oath was a "B Datuni" oath although it had variations. There was no arch in this ceremony. Persons who took this oath had already taken the original oath of "B Datuni". Further, the oath arose as a result of cleansing and confession ceremonies in which the original oath was revealed. The oath was also given to some of the people who had confessed the original oath, and in the new version, they were made to swear that they would never confess the oath again. The basic aim of the oath was the same as that of the original oath. It was intended to foster commitment and loyalty to the movement, and to ensure that the secrets of the movement were not revealed.

Leader's Oath for Initiating Oath Administrators

A more elaborate form of the "B Datuni" oath was given to a man who was being initiated as an oath administrator. The oath of initiation and the whole ceremony was either referred to as "ngunuro" meaning (ritual initiation as that of a diviner-doctor), or "confirmation" i.e. 'laying on of hands'.²³ The aim behind the whole ceremony was to initiate the candidate so that he could act as an oath administrator. He was referred to as either a "mundu mugu", (diviner-doctor) or a "mubishobu", (Bishop).

A candidate for initiation was appointed by the people in each particular locality, from among the well respected men. The candidate had to be well known and had to be a person of certain qualities. He had to be brave, wise and strong. He had to be known as a trustworthy person, with good speech and commanding voice. He had to have a strong heart and strong self discipline. He had to

be a person who could control his temper even on occasions when killing a victim was necessary especially during oathings. He had to be a person who could face repulsive sights without nauseating. Most important of all, he had to be an older man born before 1930, and he was required to be well versed in the traditions of his people.²⁴ This age limit was however lowered later when dangers increased for the Mau Mau, and when it became necessary to have younger administrators for oaths, who were capable of escaping in case the arena where the ceremony was being performed was attacked by the enemy.

The selected candidate was first handed over to senior Kikuyu elders who spent several days with him. They taught him all the relevant Kikuyu customs and traditions related to oath ceremonies. From the elders, the candidate was handed over to the Mau Mau local committee in each particular area. It was a committee made up of chosen Mau Mau leaders in each area in the reserves, and their main task was to co-ordinate between the forest fighters and the 'rural area passive wing'. It was the work of this committee to recruit forest entrants and to organise all oathing ceremonies in the reserves. The committee also collected and sent to the forest all the things that the forest fighters needed from the reserves. The work of this committee, however, became extremely difficult towards the end of the war due to the government measures that were set up to isolate the freedom fighters in the forest from the rural masses. It was to these committees that a candidate for initiation as an oath administrator was sent so that the committee could know him and prepare him for the oath ceremony. They

gave him more instructions and then they selected a team of four traditional diviner-doctors who conducted the ceremony. Such diviner-doctors had been appointed at the start of the movement, and their work was to travel from one area to another, and to initiate all candidates who had been prepared for initiation by the local Mau Mau committees.

The main part of the initiation was in form of an oath which was conducted in the manner of the "E Batuni" oath. The arena and the contents of this oath were the same as those of the "B Batuni" oath described in the early part of this chapter. But this initiation oath differed from the original "B Batuni" oath in that the initiation oath contained more vows to be observed by the initiated, more rules for him to observe, and more duties for him to perform than was the case with the "B Batuni" oath. It should, however, be remembered that such a candidate must have taken the first and the second Mau Mau oaths before he could be initiated as an oath administrator.

The initiation oath also varied from the original "B Batuni" oath in that the animal used in the initiation ceremony was chosen in accordance to Kikuyu traditional practices related to sacrifices. The animal had to be of one colour and it had to be slaughtered in the traditional manner of slaughtering sacrificial animals. Other animals were however slaughtered in the initiation ceremony and these were eaten by members of the local Mau Mau committee who witnessed the ceremony. These other animals were

slaughtered in the normal manner.

The four senior diviner-doctors first collected all the necessary plants and foods for the ceremony. They then prepared the arena for this ceremony, an arena that was similar to that of the "B Batuni" oath. During the initiation ceremony, the four elders surrounded the person who was being initiated, and they pronounced the curses which should befall him if he ever betrayed the movement. The diviners concluded the curses with the words, "May the oath kill the liar." The manner in which this oath was taken was similar to that of the original "B Batuni" oath and the person who took this initiation oath did it while he was naked.

Of great significance in this initiation oath was the fact that the person swore with more vows than those of the original "B Batuni" oath. He first swore with some of the vows of the "B Batuni" oath and then swore with additional vows, the main ones of which are listed below. It should be noted that some of these vows were similar to those which were contained in the second phase of the second ECA oath. In the second ECA oath, the vows were directed to ECA leaders. In the initiation oath, however, the vows were directed to the candidate who was being initiated as an oath administrator. These vows reveal the nature of his work. The vows were spoken to the candidate, by one of the elders and the candidate repeated them after the elder. A list of the vows is briefly recorded below.

1. If I ever refuse to work for the people and to serve them well, may this oath kill me.
2. If I ever add anything of my own, in either words or contents, except the ones in this ceremony, may this oath kill me.
3. If I ever omit anything contained in this ceremony, may this oath kill me.
4. If I ever make mistakes in this procedure and fail to repeat it all over, may this oath kill me.
5. If I ever reveal this formula and this ceremony to any other person, may this oath kill me.
6. If I ever save any person, be it my wife or son, who refuses to take an oath in which I am administering, may this oath kill me.

The elder concluded each vow while the other three elders replied. "Ururia Murongo", meaning, "May this oath kill the liar."

The above vows emphasize the fact that the initiate was expected to know and to understand the correct nature of the oathing ceremony before he could administer it. Some young oath administrators carried sheets of paper containing the correct procedures of the oath ceremonies to ensure that they administered the oath correctly.²⁵

The fact that oath administrators were expected to be well versed in the traditional Kikuyu customs governing oath ceremonies has been stated above. Each administrator was therefore trained and instructed by elders and initiated by diviner-doctors, who were also elders, to ensure that

the candidate knew the oathing procedure. This training and initiation emphasized the fact that as far as possible, the oathing ceremonies in the Mau Mau movement were intended to be conducted in accordance to traditional oathing procedures. The expertise demanded from the administrator was clearly pronounced in the vows of the initiation oath. It has been repeatedly emphasized in this study that it was due to factors beyond the control of the Mau Mau, that traditional rules and procedures for oathing had to be modified or broken in the case of Mau Mau oaths. One such modification was the giving of oaths by younger persons.

There were many more variations of the "B Batuni" oath. Of great significance was the leaders' oath which has been recorded by various writers.²⁶ In the oath that Barnett records, the paraphernalia and the arena of the oath were much simpler than those in the original "B Batuni" oath. In the oath he records, there was no strip of the chest meat as that present in the "B Batuni" oath, except a portion of that meat. The oath that Barnett records had no calabash contents either. Instead, there was a damp ball of soil, similar to the one that was there in the first KCA oath. In the oath that Barnett describes, we notice that the vows were intended to make the oath taker a committed warrior and to ensure that he performed his duties responsibly. This oath was therefore a form of the "B Batuni" oath. The recipient of the oath swore never to reveal the leaders' secrets, never to abandon leadership, and never to molest other leaders. With reference to the

nature of this leaders' oath, Itote argues that the vows in the oath were similar to those which were present in the traditional warrior oath which bound warriors to one another to ensure that they would not run away and desert their fellows in battle.²⁷

In concluding this section on the variations of the "U Datuni" oath, it should be stated here that the claim by some writers²⁸ that there were many barbarous oaths in the Mau Mau movement is not wholly true. As Mariuki states plainly, "To imply that these sorts of oaths were indulged in wholesale by most of the kikuyu tribe is like saying that all Englishmen are child-rapists and murderers simply because a few Englishmen do this every year."²⁹

The analysis of this second Mau Mau oath as well as the relationship between this oath and the other oaths covered in this study forms the greater part of the next chapter, which is also the concluding chapter.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Delf, G., Jomo Kenyatta, p.153.
2. Lari is a location in Kiambu District located on the south west of the District, close to the border between Kiambu and Rift Valley. For reference to Lari massacre, see Rosberg and Nottingham, op. cit. pp.290-291.
3. Rosberg and Nottingham, The Myth of Mau Mau, p.248.
4. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 28.10.76, Muchunu Gachuki, Interview, 25.12.76, Mukami Kimathi, Interview, 22.11.76.
5. Macharia Kirubi, Interview, 28.10.76.
6. Wanweya, J., Freedom Fighter, p.52ff..
7. Chege Gathogo, Muchunu Gachuki, Macharia Kirubi. op.cit. interviews.
8. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 7.9.76.
9. Wanweya, J., op.cit., p.52.
10. Mugo Ngobia, Interview, 28.10.76.
11. Kamau Wang'ondou, Interview, 28.10.76.
12. Barnett and Njana, Mau Mau From Within, p.13ff. The oath recorded by Kariuki, J., in Mau Mau Detainee, pp.28-30 was a simpler version of the "B. Baturi" oath, a version that was not necessarily given to actual fighters. The one recorded by Itote, W., in Mau Mau General, pp.274-290, was a more elaborate form of the same oath, mainly prevalent in the forests and one which was given to Battalion leaders who had actually taken the simpler version of the same oath at the time of entry into the forest. It is also most likely that Barnett's version of the oath was given to special leaders like Generals.
13. These vows are written here in the same way that informants recited them. Various writers have recorded the vows but in different forms, e.g. Barnett, op.cit. pp.67-69, 131-132; Corfield, Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau, p.166; Leakey has a short list of the vows, Defeating Mau Mau, op.cit., p.82. It should however be noted that some of what the authors have given as vows were not vows as such, but were rules of conduct which were given to those who took the oath during the instructions after the actual ceremony. Some such rules are recorded by Barnett, op.cit., pp.118-119; This will become clearer when we look at the after-oath instructions in the next chapter.
14. Richard Githaiga, Interview, April, 1977.

15. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 28.10.76.
16. Kamau Wang'ondu, Ibid., interview.
17. Richard Githaiga, op.cit., interview; Wambui Njau, interview, 28.10.76. Both of them made references to the pot oath.
18. Ibid.
19. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 28.10.76.
20. Wambui Njau, Interview, 10.12.76.
21. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 10.12. 76.
22. Ibid.
23. 'Ngunuro' means 'the uncovering'. The term was used for the ceremony of initiating a traditional diviner-doctor. The ceremony made him able to know many things that were hidden to other people, e.g. causes and cures of diseases. It also gave him some foresight. It was believed that God revealed these things to him. 'Confirmation' is implied by the term 'to be laid hands on' (kuigirirwo moko), and was a christian term which was used by the Mau Mau, for security reasons, to refer to the initiation of an oath administrator. The administrator was initiated so that he might be able to conduct the oath ceremonies in the same way that the traditional diviner-doctor was initiated so as to conduct traditional ceremonies, e.g. ritual purification.
24. Details on this oath were collected from Muchunu Gachuki, interviews, op.cit.; Njoroge Kagunda, interview, 10.12.76.
25. Ibid.
26. Barnett, op.cit., pp.191f; Itote, op.cit., p.280.
27. Itote, W., op.cit., p.280.
28. F.G. Corfield, op.cit., p.167.
29. Kariuki, J.M., op.cit., p.33.

The Relationship between Mau Mau Oaths, KCA Oaths and
Traditional Kikuyu Oaths and Curses

An attempt is made here to look at the interpretation of the second Mau Mau oath in line with the other oaths covered in this study, mainly because the second Mau Mau oath contained more symbols, and more rituals connected to those symbols, than all the other oaths covered here. In this analysis, great emphasis will be laid on the relationship between the Mau Mau oaths, the KCA oaths and the Kikuyu traditional oaths and curses. Of particular interest here are the symbols contained in each ceremony, as well as the rituals attached to those symbols. Before such an analysis can be attempted, it is necessary first to have an outline of the main symbols that were contained in each of the oaths or curses covered so far. This takes us back to chapter three.

THE MAIN SYMBOLS AND RITUALS

I IN TRADITIONAL OATHS AND CURSES:

A. "Kuringa Thenge" in an Oath

"Thenge" - male goat.

Use of number 'seven' in striking the goat with 7 (seven) blows.

Abstaining from sex at time of ceremony.

B. "Kuringa Githathi" as a Curse

"Githathi" - referred to as "thenge".

"Nigere" sticks on which it is placed.

Passing of grass stalks through the hole seven times.

The members of "Ethaga" clan who perform the ceremony when naked.

C. Use of "Ngata" in an Oath

"Ngata" referred to as "thenge".

"Migere" sticks acting as pegs.

Sticks passed through the "ngata" hole seven times.

D. Warriors' Oath

"Thenge".

Blood of "thenge" with which warriors were blessed.

E. The Oath in a Case of Sorcery

"Thenge" or ram which was referred to as "thenge".

A complete strip of the goat's chest meat.

Insertion of penis into the bottom hole.

Taken by a naked person.

Seven elders with seven staffs of office.

The staffs dropped seven times as a curse.

F. Oath in a Pregnancy Case

"Thenge" or ram.

Heart of the goat, the tip of which was inserted into girl's vagina.

Eating of the heart by the accused.

G. The Soil Oath

"Thenge".

Soil collected from the land in dispute.

Banana leaves spread in a hole on the same land.

The blood of the goat mixed with the soil.

Sipping of the contents in the hole, after stirring.

H. "Muuma" Oath Ceremony

"Thenge".

A piece of the goat's chestbone.

A necklace made of grass and the chestbone.

Meat of the goat from the chest.

Bundle of sticks representing the elders' staffs of office.

Swearing when biting pieces of meat and piercing eyes and stomach of the goat.

The blood of the goat.

Soil mixed with the blood.

Contents put into a small banana trough.

Eyes of the goat.

II KCA OATHSA. First KCA Oath

Dampened ball of soil held at the navel.

The Bible held high with the other hand.

B. Second KCA Oath - Phase I

Arch of banana stems, sugarcanes, arrow roots and banana leaves.

Male ram called "thenge".

Blood of the ram.

Half calabash container.

Samples of the basic traditional Kikuyu foods

A brush made from the "mugere" stick.

C. Second KCA Oath - Phase II

Ram of any one colour, called "thenge".

The blood of the ram.

Banana stem trough of one foot length used as container.

Samples of the basic traditional Kikuyu foods.

A piece of the chest meat of the ram.

A brush of the 'mugere' stick.

An arch at the entrance of the arena.

Seven vows, seven sips of contents, and seven bites of the meat.

111 THE FIRST MAU MAU OATH

An arch at entrance to the arena, made of banana stems, with leaves, some creeping plants like sweet potato vines, grasses, skin strips of the goatskin and arrowroot stems.

the chest meat of the goat.

The tail meat of the goat (githita).

Samples of the basic traditional Kikuyu foods.

Half calabash or banana trough stem as container.

Metal objects on body removed.

Facing Mount Kenya.

Swearing by using all the above paraphernalia.

Cross sign marked by the administrator with his finger.

Seven vows.

IV THE SECOND MAU MAU OATH

Thenge

Seven lines of either the goat's intestines or strips of its skin.

An arch similar to the one in III above.

A half calabash container.

Blood of the goat.

A thin and long strip of the chest meat of the goat.

"Ngata" of the goat.

Cross sign at both the start and end of the ceremony.

Sex symbolism.

Seven "mugere" sticks.

Frequent use of number "seven".

Eye of the goat.

Swearing with seven vows using each symbol.

At the beginning of this study, it was stated that several conclusions arise out of a study of Mau Mau and KCA oaths, in relationship to traditional Kikuyu oaths. It was also mentioned that Mau Mau oaths were mainly based on traditional Kikuyu symbols and rituals related to oaths and other ceremonies. In chapter three, we saw that the traditional Kikuyu oaths contained many religious symbols and rituals and that a strong belief was held on the effects of the oaths. This study of KCA and Mau Mau oaths shows that they also contained a similar religious dimension. This can be seen from the above outline of the symbols and rituals. In the outline, it is clear that many of the symbols and rituals contained in traditional oaths were adapted and combined together to form one Mau Mau oath ceremony.

It was also shown in chapter four that the adaptation of traditional oaths was first introduced in the KCA. This is also clear in the above outline. But the

first KCA oath was syncretistic, containing both a christian and a traditional symbol. After the first KCA oath, however, no more apparent syncretism is evidenced in the other KCA oaths and in both Mau Mau oaths. These latter oaths laid greater emphasis on the traditional symbols and rituals. The second Mau Mau oath contained the greatest number of these traditional symbols and rituals.

We have also seen that KCA and Mau Mau oaths contained some variations and deviations from the traditional oaths. These deviations and variations were highest in Mau Mau oaths. It has been explained all along that most of these deviations and variations arose out of circumstances beyond the control of the Mau Mau, and that these deviations can be considered as forms of adaptation of the traditional oaths to an intense crisis situation. The deviations and variations contained in the second Mau Mau oath will be looked at shortly.

Finally, it was mentioned in chapter one that the presence of these symbols and rituals, as well as the beliefs underlying Mau Mau oaths and other ceremonies in the Mau Mau movement, were cited as part of the evidence to show that Mau Mau was a 'religion'. This study of Mau Mau oaths however shows that although there was a strong religious factor in the Mau Mau movement, this factor cannot justify calling the movement a new 'religion' as distinct from the traditional Kikuyu religion. The religious factor in the movement was an adaptation of various religious beliefs and practices of the Kikuyu, which were aimed at serving a revolutionary movement. This

is clear from a study of Mau Mau oaths. Further, these beliefs and practices greatly helped to strengthen the peoples' commitment to the liberation struggle. It will also be shown here that in the Mau Mau oath ceremonies, instructions were given to people taking the oath. These instructions greatly encouraged those oath takers who may not have believed that the automatic effects of oaths would befall them. The remaining part of this chapter will address itself to an explanation of the above generalisations.

An Analysis of the Second Mau Mau Oath in Relation to the Other Oaths Given on the Outline; with Special Emphasis on the Symbols and Rituals:

A very significant symbol in the second Mau Mau oath was the chest meat of a goat. This chest meat was also an important symbol in many of the oaths covered in this study as the outline shows. The chest meat of a goat had a strong tradition among the Kikuyu. We notice that when a baby boy was born, a goat was slaughtered for him to feed on symbolically before he could suckle. It was in common practice that some blood of the goat was got from the chest area of the goat, just before the goat was slaughtered. From the same place, a small portion of the chest meat was also extracted. The mother of the child smeared the blood on the lips of the infant and she also chewed the piece of meat and fed the infant with its juice. It was only after the baby had symbolically fed on the goat that the goat was finally opened up and given to

the other family members to eat. No other person could taste the meat of that goat before the infant had been fed with it. The child could not also suckle before the ritual was completed. But the ritual was not performed when a baby girl was born.¹

The above ritual was referred to by some men during situations of extreme anger. At such times, a man stated with finality that "Ndaraire itongete, njetereire guthinjirwo. Na ciathinjwo ndiaciriire. Rung'athio ndiarutia riu!" meaning, "When I was born, I spent a whole night without sucking, waiting for a goat to be slaughtered for me. And when it was slaughtered, I did not eat its meat. I have known stubbornness since my youth!"² These were the final words that a man would utter to express his anger and to show that he was ready for a fight against the person who had angered him. When a man expressed such anger, the bystanders held him in a bid to stop the fight. In explaining the relevance of the meat in the oath, the above informant argued that "the oath of "B Batuni" was taken to mark a final despair in all the attempts we had made at peaceful dialogue. It was an oath that indicated that war was the only alternative left for us. It was an oath for warriors and it was taken by fighters alone."

Among the Kikuyu, the chest meat of a goat was only eaten by men. The men who ate the meat were the warriors, the "njamba". Younger boys could eat the meat on condition that there was no circumcised man present in the area where a goat was slaughtered. The meat was

therefore eaten by the people who were regarded as the defenders of the society. In the "B Batuni" oath, candidates were warned that they were being recruited as the defenders of the society, and during the Mau Mau war, the fighters were also referred to as "njamba cia ita" i.e. brave warriors. Some of the fighters were women and they therefore took the oath.

It was shown in chapter three that the chest meat of a goat was traditionally used as a symbol in various oaths and curses. Most important was the fact that a chest meat, similar to the one present in the "B Batuni" oath, was traditionally used in an oath involving sorcery. As in the "B Batuni" oath the taker of the sorcery oath took the oath while naked. The "thenge", from which the chest meat was extracted, has been seen as the main animal used in most Kikuyu oaths and curses and this can be seen in the outline on the symbols. In the outline, it can be seen that a portion of the chest meat of a goat was present in the second phase of the second KCA oath and in the first Mau Mau oath. In the last Mau Mau oath, a complete chest meat was used. The use of the chest meat was, therefore, not a new thing in the Mau Mau oaths. It had its roots in traditional oaths and other religious ceremonies.

A cross sign was marked on the forehead of the oath taker both at the beginning and at the end of the "B Batuni" oath. We have seen in the last chapter that the cross sign was first marked as a symbol of concluding the rite of initiating

the oath taker to the council of warriors in the Mau Mau movement (kiana kia ageri ngero). This was clearly indicated by the pronouncements of the oath administrator at the first time that he marked the cross sign on the oath taker, (i.e. You are now entering "B Fatuni") We saw in chapter four that the cross sign was used in various ways among the Kikuyu. It was used, for example, during second birth and circumcision ceremonies. An attempt was made to show that the symbol was not used in the Mau Mau movement as a christian symbol. A further elaboration of this view is necessary here.

The roots of the cross sign in traditional Kikuyu society is a subject that calls for deep research. Some writers have claimed that the symbol was a christian symbol, but this study has shown that it was traditional. In reference to the cross sign shaved on children's heads during the ceremony of chasing evil spirits, Kenyatta has stated that:

The children are shaved in a very peculiar fashion; the hair is shaved off one line running from forehead to the back of the head, and in another line from one side of the head to the other, thus forming a sign of the cross on the centre of the head. It is believed that by so doing, the remnant of the illness is scraped off, and that the sight of children shaved in this manner will frighten the malicious spirits.³

In the above statement, Kenyatta implies that the symbol of the cross sign was a traditional Kikuyu symbol. But in reference to Kenyatta's example, Mbiti has suggested

that the symbol may have been of christian origin. He has stated that:

Exactly what the sign or origin of the cross is, I do not know, but it is interesting to recall that the christians have for many centuries been using it, among other things, for protection against attack by evil spirits. If at one time in the past, christianity may have reached this part of equatorial Africa, it is significant and remarkable that the 'sign of the cross' in the fight against evil forces, should be the only trace of christianity which has been incorporated into traditional beliefs and practices.⁴

Commenting on Mbiti's suggestion, Mazrui has argued at length that:

It is not clear why Professor Mbiti should seek to establish a "first coming" (of christianity) among the Kikuyu, simply because of a resemblance in the utilisation of the sign of the cross. It would seem easier to believe that the sign of the cross, shaved on the heads of Kikuyu children as a protection against evil spirits, is an independent form of symbolism, born out of a tradition which, in its origin, had nothing to do with the religion founded by Jesus Christ.⁵

This view of Mazrui agrees very much with the oral information presented in this study. In explaining the origin of the sign in traditional society, one informant explained that:

There is a Kikuyu legend which holds that once upon a time, the Kikuyu were ruled by

women and that the women of the time were very cruel to their men. But the men organised themselves and overthrew the women's rule. Those men started new rules and new ceremonies to be used in the society. One of the rules they established held that every child had to be born again in a second birth ritual. The presiding elder concluded this ceremony by marking a cross sign on the forehead of the child. The cross sign was therefore started by the generation that overthrew the women, and this generation was referred to as "Iregi", the "Revolters".⁶

From the above statement, it is clear that the cross sign had its roots in traditional society. In the Mau Mau movement, the sign was marked on oath takers' foreheads. It has been suggested here that the presence of the cross sign in the ceremony should not lead us to view the ceremony as syncretistic. We should of course be aware that to some of the christians who took the Mau Mau oaths, the sign of the cross represented a christian symbol. But this christian influence in the minds of some oath takers was opposed to the ideas of the people who organised Mau Mau oaths. One of the oath organisers expressed the deep significance of the cross sign in Mau Mau oaths as follows:

*The cross sign we used in Mau Mau oaths indicated that we in Mau Mau were a new "Iregi" generation. Our revolt was directed against the white men and not against women. We used the cross sign as a symbol of enrolling all our people, young and old, men and women, into our movement.*⁷

It can be seen from the outline of the symbols that the cross sign was first used in an oath during the second KCA oath. The sign was used in both phases of that oath as well as in both Mau Mau oaths. In the second Mau Mau oath, however, the sign was marked both at the start and at the end of the ceremony. But the cross sign was not there in traditional Kikuyu oaths. It is enough to conclude here that though there was an element of syncretism in the minds of some oath takers with reference to the cross sign, nonetheless the sign had its roots in traditional Kikuyu society. This is further evidence to show that as far as Mau Mau oaths were concerned, the religious factor in Mau Mau was based on traditional Kikuyu beliefs and practices. The other symbols and rituals in the oath lead us to the same conclusion.

There was much use of the "mugere" plant in most of the oaths and curses covered here. In the outline of the symbols and rituals, we note that parts of the "mugere" plant were used in the traditional ceremonies of "kuringa githathi", in the "ngata" ceremony, and also in the "muuma oath ceremony." The "mugere" was not used in the first KCA oath, but was used in both phases of the second KCA oath and in both Mau Mau oaths. In the second Mau Mau oath, there was more use of the "mugere" sticks than in any other oaths covered in this study. The traditional significance of the "mugere" plant is of some interest here.

The "mugere" was believed to be a strong symbol of curses and sorcery in traditional Kikuyu society. A person who wanted to prohibit other people from grazing on his land planted branches of the "mugere" plant on the particular land as a sign that grazing on the land was prohibited. During my boyhood, this practice was very strong among the people in my home area in Murang'a. It was strongly believed that if cows or goats fed on the grass in such a prohibited area, the animals would die. It should be noted that even the animals of the person who prohibits the grazing on the land were not allowed to feed on the grass either. A man prohibited such grazing if he wanted the grass on the land to grow. Secondly, branches of the "mugere" plant were planted in sugarcane plantations in traditional society as a sign that the sugarcanes on the land should not be eaten. This was also a common practice during my childhood. The practice greatly reduced cases of theft. Prohibitions, in which the "mugere" plant were used, were believed to cause death or misfortune on the person or animals who contravened the prohibition. If a person contravened such prohibitions, he was taken to a diviner-doctor who performed a ritual purification ceremony on him. In this ceremony, the person who established the prohibitions was called upon to bless the victim.³ Such prohibitions ended at the time the owner of the grazing land or of the sugarcane plantations removed the "mugere" branches and opened the ground and the canes for use by men and

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animals.

It was the sticks of the "mugere" plant, which were believed to contain much power of sorcery and of prohibition, that were used in Mau Mau oaths. They were used in oath ceremonies in which many prohibitions and curses were directed to the oath taker. The use of these sticks increased the oath taker's fear of breaking the vows and prohibitions that he had sworn during the ceremony. But of course there were people who took Mau Mau oaths, and yet did not understand the ritual significance of such a symbol as the "mugere" stick. The case of such people who did not really believe in the significance of oath symbols will be touched upon shortly.

Another important symbol in the oaths covered was the traditional basic foods of the Kikuyu, including meat, blood, cereals and roots. In traditional Kikuyu oaths, these foods were absent. The foods were first used in the second KCA oath and their use continued through all latter oaths. The foods were mixed together in a container, a half calabash or a banana stem trough. Blood, and sometimes soil, was added to the foods to form a reddish-brown mixture. The oath taker sipped some of the contents from either a "mugere" stick or from the hand of the oath administrator. In the oaths, a person swore to the effect that may the foods bring "thahu" and death to him if he ever acted contrary to the oath.

The foods were considered as important symbols in the oath ceremonies. In emphasizing the significance

foods in the Mau Mau oaths, one informant stated that:

*The foods we used in our oath ceremonies represented the foods that we had been deprived of as a result of colonisation. They represented the soil upon which we used to grow them, the soil that the white men alienated. Land deprivation meant a deprivation of those foods. In our oaths, we swore to fight for the return of those lands.*⁹

In the oath ceremonies, a person swore while using the foods to the effect that "may these foods loathe me" (ndirothurwo ni ici). The nature of this curse needs some elaboration here. By swearing in this manner, a person prohibited himself from contravening the vows in an oath. The curse means that the foods which he used as a symbol in the oath are cursed to him if he breaks the vows in the oath. Breaking the vows automatically led to "thahu" upon the victim because the food that is cursed is the food he uses and is also the food that he would continue to use. It should be here understood that food has no "thahu" of its own except when it is cursed. The point is, however, clear that foods were used in Mau Mau oaths in the same way that they were used in traditional society. In some traditional oaths, however, soil was used as a symbol instead of the foods.

In the second Mau Mau oath, the "ngata" was used in the same manner that the "ngata" of an elephant was used in a traditional oath covered in chapter three. In both oaths, the "mugere" sticks were passed through the

holes of the "ngata" seven times. In traditional oaths, the "ngata" was used in the same way as a "githathi", and both of them were referred to as "thenge". They were used as symbols of cursing and swearing. The "ngata" of the goat was used for similar functions in the second Mau Mau oath. The "ngata" was not used in the KCA oaths and in the first Mau Mau oath as can be seen in the outline. In the "B Batuni" oath, the "ngata" was used and referred to as "thenge". The significance of the "ngata" in the oath was stated by one informant as follows:

In traditional society, passing the "mugere" stick through the hole of the "ngata" and through the holes of the "githathi" in an oath was symbolic of sexual intercourse. Sex symbolism was regarded as an important part of such ceremonies. The Kikuyu regard sexplay as a highly sacred and private affair, and there were many traditional prohibitions related to sex. When such prohibitions were performed in an oath ceremony, in other words when the swearing person performed some symbolic sexual acts, e.g. with the "ngata" of the goat, these acts were believed to bring "thahu" on the person who performed them and acted contrary to the oath. When such an act was repeated seven times, its effect was believed to be stronger.¹⁰

We therefore note that the presence of sex symbolism as was the case in the "B Batuni" oath was intended to show the people that breaking such an oath would lead to severe consequences. This symbolism was rooted in traditional Kikuyu practices.

The use of the ominous number seven was greater in the "B Batuni" oath than in any other oath covered in

this study. The "lugere" sticks were seven and each stick was passed through the hole of the "ngata" seven times. As seen above, the eye of the goat was pricked seven times. There were seven vows, and the seven vows were systematically repeated, using each symbol. Each ritual in the oath was repeated seven times.

In the third chapter, it was indicated that the number 'seven' was regarded as an ominous number among the Kikuyu. Performing an act seven times was believed to bring a lot of "thahu" upon the doer. In an oath, performing a ritual act seven times was believed to strengthen the effect of such an oath upon the person who contravened the oath. It can be seen on the outline that the use of the number was a strong feature of traditional oaths and curses, a feature that was adapted in both KCA and Mau Mau oaths. Most of the people who organised Mau Mau oaths and those who took them, did so with an understanding of the ritual significance of the number seven. As stated before, however, there were people who took Mau Mau oaths, but who did not necessarily understand the traditional significance of the symbols and rituals contained in the oath. But the use of symbolism greatly helped the people to understand the aim of the oath and to understand the seriousness of breaking the vows in the oath. Karari himself admits that as a christian, he did not at first believe in the automatic effect of the oath. But the seriousness of the symbols and rituals in the oath partly made him fear to break the vows in the oath.¹¹

Other symbols in the "B Batuni" oath included the arch and the strips of the goatskin. In analysing the symbols contained in the first Mau Mau oath, I showed in some detail the significance of the arch. We shall not dwell on it here, but we need to note again that the arch was used as a symbol of initiation in Mau Mau and KCA oaths. The strips of the goatskin in the second Mau Mau oath were used in a similar manner as the intestines used in the first Mau Mau oath. Both of them were traditional Kikuyu symbols which were adapted in Mau Mau oaths.

A new element in the second Mau Mau oath, however, was the eye of the goat. The swearing person pricked the eye once with each vow he swore, and he concluded the vow with the statement, "If I do not do this, may I be pricked in like manner (ndiroturika uu)." It should be mentioned here that the act of pricking the eye reveals some kind of sympathetic magic. The informants, however, opposed the suggestion that magic was involved, and instead asserted that the act of pricking the eye was symbolic of the consequences to follow if the oath taker acted contrary to the oath. In performing the act, the oath taker symbolically emphasized the curse that he directed to himself. Despite the view of the informants, this symbolic act portrays the use of sympathetic magic.

In concluding this section, it should be emphasized again that in the above analysis of the symbols and rituals contained in the "B Batuni" oath, and in the other Mau Mau oaths, there is enough evidence to show that these oaths

were based on similar symbols and rituals as many traditional Kikuyu ceremonies, especially oaths. The analysis also shows that there was no apparent evidence of syncretism in the Mau Mau oaths. Instead, we find many traditional symbols and rituals were combined together in one Mau Mau oath ceremony. These traditional symbols and rituals were adapted and used in different situations from the ones in which they were used in traditional society. The new circumstances under which these new oaths were given made it necessary to modify or even change completely the manner in which the symbols and rituals were used in the traditional society. It is in their attempts to adapt the traditional oaths to a revolutionary movement that the Mau Mau organised some oaths which contained many deviations and variations from the traditional oaths. What we should understand is that Mau Mau oaths were intended to foster unity, and to an extent, to encourage militancy. The oaths had to be formulated in such a way that they would serve these functions.

Another important point that should be emphasized here is that the symbols used in Mau Mau oaths were the ones that had been used by the Kikuyu for a long time in their religious ceremonies. The Mau Mau were not the first to use the symbols in ceremonies. An understanding of this fact greatly helps us to accept the view taken in this study, that Mau Mau oaths do not show evidence of a 'new religion' in the movement.

The Effects of Mau Mau Oaths

The effects of Mau Mau oaths cannot be fully

understood if we do not first consider the role of the instructions that were given to the oath takers immediately after they had taken the oath. These instructions formed an essential part of the oath ceremony.

After each oath ceremony, the recipients of the oath were assembled together in a meeting. The meeting after the first Mau Mau oath was, however, more important because people who attended the meeting after the second oath had already received similar instructions in the meeting after the first oath. The meeting was a kind of a lecture, in which all the necessary instructions were given as rules to the oathed persons.

The purpose of the meetings was to educate the people in political and military ideas, as well as to teach them the ways in which they were expected to behave during the war. They were especially instructed to maintain the secrets of the movement, particularly when they were among un oathed people. They were also given many rules and prohibitions to follow during the war. These were the instructions that could not have been given during the actual oath-taking ceremony. We can consider these instructions as an essential part of the oath ceremony, in view of the fact that some of the people who took the oaths did not believe in the effects of the oaths. The instructions after the oath played a great role in convincing such people about the need for the liberation struggle.

The meeting started with prayers and songs. They prayed while standing, with their hands upstretched and

facing Mount Kenya. It was a general rule that these prayers had to be conducted by an elder of the "Maina" generation, because it was the "Maina" generation that would have been responsible for such ceremonial matters were it not for the presence of British rule. The prayer leader was not necessarily the oath administrator. Elders of the "Mwangi" generation were also present in the ceremony so as to give instructions to the younger "Maina" generation on matters related to oath ceremonies. Members of the "Mwangi" generation also instructed the "Maina" generation on political matters related to colonial rule in Kenya.

In these prayers, they asked "Ngai" to help them and to maintain unity among them. They prayed for the unity of "Gikuyu" and "Mumbi", a unity of all the Kikuyu, men and women. In other words, they prayed that unity, which was the major goal of Mau Mau oaths, would be realised with the help of "Ngai". They also prayed for success in the war, to the effect that "Ngai" would hasten the going away of the white men, and would also help the black people to regain their lost lands. They stated clearly in their prayers to God, that if they were defeated, it was He, their God, who would be defeated, for He was the one who gave them the lands they were fighting for. These prayers were conducted in the traditional manner of worship whereby the words of the prayer leader were followed by choruses of 'Peace, beseech God, peace (Thaai, thathaiya Ngai, thaai).

In most occasions, these prayers were also reinforced by prayer songs which were sung immediately after prayers and which were taught to the new members of the movement. These songs ended in the same manner as prayers. One of the songs which was sung after the prayers in an oath ceremony was the song "Mwenenyaga we pray thee."¹² In the song, complete faith in "Ngai" was expressed. They referred to "Ngai" as the Leader of the fighters, the protector of all people including the blacks, and they indicated their faith that they would never be defeated if God was ahead of them. They sang in prayer for love and respect of one another, and for the unity of "Gikuyu" and "Mumbi". They indicated in the song that victory would only come after total unity of all the people through "Ngai"s" help. In another song, "The song of Kimathi", they expressed the same faith that they would be victorious so long as "Ngai" was in front of them. In this particular song, the oath is referred to as the "cup of love", which was also "the cup of perseverance." The song pleaded with all persons to partake of this cup of love and perseverance which Kimathi himself had taken. The informants who sang Kimathi's song happened to be his wife and children. After singing the song, Kimathi's wife commented:

The song was sung every time after the oath ceremony. Prayers were first said and then the songs followed. After the songs, the newly oathed were given rules and instructions to follow. They were educated on the political history of Kenya. They were assured that they

*should not fear to fight even though they had no ammunitions. They were assured that although they had no guns, they had their own weapons of "love for each other, unity, mercy for each other and the care for the disabled." They were also assured that they should fight courageously, knowing and believing that "Ngai" was in front of them.*¹³

After the songs and prayers, the people were instructed on matters pertaining to the ills of colonialism as it existed in Kenya. They were reminded of the bad things that the white people had done to the black people in Kenya. In these instructions, it was disclosed to the oathed people that plans were under way to combat colonialism and they were requested to play their part faithfully. The people who took the second Mau Mau oath received some simple instructions on guerilla warfare also. A strong warning was given to all oathed people that any person who acted against the movement would be considered as an enemy and would be treated as an enemy.

Thirdly, all the oathed people were given many rules to obey and they were warned that whoever contravened those rules would be dealt with mercilessly. These rules were intended to strengthen the movement. The rules in themselves comprised a Mau Mau code of ethics which cannot be dealt with here.¹⁴ The code was aimed at ensuring that all oathed persons comprised a unique and united community which was referred to as "muingi", meaning 'congregation'. The growth of this united community, which was considered and treated as Mau Mau, was

to a great extent helped by the Mau Mau oaths.

It is a strong contention here that these and many other instructions given after the oath-ceremony were very important. It was through these instructions that some of the people, who may not have believed in the automatic effects of the oaths they had taken, became convinced that the oaths had a strong and vital role to play in the liberation struggle. Such people were made to understand that the oath-taking ceremony had more to it than mere rituals. Some of the views which have been expressed by two famous Mau Mau fighters will be briefly outlined below to illustrate the significance of the instructions, and of the whole oath ceremony.

Wanweya states that the meeting after the oath ceremony consisted of an exhortation on nationalism in which people were taught the aims of the oath, in other words they were shown the need to put an end to white rule in Kenya. It was in the meeting, he argues, that "the irrationalism" of the oath ceremony was counteracted and so much replaced by "rationalism and nationalism."¹⁵ It is, however, important to note that before a person could be given this form of political education, he had first to undergo the oath ceremony. This clearly shows that oath taking was regarded as a condition that made a person eligible to know the secrets and the plans of the Mau Mau movement.

Waruniu argues that:

"Oathgiving ceremonies were, however, more than ritual initiations. We also used them

*for the opportunity they gave to educate new recruits about the history of their country, about our objectives, about military tactics and so on ... to impress upon our young men the reasons for the struggle.*¹⁶

The role of the oaths and of the meeting thereafter is well expressed in the above statements. An informant expressed a similar view when he stated that:

*"Many people thought that the oath was nothing but mere rituals. Yet it was only in the ceremony that we were able to meet and educate the illiterate masses so that they could understand that although the white man was strong, our faith and unity would help us to chase him out of our country."*¹⁷

An analysis of the effects of Mau Mau oaths is necessary here if we are to understand the functions of the oaths in the movement.

One of the greatest negative effects of the oaths was that they partly led to the division of the Kikuyu population into various groups during the Mau Mau war. We should therefore note that while most of the Kikuyu took the oaths, nonetheless they did not remain united as one group in the movement. Some went to the forests, others were jailed and detained, others remained in the reserves, while yet others became loyalist homeguards.

The Kikuyu who had taken Mau Mau oaths started to isolate all those who had not taken the oaths as well as those who had taken but turned against the movement. The Mau Mau refused to co-operate with them in any way. The

oathed people refused to exchange visits with the un-oathed. The relationship that was originally expected to exist between the oathed people and the rest was clearly defined in the Mau Mau code of ethics which we have mentioned earlier on in this chapter.

All the oathed people began to see themselves as a distinct community apart from all the other people around them. They saw themselves as the true liberators of this country. It was indicated in chapter five that although Mau Mau as a movement did not spread much into other ethnic societies, nonetheless there was the intention of spreading the movement to the other peoples, by welcoming them into the struggle. The Mau Mau idea of a separate community was therefore not intended to become a permanent feature. This was not unique to the Mau Mau movement because most nationalist movements have each as its nucleus the most nationally conscious section of the society.

Another effect of Mau Mau oaths was that some of the people who took them adhered to the movement due to their strong belief that "thahu", or even death would follow if a person contravened the vows he had sworn in. This belief is in line with traditional Kikuyu beliefs underlying oaths. One informant expressed the belief as follows:

We strongly believed that if a person disobeyed the rules of the movement, he would surely

*receive some punishment. As an example, if a person secretly collaborated with the enemy, and at the same time remained with us in the forest, he was the first person to suffer if any danger met his particular battallion. He was either wounded by an animal or shot by the enemy. We had discovered many such cases. Further, if a person contravened our vows, even while not collaborating with the enemy, he met with a lot of misfortune. As an example, many Mau Mau died as a result of breaking our prohibitions on sex. We believed that they died because of the "thahu" involved in such cases. We therefore feared breaking the rules of the oath because of such reasons.*¹⁸

If by any chance the Mau Mau discovered that one of them had contravened the oath, he was either killed or punished instantly. In such cases, the automatic effect of the oath was not waited for. This was one way in which traditional oaths were adapted in the movement.

It does not, however, mean that those who did not believe in the automatic effect of a broken oath did not continue to cling to the movement faithfully. They continued to do so because they clearly understood that the movement had a just cause. They were made to understand this especially during the instructions they received after the oath ceremony.

A controversial issue here is the stand which was taken by some of the loyalists. It should be noted that there were many loyalists who worked for the government and at the same time assisted the Mau Mau.

These do not deserve to be called loyalists. But there were others who worked for the government in opposition to Mau Mau. While some of them had not taken the oaths, many of them had done so, but had turned against the movement. The loyalists' stand is difficult to assess because few, if any, will accept that they were loyalists during the Mau Mau war. Wanyoike has tried to assess this stand of the loyalists.¹⁹ He argues that the loyalists were aware that the whites were to blame for the events that led to Mau Mau, but that the loyalists opposed the methods used by the Mau Mau against the whites. But Wanyoike should have also considered that the government committed many atrocious activities against the Mau Mau. Today, many ex-Mau Mau assert that the loyalists were selfish people who sided with the government for self gain. The Mau Mau sang many songs directed to the loyalists and their activities. In these songs, the loyalists are referred to as thieves, robbers, traitors, and 'revealers of the secrets of the black people'.

The major purpose behind the giving of Mau Mau oaths was to enable the movement to unite and to fight for land and freedom. Persons who took Mau Mau oaths were warned in the ceremony that the greatest crime was to reveal to the non-Mau Mau that there was such a plan going on. Whoever revealed Mau Mau secrets, contrary to the vows in the oath, was regarded and indeed treated as an enemy of the movement. Each oath taker was warned that if he contravened the oath, he would be punished

even before the automatic effect of the oath came on him.

Another effect of Mau Mau oaths was that most people became more aware that there was something they could do to get rid of colonialism. During the oath ceremony and the instructions thereafter, people were made to understand the need for total unity, a need that the oath was intended to inculcate in each person. The oath ceremony and the instructions increased a person's awareness and consciousness of the deprivations of his society by the whites, and made him courageous enough to join hands with the others in the struggle against colonialism. The movement helped to promote a sense of nationalism in the people. It gave them direction to follow, a direction that was not there before. The oath ceremony taught each individual and impressed on him the need to fight for liberation. It should be emphasised again that through the use of oaths, the movement became the peak of mass political organisation in colonial Kenya. In this sense therefore, Mau Mau oaths achieved their goal of unity and commitment to the liberation struggle, irrespective of the problems encountered due to the activities of the loyalist homeguards. This unity and commitment was present among those persons who were dedicated members of the movement only.

At this point, it would be good to state the views of some writers about the effect of Mau Mau oaths.

Leakey attributes the effects of Mau Mau oaths to the Kikuyu fear of magic, witchcraft, spells and ceremonial uncleanness.²⁰ But, it was mainly "thahu" that was the greatest factor in traditional Kikuyu beliefs about oaths. Leakey's assumption was that the above elements were the ones that Christianity and western civilization had not erased from the minds of the Kikuyu at the time of the Mau Mau. With this idea, Leakey concluded that the effect of the Mau Mau oath on the recipient was that it "made the person doing it an outcast, unclean, ... uncleansable and utterly degraded in the eyes of native law and custom."²¹ On the contrary, we have seen that Mau Mau oaths were to a great extent traditional in nature, and that the variations that the oaths contained were a result of unavoidable circumstances. Further, we also find that the description that Leakey gives fits the loyalist homeguards as far as the Mau Mau were concerned. The Mau Mau considered all the people who refused to take the oaths as outcasts.

In emphasizing the nature and effects of Mau Mau oaths, Rosberg and Nottingham have come to the conclusion that the oath was both a sacred and social institution that contained values which were related to the supreme values of the society. The two authors have stated that:

In taking an oath, an individual associates himself with certain sacred symbols and rituals; the behaviour or beliefs to which the individual is bound by the oath acquire a sanction that goes beyond immediate and personal obligations and that links the

*individual to a larger social entity,
whether a secret society or nation.*²²

This view notes correctly the indivisible social and sacred aspects of Mau Mau oaths, and this was the sense in which most Mau Mau regarded the oaths.

On the individual level, we find that people differ in their opinions as to what they thought and felt after taking Mau Mau oaths. These personal feelings about the oaths greatly helped to determine a person's loyalty and commitment to the movement. Some of these individual feelings about the effects of the oaths are expressed below.

In pointing out the wrong views that have been given about the nature and effects of the oaths on the recipients, Rosberg and Nottingham have recorded the wrong view which states that:

*After having taken the oath, he underwent a profound metamorphosis. He was hence immune from rational thought processes: he underwent a psychological regression by which he cast out the white culture and bound his "will" to the secret association. He became an automaton, a mere tool in the hands of the oath-givers. He became an object with whom no rational dialogue could take place until he had been psychologically cleansed.*²³

We should note that it was with such wrong views on Mau Mau oaths that the government devised rehabilitation methods in an attempt to defeat Mau Mau. The errors present in a view such as the one above can only be judged against the views of Mau Mau themselves with regards to the effect of the oaths on themselves.

Kariuki states at length that:

My emotions during the ceremony had been a mixture of fear and elation. Afterwards in the maize, I felt exalted with a new spirit of power and strength. All my previous life seemed empty and meaningless. Even my education, of which I was so proud, appeared trivial beside this splendid and terrible force that had been given me. I had been born again and I sensed once more the feeling of opportunity and adventure that I had had on the first day my mother started teaching me to read and write.²⁴

And after he took the second Mau Mau oath, Kariuki became more committed to the movement as he shows:

The oath left my mind full of strange and excited feelings. My initiation was now complete and I became a true Kikuyu with no doubt as to where I stood in the revolt of my tribe.²⁵

This deep sense of commitment to the movement, which was inculcated in a person when he took the oath, is also expressed by Itote. He states that:

Participating in the ritual gave people a chance to attach their feelings and devotion to a sacred part of their own society; they did not have to take an oath to know that they were suffering and that they wanted to do something to help themselves.²⁶

Itote explains that the people took the oaths to show how deeply they felt the sufferings and also to show how deeply they felt the need to free themselves.

The oath ceremony and the instructions thereafter had much to teach Kiboi about nationalism. As he states, "The gathering and the oath, the feeling of unity and

the belief in a cause awoke in me the stirrings of a new emotion, nationalism. It was the greatest day of my life so far."²⁷

For most people who took Mau Mau oaths, there was great fear of breaking the oath. Most informants expressed this fear. Their fear was based mainly on two factors. On the one hand, the Kikuyu regard the oath as a solemn ritual and they fear the consequences of breaking the vows in an oath. "Thahu" and even death or serious sicknesses could result from breaking an oath. In one interview, seven out of ten of the informants stated that they feared breaking the Mau Mau oaths for fear of the "thahu" involved.²⁸

This fear of breaking the oath was further strengthened by the fear of fellow Mau Mau. If the Mau Mau learnt that one of them had contravened the vows, they either killed him or punished him severely, depending on the seriousness of the offence.

Finally, there were those people who did not believe in the automatic effects of breaking an oath. Such people remained committed to the movement due to their conviction that the cause for which they were fighting was just. In this way therefore, the movement was able to maintain loyalty among most of its followers. And the contribution of the oaths to this loyalty and commitment to the movement cannot be overemphasized. It is partly for this reason that we can rightly say that the Mau Mau oaths achieved their purpose.

Conclusions

In concluding this study, we should take note of several points which come out clearly in the last seven chapters.

Firstly, this study has led to the conclusion that contrary to the writings of people like Leakey, Mau Mau was not a religion. Instead, the evidence in the study has shown that the movement had a strong religious factor. The analysis of the symbols and rituals in the oaths covered in this study has shown that the religious factor in the movement contained beliefs and practices which were to a great extent adapted from the traditional religion of the Kikuyu.

But besides containing an adaptation of the traditional beliefs and practices of the Kikuyu, the religious factor also contained some christian elements. In some of their songs, the Mau Mau used christian tunes, while in some of their sermons, they read parts of the Bible. This is clear indication that the religious factor contained some form of syncretism. However, we have seen in this study that such a syncretism did not exist in Mau Mau oaths.

The evidence available here concerning oaths also shows that the nature of Mau Mau oaths was much similar to the nature of the traditional oaths and curses of the Kikuyu. It has been emphasized in the study that the symbols and rituals prevalent in the Mau Mau oath ceremonies were as much as possible adapted from the traditional oathing practices of the Kikuyu.

Further, the manner in which the oath ceremonies were organised and administered was much in accordance with the traditional Kikuyu oaths and curses. This conclusion has been arrived at in this study after careful analysis and comparison of the traditional Kikuyu oaths and curses on the one hand, and KCA and Mau Mau oaths on the other. The traditional Kikuyu oaths and curses were religious acts, and this was the sense in which the Mau Mau considered their oaths.

Secondly, it should be made clear in this conclusion that the religious factor in Mau Mau was not limited to the oaths alone. The Mau Mau had many more beliefs and practices most of which were adapted from the traditional Kikuyu religion. They had a strong belief in God, "Ngai", and they held daily morning and evening prayers to Him, in the traditional manner of worship. They strongly believed that God would help them to regain their lost lands and to attain independence. They prayed to Him in the traditional manner of beseeching God, and they prayed while facing Mount Kenya, again according to the traditional manner of prayer.

They also believed in the traditional roles of seers, diviner-doctors and prophets. Wherever they went, the Mau Mau were guided by these traditional specialists so as to overcome various obstacles and to know what would happen in the near future. The seers became particularly useful to the forest fighters because their advice was sought for before any battle could be engaged upon. It was

a strong belief among most Mau Mau that the seers and prophets were able to know the will of God and to interpret it correctly to the people.

There were also many religious ceremonies that were conducted by the Mau Mau. They offered occasional sacrifices to God, particularly after they had suffered serious disaster. These ceremonies were conducted in the traditional Kikuyu manner, in most cases under sacred trees. They also performed cleansing ceremonies upon all those among them who happened to contravene the various prohibitions that had been established to govern the forest forces. All these ceremonies were carried out in the traditional Kikuyu manner, under the guidance of diviner-doctors. This is further indication that the religious factor in Mau Mau was mainly traditional.

All the beliefs and practices of the Mau Mau cannot be covered here because they are beyond the scope of this study. However, the presence of these beliefs and practices in the movement lead us to the conclusion that the religious factor in the movement was much wider than what is covered in this study. It is therefore the suggestion of the writer here that complete research needs to be carried out in these other areas, before a proper assessment of the whole religious factor in the movement can be made. The beliefs and practices noted above could act as a useful guide to such a research.

Thirdly, it should also be pointed out here that the presence of the religious factor in the movement, particularly the application of oaths, was cited by some colonialists as

the most important evidence to show that among the Kikuyu, politics at this time had become atavistic.²⁹ This study has however shown that this was not the case. Instead, it has been emphasised here that the oaths were intended to serve nationalistic purposes. This study has also shown that the oaths to a great extent achieved their goal of uniting the people and making them committed to the liberation struggle. In this sense therefore, we can say that the religious factor in the movement, particularly the oaths, had a vital role to play in the development of nationalism.

This contribution of the oaths to the liberation struggle was recognised by the Mau Mau themselves after independence, as depicted in one of their songs which ran as follows:

*The first person to take the oath
Had the instincts of a human being
For if he did not accept to take the oath
This country would still be in darkness.*

In order to achieve this goal of unity, the Mau Mau organised and administered their oaths in accordance with the traditional beliefs and customs of the Kikuyu. Rosberg and Nottingham have correctly observed that, "the roots of an oath's ritual lay in Kikuyu traditional religion."³⁰ In other words, the adaptation of the traditional beliefs and practices of the Kikuyu by the Mau Mau at the time of crisis was aimed at serving nationalistic purposes. In support of this idea, the above two writers have stated that:

*For an oath to be an effective instrument in overcoming social fragmentation and re-establishing a central loyalty, it had to employ the symbols that the Kikuyu recognised as common to their people.*³¹

The significance of the religious factor in the movement, and especially the value of the traditional elements in the oaths has also been clearly stated by Mugo, who has argued that:

*It was logical that at such a serious time in the history of the tribe that the Kikuyu should seek to bind themselves to the success of the 'rebellion' by the traditional, most solemn method of the Kikuyu oath for that is all the Mau Mau oath was the Kikuyu oath adopted for war: a religious expression or a moral intent.*³²

Finally, the observation here that the religious factor in the Mau Mau movement was aimed at serving as a means towards the development of nationalism is clear evidence that religion in Mau Mau had an indivisible unity with nationalism. This unity is in accordance with the general nature of African traditional religion, whereby religion cannot be separated from the social, economic and political aspects of the society.³³

FOOTNOTES

1. Wakomo Kibiri, Interview, Murang'a, April 1977; Jonah Kabae, Interview, January and April, 1977; Mugethi Chege, Interview, Murang'a, April 1977; Njoroge Kagunda, op.cit., interviews; (they all related the same traditions about the chest meat).
2. Njoroge Kagunda, Interview, 10.12.76.
3. Kenyatta, J., Facing Mount Kenya, p.263.
4. Mbiti, J., African Religions and Philosophy, London: Heinemann, 1969, p.90.
5. In p'Bitek, O., African Religions in Western Scholarship, Nairobi: E.A.L.B., 1970, p.126.
6. Njoroge Kagunda, op.cit. interviews; See also the 'ceremony of second birth', in Kabetu, M.N., Kirira Kia Ugikuyu, pp.11f.

7. Njoroge Kagunda, op.cit., interview.
8. Details given by Jonah Kabae, op.cit., interviews.
9. Kamau Wang'ondu, interview, 28.10.76; Also Muchunu Gachuki, interview, 25.12.76.
10. Ibid.
11. Barnett and Njama, Mau Mau From Within, p.20ff.
12. In the Mau Mau song 'Mwenenyaga, we pray thee' (Mwenenyaga twakuhoya), See Appendix 8.
13. See Appendix i.
14. For forest rules, see Itote, W., Mau Mau General, pp. 285-291. For the rules in detention, see Kariuki, J.M. Mau Mau Detainee, p.111. Similar rules have been given by informants, including Kamau Wang'ondu, op.cit., interview.
15. Wamweya, J., Freedom Fighter, p.55.
16. Itote, W., op.cit., pp.51-52.
17. Muchunu Gachuki, op.cit., interview.
18. Chege Gathogo, interview, 28.10.76.
19. Wanyoike, E.N., An African Pastor, pp.193-194.
20. Leahey, Defeating Mau Mau, p.84.
21. Ibid.
22. Rosberg and Nottingham, The Myth of Mau Mau, p.244.
23. Ibid., p.334.
24. Kariuki, J.M., op.cit., p.27.
25. Ibid., pp.30-31.
26. Itote, W., op.cit., p.283.
27. Kiboi, M., War in the Forest, Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1975, p.5.
28. In the Darigiti interview, Nyandarua, 12.12.76.
29. Rosberg and Nottingham, op.cit., p.331.
30. Ibid., pp.259-260.
31. Ibid.
32. Mugo Gatheru, Child of Two Worlds, p.178.
33. Mbiti, J., op.cit., p.1: 15.

APPENDIX: SONGS

1A RIRIA KIMATHI WIITU AMBATIRE: (Mukami Kimathi and
her daughters)

Riria Kimathi wiitu ambatiře
Kirima-ini ari wiki
Ni etirie hinya nauumiriru
Wa kuhoota Nyakeru.

Tukurira tondu turi andu airu
Na tutiri a nyakeru
Na tutiri a kirathimo kiao
Ngai wiitu ari ombere.

Ni oigire makinya makwa mothe
Maria nii ndagereire
Nomo ona inyui mukagerera
Na munyuire ikombe icio.

Mwanyuira ikombe cia uumiriru
Ta iria nii ndanyuiriire
Ni cia ruo ningi cia kieha
Na maithori ma ngoro.

Mwihumbe uthiu ukiririria wothe
Kunyariruo na kuohwo
Mukimenyaga muri a uthamaki
Wa Gikuyu na Mumbi.

Mutikamakio ni guthamano
Kana ni guikio ciugu
Kana gutunywo indo na kuuragwo
Ngai wiitu ari o mbere.

Mutikamakio ni irima nene
Ta iria iri mbere yanyu
Tondu Ngai ndari handu atari
Arigiciirie guothe

Tukuhoya Ngai atwitikirie
Nyakeru ainuke kwao
Tondu muti utari na maciaro
Nduhandagwo mugunda.

1B WHEN OUR KIMATHI ASCENDED

When our Kimathi ascended
 The mountain alone
 He asked for power and courage
 To defeat the white men.

We are weeping because we are black people
 And because we are not of the white race
 Nor are we partners in their blessings
 Yet our God is still in front of us.

He said all my footsteps
 Which I walked
 You too must walk in the same
 And drink from the same cups.

If you drink from the cups of courage
 Like the ones I drank from
 They are of pain and sorrow
 And tears of the heart.

Don your faces with all endurance
 Persecutions and imprisonments
 Knowing well that you belong to the dominion
 of Gikuyu and Mumbi.

Do not be discouraged by deportations
 Or being thrown into (detention) camps
 Our God is still before us.

Do not get frightened by big mountains
 Such as the ones ahead of you
 For there is no place where God is not present
 He surrounds every place.

We will beseech Ngai to grant us
 That the white man go back to his home
 Because a tree that has no fruits
 Is never planted in the garden.

2A BURURI UYU WITU GIKUYU (Mukuhi Njoroge et al)

Andu aitu waiyaki ni akuire
 Na agitutigira kirumi
 Ng'undu ici ciitu tutikendie
 Na inyui no guciheana.

Bururi uyu witu Gikuyu
 Ngai ni aturathimire
 Na akiuga tutikoima kuo.

Mbari ya Nyakeru ni ageni
 Bururi uyu no makoima kuo
 Na inyui thaka mukagera ku?
 Gikuyu kiarurungana.

Nyakeru muri a thimo nyingi
 Ka mwene noko kambagia ira
 Nayo ngwaci ya mwana wene
 Noyo ihoragia mwaki.

Andu aitu aria muri njera
 Na aria munyitirwo uthamaki
 Tigai kieha na maithori
 Ngai ni ekumuhonokia.

Andu aitu kirimu na muugi
 Nuu utangiona miithukirie
 Iria nyakeru iratuthukia
 Na maundu ma kumukumu.

213 THIS LAND OF GIKUYU

Our people Waiyaki died
 And left a curse to us
 Never to sell this inheritance of ours
 And now you are giving it free.

This land of ours Gikuyu
 God blessed it for us
 And declared we shall never depart from it.

The whity clan are visitors
 They will have to depart from this land
 And you loyalists where will you go?
 When the Gikuyu congregate?

You whity clan have many proverbs
 The homestead owners child is the first to be annointed with ira
 And the potato of another's child
 Is the only one that extinguishes the fire.

All of you our people in jails
 And all of you arrested for political reasons
 Do not worry, neither shed your tears
 For God will deliver you.

All of you our people, clever and foolish
 Who can't see the shake-ups and disturbances?
 That the white race is performing on us
 With unspeakable hardships.

3A TWARIRAGIRA KENYATTA (Wambui Njau)

Gikuyu ungiurio ungiuga atia?

Gikuyu ungiurio ungiuga atia?

No njuge Kenya ni litu

Twatigiirwo ni Mwenenyaga.

Twariragira Kenyatta

Twariragira Kenyatta

Atongorie bururi uyu

Ni getha tuume ukombo-ini.

Muthungu ungiurio ungiuga atia?

Muthungu ungiurio ungiuga atia?

No njuge ndi mutunyani

Ndarehirwo ni utunyani.

Mubia ungiurio ungiuga atia?

Mubia ungiurio ungiuga atia?

No njuge ndi muhenania

Ndarehirwo ni uhenania.

Muhindi ungiurio ungiuga atia?

Muhindi ungiurio ungiuga atia?

No njuge ndi mubiashara

Ndarehirwo ni biashara.

Nyakinyua mutiuge ngemi

Nyakinyua mutiuge ngemi

Tukunguire wiyathi

Ni getha tuume ukombo-ini.

3B

WE WEPT FOR KENYATTA

Gikuyu if you were asked what would you say?
Gikuyu if you were asked what would you say?
I would say that Kenya is ours
Bequethed to us by Mwenenyaga.

We wept for Kenyatta
We wept for Kenyatta
To lead this country
Out from slavery.

If you European were asked what would you say?
If you European were asked what would you say?
I would say I am a robber
And for robbery I came.

If you Priest were asked what would you say?
If you Priest were asked what would you say?
I would say I am a liar
And that lying brought me here.

If you Asian were asked what would you say?
If you Asian were asked what would you say?
I would say I am a businessman
And I came here for business.

Oh honourable old women sing the joy trill
Oh honourable old women sing the joy trill
To celebrate independence
That will lead us from slavery.

4A NGARINGARINGA THU CIITU (Kamau Wang'ondu)

Ndiri na kieha no nguthii
 Ona kwagia thina
 Ndiririirie guthii
 Gutetera bururi.

Ngaringaring thu ciitu
 Ngaringaring thu ciitu
 Ndiciiire ndiga
 Ndiri Munyakeru.

Gikuyu ndemi mathathi
 Maatawaraga na ng'undu
 Na thenge ciao iri mbugi
 Na migunda iri marigu.

Aria mena nganja ageni matikainuka
 Ni magie na uumiriru
 Ageni no makainuka.

Ina na umenye
 Gitumi kia ruimbo ruru
 Wicirie umenye
 Ati ti rwa gikeno.

4B

I WILL STRIKE AT OUR ENEMY

I have no fear, I will still go
 In spite of all the problems
 I have decided to go
 To fight for the land.

I will strike at our enemies
 I will strike at our enemies
 I will tell them to leave me alone
 For I am not of the white race.

Since the beginnings Agikuyu have ruled
 Through their lands
 And he-goats with bells
 And gardens full of bananas.

Those who still doubt
 The going home of the alien visitors
 Let them be courageously assured
 That aliens will go home.

Sing and know well
 The reason behind this song
 You will think and find out
 That it is a song of sorrow.

5A NA RIRIA ITHUI TWATHAMIRIO (In Darigiti Interview, 10.12.76)

Na riria ithui twathamirio
Tukiririra ciana
Tutari gwa kurima irio
Tuteithie ciana ciitu.

Na inyui acukani aya
Muthuire ciana cianyu
Na mukenda o nda cianyu
Ni inyui thu cia ruriri.

Kiriro kiingi gia ciana
Ni uria irakuruo ni nda
Tutari gwa kurima irio
Tuteithie ciana ciitu.

Tutigakira ori ori
Tutari gwa kurima
Na wiyathi wiitu kiumbe
Bururi witu Kenya.

5B

WHEN WE WERE DETAINED

When we were detained
We cried for the children
We had nowhere to cultivate food
So as to maintain those children.

And you betrayers
You who hate your children
And care only for your stomachs
You are the nation's enemies.

There is so much crying by the children
Due to hunger and stomach aches
For we have nowhere to cultivate
So as to support them.

We shall never ever keep quiet
So long as we have nowhere to cultivate food
And a freedom of our own
In this country of ours Kenya.

6A NGWENDA URIRIKANAGE KAMWANA (Muchunu Gachuki)

Ngwenda uririkanage kamwana utuike wama
 Hamwe na arata aria angi mwohetwo nao
 Tugitwarwo njera
 Twari na arata aingi
 Ni twonire thina munene
 Hindi iyo gutiri undu arata
 Kioho ni giathira.
 Na riu twi njira-ini
 Tuthiite o micii.

Hai-Hai-Hai-Hai
 Ngukira ngaririkana
 Maithori makwa magaitika
 Na ni undu wa kieha
 Tuthiite o kugomana
 Na aciari o micii.

Ngaathikwo thi ino na tiiri
 Ngumbacirrie bururi wa Kenya
 Na Kenya ndikoima tene na tene.
 Andu aria mwatigirwo
 Mugiicukumithania
 Na mbari ya Nyakeru
 Menyai atiri
 Ni ciana cia Mumbi
 Muraagithia iganjo
 Na muui Ngei ni atuheire
 Tiiri uyu
 Ndemi na mathathi
 Bururi wa Kenya.
 Na riu weyumbirio
 Ni ciana njeru.

Mwenenyaga rathima
 Andu aria mathinagia
 Ni mbari ya Nyakeru
 Makiuragagwo
 Na matiri hinya
 Na matiri na indo

Makuhoyaga hinya waku
Mwenenyaga umahotanire
Na uhoti waku
Nao makugocage tene na tena.

6B

REMEMBER ALWAYS, YOUNG MAN

Remember always, young man, to be faithful and honest
 Together with all your friends with whom you were jailed
 When we were taken to prison,
 We had many friends
 We encountered many hardships then
 But there is nothing we can say my comrades,
 The jail term is over;
 Now we are on our way
 To our homes.

Hai-Hai-Hai-Hai
 As I brood, I remember
 And my tears drop
 Because of the sorrow
 Of going to reunite
 With the parents at home.

I will be buried in this earth with soil in my hands
 Gripping tightly the country of Kenya
 And I will never depart from Kenya, ever and ever.
 Those of you who were left
 Clinging strongly to
 The white man's race
 Know now that
 It is the children of Mumbi
 You are depriving of their ancestral homes
 Knowing too well as you do that Ngai gave us
 This soil
 Ndemi and Mathathi
 The land of Kenya.
 And now it is all grabbed and kept
 By the white children.

O Mwenenyaga, bless those who are inconvenienced
 By the white men
 And those who get killed, yet have no strength
 They neither have weapons, but only pray for your strength

Mwenenyaga grant them victory, fight for them
With your ability,
So that they can praise and beseech you
For ever and ever.

7A GIKUYU NI OIRWO NI MWENENYAGA (In Darigiti Interview
11.12.76)

Gikuyu ni oirwo ni Mwenenyaga
Akiigirirwo Kirinyaga iguru
Akirwo Bururi uyu wothe ukuona
Ni ndakuhe utuike wa njiarwa ciaku.

Anake a Gikuyu ni ciembe njega
Tondu matiuragia wa kwao nuu
O uria mangiona tonya murata
Nyumite kwa Mumbi mathina ndiri.

Airitu a Gikuyu ni ciembe njuru
Twarikaniire atia ni ngagukora
Warirwo ni ciau ugithii ukindiga
Ukarira wone ndiari na itheru.

Mbara ndiri mwago ona mwamiona
Ni yatuniniore marigithathi
Matiema rumiai micii na ciana
Ngai ni munene no tukoimira.

Na maitu ukinjita njitaga naiyu
Ndathukirio matu matuku maingi
Ni undu wa gukomagira mugeka
Na gukomongagwo na thanju mutwe.

Kunda ruhia ruru maitu munjiari
Niwe waruonire rukiuna njora
Naruo ruru rungi ni rwa murata
Uria tweranaga kunja mugeka.

Twatwaragwo kware-ini cia mahiga
Na tutiamenyaga kuria twatwaragwo
Tiga no mahiga maikurukaga
Ngiringwo kuguru ngitwo kumbakumba.

7B

GIKUYU WAS CALLED BY MWENENYAGA

Gikuyu was called by Mwenenyaga
 And taken to the top of Mount Kenya
 He was told All the land that you can see
 I have given you for your descendants.

Agikuyu men are very good beings
 They consider not who is their kin or who isn't
 Whoever comes is welcomed as a friend and told
 We are Mumbi's sons we have no troubles.

But Agikuyu daughters aren't good beings
 We promised they'd wait till we returned
 What made you depart and leave us
 You'll cry and remember that we weren't joking.

War has no pleasures let me assure you
 All our firstborns died in it
 And you seconders take care of homes and children
 For because Ngai is great we shall overcome.

Mother, when you call me do so loudly
 My ears were defected for many days
 Due to sleeping on mats on the floor
 And getting beaten on the head with sticks.

Drink from this horn my dear mother
 For you were the one who saw the knife break the sheath
 And this other horn is for my dear friend
 With whom we folded up the sleeping mat.

We were taken to stone quarries
 Not knowing where we were being taken
 All we could see were rolling stones
 And when one hit me on the foot I was scolded.

8A MWENENYAGA TWAKUHOYA (Mukami Kimathi)

"Ni nii Elsie Mukami wa Dodan Kimathi. Ni ngumuinira karuimbo ka bururi uyu witu, tondu wa kuririkana Ngai uria atwikite wega. Twahoyaga na mbu. Rugaturirika atiri Ngai niwe wi mbere litu, niwe uri thutha na niwe uri mwena. Niwe watuhotaniire. Aria matuikire gaturume magituika igongona, nio ene kirathimo kia bururi uyu. Na kuuma uumuthi Mwathani amaririkane, ona aria mari mwoyo, na ciana cia ndigwa na cia ngoriai."

Ngai mweka mutangiri wa ita
Mwamukiri ma mundu na ma andu airu
Uri mbere tutingihotwo ni thu
Mwenenyaga twakuhoya.

Twakuhoya wendani na gitiyo
Na tha nyingi cia mwendwa wa ruriri
Uiguano wa Gikuyu na Mumbi
Mwenenyaga twakuhoya.

Twakuhoya tukonana twi ithuothe
Kuuma Ngong kinya Karimatura
Hindi iyo kieha ni gigathira
Njamba cia ita ciahotana.

Kamatimu muruagira ukombo
Njamba cia ita ikiruirira ng'undu
Ciatigilirwo ni muthuri ti Ireji
Mwi na maitho ni gwikigia.

Mukarira Nyakeru yathii kwao
Tondu mutikona uhuruko Kenya
Ni ngero mwanagera nyumba yanyu
Ikimucaririe uhuruko Kenya.

Thaai thathaiya Ngai thaai.

8B

MWENENYAGA WE PRAY THEE

"I am Elsie Mukami, wife of Dedan Kimathi. I will sing you a song about our land so as to remember the good things that Ngai has done to us. We worshipped while crying. The song used to remind us that Ngai is the one in front of us, behind us, and besides us. He won the war for us. Those that became the lambs of sacrifice have the blessings of this land. And from today, may the Lord remember them, both those alive, as well as all the orphans."

Ngai, the leader of the warriors
 You who receives the cries of each man and of all blacks
 When you are in front, our enemies cannot defeat us
 Mwenenyaga we pray thee.

We pray thee for love and respect
 And great mercy for the beloved of the nation
 For the Unity of Gikuyu and Mumbi
 Mwenenyaga we pray thee.

Help all of us to come together
 From Gong to Garba Tulla
 It is only then that our sorrows will end
 When the salient champions of battle win.

Kamatimu, you fight for slavery
 When our champions fight for the land
 Left to us by our Iregi ancestors
 Having the sight, you befool yourselves.

You will weep when the whites go home
 For you will not find rest in Kenya
 Cause of the calamities you have delt your own house
 May these atrocities seek a place for you.

Peace, beseech Ngai, peace.

9A ACIARI TIGAI KUMAKA

Aciari tigai kumaka
 Mwana ni aciaragwo naa agakua
 Na aciari ake makomiriria
 Tonde wa kumenya gitumi.

Njama icio ciatumwo Ndaka-ini
 Ni Kimathi mari na Mbaria
 Ni ciatharikire na hinya
 Nginya atongoria magikena.

Kuuma Muthithi na Kariara
 Mutungatiri wa itungati
 Niwe Gitau Matenjagwo
 Niwe wahuranaga mbica.

Gitau ni erire Wamwere
 Wamwere ndukanjitanire
 Wamwere ndukanjitanire
 Wakoruo uri Mugikuyu

Nano macokio ma Wamwere
 Ukunjira ndigagwitanire
 Ukunjira ndigagwitanire
 Utige tugicinirwo micii.

Riria Matenjagwo akuaga
 Ni arumire tiiri na kanua
 Akiuga nii ni ndakua
 Ndi njamba nene ya Gikuyu.

Njeri muiritu wa Kariara
 Na Njoki muiritu wa Iyego
 Nio acio mukuona mbica-ini
 Magitungatira ruriri.

Twakinya rurii rwa thaka
 Hau ni twakomire ngebu
 Twetereire Wanjeri Ngui Kamatimu magitigira.

Twaragia na ucamba munene
 Tonde wa kumenya gitumi
 Mwire muingi wikire kio
 Kinya Kenya ithire karambaa.

Mbica ici mukuona iri haha
 Ni iria twahuriirwo Kinyona
 Ni ithui twarugamiriire ugo
 Nake Wambugu aragurage.

Njamba iyo mukuona iri hau
 Niyo Ndungu muru wa Giceru
 Niwe waharurukagia ndege
 Ciukite guthinia itungati.

Kamatimu muri andu anaku
 Mwathinia ciana na atumia
 Mwaninire mburi na ng'ombe
 Gikuyu gikoimirira ku?

Mbaara ino igitwo ni itonga
 Na igekirwo hinya ni ahiki
 Na igekirwo hinya ni ahiki
 Na thikauti cia tuhii.

Wuui iya muriraniro
 Gutituire muriraniro
 Hindi ya tha ni yathirire
 Mundu akiuma kwa muka mucii
 Ni murangire na njirungi.

9B PARENTS, STOP WORRYING (Darigiti Interviews)

Parents, stop worrying
 A child wholly born gets dead
 And its parents persevere
 For knowing the reason.

The warriors sent to Ndaka-ini
 Were led by Kimathi and Mbaria
 They attacked with strength
 Till the leaders were happy.

From Muthithi and Kariara
 The caretaker of the fighters
 Was Gitau Matenjagwo
 He was the photographer.

Gitau told Wamwere
 Wamwere, do not betray me
 Don no betray me
 If you are a true Kikuyu.

And Wamwere answered
 You tell me not to betray you
 So that you may go
 And leave them burning our homes.

When Matenjagwo was dying
 He put soil in his mouth
 And said he was dying
 As a great Kikuyu warrior.

Njeri, a lady from Kariara
 And Njoki, a lady from Iyego
 Are the ones you see on the photograph
 Serving our nation.

When we reached Thata plains
 We laid ambush there
 Waiting for Wanjeri the Dog
 But the Kamatimu feared.

Mbiyu muuhigia ciana
Tumuhoere muno
Nginya akona mumuteithiriria.

Hoyai ma
Thaithai ma
Ni amu Ngai no uria wa tene.

Maithori maitikire
Twanina thiku ithatu
Twona ciana ikiriranira.

10B PRAY ON, BESEECH TRULLY (Led by Mukuhi Njoroge)

Kenyatta was praised
By the women and children
When they were taken to Yatta, to be imprisoned there.

Pray on, beseech trully,
For Ngai is the same one of old times.

Kenyatta who is loved by all
The protector of our nation
May Ngai bless him.

One lady died because of bloating
Due to eating Buffalo meat.

Much love and unity I witnessed
Of those women and children
Who shared every beanseed that dropped down.

A telegram was delivered
From Githunguri
Requesting whether we had arrived safely.

And we replied that our only sorrow
Was with the burial of Josephine.

Much tears dropped from our eyes
When we witnessed
Her clothes being given to her sister.

One European came with his servants and shovels
And we saw her burried like bags.

Mbiyu, the sharpener of our children
Let us pray for him
Till he finds a maintainer.

We cried much after three days
When we saw all our children crying together.

11A WEE UNGIURIO ATIA (Mukami Kimathi)

Kiugo kia mbere na inyui anake
 Mutungatire Gikuyu
 Ona mwathinio nduriyaga
 Na thutha no inyui mukoimira.

Wee ungiurio atia
 I nawe atia
 Kana uri Mugikuyu
 Ndoya moko meri na iguru
 Njuge nii ndi Mugikuyu.

Tugitigana na arata aitu
 Ni tukwenda mumenye hiu
 No miiri iiki yatigana
 No ngoro ciitu itwarane hamwe.

Ningi o ringi na inyui anake
 Mutungatire ruriri
 Tunyitanire turi hamwe
 Tuhote nyina wa Karwigi na ithe.

Na riria ngathii gwitu mucii
 Ngehumba nguo cia njua
 Njoke ndihake maguta
 Endwa moke maiyure mucii.

11B

IF YOU WERE ASKED

The first word to you young men
Is that you serve the Agikuyu
Even if you are troubled, troubles don't kill
In the end it's you who will triumph.

If you were asked whether you are a Kikuyu
What would you say?

I would raise both hands high
And declare myself a Kikuyu.

When we part dear friends
We would like you to know trully
That only our bodies have parted
For our hearts will move together.

Again I will tell you our youth
To serve the Gikuyu
And let us unite together
To defeat the father and the mother Eagle.

And when I will be returning home
I will put on leather clothes
Then smear myself with oil
So that all my beloveds will come and fill the home.

12A UHOHO URUA NDONIRE NA MAITHO

Ciana cia Olenguruoni ni ciatigirwo
 Hau Wabici-ini
 Manyina na maithe
 Magitwarwo Yatta
 Na aria angi Nakuru
 Kwoherwo ithaka.

Uhoro uria ndonire na maitho
 Na mukiona uhoti wa Gikuyu
 Matiathaithikire mekire o uria
 O maririirie.

Mbembe ciatemengwo Murungu akiona
 Ciana cia Olenguruoni ikinyamarika
 Akirathima ndare na nyama cia githaka
 Agitwira turie.

Mwarimu Koirigo ni anyitirwo
 Akira Muthigari wakoruo ni ukwenda
 Ndingitiga ciana ta ciana cia ngoriai
 Ngorai cukuru-ini tuthii twi ithuothe.

Mutikanoherwo uhoro wa njira-ini
 Kana mwitikire guthecithio irore
 Ciugo cia Gikuyu nicio ciatuikire
 Mwigito wa Gikuyu handu kiaruma.

Marutwo Marima ni maatwarirwo
 Hau Wabici-ini guthecithio irore
 Makirega irore magitwarwo Yatta
 Na aria angi Nakuru kwoherwo ithaka.

Mutikananyue maria njira-ini
 Kana munyue maai ma kwaraha
 Ciugo cia Gikuyu ni cio ciatuikire
 Mwigito wa Gikuyu handu kiaruma.

12B THE THINGS I SAW WITH MY EYES (Darigiti Interview
11.12.76)

Olenguruone children were left
There at the office
Their fathers and mothers were taken to Yatta
And imprisoned because of land.

I saw many things with my eyes
And you witnessed the ability of the Agikuyu
They refused to be persuaded
So they did what they wished to do.

When maize was destroyed God saw
The children of Olenguruone suffering
He blessed brambles and wild bush animals
And He told us to eat them.

Koirigo, the teacher was arrested
But he pleaded with the askari that
He would not leave the children like orphans
So he asked them to arrest him from the school ground.

Do not be cheated on the way
Neither accept to be fingerprinted
Because the traditional Gikuyu words became
The defence of the Agikuyu wherever they are.

From Marina they were taken
To the office for fingerprinting
They refused to fingerprint and were taken to Yatta
And some to Nakuru to be imprisoned for land.

Do not drink from rainpools on the way
Neither take stagnant water
For surely the traditional Gikuyu words have become
The defence of all Agikuyu wherever they are.

13A

TUGAKENA MUNO

Twoimire Olenguruoni ta thaa ithatu
Tugikinya Yatta ta thaa thita.

Tugakena muno

Nyumka ya Mumbi igicokerio ithaka.

Tweragwo narua ma narua na ihenya
Kai mutekumenya mwi mabuthu.

Muthungu ni okire na akirugama
Mbere-ini ya muingi amahure mbica.

Ciugo cia Kenyatta ni ciagiririe
Undu uria wendaga gwikwo ni ageni.

Twoimire Nakuru ta thaa ithatu
Tugikinya Thika ta thaa thita
Tukiheo maai marebe atatu
Ucio niguo cai twegagurire.

Mitheko ndonire turi Gicuka
Tugithekereruo ni ciana njeru
Tondu cieciragia twathii guthira
Tutigacoka kwonuo Kenya ringi.

Tweragwo haraka narua na ihenya
Tugicokereria indo igiteagwo
Tweragwo haraka narua na ihenya
Mutigetigire mworagia ni ri.

14A

KAMATIMU MURI AICI

Kamatimu muri aici na muri atunyani
Mwetagirira round muthii mugatunyane
Mwetagirira round muthii mugatunyane.

Mwana wa Mugikuyu ekurira akerwo kira
Thoguo ni athire Manyani na Nyukwa ari Kamiti.

Mutumia wa Kamau niwe wari Karani
Ka anake aria maarutirwo irima na Biringani.

Mwana wa Mumaumau ekurira akerwo kira
Thoguo ni athire Nyandarua ahitagwo ta thwariga.

Mwanake wa kamatimu ekurira akeruo kira
Mburi ni nyingi Gikuyu ni ngukuguranira.

Mutunia wa Matimu ekurira akeruo kira
Muungururio ni wa ruclu thii ngagutunyanire.

14B KAMATIMU YOU ARE THIEVES (Darigiti Interview)

You Kamatimu are thieves and robbers
You wait for supervision so you can go robbing.

When a Kikuyu baby cries you tell it to stop
Because its father's in Manyani and the mother's in
Kamiti.

Kamau's wife was the secretary to the men
Who were ordered out of a hideout with a machinegun.

When a Mau Mau baby cries it is told to stop
Cause its father went to Nyandarua to be hunted
like an antelope.

When the son of a Homeguard cries he is told to stop
For goats are many in Gikuyuland, he would get a
wife with them.

When the wife of a Homeguard cries she's told to stop
For the operation day is near
So her husband will go and rob for her.

GLOSSARY

- Aceera* - Name of a Kikuyu clan
- Ambui* - Name of a Kikuyu clan
- Anjiru* - Name of a Kikuyu clan
- Batuni* - Platoon on batallion
- Ethaga* - Name of a Kikuyu clan
- Gaki* - Traditional name for Nyeri
- Githathi* - A stone, with seven holes drilled through it, used as a symbol in oaths and curses. It is used in a ceremony called kuringa githathi i.e. to strike the githathi especially in an oath.
- Gikuyu* - The name of the traditional ancestor (male) of the Kikuyu. Also used for the Kikuyu.
- Githita* - The rear end organ of a sheep. Name also used for the male sex organ.
- Githuri* - The chest.
- Ihii* - Uncircumcised boys (singular kihii)
- Ikengeto* - Fatty piece of meat situated at an animal's chest, also forming part of the chest meat. It was traditionally eaten by men.
- Ira* - A white powder used in various Kikuyu ceremonies.
- Iregi* - The revoltors. A name of an ancient ruling generation among the Kikuyu.
- Irua* - Initiation ceremony of circumcision.
- Ithaka* - Lands: A major demand of the Mau Mau from the colonialists.
- Itwika* - Traditional ceremony in which one generation took over the religious and political matters from the preceding one.

- Kaana* - Child; (Kaana ka murikawe - An agemate's child)
- Kabete* - Traditional name for Kiambu
- Kamatimu* - Name used by Mau Mau to mean loyalists. Also traditionally used for very junior elders.
- Karing'a* - The Kikuyu of pure Kikuyu circumcision guild as distinct from those of the Maasai guild.
- Kiambo* - That which is set up; Name used for the arena of Mau Mau oaths.
- Kirore* - Fingerprint used as signature.
- Kirumi* - A curse, (literary means an insult)
- Komerera* - Hiders - The Mau Mau name for those people who lived in local bushes and holes during the Mau Mau war.
- Kunyua muuma* - To take an oath; to swear in a ritual ceremony.
- Kuringa thenge* - Striking the he-goat: To swear by beating a goat (usually male) or by breaking its bones.
- Maina* - Name of an agegroup or a generation set which alternates with the Mwangi generation.
- Matuumo* - A ceremonial dance traditionally held on the day before circumcision.
- Metumi* - Traditional name for Murang'a
- Migerwa* - The total paraphernalia or contents in an oath ceremony.
- Miratina* - Large fruits of a tree (muratina) which are used, together with honey, in the preparation of liquor, (singular, muratina)

- Mugere* - A shrub that was commonly used as a symbol in oaths and curses ceremonies, (plural, migere)
- Mugiro* - A prohibition or a ban.
- Mugwanja* - The number seven; (mugwanja muuru, the ominous seven)
- Muiko* - A stick, flattened on one end, which is used for stirring or smashing foods.
- Muingi* - The people; the congregation; a name used for the whole Mau Mau community.
- Mumbi* - The wife of Gikuyu; the female ancestor of the Kikuyu.
- Mundumugo* - Diviner-doctor
- Muthigi* - A staff of office carried by senior elders, (plural, mithigi).
- Muuma* - An oath
- Mwangi* - Name of an age-group or generation set which alternates with Maina.
- Mwano* - Name used for the container, as well as the contents therein, which were used by the diviner-doctor in his work.
- Mzungu* - The general Swahili name for Europeans, (plural, wazungu).
- Ndahikio* - Ritual vomiting; A ritual ceremony of purification.
- Ndirothurwa ni ici* - May these (foods etc.) loathe me; may they kill me. A curse uttered by the oath-taker, directed to himself.
- Ndua* - A large calabash in which liquor was brewed.
- Ngai* - The common Kikuyu name for God.

- Ngata* - A small roundish bone at the back of the neck (of a goat or an elephant) used as a symbol in oath ceremonies.
- Ngunuro* - Ritual initiation ceremony especially of a diviner-doctor; literary, the uncovering.
- Ngwaro* - Strips cut from a goat's skin used in various ceremonies, including purification, cursing and oathing ceremonies.
- Njamba* - A brave warrior; (Njamba cia ita, a name used for the Mau Mau forest fighters and for Kikuyu fighters).
- Nyakeru* - A name used by the Kikuyu, especially during the time of the Mau Mau, for the white man.
- Nyama ya githusi* - The chest meat.
- Tahika* - Vomit; a term used to denote the symbolic vomiting of ills during the purification ceremony of ndahikio.
- Thahu* - Defilement; the ill consequences due to a contravened prohibition, curse, or oath. Sicknesses and even death are some of the symptoms of thahu.
- Thenge* - A male goat; a name also used to refer to some special symbols in oaths and curses e.g. githathi andāngata. Female animals when used in these ceremonies were also referred to as thenge.
- Uiguano wa muingi* - The unity of the people; denoted the unity of all the people who had taken Mau Mau oaths.
- Uma-uma* - Get out, get out; an anagram which has been assumed to have been the root of the name Mau Mau.

Wiyathi

- Self rule; one of the principal demands of the Mau Mau.

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IV ORAL INFORMANTS

Benson Muchiri
 Chaura Thumi
 Chege Gathogo
 Daniel Kang'ori
 Esbon Mwangi
 James Bouttah
 Joel Kariuki
 Jonah Kabae
 Joseph Kariuki
 Justus Muchiri
 Kamau Wang'ondu
 Kinyita Mukunyi
 Kiumi Waiganjo
 Muchanu Gachuki
 Mugetni Chege
 Nugo Ngobia
 Mukami Kimathi
 Mukuni Njoroge
 Mwangi Kamau
 Njoroge Kagunda
 Nyanja Tang'aria
 Reuben Maina
 Richard Githaiga
 Wakomo Kibiri
 Wambui Hjaiu