

The Role of Mau Mau Detainees in the Conversion of Desolate Mwea Into Kenyas' Largest Rice Production Settlement Scheme in the 1950's

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ABSTRACT: In the 1950s colonial Kenya witnessed a peasant uprising known as Mau Mau movement. Thousands of Kenyans took up arms to face the colonial government in the struggle for land and freedom. Many freedom fighters were killed by colonial security forces while others were imprisoned. This article focuses on the role played by the Mau Mau detainees in Mwea to the growth of the Mwea Rice Irrigation Scheme the headquarters of *pishori* rice production in Kenya. It also examines the circumstances that led some detainees to remain in the scheme even after rehabilitation and release, the nature of landholdings in Mwea, the challenges that ex-detainees continue to face, their experiences after attainment of independence and their relationships with other settlers under the National Irrigation Board. The paper established that the ex-detainees and their offspring's have proposed certain reforms that would enable them feel compensated for their sacrifices during the struggle for independence. It was evident that some ex-detainees were released without incident to their villages while a considerable number of ex-detainees were not accepted back by their own people irrespective of how well they behave in prison. Those rejected by their colonial chiefs and were taken back to Mwea to continue growing rice. The government demarcated the scheme into five or six acre parcels which the detainees don't own as it is a trust land. The article makes the following recommendations. First there is need for reforms that will lead to security of tenure and appropriate remuneration for the farmers from the rice they produce. Secondly, reforms in the management of the scheme will empower the farmers to be decision makers also issue a title deed to Mau Mau veterans living in Mwea irrigation scheme to enable them secure loans to improve their living livelihood and enable their off springs to inherit the land they live in Mwea like other veterans settled elsewhere by the government.

I. Introduction

In the 1550s an uprising by African peasants erupted in Kenya spearheaded by Mau Mau movement. The objective of the movement was to repossess the alienated land and for freedom. This paper examines the role of Mau Mau detainees in the establishment of o Mwea irrigation Scheme. Mwea irrigation scheme in Kirinyaga County, Kenya. The origin of the scheme can be traced to Mau Mau detainees who were being rehabilitated by the British in the 1950s in the final stage of release to their homes. Some of the detainees were later resettled in the scheme.

Objectives of the paper

The objectives of this paper are

1. To establish the nature of Mau Mau detainees labour in Mwea Rice Irrigation Scheme.
2. To assess how the Mau Mau detainees transformed Mwea Irrigation Scheme.

3. To examine the economic status of Ex-Mau Mau detainees after their settlement in Mwea Irrigation Scheme.

II. Research methods

The paper relied on primary data, in form of interviews and archival materials as well as secondary data. Primary data was sourced from National Archives and Documentation Centre and the National Museum Library. Secondary data was sourced from journals, books, newspapers articles and the internet. The gaps identified in secondary sources were filled by use of archival sources. On the other hand, gaps in archival sources were filled by oral interviews and questionnaires which was conducted with former Mau Mau detainees in Mwea, a former chief, ex-detainees children, irrigation board official and a prison official. The researcher electronically taped the interviews which were transcribed after each day's work and some were recorded in a note book. The interviews were taped as most of the respondents were illiterate and were interviewed in Kikuyu language which required translation later.

III. Background to the study

The colonial land question in Kenya evolved through a process via the colonial state. The colonial administration in Kenya expropriated African land for settlement of European immigrants to develop land for agriculture to pay for the construction of the railway line that connected Kenya with Uganda to make the colony self-sustaining (Sorenson, 1968). In 1897 the commissioner of East African Protectorate using the 1894 Land Acquisition Act borrowed from India that was extended to Kenya to appropriate all land that was situated within one mile on either side of the Kenya-Uganda railway. This Act was used for compulsory acquisition of African land for purposes of public utilities like government buildings, roads and game reserves (Ogendo, 1991). The Jurisdiction Act of 1890 promulgated the East African Land Regulation of 1897 which was used to alienate African land to allocate to the White settlers. After constructing the railway the first commissioner of East African Protectorate Sir Hardinge left in 1901 and was replaced by Sir Charles Elliot. (Mungean, 1966)

Sir Charles Eliot had a hard task to find resources to run the colony and pay for the construction of the railway. To solve the problem the fastest solution was to impose taxes on Africans. A hut tax of two rupees was introduced in 1902 (Mungean, 1966). The second solution was to improve the economy by relying on Indian and European settlement. Sir Eliot encouraged European settlers to take up land in the colony for growing cash crops. It was Elliot and Lord Delamere a pioneer settler who promoted the Protectorate as a "White Man's" country. From 1902 there was a large influx of European settlers from South Africa, New Zealand and Europe to settle in the colony (Sorenson, 1968).

The new land tenure system was supported by both administrative and legal means. Force was also used against African communities to compliment legislative and legal means as some Africans opposed land alienation. Through force and trickery African communities were subdued and lost their prime land. Crown land legislations were introduced which underlined the crown land had original title deed to land where Africans had vacated and deserted and had to be given to White settlers (Okoth Ogendo 1991).

The settlers were given 21 years lease (Mortenseu 2004). In 1902 the Crown Land Ordinance extended the leases from 21 to 99 years and all land in the protectorate became 'Crown Land' under the control of the Queen of Britain to be sold or rented to the European settlers. By 1914 more than five million hectares had been taken away from the Kikuyus and Masai and allocated to the European settlers. (Mortenseu, 2004). The 1902 Crown Land Ordinance was replaced by The Crown Land Ordinance of 1915 which awarded the White Settlers freehold titles of 1000 acres of land and a security of tenure of up to 999 years. The Ordinance declared all land as belonging to the Crown Queen and subject to disposal at her will. Africans became tenants of the Crown and their land could be taken away any time for European settlement. Land that was assumed not 'occupied' was forfeited to the state (Otieno, 2014). African reserves were established after this ordinance but security of tenure for Africans was not guaranteed therefore affecting customary land use practices such as pastoralism and shifting cultivation. Communal land became obsolete and customary law became subordinate to British law (Otieno,

2014). These laws led to loss of land among Africans and caused a lot of resentments towards the colonial government.

The European farmers faced shortage of labour and the colonial government introduced compulsory labour policy brought into being by the 'Northey Circular' of 1919, so named after General Northey, the colonial governor at the time (Okia 2013). Although this merely obliged the District Commissioners to force Africans to provide labour, the conditions and other legislations forced most of the Kikuyu in the reserves to seek wage labour to pay taxes (Holmes, 1980).

It was not only the Africans that were affected by these colonial land policies. The Asians were only allowed to have land in low land regions like the coast and Nyanza far from highland areas. Thus, in 1923 there was a clamour for recognition by Indians in Kenya. Indians had settled in Kenya after the construction of the railway. The Indians wanted to be allowed to purchase land in the White Highlands denied to them by the 'Eldgin Pledge' of 1906 which that they were the only ones to own and control land in the White Highlands (Kamoche, 1981). The settlers sent a delegation to meet the colonial secretary to demand a halt to Indian migration to Kenya. The colonial secretary, the Duke of Devonshire dismissed settlers demand for self-government declaring that Kenya was an African country and African interest would remain paramount. This declaration gave the colonial office exclusive rights to act as trustee of Africans (Maxon, 2011). The measured decision by the colonial secretary saved Africans in Kenya the predicament that faced Zimbabwe and Apartheid South Africa where settlers declared independence leading to massive land losses and extreme cases of racial segregation.

However, in an effort to calm down Africans and pretend to implement trusteeship the, the colonial government sneaked in segregationist policies through the Native Trust Bill of 1926 which reserved certain areas for exclusive use by Africans but with the governor retaining authority to take away such land from Africans for use and to the benefit on Non Africans. Non-Africans could be given a lease of 33 years (Kenya Land Commission 1934).

The 1930 Native Land Ordinance was enacted to cushion the Native's' grievance of challenging the concept that all land belonged to the Crown. (Otieno, 2014). The Native Land Trust Ordinance established the Native Trust Land Board through which native reserves could be appropriated for public use (Mbote, 2013). The 1930 Native Land Ordinance was amended in 1932 to allow appropriation of native reserves upon discovery of minerals. The discovery of gold in part of North Kavirondo as (present day Kakamega) led to gold rush in which local European settler farmers and miners prospectors converged in Kakamega. The discovery of gold led to rapid change of Land Native Trust Ordinance in 1932 to allow alienation of land for European mining interests. The amendment was meant to satisfy miners and companies demand for land. Gold mining came to an end in 1952 due to exhaustion of the mines (Shilaro, 2000).

In a submission to the Kenya Land Commission Jomo Kenyatta, who would later become the first post-independence Kenyan president, remarked that the effect of the land policy was not only lost land, but loss of a community who became squatters. He further noted that this was a matter which was of great disadvantage to the Kikuyu people because it has disorganised them. (Kenya land Commission 1934).

Thus, the 1932 Kenya Land Commission (Carter Commission) fixed the boundaries of White Highlands and removed Africans from the area. The Carter Commission provided a legal segregation by fixing boundaries of the native reserves and areas reserved for the White Highlands. (Kenya Land Commission 1934). The implementation of the Carter Commission recommendation led to creation of African reserves bearing the name of the African communities like Kikuyu, Nandi, Meru, Embu, and Taita Taveta among others. This decision has led to inter-ethnic conflicts in post-independence Kenya when "nonnatives" seek land in such places. The creation of African reserves increased congestion in African reserves forcing a large number of Africans to migrate to the white highland to seek for wage labour and be able to pay taxes and meet family livelihood. As a result of these ordinances European annexed African land. Lord Delamare one of the largest farmer owned 400,000 hectares of land (Swanesberg, 1972).

The effect of land alienation was being felt most in central Kenya where population density was high and their proximity to land that was preferred by European settlement. Between 1918 to 1928 over 100,000 African squatters had settled in the White Highlands (Kanyinga, 1991). The colonial government imposed a hugely burdensome 'hut tax' and 'poll tax' collectively equivalent to two months wages at the local rate (Elkin, 2005). The combined effect of the land and tax policy was to force Kikuyu migration in search of work and land. This condition led to rise of what become known as the squatter community, and the dispersal of tens of thousands of Kikuyu tribesman in search of living on settler farms and plantation.

By 1945 there were over 200,000 registered squatters in the White Highlands, the vast majority of whom were Kikuyu (Kanogo, 1993). The squatter arrangement brought benefits to both the squatter and the white settlers (Kanogo, 1986). Gachube Gachara (O.I., 13.2.2018) one of the respondents noted that at the beginning of the squatter system in Rift Valley his parents were very rich in livestock. Later the number of livestock they kept were reduced to five sheep through rules enforced by a European called *Kifagio* (broom). The Europeans he stated introduced taxation to further impoverish Africans families. However during the world wars, conflict between the settlers and the squatters. Initially, the poor settlers had allowed African squatters to work on a portion of land given to them to cushion them from the poor wages. However, the squatters used that opportunity to keep livestock and grow crops that almost transformed to sharecroppers which became a threat to European supremacy. Admittedly, some squatters were becoming rich and even wanted to pay rent for leased land instead of providing labour Thus European settlers started to see squatters as competitors instead of labourers in their farms (Kanogo, 1993).

The agitation by White settlers led to the passing of the 1937 Resident Native Labour Ordinance which empowered the District Commissioners to limit the number of squatters stock and size of their gardens and prescribe the number of days the squatters would work (Bates, 1987). Interestingly many arguments were advanced to legitimise the policy like the claim that the White settlers had imported exotic breeds which were being infected by diseases transmitted by ticks from local livestock breeds which were disease resistant. This was enforced through destocking of African breeds in Rift Valley and Machakos. The Kamba staged a protest march to Nairobi led by Muindi Mbingu in 1938. (Tignor, 1971). In Nakuru it led to forced evacuation of Kikuyu and their belonging in Olongurueni to arid Yatta in Machakos areas. There were restrictions on land an African could occupy. Africans were legally disabled to cultivate one acre of land if they had one wife and two acres if more. Ownership of sheep was limited to 15 animals (KNA/MSS/43/6). These measures caused anxiety among the squatters making the District Commissioner to note in 1950 that there was 'squatter unrest' and 'numerous meeting' against the local regulations (Bates, 1987). This agitation was the genesis of Mau Mau revolt.

The Kenya Highland Ordinance of 1939 redefined the boundaries of the Natives reserves and those of White Highlands. The Ordinance established the Highland Board to guard the interest of the settlers (Sorrenson, 1968). The legislation also created reserves for the "Natives" far away from European settlement (Mamdani, 1966).

These rules were unpopular and led to increased political resistance towards the colonial administration (KNA/DC/ NKU/1/5). To cement their resistance the squatters started administering an oath of unity forming the foundation of Mau Mau oath taking and support in Olernguruone that formed the basis of Mau Mau revolt (Kanogo, 1989). The taking of the oath spread rapidly to Kikuyu squatters in the Rift Valley until 1940 when the last squatters were transported to Yatta area in Machakos while others were resettled in the dry Ndeiya in Kikuyu (Furedi, 1990). This resulted to political unrest and economic crisis that the colonial government declined to address (Kanyinga, 1999).

In 1954 with deteriorating political climate the colonial government set up a commission under R.S.M. Swynnerton the Assistant Director of Agriculture to investigate how to improve and make African land tenure system productive. The Swynnerton Report made recommendations on land management and reforms especially in 'Mau Mau' districts of central Kenya. The report observed that traditional land tenure system encouraged land

fragmentation into unviable units for agricultural production and frequent land disputes. The report recommended land consolidation and registration of individual land owners (Swynnerton, 1954).

Large scale land consolidation began in 1955 and land tenure rules of 1956 was regularised by Native Land Tenure Rules of 1956. To ensure the process run smoothly the African Courts Ordinance was passed in 1957 to bar litigation on land where 1956 rules applied to ensure no African had security of land tenure or negotiable title for land holding. (World Bank report, 1963). The Swynnerton Plan led to land consolidation and issuance of title deeds to the loyalists in central Kenya thus denying Mau Mau leaders and followers in detention camps and forests a chance of owning land as intended. The plan also allowed Africans to grow cash crops and engage in small scale holding. (Swynnerton, 1954).

These colonial policies became the immediate cause of Mau Mau movement fighters struggle to reclaim their land back. They believed that the colonial state could not be reformed because of vested interests of Europeans. The only alternative was armed struggle to force the Europeans out of Kenya. The White settlers took advantage of newly posted Governor Sir Evelyn Baring who declared a state of emergency on 20th October 1952 declaring Mau Mau struggle as unlawful. This led to massive rounding up of anybody from Central Kenya and towns who were repatriated to their reserves. The colonial state arrested the leadership of the Kenya African (Union KAU) which they thought had fuelled Mau Mau war. (Maloba, 1993)

The implementation of Emergency laws led to arrest of thousands of Kikuyu who were detained in various detention camps spread throughout the country mostly in isolated hardship areas as a form of isolation from the general population. While thousands were detained after actively participating in the fighting many more were picked from civilian life on allegation of being Mau Mau sympathisers (Boender, 2023). After spending several years in detention camps and separation of hardcore and moderates the government came up with rehabilitation mechanism in an effort to decongest detention camps. Thus the government established rehabilitation camps in Mwea, Hola and Perkerra for converting these detainees to “useful” citizens. (Boender, 2023).

Detention camps where Mau Mau veterans in Mwea were detained

Seven camps namely Thiba, Kandongu, Tebere, Wamumu, Thiba and Gathigiriri were constructed to accommodate the repatriated Kikuyus and Mau Mau detainees in Mwea. (Chambers (1969). The seven camps in Mwea plains were meant for the rehabilitation of ‘black’ detainees from Manyani, Mackinnon, Manyani and other camps (KNA DC/EMBU/1/16/1958). The idea was to transfer more detainees from other work camps to Mwea camps for further screening and work in rice fields (KNA/VP/14/12).

Mwangi Kamau (O.I., 2. 4. 2018) of Mathangauta was arrested in Kinare area of Kiambu after being injured in a fight with colonial forces. He was taken to Naivasha camp then Molo where there were 300 other detainees. They were then taken to Yatta in Machakos where they constructed water canals for irrigation. In 1955 he was taken to Githiga in Kiambu on his way to be released to his my chief. Since he came from chief Wariuhiu’s (he had been killed by Mau Mau fighters) location he was seen as a bad person and was taken to Mwea rehabilitation and settlement

Isaac Mburu Njugua (O.I., 22.2.2018) stated he was arrested in Tanganyika (modern day Tanzania) where he had fled to avoid arrest after he participated in the killing of chief called Luka Kahangara of Upland and his family in March 1953. He was repatriated to Kenya. He was taken to Kiambu and later detained in Manyani which was a detention camp for hardcore detainees and finally ended up in Embu, Tebere camp.

Isaac Mburu Njuguna (O.I., 22.2.2018) was one of the detainees who had previously fled to northern Tanzania. Some of the detainees had fled to northern Tanganyika. Tanganyika’s Governor, Edward Twining feared that Mau Mau movement would spread to Tanganyika. To forestall such occurrence he ordered Kenyan Mau Mau suspects to be screened and repatriated back to Kenya. (KNA/DC/EBU/1/14). This information is collaborated by one of the respondents Mburu Njuguna (O.I., 22.2.2018) who noted that 1952 he participated in killing Chief

Luka Kahangara of Upland and his three wives and a total of 97 people were massacred. He fled to Tanganyika through Magadi. He stayed near Arusha where Mwalimu Nyerere helped them. The government of Tanganyika arrested them in 1954 and they were taken to Kiambu and later to Embu prison. It is important to note people from Central who knew how to pick tea were employed in Tanganyika tea plantations.

Sebastian Gikunju (O.I., 23.8.2018) a son of one of the detainees pointed out that his father Gikunju Njiru was sentenced for oathing at Kianyaga (Kirinyaga County) and later transferred to Mackinnon Road, then Mara River and Manyani and ended up in Gathigiriri camp on the way to release. According to the respondent his father was detained for participating in administering Mau Mau oath. He was denied a chance to join fighters in the forest as he was an orphan. Orphans were not allowed to go to the forest to fight lest they die and leave their families without descendants. His testimony brings a new dimension on the background check done before one would join the military wing of Mau Mau. In African tradition sons were greatly valued in perpetuation of family lineage.

Jacinta Waruimu (O.I., 28.8.2018), another respondent whose husband hailed from Ihururu in Nyeri where he was arrested and sentenced for four years imprisonment for belonging to Mau Mau. He was jailed in Manyani, Embakasi and later Tebere camp on his way to release. He was not accepted by his chief and was repatriated to Mwea.

In Mwea division Kadongu camp was opened first as a mixed camp for common prisoners and Mau Mau detainees and later as a prison situated on a site of a permanent village inland consolidation, Kandogu was demolished in 1959 and structures taken to Gathigiriri (O.I., 29.8.2018).

Karaba camp was from 1957 used for rehabilitation of Mau Mau and K.K.M (*Kiama Kia Muingi*). K.K.M. which was an offshoot of Mau Mau in 1958 but within eight months had been expunged from the Kikuyu reserves. In 1958 the government lifting the six year old curfew led to a large number of detainees were being released from prison. (KNA /XA.1/11/37).

Thiba camp which had been closed due to lack of prisoners was reopened again in 1960 to accommodate large number of prisoners from Nyeri District who were to be rehabilitated on their way to release (KNA /GAR/C/EBU/I/18). Thiba camp today serves as a hospital.

Gathigiriri was established in 1952 as a rehabilitation camp for Mau Mau detainees but by the end of 1960 it was taken over by the prison department (KNA/DC/EMBU//1/19). Gathigiriri today is used as prison facility while all the others were closed down after the end of Mau Mau revolt. According to Constable Daniel Musembi the officer in-charge of record at Gathigiriri prison, most of the camp's old structures were demolished and taking of photographs is not allowed in the prison (O.I., 29. 8.2018).

Apart from Mwea detention camps other work camps that were part of work camps before release included Saiyusi, Mara and Aguthi work camp in Nyeri (KNA/VP/14/12). Admittedly Aguthi camp later was named by African as Kangubiri meaning "you are free" which was a Kikuyu interpretation of the final words used by officers before they were released.

Rehabilitation of Mau Mau Detainees

This section examines what detainees went through before they were released to their home districts. As already discussed, this study was conducted in Mwea Irrigation scheme which was established to rehabilitate detainees.

Elkins (2005) revealed in her book *Britain's Gulag* that British forces detained thousands of residents of Kikuyu in concentration camps and reinforced villages. Here thousands died from dysentery and typhoid when they weren't being used as slave labour, with the gates to many camps slogans like 'Labour and freedom' while the national anthem was broadcast from loudspeakers. Torture was widespread in the camps. According to Daniel Musembi many of these deaths are recorded in confidential files of prisons and has not been declassified (O.I., 29. 8.2018).

In these camps the detainees from the whole country were screened and those who seemed like cooperating were transferred to work camps in Mwea and Marigat (Perkerra) where they were trained in agriculture or in dressing construction stones. Seven camps were constructed to accommodate repatriated Kikuyus and Mau Mau detainees in Mwea. The seven camps were Thiba, Kandongu, Tebere, Wamumu, Thiba and Gathigiriri. In post independent era Gathigiriri later became a prison while Wamumu became an approved school for rehabilitating young boys caught in crime (Chambers, 1969).

The detainees transferred to Mwea camps required further rehabilitation before release to camps near their homes. (Askwith, 1995) This was the 'pipeline' process where the detainees went through various stages until fit to join their people in the Kikuyu villages. Once the rehabilitation officers were convinced that the detainees had reformed they were presented to their chiefs.

Mwea at the time was a desolate place, it was ideal for hardcore Mau Mau detainees to isolate them and rehabilitate them to fit into the society. It was in this same place, where 1,000 hardcore Mau Mau freedom fighters were literally broken (Kareithi, 2023). The colonial office who was given the task of breaking up these battle-hardened men was a 35-year-old Indian-born Irishman, Terence Gavaghan (Kareithi, 2023).

He hired 200 Kikuyu collaborators to work on the freedom fighters. Gavaghan had been recruited in March 1957 at the age of 35 to experiment "The Dilution Method" was to bring the prisoners to reality. It was claimed that the supporters were suffering were suffering from mental disorder. This was a physical and psychological method of torture which secret government memos described as use of force in enforcing discipline in detention camps (Kareithi, 2023).

The prison camps were organized into a screening network called 'pipeline'. The five camps on the Mwea plains were primarily used for the rehabilitation of 'grey' detainees from Manyani and other camps. (KNA/ADP/DC/EBU/20). The 'pipeline' had 'white', 'grey' and 'black' classification system, 'White' comprised cooperative detainees while 'grey' included detainees who had taken the oath but were compliant and were deported to mid-level camps for hard labour, for re-education and counter propaganda. The 'black' represented hardcore Mau Mau detainees who were deported to exiled camps not to be freed until end of emergency in 1959 (Blacker, 2007).

Paul Ndegwa (O.I., 2.4.2018) noted that the detention camps had barbed wires and sentries to ensure that the detainees do not escape. He was screened at Kandogou camp and spent six months digging canals for irrigation in Nguka under hot conditions. The guards would beat and inflict severe injuries on detainees who disobeyed their orders

Gachube Gachara (O.I., 13.2.2018) aged 89 years was arrested in 1952 in Kinangop (Gwa Gutu) where he and his parents were working in a White settler farm. He was remanded in Naivasha prison and later jailed for three years He was thereafter transferred to Nakuru where he worked in a quarry and then taken to Mackinnon camp in Nairobi. The detainees were shown how to march like soldiers and sing songs to show they had recanted the Mau Mau oaths they had taken. Those who were disobedient were severely beaten with whips by the guards (*Johnnies*). He also spent time in Manyani camp where the detainees would be beaten severally as they embarked from the trucks that took them to Manyani. The detainees were also starved of food and were only provided with porridge and a small piece of *ugali* in a day

Samuel Mwangi (O.I., 2.2.2018) was arrested after he sneaked out of Nyandarua forest to get food. He was shot, injured and taken to hospital and chained to the hospital bed. He was latter jailed in Yatta camp where the detainees were digging irrigation canals with severe beatings and being starved of food. At least seven detainees were shot dead and two guards killed during a fight.

In a debate in British Parliament the then Colonial Secretary of state, Lennox Boyd noted that one prisoner at Gthigiriri camp called Gacheri Githuma was assaulted during rehabilitation and collapsed and died at Gathigiriri camp. (KNA/AB/18/1/1957). In yet another case a rehabilitation assistant in Gathigiri prison camp used rubber

strips to hang a detainee called Muchiri by the wrist from a beam. He was taken outside the hut but died soon after due to brain hemorrhage (KNA/AB/18/1/1957).

The respondents indicated that they were tortured during interrogation in order to reveal the plans of the Mau Mau movement and also to denounce the oath they had taken. The respondents also indicated that they were given hard manual work like digging of tunnels, constructing roads and quarrying. (O.I., 13-02. 2018))

In general the detainees were engaged in hard manual work which included clearing bushes, digging of irrigation canals, tilling of land, constructing *Manyatta* (makeshift houses) and roads. They also dug holes where soil samples were collected and taken to Nairobi for testing on suitability of growing rice. Gachube Gachara (O.I., 13.2.2018) of Murubara village posited that after screening in Manyani camp by home guards they were put in trains and take to Mwea in Kirinyaga". In Mwea the prisonets dug water canals for irrigation. Additionally they dug holes where soil samples were collected and taken to laboratory in Nairobi to find out whether the soils were suitable for growing of rice.

Another respondent Zakayo Kiarie another respondents (O.I., 27.3.2018) also confirmed that they dug holes to get soil which was taken to laboratories for testing whether the soils were suitable for rice farming. It would seem some of the work done was to ensure detainees were occupied doing something. Some detainees were employed by government departments as clerks, artisans and cooks after release from detention (KNA/DC/TANA RV 7/15).

Cleansing and De-oathing of Detainees

Askwith (1995) assumed that the detainees who had taken the Mau Mau oath were possessed by evil and must be cleansed by public confession as performed in Kikuyu customary laws, paid manual labour and literacy classes. Askwith further noted that detainees were forced to confess and some of the hardcore ones were beaten to death. The mistreatment of detainees elicited concern in the British House of Commons. A member of the House of Commons while asking a question to colonial secretary Sir Lennox Boyd wanted to know action taken against a rehabilitation assistant for beating a detainee and hanging him up by his wrist from a beam until he died (KNA/AB/18/1/1957). It was a policy that hardcore detainees who refused to renounce their oath would be beaten using open hand, rubber strips and sisal strings (KNA/AB/18/1/1957).

Berman (1996) contends that oaths ensured the largely mythical mechanical solidarity of a Kikuyu community that had, in truth, always been politically fractious. According to Kenyatta, in the Kikuyu society breaking the oath invoked an unstoppable curse on oathers and their families. As a result, the oath became a powerful mechanism in the formation of Mau Mau and served as a precursor to Kenyan Independence in 1963. Contrary to the long standing discourse of savagery, the Mau Mau oath was actually an elaborate, dynamic, and sophisticated ceremony based on ancient oathing traditions, symbolism, and beliefs. Those taking the oath were held together by what Kenyatta refers to several times in his ethnography of the Kikuyu, *Facing Mount Kenya*, as "symbols of truth" or "symbols of the oath" (Kenyatta, 1938)

The oath taken by the respondents were secret, sacred, morally and spiritually binding. There are no records of the oath but several of its aspects have been pieced together. They are thought to include "If I know of any enemy of our organization and fail to kill him, may this oath kill me," and "If I reveal this oath to any European, may this oath kill me". These were ritualistic oaths that were taken by the freedom fighters (Mau-Mau binding oaths). Several oaths existed but the respondents state that they took *Mungururio* oath. This type of oath was for everybody in reserves. It was set as a psychological preparation for everyone to prepare for a major contest. Others affirmed that they took *Mbatuni* oath which was taken by those who were going to war. It was indeed a sacrament of strengthening (*umiriria*); and indeed, the second oath for everyone (Barnet & Njama, 1966). According to Gachube Guachara (O1. 13.2.2018) who took both *Mungururio* and *Mbatuni* at Maela, Naivasha.

Detainees were classified according to the oath taken and had to sing songs to show that they had recounted the oaths.

Mau Mau Detainees Experience since Resettlement in Mwea

Up to 1933 Embu district comprised of Embu, Mbere, Ndia and Gichugu Divisions. Ndia, Gichugu and some parts of Mwea are today in Kirinyaga County while the rest is in Embu County. During the establishment of Mwea Irrigation Scheme Embu clans representatives were opposed to settlement of the Kikuyus in the scheme but several meetings were held with them and the upper limit of the scheme of that was tentatively agreed. (KNA/DC/EBU/1/19/1960). Embu land owners in the area were to be allocated land elsewhere (KNA/VP/14/12).

Archival information confirms that by 1954 the Mwea Irrigation Scheme was underway with 200 or more acres of rice were planted in the short rains and in the Tebere area a (600 acres) where canal excavation was in progress. (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/14). Tenders had been called for construction of headwork's and concrete structures along the canals and plans were ready for preparation of the 500 acre pilot scheme area. (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/14). This was the first season in October-December 1954. The detainees provided labour throughout the year on varying stages of rice growing. They were later being joined by 800 landless persons (*ahoi*) from Kikuyu districts as paid labourers who later became settlers in the area. (KNA/EBU/1/14/1954). Kandogu prison was kept at full strength throughout the year and was engaged primarily on providing labour for the rice scheme. The Embu- Meru road which was partly constructed by Mau Mau detainee's labour made progress and was nearly completion to the district boundary (AGR/DC/EBU/1/20/ 1958).

The development of Mwea Irrigation Scheme was hastened and in 1957 approximately 2,149 acres of land were prepared for irrigation compared to 257 acres the previous year. (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/19/1960). In 1957 a total of 3,254 Embu detainees were released without incident to their villages. About 1700 detainees remained and of these some 240 because of their past records were not accepted back to their own people for a considerable time irrespective of how well they behave in prison. (KNA/DC/EBU/1/2/1957).

Mwea Irrigation Scheme comprising of two blocks of which 15,500 acres were formally set aside by the government thus opening way for rules to be applied (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/17/ 1958). The scheme though with challenges had proved a great success. In the first crop 79,760 bags of rice were reaped from 3281 acres giving a yield of 24.31 bags to an acre in 1958. (KNA/DC/EMBU/1/17/ 1958). Askwith noted that Agricultural reforms were meant to benefit the inhabitants of Embu that had been given the responsibility to oversee the farm management, processing and marketing of rice in Kenya (Askwith, 1995).

Majority of Mau Mau detainees went into detention landless and came out in the same state (Elkin, 2005). The Swynnerton Plan was put in place to ensure security of tenure for loyalists left in African reserves and in the process appropriated land initially owned by those who had gone to the forest to fight the colonial state. Those held in detention camps lost out in the demarcation process since women were not recognised as land owners. (Elkin, 2005). The detainees lost out in the land consolidation process despite the efforts of their wives who remained in the village to protect their land. Land consolidation and adjudication was meant to benefit chiefs and loyalists' supporters. The colonial government anticipated that those allocated land would be too busy to participate in the Mau Mau movement and cooperate with the Europeans. (Sorenson, 1967)

The loyalists therefore benefited from the land reforms and acquired huge tracks of land. There was a deliberate government policy on forfeiture of Mau Mau land. The provincial commissioner in central Kenya signed orders for forfeiture of land. (KNA/ Fort Hall Annual Report/ 1956). The resettlement programmes of the 1960s after independence were meant to deprive Mau Mau fighters and their supporters of their ancestral land did not benefit ex-detainees. (Askwith, 1995).

After release from detention the detainees were taken to their home districts where chiefs were then summoned to pick people from their area after release from detention However, the chiefs picked people depending on their past records and availability of land (Gachube Gachara O.I., 13.2.2018). If the Chief confirmed that the former

detainees were of good character and there was available land, the detainee could be integrated with other members of the family. Those who were not picked by the chiefs were returned and settled in Mwea.

An official committee for settlement for central province noted that landless Mau Mau convicts from Nyeri who had not committed murder totaling 65 would be relocated to Mwea with their families (KNA VP/14/12). Mwangi Kamau (O.I., 2/4/2018) of Mahigaini narrated how in 1955 on his way to release he was taken to Githiga in Kiambu where chiefs were to identify them. When it was discovered that he came from Waruhus location (Waruhui a colonial chief was murdered by Mau Mau agents sparking the declaration of emergency), Mwangi was not accepted as the chief argued he would spread Mau Mau ideology among the people to justify his rejection. Mwangi was repatriated to Mwea.

This statement was confirmed by Paul Ndegwa (O.I., 2.4.2018) of Mahigaini who was taken to Ngenia location in Kiambu on his way to release. His parents did not have land in Kiambu as it had been alienated by White settlers and he agreed to go back to Mwea where the government was promising detainees land. Thus, he became one of the workers in the rice scheme. Kanyinga (1999) asserts after the end of the state of emergency some freedom fighters had nowhere else to go. The government was afraid that if they went back to their villages they would incite others to violence.

The chiefs were cautious when receiving such people as Mau Mau ex-detainees were regarded as dangerous to the residents. It would be dangerous to release a large number of people into the society without support as they would have joined the fighters in the forest. The detainees therefore had to remain in the camps opening huge areas for rice cultivation as negotiations went on for their release (Ask with, 1995).

Zakary Ng'ang'a (O.I., 27.2.2018) of Kirogo village narrated how they were ferried in trucks to Kirigiti stadium in Kiambu from Mwea on their way to release. His chief Makimei rejected him as he was suspected to have participated in the Lari massacre. Makimei was a local chief in Lari who had a reputation of toughness and a loyal ally of colonial officials. On 26th March Mau Mau attacked Lari killing 120 collaborators who included local chief Luka Kahangara, homeguards and their families. The reason for the killings was Makimei's vigorous pursuit of Mau Mau fighters. Makimei escaped as he had built defenses round his home and he was able to fend off the attackers. This was followed by a second massacre by home guards who took revenge on any person suspected of being a Mau Mau sympathiser (Kiringa, 2012). In 1957 they were supposed to be allocated three acres of land to grow rice and a plot to construct his house. Those who worked hard were later allocated an extra acre and a plot each to construct a house (Chief Kuhota (O.I., 17.4.2018).

Gachube Gachara (O.I., 13.2.2018) narrated how he was taken to Kamirithu camp in Kiambu where his family had relocated from Naivasha during the State of Emergency. The chief came with home guards and asked him whether he had land. Gachara was fortunate that his wife was living with relatives and later joined him in Mwea Irrigation Scheme. Some of the respondents indicated that the loyalists married their wives after lying to them that they had died in the war. Sebastian Gikunju (23.8.2018) asserted that his fathers' livestock and land were taken by relatives after it was assumed that he had died in detention. The detainees were resettled in Mwea to grow rice as they had nowhere else to relocate to.

Mwea Irrigation scheme was therefore conceived as an area for resettlement of Mau Mau detainees to keep them more occupied. Thus, in cases where the chiefs or the community rejected the detainees because of their known hard line activities during Mau Mau war the detainees would be rejected and the rehabilitation if the officials would decide the appropriate place for them. More often than not, the detainees would be ferried back to Mwea for resettlement they thought that the detainees could work in those desolate places to produce food. The detainees could learn new skills that they could use after release.

The loyalists were not enthusiastic about detainees returning to their villages for there was fear of revenge. Although they had a lot of powers like determining who were released from the 'pipeline' or exile, loyalists used their powers to prevent detainees from returning to the reserves making them to go back to settlements like Hola and Mwea (Elkin, 2005).

Kanyinga (1999) posits that the ex-detainees taken to concentration camps in Mwea were from neighbouring Kiambu, Muranga, Nyeri, Embu and Meru. This a claim supported by evidence from numerous respondents interviewed in this study. Mwangi Kamau (O.I., 2.4.2018) who currently resides in Mathangauta in Mwea said that he came from Githunguri in Kiambu. On his way to release he was taken to Githiga in Kiambu where chiefs, Makimei, Waruhiu and Magugu were screening the detainees. He was rejected by chief Waruhiu as a dangerous detainees and taken back to Karaba camp in Mwea.

Gikunju Njiru, according to his son Sebastian Gikunju (O.I., 23.8.2018) was from Mwea, Kirinyaga County. He was released at Gathgiriri camp and given Land at Nyamindi village to grow rice. He decline to take the land as he feared further exploitation as the land had no title. He was later allocated land at Karaba with the assistance of the local chief in 1960.

The Mau Mau ex-detainees Gerrison Muturi Kega (O.I., 19.2.2020), Zakayo Kiarie (OI, 27.8.2018) and Mbugua Gichuhi (O.I., 19.2.2018) confirmed that they first settled at Tebere where they constructed the first communal houses before they spread to other areas in Mwea Irrigation Scheme. The office of District Officer (D.O) of Mathira in July 1956 sent 65 males for resettlement to Mwea while other 100 and 20 were sent from Kiambu and Fort Hall (Muranga) respectively. These males were later to be followed by their families once they were settled. (KNA/VP/14/12). The ex-detainees once resettled in Mwea Irrigation scheme were allowed to construct houses to accommodate four people as they built more houses to accommodate the rest. The respondents indicated that they build houses they were to live in using bricks commonly called "*maturubari*", bamboo and grass. Paul Ndegwa (OI, 2.4.2018) of Mahigaini indicated that he arrived in Mwea in 1956 and was tasked to load trucks with posts for constructing houses and sand for making bricks.

The detainees were later allowed to bring their wives and children who were quarantined for 14 days for vaccination. (Mwangi Kamau O.I., 2.4.2018) respondents indicated that the land they were allocated is under trust and they only have a card to signify that they were allocated the land for farming purposes. The land therefore belongs to the government because they do not have title deeds.

The respondents therefore feel that the government has not done enough to ensure they own the land or allocate them more land. Paul Ndegwa (O.I., 22 .4.2018) bitterly recounted that he lost land during the emergency while he was in detention which was allocated to the home guards. Ndegwa lamented that Jomo Kenyatta (the first president of Kenya) and the home guards bought the land from settlers and relocated Mau Mau detainees to Mwea to settle them on government land. Settling of the ex-detainees in Mwea was meant to reduce land conflicts as detainees land had been allocated to the home guards while they were in detention. The ex-detainees think the post-independence government have failed to recognise their efforts through land compensation that they fought for.

Karuti (1990) posits that Mau Mau demand for property rights (control of land) and enhancement of their freedom continued after independence in 1963. This demand became a threat to the post- independence government as it wanted to maintain the status quo. The government lied to ex-Mau Mau detainees and did not compensate them for loss of land while they were in the concentration camps. On the other hand, retired chief Kuhota (O.I., 17. 4. 2018), argued that if the farmers in Mwea Irrigation Scheme got title deeds they will sell their land and become destitute. He also believes that land in Mwea should only be preserved for rice growing.

Jomo Kenyatta's ascendancy to power made former Mau Mau fighters assume that they would get jobs in the government; however, the government's criterion for employment was education. Gachube Gachara (O.I., 13.2018) blames his poverty on lack of education as he could not secure a white collar job after independence. Paul Ngei, in 1963 tabled a motion in parliament, seeking members' approval to have a programme of assisting ex-detainees to make them fit for the country's economy and employment. However, members amended the motion, asking the government to investigate and take measures to assist the children and widows who were left destitute due to imprisonment and the state of emergency in 1952. However, after the motion was amended, it became vague. Mau Mau veterans perceived that it would not influence their lives (Hansard, 1969). This assertion

was contrary to what ex-detainees expected as they thought that the government would repossess lands from the Whites settlers and redistribute it to the Africans.

Jomo Kenyatta included loyalists in the government which required Mau Mau memories be suppressed as a subject. The land question and other packages for Mau Mau raised in parliament ended prematurely as the government of Jomo Kenyatta was uncomfortable with Mau Mau issue. The Mau Mau detainees were forgotten immediately Kenya attained her independence. The post- independence government forgot them as soon as the loyalists were appointed to senior government positions. The Mau Mau veterans believed they had a right to be compensated by being allocated free land and other material gains since they shed blood for Kenya independence. According to respondent Wanderi Ngatia (O.I., 11. 4. 2018) the sons of former loyalists assumed various offices since at the height of the war; they went to school, thus reaping the benefit of independence. On the other hand, Mau Mau war veteran's children struggled to secure jobs as they did not acquire western education. Buijtenhuijs (1973) argued that Mau Mau ex-freedom fighters were collecting crumbs falling from the loaded tables of the Kikuyu elites. In addition, other Mau Mau ex-detainees suffered the same fate.

The political condemnation and different views of the Mau Mau movement amongst scholars has given Mau Mau a new face that has instilled an urge for research to understand them better. The urge has led to the rekindling of Mau Mau memory due to public debates and political confrontation on different issues. In October 2008 Hon Mututho a member of National Assembly for Naivasha tabled a private member's motion to have Mau Mau and other freedom fighters acknowledged for their contribution to the liberation of the country. He noted that fighters were in their sunset years and living in dehumanising conditions and absolute poverty. He urged parliament to consider allocating 2.5 acres of arable land and humanitarian assistance to cater for Mau Mau and other freedom fighters as a token of appreciation for their role in bringing independence. (Hansand, 2008)

Branch (2009) posits that although the governments of Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi failed to assist and recognise the ex-detainees there is a street named after Dedan Kimathi and his monument has been put up in Nairobi. In 2013, Mwai Kibaki's government recognised Mau Mau as a legal movement which contributed to Kenya's independence. (Wahome, Kiruthu & Mwangi, 2016). Kibaki government also unveiled a statue of Dedan Kimathi on 18th February 2017 and promised a search of his body to give it a proper burial (Coombes, 2011). However Kibaki's government did not solve ex-Mau Mau detainees' quest to acquire land. Land in Mwea Rice Irrigation Scheme remains as state land with the ex-Mau Mau detainees and other farmers as tenants of the state.

The British government also agreed to compensate some of the victims of Mau Mau torture in a case filed by Kenya Human Right Commission through a British law firm Leigh Day (KNHCR, 2013). Some of the respondents however contended that the compensation by British colonial government in 2013 went to the wrong people. According to respondent Gachube Gachara (O.I., 13 02.2018) and Ngure Njuku (O.I., 19. 2. 2018) those who filed this case did not consider Mau Mau ex-detainees who were not members of Mau Mau War Veterans Association (M.M.W.V.A). However in a press release KHRC executive director argued that the commission which filed the case was only able to identify 330 ex-detainees. The ex-detainees have also played a role for their relegation to the periphery by forming many veteran organisations each claiming to represent the genuine freedom fighters.

This study concurs with Munene (2012) who concluded that in spite of Mau Mau movement contribution to the struggle for independence politicians have conspired to deny them their rightful place due to neo-colonial tendencies that followed after independence. Loyalists, noted Wamwere (2008) who benefited from colonial education became beneficiaries of post-colonial position of power. The ex-Mau Mau detainees indicated that they were exploited by the National Irrigation Board. The board paid them poorly for their produce. The board took much of the harvest and left the farmers with 12 bags of rice to consume the whole year yet they had no other source of income (Gachara Gachube O.I., 13 02.2018). The police and NIB guards policed the scheme to ensure that farmers did not hide even a grain of rice. Those caught were severely punished.

Mwea Irrigation Scheme is located in a hot flat area prone to mosquitoes and rice is planted in stagnant water. The respondents indicated that they were affected by diseases like malaria and bilharzia. Malaria and bilharzia are common where rice fields are flooded for long periods. These diseases are transmitted by vectors or intermediate hosts living in rice fields and canals. (Mwangi, 2016). Medical facilities are also not adequate.

The ex-Mau Mau detainees were allowed to bring in their families after settling in Mwea. However children above 18 years were supposed to leave the scheme. This rule was later relaxed and children are now allowed to inherit the land. According to Kanyinga (1999) the children were supposed to move to towns or elsewhere. However NIB has relaxed on enforcement of this rule and children above 18 years are not victimised to leave the scheme and farmers are also allowed to keep livestock.

Additionally sub-division of paddies have impoverished the ex-detainees and other farmers further. The poverty levels among the ex-detainees is reflected by the brick mud houses some of them live in. Some of these houses were temporary mud walled and old dating back to 1950s and 1960. The land that they were allocated in the 1950s and early 1960 is inadequate to sustain their needs and the growing population. Sebastian Gikunju (O.I., 23.8.2018) a son of an ex-detainee indicated that his father died a desperate man who could not fully meet his family obligations. He participated in education his siblings to assist his father. The father Gikunju Njeru, died dejected and a desolate man as he could not sustain himself. Respondent Isaac Mburu Njuguna (O.I., 22. 2. 2018) who was sickly during the interview died shortly after the interview.

Mwea land is still under trust land and the tenants do not have title deeds which they could use to access loans or even have the freedom to dispose the land. African Land Development Programme (ALDEV) which was a colonial project stalled due to insufficient funds and poor supervision. ALDEV handed all its assets and liabilities in 1968 to the newly constituted body called National Irrigation Board (NIB) created through an Act of parliament in 1966. Additionally, the Board provides land for irrigation schemes and funds for their activities.

NIB was mandated by law to charge cess on any agricultural produce grown in any irrigation scheme. The cess was to be used to develop the relevant scheme's infrastructure. To support the NIB parliament passed regulations legal notice 68 of Kenya legislation 1977. This regulation was to help NIB to maintain itself as statutory body. For example, a licensee was to cultivate his holding to the satisfaction of the manager. A farmer was also expected to deliver the harvest of any crop other than the portion for family consumption to the manager on NIB. (GOK, 1977). Ndegwa (2014) observed that the farmers who included the Mau Mau ex-detainees had the following grievances.

- a) Forced labour and those whose land was not worked would face withdrawal of their tenancy.
- b) Slave master type of experience where guards and irrigation officials screened farmers to ensure rice was not smuggled out.
- c) Outdated colonial regulations that denied women and children right to own land.
- d) Farmers paid NIB recurrent expenditures through forced deductions from farmer's income.
- e) Farmers were not represented in management of NIB.
- f) Farmers co-owned the estimated five million rice mills with NIB through their cooperative but were not paid dividends (Ndegwa, 2014). One of the respondents Mr. Isaac Mburu Njuguna claimed during the interview that the original owner of Mwea Rice Mills were the ex-detainees but were defrauded by NIB.
- g) Farmers were promised title deeds during elections which was never effected.

IV. CONCLUSION

The article concludes that the ex-Mau Mau in Mwea Irrigation scheme originated from the former Central region of

Kenya. Majority of the veterans were born in Kiambu while others were born in Muranga, Nyandarua, Nakuru,

Kirinyaga, Kericho, Kirinyaga and Nyeri. The veterans joined the Mau Mau movement in order to defend their land from being taken by the British colonialists. The Mau Mau ex-detainees were arrested, tortured and in order to reveal the plans of Mau Mau and also to denounce the oath they had taken. The detainees were also engaged in hard manual work like digging of tunnels, constructing roads and making building materials.

The British Colonial Government played a key role in the establishment of Mwea Irrigation Scheme. They developed the infrastructure which included roads, houses, irrigation tunnels and rice farming paddies. They also introduced rice farming which they handed over to GoK after independence in 1963.

During this period, the government took most of the produce without paying and left a little for the farmers to consume. The living standards of the farmers were therefore affected and they lived in poverty. The social economic challenges facing the ex-detainees and the community in Mwea Irrigation Scheme are limited land resources due to population growth thus the land cannot sustain the needs of the large families. The Mau Mau ex-detainees also feel that the government has not done enough to ensure they own the land allocated to them because they do not have a title deed. The land belongs to the government and thus the tenants do not have title deeds which they could use to access loans or even have the freedom to dispose it. The plots are also land small thus it cannot sustain their needs and the growing population.

The ex- Mau Mau detainees and other farmers were also exploited by the National Irrigation Board. The Board paid them poorly for their produce. The ex-detainees have little to show for their labour just like other farmers who live in poverty. The veterans were also affected by diseases and there were few medical facilities and they do not have the capacity to pay for their medical expenses. The situation marginally improved to the advantage of the farmers some of whom are ex-detainees because the rice growers are free to sell their produce to willing buyers after they resisted control by NIB. The population has grown and the land cannot sustain the needs of the large families. The people in the area however continue to languish in poverty

Mwea Irrigation Scheme established during Mau Mau emergency has achieved important results. Despite the challenges it has been demonstrated that African families can engage in intensive farming under irrigation and provide rice to the nation over the years.

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