

## Nationalism, Pimping Laws and Local Geographies of Crime and Punishment in Colonial Kenya, 1895-1963

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### Abstract

Before and during the emergency women in Kenya were increasingly moving into larger cities as prostitutes and causing discomfort to the colonial authorities, and as such they interfered with the preoccupation of the state in countering the Mau Mau insurgency. Consequently, these prostitutes resulted into disobedience. For long Thuku demonstrations had provided them with an opportunity to show their dislike of the authorities and the police. This paper therefore, examines prostitution as a crime and how the state formulated laws to control the vice. We argue that colonial rule was not only maintained by brute military power but also by subtler methods of discipline and control: through legal codes, penal practices and criminological discourses. This paper examines the history of colonial criminality in Kenya. As we will see, ideas of criminality and methods of disciplining prostitutes took distinctive forms in colonial contexts, in no small part because of notions of racial difference at the heart of the European imperial project. We will explore this interaction examining as we interrogate the related histories of systems of punishment such as colonial prisons, corporal punishment and police violence.

**Key words: Colonialism, Mau Mau, Nairobi, Prostitution, Women**

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### I. INTRODUCTION

In the first two decades of the Nineteenth Century, women migrated from rural areas to the urban suburbs in search for wage labour. The majority were from the Meru, Embu and Kikuyu communities whose homeland of adjoined Nairobi. Some of the reasons that made these women leave their rural areas included; marital discords, quarrels with parents, widowhood, and childlessness.<sup>3</sup> Most of these women ended up in the business of selling sex.

Prostitution supplemented the low wages paid to these working women. Women in Nairobi used their wage labour as a way of increasing their earning as prostitutes. From 1937 in Nairobi there was increased employment for women. They participated in the sale of some specialized tasks of domestic labour. There were 164 childcare servants (ayahs), 58 hospital ward attendants, and 15 licensed brewers who supplied employed women in Nairobi. They lived in Pumwani between 1937 and 1939.<sup>4</sup> There are those who supplemented their wages with prostitution. They used the legality of having business in European and Indian areas to solicit men. Women who practiced prostitution in Nairobi were called *Malaya* prostitutes<sup>5</sup> or *watembezi* prostitutes.<sup>6</sup> Women also participated in sewing for those that were Christians.

However, colonial officials in Nairobi were less concerned with housing urban Africans than they were with controlling them. The colonial state attempted to manage urban Africans by housing them in designated areas. The state divided the city into areas designated legal and illegal for Africans. The colonial state decided to demolish Pangani village. It acted like the oldest uncontrolled African settlement in Nairobi. The settlement was

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<sup>3</sup> KNA/NRB/DCI/111/ Figures drawn from Political record 1906-Census

<sup>4</sup> L. White, *The Comfort of Homes prostitution in colonial Kenya* (Chicago, 1990), p.2

<sup>5</sup> Malaya is taken from Kiswahili dictionary. It means 'Europe' - *ulaya* so as the connotation of prostitution is that it was brought about by the British. These women stayed inside their rooms and waited for men to come for them. This form of prostitutes predicated on the women's having a room to which a man might also purchase access. They provided the most extensive set of domestic services for sale including food, bathe water, conversation and when a man spent the night breakfast.

<sup>6</sup> The *watembezi form* – Watembezi is from a Swahili verb kutembea "to walk" is street walking. They solicited men in all places. The law calls; bars, hotel lobbies and of course streets. Women sought men somewhere other than their place of residence and it was common for homeless women.

officially source 1939. The demolition of Pangani was described as a masterstroke of urban labour policy. It was designed as a way of using segregation in towns as a means of obtaining cheap labour.<sup>7</sup>

It should be noted that sanitation, crime, and literacy all had a meaning to colonialists. A policy was enacted by the colonial state so as to contain the African population in an informal settlement like Shauri Moyo. Africans who were affected by the Pangani demolition were either repatriated into their reserves. Others into Shauri Moyo. Africans were contained in these locations so that sickness and crime could not spread over to European areas where Africans worked daily and infect the population. The crime rate in Nairobi increased during and after second world war. Due to congestion in African settlement, there was an increase in theft. In 1939, the governor wrote to his successor that African women in African settlement needed to be educated. The governor noted:

African women must receive education not only in cooking food and looking after babies, both of which I admit are very important, but also sufficient to be able to read native books and papers so they shall be able to talk on an equal footing with their menfolk. I believe the African who takes quite an intelligent interest in European affairs gets fed up when he goes back to his hut and finds his wife can think and talk of nothing but maize, manure, and goats. Thereupon he goes off to his counterpart of the club which may become a sort of talking shop and possibly a centre up disaffection.<sup>8</sup>

The colonial state was interested in controlling the increasing level of prostitution through education. Women had to be compelled to education, families were to be literate, relatively well put and respectable. The state aimed at making urban men and women love men who worked and women who cooked. It should be noted during after the second world war there was an increase in crime in Nairobi. There was a breakdown of morals and the disintegration of customary law.<sup>9</sup>

The superintendent of the African Location, Tom Mbotela complained about the number of armed gangs that made the law-abiding resident afraid to go abroad at night. According to Ainsworth in the past, it had been easier to control African locations not just because the population was smaller but because the population was by nature more law-abiding. "African have now adopted an attitude of opposition."<sup>10</sup> Housing shortage and increase in population in Nairobi led to resistance from Africans against the colonial state. Women prostitutes who had become landlords in Nairobi suffered losses due to the colonial state criminalizing and denigrating landlords.

There was also a large military presence in Kenya during the war. Africans were employed as cooks and cleaning staff in the camps that housed all these men. Military presence in Kenya increased wages for domestic labourers. The colonial state passed 1944 Servant Ordinance that restricted the number of servants Europeans could have to three per European.<sup>11</sup> The war increased demand for female wage labour. Prostitutes increased their wartime profits. They chose their customers more selectively than before. Kikuyu teenage *watembezi* prostitutes rose during the war.

They were said to be fourteen and fifteen years old. The Colonial state was appalled by the presence of juvenile streetwalkers mainly because of their youth. European soldiers asked taxi drivers who were connected to juvenile prostitution to take them to Eastleigh where the juveniles walked the street adjacent to the military camp. The young *watembezi* prostitutes were frequently arrested for pass-laws violations; those judged to be under fifteen were not formally charged but were sent home as soon as possible. At this point in history, the colonial state had not established a female prison for the lawbreakers. Many of these teenage prostitutes were arrested several times over as they returned to Nairobi. They were especially vulnerable because of their youth and their presence on the streets. The war increased the number of women that engaged in *watembezi* prostitution.<sup>12</sup>

The arrest of juvenile *watembezi* prostitutes in Nairobi took place in Eastleigh and on main roads of Eastleigh to Kiambu and Thika. Older *watembezi* prostitutes were sometimes arrested. The wartime judges

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<sup>7</sup> See L. White, *Women's domestic labour in colonial city. Prostitution in Nairobi 1900-1950* in Jone Parpart and Shawn Stitche (eds) *Patriarchy and Class African women at home in the work place* (boulder CO: west view press 1988). pp. 139-60

See L. White, *Prostitution Identity and class Consciousness during world war II* signs journals of women in culture and society II 2(1986), pp.255-73 Goldman pp. 76-77

<sup>8</sup> L. White, *The Comfort of Homes prostitution in colonial Kenya* (Chicago, 1990), p. 142

<sup>9</sup> See Julius Carlebach, *Juvenile Prostitutes in Nairobi* (Kampala East African institute of social research 1961), pp. 28-29

<sup>10</sup> Luise white p. 144-146

<sup>11</sup> A. Haywood and F.A.S. Clerke, *The History of Royal West African Frontier Forces* (London, 1964), pp. 330-331

<sup>12</sup> A.M. Sigsworth and J.J. Wyke *A. Study of Victorian Prostitution and Venereal disease in Martha vicinus* (ed) Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian age (London, 1973), pp.77-99

considered the arresting officers to be rejected suitors. The reason as to why prostitution increased during the war is that they saw European men as rich, generous and possessing access to the state. It was a simple price of paper legitimate or at least enhances prostitution. The European soldiers paid substantially more than the Indians. Europeans also gave food in addition to cash. *Watembezi* prostitutes allowed that their interaction with Europeans could offer protection as well as money and food. Wartime *watembezi* agreed that a letter "proving" employment in European households was the best protection a prostitute could have. During the war, the *Malaya* prostitutes combined with *watembezi* prostitution in Nairobi.<sup>13</sup> The war created a state of confusion for *Malaya* prostitutes. In the previous time before the war, they had been able to increase their profit margins by supplementing transactional sex relation with food, domesticity, bedding and bathwater. During the war, Kenya African rifles comprised the most regular customers of Nairobi prostitutes. Most of the men that came to *Malaya* prostitutes had small time to be with them.

## II. MAU MAU AND PROSTITUTION IN COLONIAL NAIROBI

During the State of Emergency, the colonial state implemented the British Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869. This, created an apparatus in which women identified by police as "common prostitutes" were registered and subjected to vaginal examinations; if they were found to be infected with a venereal disease, they were to be incarcerated for up to nine months in a hospital containing a locked venereal ward.<sup>14</sup> Everything came to a standstill and therefore prostitute would not participate in transactional sex. They were very idle. Prostitutes became violent and dangerous as they merged into militancy of Mau Mau. This was after the Emergency Order in Council Criminalized prostitutes' presence in Nairobi. Housing was transformed by the emergency and their houses demolished. The curfews and dangers of night-long visits reduced *malaya* prostitutes' earnings and made the *watembezi* form prohibitive for women without passes and dangerous for women with them.<sup>15</sup>

Prostitutes had gained a dubious legitimacy they had not had before. They used menstrual blood in the oath-taking process by these African male politicians threatened the colonial state with prostitutes. For example, letters in the terracing campaign of the late 1940s claimed that the intensification of this activity drove women into urban prostitution.<sup>16</sup> The colonial state was threatened. According to Focus group discussion 1 conducted:

Menstrual blood was a form of terror used by Mau Mau to instill fear. It was the dirtiest and most scaring ritual that showed seriousness of this exercise because the colonial state had purposed to hunt out all Mau Mau. Therefore, Mau Mau had to devise a mechanism of uniting them against the colonial state. Prostitutes feared jail and the colonial officials feared lawlessness caused by Nairobi prostitute. Nairobi prostitute cooperated with Mau Mau to advance their agenda. (FGD:Female Participant,77 years)<sup>17</sup>

According to the District Commissioner in Nyeri, a mass meeting held in 1952 was infiltrated with over 40 busloads of thugs and prostitutes who were under the instruction to excite the crowd. During the Second World War, the relationship between Nairobi prostitutes and soldiers was treated lightly but later the relation between the police and the Nairobi prostitutes was given a new and predatory meaning during the State of emergency. Prostitutes laid tender traps for the African askaris. They abducted and suffocated them to death in order to steal their guns. Prostitutes in Nairobi were loyal members of Mau Mau. Colonialists associated uncontrolled sexuality with uncontrolled politics. They defined a political landscape in Nairobi as that which was determined by their loving categories than their African life.<sup>18</sup>

G.R.B Brown the Nairobi District Officer complained that Shauri Moyo, Kariakor, and Pumwani were centers of trouble in Nairobi. The three African locations where prostitutes lived were overcrowded and poorly constructed, Starehe, Ziwani, Kaloleni, Bahati, and Makongeni acted as centers for Mau Mau oath-taking ceremonies. Men from Ziwani attacked policemen in Kariakor. Oath-taking in Nairobi was administered in homes and on the business premises of prostitutes. Prostitutes who included a number of Kikuyu Muslims were oathed in Pumwani and Eastleigh in the 1950s. They were directed to collect information and to contribute money frequently to support Mau Mau activities.<sup>19</sup> There was a prostitute organization known as *sauti ya Malaya* – "voice of the prostitute." Women supported the decolonization process in large numbers. For example, in 1947,

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<sup>13</sup> Nic Nelson "Women must help each other: The Operation of personal networks among Buzaa Brewers in Mathere Valley Kenya in Patricia Caplan and Janet, M. Bujra (eds) Women United women defied (London,1979) ,pp. 72-98

<sup>14</sup>See Luise White ,p.176

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp.210-212,See also Anne Macclintock *The Scandal of the Whoreachy: Prostitution in colonial Nairobi*

<sup>16</sup> Throup, Social Economic origin, pp.152-157

<sup>17</sup> Fgd, Female Participant,2/6/2019

<sup>18</sup> Sec. F. D. Cortfield, *Historical Surveys of the Origin and growth of Mau Mau*. (London, 1960), p. 37

<sup>19</sup> Spencer. Kenya African Union p.208.

there was a women strike on coffee in Kiambu. Women-led an anti-terracing campaign in Muranga. In 1950 Kiambu women administered loyalty oath to men.<sup>20</sup>

Kikuyu prostitutes in Nairobi formed a political activist movement which was a large Pattern of women's activism for many women. In the post-war, they become the second-generation protestor. This generation of women swept Central Province. Colonial officials admitted that women protest in rural areas was the work of outside agitators. Tom Askwith, who was in charge of the rehabilitation of Mau Mau fighters believed that women's militancy was more violent and more rapid than the males.<sup>21</sup> Prostitution influenced the course of Mau Mau protest in Nairobi. Mau Mau too transformed prostitution and legal sexual relation in Nairobi from the start of the State of emergency in Kenya, Kikuyu women were arrested for not having passes. They were jailed for six months to one year. Women who earned money from prostitution made a donation to Mau Mau since Mau Mau controlled the city.

Between 1957 and 1962, the African population in Nairobi was estimated at fifty thousand. Between 1957 and 1962, the number of African men registered in wage employment dropped by eighteen thousand.<sup>22</sup> A combination of *Malaya* and *Waziwazi* prostitutes emerged in Nairobi. The *watembezi* form flourished in the early 1960s as women in Eastleigh went often to Central Nairobi and later to Westland to find men. By the mid-1960s some *watembezi* women moved to Westlands as rent began to decrease slightly when the area was inhabited by Indian and Africans. In the late, colonial Nairobi prostitution became a self-sustaining workforce. Prostitution gave women in Nairobi reliable incomes.

They even supported men through a period of unemployment. The involvement of women in prostitution and association with Mau Mau in Nairobi was criminalized. Mau Mau strengthened monogamy both in the forest and in Nairobi where couples married not because of Mau Mau dictates but to avoid detention and the arrest. Nairobi prostitutes from Pumwani and Eastleigh were oathed and told to collect information that would help the Mau Mau movement.<sup>23</sup>

By 1960, African locations like Mathare, Pumwani were overcrowded. New crimes emerged and criminal gangs arose in large numbers. At the same time, Langata woman prison was established to cater to imprisonment women in Nairobi as a result of women population in Nairobi. This was to confront the new realities of urban life. Prostitutes and brewers were on the rise. Post-war colonial attempts to control Nairobi also failed precisely because of the kind of city colonial rule had made. Nairobi was a place where most of the workforce lived illegally. Squatters in illicit relation with landlords and neighbours, who lived outside the structure of colonial separation.

When the state of emergency was declared in 1952 political violence against the British in Kenya emerged. The Mau Mau movement was termed as a barbarous, atavistic and anti-European tribal cult by the colonial officials.<sup>24</sup> Women played a significant role in the movement. Women in the indigenous Kikuyu society occupied a disadvantaged position. They were oppressed and therefore bound to accept anything that could deliver them from that situation violence included. Mau Mau movement created a platform for them to deliver themselves. They were accepted on an equal basis as men because of the need of Mau Mau to increase their numbers.<sup>25</sup>

Women had also been left behind by men who were exposed to new ways that came with Western civilization. They were inevitably drawn into active participation in the Mau Mau. They were reasons why women participated in the Mau Mau war. Increased congestion in the Kikuyu reserve, due to an increased population led to emigration. Women were assigned new roles due to migration of the male population from the reserve as the indigenous division of labour took a new shape. This made women engage in tasks otherwise considered to be of the male domain. Women felt the pressure of the diminishing land in the reserve. The overcrowded women in the reserve lived a life of bitterness and became a perfect reservoir for recruitment into the movement. Women had nothing to lose by joining the Mau Mau movement.

The few women who had basic formal education had their perception changed. Independent schools played an important role in instilling confidence and patriotism in their pupils. Therefore, women who had education took a leadership role in the Mau Mau. Independent churches also played a significant role in changing peoples' outlook. More men and women in government-sponsored schools were drawn into political activities. For example, over two thousand men and women at the Kaboti native industrial training depot

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<sup>20</sup> See Cora Ann Presley. *The Transformation of Kikuyu Women and their Nationalism*, PhD Thesis. Stanford University, 1986, pp.201-29

<sup>21</sup> KNA/ Community Affair Department Annual Report 1953 Kenya government

<sup>22</sup> See KNA /MAA2/5/1841 Policy Issues of Passbook in Nairobi, War Council minutes 21 May 1954 notes on unrest.

<sup>23</sup> See Spencer,p.237

<sup>24</sup> See East African Standard 5 November, 1954

<sup>25</sup> Ibid 9 September 1953.

(KNITD) sang the prohibited *Kanyegenuri* a political song that was first sung after the Harry Thuku riots of 1922 to commemorate the heroic rule of Nairobi women in this incident.<sup>26</sup>

The development of independent schools and churches was an expression of cultural nationalism. Kikuyu independent schools and churches supported militant nationalism. Although the majority of women were illiterate, the few that received formal education became a valuable asset to the movement because of their ability to read and write. Those who had education were at the core of organizing the movement. They realized the potential of women in the movement, therefore, disregarded the indigenous accepted ideas of the place women. Education had gone a long way in changing the attitudes of people.

It is in this changing role of Kikuyu women in a society that the roles of women in Mau Mau should be seen. Women in the colonial years in Kenya were forced to move into roles hitherto regarded as the preserve of men. In this light, the participation of women in the Mau Mau war is seen. The success of the Mau Mau movement depended on the degree of unity of its movement. The strongest binding force that created a common bond of secrecy among the Mau Mau was the oath. The clandestine Mau Mau oath began as early as 1947 in the Rift Valley.<sup>27</sup> The majority of the Mau Mau in the central region of Kenya took it in 1952.

The Mau Mau central committee a wing of Kenya African Union (KAU) began confrontation with the colonial state challenging settler dominations in Kenya. Men like Fred Kubai, Bildad Kaggia, Eliud Mutonyi, and Isaac Gathunju were the core group leaders of Mau Mau organizers in the central committee. They had anticipated the outbreak of violence that was to be unleashed with the declaration of the state of emergency and the simultaneous detention of the leaders. Marion Wangare Kamwana notes,

Masses of people were recruited into the movement, weaponry obtained, and fighting forces prepared. An assortment of guns and ammunition was bought or stolen from the army or police. Women played a significant role in the acquisition and smuggling of such arms.<sup>28</sup>

Police officers would be kidnapped and killed. It was a risky venture to women who had made a decision to liberating our country from the European. The oath that was taken motivated them to fight to the end. Mau Mau leaders concentrated on mass recruitment in the struggle among the Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru. The Kamba were also recruited. This is because of their close proximity to Nairobi. Nairobi was the nerve Centre of colonial rule followed by settler population spread throughout the best farming lands in the Rift Valley.<sup>29</sup> Women who had been recruited took the oath as their first activity in the process of recruitment. Mugure wa Mwangi avers:

Women who become members of the Mau Mau were initiated into the movement by taking the oath. Some took the oath voluntarily to show that they were ready to fight for freedom. Others were intimidated into taking the oath because it became dangerous for those who had not taken it. They were equated to being an anti-freedom struggle. Although I have stated that the oath alone was a sign of membership into the Mau Mau. This does not mean that one necessarily became an active member of the movement after taking the oath.<sup>30</sup>

It is through the administration of the oath that recruitment was carried out in the urban areas and as well as rural areas. Among the squatters in the European household, in the police and military forces and even among the ranks of the infamous, home guards. Anyone who took the oath was assigned some active role to play. Magdalene Wanjugu Kimani observes:

Some women were assigned the role of acquiring vital information on the government strategy, recruitment of couriers of this information, organization of weapon and other much-needed items such as police uniform, medicine, faked or bank pass track hiding and smuggling. These activities were performed by those only considered committed.<sup>31</sup>

This was the support group in the Mau Mau which was referred to as the passive wing. For the reason that they did not actually take the arms to fight in either of the two forest zones. This group kept the movement alive through the material as well as moral support. The government found it difficult to deal with the group as they could not be seen or easily traced and eliminated as the actual Mau Mau council.

The main objective of the oath in the times of recruitment was to forge unity among the members and to create a central rallying point of loyalty in the movement by bridging the gap. This is because an oath in the traditional society was not administered to women and children. Lambert<sup>32</sup> observes that women in the traditional society had their own special form of oath which according to him was sworn by a woman against

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<sup>26</sup> Rosherg and Nottingham, p. 105

<sup>27</sup> See Kanogo, p.136

<sup>28</sup> Marion Wangare Kamwana, O.I. from Nyeri 2/6/2019

<sup>29</sup> Kanogo, p. 149

<sup>30</sup> Mugure Wa Mwangi, O. I. 2/6/2019

<sup>31</sup> Magdalene Wanjugu Kimani. O.I. 2/6/2019

<sup>32</sup> Lambert, p.55

herself in evidence that she was telling the truth or that a claim of hers is just. The sacredness,<sup>33</sup> overwhelming moral and religious force associated with oathing was considered very powerful for women.

Leakey<sup>34</sup> notes, that women and children were given the oath by the Mau Mau because Kikuyu firmly held to the belief that once the oath was taken by one member of the family then the whole family become affected and if the oath was broken the calamity would befall the whole family. The fear that came along with the oath strengthened the bond between the Mau Mau. If one refused to take the oath, he/she would be tricked into it. Although some took the oath out of their own conviction. Oath administration and the Mau Mau leaders inserted fear so as to keep the oath a secret. Oath-taking, administration, and association with Mau Mau was a crime that led to detention without trial. Field Marshal Muthoni Kirima, one of the freedom fighters observes that:

The aspect of fear that came with the oathing ceremony was used to initiate the individual because a member who betrayed the oath was not only jeopardizing his own self but of the entire family. The most active member of the Mau Mau were the wives of the home guards who had the advantage of getting to know what the government was planning. The home guards whose wives were in the Mau Mau rarely reported the activities of their wives or the members of their family to the authorities for fear of the oath they had taken for the sake of keeping the family group together. Without women, men could not have succeeded in the fight against the European in Kenya. We thrived because the European underestimated the women involved in the war.<sup>35</sup>

C.I.M Alport<sup>36</sup> in his report "*Kenya's answer to the Mau Mau challenge*" notes, that women themselves also administered the oath. This assertion is erroneous since Judith Wamaitha Kirathe noted:

I took the oath three times and every time I took the oath; it was administered by the men who had been assigned this responsibility. Women did not administer the oath. The closest that women got to it was through women seers who were often called upon to prophesy on whether it was safe to hold oathing ceremony in a certain place at a given time.<sup>37</sup>

Oathing involved the use of blood and soil. A symbol which acquired supreme value with the dispossession of land. This attracted most women because their traditional task involved tilling the land. According to Alport, as long as the Mau Mau was a movement that demanded back stolen land, women would continue to support the movement. He notes:

In so far as it is based upon a wish for additional lands and the women were interested in the possessing land because it was their contribution to the maintenance of the family. Mau Mau appealed to the family. Mau Mau appealed to women.<sup>38</sup>

It should be noted, that most of the women who had been assigned roles took the oath more than once as an expression of commitment to Mau Mau. The first oath-initiated members into the movement without giving individual particular task or vows. As long as one was able to read and write, she would be placed in a strategic place where vital information could be picked since it was considered that they were educated. For example, a cleaner in governmental offices, ayahs in the European households and telephone, exchange Centre. Women who were close to either Mount Kenya and Nyandarua forest, could be recruited to gather and carry provision to the fighters in those forests. As will be discussed later, before security was tightened in the Mau Mau villages these women would supply the fighters in the forest with food and clothing. They would be used to transport provision between various camps as fighters were often on the move.<sup>39</sup>

Women carried out their duties very enthusiastically. This enthusiasm was catalysed by the fact once a member of the Mau Mau was entrusted with a mission, the penalty for not executing that task was heavy and death would often be the consequence of failure in mission. Prominent loyalists in Nairobi were under assault. Men and women who resisted the oath and the Mau Mau course of action were murdered as well. Occasionally murders were carried out by the Mau Mau just to teach others a lesson. There was a well-established network of Mau Mau fighters in Nyeri area, the Southern slope of Mount Kenya and in the areas around Kiambu and Muranga. It is estimated that 15,000 fighters were in the forest by 1953.<sup>40</sup>

It is worth noting, that topography of a given area to some extent determined the role that women in the area would perform. For example, those in urban Nyeri had more access to information from the government officials and European homesteads. Those on the fringes of the forest provided food and sometimes shelters to the fighters. Women leaders were important in linking the reserves and forest, they acted as coordinators.

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<sup>33</sup> See also Kenyatta *Facing Mount Kenya*

<sup>34</sup> L.S.B. Leakey, *Defeating Mau Mau* (London, 1954), p. 37

<sup>35</sup> Field Marshal Muthoni Kirima, O.I. 22/7/2019

<sup>36</sup> C. I. M. Alport

<sup>37</sup> Judith Wamaitha Kirathe, O. I. 3/6/2019

<sup>38</sup> Alport, p.34

<sup>39</sup> B.Kaggia, p.80

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.89

Female local leaders were found in each locality and locality in this case sometimes comprised several villages. All these activities were criminalized by the colonial state. Any women arrested as a result of these activities was arrested and detained at Kamiti, Gatamaiyu and later Langata women prison.

Women leaders played a significant role since organized the provision of food and transportation of such provision to reach the fighters. Mau Mau fighters would raid settler farms and make off with cattle and sheep which they would slaughter in the forest. The forest yielded at times edible fruits and roots and wild game. Mau Mau fighters took advantage of the fact that initially, the government did not suspect that women were ardent supporters of the Mau Mau. Most of the women who were in the forest by 1953 and 1954 would be more likely to bent to make contact in the reserve and towns. They would arrange for provision more than the male fighters who were bound to attract more attention. In 1953, the government made it a criminal offense, punishable by death to supply food, drinks or medicine to "terrorists" Mau Mau fighters. Those women who supplied Mau Mau with food braved the odds to feed them. They risked their lives. They were not taken to any court. Once caught in the act they would be easily shot as they try to run away.<sup>41</sup>

Carrier services were the most efficient of all service rendered in the support of Mau Mau. This service was used to transmit message between the freedom fighters in the forest and their supporters in the urban and rural areas. This service gave Mau Mau information on the movement and strategies that British troops adopted from time to time. Particularly outstanding in the carrier services were the underground network between Nairobi and the fighters in the forest. The network was widely known as *kenda kenda* named after the fast-moving police vehicle that normally answers emergency calls. The message of important direction from the Mau Mau headquarters in Nairobi and provision of arms, communications, and medical supplies were conveyed through this network.<sup>42</sup>

The emergency regulation-imposed death penalty for consorting with terrorist. Couriers who braved this danger by regularly coming to Nairobi to deliver the message to the organizers and returning with those things in the forest for the fighters. The Colonial state found it difficult to suppress courier services. Women performed very well as Mau Mau couriers. They maintained good contact with the fighters in the forest. They also linked between the urban and rural areas. Their prowess in this was very significant in acquiring information after spying out on locations where arms and communication items were likely available.

Kaggia<sup>43</sup> in the *Roots of freedom* maintains women who had been recruited as spies in the Mau Mau movement were very tactical. He observes:

It was the job of these recruiters to woo these persons by any means possible." The girls would lie or even use their love to win them over. These methods helped to win them over...These methods helped the movement to penetrate all spheres of government.

It was an effective means done as part of recruiting women that were deemed to be useful to the movement. Karari Njama<sup>44</sup> in *Mau Mau from within* states, the women went into forest, sent from reserves or by urban guerillas to deliver messages to the forest fighters. He mentions one girl by the name Wamu had joined the fighters as a courier. Wamu had education up to form one. Kariri states that Wamu was bright expressive and fearless. She told Mau Mau fighters much about Mount Kenya and the possibility of meeting war veteran general Ndaya. Women in the Mau Mau movement used their sexuality to obtain arms or information or get an enemy killed. Young girls with little education were valuable in the courier services. They were used for the purpose of infiltrating the rank of government soldiers and the police. Young girls used dances and other social was used to socialize with KAR and tribal police.

Due to the intense Mau Mau militancy the colonial state used home guards who belonged to a semi-military organization formed and partly armed by the government to aid in the maintenance of law and order in the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru reserves. They policed their local areas and protected those that were considered loyal to the government. They arrested and obtained information on Mau Mau fighters. By 1954, there were 20,000 Kikuyu home guards and 320 posts were constructed. Kikuyu home guards were the worst Mau Mau enemies. They were worse than white soldiers. Janet Nyaguthii<sup>45</sup> notes:

Home guards were hated and scorned as traitors who had sold their country. Many songs were composed in the villages and in the forest describing the home guards for having been "bought" by the colonialists.

The colonial states protected the home guards because of the utter contempt they were held with. The Mau Mau fighters had vowed to destroy them. The home guards were placed in special guard post and their families. The designated place was known as "loyal area." Together with their families, they would be escorted

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<sup>41</sup> M.W. Gachihi , 'The Role of Women in Mau Mau' Masters Thesis University of Nairobi, 1986 p.22

<sup>42</sup> Ibid,p.34

<sup>43</sup> B. Kaggia

<sup>44</sup> K. Njama

<sup>45</sup> Janet Nyaguthii, O.I. 22/6/2019

to the course of their activities. Guards wives were more exempted from communal labour which all other women were forced into six days the week. Children were escorted to school and women to and from their shambas.

Village women became victims of home guards actions. They were forced and driven to fetch firewood, clean compound, carry water and various duties for the guards. The colonial state devised other measures of converting hardcore women who continued rendering the services to the Mau Mau movements. Social welfare *Maendeleo ya wanawake* clubs were introduced in the emergency villages. This will be discussed in the next chapter. Mau Mau conducted raids on the home guards posts based on the information acquired by village women while working in these posts. This is why Mau Mau fighters would storm a post and in most cases, would walk directly to the armoury or where other provisions such as blanket, overcoats or boots were kept because they had full details of the layout of the post before the attack.

In 1954, the colonial state outlawed access of the home guards post because most of them had been destroyed by the Mau Mau. Only the home guards were allowed access within the parameters of the post. Even home guards' wives were not allowed. Their wives and families were confined in huts adjoining the post. Anybody who went to the post had to be licensed by the District Officer in charge of the area and the head guard. Interestingly, some wives of the home guards were members of the Mau Mau. Such women were valuable assets of the Mau Mau.

Mothers recruited their children into the Mau Mau. Children were well used to run errands in the movement. School children and the herdboys were used to spy and report on the movement and activities of the home guards whom they would innocently follow to and fro in an attempt to pick anything useful. Once in school uniform, young boy seemingly on his way to school could follow troops or Kikuyu guard without arousing suspicion that he was on a mission for Mau Mau. Mary Nungari Kamenju notes:

Children played a vital role in the Mau Mau war. village boys herding cattle or playing their dairy game would anxiously hover around guard post or colonial wounded fighter lying low in the village outskirts spying for them until it was safe for them to move. Children being closer to their mother than any other group received first awareness of the worsening political situation in Kenya.<sup>46</sup>

Women also took to the forest as fighters they supported men in activities such as transport, signals, medical corps, and dance. Some women engaged directly in military combat. They were referred to as *itungati*.<sup>47</sup> They were outstanding activists. Women in Muranga are recorded to having helped Mau Mau freedom fighter to escape by destroying a camp at Mathioya and razing it to the ground.<sup>48</sup> Renowned women fighter such as Marshal Muthoni and Cinda Reri made a name for themselves as fighters. Marshal Muthoni was born in 1930 and went to the forest in 1953 at the age of twenty-two. She remained there until 12 December 1963. Field Marshal Muthoni notes:

While I was in the forest fighting, I did not think of myself as a woman but I operated as other fighters did. To struggle and to fight. There was no distinction of a task I performed and what other male fighter did.<sup>49</sup>

Cinda Reli had a battalion of two hundred women under her command. The women under her command were allocated duties which included fetching firewood and water, mending, clothes and delivering the messages to the reserve. The *Itungati* women boasted the morale of fighting time by singing Mau Mau patriotic songs which they composed. Some of the songs paid tribute to some heroic deeds. The women in the forest performed one such song, for example, ran as this Kimathi wife was the secretary of the gallant. Fighting women's wing bren gunned in the hide out by the enemy.<sup>50</sup>

From the above song, it was quite clear that there were indeed women activities in the forest comparable to men. Besides composing songs to commemorate the dead as well as tragic incidents, fighters also sang songs that extolled the virtues of fellow fighters. They also nicknamed outstanding fighters. For example, Kimathi was referred to as "fountain of independence" It is worth noting that women had been politicized to the extent of taking up arms. The war produced *Itungati* women as an indication of the forces of nationalism that had transcended the traditional sex and social barriers. Mau Mau war had three armies, one that operated in and around Mount Kenya, the second one at Nyandarua ranges of mountains and the third one in and around Nairobi.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Mary Nungari Kamenju, O.I, 2/6/2015

<sup>47</sup> *Itungati*, It was a term used to refer to actual fighters only

<sup>48</sup> Itote, *Mau Mau in action* pp. 139-149

<sup>49</sup> Marshal Muthoni, O.I,2/6/2018

<sup>50</sup> Kenyatti, p. 103

<sup>51</sup> Alport p. 957



### III. CONCLUSION

Prostitutes joined the secret Mau Mau organization that emerged after 1948. The new recruits were required to take an oath of loyalty. Though swearing to abide by a solemn promise was traditionally reserved for males, when the Mau Mau movement began, women also took oaths and were often able to administer oaths to male and female recruits. Mau Mau women adherents were, therefore, breaking an important gender barrier from their introduction to the movement by giving and taking oaths. Upon realizing the involvement of women in the Mau Mau, the colonial government incarcerated them in villages and detention camps. Maendeleo ya wanawake was also used to distract them from their involvement with the Mau Mau. Early Nairobi prostitutes had become entrepreneurs who took advantage of a certain demographic socio and economic situation to achieve high incomes and thereby acquired property, particularly investing in real estates. The women's 'ability to accumulate savings in this way equalled or surpassed that of men. The womenfolk who had been excluded from formal employment resorted to prostitution 'as a reliable means of capital accumulation. This category of women became vital in the decolonization process in Kenya. The significant participation of women in the liberation struggle is worth noting. Both men and women participated actively and passively however, Prostitutes participated in all phases of the anti-colonial war in Kenya as early as 1950s.

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