A HISTORY OF THE KIKUYU TO 1904

Godfrey Muriuki

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ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

ABSTRACT

This thesis is the first systematic attempt, so far undertaken, to collect and analyse the historical traditions of the Kikuyu.

It demonstrates that among the Kikuyu the genealogies of the mbari or kinship groups are a more fruitful source of historical evidence than the popular myths of origin which are practically worthless. The former indicate that the Kikuyu are an amalgam of diverse elements drawn from a wide area.

An analysis of Kikuyu society, which was based on kinship groups and the mariika system, shows that it was moulded by the mode of the initial immigration and pattern of settlement. The mariika system provided manpower for public duties and was a vehicle for education and social control. This society was also highly competitive and egalitarian.

Relations between the Kikuyu and their neighbours are also examined. It is shown that there was no basic difference in the relations existing between the Kikuyu themselves, the Kikuyu and the Maasai or the Kikuyu and their cousins around Mount Kenya. The bad reputation of the Kikuyu is shown to have emanated from the Kamba and coastal traders with disastrous results to the relations existing between the Kikuyu and all the newcomers.

Finally, the initial establishment of the British rule, by force, is examined. The whole ambit of the western civilization descended on the conquered with far-reaching repercussions to their way of life.

CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades or so the African continent south of the Sahara has witnessed radical changes. And while the focus of attention on these changes has largely been centred on the process of decolonization, a much less-publicized but integral part of this revolution has been the reappraisal of the attitude of historians towards the study and teaching of African history. African history is no longer regarded as an appendage of European history nor is its subject matter the colonial exploits of the missionaries, explorers, traders and administrators. African history has become of age, and rightly established itself as a respectable academic discipline in Africa and in other parts of the world, particularly Europe and North America.[1] To a large measure, this reversal of fortunes has been accelerated by the emergence of the hitherto dependent territories into fully-fledged independent states. Aware of the importance and the role of history in the solidification and preservation of national identity, these new states have been foremost in the call for re-interpretation of their history. This is of crucial importance to them since many of them are composed of heterogeneous, and artificial units that are often strained by endemic centrifugal forces, a phenomenon commonly called tribalism. But the call for a new approach to African history has not been solely, or even mainly, confined to the political practitioners. On the contrary, the

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1. R. Oliver: African History for the Outside World, an inaugural lecture delivered on 13 May 1964; R. Oliver: The Middle Age of African History, London, 1967, pp 92-7.

coming of age of African history is due to the efforts of a new generation of Africanists which has been at the vanguard of the new interpretation of and approach to African history.

These scholars have emphasized, in particular, the brevity of the colonial period with which the bulk of the extant studies have hitherto tended to be concerned. The subject matter of colonial history has been shown to be equally limited in scope. Understandably a general characteristic of these studies is that they have been conditioned by the climate of the colonial era; and hence they have concentrated upon the activities of the foreigners to the virtual exclusion of the African peoples. The picture emerging from them has consequently been far from adequate. They have tended to portray the foreigners as a catalyst in a sea of hitherto docile and dormant recipient communities. Yet, so often where a closer study has been undertaken, this conclusion has been shown to be untenable.[1] Furthermore the colonial era cannot be adequately understood or analysed without due consideration being given to the preceding period. It is this fact that has led students of the history of Africa to the conclusion that African history must of necessity be a history of and for Africa. That is, a history which, while inevitably including much about outside influences from Europe and Asia, will invariably attempt to put these in their proper perspective. These outside influences are hence only one, albeit an important one, of the

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1. For example, Mutesa, the Kabaka of Buganda, did not invite missionaries because of his desire for Christianity gua Christianity but as a political weapon. J.M. Gray: "Mutesa of Buganda" in Uganda Journal, vol. 1, 1934, pp 22-49.

many factors that have influenced or left an imprint on the course of African history. Viewed in this light, the history of Africa ceases to begin with the incursions of the Arabs and Europeans into Africa, as formerly portrayed in history curricula of colleges and schools and in some of the existing text books. It becomes the study of the African people in the past and present. Accordingly it conforms to the historical tradition to the extent that the theme of history is the study of man and his actions,[1] or as Professor Oliver has so aptly put it, "... history is the history of Man, and not just of European man, or even of so-called civilized man".[2]

Faced with the dearth of written sources, or even their non-existence, historians have primarily relied on oral traditions for the reconstruction of African history. But this has presented its own problems. As Vansina has shown, oral traditions do not exist in a vacuum; they have a purpose and function to fulfil in any society and, on that account, are conditioned by the political and social structure.[3] But if this creates difficulties, these are neither inherently peculiar to Africa nor are oral traditions necessarily more unreliable than the written

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1. M. Bloch: The Historian's Craft, Manchester, 1954, pp 10-11, 25-6.
2. Oliver, inaugural lecture, op cit. pp 17.
3. J. Vansina: Oral Traditions: A Study in Historical Methodology, London, 1965, chapter 4 and pp 170-3. This is a general historical problem as P. Weiss has argued - "Since our idea of the reasonable is in good part a function of social experience all histories have a tribal side, reflecting the assumptions and evaluations shared by the numbers of a society." See P. Weiss, History: Lived and Written, Illinois, 1962, pp 11.

sources.[1] No historian can be entirely divorced from the society in which he lives and to that extent this will influence his judgement and values. Moreover the problem of African historiography is not an isolated entity. It is part and parcel of the world-wide problem of the nature of history, and history, it has been argued, can only arrive at probabilities never certainties.[2]

In the study of oral traditions, it has been implied that centralized societies are better able to preserve their oral traditions than the acephalous ones.[3] This view seems to underrate the oral traditions of the latter societies. Perhaps this is not surprising for individual researchers have hitherto concentrated their efforts on the centralized societies due, partly, to the difficulties involved in collecting oral traditions of the acephalous societies. Evidently, until recently little work has been done on acephalous societies. This pattern, however, is rapidly changing. In Kenya alone, the studies recently

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1. For a discussion of the African historiography, see 1st, 2nd and 3rd Conferences on History and Archaeology held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, edited by R.A. Himilton (1955) and D.H. Jones (1959) and in the Journal of African History, Vol. 3, 1962 respectively; J. Vansina, R. Mauny and L.V. Thomas (eds): The Historian in Tropical Africa, Studies Presented and Discussed at the Fourth International African Seminar at the University of Dakar, Senegal, 1961, London, 1964; M. Posnansky: Prelude to East African History, Papers Read at the First East African Vacation School in Pre-European History and Archaeology, December 1962, London, 1966.
2. "The historian never arrives at certainty; he rarely ends with more than a not altogether sifted totality of plausible, hypothetical, guessed-at and imagined formulations of what had been." - P. Weiss, op cit. pp 45.
3. J. Vansina, op cit. pp 173, and R. Oliver in Vansina, Mauny and Thomas (eds) op cit. pp 309.

carried out by Jacobs, Were and Ogot indicate that our ignorance of the uncentralized societies has been partly due to neglect.[1] This study will show that far from there being a poverty of oral traditions, among such societies, their social and political structure only calls for a different approach in the retrieval of their traditions. Whereas traditions in the centralized societies were often controlled and rigidly regulated by a narrow circle of courtiers, those in the uncentralized societies were spread among much wider groups such as the head of families and lineages or experts in judicial, political and religious processes of the tribe. This difference appears to be marginal rather than fundamental; in the former case the custodians of oral traditions are known and easily identifiable, while in the latter this is not the case. Here the researcher has to cast a more widespread net, because every lineage head or expert may have something of importance to contribute.

Although my study of the Kikuyu did not commence until October 1966, my interest in the subject goes further back than this. My interest in African history was stimulated during my undergraduate studies at Makerere University College, Uganda, where I read history, in 1961-4, under the revised external history syllabus of the University of London.[2] But I owe my appreciation of the role of oral traditions in the study of African history, to participation in a vacation school organized by the British Institute of History and Archaeology in East Africa held in

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1. A.H. Jacobs: The Traditional Political Organisation of the Pastoral Masai, unpublished D. Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1965; G.S. Were: A History of the Abaluyia of Western Kenya, c. 1500-1930, Nairobi, 1967; B.A. Ogot: History of the Southern Luo, Migration and Settlement, Nairobi, 1967.
2. For details see Oliver, inaugural lecture, op cit. pp 4-6.

December 1962.[1] It was then that I realized how little I knew about the pre-colonial history of East Africa or indeed of the Kikuyu. Luckily and soon afterwards, with the assistance of the History Department of Makerere College I was able to spend April to May 1963 in Nyeri District familiarizing myself with oral evidence relating to the establishment of the British administration in that part of Kikuyuland. My initiation had thus begun.

October 1966 to June 1967 was spent at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, making a general survey of the background material available in Britain. These documentary sources were later supplemented, in July and August 1967, by further sources housed at the Kenya National Archives, Nairobi. The more important primary sources are the works of Routledge, Hobley and Leakey, while general ethnographical surveys are to be found in the works of Cagnolo and Kenyatta.[2] Most of the existing material is ably summarized by Middleton and Kershaw in their contribution to the Ethnographical Survey of Africa.[3] Other primary sources dealing with specialized aspects of Kikuyu society are the articles contributed by K.R. Dundas (1908-9), McGregor (1909) and Tate (1904, 1910-11).[4] Another important

1. Posnansky, op cit.
2. W.S. & K. Routledge: With a Prehistoric People, the Kikuyu of British East Africa, London, 1910; C.W. Hobley: Bantu Beliefs and Magic, with Particular Reference to the Kikuyu and Kamba Tribes of Kenya Colony, London, 1922; C. Cagnolo: The Akikuyu, Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore, Nyeri, 1933; L.S.B. Leakey: The Southern Kikuyu Studies, unpublished mss, 1938 (hereafter Leakey, mss); J. Kenyatta: Facing Mount Kenya, London, 1938.
3. J. Middleton and G. Kershaw: The Kikuyu and Kamba of Kenya, London, 1965.
4. H.R. Tate: "The Native Law of the Southern Gikuyu of British East Africa" in Journal of African Society, Vol. 95, 1910, pp 233-54 and Vol. 10, 1911, pp 285-97, and Kenya National Archives (hereafter KNA), ref. PC/CP/1/4/1; K.R. Dundas: "Notes on the Origin and History of the Kikuyu and Dorobo Tribes" in Man, Vol. 8, 76, 1908, pp 136-9 and Vol. 8, 101, 1908, pp 108-2; A.W. McGregor: Kikuyu and Its People, Church Missionary Review, 1909, pp 30-6.

source is the report on Native Land Tenure in Kikuyu Province, dealing specifically with land and the related subjects. Besides, Barlow and Lambert have also made major contributions to our understanding of Kikuyu society. Barlow was perhaps the most thorough and painstaking student of Kikuyu society there has yet been, and it is on his original linguistic work that Benson's standard Kikuyu-English Dictionary is based.[1] His private papers are also a mine of information, and contain his research notes dealing with all aspects of Kikuyu society, including their oral traditions. Lambert, on the other hand, summarised the existing traditional history of the Mount Kenya peoples and attempted to reconstruct a history of their migration.[2] But his work could be criticized on two grounds. As indicated in chapter 2, he assumed that all the Mount Kenya peoples came from Shungwaya, whereas only Meru traditions alone suggest this. Secondly Lambert recognized the importance of the mariika system, in regard to chronology, and the essential principles governing their formation. Yet he failed to carry this to its logical conclusion, which would otherwise have permitted him to extend the chronology, based on the mariika, back to the 16th century without having to resort to doubtful "average rate of occupation" or "co-efficient of expansion".[3]

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1. T.G. Benson (ed.): Kikuyu-English Dictionary, Oxford, 1964.
2. H.E. Lambert: The Social and Political Institutions of the Tribes of the Kikuyu Land Unit of Kenya (hereafter Lambert, mss)
3. H.E. Lambert: The Systems of Land Tenure in the Kikuyu Land Unit, Communications from the School of African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1950, pp 35.

Another unique and indispensable primary source is The Kenya Land Commission, Evidence and Memoranda.[1] This is the product of the Royal Commission despatched, under Sir Morris Carter in 1932, by the British Government to inquire into the land problem, an incessant source of political friction in Kenya. It is particularly valuable as a source for the state of Kikuyuland in the second half of the 19th century and the initial contacts between the Kikuyu and the Europeans. It also gives graphic surveys of the manner in which the Kikuyu adjusted themselves under the new regime in this century. Nevertheless a word of caution is necessary about this and the other sources. From 1920 onwards land had become a bone of contention between the Government, the Kikuyu and the white community. To the extent that land and their traditions of origin and migration are interrelated, it is crucial to distinguish between the material collected before and after 1920. Much of the later work, whether contributed by Kikuyu or Europeans, was politically inspired. On that account the work of Dundas, Routledge, McGregor, Barlow and Tate is more valuable and reliable in their treatment of the Kikuyu traditions. By the same token, one should be wary of much of the evidence contributed by the professional politicians, such as the officials of the various Kikuyu political parties.

Several recent studies have a bearing on my field of study. The study of the Maasai carried out by Jacobs influenced my researches in one respect.[2] His elucidation of the relationship between the Maasai

1. HMSO: Kenya Land Commission, Evidence and Memoranda, 3 volumes and Report, London, 1934 (hereafter KLC). Particularly useful is the original evidence which contains more details. This is housed in the Lands Department, Nairobi.
2. Jacobs, op cit.

tribes and their sedentary and agricultural neighbours proved to be valuable in regard to Kikuyu/Maasai relations. In his study of the establishment of British rule in Kenya, Mungeam briefly discusses how this was carried out among the Kikuyu.[1] And Rosberg and Nottingham, in their survey of nationalism in Kenya, examine the manner in which the Kikuyu readjusted themselves to British rule in the first quarter of this century.[2] They also attempt to answer the question why the Kikuyu were among the first people to display political consciousness in Kenya and, in particular why this led to the Mau Mau uprising. Finally, in his two studies, Sorrenson discusses the land issue, particularly land consolidation, and the genesis of white settlement together with the Kikuyu land grievances arising therefrom.[3]

Though the Kikuyu proved to be fairly richly-covered by written sources, it became clear, nevertheless, that no systematic survey of their traditions had been carried out. Nor had any analysis of their expansion and settlement been undertaken in any depth. Consequently the field work, undertaken between September 1967 and July 1968, was the most important part of my research. The strategy for the collection of the oral data was influenced by several factors. The pattern of migration and settlement, as discussed in chapter 2, was one of the important considerations. From the reading of the written sources, it was evident

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1. G.H. Mungeam: British Rule in Kenya 1895-1912: The Establishment of Administration in the East African Protectorate, Oxford, 1966.
2. C.S. Rosberg and J. Nottingham: The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya, Stanford, 1966.
3. M.P.K. Sorrenson: Origins of European Settlement in Kenya, Nairobi, 1968 and Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country, Nairobi, 1967.

that the Kikuyu had originally spread into Gaki and Kabete from the vicinity of the Metumi/Gaki border. This expansion was undertaken ridge by ridge by small bands of kinship groups. But bifurcation and hiving off of the clans and sub-clans had occurred, in course of time, leading to individual clans being widespread all over Kikuyuland. To be able to trace this expansion and hiving off, it became necessary to conduct interviews ridge by ridge, following for convenience the administrative units. I commenced the research from the frontiers and worked inwards - that is, from the most recently settled areas to the centre of dispersion.

Another important factor was the manner in which the oral traditions were transmitted in Kikuyu society, which as already noted is uncentralized and segmentary. Kikuyu traditions are neither controlled nor regulated by any single section of the community. Kikuyu traditions are on that account largely free, informal and widely diffused.[1] The more popular traditions which occur throughout Kikuyuland are often too vague and unhelpful. Clan or lineage genealogies, therefore, are of greater significance. Ideally the heads of the clans and lineages are perhaps the best sources by virtue of their status as custodians of family affairs. None the less, their role has become obsolete in this century and, with the rapid increase in population, new mbari, or sub-clans, have been formed and have dispersed all over Kenya. By 1962 it was estimated that 30% of the Kikuyu lived outside their own districts.[2]

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1. Vansina, op cit. pp 121-9.
2. Kenya Government, Statistical Division of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development: Statistical Abstract, Nairobi, 1967, pp 36.

This figure has become even higher since independence because many of them have taken up land in the Kenya highlands, formerly settled by white farmers. This dispersion throughout Kenya made it impracticable to collect traditions clan by clan. It was more convenient to collect their traditions family by family, or mbari by mbari. But whatever approach was adopted, it had to satisfy two criteria - to tap the best available sources, while at the same time covering as wide a cross-section of the population as was possible. At this juncture, the educational system of the Kikuyu becomes relevant.

From an early age, a Kikuyu child was informally taught some of the tribal traditions. Tales, riddles or proverbs formed an important source of amusement for the young as they sat around the fire-place waiting for the evening meal to be ready. Sooner rather than later, they in turn learnt to recite these to their friends or brothers and sisters. In my own experience, I recall that even after going to school a period was set aside each week during which pupils related their favourite folk tales to their classmates or tested each other's memory with riddles. It was considered to be a real shame for a pupil to be unable to do this. The second stage of this informal education was reached when the children grew a little older. The boys accompanied the males, especially their fathers or grandfathers, from whom they learnt the necessary manly skills - fighting, herding and clearing of the virgin forest - as well as the outline of mbari affairs. Included in these were the family genealogy, the boundaries of their land, their debtors or creditors, and so on. The girls, in their turn,

accompanied the womenfolk from whom they, too, acquired the essential knowledge and skills befitting their role in the society. The need for being well-acquainted with the traditional education was reinforced by the fact that any departure from the accepted norms and deportment was considered to be a serious offence because it brought shame on the family. In any case the dynamics of the society was such that only individual merit and achievement were regarded as the criteria for leadership. No individual, therefore, would have wished to remain ignorant, a factor which constituted an important incentive to learning.

By far the most important stage of education was reached when boys and girls were initiated in order to become adult members of the community. The neophytes underwent formal instruction on tribal lore at the hands of experts called atonyi, who advised their pupils on all aspects of the initiatory rites. During the period of initiation, the neophytes lived in temporary huts built in the home of the sponsor where the ceremonies took place. The instruction at this stage occurred at a particularly opportune time; this was a vital formative stage because it marked an individual's transition from childhood to adulthood, as will be seen in Chapter 4. After this girls continued to learn informally more about their role as girls and mothers under the discerning eye of their more experienced womenfolk. And the anake, the circumcized boys, served as warriors before graduating as elders of the tribe. ~~They served as warriors before graduating as elders of the tribe.~~ They served an apprenticeship period as junior elders before qualifying to be senior elders, permitted to hear cases or officiate as priests in

the multifarious rites and ceremonies that marked Kikuyu life. It was this group which formed the real depository of Kikuyu traditions. Their chief duty was to ensure the welfare of the community by coordinating the various facets of tribal activity, a duty that inexorably demanded extensive knowledge of the tribal lore. This then formed the core of my informants as far as was practicable. But as they put it, Kirira ti ukuru, knowledge of the tribal lore is not the prerogative of the old. There were thence younger men who by virtue of their duties had acquired extensive knowledge of their society. Many of them had served in their community as headmen, chiefs, teachers, court assessors, interpreters or clerks. In fact the above axiom proved all too true. Besides, the harsh conditions prevalent in the large villages built during the Mau Mau war had taken a heavy toll of the elder group. This necessitated leaning rather heavily on the younger men.

Having isolated the class of people which was likely to provide useful informants, the problem of choosing the actual informants still remained. This was carried out in two ways. In some parts of Kabete and Gaki, I already had contacts who introduced me to their own families or any other people whom they thought could be useful or who were regarded as experts by the local people. I considered this to be by far the best method. First, in most cases the inhabitants of every village or ridge knew who were the experts in their midst, some of whom were even known beyond their own locality. Secondly and more important, the advantage of this method was that an atmosphere of confidence between the potential informant and myself was generated. I considered

this to be of prime importance. Wherever practicable I took my contact with me during the actual interviewing so that he could introduce me properly and allay any mistrust that might arise. The generation of confidence was of crucial importance because the colonial climate had bequeathed a legacy of mistrust and suspicion on anyone attempting to probe into personal or family affairs such as I was attempting to do. It was impossible, though, to confine myself to this approach particularly in those areas where I was a total stranger. In such areas I had, of necessity, to make use of the administrative officials. But this approach was not without problems of its own. Some might be unwilling to help or might conveniently forget the appointments made with them. I was aware, too, that in the past District Commissioners had collected traditions in a baraza, open air meeting, a feature that I had no wish to repeat. As a matter of fact, there had been a surfeit of such barazas during the innumerable committees and commissions of enquiry that had visited Kikuyuland. In addition to that, I was apprehensive that where the government might have problems of its own my work could be seriously hampered if I became too closely identified with it. For these reasons, it was my determination to eschew official assistance wherever I could. Against such misgivings is the fact that administrative officials can quickly and easily provide the important informants. The chiefs in particular know the areas and people under their jurisdiction very well. In some cases, they know who are the experts, some of whom they themselves might have sought advice from in course of their duties. In retrospect, I found that a popular chief

was a real asset, an unpopular one a major liability. Most of the chiefs left as soon as they had introduced me to the potential informants, except for a few whose enthusiasm and keenness were enough for them to endure the drudgery of a lengthy interview.

From the outset, I had several advantages. I am a Kikuyu and have been brought up in a traditionally orientated family. My childhood was spent herding cattle for my maternal grandfather, from whom I imbibed much of the traditional lore. I had also had a stint of teaching which afforded me valuable contacts throughout Kikuyuland. But the most important factor was the changed political climate. I was positively reminded of this fact time and again. In the colonial period land was one of the major political issues that agitated the Kikuyu. The Crown Land Act of 1915, the Maxwell Committee of 1929 and the Carter Commission of 1932-3 had raised points which seriously seemed to undermine the Kikuyu rights to land. One particular argument put forward was that the Kikuyu, being as much immigrants as the European, had no special claim to the land. It was argued further that the Kikuyu, having originally acquired their rights to land by conquest, had surrendered this in turn to their European conquerors. Worse still, it was argued that the Athi had no right to sell, give or surrender land. Thus tribal history was very much intertwined with their rights to land. On that account it had become a taboo for any Kikuyu to discuss the past frankly where this seemed even remotely to contradict or in any way undermine their claim to the ownership of land prior to the dawn of the colonial era. This mood was radically altered by the attainment of independence in

December 1963. People were now ready to discuss their past truthfully without undue misgivings. This was particularly noticeable in the relevant information on expansion and the various methods used in the acquisition of land as detailed in chapter 2.

There were two methods open to me for conducting the interviews - to hold either group or individual interviews. By group interviews is meant the situation whereby a number of informants are assembled, asked their opinion about a particular issue, discuss it and then arrive at a consensus of opinion. This method was only found to be useful when eliciting a particular type of information such as a list of age groups or trading commodities. On such an occasion, the informants were able to remind each other in case of forgetfulness. Elsewhere, the method had very serious drawbacks. A forceful and respected personality can dominate the whole proceedings to the exclusion of all the others. And in this respect he can play a far greater role in choosing a particular variant of a tradition than his knowledge warrants. This was particularly so where vested interest was at stake. But a more serious drawback is that in a group interview the participants play a dual function. They are the source of the data as well as its analysts. Here there is the danger that they might decide to tell only what they think one should know. I found it more politic to record all the variants of any one tradition and then decide for myself what to accept. The ideal method was to hold individual interviews conducted in the informant's environment; the home atmosphere generally gave the informant a sense of self-confidence which was vital to a successful interview.

The researcher became his guest and, so long as mutual confidence was established from the beginning, the informant did not feel inhibited, as so often happens in a group interview. In this case there was no need to exaggerate his importance or even hide his ignorance as he would be tempted to do in the presence of his peers.

But there cannot be a hard and fast rule on this score. Despite my preference for individual interviews, my intentions were at times frustrated by circumstances. Where I relied on the assistance of chiefs in seeking potential informants, it was not unusual to find that a chief had collected a dozen or so informants at his headquarters. Whenever this arose, I either reduced the group to a manageable proportion or concentrated on family genealogies alone. In the latter case, I noted the more knowledgeable informants and visited them individually and at their homes later on. If two or more informants chanced to belong to the same mbari, I recorded all the versions of their genealogy, particularly points of divergence. My lot was made easier by the informants themselves as they were sometimes certain who knew most about a particular issue in their locality.

My fieldwork was commenced in Nyeri (Gaki) District, county, in September 1967. Nyeri was chosen first because this being my home district I had more contacts there than anywhere else. I began by drawing up a questionnaire on the basis of which I hoped to be able to discover the most useful informants. The questionnaires were administered for me by the pupils of two secondary schools. The experiment proved a failure and was thenceforth abandoned. While the pupils and

teachers were enthusiastic, it became obvious that for the pupils to be capable of producing worthwhile material, an initial period of training would need to be followed up by very close and constant supervision. Effective supervision could not be exercised over such a large number of assistants. However, the deciding factor was the nature of Kikuyu traditions. They were not of the type that are amenable to a questionnaire, being largely narrative in form. In the event, I drew up a guide which consisted of a list of topics, and the relevant questions that I wished to be covered. This time I was luckier to have the assistance of teacher trainees from Kagumo Teacher Training College during their vacation. After an initial briefing session, a programme was drawn up to ensure adequate supervision. They were visited once a week during which a practical session was held; an informant of their choice was interviewed by me to demonstrate the proper way of conducting an interview as well as framing questions. I then went over the scripts of their interviews, after which they were requested to seek further information on points that were unclear or particularly valuable.

This group was a distinct improvement on the first one, but even here the temptation of quick and haphazard work, in order to enhance emoluments, became apparent. For example, one of the students once claimed to have conducted 29 interviews of different informants in four days. The results, by and large, did not seem to justify the plan, and ultimately I grew wary of assistants and decided to do the rest of the work on my own. Luckily, from February 1968 I was greatly assisted

by my wife, who transcribed the interviews from tapes, thus leaving me free to concentrate on interviewing.

Most of the interviews were recorded on tapes. Right from the beginning, and in order to allay any probable suspicions, it was made clear to my informants that our discussion would be taped unless there was any objection on their part. The tape recorder was widely accepted and only a negligible number objected to it. Even then, this only occurred when discussing what they thought were sensitive points which reflected unfavourably on the character and integrity of individuals or mbari.

The problem of whether informants should be paid was being widely discussed in Kenya at the time of my fieldwork and even gave rise to an article in the local press. This practice is objectionable on two counts; it will make it increasingly difficult for bona fide students of limited means to undertake any meaningful research of this type. Worse still, once payment of informants becomes fashionable it will not take long before spurious information is invented for sale. Certainly I had no wish to add to this problem; it was my practice not to do anything that would give the impression that I was interested in buying information. My interviewing proceeded as soon as I had been introduced to a prospective informant. At the end of it and as a token of gratitude, I then offered the informant a pound of sugar or tea, or a roll of snuff which I had normally bought beforehand. In the event only two of my informants demanded payment. Otherwise everyone was enthusiastically cooperative about my project, and I was given every assistance.

Truly their overwhelming hospitality and kindness had to be seen to be believed. I was treated as an honoured guest even in the humblest of homes.

Chronology is a basic requirement in any attempt to place historical events in perspective. Historical time has been called "the very plasma in which events are immersed, and the field within which they become intelligible."[1] Yet this is one of the major handicaps that confronts an historian in Africa who utilises oral traditions as a source of evidence. In an attempt to overcome this problem, scholars have resorted to the use of lists of kings or rulers, generations and age differentiation systems, in order to establish a reasonable chronological framework. This study makes use of the last two - the generations and age systems.

The Kikuyu did not recognize the seven-day week, although the day was divided into portions corresponding to the position of the sun over the sky. For reckoning time durations that were longer than a day, the Kikuyu depended to a large extent on the lunar month. Their activities, too, were planned to correlate with the various phases of the moon's cycle. Each of the phases bore a particular name dependent upon its predominant weather characteristics. Furthermore, and as we shall see in chapter 1, the year was divided into two major and two minor seasons according to the weather and the agricultural activities. Broadly the Gathano and Themithu seasons were amalgamated with Kimera kia njahi and mwere respectively. Each of these seasons consequently

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1. Bloch, op cit., pp 27-8.

lasted for approximately six months and formed the Kikuyu year, mwaka or kimera. It is important to bear this in mind in considering the age system.

In discussing their past, the Kikuyu very often indicate the time factor by such phrases as, "at the time of Iregi", "when the Manguca were warriors," or "the Mungai did it". This is an indication that not only are they very historically minded but also that their mariika, or age sets, act as milestones of chronology. This feature has led many previous writers to note the potential importance of the mariika for establishing a reliable chronological framework, and several lists of them have been collected in the various parts of the country. All the same, some of these lists are very muddled, inaccurate and at times confusing too. It is therefore necessary to be aware of the various facets of age differentiation as well as the various shades of meaning of the word riika. Here I am not concerned with riika in the sense of age grades, which are status roles that are commonly ascribed to individuals, within certain ages in most societies. My concern is with riika in the sense of age sets or age groups which are coeval, corporate groups whose members are recruited through specific criteria. This word is not at all precise, as is shown in chapter 4, and this may have been the source of confusion. Depending upon the context, it may refer to generation (moiety) or to three slightly different kinds of initiation sets, comprising either all the neophytes who underwent circumcision in any one year, or an army contingent embracing several initiation sets, or an exclusively female initiation set.[1]

1. See figure 1.

FIGURE 1: THE MARIIKA FORMATION.

RULING GENERATIONS	GAKI (NYERI) ARMY SETS	GAKI (NYERI) INITIATION SETS.	METUMI (MURANG'A) / KABETE (KIAMBU) ARMY SETS	METUMI (MURANG'A) / KABETE (KIAMBU) INITIATION SETS.
1898-? MWANGI	NDUMIA OR NGUNJIRI (RIGHT HAND)	1898 Nuthi (start of an army set)	KIENJEKU	1898 Kienjeku (start of an army set).
1862-97+5 MAINA	1889-97 MUHINGO (Girls only)		MUHINGO (Girls only)	1897 Ndutu/Nuthi 1896 Kagica 1895 Kibiri/Nduriri 1894 Ruharo
	1884-8 NDIRANGU OR NDUNG'U (LEFT HAND)	1888 Thugu or Nyuguto 1886 Wamwega 1884 Muricu	1885-93 MUTUNG'U OR MBURU	1893 Mutung'u 1892 Nyongo 1891 Gicere 1890 Ngigī 1889 Ngando/Muiring'oto. 1888 Uhere 1887 Mburu 1886 Ngarūiya 1885 Kiniti
	1875-83 MUHINGO (Girls only)		1881-4 MUHINGO (Girls only)	
	1870-4 NDIRITU (RIGHT HAND)		1872-80 NJENGA OR MBIRA ITIMU	1880 Boro 1879 Wanyoike 1878 Ngunga/Mwirīgi 1877 Rūhang'a 1876 Ngugī 1875 Kiambuthi 1874 Kiriira 1873 Mang'uriu 1872 Muiruri
1827-61+10 IREGI	1861-9 MUHINGO (Girls only)		1868-71 MUHINGO (Girls only)	
	1856-60 MANGUCA		1859-67 MBUGUA	1867 Mbugua 1866 Gucu Nduike 1865 Nguo ya Nyina 1864 Wangigī 1863 ? 1862 ? 1861 ? 1860 ? 1859 ?
	MUHINGO		1855-8 MUHINGO (Girls only).	

No special problem is posed by the generation sets since these are fairly uniform throughout the Kikuyu country. Again the exclusively female initiations also present no problem since female initiation was an annual event. It is the male initiation sets which pose serious difficulties in the attempt to trace their proper sequence. This is particularly so since the bulk of the existing literature gives little clue as to their mode of formation. My own modest research on the subject indicates that there were two systems of army and initiation set formations. As shown in chapter 4, there were two systems of formation; one was operative in Kabete and most parts of Metumi with the exception of those which border on Gaki, and the second one was operating in Gaki together with the adjacent parts of Metumi.

The former system - call it the Metumi system - was based on a muhingo, closed period, which lasted for 9 imera or miaka during which no initiation of boys took place at all. But it should be noted that initiation took place on the tenth kimera, which in effect meant that it took place after 5 years, since as a rule initiation took place only during the Themithu after the mwere, millet, harvest. This was followed by annual initiations for the next 9 years before the next muhingo was imposed. These nine initiation sets formed one army contingent or regiment set. It is only to be expected that the system in Metumi and Kebete should coincide, Kabete having been so recently occupied that there had not been time for the development of a different pattern. And it was generally agreed by my informants that the first initiation set to be circumcized in Kabete was the Mungai. A comparison of all

the lists of sets that were collected indicates this very consistently, despite the fact that these sets have not been in operation to any effective degree in this century.

Lambert, who alone has discussed the regiment sets in the whole of Gaki, implies that there were wide divergences in the various localities. Indeed he concludes that the system in Tetu, Aguthi, Mathira and the areas close to Metumi followed different systems. This conclusion is not borne out by the evidence I collected. Moreover, Lambert overlooks one important factor, that Gaki was an area that had very close ties with the Maasai and one where their influence would be most marked. This is evidenced by the division of sets into the right-hand (tatane; Maasai, tatene) and left-hand (gitienye; Maasai, kedyanye) and also by the distinction made between the first set to be initiated after a muhingo, muricu, which was considered to be senior to all the others and whose name remained the official one for the whole regiment set. These two features are similar in all parts of Gaki without exception, and it is relevant to point out that this was borrowed from the Maasai. A third feature that was common to all of them is that their muhingo was imposed for 9 years, and finally a close scrutiny of the various lists collected clearly indicates that their names were remarkably similar if not identical. Taking all these factors into consideration, it seems that the Gaki pattern was widespread in the whole of the district or county, and not as localized as Lambert thought.

Nonetheless, one problem still remains in connection with the Gaki system. How long did it take to form a regiment or army contingent?

My information on this issue is conflicting and muddled. But I incline to the view that, since this was essentially based on the Maasai system, it took 14 years or thereabouts to form a regiment, nine of which were muhingo years. Therefore it must have taken five years to complete a regiment set. In some areas there was initiation in each of those yèars while in others initiation sets were spaced over a year or two depending upon the locality. Hence, after the muhingo, two, three or more sets were formed. This appears to be the only plausible explanation of the differences in the number of sets that formed a regiment. Furthermore it is this feature that would seem to account for the apparent divergences noticed, but not accounted for, by Lambert. The need for a standing army meant that in some parts, notably Mathira and Tetu, a minor muhingo was imposed after the muricu had been initiated. It should be noted too that in these two areas there was close cooperation and migration to and fro, as Wang'ombe's movements demonstrate.[1] Finally, the evident divergence shown by the lists from the Metumi/Gaki border should be attributed to the fact that for mariika purposes this was a no man's land. Above all, and despite all the apparent discrepancies, the muhingo was observed at the same time over a wide area; the ituika process also took place, at the same time, all over Kikuyuland. This feature not only helps us in arriving at approximate periods, but is an important consideration when assessing the importance of the age sets in establishing a reliable chronology.

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1. Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 226, 235, 308.

Thus there were two outstanding features of the mariika. First, they were vitally important in an individual's life, and secondly they were at the same time regular or periodic dependent upon the sex. And because of their importance it was most unusual if not impossible for an individual not to know how they operated or be able to recite the names of past sets. Even granting that the regiment sets were formed irregularly, they can still be measured by the reference to the female initiation sets for as far back in time as these could be remembered. For the majority of people, however, it is the regiment sets that mattered most and were best remembered, even though it is no longer possible to discover exactly how they were formed.

There is a mass of oral evidence that enables us to calculate, with reasonable certainty, the dates corresponding to the various sets that have been enumerated by the informants. Take Kabete, for example. We are told that Europeans camped at Kiawariua, Lugard's Dagoretti, when Njenga and Ngigi were warriors and that the latter were then neophytes. We are also told that Mutung'u were initiated at a period when the Kaputiei and Loita were fighting each other, when the Maasai took refuge among the Kikuyu after the cattle epidemic, and that in the same year Waiyaki was arrested and deported. We are informed, too, that Mutung'u were ihii, uncircumcized boys, when Kiawariua was ransacked and also during a Maasai raid at Mbari ya Gicamu's. Uhere, an older set, is also said to have been preparing for initiation when Nyanja and Ruara passed through Kikuyu-land. And turning to the written sources, we have corroborating evidence which is quite extensive: Waiyaki was arrested in August 1892,[1] the Maasai

1. M. Perham: The Diaries of Lord Lugard, London, 1959, Vol. 3, pp 408.

took refuge among the Kikuyu in large numbers around 1892-3, and, after being maltreated by them, sought Hall's help and built their manyatta, Kraals, at Fort Smith towards the end of 1893,[1] Kiawariua was established by Lugard in October 1890,[2] von Hohnel and Teleki passed through Kabete in September 1887,[3] Hall noted the presence of smallpox around Fort Smith in October 1892 and its spread further north in Gaki, Konyu (the southern part of Mathira), was noted by Gregory in 1893.[4] Finally the Gicamu raid occurred in May 1892.[5] Taking all this evidence into account together with the practice of having initiation after the millet harvest, it seems certain that Uhere set was initiated in 1888, Ngigi in 1890 and Mutung'u in 1893. Further evidence provided shows that Mutung'u marked the completion of a regiment set which was followed by a muhingo. This muhingo was lifted by the initiation of Kienjeku initiation set in 1898.

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1. The Maasai took refuge after the Morijo war, see Jacobs, op cit. pp 100-3; J. Ainsworth to IBEACo., 15 February 1894 in Foreign Office (Africa series) - hereafter FO-correspondence ref. FO2/73; Hall to Col. Hall, 24 November 1894; Hall's diaries for 20, 21, 29 September and 8 November 1893; Hall to IBEACo., January 1894 in FO2/73. Hall's Papers are housed in Rhodes House, Oxford.
2. Perham, op cit. Vol. 1, pp 309-11, 317-48; J.W. Gregory: The Great Rift Valley, London, 1896, pp 91; Boedecker in KLC Vol. 1, op cit. pp 703.
3. The Kikuyu thought that Qualla (Dualla) and Kijanja, both caravan leaders to von Hohnel and Teleki, were the important people since it was with them that they negotiated for toll. Hence their visit has always been referred to as that of Ruara and Nyanja. See L. von Hohnel: The Discovery of Lakes Rudolf and Stefanie, London, 1894, Vol. 1, pp 286-361.
4. Hall, Diary for October 1892; Gregory, op cit. pp 195. Note the fear expressed by the Mathira at the northern border that Gregory might bring in the disease if allowed to pass through. See Gregory, op cit. pp 158.
5. Purkiss to Portal, 31 January 189[illegible] in FO2/60.

Lambert, Leakey, Beech, Knight and Tate have given varying dates for the various lists of the mariika that they collected.[1] Compare the gap, for example, existing between the Ngigi and Mutung'u in their respective lists. No adequate explanation is offered for these gaps. Moreover, assuming that we are right in accepting that Mutung'u should have marked the end of one regiment set, and on this we all agree, then the first initiation set to inaugurate the regiment set thus completed should have been initiated in 1885. It is my contention that Kabete mariika should be suspect between 1890 and 1902 because in this period that region experienced traumatic changes that threw their social structure into turmoil. The constant raids by the servants of the Imperial British East Africa Company followed by disease and famine which visited them meant that there was neither time nor initiative to bother with what were complicated rituals that demanded time and wealth. Further north in Metumi no such disruptions occurred, as is clearly shown by their mariika which are more complete.[2] To conclude, the regiment set completed by Mutung'u in 1893 should not have been called Njenga; it should have been called either Mburu or Mutung'u, Njenga being an earlier regiment set. But this regiment set was never completed and in the eyes of the Kikuyu theirs was the age of disaster and shame because they had been defeated by the British and decimated by disease and famine.

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1. Lambert, 1965, op cit. chapter 2; Leakey, mss, chapter 18; Beech in KNA/PC/CP/1/4/2, pp 31-2; Knight in KLC, vol. 1, pp 900-2; Tate in the Journal of African Society, vol. 10, op cit., pp 286-9.
2. Barlow Papers, op cit., File on Mariika; Cagnolo, op cit. pp 198-202; Champion in KNA/KBU/3/12.

FIGURE 2: THE MARIIKA.

RULING GENERATIONS	REGIMENT (ARMY) SETS.	
	METUMI/KABETE	GAKI
MAINA 1862-97 ± 5	1885-93 MUTUNG'U 1872-80 NJENGA	1884-8 NDUNG'U/NDIRANGU 1870-4 NDIRITU/NGUNJIRI
IREGI 1827-61 ± 10	1859-67 MBUGUA 1846-54 MUNGAI 1833-41 GITAU	1856-60 MANGUCA 1842-6 KING'ORI.
NDEMI 1792 ← 1826 ± 15	1820-8 KANG'ETHE 1807-15 WAINAINA 1794-1802 NJOROGE	1828-32 NDIRANGU 1814-8 NDIGIRIGI 1800-4 NDIANG'UI
MATHATHI 1757 - 91 ± 20	1781-9 NG'ANG'A 1769-77 KINYANJUI 1756-64 NJUGUNA	1786-90 THIURI 1772-6 NGITHITU 1758-62 MATU
CIIRA 1722-56 ± 25	1743-51 KINUTHIA 1730-8 KARANJA	1744-8 TATUA 1730-4 THUITA
CUMA 1687 - 1721 ± 30	1717-25 KIMANI 1704-12 KAMAU 1691-9 KIAMUHIA	
MANDUTI 1652-86 ± 35	1678-86 CEGE 1665-73 ? KIARII 1651-9 ? MBIRONDE	
? AGU 1617-51 ± 40		
? TENE 1582-1616 ± 45		
? MAMBA 1547-81 ± 50		
? MANJIRI 1512-46 ± 55		

For all these reasons, there was no glory to be associated with their set and it was not unusual therefore that they chose, albeit unconsciously, to be associated with Njenga, the regiment that had the honour and reputation of having been a terror to the Maasai. Hence they are called Njenga, derived from cenga (cut), or Mbira Itumu, meaning Spear Spinners, which is a picturesque image of spinning spears as the regiment marched to battle. This conclusion is in accord with the lists collected in Metumi. A tentative arrangement based on this conclusion is shown in Figure 2.

When considering the sequence of the Mutung'u sets, I have regarded Kianjagi and Ruhonge, which appear in Limuru and Kikuyu/Kiambaa lists, to be local names of some of the sets already listed. From Mbugua regiment set it is impossible to know the right order of the constituent initiation sets and even Njenga itself presents some problems among its earlier sets. Indeed as a Wainaina told Barlow, in 1932, from Gucu Nduike the lists become less precise. This is also demonstrated by the lists collected by Champion and Cagnolo which very clearly indicate the muhingo between the Mutung'u and Kienjeku and also between Mburu and Boro. Further back than that it is impossible to pick out the girls' sets. Lastly, going back beyond Kamau, the earliest regiments of all were only mentioned by a few informants, judging by my lists and those of the others.

Turning to Gaki, and applying similar techniques, it has been possible to draw up a tentative list as shown in Figure 2. Once again lists collected earlier have been compared and contrasted with those

obtained recently. This proved to be a more complicated area because of the local variations, but, when compared with the all-embracing generation sets the result does not appear to be too divergent. For example, Ndung'u, which was sometimes called Manguca also, was according to informants outside the area the same as Mutung'u (mistakenly called Njenga) in Kabete.

Finally the generation sets. According to most informants, Mwangi took over from Maina during the muhingo after which Kienjeku and Nuthi in Metumi and Gaki respectively were initiated. That would fall between 1889 and 1898. Kenyatta places this between 1890 and 1898.[1] There are references too to the effect that this ituika occurred towards the end of the 19th century. Ituika is a protracted affair that is said to take years, and for this reason it would not surprise anyone to hear that it may have indeed been in the process for that long. It shall consequently be assumed that it was taking place between 1890 and 1898. This does not look out of place; we are told, for example, that Irungu was in the process of taking over the running of the country from Mwangi between 1925 and 1932 according to Barlow.[2] Lambert thinks they should have taken over in 1924/5, Beecher saw the preparations in 1931/2 and an administrative officer noted it in 1929.[3] It is apparent, therefore, that Irungu was trying to effect the transfer of power from 1924 to 1932, a period of nine years. If Mwangi effectively took over

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1. Kenyatta, op cit. pp 190
2. Benson, op cit. pp 467.
3. Cagnolo, op cit. pp 86, 120-1; Lambert, mss, op cit. pp 361; KNA/PC/CP/1/1/2, op. cit. pp 47; and L.J. Beecher: A Kikuyu-English Dictionary, 1935, Kahuhia, Fort Hall, pp 68.

in 1898 and should have relinquished office in 1932, they would have been in office for 34 years. This is in general agreement with the views of most informants who say that each generation ruled for a period of 30 to 40 years. If we take 35 years as the average period of office, the result seems to tally with the Kikuyu traditions as shown in Figure 2. The sequence of the sets has been determined by the elimination of those names - such as Karirau and Gumba - which refer to specific incidents and in all probability are names of regiments or initiation sets. Terms such as the Tene, long ago, and Agu, ancestors, are admittedly vague and could refer to any of the earlier generation sets. But on the other hand, from the era of creation, Manjiri, to the appearance of internal dissension among the ancestors, Manduti, could hardly have been a period of only two generations, as implied by some of the lists that enumerate the generation sets. Furthermore, nearly all those who collected lists of the generation, at the turn of the century, were told that there had been no less than 10 to 12 generations up to the Mwangi generation; others were told that there were many more although no one could enumerate all of them with any confidence.[1] Indeed the existing evidence is contradictory and tenuous, and we cannot deduce, with any degree of confidence, the number of generations which preceded the Manduti. To offset the telescoping of generations that has obviously occurred before the Manduti generation, therefore, we shall retain the Tene and Agu, despite their vagueness, for lack of better descriptive terms.

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1. McGregor (pp 32-3) enumerates 10, Beecher (pp 68) 12, K.R. Dundas (Man, 1908, Vol. 8, pp 181-2) 10, Tate (the Journal of African Society, vol. 10, pp 290), 11.

The Ndemi and Mathathi are sometimes interchanged by individual informants. Here the Mathathi will precede the Ndemi following the lists collected early this century. The fact that the Mathathi commemorate the period of the initial decorating of bodies with red ochre, a feature that seems to have been borrowed from the Maasai, suggests that this occurred earlier than the period of the rapid expansion commemorated by the Ndemi. The remainder of the generation sets have been regarded as a summary of Kikuyu traditional history: consequently since the Manjiri refers to the period of creation, this should come before the Ciira, for example, which represents the period when the Kikuyu greatly increased in numbers. Nonetheless, evidence only becomes more definite and reliable after the Manduti generation.

Chapter 1: The Physical Setting[1]

The Kikuyu,[2] who numbered at the 1962 population census 1,642,065 people, constitute the largest group of the North-eastern Bantu, and inhabit the Central Province of Kenya.[3] Prior to the Independence Constitution of 1963, when their area was considerably increased, they occupied only about 1250 square miles.[4] Their homeland is divided into three administrative districts - to the north is Nyeri or Gaki, to the south is Kiambu or Kabete, and at the centre is Murang'a or Metumi which is traditionally considered to be their ancestral and spiritual home. But these political divisions were, however, rather vague and indeterminate at the turn of the century and indeed only coalesced during the colonial period.

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1. For the physical environment of Kikuyuland see HMSO: A Handbook of Kenya Colony and Protectorate, London, 1920, pp 43-51; B. Dickson: "The Eastern Borderland of Kikuyu" in the Geographical Journal, Vol. 21, 1903, pp 36-9; R. Crawshay: "Kikuyu: Notes on the Country, People, Fauna and Flora" in the Geographical Journal, Vol. 20, 1902, pp 24-49; S.J.K. Baker: "The East African Environment" in R. Oliver and G. Mathew (eds), History of East Africa, Oxford, Vol. 1, 1963, pp 1-22; H.J. Mackinder: "A Journey to the Summit of Mount Kenya" in the Geographical Journal, London, Vol. 15, 1900, pp 453-86; HMSO: Report of the East Africa Royal Commission, 1953-5, London, 1961, pp 8-9; and Kenya Government: Atlas of Kenya, Nairobi, 1964.
2. This study excludes the Ndia and Gicugu although they regard themselves and are regarded by their neighbours as Kikuyu. The proper spelling should be Mugikuyu (sing.), Agikuyu (pl.) for the people, Gikuyu for their country and Gigikuyu for their language. But to avoid confusion and in view of its wide currency in modern usage I shall stick to Kikuyu, its anglicised form, for all three.
3. Kenya Government: Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Kenya Population Census 1962, Advance Report, Vol. 3, 1964. Compare with Kamba 933,219, Meru 439,921, Embu 95,647, Tharaka 38,474 and Mbere 38,172.
4. For example Nyeri has been enlarged from 336 to 1268 square miles, Murang'a from 583 to 956 and Kiambu from 324 to 946. See Kenya Government: Statistics Division of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Statistical Abstract, Nairobi, 1967, pp 2.

Kikuyuland is a dissected plateau of approximately 100 miles in length from north to south and 30 miles in width from east to west. Its altitude ranges from about 4,000 feet to over 8,000 feet above sea level, and it is well-marked by natural landmarks. To the north it is dominated by Kirinyaga (Mt Kenya), a three-peaked massif of an extinct volcano, rising to 17,040 feet; to the west its border follows the Kikuyu escarpment of the Rift Valley which merges to its north with the Nyandarua (Aberdares) Range which rises to over 12,000 feet; and to the east and south lies Kianjahi, or Ol Donyo Sabuk, and Kiambiruiru, Ngong Hills, respectively. The whole plateau, moreover, tilts to the south-east from the mountain and foothills into the Mbere and Kaputie plains. The northern boundary of the plateau is clearly marked by Nyeri Hill and a low line of hills bridging the Nanyuki-Nyeri corridor to Nyandarua and Kirinyaga. This plateau is characterized by deep, narrow gorges which have been furrowed by the numerous parallel streams flowing into the Thagana and Athi Rivers. A cross-section of the country from north to south, therefore depicts a series of parallel ridges and valleys a few of which are broad but most of which are very narrow.[1] It is this feature of the Kikuyu plateau that has conditioned the pattern of settlement and the political as well as social organisation of the Kikuyu to a considerable degree, as we shall see in Chapters 2 and 4. Equally it also proved to be as disheartening as it was cumbersome and exacting to the early foreign travellers who traversed the Kikuyu country.[2]

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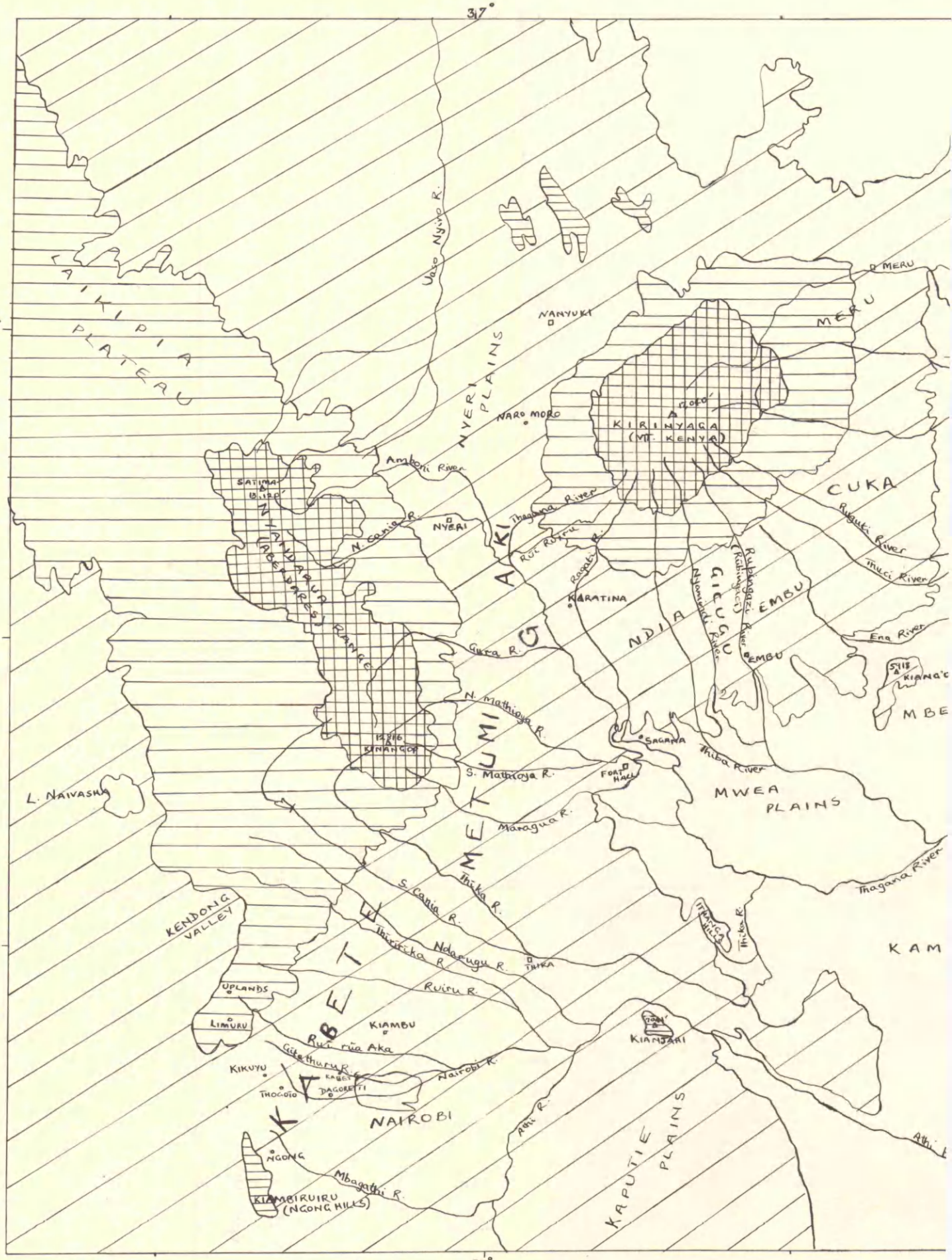
1. Crawshay, op cit. pp 27; Dickson, op cit. pp 36-7; Handbook, op cit. pp 44, 98.
2. Note for example von Hohnel's experience in von Hohnel: op cit. Vol. 1, pp 301, 315-6, 322 and 328.

KIKUYU PLATEAU : PHYSIC



MAP 1.

The Kikuyu escarpment and Nyandarua Range are drained by south-eastward flowing streams. All the tributaries north of the confluence of the Thika and south Cania Rivers join the Thagana River, while those to its south join the Athi River. Kirinyaga, with its permanent snow cap, is the source of many tributaries which are fed by the glaciers and flow south-westwards to form and join the mighty Thagana River before it curves eastwards on its journey to the coast. Among some of the major tributaries are the north Cania, the Gura, the Maragua, the north and south Mathioya, the Thika, the south Cania, the Ndarugu, the Ruiru and the Rui rua Aka, the Women's River, or as it is commonly mis-spelt Ruaraka.[1]

This topography has resulted, to a great extent, from the geological structure of the plateau.[2] It is covered by an irregular gneiss basement on which a sheet of tertiary lava flow has been superimposed. The volcanic activity has also given rise to volcanic piles such as the Nyandarua and Kirinyaga. The plateau slopes from the north-west to south-east because of the subsidence of the country to the south, while the Laikipia plateau is thought to have remained intact. Over the years, this structure has been exposed to the agents of denudation resulting in waterfalls where exposed gneiss crosses the streams. The Cania and Thagana are examples. Heavy rainfall, especially, has enabled the streams to furrow deep and winding valleys as they flow

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1. It is so-called because a Dorobo woman used to man one of the fords and demanded toll from travellers.
2. Baker, op cit. pp 1-3, Handbook, op cit. pp 93-100 and Atlas of Kenya op cit.

over the gneiss and granitic rocks of varying hardness. Consequently, the Kikuyu plateau is a trenched and denuded plateau of ridge and valley.

To the north of the low line of hills marking the beginning of the Nyeri-Nanyuki corridor, lies the Nyeri plain, which is hemmed in by the Nyandarua and Kirinyaga. The plain is dissected by deep, steep-sided valleys separated by intervening grassy plains anything up to five miles in breadth. At the turn of the century, this formed a natural home for the Purko and the remnants of the Laikipiak Maasai, who were only separated from their neighbours, the Kikuyu, to the south by a thin fringe of primeval forest which was a useful defensive barrier in case of need. Far from being the "traditional enemies" of the popular literature, the Maasai and the Kikuyu had extensive trade relations, had intermarried and even on occasion, made military alliances against their common neighbours. Moreover and more important, a sizeable section of the Kikuyu is of the same stock as the semi-pastoral Maasai, especially those Maasai tribes which formerly inhabited Laikipia. In short, the much publicized Maasai/Kikuyu wars were no more serious or numerous than those between the Kikuyu themselves. And even then they were a much later development dating from the nineteenth century. Consequently there have been very close ties between the two peoples which, in turn, have led to cultural fusion, a process which has left a deep imprint on the Kikuyu, as we shall see in chapter 2. The Maasai were also the neighbours of the Kikuyu to the west, where they were separated from each other by the forested Nyandarua range running from north to south for about 90 miles. The Maasai also occupied the vast,

broad and undulating Kaputie plains beyond the Kiambiruiru and here, too, they were separated from the Kikuyu only by a forest fringe.[1] There were other neighbours besides the Maasai. The country lying to the east of Kikuyuland is inhabited by their cousins - the Meru to the north-east, the Ndia, Gicugu, Mbere and Embu to the east, and to the south-east the Kamba with whom they are especially closely related.[2] Furthermore, it is from these areas that the ancestors of the Kikuyu originated, as shown in chapter 2. Other important neighbours of the Kikuyu were the Athi (Dorobo) who were living in the forests at the turn of the century. Their importance and significance cannot be over-emphasized because of the part they played in regard to land acquisition, the ivory trade and the origin and migration of the Kikuyu. It will be argued, later on,[3] that not only are the Athi the ancestors of some of the Iloikop (semi-pastoral Maasai) but also of a good many Kikuyu sub-clans. And it was this common ancestry, between the Iloikop and the Kikuyu, especially in Nyeri, that may have facilitated the extraordinarily good relations between specific Maasai and Kikuyu families.

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1. J. Thomson: Through Masai Land, London, 1885, pp 310-4, 319-20; von Hohnel, op cit. pp 302; Routledge, op cit. pp 7; Mackinder, op cit. pp 463; Handbook, op cit. pp 44, 46, 47; Gregory, op cit. pp 157.
2. J. Middleton and Kershaw, op cit. and H.E. Lambert: The Systems of Land Tenure in the Kikuyu Land Unit, Communications from the School of African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1950, chapter 1 (hereafter referred to as Lambert, 1950); and Lambert 1965, op cit. chapter 1.
3. Chapter 2.

In Kenya, as indeed in the rest of East Africa, rainfall is determined by relief to a very considerable degree. For this reason, Kikuyu country, whose altitude varies from about 4,000 to over 8,000 feet above sea level, is more favoured by rain which may average from 40 inches on the lowlands to over 70 inches on the highlands per annum. This rainfall decreases gradually towards the lower altitude until in Nanyuki, to the north, it is only 20 to 30 inches per annum. In the Mwea plains, to the east, it is under 30 inches and rapidly decreases to below 20 inches per annum in Tharaka. But its reliability is even more decisive; while this is generally good in Kikuyuland, it is very poor elsewhere. For example, east of Embu town the probability of getting less than 20 inches of rain per annum is 10 to 20 per cent and reaches 30 per cent in Tharaka. In such areas, therefore, the threat of drought becomes very pronounced, which in turn enhances the possibility of frequent famines. The prevalence of droughts and famine in an ecologically marginal region might have significantly contributed to the migration of the Kikuyu group.

Like the rest of the country, there are two rainy seasons because of the effects of the south-east and north-east trade winds blowing from the Indian Ocean towards the inter-tropical convergence zone at the equator. The long rains fall between March and May, and the short rains between mid-October and December. Due to this incidence of rain the Kikuyu divide the year into two seasons corresponding to the rainy seasons; Kimera kia njahi (Dolichos lablab season) from March to about July and Kimera kia mwere (millet season) from October to December. And

sandwiched between these two were the cold, drizzly months between July and September called Gathano, and the bright, sunny and fair-weather months of January, February and March called Themithu. But each of the lunar months was named according to the weather prevalent at the time.[1]

Another important factor is the incidence of malaria and the tsetse fly. Eastwards of an imaginary line drawn between Fort Hall and Embu towns, there is a high incidence of malaria. In addition, the region suffers from human and animal tryponomiasis vectors, especially a corridor running north to south and between Embu and Tharaka. But Kikuyuland, in contrast, has a low incidence of the former and none of the latter diseases, due largely to the high altitude and other climatic factors.

Besides an unusually adequate rainfall, Kikuyuland is also endowed with moderate temperatures. Its deep red soil, derived from the volcanic tuffs, was rich in humus from the cleared primeval forest and hence made the land very productive. It was therefore an ideal habitat for the agricultural, hardworking Kikuyu, who made it for a long time the granary of their neighbours as well as for the European and Swahili caravans which passed by or through their country especially in the 19th century. It is no exaggeration to say that Kabete, for example, became to the caravans in due course what Cape Town was to the passing ships in

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1. Baker, op cit. pp 9-14; Gregory, op cit. pp 26; Handbook, op cit. pp 124-30, 148-55; K.R. Dundas: "Kikuyu Calendar" in Man, Vol. 9, 19, 1909, pp 37-8; Benson, op cit. pp 6, 492; C. Cagnolo, op cit. pp 7, 194-6.

the 17th century. The Kikuyu produced food far in excess of their needs in order to be able to trade with their neighbours.[1] Trade, therefore, was an important activity both internally and externally; external trade was, however, more important especially that carried on with the Maasai and the Dorobo.

Nevertheless although the Kikuyu were chiefly agriculturalists, they also kept an appreciable number of livestock, chiefly the mburi (sheep and goats) and cattle. Cattle were few and far between and, perhaps because of this, were the prerogative of the wealthy in the community. Not so the mburi. They were far more common and played an important role in the life of the ordinary Kikuyu. They were slaughtered during various ceremonies and sacrifices; they were paid as dowry; and their skins provided bedding as well as clothing. The Kikuyu had, therefore, a mixed economy and, besides pastoral and agricultural pursuits, some specialized in iron-work, tannery, bee keeping and trade, especially external trade.[2]

The ridge-and-valley topography, which is such a predominant feature of the Kikuyuland, had great influence on the nature of the original

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1. Mackinder, op cit., pp 457, 460-2; von Hohnel, op cit., pp 302, 315, 332, 335; Gregory, op cit., pp 192; Bishop A.R. Tucker: an extract from "The Times" of 24 January, 1892 in FO 2/57; Sir Gerald Portal to Lord Rosebery, 24 May, 1893 in FO 2/57; F.D. Lugard: The Rise of our East African Empire, vol. 1, Edinburgh, 1893, pp 323, 328, 418-9; M. Perham (ed), op cit., pp 285, 314, 316; Thomson, op cit., pp 307, 309; J.R.L. MacDonald: Soldiering and Surveying in British East Africa, 1891-4, London, 1897, pp 109, 111, 115; A. Arkell-Hardwick: An Ivory Trader in North Kenia, London, 1903, pp 50-4, 345.
2. Middleton and Kershaw, op cit., pp 17-22; Cagnolo, op cit;, pp 31-41; Routledge, op cit., pp 38-48, 66-102, 105-7; Kenyatta, op cit., pp 53-92.

settlement, the acquisition of land and the subsequent land tenure. In turn, the original settlement pattern had considerable influence on the nature and interplay of forces within the social and political organizations that emerged in the course of time. The immigration into and settlement of the Kikuyu plateau was a slow process, which was spearheaded either by individual pioneers or small family groups who staked claims to particular ridges. Consequently land was occupied ridge by ridge by the pioneers, who were later joined by their kinsmen or alternatively attracted diverse elements into their sphere. The chief bases of claim to land were either the first clearance of the virgin forest, kuna, or the initial hunting rights. This, however, did not apply to most parts of Kabete, where most of the inhabitants claim to have bought their land from the Athi.

Being primarily an agricultural people, the Kikuyu have been deeply attached to their land, which has been regarded by them as more than a mere economic asset. Largely because of the mode of migration and the topography, both of which conditioned the ensuing settlement pattern, there developed neither the tribal nor the individual ownership of land as we shall see in chapter 2.[1] Land was owned by the

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1. For a discussion of the Kikuyu land tenure, see M.P.K. Sorrenson: Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country, op cit., Chapter 1; Kenyatta, op cit., Chapter 11; Middleton and Kershaw, op cit., pp 48-52; Lambert 1950, op cit., chapters 4-8; Routledge, op cit., pp 3-7; evidence by various informants to be found in Barlow Papers; M.H. Beech: "Kikuyu System of Land Tenure" in Journal of African Society, vol. 17, 65, 197 pp 46-59 and no. 66, 1918, pp 136-44; Kenya: Native Land Tenure in Kikuyu Province, op cit.; J. Fisher: The Anatomy of Kikuyu Domesticity and Husbandry, London, 1964, pp 177-226; L.S.B. Leakey: "Land Tenure in the Native Reserves" in the East African Standard of September 8 and 15, 1939 and A.R. Barlow: "Kikuyu Land Tenure and Inheritance" in the Journal of East Africa and Uganda Natural History, no. 45-6, 1932, pp 56-66.

mbari[1] and its administration was entrusted to a muramati, guardian or custodian, who was the nominal head of the mbari. The mbari ownership of land was further reinforced by the religious beliefs, especially ancestor worship. This led to deep attachment to the ancestral land and the mbari land tenure was a safeguard against exploitation by any one member of the clan however strong or influential he might have been. Nevertheless, in a society that had strong community spirit, the welfare of the less fortunate was catered for by the rest of the community. Anyone without land, for example, could always be a muhoi, tenant-at-will, on someone else's land, with the assurance that save for misconduct his tenancy would be secure. Indeed the ahoi, tenants-at-will, were always welcome mainly near the frontiers, where manpower was in great demand for performing various tasks. It was the ahoi phenomenon, among other factors, that led, at the turn of the century, to the dispersal of the ten clans all over the country. This has been instrumental in obscuring the original pattern of settlement in many cases, and in spite of the mbari ownership of the land. But there was little conflict between the mbari and their ahoi; there was a delicate balance between the apparently competing interests of the ahoi and the mbari - both were under the microscope of a strict customary code that safeguarded their respective interests. When the white man and the cash economy came on the scene, however, they both contributed to the upsetting of this balance of interests: in the long run, the ahoi

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1. A lineage or a sub-clan, depending on numbers, tracing its origin to a common male ancestor a number of generations back. See Kikuyu Historical Texts.

were seriously affected and posed grave social and administrative problems in the 20th century as an uprooted peasantry.

Finally, the ridge, besides being the basis of mbari land, was an important link in the political and social chain that cut across the kinship ties. The elementary family, nyumba, consisting of a man, his wife or wives, and their children, was the core of the Kikuyu society. Those nyumba, which traced their origin to a common male ancestor several generations back, formed a mbari which may have numbered anything from a few hundred to several thousands. The various mbari traced their ancestry to the original ten mihiriga, clans. But although the nyumba formed the primary unit in the social framework, it was also the political unit. Each nyumba formed a mucii (sing.; pl. micii), homestead, and the various homesteads were grouped together into an itura (sing.; pl. matura), a collection of dispersed homesteads. The itura was the focus of the social and political interaction of everyday life, and was in many ways a closely-knit community. The matura were, in turn, linked together to form a bigger administrative unit, the mwaki[1] which in turn would be part of a rugongo (sing.; pl. ng'ongo), a ridge. The ridge was by far the largest administrative unit under normal circumstances. None the less, in times of crisis, mutual need or country-wide ceremonies, an ad hoc alliance of several ridges might emerge and act in concert. This grouping was designated a bururi, an indeterminate term which could have meant anything from the whole of Kikuyu country to a mere handful

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1. The unit occupied by those who assisted each other with hot embers to light fires. Mwaki (sing.) means fire; plural Miaki.

of ridges. A particular mbari or even clan might have been predominant in one administrative unit, such as an itura or ridge, but this was not always the case since the various clans and mbari were widely dispersed.[1]

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1. Middleton and Kershaw, op cit., pp 23-32; Kenyatta, op cit., pp 1-2, 5-6; Cagnolo, op cit., pp 20-2; Fisher, op cit., pp 5-20.

Chapter 2: Migration and Settlement

The country now inhabited by the Kikuyu people was originally covered by a vast primeval forest which was sparsely populated by a hunting and gathering group of Gumba and Athi hunters. It attracted the Kikuyu because, at the time of their expansion, it constituted an island of adequate rainfall, cool temperatures and fertile soil, particularly when contrasted with the region skirting it towards the eastern border. When they explored its potentialities it became an attractive area of expansion and, in their eyes, a land of unlimited opportunity. In course of time and after its occupation, it was with a deep sense of gratitude that they increasingly came to feel that God had given the Kikuyu "a very pleasant country indeed that does not lack food or water or land."[1] And this, I think, is in effect a succinct summary of the basic factors that have influenced their migration and settlement through the generations.

Kikuyu pioneers are said to have been preceded, in the Kikuyu plateau, by the Maitho/Maitha a Ciana, the Gumba, the Athi and the Dorobo. Opinion varies, however, as to whether these four were separate and distinct or related groups of people. Beech, Stoneham and K.R. Dundas recorded that the original inhabitants were the Maitha/Maitho a Ciana, "enemies or eyes of small children", who were displaced by the Gumba and the Athi/Dorobo.[2] Hobley, on the other hand, recorded

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1. R. Macpherson: Muthomere wa Gikuyu: Ng'ano, Nairobi, 1944, pp 5.
2. M.W. Beech: "Pre-Bantu Occupants of East Africa", Man, Vol. 15, 1915, pp 40-1; H.F. Stoneham: "Notes on the Dorobo and Other Tribes", KLC, Vol. 2, op cit., pp 2061-2; K.R. Dundas: "Notes on the Origin and History of the Kikuyu and Dorobo Tribes", Man, Vol. 8, 1908, pp 136-9.

that the Maitho/Maitha a Ciana were displaced by the Athi, who were the true Dorobo and descendants of an ancestor called 'Digiri'.[1] And commenting on their own ancestry, the Dorobo told K.R. Dundas that "they, the Masai and the Kikuyu, are the descendants of a common ancestral tribe called Endigiri, and that their ancestors came from beyond Mount Kenya".[2] In a footnote, Dundas explained that the Endigiri or Muisi were known to the Kikuyu as Maitha a Ciana, a name that was "said by some to have been applied originally to all the Dorobo or Asi".[3] It is evident, however, that the term Maitho/Maitha a Ciana was only fashionable particularly in Metumi and some parts of Gaki. Routledge and McGregor, both of whom worked in those parts, identify Maitho/Maitha a Ciana as the same people as the Gumba.[4] In this respect, it is significant to note that the Cuka, the Mwimbi and the Tharaka do not seem to have any recollection of such a people as the Maitho/Maitha a Ciana, whereas they clearly recall the Gumba.[5] Moreover in the recently collected data very few people could recall the former, and those who did thought that they were the same people as the Gumba.[5] In view of this, it would seem that although the term Maitha/Maitho a Ciana might have originally meant the ancestors of the Gumba, later on it specifically referred to the Gumba or, in very rare cases, to the Athi in general depending upon the context.

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1. C.W. Hobley: "Notes on the Dorobo People and Other Tribes: Gathered from Chief Karuri and Others", Man, Vol.6, 1906, pp 119-20. See also his notes on the Dorobo in Man, Vol.3, 1903, pp 33-4 and Vol.5, 1905, pp 39-44 and in KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1.
2. K.R. Dundas, op cit., Man, Vol.8, pp 139.
3. Ibid, pp 139.
4. Routledge, op cit., pp 3-5; McGregor, op cit., pp 31.
5. Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 75, 104.

Doubt has also been cast, notably by Lambert, as to whether the Athi should really be identified with the Dorobo.[1] The apparent ambiguity that is implied by the extant literature and the oral data has arisen because of two factors. The Kikuyu word Athi, hunters (sing.: mwathi), was used to mean either any individual who practised hunting as a way of life, irrespective of ethnic grouping, or more specifically a tribe whose economic activities were largely centred upon hunting and gathering. Moreover, apart from the inherent ambiguity in the word Athi, its obscurity was further increased by the reluctance of the Kikuyu to discuss any issue which seemed liable to undermine their rights to land. The political controversy centring round the alienation of land to white settlers generated an atmosphere of mistrust that precluded any honest discussion of oral traditions which embraced the sensitive realm of land. This was more especially so when faced with what appeared to the Kikuyu to be unsympathetic enquirers. On the other hand, material collected prior to the emergence of organised political consciousness among the Kikuyu, that is during the period before 1920, taken in conjunction with the data that I have recently collected, demonstrate unequivocally that Athi and Dorobo are alternative names for the same ethnic group. The former was commonly used in Gaki and Metumi, and the latter in Kabete. In Gaki and Metumi, though, Athi has come to mean the early Kikuyu pioneers, in some cases, just as in Kabete it has crystallised to mean the Dorobo hunters who are reputed

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1. Lambert, 1950: The Systems of Land Tenure, op cit., chapter 4.

to have sold land to them. All the same, the two facets of the issue do not seem to be in any way contradictory or mutually exclusive, since some of the Kikuyu mbari trace their ancestry to Athi ancestors. In view of the foregoing, there seems to be little doubt that the Kikuyu were preceded by two distinct, but perhaps related, groups of people; and in all probability these were the Gumba and the Athi/Dorobo.

Little is known of these people nor do the informants clearly distinguish between them. The Gumba or the Maitho/Maitha a Ciana, who were the first group to come into contact with Kikuyu pioneers, are said to have been a race of hunting dwarfs, rather like the pygmies, who lived in roofed-over, dug out caves or tunnels. Estimates of their height ranges from 2 to 4½ feet, but they were otherwise stocky, clever and rather retiring. Besides hunting (armed with bows and arrows) and gathering, they are also said to have been bee-keepers and experts in iron-working and pottery. The innumerable depressions that exist all over the Kikuyu country are held to be the sites of former Gumba homes. The contact between these hunters and the Kikuyu pioneers is important for two reasons. The Kikuyu claimed, according to Northcote, that they were taught the art of iron-working and smelting by the Gumba.[1] If this is so, this was an important contribution by the Gumba since it is the use of iron which enabled the Kikuyu to effectively clear the forest for cultivation. It also appears that it was from them that the Kikuyu borrowed the art of circumcision, cliteridectomy and some

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1. Beech, op cit., Man, Vol. 15 pp 40-1.

features of the age system. This view rules out the possibility of the Kikuyu having borrowed their mariika, age differentiation, system from either the Maasai or the Galla. The mariika system was in operation long before the Maasai and Kikuyu communities came into contact and, when they did, it was only Gaki which was heavily influenced by the Maasai pattern of age system. As to the Galla, Haberland has shown that not only is their importance in the cultural history of eastern Africa over-rated but, as he concludes, "it is not possible to maintain that the Galla were responsible for the diffusion of the age-grade (gada) system... The formation and dissemination of the gada-system probably lie as far back as the disintegration of the eastern Hamitic language group into several distinct languages".[1]

The second group that the Kikuyu pioneers came into contact with were the Athi. Like the Gumba, they were also hunters and gatherers who neither cultivated nor possessed livestock. They obtained the latter from their neighbours in case of need. The Athi played a very significant role in the life of their Kikuyu neighbours; they were important trading partners, selling animal products such as ivory, hides and skins, as well as acting as middlemen between the Kikuyu, the Maasai and the coastal traders. Moreover, in some parts of Kikuyuland, notably Kabete, they are the ones who sold land to the Kikuyu in exchange for livestock which apparently they avidly sought. This mutual inter-dependence between the two communities continued to exist right up to

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1. E. Haberland: Galla Sud-Athiopiens, Stuttgart, 1963, English summary, pp 771.

the 19th century as exemplified by the number of caravans that sought their aid in attempting to procure food from the Kikuyu. Mianzini, for example, was considered to be an important victualling site because the Athi, who had settled in the Kinale forest, acted as trading intermediaries between the caravans and the source of food in the heart of Kikuyuland.[1]

The extant written sources - as indeed the Kikuyu oral traditions - do not provide an explicit picture of the differences or relationship, if any, between the Gumba and the Athi. There are, however, striking similarities as exhibited in their habitat, material culture and their economic and social organisation. The only marked difference between the two communities, as far as the traditions go, was manifest in their respective stature; the Gumba being portrayed as men of small stature like dwarfs or pygmies, in contrast to the Athi who were not dissimilar to their Bantu and Nilo-Hamitic neighbours. Furthermore, according to the Kikuyu, the two groups lived side by side and even intermarried.[2] Yet some of the Kikuyu traditions positively portray the two predecessor communities as separate and distinct groups. Whatever the true position may have been initially, there is no doubt that the Athi have assimilated a considerable section of the Gumba, some of whom are known to have sought refuge in the forests following Kikuyu encroachments on their hunting grounds. Dorobo traditions, as recorded by K.R. Dundas, are however not so ambivalent; they claim that the Dorobo were divided

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1. G.A. Fisher: Das Massai-Land, Hamburg, 1885, pp 47-8, 81, 99.
2. Routledge, op cit., pp 5.

into the Gumba, who hunted on the plains, and the Okiek (the Athi of the Kikuyu) who lived in the forests. And as noted above, they asserted that they, the Maasai and the Kikuyu, were the descendants of a common ancestral tribe, the "Endigiri", who had migrated from beyond Mount Kenya.[1]

While we can determine what became of the Athi when they came into contact with the Kikuyu, the fate of the Gumba is shrouded in mystery and myth. The traditions of the Mwimbi, Cuka and Kikuyu aver that the Gumba fled en masse after being frightened by the appearance of helmeted hornbills, magogo (sing. igogo). One day, so the story goes, the helmeted hornbills settled on a tree while cawing at the same time. The Gumba thought that the magogo were shouting "Over there! Over there!",[2] thereby directing an army of warriors to attack them. Thoroughly disconcerted they migrated and disappeared into the ground, or moved westwards or northwards, the details varying with each informant. This however seems to be a rationalization, as it is an over-simplification, of a more complex process. And although this tradition is devoid of details it points to some important factors.

The apparent flight of the Gumba is suggestive of a worsening of relations between the two groups of people, a process that might have taken a considerable period of time. A number of factors may have influenced the situation, the chief of which must have been the intrusion of the proto-Kikuyu elements into a predominantly Gumba domain. The

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1. K.R. Dundas, op cit., Man, 1908, pp 138-9.
2. The Kikuyu say that when these birds are cawing they say "O hau! O hau!".

clearance of bushland for agricultural purposes was in itself a direct threat to the Gumba way of life and more especially their livelihood. It is conceivable, therefore, that faced with this danger they were not slow to retaliate. This, in turn, would have set in motion a chain reaction of retaliatory and counter-retaliatory measures that short of a stalemate could only be arrested by one group deciding to migrate to avoid annihilation. In any case there would have been plenty of scope for misunderstanding, if not quarrels, once the two groups were living in proximity to each other. The Gumba were not weaklings and, armed with their bows and arrows, could have effectively defended themselves against the intruders. But it is much more likely that the determining factor was that the intrusion of human habitation, coupled with their destruction of the bushland, forced the wild animals to retreat further afield and eventually into the precincts of the primeval forests higher up the plateau. The retreat of the wild animals, the main source of livelihood of the Gumba, would of necessity have forced the Gumba to follow them, either into the high mountain forests or southwards across the plains. This argument rules out the idea of a Kikuyu conquest, which is not supported by the available data. The Kikuyu "obtained the country by a system of peaceful penetration, effected by individuals, or small bands of individuals united only by family ties".[1] This does not rule out the occasional conflict, some of which will be referred to in due course. Albeit such conflict as there was was not confined to the Gumba and the Kikuyu alone; intra-clan and inter-mbari fights were all

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1. Routledge, op cit., pp 3.

too common among the Kikuyu themselves. I am inclined to think, however, that given the acknowledged ability of the Gumba as a fighter and especially his prowess in using bows and arrows in a terrain that he knew well it is unlikely that the intruders would have made much headway in face of a determined opposition from him. On the other hand, it is much more likely that both groups realized that it was to their mutual advantage to live amicably; the Kikuyu needed the hides and skins that were available from the Gumba as much as the Gumba needed some of the agricultural products of the Kikuyu. And the available evidence tends to support this view that they reached a modus vivendi. In the sequel, there was settlement amongst and intermarriage between the two peoples, the descendants of such marriages becoming full members of their respective Kikuyu clans while at the same time retaining some of the aspects of a hunting and gathering economy. It is very probable that it was this group of semi-Kikuyu, semi-Gumba which contributed the bulk of the pioneers who initially settled in the secondary nuclear area of dispersal in Gaki and Metumi.

This process of absorption was to continue when the Athi came into the picture. While some of the Athi migrated into the forests of Nyandarua and Kirinyaga or settled among the Maasai, others took to the Kikuyu way of life, a transformation that was facilitated by the ceremony of mutual adoption which made them full members of the Kikuyu community. The only reminder of this process is perhaps preserved in the Kikuyu attitude to wild game - it was anathema for the majority of them to touch it. This did not apply to some clans or sections of them.

"The Achera, the Ambui, the Ethaga, and the Anjiru", Routledge noted, "may eat wild game. In two other clans, the Angari and Aizerandu, some may eat wild game and some may not. This difference is accounted for by tradition, that in each there were originally two brothers, one of whom went and killed game and the other did not, and their respective descendants adhere to the precedent thus laid."[1] Thus complete assimilation has almost taken place; today the only remnant of the Athi as an ethnic group is to be found among their descendants around Kambaa, in Limuru division of Kabete, where they were settled by the colonial government after being ejected from Kinale forest in the 1930s. And even here it is fairly difficult to trace them. It can therefore be argued that this albeit chance encounter between these groups had profound consequences which greatly influenced both groups.

The traditions of these people do not give adequate information as to where and when their initial encounter occurred. And for this reason any attempt to provide the answers must remain speculative until we have confirmatory data from archeology. However, a close examination of the generation and military sets might provide useful clues. By the middle of the 17th century several basic features of the social and political structure of the Kikuyu had emerged. The organisation of the ruling generations go as far back as the early decades of the 16th century while the military sets date from the middle of the 17th century. And none of the informants claimed that these lists were exhaustive, if

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1. Routledge, op cit., pp 21-2.

anything, they claimed that there might have been others which they had forgotten. And if the initiation ceremony was borrowed from the Gumba, as has been argued above, then the encounter between the Gumba and the proto-Kikuyu must have taken place several generations before the middle of the 17th century. Significantly, the clan system had evolved by mid-17th century and matriarchy had been superseded by the patrilineal and patrilocal social and political organisation; such a transformation could hardly be expected to have been completed overnight. The middle of the 17th century however has been taken as a basis for argument merely because from then onwards the evidence becomes reasonably reliable with specific episodes being associated with each of the generations. Moreover, there is a close parallel between the system of age differentiation of the Ndia and Kikuyu as opposed to that of the Meru. Finally, the traditions of the Kikuyu state unequivocably that their clans had already evolved by the time that they crossed the Thagana River into Metumi and Gaki. Consequently all these social upheavals took place before their arrival in their present homeland.

The gradual expansion by the vanguard of the Kikuyu pioneers pushed the forest fringe further and further back until ultimately they reached the vicinity of their final area of dispersal around the Metumi/Gaki border. The relations between the Gumba and the incoming Kikuyu pioneers worsened and a fight ensued at Giitwa and Karirau. The deterioration of relations between the two groups together with the effects of the receding forest fringe eventually drove the remnants of the Gumba even further into the extensive forests of the Kikuyu plateau where they joined the Athi. And as the Kikuyu increased in number their clearing

of the forests gained momentum, and in the words of Routledge, "the Akikuyu pushed on and on. Their progress was like that of the locusts - the ranks at the rear, finding food supply exhausted, taking wing over the banks of the main body to drop to ground in the forefront. And as locusts clear a sturdy crop, so have the Akikuyu cleared the forest."[1] This intrusion by newcomers, who made additional and different demands on the natural resources, forced the Gumba and the Athi, too, either to adapt themselves to the new environment or seek a new way of life elsewhere. Thus they lost most of their former hunting and gathering territories. Faced by this eventuality, they developed a form of symbiotic relationship with the cultivators from whom they obtained some of their needs. But despite mutual economic convenience contact was kept at a minimum by a sizeable number.

Nevertheless this stage of rapid expansion did not materialize until the last decades of the 19th century. Meantime, after the Giitwa and Karirau episodes, little is heard of the Gumba apart from at Gathagana, at the confluence of the Gura and Thagana rivers, where the last group which had allegedly prevented the expansion of the Mathira was defeated. It is also said that this forced the Kikuyu to destroy the natural bridge, which had hitherto been there, in order to contain the Gumba who had used it to cross into Mukure-ini division. The oral traditions do not state categorically when this episode occurred. But it seems that this occurred during the Tregi generation, during the mid-19th

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1. Routledge, op cit., pp 6.

century. In all probability this was during the Barabiu invasion which might have involved some of the remnants of the Gumba and Athi, then known to have been living in the Mount Kenya forest. This implies that the Gumba were only present in any appreciable numbers in the country towards east of Metumi, their numbers tailing off towards the eastern borders of the Kikuyu plateau. This view is in accord with the picture portrayed by the Dorobo traditions - that is, the Gumba hunted in the plains and the Athi (Okiek) in the forests. Certainly the Gumba are almost unheard of in Kabete. By the time that the Kikuyu elements reached their final centre of dispersal in the plateau, therefore, the Gumba had virtually ceased to exist as an ethnic group; they had either been absorbed by the Athi or the Kikuyu pioneers or alternatively settled amongst the latter group after abandoning their way of life.

There are two main myths which attempt to explain the origin of the Kikuyu. One of them relates that a man who had four sons called them at his death-bed to apportion his possessions. He had four articles - a herding staff, a quiver of arrows and bow, a stabbing spear and a digging stick. Depending upon the choices that they made, the four sons became the ancestors of the pastoral Maasai, the Kamba, the Athi and the agricultural Kikuyu respectively. Very few people recall who this man was and it is only Tate who records that the man was a Mumbere living east of Mbere.[1] But by far the most popular myth is

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1. H.R. Tate: "The Native Law of the Southern Gikuyu of British East Africa", Journal of African Society, Vol. 35, 1910, pp 233-54; Routledge, op cit., pp 283-4.

that which associates the Kikuyu with the Mukurue wa Gathanga. God appeared to Gikuyu, we are told, and allotted to him all the land to the south-west of Mount Kenya.[1] Gikuyu and his wife Mumbi, the Adam and Eve of the Kikuyu, made their home at Mukurue wa Gathanga, and while there had nine daughters. The latter became the ancestors of the 'full nine' clans.[2]

These myths are clearly unhelpful and only two points are worth noting. First, the implication that the Kikuyu might have migrated from beyond Mbere and that they might be related to their neighbours. Secondly, the possibility that the area around Mukurue wa Gathanga was a significant one in the evolution of the Kikuyu. Otherwise, the study of mbari genealogies is far more rewarding. Indeed, while the Mukurue region remains an important area, it is no longer the cradle, some of the mbari having come from as far as Meru, Mbere, Cuka and Ndia. Igembe, Tharaka, Ithanga and Thagicu are places that are also frequently mentioned.

While it is difficult to name any one specific cause of the initial sparking off of the proto-Kikuyu migration, several factors may have been

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1. Kenyatta, op cit., pp 3-6, Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp7, 65, 138. No satisfactory explanation was given why the ancestors were called Mumbi and Gikuyu. The only plausible information offered was that a man met a woman who was making pots, kumba, and that this woman discovered that the man was sheltering under a wild fig tree, mukuyu. On marrying they called each other by nicknames, a usual Kikuyu custom, associated with the circumstances of their initial meeting. Thus the man called the woman Mumbi, potter, while the woman called him Gikuyu, of the fig tree.
2. 'Full nine' means ten; it was held that it would be courting disaster to count people or livestock. There are ten clans, the Aicakamuyu being the descendants of an unmarried mother from one of the other nine.

of paramount importance. Ecologically, the Igembe and Tharaka probably were, as they still are, climatically very poor, of meagre resources and susceptible to famine whenever the rains failed, as we have seen in chapter 1. In contrast, the area to its west was not only a potentially attractive agricultural land but it was also sparsely populated by a few wide-ranging nomadic hunters. It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that this area, now Mbere and Cuka, offered a welcome refuge to those immigrants suffering under the ravages of famine. But people sometimes do adapt themselves in their old homes, in spite of its being a harsh environment, unless there are other compelling factors which dictate otherwise. A sudden increase in the population, for instance, would deplete the already meagre resources and, secondly, a foreign invasion would spark off migration. In this case, the Galla impingement could have resulted in both factors operating. A slight increase in population in a marginal land can make a world of difference to its ecological viability and would be sure to give a fillip to migration if not actually sparking it off. Such an impetus to the migration of the proto-Kikuyu was perhaps subsequent to the Galla incursions to the north and east of Meru and Tharaka regions. It is significant that the Meru traditions claim that one of the factors that led to their migration was their ill-treatment by the Nguntune, a light-skinned race.[1] And some of the Tharaka, in particular, claim to have found the Galla living in the

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1. Lambert, 1950, op cit., chapter 2 and E.R. Shackleton: "The Njuwe", Man, Vol. 30, 1930, pp 201-2.

present Tharaka country when they occupied it.[1] In this respect, it should be noted that since the beginning of the 16th century the Galla had overflowed their ancestral home in the southern part of the Ethiopian highlands, and scattered in all directions. By the middle of the same century some of them had advanced as far south as the mouth of the Juba River on the eastern coast of Africa.[2] It should be noted, too, that according to the Kikuyu traditions the early part of their history was marked by internal tension as well as raiding. The Manduti and Cuma generations, from the middle of the 17th century to the first half of the 18th century, commemorate this phenomenon. But on the basis of the available evidence, we cannot be categorical about this; indeed, the arrival of more Bantu elements could also give rise to all these factors coming into play. Meantime, it remains true that we have no certain knowledge of the cause or causes of migration of the proto-Kikuyu.

Although the climatic conditions coupled with the effects of the Galla incursions appear to have been important factors contributing to the migration of the proto-Kikuyu, other secondary issues lent their weight. Indeed an examination of mbari genealogies reveals that each mbari had its own particular and peculiar reasons for deciding to migrate. Various reasons are cited among which were: internal family or mbari quarrels, criminals flying from justice, adventurous individuals, fear of witchcraft, natural disasters such as famines or diseases and search for a better home if dogged by misfortunes.[3]

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1. A.M. Champion: "The Atharaka", Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Vol. 42, 1912, pp 69-70.
2. Haberland, op cit., pp 772-3.
3. The Kikuyu believe that if an individual is dogged by misfortune, migration to a new area might change the course of events.

The emigration of the proto-Kikuyu from Meru and Tharaka or a detailed study of their migration via Mbere and Ndia lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Consequently no discussion of the relationship between all the Kikuyu group will be attempted; that task will have to await further researches among the Mbere, Tharaka, Ndia and the Meru congeries. Be that as it may, this should not, it is hoped, preclude some general observations about them. The Kikuyu proper and the Cuka have no traditions of having ever migrated from the coast let alone Shungwaya. The Embu and Kamba, according to the researches recently carried out among them, do not have traditions that recall their emigration from the coast either.[1] It is the Meru congeries alone that claim to have come from a place to the east called 'Mbwa'. According to the Embu, Mbere and the Kikuyu, their ancestors originated either from the east or north-east of the present Mbere country. In the event and on the basis of the available evidence, the most that we can deduce is that their ancestors migrated from Meru, and especially Igembe, and the Tharaka countries and that this migration was well underway by the 16th century. Accordingly there does not seem to be any historical evidence for the conclusion, popularized by Lambert and henceforth accepted by subsequent scholars, that the branch of the north-eastern Bantu inhabiting the Mount Kenya region came from Shungwaya. Presumably a study of the Meru congeries and the Tharaka might throw some light on this problem.

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1. S.C. Saberwal: "Historical Notes on the Embu of Central Kenya"; and J. Forbes Munro: "Migrations of the Bantu-Speaking Peoples of the Eastern Kenya Highlands: A Reappraisal", in the Journal of African History, Vol. 8, 1967, pp 29-38 and 25-8 respectively.

As for the Kikuyu proper, they are an amalgam of several groups of people. One section may have entered Mbereland from its east, perhaps from the present Tharaka country. The second group, which appears to have been related to the first one, emigrated from Meru before reaching the Mbere country. The early administrators, for example, were told by the Kikuyu that they had migrated from Igembe.[1] Some of these migrants are presumed to have settled in Mbere to form the Mbere people of the present day, while a section of them moved northwards into the Embu country. Today this section forms the Embu people. The other section migrated into Mwea plains where in the course of their sojourn they were joined by a third group composed of Kamba elements - the Thagicu - of whom we know very little.[2] This area at the confluence of the Thagana and Thika Rivers and known as Thagicu or Ithanga, seems to have been an important area. Some mbari informants categorically assert that their ancestors migrated from Ithanga while others say that they came from the Kamba country and specifically mention Thagicu.[3] It is probable that the Thagicu, who seem to have assimilated a lot of Kamba blood, were originally an overspill of the Kamba moving northwards from Kitui, and met the proto-Kikuyu in this region. It may even be that Gathanga is derived from Ithanga. Certainly the physical environment connoted by the word, a place of sand, does not fit the present site

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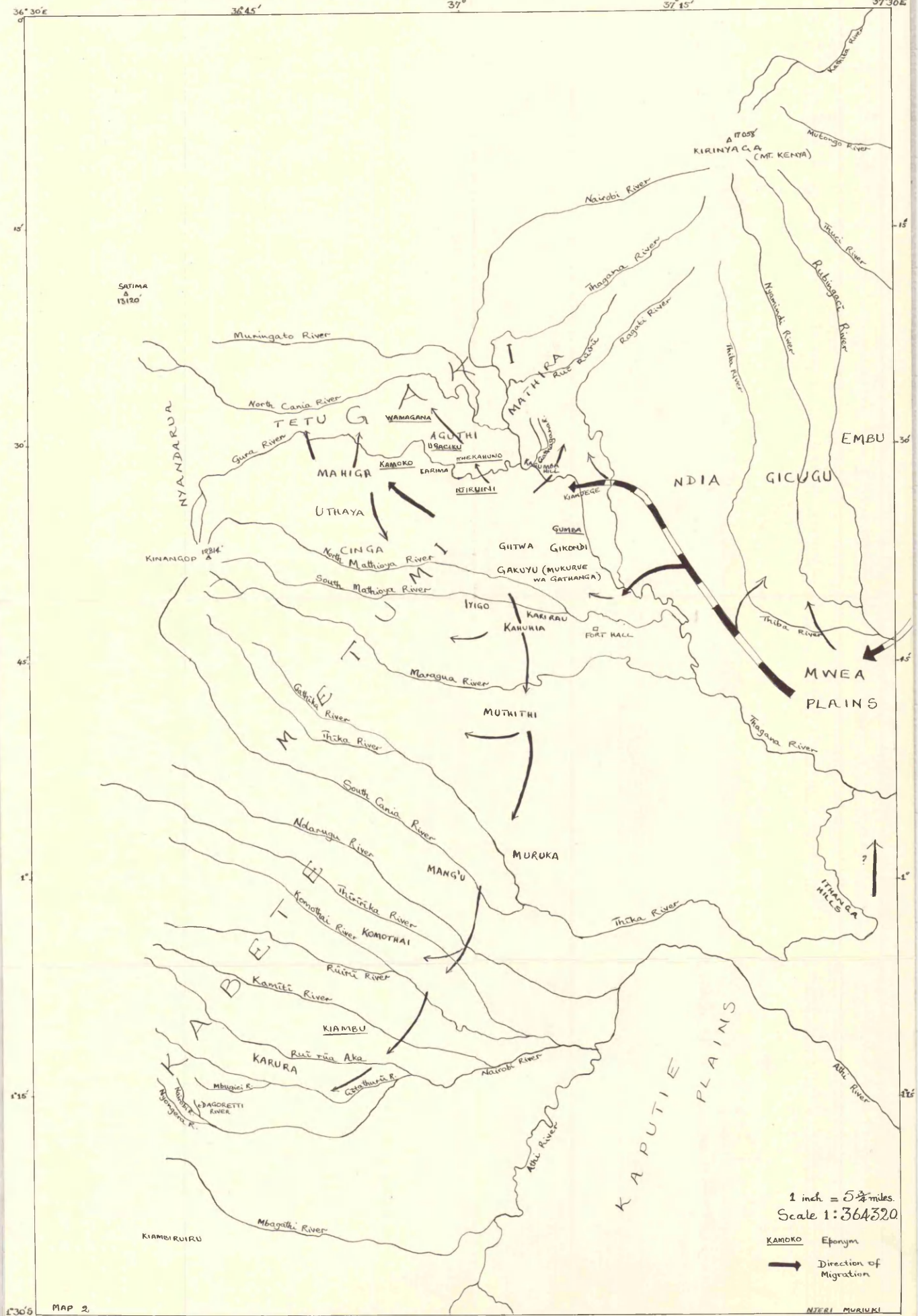
1. See KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1.
2. See Map 2.
3. K.R. Dundas, Man, Vol. 8, op cit., pp 137; Kikuyu Historical Texts op cit., pp 1, 30, 31, 138.

THE DISPERSAL OF THE KIKUYU



around Gakuyu. And since the period of evolution of the Kikuyu as a distinct group had passed by the time that they reached the area around Mukurue wa Gathanga, having by then acquired all the basic characteristics of their culture, this presupposes a lengthy period of consolidation en route. The fact that they share some features with the Ndia, such as the military sets, in contrast to their other cousins tends to support this argument.[1] Ithanga is also said to have been the source of iron ore, muthanga, which was smelted to produce pig iron used in making implements that were so vital especially in clearing the forest. To clear the forests, they used axes and minyago, pointed digging sticks, but for the giant trees they would light a fire at the foot of the tree and continuously scrape the charred portion, meantime heaping more dry leaves and small branches to keep the fire going. No giant of the forest could withstand such an onslaught. For these reasons, Ithanga and Thagicu regions were the most important centres of consolidation, more important even than the proverbial Mukurue wa Gathanga. It was probably here that the various proto-Kikuyu elements evolved into the Kikuyu proper. This view is reinforced further by the fact that some informants categorically stated that they came from Ithanga whereas others called their place of origin Mukurue wa Ithanga. In Mathira, for example, Barlow was informed that the Mathira came from the latter place.[2]

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1. Lambert, 1965, op cit., chapter 3 and 5.
2. See Unsorted Miscellaneous File in Barlow Papers; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 1-31.

From the region of Ithanga the Kikuyu pioneers trekked in small groups towards the west leaving some of their kinsmen en route who today form the Gicugu and Ndia. A group that we do not know enough ebout, but who also joined the main body of migrants in Mbere, are the Cuka or their ancestors. They claim to be akin to the Tharaka, and Orde-Browne thought that they were the descendants of the aboriginal inhabitants.[1] Thus by the time that the Kikuyu pioneers immigrated into Ndia they had absorbed nearly all the ethnic groups that have contributed to their physical characteristics, except the Gumba and Athi whom they continued to absorb and the Maasai whom they came across at a much later stage. An administrative officer in Embu recognized the complexity of assimilation and migration that had occurred in this area when he remarked that "some say (they came) from the plains round the Lonya Sabuk, others from the east of the Tana, while still others state they came from the north."[2]

By the time of the Cuma generation, at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries, immigration into northern Metumi and southern Gaki was well underway. It seems to have been accelerated by, among other things, internal dissension which had led to raiding on a large scale. It is suggested that this tension arose between the farmers and the nomads.[3] But for an industrious agricultural community,

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1. G. St. J. Orde-Browne: The Vanishing Tribes of Kenya, London, 1925, pp 17-27, 63-4; and "Mount Kenya and Its Peoples: Some Notes on the Chuka Tribe" in the Journal of African Society, Vol. 15, 1916, pp 225-31.
2. See KNA/PC/CP/6/4/1.
3. Hall's report to IBEACo. of 13 March 1894 in FO2/73.

Gaturi and Lower Githi which border on Ndia offer no attraction. The area, moreover, is almost inaccessible from the east, being ringed by a series of deep, tortuous gorges which are formidable even today, despite modern technology. It is also a dry region of poor sandy soils. Any pioneer is more likely to move further west to Gathuki-ini and Njiru or south Mathira and Mukurue-ini divisions. Despite land shortage among the Kikuyu, it is pertinent to mention that certain sections of Gaturi and Lower Githi have remained very sparsely populated or completely empty up to the present day.

A further period of consolidation ensued, during which the Kikuyu evolved as a distinct group before fanning out towards Gaki and Kabete. It appears that the routes of migration in those days were along the river valleys crossing the rivers by natural bridges, morumathi (sing. urumathi). Several of these are mentioned such as the ones at Gathagana and Kianjege on the Thagana River, and the one over the Komothai River in Kabete. From Ndia the pioneers migrated to the area around Sagana Station; some might have crossed into Gaturi but most of them appear to have veered northwards into southern Mathira before crossing into Mukurue-ini via the natural bridges at Kianjege and Gathagana.[1] But those who remained in Mathira encountered strong opposition at first from a sizeable section of the Gumba and Athi, but finally from the Barabiu, who forced them to cross into Mukurue-ini

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1. McGregor records that on migration from Thagicu the Kikuyu settled in Mathira to begin with. See McGregor, op cit., pp 31.

division during the Iregi generation, at the first half of the 19th century. Thus the Mathira were forced to seek safety amongst the rest of the Kikuyu. Consequently it was the region between the Gura River, to the north, and the North Mathioya River, to the south, that became the secondary nuclear area where the Kikuyu pioneers finally evolved into Kikuyu proper in contradistinction to their closest cousins, the Gicugu and the Ndia. This epoch was characterized by the problem posed by the remnants of the Gumba and Athi; and the most notable event was the continued assimilation of these groups, their quarrels notwithstanding.

According to the traditions, the Ciira generation was characterized by an increase in population around the secondary nuclear area. It is not surprising, therefore, that it was in this period, during the first half of the 18th century, that appreciable numbers began to fan out westwards towards the Nyandarua, southwards towards Kabete and northwards into Uthaya and Aguthi. North-eastwards expansion along this frontier was a slow one, and the situation did not change until the time of the Ndemi and Mathathi, when a spate of expansion in Mathira gained momentum in real earnest. This influx of settlers continued unabated until the Iregi generation, in the first half of the 19th century, when a major setback occurred. Sometime in the 19th century the Barabiu, Galla and Somali, launched a major attack in the Kenya Highlands. The Kikuyu in Mathira and Tetu were driven back into Mukurue-ini division and the southernmost parts of Mathira division.[1]

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1. McGregor, op cit., pp 32; K.R. Dundas, Man, Vol. 8, op cit., pp 138.

It is also suggested that some of the Gumba and Athi remnants might have joined the Barabiu to attack the Kikuyu. This threat was so real and serious that the Kikuyu were forced to destroy the natural bridge at Gathagana in an attempt to contain the Barabiu who had used it to cross into Mukurue-ini division. In fact the Barabiu were only defeated by the allied forces of the Maasai, the Athi and the Kikuyu. Thus the generation named Iregi, or revolters, commemorates the defeat of the Barabiu rather than the overthrow of the despotic rule of "King" Kikuyu.[1]

To a large extent the rate of expansion in Mathira, as indeed in Tetu and the south-western outskirts of Kabete, in the 19th century, was conditioned by the relations existing between the Kikuyu and the Maasai. But the two groups appear to have reached some mutual understanding which resulted in widespread intermarriage between them. Close cooperation between them facilitated the absorption of the Maasai through intermarriage, especially when an influx of Maasai refugees occurred mainly as a result of famine or internal conflict. In particular the Purko and Laikipiak wars of about 1875 produced an influx of refugees who took refuge amongst the Kikuyu mbari, among whom, they allege, they already had many relatives. This was a significant feature of Maasai and Kikuyu relations, that although they were quite often at war with each other, just as the Kikuyu fought amongst themselves, there were always friendly relations between specific families on both sides, the majority of whom had kin-connections with each other.[2] And although no statistics

1. Kenyatta, op cit., pp 186.
2. Personal communication by Jacobs.

are available, the impression given by the informants is that perhaps half or more of the population in Mathira and Tetu is of Maasai origin or has Maasai blood. Indeed there are large mbari which are predominantly Maasai and still retain contact with their Maasai kinsmen up to the present moment.

However, congenial relations with the Maasai were intermittent. Sometimes they became very strained, if not actually ruptured, and the Kikuyu were sometimes forced to retreat into the lower reaches of southern Mathira and Tetu, while others emigrated altogether. Nevertheless expansion still continued unabated. On the eastern frontier of Mathira, which was relatively peaceful, they had reached the outskirts of Iria-ini and Magutu locations by the beginning of the 19th century. And the Konyu and Kirimukuyu, who bore the brunt of the Maasai raids, had reached Karura and Ruthagati by the same time. Gathu-ini and Wamurogi salt-licks were battle grounds in this period, when the Kikuyu took their livestock for watering. Indubitably it was not until after the 1880s that they effectively occupied the area north of the Rui (River) Ruiru. This understandably coincides with the great cattle epidemic and the Purko and Laikipiak wars. The observations of the early travellers, who journeyed through this area, help us to determine the location of the frontier to a precise degree; Gregory, for example, found that there was extensive cultivation around Gathu-ini salt-lick when he travelled through the northern frontier in 1893. And Boyes and Mackinder found that towards Magutu the Kikuyu had effectively occupied the area

up to and around the Kiamuceru Hill by 1898 and 1899.[1] Further to the north, occupation did not take place across the Thagana River until the colonial period and especially after the eviction of the Maasai from the Nyeri plains to make way for the European settlement schemes. This is corroborated by the oral evidence.[2]

By the close of the 19th century, the Mathira had almost evolved, since the first half of the 18th century, into a sub-tribe. Their assimilation of more Ndia elements, and the widespread absorption of the Maasai as well as the Athi, led them to acquire singular characteristics, such as their distinctive dialect, which distinguished them from the rest of their kinsmen even within Gaki district itself.[3] Their emergence as a sub-tribe was only arrested by the arrival of the British, without whose intervention they would have very likely evolved into a sub-tribe such as the Ndia and Gicugu. The only difference in this case would have been that such a group would have been a sub-tribe more akin to and closely associated with the Maasai. And their neighbouring Maasai would not have been like the other Maasai either; the Laikipiak Maasai, for example, were distinct from the other pastoral tribes precisely because they had absorbed large numbers of the original Athi who gave up hunting and gathering to become pastoral or semi-pastoral.[4]

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1. Gregory, op cit., pp 157-61, 189-92; Boyes, op cit., pp 167-78, 180-99; Mackinder, op cit., pp 462-4.
2. See evidence by the government officials, settlers and the Kikuyu in KLC, Vol. 1, op cit., pp 82-110, 510-48; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 2, 11, 12-13.
3. K.R. Dundas records that the Iria-ini, in particular, represent a fusion of various tribes such as the Laikipiak and Dalalekutuk Maasai. See his article in Man, 1908, op cit., pp 136-7.
4. Jacobs, personal communication.

It is this feature more than anything else which they shared with their Mathira neighbours who had also absorbed some of the AtHi. It is even conceivable that their congenial and friendly relations may have sprung from their sharing a common Athi origin. However that is a problem that requires further investigation.

Immigration northwards into Uthaya was spearheaded by the Aithiegeni clan who had initially settled around Gikondi. The pioneer who is reputed to have settled there initially was a certain Kambaire Munjuri, who immigrated to Karima together with his four sons - Ngai, Gitene, Kirumwa and Maigua. This was perhaps at the time of the Cuma generation, about the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century. Farther north Kamoko, who is alleged to have been herding his livestock, is said to have been joined by a Mumbui hunter, Magana, a man who is reputed to have ranged far and wide - from Mathira to Wamagana (named after him) - before joining him at Mahiga in the first half of the 18th century.[1] Other pioneers spread across the Gura River into Aguthi from Tambaya, but expansion farther north was considerably slower, only reaching the vicinity of the North Cania River towards the end of the 19th century.[2] This credibly slow rate of expansion is related to the Maasai threat as exemplified by the situation in Mathira. But here, as in Mathira, there was extensive intermarriage between the two peoples with the same consequences. In effect, by the

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1. Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 42-56.
2. Routledge found them clearing the forest around the banks of the North Cania River in 1902. See Routledge, op cit., pp 7-8.

19th century the two groups were conducting joint raids not only against their own people around them but as far away as Ndia and Cuka.

Between the Cuma and the Ciira generations, that is from the late 17th century to the mid-18th century, there was unimpeded expansion westwards towards the Nyandarua. This expansion was along the ridges particularly between the north Mathioya and Boyo Rivers. Here the Kikuyu met little opposition, except by a few Athi who were routed at the confluence of the Boyo and southern Mathioya Rivers - Karirau. Despite the absence of serious opposition they did not reach the foothills of the Nyandarua until the middle of the 19th century. Presumably the misty, cold weather at such heights deterred would-be pioneers. It was perhaps this discouraging weather that forced them to migrate southwards across the ridges. Many of the people who now live in Kabete spread there from Iyigo and the Gathuki-ini region, apart from those who were forced to retreat from some parts of Gaki by Maasai or Athi threats. The advance southwards was marked by a steadily advancing frontier till they reached Muruka and Gatanga where Maasai opposition began to worry them. But this was not until the Mathathi generation or the second half of the 18th century. By the Cuma generation, the late 17th century to the mid-18th century, they had begun to trickle into Kahuhia and Withaga overspilling into Muthithi by the second half of the 18th century. And evidently it was the warriors initiated during the reign of the Mathathi generation that provided the bulk of the people who ventured across the South Cania River into Kabete. Thus the peak of expansion across the South Cania River occurred in the first half of the 19th

century. But remembering that this was preceded by a period of exploration, the initial immigration is likely to have begun late in the 18th century, if not earlier. Many of the informants allege that the first batch of warriors to be initiated in Kabete was the Mungai, initiated about the middle of the 19th century, and that it was only the Mbugua, initiated in the first two decades of the second half of the 19th century, amongst whom the majority were initiated in Kabete.[1] By that time the frontier had advanced as far south as the Rui rua Aka, the Women's River.[2]

The southward expansion by the Kikuyu apparently led to a concentration of the Athi in Kabete, just as their expansion northwards had led to the same phenomenon taking place around Kirinyaga. It is even feasible that this might have led to their consolidation once more. It was not politic, therefore, for the vanguard of the Kabete pioneers to have antagonized them, let alone to have tried to drive them forcibly away. The Maasai were also on the Kaputie plains and an alliance by the two groups would have presented the Kabete with formidable obstacles, especially because pioneering was still undertaken by individuals or small groups. For all these reasons, it was imperative that the Kabete should come to terms with the Athi if their expansion was to be effective. Understandably, and in contrast to the situation further north, in Gaki and Metumi, some had to buy the land in most parts of Kabete with the exception perhaps of certain localities of Gatundu division.[3] Contrary

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1. Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 141, 147, 151, 160, 181.
2. This is incorrectly spelt Ruaraka in all the published maps and books.
3. Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit, pp. 134-6.

to the view expressed by Lambert and others, the Athi were not forcibly eliminated, nor were they cheated of their land by guile and chicanery.[1] They were too strong and well-armed to be so easily driven off. Moreover and more important, the Kikuyu way of life and that of the Athi were complementary. In particular the symbiotic relationship between the Kikuyu and the Athi was conducive to mutual understanding and cooperation wherever this was practicable. This led to a fairly large number of the Athi being absorbed by their virile neighbours through intermarriage and mutual adoption. This process is shown by the existence of some mbari which are of essentially Athi ancestry, while a still greater number have Athi blood. Even those Athi who sold their land retained friendly relations with the buyers; these transactions, moreover, were preceded by an elaborate code of procedure which has made land negotiations be likened to marriage proceedings. It was imperative in all these negotiations that land was only sold after close and firm ties had been established between the two parties. Thus the Kikuyu acquired land by a "process which consisted ... partly of alliance and partnership and partly of adoption and absorption, and partly of payment". Certainly it was not by a process "largely of force and chicanery".[2]

The oath of mutual adoption was an even more serious affair that was not lightly taken. Both parties swore a solemn oath to be like brothers in all matters, not to shed each others blood or cause each

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1. KLC, op cit., Report, pp 93.
2. Ibid.

other harm in any way. They also swore to help each other in times of need. Consequently having undergone the ceremony, the Athi were full members of whatever mbari adopted them, and were henceforth protected from any molestation by outsiders or within the mbari. A case in point is Kihara, who protected some Athi whom he had adopted when they were molested.[1] Athi and Kikuyu relations were so complex as to defy generalization. Each individual Kikuyu or Mwathi developed special relations with his benefactor. However, this is not meant to deny that there was sharp practice by unscrupulous individuals on both sides; some Kikuyu, such as Gatonye Munene and Waiyaki Hinga, are alleged to have maltreated their Athi, and equally some Athi are alleged to have sold the same piece of land to different individuals at the same time.[2] Moreover powerful mbari along the frontiers had become a menace to everybody, whether they were Athi or Kikuyu. These seem to have attracted a clientele of warriors and to have behaved in a manner reminiscent of the private armies of medieval Europe. The Mbari ya Munyori, for example, is alleged to have dispersed the Mbari ya Mbuu from their land around Kiambu (named after their ancestor Mbuu) despite the fact that both are closely related Ambui mbari.

However down to the Rui rua Aka immigration was along the traditional lines - spearheaded by individuals. But as the frontier advanced southwestwards the demands for defence became greater the nearer they approached

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1. See especially evidence by Muiruri Muinami and Wanjugu Marimbi in KLC (original evidence) vol. 7 or its summary in KLC vol. 1, pp 284-5.
2. Evidence by A. Muthuri, Waiganjo and Lewis Kaberere in KLC (original evidence), Vol. 7 or its summary in KLC, vol. 1, pp 223-9, 265-8; Kikuyu Historical Texts op cit., pp 131-92.

the Maasai border. It became impossible consequently for single-handed pioneers to blaze the trail. The age of single-handed enterprise came to an end, the role of individual pioneering falling upon the shoulders of the mbari, which had many warrior sons or else attracted a clientele of warriors. Otherwise brave warriors made their homes along the frontiers and invited a motley of interested parties to join them and help in defending the newly-acquired land or in purchasing it where this was applicable. It was this phenomenon that strained the traditional social organization, these mbari or individuals usurping the traditional balance of power by taking the law into their own hands, such as often flouting the code of behaviour by refusing to pay blood money.[1]

In about a century the Kikuyu had effectively inhabited the area between the south Cania and Nairobi Rivers. This was a fairly rapid expansion and may be related, to a great extent, to an increase in population. The decline in Maasai power, though not of crucial importance, was also a contributory factor. Immigration into Kabete spanned the period between the life of the Kinyanjui and Mungai warriors, from the second half of the 18th century to the middle of the 19th century. Many of the informants assert that very few of the Kamau, Kimani or Karanja generations of warriors emigrated from Metumi. Many of them are said to have died of old age around Muruka and Gatanga, unable to

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1. Tate records that the Acera, Anjiru, Agaciku, Aithiegeni and Ambui were the most powerful and were constantly engaged in fighting each other over property. They also refused to pay blood money. See Tate, 1910, op cit., pp 237.

cross the South Cania River. And the first batch of warriors to have encountered and fought with the Maasai are reputed to have been the Gitau and Wainaina warriors who were initiated in the first half of the 19th century. This encounter took place in the vicinity of Thika, none of them having been in evidence north of the Maragua River. So there had been a steady advancing of the frontier, and the Kikuyu had reached the locality of the Karura River, by the middle of the 19th century, from where they were thrusting towards the Maasai border. The Maasai were in fact not very far away, being very much in evidence around Nairobi and the area between Ngeca and Kiambaa when the Ngigi warriors, initiated in 1890, were children. The 1880s saw their occupation of the area between the Karura and Nairobi Rivers and also towards Muguga. Two people led the advance in this frontier; Gatonye Munene made his kihingo, a fortified cluster of homesteads (pl. ihingo), in the 1880s at Muguga and Waiyaki Hinga moved to Mbugici, near Fort Smith, from Karura between 1887 and 1890.[1] And none of the pioneers had gone beyond the Nairobi River by the time Lugard established his fort at Kiawariua (Dagoretti) in 1890. There was no cultivation around the area then and Thogoto was then a thick forest. Westwards they had just approached the vicinity of Limuru, and the Lari salt-lick was really a battle-ground, it being necessary for cattle to be guarded by warriors when they went for watering. However immigration continued unabated and with the

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1. Von Hohnel found Waiyaki at Mukui (Karura) in 1887 and he had migrated to Mbugici when he returned from his trip to Lakes Rudolf and Stefanie. See von Hohnel, op cit., pp 298-315. Lugard found him at Mbugici in 1890 and by 1894 had claimed the area between Mbugici and Thogoto.

the increase in population the Kikuyu began to expand westwards into Nyandarua, having hitherto only occupied a stretch of land parallel to the Kaputie plains.

The traditional Kikuyu land tenure has aroused considerable interest and controversy all through the colonial period. It has been claimed that their political consciousness has stemmed from the problem of land alienated for white settlement. The main bone of contention was whether or not the so-called 'githaka system' existed and, secondly, what it meant if it did, and thirdly whether it was uniform throughout Kikuyuland. But before deciding whether or not it existed, a discussion of the original pattern of the migration and the subsequent system of land acquisition might be useful in this context.

Essentially the system of land tenure that emerged was governed by the initial process of the acquisition of the land. The procedure of individual pioneers striking out on their own led them to exploit the natural resources along the ridges and towards the Nyandarua in most parts, except in Mathira where the expansion was northwards towards the Kirinyaga. The burden of the data indicates that in the early stages at least the vanguard of the pioneers seem to have been a fringe of hunters who trapped wild animals, collected wild honey or hung beehives on trees in the forests. They were followed by pastoralists and agriculturalists at a later stage. And although the original pattern of settlement has now largely been obliterated by various factors, a study of the place names reveals that they represent, especially in Metumi and Gaki, the names of the original settlers. What is more, in some areas

the eponyms represent the original clan settlements after their initial immigration. Some of these clan settlements are regarded as the spiritual homes of the clan, where clan reunions used to be held. These clan settlements were invariably acquired on a ridge basis, each clan settling in its own ridge. It is clear, therefore, that the nature of the terrain taken in conjunction with the pattern of immigration were of paramount importance and perhaps dictated the pattern of the original settlements which, in turn, greatly influenced the nature of the land tenure that emerged among other things. The basic tenet of land acquisition was on the basis of first come first served, and the initial activities carried out in exploiting the natural resources in time came to be accepted as the basis of land ownership. And when the agriculturalists appeared on the scene and cleared the virgin forest, that too came to be accepted as a criterion for claim to ownership. Anyone who acquired land by any of these methods claimed to have acquired it by kuna, cutting down virgin forest land, or mutego, trapping. There were also other ways in which individuals could have acquired land. Land could have been obtained through marriage. It was customary for in-laws to offer land to each other when this was deemed necessary. Equally friends could present each other with land as gifts. Besides, land could also be transferred or forcibly taken by another mbari as blood money in lieu of livestock, particularly where a mbari was unable or unwilling to meet the necessary fine.[1] In such cases, however, the

1. In 1929 Paulo Mathenge of Mahiga Mission gave details of two such cases. See his note book, pp 7b-8b in Barlow Papers, op cit.

land would be redeemed by paying the required compensation. A poor man could also attach himself to a rich man's daughter and after marriage continue to cultivate portions of land alloted to the girl when young. Finally and at a later stage, one could have acquired land by buying it from the Athi or the other Kikuyu.

Later developments apart, land essentially belonged to an individual person or a small group of closely related people at the outset. On the other hand, with the increase in population this circle was widened through the generations to include the descendants of the original pioneers. The essential thing is that such a group had a strong community interest born of the need to defend themselves in a hostile environment of wild animals and other enemies, not to mention the co-operation demanded of them in the task of clearing the giant trees of the primeval forests. This then saw the birth of the ancestral land, to which in the course of time descendants became deeply attached for religious purposes, because of the need to pour libations and propitiations to the ancestors to ensure the well being of the family. Thus the mode of land acquisition concomitant with the worship of the ancestors led to the mbari tenure of land as opposed to either communal or individual ownership. The communal rights were only limited to salt-licks, rights of way or firewood.

There were various basic principles governing mbari land tenure. The most important principle governing the system was that all the land belonged to the mbari as a whole and any member of the mbari had the right to utilize any part of it so long as no one else had made prior

claim to it and, more important, provided that the head of the mbari, muramati (guardian), was informed. Such mbari land, ng'undu (or githaka in Kabete), clan estate, could be sold, but any sale must be approved by the whole mbari, all such sales being redeemable on repayment of the original payment together with a fee to cover improvements, say of perennial crops such as ikwa (yams), marigu (bananas). Non-clan members, ahoi (tenants) or athoni (in-laws) were also given occupational rights by the muramati so long as they were of good behaviour and provided the consent of the whole mbari was sought beforehand. The ahoi could be summarily deprived of their occupational rights for any misdemeanour towards the mbari or for theft or witchcraft. Otherwise, they paid nothing for the use of the land apart from offering the occasional gift, for example, of beer at the appropriate times. No purchaser of such land, muguri, could sell it to a third party without the consent and approval of the vendors, to whom he was required to offer it in the first instance. It was only if they were unable to redeem it that it could be offered to others outside the mbari. It seems, therefore, that the principle of outright sale was so circumscribed as to make it impracticable unless there were other extenuating circumstances. It is in fact true to say that, until the invasion of the European influences and ideas, outright sales of land were unknown between the Kikuyu themselves, the more so since any industrious person could have obtained his own land at the frontier, lack of land being unknown in those days.[1] Thus under customary law, there were no sales of land in perpetuity.

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1. Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 155-6; see Land Tenure file in Barlow Papers, op cit.

Or as the Kikuyu put it, githaka ni ngwatira, land is a loan. Answering the question "can land be sold outright?", elders from Gaki told the Maxwell Committee that, "All that is (e)ver conveyed is a temporary and provisional right to reside, to cultivate and to keep stock on a given area or areas. There is always right of redemption."[1]

The principle that land should never irretrievably pass from the mbari was reinforced by the close attention paid to the boundaries separating the territory of one mbari from that of another. These were clearly marked by natural features such as rivers, valleys or ravines. Where this was not applicable, trees were planted, stones heaped or human hair buried all along such boundaries. No permanent boundaries were, however, fixed between the thanju, strips of land (pl.; ruthanju singular) of the same mbari. The same rule applied to the boundaries separating closely related mbari. On the other hand, the rights of the individual families were not left to chance; these were safeguarded by the system of inheritance. The practice was that originally a pioneer apportioned his land to each of his wives, if he had more than one. His sons had equal rights to all the land cultivated by their respective mothers. Thus on marriage the sons acquired portions of their mother's cultivated land. But they could clear any unused land that belonged to their father in case of need. All the uncultivated land was reserved for grazing or as woodland and was jointly owned by all the sons. Similarly the grandsons would have equal rights

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1. Maxwell Committee, op cit., Appendix, pp 7.

to the land cultivated by their mothers, and on marriage would subdivide the land accordingly. After three or more generations, depending upon its size and the number of its occupiers, the land became a patchwork of tiny strips of land of all shapes and sizes from ridge to ridge. This gradual decrease in the size of holdings could only be arrested by a reduction in the population due to famine or disease, or where some families had no male heirs, in which case their land reverted to their nearest kinsmen. Technically there was no inheritance through the female line.[1] Girls, for example, could still continue to cultivate portions of their mother's land after marriage but only at their father's or brothers' pleasure. This rule tended to reinforce the principle that the mbari had absolute ownership of land. The ahoi or those given rights of cultivation such as friends and athoni could not inherit such land outright and their continued use of it rested solely with the mbari owners who could terminate such rights at will.

While this has generally been accepted as the traditional system of land tenure prevailing in Gaki and Metumi, there has been a great deal of argument as to what system operated in Kabete. One school of thought, that includes some of the Kikuyu themselves and their supporters, has maintained that the Kabete practised individual land tenure because they had bought their land from the Athi on an individual basis.[2] Their

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1. Maxwell Committee, op cit., Appendix, pp 9.
2. M.W.H. Beech: Kikuyu System of Land Tenure, op cit., pp 46-59 and 136-44; F.H. McKenrick, J. Henderson and L.S.B. Leakey to Barlow in the Land Tenure File, Barlow Papers; Evidence given by the Kabete to the Maxwell Committee, Appendix.

opponents, on the other hand, hold the view, which was generally espoused by the Kenya Government and the settlers, that the Africans had no value for land per se until the corrupting European influences brought individual land tenure on the scene. In common practice with all the Bantu, so the argument ran, there was only communal ownership of land, at best, but all that the Kikuyu had in reality were occupation rights which was all that they had bought from the Athi. The livestock that they paid were meant to be no more than compensation for disturbances, as the Athi did not own the land themselves in the first place.[1] Both views, however, oversimplify a more complicated situation.

The settlement of Kabete was in many ways similar to the situation further north in Metumi and Gaki. In some parts of Gatundu, for example, first clearance of the virgin land was the basis of the acquisition of land. But the existence of large concentrations of Athi colonies in Kabete led to the adoption of other methods in order to acquire land. Basically this hinged upon making friendship with the Athi, which was a prerequisite to any land transactions. Mutual understanding was established, after which the Athi sold land to the Kikuyu or simply allowed them to occupy it especially where they were adopted by the Kikuyu. But the story that the Kikuyu paid hundreds of thousands of goats for land is definitely untenable. Rather land was indeed very cheap then - the sale sometimes stipulating only a first instalment of 30 goats for the virgin forest land with perhaps a further 30 goats to

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1. KLC, Vol. 1, op cit., pp 28-81.

be paid when the land was cleared.[1] Such transactions were in fact rarely completed for a variety of reasons, for example the Athi migrating. The nature of these transactions, moreover, did not anticipate such a quick finalization of the sale; it envisaged an active and continuous personal relationship, the Athi seeking help as and when they needed it. It was this feature that led the relationship to be compared to marriage transactions. Other Kikuyu acquired their land as compensation for a variety of alleged crimes committed by the Athi such as murder, trapping of livestock by their traps or theft. One person is even alleged to have demanded compensation when a tree hit his house! But sharp practices were limited to a comparatively few people both Athi and Kikuyu, and the fate of Bera is a good illustration of this.[2] What is overlooked quite often is that there were many Athi who peaceably settled among the Kikuyu through adoption and intermarriage.

Having acquired land, an individual was normally followed by his relatives or alternatively encouraged warriors to settle on the land as ahoi to help with defence against possible attacks by the other mbari or the Maasai as well as helping him to clear the virgin forest, which was not an easy task in those days. Indeed many of them needed no persuasion as the rutere, frontier, was regarded as the land of opportunity where any industrious individual expected sooner or later to acquire wealth of his own to enable him to buy his own land. The

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1. Routledge, op cit., pp 5; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp144, 158-9.
2. See evidence to the Land Commission in KLC, Vol. 7 (original evidence) by A. Muthuri, and Lewis Kaberere; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 160-2, 191-2.

frontiersman consequently built large ihingo capable of accommodating hundreds of people, some of whom were warriors under his patronage. It was the existence of this motley collection of diverse elements which led Ainsworth to the conclusion that the Kikuyu had no clans on the eve of the arrival of the British as these were in the process of evolution.[1] The halting of this expansion by the British Government at a time when waves of immigrants were still coming in even after 1900, together with the alienation of some of their land for the settlement of the white settlers, meant that it did not take long before a serious shortage of land had become a reality. In fact the problem had become noticeable as early as 1910, and particularly the problem of the status of the ahoi was brought into sharp focus. This triggered off a re-examination of the traditional land tenure in an attempt to alleviate the deteriorating situation which was only reduced, in part, by their trickling into the farms, owned by the white settlers, to become squatters.[2] Under these circumstances, a section of the Kikuyu, fearful of the demands of the ahoi, as much as of the white settlers, sought ways to consolidate their hold on land by demanding that their rights to their land should be entrenched by the granting of land titles to individual land holders. This would in effect have entailed the recognition on the part of the government that the existing land tenure was based on individual tenure. This the government was reluctant to do because for one thing it would have had adverse effects on the white settlement policy, and secondly there was a genuine concern by the administrators over the fate of the

1. For example see Ainsworth's memorandum, in the file on Land Tenure in the Barlow Papers, following a series of meetings with the Kikuyu chiefs and the interested parties. Barlow and Arthur acted as interpreters on July 6 and 20, 1920.
2. See the correspondence re land in Barlow Papers.

ahoi should such a scheme be embarked upon. It was no secret among the Kabete that their sense of the value of land had been whetted, and they were therefore anxious to throw out the ahoi irrespective of the rights that they had under the traditional land tenure. The ahoi were thus supported by the administrators who did not cherish the idea of the emergence of a small landed aristocracy at the expense of hordes of landless people who were bound to present serious administrative problems. The missionaries, useful allies of the Kikuyu at this time, fully supported them and pressed for the granting of titles, hoping thereby to forestall the ever threatening sword of land alienation dangling over the heads of the Kikuyu.

The problem of the ahoi, together with the threat posed by the alienation of land for white settlement, culminated in the theory which was christened the 'githaka system' in an attempt to safeguard Kikuyu land from further alienation.[1] The early enquirers such as Tate and Beech accepted that the principle of individual tenure operated before the coming of the British, but what was in doubt was whether under customary law land was ever sold in perpetuity. The theory of irredeemable sales was supported by the missionaries who, in good faith, wished to safeguard their up-and-coming missionary adherents, who were in many ways handicapped by the redemption of land; this applied in particular to their newly-acquired land which they could not develop for fear of being bought out at a future date. Pre-eminent among those who were

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1. R.L. Buell: The Native Problem in Africa, New York, 1928, pp 308-10.

in the forefront of the battle over this issue were the chiefs, who were anxious to safeguard their recent acquisitions, some of which had been acquired by sharp practice, or buying out of poor relatives and neighbours.[1] But while the majority of the Kikuyu would have objected to the consolidation of a few landowners by law, and especially the chiefs, if the principle of outright sale of land was accepted, it was in the interest of perhaps a good majority to accept it, albeit willy-nilly, for fear of Athi claims, and especially because of the vulnerability of the recent immigrants who might have to face the consequences of such an eventuality. It is clear therefore that it was the chiefs, supported by like-minded individuals, who deliberately altered the traditional system of mbari ownership of land and the redemption of land sales to suit their own ends. Dr. John Henderson of Ng'enda Mission ruefully noted in 1924, "Land in the Gikuyu reserve may appear to belong to one owner but later it is found to belong to several. When the mission has been given a piece of land for a school later there may appear two or three men with a right to the land which was given (and) the kiama as such does not have any right over the land."[2] And Leakey also noted that, "No Githaka or part of the same can be sold by any of the Ene without the consent of all the joint Ene."[3] And this view was

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1. Note for example Kinyanjui's extravagant claims, see KNA/PC/CP/1/4/2, pp 87-188. For the manner in which he acquired it see the Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 164. See also evidence given by Ainsworth, Boedecker, Watcham and Canon Leakey in KLC, Vol. 1, op cit., pp 491-508, 694-708, 734-6, 845-73.
2. Henderson to Barlow in Barlow Papers (Land Tenure File), op cit.
3. L.S.B. Leakey to Barlow, Ibid.

accepted by those giving evidence to the Maxwell Committee on land tenure of 1929. Indeed as late as 1936, an administrator noted that "the principle of redemption has not entirely disappeared in the Kiambu district."[1] And Barlow was informed, as late as 1941, that "Formerly if a man sold land clandestinely he might be 'hung' by the mbari" and that even the land acquired in lieu of blood money could still be redeemed by the mbari concerned.[2]

It is my view, then, that land and politics among the Kikuyu was not simply a problem of the Kikuyu versus the white settlers. The resentment of the Kikuyu was generated by the unsettling of the traditional land tenure within the society, at a time when it was under a frontal attack by the individualism of western society, as much as it was generated by the alienation of their ancestral land. And as much energy, time and money were expended in interminable land cases amongst themselves as was spent in the campaign against the settlers. The pressure within the society was only reduced by the political leadership which reorientated this growing resentment from within the society towards the administration and the settler community around them. Moreover landlessness was not solely aggravated by the alienation of land, but also by the increase in population, thanks to medical facilities, at a time when further expansion along the traditional lines was impossible and when the cash

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1. Correspondence by the DC and PC re land of 24 June 1936 in Barlow Papers. The Maxwell Committee noted that "any man who attempted to sell land without the knowledge of his mbari would have been killed." See Maxwell Committee, op cit., [illegible] Appendix, pp 52.
2. Notes of an interview - Wagakari, Kinyanjui Muriu and Samuel Gitau - on land, 13 October 1941, in Barlow Papers (Land Tenure File).

economy was changing many aspects of the traditional framework which could have acted as safety valves. It is for this reason that the ahoi played a significant part in the political movement once they were mobilised whether they were squatters on farms owned by white settlers or as landless peasants among their own people.[1]

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1. Rosberg and Nottingham, op cit., pp 243-4 and 248-59.

Chapter 3: The Kikuyu and their Neighbours

Prior to the advent of the colonial era, East Africa was plagued by several disruptive influences - famine, disease, slave trading and the inter-tribal conflict. For the exponents of the British Empire and like the propagandists of the imperial cause all over the world, the chaos that was occasionally wrought by these destructive agents, and especially the last two, was a popular propaganda theme. It was eagerly seized upon to stir the conscience of an otherwise sceptical British public into pressuring their government to extend the Empire into East Africa. Lugard, one of the chief exponents of this course, hopefully pleaded,

> "Surely people in England will presently begin to realise that the Arab slave-raider is not the only curse of Africa, but is rivalled, as I have elsewhere said, by the awful and intolerable tyranny of the dominant tribe. It is from this tyranny, no less than from the slaver, that our administration, and the dawn of an era of law and order is to deliver the more peaceable and industrious agricultural tribes of Africa."[1]

And as for the inter-tribal conflicts, the attention, if not the wrath, of most observers was directed against the Maasai who, because they "loved war and slaughter, loot and rapine",[2] were for "long the terror and scourge of all their neighbours".[3] Moreover they were accused of having spread their terror from the shores of Lake Rudolf to the north, to central Tanzania in the south and from the banks of the Thagana

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1. Lugard, Vol. 1, op cit. pp 87.
2. C. Wills: Who Killed Kenya? London, 1953, pp 29.
3. C. Eliot: The East African Protectorate, London, 1905, pp 133-4 and 239.

River to the east, to the shores of Lake Victoria in the west. As Low has put it, the "Masai had two overriding passions - cattle and warfare"; cattle were their pride and source of livelihood while warfare was an essential ingredient for a youth's attainment as well as proof of manhood. It was hence these concomitant factors which were the driving force behind the abject terror inflicted upon the peaceable and sedentary agriculturalists, such as the Kikuyu, by their neighbouring "lords of the plains".[1] Commenting on Kikuyu-Maasai relations at the turn of the century, Routledge remarked, "Between the two nations reigned perpetual war."[2] Nevertheless the view that the Maasai were a terror to their neighbours or that they were constantly at war with them needs drastic qualification as far as Kikuyu-Maasai relations were concerned.

Admittedly considerable raiding took place between the two groups. But this state of affairs however was tempered by other extraneous factors which were conducive to their mutual understanding. To begin with, their respective modes of life were in some ways complementary; the pastoralist needed some agricultural produce in the same way as his opposite number required some animal products. Like most pastoralists in East Africa, moreover, the Maasai were particularly vulnerable to famine, because any natural calamity - such as the vagaries of the weather or any epizootic epidemic - was a threat to their chief source of livelihood, the livestock. On such occasions they were heavily

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1. D.A. Low in Oliver and Mathew, op cit. pp 301; and in V. Harlow, E.M. Chilver and A. Smith (eds): History of East Africa, Vol. 2, London, 1965, pp 1-2.
2. Routledge, op cit. pp 13.

dependent upon their agricultural neighbours with whom they had either to trade or else seek refuge to avert starvation. If there had been a rupture of relations beforehand, emissaries were despatched to explore the possibilities of concluding a peace treaty before trading activities were resumed. As far as the Maasai-Kikuyu peace negotiations were concerned, it is apparent that the initiative was in most cases taken by the Maasai. Peace negotiations were not lightly undertaken as the conclusion of a peace treaty - munyoro - involved a protracted and elaborate procedure culminating in a solemn religious ceremony during which both parties took a solemn and binding oath.[1] "If we ever kill the Maasai," they declared publicly, "may we be slaughtered like this (goat)! If we ever harm them, may we be killed thus!"[2] And very serious consequences were believed to attend anyone who broke such a solemn oath: the most serious consequence would be either a visitation by natural calamities as a result of being ritually unclean, or being handed over to the wronged party for the appropriate punishment. That the latter was no idle threat is demonstrated by the fate of a warrior from Kiambu, called Wangai, who was handed over to the Maasai after he had broken a peace treaty in the 1890s.[3] Peaceful coexistence, therefore, was duly recognized as being of prime importance to the well being

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1. Leakey, mss, op cit. chapter 13, and Unsorted Miscellaneous File in Barlow Papers; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit. pp 228, 237, 262
2. The procedure for the taking of an oath was as follows. An ewe was tied and the elder taking the oath on behalf of the people cut its throat while simultaneously chanting, "Ithui tungikoraga Ukabi turotuika uguo! Ithui tungikonera Ukabi kirii turotuika uguo!"
3. KLC, vol. 1, pp 248-9.

of the two communities. Indeed the experiences of the Maasai in the 19th century is a case in point. The various disasters that overtook them - the cattle epidemic, smallpox and their internecine wars - culminated in a large scale influx of refugees into Kikuyuland. In fact this phenomenon was not confined to the Kikuyu alone; throughout the 19th century Maasai refugees are known to have settled among the Taveta, Chagga, Arusha and the Luhya.[1] In addition, and as in Ashanti and Dahomey in West Africa, arrangements existed whereby women and children could be pawned in times of misfortune.[2] Those Maasai families which were in dire need left their children and women in the hands of the Kikuyu in exchange for foodstuffs, hoping to ransom them in better times. No stigma was attached to pawnship and the system was commonly practised by the Kamba, Kikuyu and the other Mount Kenya peoples. But it was only practised during famines. In the event, it fulfilled an important function by ensuring that a family did not starve.[3] Pawnship was certainly not regarded as slavery: indeed it was a stage on the road to full adoption. Such children became full members of their respective Kikuyu families which adopted them until they were ransomed. It seems unlikely that the Maasai would have sought refuge among the Kikuyu let

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1. Oliver and Mathew (eds), op cit, pp 307.
2. S. Miers: Great Britain and the Brussels Anti-Slave Trade Act of 1890, Ph.D. thesis, University of London, August 1969, pp 151-73.
3. Commenting on 25 women and children found among the Kikuyu, Craufurd noted, "In a great many other instances it transpired that the alleged captives had imposed on themselves captivity; they had in point of fact thrown themselves on the Wakikuyu in order to obtain food, promising future payment in return for this." Report, 20th January, 1899 in FO2/189.

alone have pawned their children if there had been any possibility of their being seriously ill-treated.

Equally, interdependence was mutual. The agriculturalists would also be dependent upon the pastoralists, to some extent, at times of such adversities. Irrespective of the occasional adversity, however, the importance of trade, in its own right, was well appreciated for it to stimulate peaceful relations.[1] There is no doubt that the threat of visitation by the natural calamities perhaps mellowed the attitude of the Maasai towards their neighbours and made them amenable to intercourse. But some of their daily requirements, such as gourds for milk and tobacco, were equally essential to them and these could only be obtained from the agriculturalists. To the Kikuyu, in particular, their trade with the Maasai was singularly profitable and it was not at all surprising that it was normally they who took the initiative. The Maasai had all that the Kikuyu lacked and desired most - livestock, leather cloaks, hides and skins and various ornaments such as beads and cowrie shells which the Maasai obtained from the coastal traders. It was an accepted axiom that trade was above petty squabbles, and it was this realization that led to a gentleman's understanding that ensured that trade continued in spite of any hostilities that might be in progress between them. Thomson observed this ambivalence in the Kikuyu-Maasai relations along the south-western border and commented,

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1. G. Muriuki: "Kikuyu Reactions to Traders and the British Administration, 1850-1904" in Hadith 1, the Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Historical Association of Kenya 1967, Nairobi, 1968, pp 104-5.

> "Curiously enough, however, though they are eternally at war to the knife with each other, there is a compact between them not to molest the womenfolk of either party. Hence the curious spectacle is exhibited of Masai women wending their way with impunity to a Kikuyu village, while their relatives are probably engaged in a deadly fight close at hand."[1]

This was to be confirmed by von Hohnel and Teleki a few years later. Not only did they find that women were perfectly safe in spite of Kikuyu-Maasai feuds, but they successfully appointed a Maasai woman to act as their intermediary along the same frontier.[2]

Apart from the spirit of good neighbourliness engendered by mutual economic convenience, good relations between the two appear to have been the norm rather than the exception. Contact between them probably dates back to the first half of the 18th century, and the oral traditions of the Kikuyu suggest that there were amicable relations with the Maasai from at the latest, the beginning of the 19th century when they cooperated in driving out the Barabiu. The Barabiu, presumably assisted by the remnants of the Athi, had made an inroad into northern Gaki driving the inhabitants into Mukurue-ini Division and the lower extremity of Mathira Division.[3] This incursion of the Barabiu into the highland region might have been instrumental in sparking off a spate of disturbances and turmoil in the highlands, which appears to have characterized the period between the end of the 18th century and the first quarter of the 19th century. Subsequent to the expulsion of the Barabiu, ca. 1800-30,

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1. Thomson, op cit. pp 308. See also Fischer, op cit., pp 40, 99.
2. Von Hohnel, op cit., pp 291.
3. See Chapter 2.

there was an era of comparative peace between the Maasai and the Kikuyu, which lasted until the great cattle epidemic of 1889-90.[1] The Kikuyu inhabiting Gaki, for example, aver that it was taboo for them to attack the Burugu Maasai (Purko) who were considered to be their close kinsmen. It is also widely maintained that it was not until the time of the Ndung'u warriors, who were initiated about 1884-8, that the two groups commenced to raid each other. This comparatively congenial relationship, however, was not apparently extended to the Laikipiak Maasai with whom the Kikuyu claim to have had particularly strained relations all along.

Other evidence lends credence to this view. It is significant to note, in this respect, that the Kikuyu word for Maasai is Ugabi/Ukabi, which was not only derived from the word Wakuavi, Iloikop, but also synonymous with enemy. It would appear therefore that the Kikuyu in Nyeri, like all the other peoples in and around the highlands of Kenya, had largely to contend with the Iloikop Maasai whose aggression and addiction to raiding, even against the other Maasai tribes, was well known.[2] None the less Laikipiak-Kikuyu relations, though strained, did not amount to 'perpetual war' either. For one thing, there were extensive intermarriages between the two groups, to the extent that specific Laikipiak families or localities had cordial relations or even close kinship ties with specific Kikuyu families. The Maasai state,

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1. Jacobs, op cit. pp 96.
2. See, for example, Krapf's Journals for March 1845, December 1847, March/April 1849 in CMS, CA5/016/M1 & M2 and Jacobs, op cit, pp 89-91, 104-6.

for example, that when the Laikipiak were defeated by the Purko, ca. 1870-5, many of them took refuge among the Kikuyu in Nyeri precisely because they had previous relatives among them.[1] Secondly, Krapf recorded an interview that he had with five Kikuyu who had come from "Kizu";[2] in the "neighbourhood of Mount Kenya" and had accompanied a Kamba caravan to the coast in 1853. He recorded, inter alia,

> "They also mentioned that a division of Wakuafi was residing in their territory, and that they were on good terms with them, the Wakuafi feeding their herds on their ground."[3]

It was the existence of such peaceful and close relations, along the northern frontier, which, though erratic, accounts for the extensive intermarriages which took place between the two groups. Furthermore, it underscores some of the factors behind the claim, made by many Kikuyu mbari, that either their ancestors were of Maasai origin or alternatively that their mbari have Maasai blood. Even today many of them still claim to have many relatives among the Maasai.

The view that the Maasai were "fierce traditional enemies"[4] of the Kikuyu or that the two were wont to raid each other would seem to be largely based on the conditions prevalent in the last decade of the 19th century. Their relations worsened in this decade subsequent to the rinderpest epidemic which decimated their livestock. But while most

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1. Jacobs, op cit. pp 73-83, 97-8 and personal communication; KLC, vol. 1, op cit. pp 110 and 527; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 11, 27, 249.
2. These traders probably came from the vicinity of Kiru in Kangima Division, Murang'a District.
3. See Krapf's letter to Baylis in CA5/016/M2 pp 519-20. In his 1851 journal, Krapf has noted "... in many localities in that region the Kikuyuans appear to live in companionship with the Wakuafi." See J.L. Krapf: Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours During an Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa, London, 1860, pp 351.
4. E. Huxley and M. Perham: Race and Politics in Kenya, London, 1944, pp 67.

observers comment extensively on Kikuyu-Maasai hostilities, there is surprisingly little comment on the equally fierce raiding between the various Kikuyu localities in the same period. To the north, for example, it appears that Meru, Ndia, Gicugu and Embu were not so seriously affected by the epidemic as Nyeri was. In the event they became the target of various raids by warriors from some parts of Nyeri, such as Mathira Division. But no sooner had some of the Mathira acquired the coveted livestock than they too became the target of raids mounted by their neighbours. In Mathira itself there was a spate of local raids such as the ones between Konyu and Magutu, Iria-ini and Kirimukuyu. As late as 1903, Konyu was reported to have robbed Tumutumu and 'Mazeras' of their goats, which they then took to Nyeri Town as payment of the hut tax.[1] These internal conflicts, however, did not deter them from uniting to make major raids on their other neighbours. They made a particularly large raid on the Ndia in September 1891.[2] The raid was the brainchild of Wang'ombe Ihura, a man who was closely associated with the Maasai warriors. It appears that, finding himself unable to command the loyalty of all the warriors from Mathira, he decided to bolster up one of their sections, which he could trust, with Maasai mercenaries, in order to raid the Ndia for livestock. Several raids were made on the Ndia, but this appears to have been the largest and most famous of the raids of the period. It is estimated that more

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1. See historical notes on Iria-ini and Fort Hall in KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1; Mackinder op cit. pp 459, 462.
2. E. Gedge: "A Recent Exploration under Capt. F.G. Dundas, R.N. up the River Tana to Mount Kenya" in the Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, vol. 14, 1892, pp 527-8; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 223-9.

than 500 Maasai and Kikuyu warriors took part. The raid itself was symptomatic of the general deterioration of tranquility throughout the highlands of Kenya as a result of the rinderpest.[1] But the situation was aggravated by Wang'ombe, who was not slow to exploit the situation. Ultimately his tactics made his presence in Mathira insufferable and it was not surprising that he was forced to flee from Mathira to Tetu, despite his Maasai mercenaries. Before this episode however he had masterminded yet another major raid, this time against his fellow Kikuyu in Uthaya, Mukurue-ini and the contiguous parts of the Murang'a District. Once again he had enlisted the aid of Maasai mercenaries who, together with the Tetu and Mathira warriors, combed the region from Uthaya Division to the banks of the Maragua River. This took place sometime between 1892 and 1894.[2] Incidentally this was the only occasion when the Maasai are known to have conducted such a big raid in those parts, otherwise hitherto the inhabitants of the region claim that they did not experience any organised Maasai raids apart from isolated cases of cattle thefts by small groups of Maasai morans. In due course Wang'ombe turned against his own allies, leading Kikuyu warriors to attack the Maasai and vice versa. In January and February 1902, he is reputed to have attacked the Konyu on three separate occasions assisted by the friendly Maasai warriors.[3] All the same the mood prevailing in Nyeri

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1. Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 223-5.
2. See Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit, pp 231-5 and Cagnolo, op cit., pp 101-3.
3. See historical notes on Iria-ini and Fort Hall in KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1 and KNA/DC/FH/6/1 respectively.

District was not an isolated case. To the east of Kikuyuland, Kutu, like Wang'ombe, was harrassing his neighbours, while at the same time Ndia people were raiding their neighbours to the west as well as the Embu. The Meru too were attacking the Cuka and Embu. And to the south-east of Kikuyuland, the inhabitants of Muruka, Kandara Division of Murang'a, were in feud with the Kamba.[1]

Turning to the southern frontier, the situation was similar in many ways to that pertaining in the north. Here the Kikuyu did not come across the Maasai in any appreciable numbers until the second half of the 18th century, when Kikuyu expansion brought them into the vicinity of the Maasai habitat, the Kaputie plains. And in times of adversity the Maasai took refuge among the Kabete in the same way as they had done to the north. This occurred for instance after the great rinderpest epidemic of 1889-90, during the outbreak of the small-pox and the ensuing famine, as well as during the civil wars between the Sendeyo and Lenana factions. Lenana and Sendeyo were the sons of the great Maasai laibon, Mbatian.[2] But even among the southern Kikuyu the absorption of Maasai elements pre-dates these disasters. Take for example the Waiyaki family. Waiyaki's father, Kumale ole Lemotaka or

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1. See historical notes on Embu in KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1; and A. Arkell-Hardwick, op cit., chapters III and IV.
2. The evidence on the Maasai refugees is quite extensive but the most authoritative is to be found in the evidence to the Kenya Land Commission of 1932-3 in KLC, vol. 1, op cit., pp 167-70, 244-6, 740, 746, 950-2; Reports to the Imperial British East African Company and the diaries of F.G. Hall and J. Ainsworth housed in Rhodes House, Oxford; and the Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 239, 245, 247.

Hinga according to the Kikuyu, sought refuge in the home of Gatheca Ngekenya while that family was still at Thare (Kiria) in Kandara Division, Murang'a District, and before they had crossed the Southern Cania River to settle in Gatundu. This probably occurred during the First Iloikop Wars of the Maasai tribes which took place in the early part of the 19th century.[1] There are other Kikuyu and Maasai families which had assimilated Maasai blood and vice versa before the rinderpest epidemic. In particular the Anjiru of the mbari ya Gathirimu, who were noted medicinemen, had very close ties with the Maasai, especially the laibon family of Mbatian. There is even a considerable body of evidence which very explicitly suggests that Subet (Thubi according to the Kikuyu), the first Maasai laibon, might have been a descendant of the mbari ya Gathirimu.[2] Indeed, the Maasai respected Kikuyu medicinemen whose help they frequently sought not only in Kabete but also in Nyeri.[3] This would be a further important factor contributing to peaceful relations between the two peoples. Here too joint Maasai-Kikuyu raids were also a familiar feature similar to those observed by Boyes along the northern frontier.[4] Ainsworth reported joint Maasai-Kikuyu raids against the Kamba in 1894, and Kenyatta was informed by his grandfather that this

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1. The word hinga, hypocrite or dissembler, was applied to anyone living among the Kikuyu who spoke Maasai language or who had lived among them.
2. Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 145 ; Unsorted Miscellaneous File in Barlow Papers; KLC, vol. 1, op cit., pp 170; Leakey mss, op cit., chapter 3.
3. In Nyeri the Maasai are reputed to have consulted Njiri from Magutu. See KLC, vol. 1, op cit.pp 527.
4. Tetu warriors were rumoured to have threatened to call their Maasai allies to fight against Boyes. See Boyes, op cit. pp 110.

custom was fairly common, joint raids being directed against a section of either the Kikuyu or one of the Maasai tribes.[1] It is also suggested that some of the Kikuyu warriors assisted Lenana during his quarrels with his step-brother Sendeyo.[2]

As along the northern frontier, Maasai-Kikuyu relations in Kabete worsened in the last decade of the 19th century. Apart from the other factors already mentioned in connection with the situation to the north, the situation was radically altered by the presence of the Imperial British East African Company along the southern border. Some of the Maasai refugees were all too ready to steal foodstuffs from the Kikuyu shambas, an act that was bound to provoke the wrath of the Kikuyu in general. The problem might however have been solved by the interested parties through arbitration had not the situation been complicated by the refugees building their manyatta, kraals, within the environs of Fort Smith, the stronghold of the Company, at a time when the Kikuyu and the Company were at loggerheads. From the comparative safety afforded by the fort, they were able to harrass the neighbouring localities with impunity. Worse still, the Maasai warriors were very frequently employed as levies to supplement the Company troops and later the Protectorate forces during the increasingly frequent punitive expeditions that were mounted against the Kabete.[3] In turn, the Kabete had no scruples

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1. Ainsworth to IBEACo. 27 March 1894 in FO 2/73; and Kenyatta op cit. pp 210.
2. Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit. pp 244.
3. Hall's diaries, Hall to Col. Hall, February 12 1894 in Hall Papers; Hall to IBEACo. in FO2/73; Hall to IBEACo., August 22, 1898 in FO2/165.

in despoiling the Maasai refugees, a factor that could only lead to further poisoning of their relations. The situation became so fraught with danger and such a strain on the Company administration that Hall was forced to eject the Maasai from the vicinity of Fort Smith to Ngong in June 1894.[1] Thus the peace settlement negotiated on the outbreak of the rinderpest epidemic and the Maasai civil wars had proved to be ineffective beyond all repair.

Yet the deterioration in Maasai-Kikuyu relations cannot solely be explained on the basis of any inherent hostility that existed between the two peoples. If anything, it was indicative of the disruption that they were experiencing under the strain of a series of adversities and the new contacts with the outside world. The Kikuyu around the southern border in particular were undergoing rapid change as a result of decades of trade and contact with the coastal people. And this process was accelerated even further by the establishment of the Company at Kiawariua (Dagoretti) and, later, at Fort Smith. The demands and requirements of the Company, together with full exposure to outside influences, led to a decade of turbulence, and ultimately a section of the Kikuyu, having succumbed to the temptation of personal gain, was ready to cooperate with the new forces. The rise of a pro-Company faction led by Kinyanjui Gathirimu, Hall's 'fidus Achates',[2] was a significant pointer to the transformation of social and political

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1. Hall's diary for 1894 in Hall Papers.
2. Hall to Col. Hall, February 12, 1894 in Hall Papers.

attitudes taking place in Kabete. And it is significant that those who were ready to compromise and accommodate themselves to the changing circumstances were nonentities in the traditional society. Kinyanjui and his faction were ready to support the Company at all costs in order to bolster up their position and influence outside the traditional structure. But a major consideration was the economic rewards that accrued from their employment as porters, informers or as soldiers of fortune. Self-interest and particularly quick gain were slowly but surely eroding the traditional ideas and norms about the paramountcy of the welfare of the community in contradistinction to the individual interest. This could only lead to a weakening of the social structure and it is not surprising that, by the turn of the century, McGregor found the business instincts of the Kabete people astonishingly keen. "They work fairly well compared to the other East African tribes," he remarked, "but unfortunately owing to the many caravans which passed here in the past, the love of the Rupee is getting hold of them in a remarkable degree."[1] Above all, some of the larger mbari were becoming a law unto themselves as noted in Chapter 2. Secondly some of the immigrants into Kabete, albeit a tiny minority, consisted of criminal elements who had either fled from justice or had been disowned by their families and had therefore sought refuge on the southern frontier. Significantly, it is alleged that Kinyanjui, who was Waiyaki's dependent, migrated to Kabete after being disowned by his relatives in Kiria (Kandara, Murang'a) for his misbehaviour. It was perhaps a combination

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1. A.W. McGregor to the CMS dated 24 November 1900 in CMS Archives, G3.A5/no.7.

of all or some of these factors that explain to some extent why some individuals were quick to despoil the Maasai or ally themselves with the Company or colonial administration in expectation of economic and other rewards. The victims of the changing traditional structure and norms were not simply the Maasai refugees or just the Maasai-Kikuyu relations but also the Kikuyu themselves in the long run. Furthermore this set the stage for the spirit of individualism that altered the traditional social pattern even further in the 20th century with far reaching consequences.

The situation in Gatundu Division during the Great Famine of 1898-9 is a case in point. Taking their cue from the Company and Government forces, some Kikuyu warriors arrogated to themselves the powers and functions of the traditional council of elders and warriors. Initially they acted as the traditional and innocuous council of warriors which from time to time was entrusted with some civil functions, such as the enforcement of the payment of debts or even the punishing of thieves. But ultimately they mimicked the outward trappings of a thabari,[1] which was nothing less than an unprincipled band of marauding brigands who terrorized all and sundry. They burnt homes, locked people in their houses and then set them on fire, murdered others and confiscated live-stock and food at a time when famine was taking its toll. In all essentials, they were akin to the ruga ruga bands of Yao and Ngoni

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1. These outlaws, njangiri, modelled themselves on expeditionary forces which they had witnessed on many occasions sent against them by the Company and Government officers. The name thabari was derived from safari.

elements who terrorized Southern Tanzania in the second half of the 19th century.[1] The Kikuyu thabari was alleged to have confiscated livestock belonging to the mbari ya Kigamba, to have terrorized herdsmen at Gacoka, and to have been responsible for murdering some members of mbaris of Gitau Thube, Njege and Ngiricu Mugwe, Kaburu and Ihura. There were many such bands but the most notorious ones were in Kiganjo Location of Gatundu Division. They raged far and wide and their extortionate activities were only brought to an end by the death of most of the robbers while on a raid in Ithiru, Murang'a, and by the end of the famine, when other warriors felt strong enough to assert traditional authority. This was a completely foreign phenomenon in the history of the Kikuyu and the ruthlessness of these outlaws has only been outmatched by the behaviour exhibited by both protagonists locked in the Mau Mau conflict of 1952-61 with which it has been compared.[2]

Another example of the deterioration in the traditional scheme of things was shown by the Kamba. Formerly they had been the foremost middlemen between the Nyika peoples and the ivory-hunting peoples in the interior. In this role, they were important trading partners of the Kikuyu at the heyday of their commercial activities in the first half of the 19th century. But by the second half of the same century their activities had deteriorated into robbing and raiding.[3] In

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1. See Oliver and Mathew, op cit. pp 208-11 and Chapter 8.
2. Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 237-43.
3. For a discussion of the Kamba trade in the 19th century, see J.E. Lamphear: The 19th century trade routes of Mombasa and the Mrima Coast, Essay presented for M.A. in Area Studies (Africa), School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, September, 1968; von Hohnel, op cit. pp 331.

particular they were engaged in capturing Kikuyu women all along the eastern border of Kikuyuland.

For these reasons, the conditions prevailing towards the end of the 19th century were far from typical. Certainly the Maasai and the Kikuyu were not implacable enemies, and there was no chronic tension and confrontation between them. Indeed their relations do not seem to have been any worse than those existing between the various Kikuyu localities or the Maasai tribes themselves. True, war existed, in the form of raiding and counter-raiding which occasionally cooled their relations; but it should be realized that to the warriors this was sport not unlike the spirit and excitement of the Football Association Cup final - there was no bitterness or hatred. As Orchardson has remarked in discussing the wars between the Kipsigis and the Maasai,

> "War with the Masai was looked on as true war, and was carried on under strict rules, as much for glory and the love of fighting as for the acquisition of cattle. It was played almost in the spirit of an adventurous game, the prize of each bout being cattle. There seems to have been little bitterness or hatred and only when one side broke some rule would the other retaliate by some similar deed. Peace was made under oath and was unbreakable without mutual consent and due warning."[1]

Hence warfare was in certain circumstances regarded as sport, a view that is strengthened by the fact that casualties were few. It was this attitude towards warfare that accounts for the various "jousts and tournaments" that took place between the various Maasai tribes when they were at peace with their neighbours.[2] The Kikuyu, too, had a similar practice,

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1. I.Q. Orchardson: The Kipsigis, Nairobi, 1961, pp 7; Thomson, op cit., pp 414; A.C. Hollis: The Masai, Oxford, 1905, pp 321-2.
2. D.A. Low in Oliver and Mathew, op cit., pp 303; Thomson, op cit., pp 414.

and their 'tournaments' involved the warriors, or even the boys, from the various Kikuyu localities. Thus the popular stories about the hostility and depredations of the Maasai against their neighbours have been very much exaggerated. The bad reputation that the Maasai and Kikuyu had can be attributed to the stories spread by the Kamba traders about them. The Kamba traders, anxious to retain their monopoly of the interior trade, were not slow in spreading weird stories not only of the fierceness of the Maasai but also of the "thievish and treacherous" nature of the Kikuyu. Equally they dissuaded their cousins from trading directly with the coastal peoples by spreading similar stories concerning the Arabs, Swahili and the Nyika peoples.[1] Understandably this chorus was later taken up by the Swahili and Arab traders in their attempt to keep out other competitors, especially in the last three decades of the 19th century, when Europeans were getting interested in the hinterland. Jacobs has convincingly shown that the atrocities attributed to the Maasai in general were mostly in fact committed by the Wakuavi, semi-pastoral Maasai. He has argued that the picture depicting the Maasai as "the all-powerful, ferocious people" cannot be sustained by fact, this picture being the result of a deliberate campaign on the part of the Swahili traders to keep out competitors by playing upon their susceptibilities towards the people of the interior. The attempt to discredit the Maasai was carried on a step further by some of the early administrators, particularly Charles Eliot, in order to have an excuse

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1. G. Muriuki, op cit., pp 107-8.

for depriving them of their land and thus make way for white settlement.[1] The evidence called to prove that there existed traditional Kikuyu-Maasai enmity, however, stems in large measure from the role that the Maasai played during the period of Company rule, between 1890 and 1895, and the establishment of the British administration thereafter. The officials of both the Company and the Government frequently employed the Maasai morans as levies to assist the regular forces during the punitive expeditions, some of which took the Maasai where they had never set foot before. By 1898 the Maasai had seen service "on many occasions in Kikuyu, Ukamba and Eldama (Ravine)",[2] and this continued even more extensively in the first decade of this century. Hence, to the majority of the Kikuyu, the Maasai gained their reputation of being fierce and war-like enemies largely because their alliance with the all-powerful Comba, Europeans, gave them the opportunity of having a field day. Commenting on the "abject terror" which the Kikuyu and Kamba were supposed to entertain for the Maasai, Dundas remarked that this was "not always a fact", just as the Maasai power was "much over-rated". The reputation of the Maasai in this respect, he concluded, rested on "their unceasing minor raids, which might better be described as robberies", and on the fact that "they were often employed by (the administrators) to subdue other tribes, and were therefore regarded as in league with the all-powerful European."[3]

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1. A.H. Jacobs: "A Chronology of the Pastoral Maasai" in Hadith 1, op cit. pp 24-30 and also in his thesis pp 89-91, 104-6.
2. Hall to IBEACo., 22 August 1898 in FO2/165.
3. K.R. Dundas: The Organisation and Laws of Some Bantu Tribes ..., op cit., pp 236-7. See also Routledge, op cit., pp xi. Hobley, another early administrator commented "It is probable that the scourge of the Masai was generally much overrated, and that they were as often as not badly beaten by other tribes." See C.W. Hobley: Bantu Beliefs and Magic, op cit. pp 244.

In any case, though formidable on the plains, the Maasai were an easy target if they ventured into the forests where their spears and shields were no match for the Kikuyu and Kamba arrows or for their staked war-pits.

The Kikuyu-Maasai contact had far-reaching consequences. As already noted in Chapter 2, some of the Kikuyu mbari trace their origin to Maasai ancestors, while an even bigger number has absorbed Maasai blood as a result of the extensive inter-marriages that have taken place between the two peoples. Consequently it is no surprise that there has been deep and extensive cultural fusion, especially along the northern and southern frontiers of Kikuyuland. The most easily noticeable influence was that the insignia of the Kikuyu and Maasai warriors - hair style, shield decorations and so on - were identical.[1] Yet these outward signs were merely indicative of a more deeply-rooted exchange of cultural traits that had been going on for a long time.[2] Linguistically, for example, the Kikuyu language is heavily indebted to the Maasai language from which it has borrowed nearly all the words relating to cattle and especially the descriptive ones. Also certain religious concepts, such as Ngai (God; Maasai, E'Ngai) were borrowed from them too. Nonetheless the most significant cultural influence was in the field of initiation and military tactics. With the increase of the hinga, those Kikuyu who were of Maasai origin or had lived among the Maasai, were

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1. C.W. Hobley: Ethnology of the Akamba and Other East African Tribes, Cambridge, 1910, pp 132; Routledge, op cit. pp 15-6, 30; Thomson, op cit., pp 308.
2. Eliot, op cit. pp 106, 127 and 134; Boyes, op cit. pp 110-1, 298-300; and Oliver and Mathew, op cit. pp 199, 203, 207.

grouped with their descendants into an all-embracing section, including other non-Kikuyu elements, called the Maasai 'guild' for ritual purposes. Their children were initiated according to rites that were similar to the Maasai rites, which were slightly different from those practised by the Kikuyu 'guild'.[1] The initiation of the Maasai 'guild', as indeed most of their ceremonies, were less elaborate and still less expensive than their counterparts. This feature sometimes recommended them to the poorer members of the Kikuyu community, who otherwise laid no claim to having Maasai blood.[2] Ordinarily the Maasai 'guild' suffered no social or political disabilities, and were only barred from officiating in public rituals or ceremonies. Indeed if a family was plagued by misfortunes, it had the option of changing from one 'guild' to the other so as to break the sequence of bad luck, as it was believed that such a transfer would bring bad luck to an end. The division of the Kikuyu into two respective 'guilds' was only in vogue to any appreciable extent along the frontiers of Kabete and Gaki, the two places where Maasai impact was both extensive and of long standing. The acceptance of the Maasai initiation rites and the setting up of their own 'guilds' is a definite testimony of the extent of Maasai influence upon the Kikuyu. This becomes even more significant when it is realized that initiation influenced every facet of Kikuyu society. In particular, the whole fabric of social and political interactions was centred upon initiation, as will be seen in the next chapter.

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1. Hobley: Bantu Beliefs and Magic, op cit., chapter 5; L.J. Beecher, The Kikuyu, Nairobi, 1944, pp 5-6.
2. For the variation in religious rites between the two 'guilds' see M.N. Kabetu: Kirira kia Ugikuyu, Nairobi, 1966.

But Maasai influence went far beyond the initiation rites and even affected the subsequent organisation of youths into an efficient fighting force. This was particularly so in Gaki, where it is claimed that their military organisation owed its efficiency to the guidance given to them by the Maasai. The Maasai are claimed to have instructed them in such activities as scouting and reconnoitring as well as recruitment, which enabled them to drive out the Barabiu at the beginning of the 19th century during the Kikuyu-Maasai alliance.[1] If this was so, Maasai influence proved in due course to be particularly effective in the organisation and recruitment of warriors. And in most parts of Gaki, the warrior corps was divided into two main groups. The first batch of initiates to inaugurate the recruitment of a new warrior set, after the muhingo, the closed period when no initiation took place, was called a muricu. It was also designated tatane, right hand (and derived from Maasai tatene), while the subsequent initiates that completed a warrior set were called mucenge and regarded as gitienye, left hand, or kedianye in Maasai. The muricu warriors were regarded as, and indeed were, senior and more experienced than mucenge warriors; and the name given to the muricu warriors at initiation was normally the one that was subsequently adopted by the whole warrior set.[2] In

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1. See historical notes in Barlow Papers, op cit.
2. Lambert, 1965, op cit. pp 11; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit., pp 193-9. According to the Maasai customs, they were divided into two moieties corresponding to the two sides of a cattle-post. When a man married, the first wife built her hut on the right hand side of the gate, the second wife on the left, the third on the right and so on. The 'right hand' was associated with seniority, privilege, strength and worldly things, while the 'left hand' was associated with weakness, misfortune and supernatural things. See Jacobs, op cit. Chapter 4.

course of time, however, this nomenclature would no doubt be affected by the recruitment of other warrior sets. The second warrior set would be an exact replica of the initial set with the two sections - muricu (tatane) and mucenge (gitienye). This designation, though precise and retaining the original idea, would nevertheless blur, if not confuse, the distinctions existing between the two warrior sets. But the initial set would be to all intents and purposes senior to those initiated after them. Hence within the strict meaning of gitienye and tatane the correct designation would theoretically be tatane for the senior group and gitienye for the junior group. Nevertheless this would blur the distinctions existing within each warrior set and the functional importance of tatane and gitienye would be lost. It was perhaps the need for retaining the original function and importance of these designations, as well as avoiding the possibility of confusion, that muricu and mucenge were specifically used to describe the divisions within a warrior set while tatane and gitienye were ascribed to alternate warrior sets. The former thus retained their initial functional importance, while the latter lost all significance since warriors belonging to either set had equal status.

The promotion of younger warriors to the rank of senior warriors was another aspect of military organisation that was similar to the Maasai pattern in some respects. There was no specific ceremony among the Kikuyu to mark the occasion, but the handing over of military responsibility for the defence of the country was an elaborate affair. Each young warrior had to pay a fee to his seniors before being admitted

into their ranks. The senior warriors did not however relinquish military duties until they were satisfied that the younger ones were capable of performing the functions entrusted to the warrior corps. Throughout Kikuyuland every junior warrior had to pay a fee for his promotion but it seems as though it was only in Gaki that this was regarded as being equal to the ituika, in importance, and where junior warriors took over as a body. And though differing in important respects, this promotion of warriors among the Kikuyu had significant parallels with its Maasai counterpart, the eunoto ceremony.[1]

Besides the Maasai, the Athi were the other neighbours of the Kikuyu along their frontiers to the north, west and south-west. From their haunts in the Kirinyaga and Nyandarua forests, the Athi were constantly in contact with the Kikuyu. And like the Maasai, they offered the Kikuyu attractive goods which were not available in Kikuyuland in any appreciable quantities. As the Athi depended largely on game for their livelihood they had plenty of animal products to sell to the agriculturalists. In particular elephant meat was considered to be a delicacy for which the elephant was avidly sought and pursued. The Athi were expert elephant hunters and hence an important source of ivory, which they sold to their Kikuyu, Kamba and Maasai neighbours in exchange for goats, which they were particularly fond of. This was a particularly lucrative trade for the Kikuyu, because a good ivory

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1. For the organisation of the warriors in Gaki, see Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit. pp 193205 and Lambert, 1965, op cit. pp 10-17. And for the Maasai system see Jacobs, op cit., chapter 4.

tusk, say of five 'hands',[1] could fetch between 50 and 100 goats when sold to the Kamba or Swahili traders. By the 1840s Kikuyuland was recognized as an important source of ivory. The Kamba traders were initially the principal ivory buyers in these parts, as exemplified by Kivoi, the Kamba merchant prince. He told Krapf, in 1849, that he had left his ivory in the Athi country as well as at 'Muca' in Kikuyuland. And one of Krapf's bearers, a Mnyika who had travelled extensively in the interior from Chaggaland to Laikipia, mentioned that in 'Mulama'[2] country there was plenty of ivory which was sold to the Kikuyu.[3] Most of the ivory sold by the Kikuyu was obtained from the Athi, since they themselves were not particularly reputed as hunters. In any event it was a taboo for a self-respecting Kikuyu to engage in hunting as an occupation. The only occasion when this was permissible was in trapping wild animals in order to protect crops from their forages.

But the Athi offered other articles of trade that were equally in demand. These were buffalo hides for making shields, ready made shields, animal horns, rare skins such as colobus monkey skins which were especially used for making elders' garments and warriors' insignia, and also ligaments for sewing skin garments. Above all they acted as intermediaries between the Kikuyu on one hand and the Maasai or the coastal traders on the other. The Athi colonies at Mianzini and Ndoro were very prominent

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1. A 'hand' was the length of the hand between the elbow and the finger tips.
2. This perhaps refers to an Athi colony in the vicinity of Nanyuki and Mukogodo regions.
3. See Krapf's Journal for November-December 1849 in CMS Archives, CA5/016/M2, pp 277-81.

as middlemen, and were largely dependent on this role for their livelihood. Hardly any caravan ever travelled beyond the Kikuyu borders without stopping at Mianzini for provisions, unless it had managed to have direct access to the Kikuyu while camping at Ngong.[1] Alternatively a caravan could obtain the requisite foodstuffs on the northern border but, once again, it had to employ the services of the Athi living in the vicinity of Ndoro, a place that had become a definite important market. The Athi were equally important in other roles; quite often they were called upon to be spies, scouts, guides or even menial servants. They were the real mentors to their agricultural neighbours, and in this role they were able to introduce the landless and needy Kikuyu to those of their numbers who were amenable to parting with their hunting grounds. In Kiambu most of the land was obtained from them in a variety of ways but chiefly in exchange for goats, which they seem to have been avidly fond of. And as seen in Chapter 2, these transactions were still going on towards the end of the 19th century.

Despite the much vaunted absence of natural barriers between the Kikuyu and their related Mount Kenya peoples, in contrast to the situation along the Maasai borders, the relations which existed between them do not seem to have been radically different from those prevalent along the Kikuyu-Maasai frontiers. In any case the presence of a fringe of forest along the Kiambu and Nyeri border, at the end of the 19th century, was there by accident rather than by design. Indeed even at that time it was constantly being eaten away by the axe and the fire. Along the

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1. Fischer, op cit., pp 98-9.

northern frontier, cultivation had been extended to the Ruguru Location of Mathira in the 1890s, and by 1902 the forest around where Nyeri Town now stands was being furiously attacked to make way for cultivation. And in Kiambu the Kabete had their eyes on the Thogoto area. Indeed the destruction of the oft-mentioned forest fringe to make way for cultivation was only arrested by the arrival of and interference by the British administration. The existence of this forest fringe, therefore, should not be given undue importance in any assessment of the relations between the Kikuyu and their neighbours. The oral data makes it quite clear that there were many fratricidal conflicts not only within the Kikuyu group of peoples but also among the Kikuyu themselves. The Kabete and Kamba, for example, were raiding each other occasionally and the latter were also raiding as far north as Ndia; the Mathira and Tetu raided the Ndia too as well as the Embu, and at times as far away as Meru. Previous internal conflicts, if not actual enmity, rankle up to the present day. There is no basis, therefore, for the general assumption that the relations between the Kikuyu and their cousins were necessarily more cordial than those between them and the Maasai. Indeed there was nothing significantly conducive to congenial relations within the Kikuyu group. All of them were agriculturalists and except in times of famine there was little that they desired or required from each other. Trade between them, for example, was severely restricted, in contrast to the Maasai/Athi trade. Only the Kamba had any important trade relations with the Kikuyu, and that only for a brief period in the middle of the 19th century.

By the 1840s the coastal trade north of Pangani was in the hands of the Kamba, who had managed to wrest it from the Swahili and Nyika peoples.[1] The Kamba were renowned for their prowess as hunters, and it was this feature that stood them in good stead in the commercial activity that they so ably developed as ivory traders. They were however chiefly middlemen, and except in a few cases they did not have direct access to the Arab or Swahili traders. Their caravans, sometimes of up to 500 people, brought ivory to the Nyika peoples, who in turn acted as go-betweens between them and the Mombasa traders.[2] At its heyday the Kamba commercial empire was very extensive; it spread from Unguu and Usagara in north-eastern Tanzania to the Mount Kenya region, Baringo and beyond. The extent and success of the Kamba commercial activity at its apogee is typified by Kivoi of Kitui. His trading activities extended from the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro to those of Mount Kenya and even up to Samburu and further north. His caravans loaded with ivory entered Mombasa instead of disposing of his goods among the Wanyika because he was personally known to the governor of Mombasa.[3] His village too was a hub of trading activities between the Kamba and the Kikuyu, Embu, Mbere and the other Mount Kenya peoples. Several factors account for the Kamba monopoly of the interior trade. To begin with, this ivory trade was suited to their natural hunting ability and knack for trade. Besides the Galla and Wakuavi presented

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1. For a description of Kamba trade see Krapf's journals and letters in CMS Archives; and J.E. Lamphear, op cit.
2. Rebmann to CMS in CMS Archives, CA5/016/M2, pp 643.
3. Krapf's journal for November/December 1849, pp 281, 289.

a formidable obstacle to the Wanyika, who were in any case actively discouraged by the Kamba with suitable and appropriate juicy stories of the fierce pygmies and cannibals who inhabited the interior and fattened people for slaughter. Krapf aptly noted:

> "I conjecture that these stories have been invented by the Wakamba and caravan leaders, in order to deter the inhabitants of the coast from journeying into the interior, so that their monopoly of trade with the interior may not be interfered with."[1]

Similarly, suitable yarns were spun to dissuade the Mount Kenya peoples from venturing to the coast. However the moment the Wakuavi were defeated, sometime in the 1830s, the situation was radically changed and the Kamba monopoly was challenged by the coastal traders as well as by the Mount Kenya peoples.[2]

Swahili and Arab traders had posed a serious and effective challenge to the Kamba by the 1860s. Realizing the difficulties of tapping the interior trade by the Kamba route, which was not only in the hands of the Kamba but also vulnerable to the Galla attacks, they started to tap the interior trade via Taita and the Kilimanjaro region.[3] The traders journeyed from Mombasa to the south-western border of Kikuyuland, via Taita and Kilimanjaro, camping at Ngong, then known as Ngongo Bagas. From there they veered north-westwards to Mianzini and then crossed the

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1. Krapf's journal for November/December 1849, pp 281, 289.
2. It is not certain when the Wakuavi were defeated. Krapf, writing on 9 December 1847, noted that this occurred "some years ago", while Rebmann, in his journal for March/April 1849, wrote that this took place "in the last 15 years". Thomson estimated that it was about 1830. See CMS Archives CA5/016/M2, pp 102-3, 214, 270; and Thomson op cit. pp 414-5.
3. J. Wakefield, "Routes of Native Caravans from the Coast to the Interior of East Africa" in the Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, Vol. 40, 1870, pp 314-9.

Laikipia plateau to Uaso Nyiro, Meru and beyond. Thus they were able effectively to challenge the Kamba monopoly by tapping at the very source of ivory in the environs of Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya. The challenge was completely effective and by the 1870s, as New observed, "The people of Mombasa do a large trade with the interior. Their caravans visit Teita, Chaga, Ukambani and the Masai country, as far west as to the shores of the Victoria Nyanza, north-west to the regions about Lake Baringo and the confines of Samburu."[1] Northwards they were also sending caravans to Meru and as far as 'Reya', near Marsabit.[2] At the same time the Mount Kenya peoples appear to have got tired of the Kamba monopoly. Hitherto they seem to have resigned themselves to playing second fiddle in the interior trade; they were content to take ivory, tobacco and food to the Kamba villages in exchange for the coastal goods - cowrie shells, beads, salt and cloths - weapons and particularly poisons for their arrows as well as medicines, for which the Kamba had earned themselves a name.[3] Some of the Mount Kenya peoples appear to have been junior partners, quite often being responsible for the buying of the ivory in the interior and transporting it to the Kamba villages or alternatively waiting for them to come and collect the purchases themselves. Kivoi, for example, claimed to have left his ivory among the Kikuyu and Athi in 1849.[4] Indeed the more

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1. C. New: Life, Wanderings and Labours in Eastern Africa, London, 1873, pp 55. One caravan had reached Samburu by 1869. See Fischer, op cit. pp. 98.
2. Ibid, pp 460; Wakefield, op cit.
3. J.L. Krapf: Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours during an Eighteen years' Residence in Eastern Africa, London, 1860, pp 296-7, 311-6.
4. Krapf's journal for November/December 1849, op cit. pp 281.

enterprising traders from Embu, Mbere and Kikuyu were getting as far as the coast, albeit accompanying the Kamba caravans.[1] These occasional trips were bound to have significant repercussions in the organisation of the Kikuyu-Kamba trade. No doubt they whetted the appetite of the Mount Kenya peoples to have direct access to the coastal trade without having to go through the irksome Kamba middlemen. The fate of Kivoi and Krapf, in August 1851, seems to indicate this changing attitude.

Krapf met Rumu Gikandi, a Muembu trader who had visited Kivoi's village during one of his trading expeditions, who gave him a lot of tantalizing information about Mount Kenya and the surrounding regions. This stimulated Krapf's interest for a trip up the Thagana River. Kivoi arranged for one as he too wished to go north in order to collect ivory. It was during that journey that Kivoi died on the Mwea plains at the hands of robbers, and Krapf narrowly escaped with his life. In retaliation for Kivoi's murder, a small Embu caravan was attacked and its members duly murdered, as it was suspected that his death had been master-minded and effected by Embu and Mbere robbers. This was in fact not an isolated incident; Krapf was told that prior to this incident a Kikuyu caravan had also been put to death in retaliation for a similar offence committed in Kikuyuland against some Kamba traders.[2] These episodes highlight the problem of trade by the Kamba-Embu route. For a while, recognising the necessity of tapping the source of ivory to their north, the Kamba were nonetheless reluctant to allow their

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1. Krapf to CMS, 11 September 1852 and 30 August 1853 in CMS Archives, CA5/016/M2, pp. 454-5 and 519-20 respectively.
2. Krapf: Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours during an Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa, London, 1860, ~~op cit.~~, pp 311-33.

neighbours to have direct access to the coastal traders. In the event the Mount Kenya peoples were getting disenchanted with the Kamba monopoly, quarrels ensued and ultimately one lifeline of the Kamba trade was severed. Outmanoeuvred by the Swahili to the south and west, and their trading activities seriously hampered in the Mount Kenya region, and the Galla making it virtually impossible for them to extend their trade eastwards, the Kamba trade gradually declined and deteriorated into mere robbery. And by the end of the 19th century the Kamba, in the eyes of the Kikuyu, were only famous for kidnapping women and children whom they sold to the Arab slave dealers.[1] By then the coastal traders had not only ventured into the interior but had also effectively displaced the Kamba as the chief traders. The Kamba-Embu route had revived its former importance by the 1890s, caravans travelling from Takaungu to Sabaki, Athi, Ikutha, Kitui, Ndia - then known as Murang'a - Laikipia and Tharaka. Ainsworth noted in 1895 that this was "a route apparently much used" and that "Merang'a, a district in the Kikuyu country, is a place from which many slaves come".[2] He had earlier reported, in 1893, that Machakos was an old Arab and Swahili camp for slaves and ordinary trade, the Kamba doing a brisk trade in selling the Maasai and Kikuyu.[3] The last two decades of the 19th century were marked by particularly

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1. This view has been entrenched in the traditions by the story of Cinji and his sister. The relevant stanza runs:
   Cinji, Cinji! I have often warned you
   That I am constantly spied upon
   By three men from Ikamba.
2. Ainsworth to IBEACo., 31 January and 20 February 1895 in FO2/97. "Merang'a" referred to Ndia.
3. Ainsworth's Machakos District Report for 1893 in FO2/57.

strained relations between the Kikuyu and Kamba, and the situation was made worse by the Kamba attempts to kidnap Kikuyu women for sale. Nevertheless their relations were in many ways similar to those existing among the Kikuyu themselves or between the Kikuyu and the Maasai. That is, they were temperamental and spasmodic. Indeed while this squabbling was still going on, there were a few Kikuyu colonies in the northern and western parts of the Kamba country.[1] And when the Great Famine broke out among the Kamba, they flocked into Kikuyuland in large numbers in search of food. In fact the spreading of the famine to some parts of Kikuyuland is partly attributed to the fact that large reserves of food were sold to the starving Kamba in exchange for livestock or the coastal goods. The worsening of Kamba-Kikuyu relations was consequently often offset by the realization, by the Kamba, that Kambaland was prone to frequent famines. Hence they could ill-afford to antagonize the Kikuyu, from whom they had to rely for foodstuffs as occasion demanded. There was also another mitigating factor; some of the Kikuyu, especially those along the eastern border, had relatives among the Kamba through the intermarriages which had taken place, though on a smaller scale in comparison to the Maasai-Kikuyu intermarriages.

External trade - particularly that with the Kamba and Maasai - was an important aspect of Kikuyu society. Kikuyu women went to trade as far as Lake Naivasha, Narok, Kajiado and Nanyuki.[2] It involved elaborate preparations, and sometimes the participants had to endure untold hardships

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1. Ainsworth's Kamba Report of 1 January 1894 in FO2/73.
2. Fischer, op cit., pp 40, 99; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit. pp 253-5.

ranging from the fierce wild animals to the weather, not to mention the enemy or robber that might be lurking in the bushes along the trade routes - njira cia agendi. Trade, however, was largely in the hands of women, and was certainly not the sort of job that appealed to self-respecting warriors or elders. Consequently, as far as the male population was concerned, this was left exclusively in the hands of the poor men who were unworthy of military service due to physical disabilities or those who had no compunctions in engaging in such menial tasks. All told, there were few men who engaged in trade as they had no immunity like that which was extended to the womenfolk on trading expeditions. The women traders were drawn from the married middle-aged, but still strong, age group, lest unmarried girls excite the covetousness of the Kamba or the Maasai warriors. A trading expedition was invariably led by a hinga who knew the terrain well otherwise it would be difficult to locate the Maasai because of their seasonal transhumance. All the hingas knew the Maasai language well, being either Maasai descendants or having lived amongst them. The traders to the Kamba and Maasai countries were afforded hospitality in the villages or manyattas, which became the centres of their trading activities. More often than not, the traders established themselves in the homes of relatives, friends, or acquaintances. And in many cases particular Kikuyu localities traded with particular Maasai localities. It was of course an added advantage to have relatives among the Maasai, as this not only ensured a welcome hospitality but also gave them ample assurance of their safety and chances for success. This feature had important repercussions on the relations

between the Kikuyu and the Maasai; it enabled relatives on both sides to keep in touch with each other and also facilitated even further cooperation between specific Maasai and Kikuyu localities. On occasion temporary trading markets were established at the borders, and especially during the famines, when it was deemed essential to trade on a large scale in order to avert starvation among the Maasai. To the Maasai, and Kamba during famines, the Kikuyu offered a variety of foodstuffs such as njahi (dolichos lablab), maize, several varieties of millet flour, dried banana flour, green bananas and sugar cane. Other items of trade that the Maasai sought were honey, tobacco, earthenware cooking pots, a variety of calabash containers, spears, swords and red ochre. At normal times the Kamba sought first and foremost ivory and tobacco. In exchange for these items, the Kikuyu obtained beads, brass and iron wire, salt and cowrie shells, which had been obtained from the coast, and livestock. But each group offered special items - the Kamba offered poisons, medicines, chains, snuff boxes, bows and arrows and iron ore from the Ithanga Hills, while the Maasai offered skins, leather cloaks or livestock.

There was also considerable internal trade among the Kikuyu themselves. Indeed internal trade was probably more important and affected a larger population than the external trade. All transactions were in the form of barter, although by the end of the 19th century iron pieces, goats and beads were increasingly becoming forms of currency. The internal trade was well organized, and in Murang'a and Nyeri markets were held every fourth day. Among the oldest and best known markets were Gakindu, Gacatha, Karatina, Giitwa and Muthithi. On market days

no other functions of any significance took place in the vicinity of the market and, even if there were feuds or fighting going on between the ridges, these were halted on that particular day. Law and order was kept by a group of warriors whose responsibility it was to supervise the market. A variety of commodities were bartered in these markets; on one hand were the agricultural products which were bartered for the traditional handicrafts produced by the specialists. And on the other hand were other rare commodities, such as cowrie shells and beads, which the more adventurous members of the community had obtained from the Maasai or Kamba. The latter were highly valued for their aesthetic value and consequently were only bought by the well-to-do Kikuyu. The market gave those who confined themselves to farming a chance to exchange their foodstuffs with iron implements, salt, red ochre, pottery and leather garments. Some localities specialized in particular commodities. Gaturi and the contiguous areas, for example, were reputed for their poisons, medicines, tobacco and a host of iron goods such as knives, swords, spears and arrows. Gakindu too was known for its grinding stones and tobacco. The area around the Nyeri/Murang'a border seems to have been foremost in trading enterprises; not only did it extend its trade to the other parts of Kikuyuland but it had also trading contacts with Kamba traders. And they have retained their business acumen up to date. Inter-district trade was however restricted to the exchange of agricultural products and the few items made by the specialists except in times of famine. Murang'a sold red ochre, pig

iron, iron implements and tobacco to Kiambu in exchange for soda, skin garments, beads and cowrie shells which the Kabete obtained from the passing caravans or the Maasai. A similar pattern of trade existed between Murang'a and Nyeri. Throughout Kikuyuland there were well-kept roads, njira cia agendi (foot highways), from Nyeri to Kiambu, with bridges at the appropriate places.[1] These trade routes were cleared during the ituika in particular.

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1. von Hohnel, op cit. pp 334, 336, 346.

Chapter 4: The Social and Political Structure

By the end of the 19th century, Kikuyu society was patriarchal, uncentralized and highly egalitarian. These features were primarily based upon two main props: the family was the fundamental basis of its social structure, while the recruitment of males into corporate groups of coevals, through initiation, was the *sine qua non* for political interaction and organisation. The territorial organisation, however, was essentially fluid and *ad hoc* in nature. Consequently there were no formalized administrative units until the beginning of this century when these were carved out by the British administrators. Equally, no single group of people was charged with the responsibility for the maintenance of the social and political institutions of Kikuyu society. Indeed it was the duty and responsibility of each individual to safeguard that part of the society in which he was involved at any given time. Kikuyu society, therefore, was basically acephalous, with authority and power being widely diffused throughout its varied components. The failure of the British administrators to recognize this fact led to serious administrative difficulties, the more so when a few individuals were recognized as chiefs where none had hitherto existed in the traditional structure. In the event, this soured the already strained relations between the British and the Kikuyu, and led to further misunderstandings which, in turn, had far-reaching repercussions on their mutual outlook.

While most informants find it easy to describe the structure of Kikuyu society as it existed at the turn of the century, they offer no

clue as to its historical development. One of the traditions, for example, claims that at one time Kikuyu society was matriarchal and that the menfolk staged a coup d'etat which ended the female rule. Few informants could say, with any degree of confidence, when this occurred; the majority admit they do not know, while the others are tempted to associate this major social upheaval with the Iregi generation. All that we can say with any degree of certainty is that the transformation of Kikuyu society from a matriarchal to a patriarchal social system had taken place before they immigrated into Metumi and Gaki. Clearly it is difficult to establish the chronological sequence of even some of the major landmarks of Kikuyu social and political history. Consequently some of the time-references offered in this chapter are partly conjectural.

The intrusion of Kikuyu elements into the Gumba domain was significant because, as we have seen in Chapter 2, the Kikuyu might have borrowed some features of the mariika system from the Gumba. But this intrusion is hard to date. Those informants who offered Gumba and Karirau as names of generations placed them before the Agu and Tene.[1] And Lambert was told that the Agu generation was associated with expansion.[2] It is probable, therefore, that Kikuyu/Gumba contact dates back to at least the 16th century, if not much earlier. And by the middle of the 17th century the mariika system had taken root in Kikuyu society. Furthermore, during the period up to the Cuma in the

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1. See, for example, Beecher, A Kikuyu-English Dictionary, op cit. pp 68; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit. pp [illegible] 213, 218.
2. Lambert, mss, op cit., Chapter 6.

early 18th century, the Kikuyu were still small in numbers and hence it was still possible to retain very close kinship ties. This was also the era of pioneers. All the same, the organisation of all males into cooperative groups of coevals would have tended to loosen the kinship ties. Equally, the threat posed by the Gumba and Athi demanded some semblance of unity and cooperation over and above the kinship group. For these reasons, since the beginning of the 17th century, forces that cut across the kinship ties existed side by side with those that encouraged kinship solidarity. But the dispersal of the lineage groups towards Gaki and Kabete, particularly during the Ciira, in the first half of the 18th century, meant that it became increasingly difficult to retain close mbari solidarity. Thus inter-mbari cooperation was, no doubt, given impetus especially during the Mathathi, the second half of the 18th century, owing to the Maasai threat. Clear evidence of inter-mbari cooperation, however, is not forthcoming until the Iregi generation during the first half of the 19th century, when the Barabiu were driven out of northern Gaki. Yet, though it is discernible that external threat stimulated unity which cut across the kinship groups, loyalty to the kinship group still remained an important feature owing to the nature of the Kikuyu society that was emerging. The two competing loyalties ensured the survival of a series of petty and virtually independent groups divided from each other by streams and other physical features.

Kikuyu society was largely moulded by two factors - the mode of their initial immigration and the subsequent pattern of settlement.

As already noted, in Chapter 2, immigration into Kikuyuland was undertaken by either individual pioneers or small groups of kinship groups. Secondly, owing to the physical configuration of the Kikuyu plateau, the pioneers settled on separate ridges usually demarcated from each other by rivers, valleys or deep ravines. From the outset, consequently, each of the pioneering groups formed an independent and self-contained unit that often competed with other units in exploiting the natural resources of their new homeland. Admittedly the life of a pioneer was a difficult one, and in time the pioneers became legendary folk heroes. A pioneer had to endure the elements of nature as well as danger from human foes and the wild animals. In any case the clearing of the forest in itself was no mean job - it demanded a high degree of cooperation and industry by each pioneering group. Understandably the picture of the frontiersmen painted by folklore is that of men of courage, resourcefulness and hard work; in short, the type of hero that any good Kikuyu was exhorted to emulate. Thus the pioneers were the focus of esteem which, in time, turned into veneration, particularly because the pioneers assumed the role of mbari founders after several generations. As mbari founders and ancestors, the pioneers were entitled to reverence and were the object of prayers and propitiatory sacrifices that were part and parcel of the ancestor worship.[1] A mbari might inhabit a whole itura, mwaki or even rugongo, depending upon its size and circumstances. Where such a situation prevailed, mbari solidarity would be particularly strong, because these units, and

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1. For a discussion of Kikuyu religious ceremonies and rites, see Kabetu, op cit.

the itura in particular, were the focus of social and political interaction. The settling of quarrels and the regulation of local affairs, for example, were carried out on a kinship or itura basis, both of which coincided in some cases. For these reasons, the pioneering groups and their immediate descendants developed into very closely-knit communities with a deep sense of communal interest and spirit. Moreover their isolation from each other, competition or even actual hostility existing between the mbari or ridges, as was sometimes the case, deepened a stage further the localism and particularism that have come to be such a hallmark of the Kikuyu society. The era of small, closely-knit communities is likely to have lasted up to the middle of the 18th century.

Nonetheless the mbari, or ridge, owed allegiance and loyalty to a much wider community. To begin with, each mbari traced its origin to one of the ten Kikuyu clans and hence regarded itself as a direct descendant of the mythical ancestors of the Kikuyu people, Gikuyu and his wife Mumbi. In this vein, each individual Kikuyu saw himself as belonging to the wider community of Ciana cia or Mbari ya Mumbi, the family of Mumbi. But this wider community, of Mbari ya Mumbi, was of little practical importance in day to day life, where the clan, or a segment of it, was of more significance. Opinion varies, however, as to how many clans there are, but in the published lists they range from 9 to 13.[1] All the same, a careful study of the extant literature,

1. For example, Kenyatta (pp 5-6) enumerates 9; S.K. Gathigira (Miikarire ya Agikuyu, London, 1952, pp 1-2); G. Wamjau (Mihiriga ya Agikuyu, Nairobi, 1967, pp 3-5), Kabetu (pp 1-2) and Benson (pp 158) enumerate 10; Tate, 1910 (pp 237) enumerates 11 and Routledge (pp 21) 13. The clan names are Anjiru, Aceera, Agaciku, Ambui, Ambura/Akiuru/Ethaga, Angeci/Aithirandu, Angui/Aithiegeni, Angari/Aithekahuno, Airimu/Agathigia and Aicakamuyu.

taken in conjunction with the recently collected data, indicates definitely that there are 10 clans. The evidence stipulates that originally there were only 9 clans which were directly descended from the legendary nine daughters of Gikuyu and Mumbi. At one point in the history of the Kikuyu, an additional clan, the Aicakamuyu, was formed from the descendants of a girl, from one of the clans, who became an unmarried mother. Evidence for this assertion is not so readily forthcoming, but it is widely accepted by the Kikuyu that their clans are kenda muiyuru, 'full nine', meaning ten. This designation gained currency from the Kikuyu aversion, for magical reasons, from correctly counting either human beings or livestock, because it was widely believed that such an irresponsible act would be followed by dire consequences. On request, on the other hand, most informants enumerate ten clans, their beliefs notwithstanding.

These ten clans were already in existence at the time of the initial Kikuyu immigration into the plateau. And by the end of the 19th century, they were widely dispersed all over the Kikuyu plateau. But despite the long distances involved, they attempted to retain clan/mbari solidarity by holding occasional reunions, when kinsmen from Kabete, Metumi, Gaki and even Ndia were supposed to be present. Each clan appears to have had a particular spiritual home around the Metumi/Gaki border, where clan/mbari reunions are alleged to have taken place. The last reunion is claimed to have taken place towards the end of the last century.[1] No single clan was politically dominant, though some

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1. Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit, pp 52, 78.

of them were entrusted with specific public duties which they performed for and on behalf of the community at large. Each clan, however, was associated with specific traits and idiosyncracies and all of them had distinguishing marking for their beehives and livestock.[1] The Anjiru clan, for example, were reputed to be expert medicinemen, while the Ethaga were the rain makers as well as specialists in certain forms of witchcraft. In theory, at least, and distances notwithstanding, clansmen were supposed to act as a corporate body, particularly on important occasions such as during initiations, marriages, sale and purchase of land or on payment of blood money. Supposedly there was a strong bond linking clansmen, and wherever they met they were expected to assist each other if necessary. This however was very much dependent upon their size. Some were extremely large; the wealthier a clan was the larger it tended to become because, since this was a polygamous society, menfolk were able to marry as many wives as was practicable. A clan, or a section of it, with many sons wielded considerable influence and normally became relatively rich, wealth in those days being measured in terms of the number of livestock, wives and offspring that an individual had. A large, wealthy and influential clan - and the three normally went together - augmented its ranks by acting as a magnet which attracted non-clan and non-Kikuyu elements, such as the Maasai and Athi, into their fold. Within a comparatively short time, such elements were completely absorbed, thereby considerably enlarging the already substantial clans. This was however not always the case. Some of

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1. The most comprehensive discussion of the qualities and characteristics of the clans is in Wanjau, op cit.

these elements were never really absorbed and they remained as ahoi, tenants, of their host clans. Moreover with the increase in population there was considerable hiving-off of clan and mbari groups, and descendants of the original pioneers became widely dispersed and even tended to lose touch with each other. Owing to the increase in and the subsequent dispersal of the population, the original pattern of settlement was significantly modified in due course. It became no longer true that the descendants of a pioneer or members of a single clan were the sole inhabitants of an itura or even a ridge. The presence of the ahoi altered the original picture even further as it tended to loosen the mbari and kinship ties. For these reasons it became physically impossible to muster all the descendants of a pioneer. In any case some of them had by now developed into fully fledged mbari in their own right. Above all, even if it had been possible to muster all the clansmen, the gathering would have been too unwieldy for practical purposes. In the long run, therefore, it understandably became impossible to retain even a modicum of cohesion in the larger mbari, let alone within a clan. Ultimately the mbari, or a part of it depending upon its size and distribution, became the chief nerve of coordinating what were supposed to be essentially clan affairs. In fact in some parts of Gaki and Metumi the clan, as a social factor, had declined so much, due to fission, that by the beginning of this century when people there talked about the muhiriga, clan, they were in effect referring to the mbari. This is not surprising, since some of the clans were so widely dispersed that some of them even claimed

to be related to some of the Kamba and Maasai clans.[1] Presumably these clans may have had a common origin, particularly those that are common to both the Kikuyu and the Kamba.

To ensure the smooth running of mbari affairs, each family, nyumba, was regarded as a social and administrative unit under the headship of the father. In case of his absence or death his duties devolved upon the eldest son, or the eldest son of the senior wife in an extended family. The head of the nyumba was supreme in all family affairs, although if he was the son he would normally consult his brothers or the other close relatives before executing important matters. Mbari affairs, on the other hand, were coordinated by a mbari council comprised of all the initiated males who had attained elder status. But this rule was invariably flexible, and sometimes even warriors could participate in the deliberations of the council. Normally the council chose a titular head called muramati, guardian, whose primary duty was to regulate the day to day affairs of the mbari, such as mediating or, more important, being its spokesmen in intra-mbari affairs. It was the muramati, too, who administered the mbari land as well as calling the mbari council when the occasion arose. A muramati was normally the eldest son from the senior house line, githaku, but a junior but more capable man from a junior house line could be appointed also.

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1. K.R. Dundas, "Notes on the origin and history of the Kikuyu", op cit., Man, 1908, pp 136-9; McGregor pp 31.

Other factors contributed to the process of integrating the various elements that were to make up the Kikuyu, and they, too, appear to have taken place simultaneously with the development of kinship ties as an important social factor. The impetus to the development of the integrative forces was perhaps given by the external threats posed at various stages by the Gumba, the Athi and the Maasai. The first indication that there was coordination and concerted effort on the part of the various Kikuyu Mbari/clans dates back to the pioneering era. The defeat of the Gumba and the Athi around the Metumi/Gaki border, especially at Giitwa and Karirau, already mentioned in Chapter 2, could hardly have been accomplished by the efforts of a single kinship group or even a ridge. Such cooperation, coming as it did in a crucial formative period, must have gone a long way in cementing inter-ridge and inter-clan solidarity and integration. And by the beginning of the 19th century, the integration of the Kikuyu seems to have become a fact as well as an every-day occurrence. The coordination of their activities, social and political, on a district level, at the very least, seems by then to have become a permanent feature of their society. This is indicated by their cooperation, together with the Maasai and some of the Athi remnants, in driving away the Barabiu, and also by the defence tactics that they subsequently evolved which demanded close and widespread coordination. Apart from the need for defence, there were other social, economic and religious functions that required participation on a wider basis than the descent or itura group. Among such

functions were the organisation of the initiation rites and the public sacrifices, and prayers that were deemed necessary at various times and for various reasons, such as sacrifices for rain, in times of pestilence, at the beginning of the planting season and harvesting of the first fruits.[1]

In the long run, neither the sentimental notion of being Mbari ya Mumbi, nor the external threats, nor even the public cooperation needed during the religious ceremonies could be a match for the all-embracing and institutionalized mariika system that cut across the lineage and territorial groupings. The oral traditions do not give a clear picture as to when the Kikuyu began to adopt their particular mariika system. But we have definite evidence that the mariika system was in existence by the middle of the 17th century. The mariika system was the most effective counterpoise to the introvert tendencies of the mbari and the other fissiparous forces. Above all, it was the mariika system, more than anything else, that contributed to the bond that linked up all the Kikuyu and made them feel they were a single people.[2] Their importance cannot, therefore, be overemphasized; and significantly all the students of Kikuyu society have noticed, in varying

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1. Kabetu, op cit. pp 87-9.
2. For a discussion of the integrative role of the age groups in the uncentralized societies see S.N. Eisenstadt: From Generation to Generation, Age Groups and Social Structure, London, 1956; and by the same author "African Age Groups: A Comparative Study" in Africa, London, 1954, Vol. 24, pp 100-12.

degrees, the existence and importance of these coeval institutions.[1] However, partly because the Kikuyu age system has been inoperative in the 20th century, there has been considerable divergence of opinion as to the mechanism of their operation. To begin with, and in common with all societies, a role or status was ascribed to each individual according to his age; for example, ciana (children), mumo (young initiates), anake (warriors), and athuri (elders). But among the Kikuyu these were much more important and defined. The males especially passed through a prescribed pattern. Of more importance, however, both socially and politically, was the grouping of the initiates into age groups or sets. This was a corporate group of coevals recruited by age and whose sine qua non was circumcision. Each age set consisted of novices initiated at any given time, who remained members of it throughout their lives. Moreover each set was given a name which was distinct and institutionalized vis-a-vis those younger or senior to them. And their promotion too, particularly in the lower echelons, was by groups and not as individuals, with the exception of their promotion to the elder grade, which depended on other contingent factors as well.

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1. For a survey of Kikuyu age system see A.H.J. Prins: East African Age-Class System, Groningen, Jakarta, 1953, pp 40-57 and 98-118. H.R.Tate: "Further Notes on the Southern Gikuyu" in the Journal of African Society, op cit. pp 285-97; Leakey, mss, op cit. chapter 18; Dundas: "Kikuyu Rika" in Man, op cit. pp 180-2; Routledge, op cit. pp 9-11, 154-67; Lambert, mss, op cit. chapters 6, 7, 8; McGregor, op cit. pp 30-6; Cagnolo, op cit. pp 81-95, 120-5, 198-202; Hobley: Bantu Beliefs and Magic, op cit. chapter 5; Kenyatta, op cit. chapters 6 and 9; Barlow Papers and Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit. pp 193-214.

Failure to distinguish that, according to the Kikuyu age system, the word riika could refer to four different age groups has led to a considerable confusion, as is exhibited by the divergent mariika lists that have been hitherto published. In its broadest and most general sense it means a generation. This referred to the tribal moiety charged with the responsibility of running the tribal affairs at any given time, the conspicuous and distinctive feature of which was the ituika, the handing over process. The ituika took place every 30 to 40 years, during which one generation handed over to its successor the reins of power to conduct the political, judicial and religious functions. The two moieties were Mwangi and Maina or Irungu, and members were recruited according to birth. Sons were born into their grandfather's moiety, particularly the first-born sons who, in any case, were named after them. There was therefore a linking of grandfathers and grandsons, both of whom regarded each other as classificatory equals and exhibited a deep mutual attachment and affection. The moieties' names, Maina and Mwangi, seem to have been only applicable to the living generations; those which had died off were given a definite name, specific to them, and which noted the most outstanding feature of their period or reign.

In its more restricted sense, a riika meant an initiation set which comprised all those boys, and girls too, who had undergone circumcision in a given year. Circumcision was the only criterion for its membership and the set was normally named after the most outstanding event that occurred either shortly before or after their initiation. Several such initiation sets were grouped together to form a contingent

of an army, and for this purpose they were then given an all-embracing name which may have been the name of one of the initiation sets - normally the first one to be initiated - or a totally different one. This army contingent or regiment was also called a riika.

While the boys underwent a muhingo, closed period, during which no initiation took place, it was considered to be ritually unwise to include the girls in the ban. Girls were hence initiated every year. If their initiation coincided with that of the boys, as a rule they associated themselves with and acquired the same irua, circumcision, name as the boys. But on those occasions when initiation was exclusively female in composition, it was given an individual name which distinguished it from all the others. Hence the fourth sense in which the word riika could be used was in reference to an exclusively female initiation.

Compared to the various ceremonies that every Kikuyu underwent from birth to death, none was more significant than initiation. Its importance was underscored by the fact that it was the basic prerequisite for the attainment of full adult social status. "The festivals and rites associated with both marriage and death", Routledge observed, "hold but a small place in Kikuyu imagination compared to that greatest of all ceremonies whereby the boy becomes a man and the girl a woman."[1] The initiation rites dramatized the transition of an individual from childhood to adulthood. They highlighted too the symbolic divesting of childhood characteristics especially because of their emphasis on

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1. Routledge, op cit, pp 154.

the complete and symbolic separation from the world of youths. Hence initiation conferred social status, and the erstwhile youths became full members of the community. Above all, it was also at this particular juncture that the neophytes were instructed in the tribal lore. This instruction was considered to be just as important as the physical aspects of the initiation rites, ndemengo; indeed any individual who did not participate in the educational aspect of the initiation, kuumithio, was not considered to have been fully or properly initiated. He would remain throughout his life the target of humiliating taunts from his irua mates.

In the absence of any formal centres of instruction, initiation served as one of the main educational channels in the society. This education ranged from personal hygiene and the etiquette henceforth expected between an individual and the rest of the community, to instruction in the traditional lore. "Respect children and elders," they were implored, "and respect women and your riika mates." Equally the new initiates qualified for the allocation of important roles, responsibilities and privileges in the social system. And among themselves the members of an age set demanded and encouraged cooperation, solidarity and mutual help. As a result age groups exhibited a strong sense of comradeship and fraternal egalitarianism. Indeed, riika mates looked upon each other as actual blood brothers or sisters, depending upon their sex, and behaved accordingly. The spirit of comradeship was so strong among riika brothers that it occasionally even led to a sharing of their wives!

As adult members of the community, the initiates were expected to play their part in the maintenance of the status quo. In particular, the male initiates became members of the warrior group whose primary duty was the defence of the country. For this purpose, it was deemed essential to have an army. This army consisted of the junior and senior warriors together with the remnants of the retired regiment who had not yet been fully absorbed into the elder group and who, by virtue of their experience and knowledge, acted as advisers to their juniors. The newly initiated youth were in effect a corps of cadets, and the senior warriors did not relinquish their responsibility for the defence of the country or retire from active service until they were satisfied that the junior warriors were experienced enough to take over their functions. It took approximately 14 years for each warrior group to be completely formed and ready to assume full responsibility which was entrusted to the warrior corps. This period of formation consisted of 5 or 9 years of a muhingo, or closed period, and 9 or 5 years of pupillage as junior warriors respectively, depending upon whether an individual lived in southern or northern Kikuyuland. In practice, the senior warriors did not retire until a new batch of initiates were ready to take over from the junior warriors, who had in the mean time undergone their pupillage. The closed period, during which no boys were initiated, served two main purposes. On the one hand it ensured that at initiation there were enough mature candidates capable of shouldering the responsibilities that would devolve upon them as a warrior corps. On the other it provided a useful gap during which

the previous initiates, now junior warriors, consolidated themselves as an age set while at the same time acquiring the essential experience of their impending political and military functions before being saddled with the responsibility of executing them and ensuring adequate pupillage of the next batch of initiates. However, the retirement of the senior warriors was a gradual process and there was no ceremonial promotion comparable to the Maasai eunoto. Nevertheless, once the junior warriors became of age, this was a signal for the senior warriors to marry and retire to a more peaceable life. But there was nothing to stop them continuing with active military service after marriage and many of them did so. Public opinion and family pressure were so strong, however, that it dictated their retirement sooner rather than later.

The promotion of the junior warriors and the simultaneous recruitment of the new initiates into the junior warrior grade ushered in a closed period. Its duration depended upon whether one lived in northern or southern Kikuyuland; it was 9 years in Gaki and the contiguous parts of Metumi, and 5 years in the rest of Metumi and Kabete. This was followed by an open period of initiation, which lasted for 5 or 9 years in Gaki and Kabete respectively. All those initiated in the same open period formed a junior warrior set embracing all the annual irua sets. In turn, a junior warrior set formed a contingent of the army with its own distinctive songs and shield emblems.[1] Military service apart, the warrior corps formed a reservoir of able-bodied

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1. Kenyatta, op cit., pp 206.

manpower for performing other public functions. They acted as executive officers to the elders, being entrusted with such activities as policing duties in the markets and during the festivals, the arrest of habitual criminals and the calling of public gatherings such as ibata, during which rules and prohibitions were promulgated or other important pronouncements made. When it was deemed necessary, a njama ya anake, warriors' council, gathered and scoured the country, each part in turn, punishing habitual criminals and any other offenders. But the njama only arose when the situation had deteriorated to almost unmanageable proportions. Warriors were also entrusted with the more difficult tasks which were regarded as a man's job. Such duties included the clearing of virgin land or performing any other arduous jobs. Others included herding livestock, planting specified crops - such as yams, bananas and sugar cane - providing building material as well as building houses and cattle kraals. Otherwise the warriors were a privileged elite which to a casual observer did nothing else except gorge enormous amounts of food and meat. Their sustenance, for example, was in the hands of all the people and not just their own lineage groups. In effect, they were fed by the villagers wherever they happened to be. This generosity was in appreciation of their service to the community; and they were honoured and respected to the extent that it was said of them "Mwanake ni kienyu kia Ngai", the warrior is a piece of God.

Despite the enormous power and privileges in the hands of the warriors, they were on the whole adequately controlled. Like all the

other age groups, they were strictly controlled by their own council, which had the overall command of their activities including even personal behaviour. The junior warriors had their own council, njama ya anake a mumo, and so did their seniors. Within each territorial unit there was a corresponding council of warriors, each with a nominal leader, muthamaki. The muthamaki acted as the chief spokesman for the territorial warriors, but his chief duty was to control and supervise their welfare and activities, to reprimand wrong-doers and also to assemble the warriors when necessary. Promotion from the junior to senior warrior class was a gradual process, and each initiate had to pay an entrance fee to his seniors before he could be admitted into their ranks. Within each warrior group, there was a rigid code of behaviour to ascertain that a warrior did not bring shame to the riika. Such an offence was considered to be a heinous crime and was punished by severe fines. In return the warriors defended their honour individually and collectively as honour was considered to be the highest tribute that could be bestowed upon them by the general public, especially when public acclaim was embodied in songs and dances. Accordingly, the age set acted as a very important agent of social control and thereby contributed enormously to social and political stability.

To ensure that there were adequate defence arrangements, a number of steps were taken. Nearly all the matura were built on the brows of the ridges, and where possible on hilltops. The homes, especially those along the frontier, were also effectively and meticulously

fortified.[1] Along the frontiers the villages were in effect forts, ihingo (pl.; sing. kihingo), and in many respects similar to the Emergency villages which were built during the Mau Mau war. When the site for a new village was earmarked, the ground was cleared, while at the same time making sure that the larger trees and undergrowth of the primeval forest surrounding it were left intact. Trees were cut in such a way that they were not completely separated from their roots; they were then felled outwards where they were left growing in their fallen position. A fence of tangled branches and trees was thus formed, which in the course of time became overgrown with thorny creepers such as mutanda mbogo or pterolobium stellatum, thereby making it impregnable. A single clearance was made to form an entrance to the village and this was strongly palisaded with strong poles on either side. On either side of the entrance, moreover, deep holes were dug, fitted with sharpened stakes and covered with brushwood. A number of gates were also constructed along the main path leading to the kihingo. At nightfall these gates were closed and entrance to the village could only be gained through a secret passage at the back of the village. This secret passage was particularly useful during attacks, because women, children and livestock could always flee through it, leaving the men to fight. No-one could enter through it without being heard, and in any case its existence was only known to the members of the kihingo. Where the situation warranted it, a pit with a wicker drawbridge was

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1. Leakey, mss, Chapter 5; Boyes, pp 83, and MacDonald, op cit. pp 110; Gathigira, op cit., pp 9; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit, pp 135, 226.

dug at the main entrance. The primeval forest left intact around such ihingo concealed them very effectively. As Hinde noted, "So well concealed are the Wakikuyu villages that it is possible to pass within a few yards of one without having any idea of its existence."[1] In contrast to the ihingo at the frontier, the villages in the interior of Kikuyuland were not so strongly fortified or enclosed as a single unit. They were largely a collection of individual homesteads built close to each other. But even there each homestead was lightly fortified.

At the entrance to the kihingo, there was a guard house, boi, where warriors kept watch for enemies. In the interior, guardhouses existed on each ridge, and it was there that the warriors held their consultations. In some places it was only the members of the njama ya ita who were allowed to sleep in the guardhouses. If a Maasai raid was imminent a group of warriors were handpicked from each itura to man the guard posts at the border.[2] These were called miriri, and while manning the border posts food was contributed by all the villages and daily taken to them by the girls. This was the closest that the Kikuyu came to creating a standing army. Each miriri could keep watch for as long as four months before being relieved. Evidently there was an elaborate system of defence and it was perhaps for this reason that the Maasai found it usually politic to attack just before dawn, or at night, when they had the chance of a surprise attack. And even then

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1. S.L. & H. Hinde: The Last of the Masai, London, pp 21.
2. See notes on warfare in the Unsorted Miscellaneous File in Barlow Papers.

their attacks were confined to the borders to ensure a quick retreat if need be. Nevertheless, the concept of a standing army, probably only dates back to the beginning of the 19th century.

It appears that the perfection of Kikuyu military organisation was very closely associated with the degree of the external threat. Apart from the Gumba and Athi, the Laikipiak Maasai appear to have been the only group that presented a major threat as far back as the first half of the 18th century. This threat had two important consequences: some of the Kikuyu, from Gaki, migrated towards the southern frontier, where it was more peaceful. Secondly, the Gaki reorganised their warrior groups in order to meet the new menace. No doubt the Maasai system of warrior organisation influenced them. Then there followed a period of peaceful coexistence between the Gaki and Laikipiak which was not broken until early in the 19th century, when the Barabiu invaded the highlands. According to Kikuyu traditions it was during the Barabiu raids that the Kikuyu perfected their military tactics under the guidance of their Maasai allies. So, when Kikuyu/Maasai hostilities finally broke out again in the 1880s the Kikuyu were well prepared not only to defend themselves but also to mount raids against the Maasai.

The actual organisation of the warrior corps was based on the territorial units as well as the riika.[1] Each ridge, or mwaki depending upon the size, had a military unit which consisted of a junior and senior regiment and also a njama, the njama constituting the leadership

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1. Gathigira, op cit. pp 81-3; Leakey, mss, op cit. Chapter 25; Lambert, 1965, op cit. chapter 8; Kenyatta, op cit. pp 205-8.

of such a military unit. In times of need, say when making a large raid, the warriors from a number of ridges combined to form a single army, but each military unit remained under the command of their particular ridge njama. The chief coordinator of all the activities of the warriors was the njama ya ita. It was their duty to summon the warriors, guukiria ita, to seek the advice of the medicinemen, kuragura, to scout, spy and reconnoitre on the disposition of the enemy. It was their duty, too, to supervise the division of the spoils of war after a successful raid. The njama did not act as a body in all situations; some members were entrusted with the reconnoitring and were called athigani while others consulted the medicinemen and hence carried the muthaiga, medicine for good luck, kinandu, a flask of sacred oil, and githitu, charm. These articles were supposed to ensure a successful raid. Still others were entrusted with ceremonial functions, such as prayers before a raid, or performing any other rites that the medicineman might have instructed them to perform before the actual attack. Sometimes the medicineman instructed them to make a sacrifice in the plains just before the raids. They also normally prayed before the attack. The njama, and particularly the athigani, had supreme authority over the activities of the rank and file. The njama was normally chosen from the cream of the warriors and only the brave, experienced and courageous ones were admitted into their ranks. In some places only the first-born were admitted. To all intents and purposes they were the officer corps. Second in importance and experience were the gitungati, reserve ranks. This group consisted

of the natural leaders and had to be well built, strong, brave, athletic, clever, modest and morally upright. They were appointed by virtue of their demonstrated ability while they were still young warriors. This distinguished rank of warriors only fought when the others found themselves hard-pressed and unable to rout the enemy. And as their name implies - derived from tungata, to take care of - their chief duty was to remain behind and guard the rest of the army against a surprise attack by the enemy during the retreat. Thus they were the rear-guard. The vanguard was called ngerewani, or thari. It also consisted of brave and experienced warriors, as they were the chief combatants. Their duty was to capture livestock while at the same time carefully guarding the carriers of the githitu and kinandu. It was essential to make sure that they were not captured by the enemy as it was considered to be a calamity should these be lost. The ngerewani also consisted of some, the younger and newly initiated, warriors who, because of their bravery, merited such honour. It was this younger group who were entrusted with the initial surprise attack and capture of the enemy's livestock. Finally, there were the older generation of warriors, some junior elders, weak warriors or the young and inexperienced initiates. All these belonged to the murima or mbutu, whose main duty was to drive away the captured stock. They also carried off food or any other loot, thus leaving the main body of warriors to fight unhampered.

The chief purpose of the raids was to capture livestock. The immediate aim of the thari consequently was to kill the herders, capture their stock and then hand them over to the mbutu to be driven away as

soon as possible and, in any case, before the enemy had had a chance to organize a counter-attack. Hence surprise was one of the most essential tactics in order to minimize fighting which, for this reason, was neither necessary nor very common. Smash-and-grab tactics were the order of the day, except when the livestock chanced to be well guarded. To achieve this the athigani took great pains to recommend attacks only when and if they were satisfied that the livestock were unguarded. Such occasions occurred when the Maasai were preoccupied with feasts or ritual ceremonies. Besides, bloodthirsty or wanton killing of women and children was strictly forbidden, and it was taboo for a warrior to rape or seduce women prisoners during a raid. Prisoners could always be ransomed, failing which they remained in Kikuyu country to become full members of their captor's family. Spoils of war were divided by the njama according to an accepted procedure. First and foremost, the medicineman got his ndang'uru, an animal of outstanding features chosen by him as a sign of the herd to be captured. That done the njama selected their own spoils, after which the warriors who had acquitted themselves particularly well in battle did the same. The remainder of the loot was then shared according to the number of ridges that had participated in the raid. To each according to his deeds was the rule of the game. For example, those who had killed an enemy got more cattle as well as taking the personal effects of the defeated foe. Moreover they were entitled to sing kaari (a warrior's song of triumph after killing an enemy) among their relatives, during which the relatives were required by custom to offer them presents in

the form of livestock or whatever they could afford. However, not all the raids were so elaborately organized. Sometimes the more daring and adventurous warriors raided in small groups, especially when they were aware that their prospective victims were less stringent with their defence precautions.

When the junior warriors became of age, their seniors were expected to terminate their active military service in due course, to marry and thereby qualify for admission to the next stage of their life - the council of elders or kiama.[1] This was a social status grade, not an age set, and was divided into two main groups. At the lowest level were the junior elders, a group that consisted of all those men who had married and hence ceased to be on active military service. In order to be recognized as junior elders they had to pay a fee of one mburi, goat, and a calabash of beer. Even then they were not regarded as full members of the kiama, and had more in common with the warriors than the elders. They could, for instance, still go on raiding or be called upon to take up arms against the raiders when necessary. As a result of this they were called kamatimu, carriers of spears, or muranja. The important step in their promotion to elderhood came when their first child was circumcised. This was an important event in their lives, as it properly and effectively marked their transition from warriorhood to the full status of junior elder. On this occasion it was the custom

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1. For the organisation of the ciama, see Gathigira, op cit. pp 63-8; Lambert, 1965, op cit. chapter 9; Benson, op cit. pp 6-7; Prins, op cit. pp 40-57; Hobley: Bantu Beliefs and Magic, op cit. pp 209-15; Barlow Papers; McGregor, op cit. pp 34; Kabetu, op cit. pp 93-4; Routledge, op cit. pp 197-204.

for every parent to pay a fee of one goat and beer before being allowed to have their children circumcised. It appears therefore that payment of a fee at the initiation of a first-born child was, strictly speaking, not a fee paid towards promotion to elderhood. This argument is reinforced by the fact that the council of the junior elders was called kiama kia mburi imwe, the council of one goat. Be that as it may, in actual practice the procedure followed meant that a man who aspired to be a junior elder paid two goats before he had actually attained that status. The junior elder grade can therefore be conveniently subdivided into two minor groups - the newly married warriors who still continued to participate in raiding and who carried spears and thus earned the epithet kamatimu, and those who had had their first-born children circumcised hence qualifying to be called elders (athuri). The latter group carried white staffs - mithigi (pl.), muthigi (sing.) - together with loosely tied mataathi leaves, leaves of clausena anisata, as symbols of their office. This was essentially a training grade comparable to the junior warriors. The kamatimu, in particular, were not entitled to judge a case, let alone officiate in any ceremonial or ritual activity. All of them were mainly engaged as assistants who acted as errand boys for their seniors as part of their training. In contrast the athuri, though regarded as junior elders, could theoretically hear minor cases which did not involve serious offences.

Depending upon individual circumstances, the junior elders paid a further fee of two goats and beer to mark the end of their period of apprentice-ship. They were thereby admitted into the kiama proper and

regarded henceforth as senior elders. As symbols of their office they wore ear-rings and carried blackened staffs and mataathi, or maturanguru leaves tied with a twisted string. The council of senior elders was known by a variety of names such as kiama kia mburi igiri (the council of two goats), kiama kiria kinene (the big council), kiama gia athamaki, (the council of leaders) or simply as the kiama (the council). It was the highest authority in the land vested with executive and judicial functions. Like its junior, the kiama could be sub-divided into several sections according to their varied functions. But these sections varied in prominence and importance with the locality. Some elders, by talent and inclination, were proficient in judicial or religious affairs. By and large this group tended to be more influential in those spheres than their comrades. In particular, there was an inner core of prominent elders which virtually ran the affairs of the kiama. Special qualifications, too, were necessary before an elder could be permitted to officiate in religious rites. And like the athigani, among the warriors, these officials formed, in some parts, an inner circle of the kiama called kiama kia maturanguru, so-called because of the tradition of carrying maturanguru leaves as a symbol of their office. Where this custom obtained, they were also the only athuri permitted to wear ear-rings. This appears to have been the case in Kabete, where they were called kiama kia ukuru, the council of old age. No such distinctions appear to have been prevalent in Gaki or Metumi, where the religious officials were merely regarded as part of the inner circle of the kiama. Their duty was to officiate in all public rites and prayers to Ngai on

such occasions as praying for rains, planting or harvesting ceremonies or conducting cleansing rites in times of adversity. Each territorial unit had a corresponding kiama: at the lowest level was the village council which dealt with village affairs, and above it were the mwaki, ridge and district councils. Each of them had a leader or spokesman, muthamaki, who acted as their coordinator. But it was not all the elders who actively participated in the council affairs. In order to play any significant role in its functions an elder had to be a member of the ruling generation, a rule that did not apply to the warrior corps.

The most significant function of these councils was perhaps to administer justice. This was carried out through arbitration by a court of the kiama assessors.[1] The primary purpose of the judicial process was to maintain peace and stability in the society. Under the customary law, there was no imprisonment, compensation being the main method of concluding most litigations. The assessors involved in the hearing of a case depended very much on the type and number of people that it affected. Within the kinship group, the settlement of disputes was the responsibility of the head of the family or muramati, depending upon the seriousness of the offence committed or the number of families involved. A ndundu ya mucii, mbari or muhiriga, the private bench of the family or clan, was assembled for the purpose. However, disputes

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1. For the procedure followed in such benches and the amount of compensation payable, see Tate in the Journal of African Society, Vol. 9, op cit. pp 238-54; Cagnolo, op cit. pp 147-59; Hobley, Bantu Beliefs and Magic, op cit. pp 215-9, 230-4; Routledge, op cit. pp 204-21; Kenyatta, op cit. pp 214-30; Kabetu, op cit. pp 94-101.

involving members of different mbari were settled by the village council or a bigger council, depending upon the seriousness of the dispute and those it involved. The deciding factor, all the same, was the litigants themselves, who normally made their wishes known by requesting members of the appropriate kiama to start proceedings. Initially the disputants attempted to settle their differences privately, failing which they agreed to refer the case to the elders for arbitration. Their evidence, together with that of any witnesses, was then heard. After this the case was opened for a general discussion by those present. Normally the hearing was public and anyone could express an opinion on the points raised or at issue. Included in the audience were the junior elders, and even some of the warriors who wished to be acquainted with the legal procedure. Indeed it was partly through attendance at such hearings that most people acquired experience and knowledge of the customary law. Finally a smaller group, ndundu ya kiama, inner council, retired to consider judgement. The ndundu consisted of the senior elders but excluded anyone with a direct or indirect interest in the case. Meanwhile, before the case could be heard, each litigant produced a goat as the court's fee and this was duly slaughtered and roasted during the ndundu session. The ndundu having arrived at a decision, the meat was then eaten and judgement pronounced. If any of the aggrieved party felt dissatisfied with the verdict, he could appeal and the case was heard all over again. In such a case the elders who had heard the case initially coopted other athamaki from the other villages or miaki as the case may be. This procedure was followed because the Kikuyu

judicial councils were essentially ad hoc; there was also no formal distinctions between the elders who constituted the village or ridge council. The composition of the bench depended on the individual case. Obviously any litigant preferred his case to be heard by the senior elders whose knowledge of precedence and impartiality could be relied upon. It was common, therefore, for the famous ones to be in demand at all levels.

After the pronouncement of the judgement, the guilty party was expected to pay compensation within two days. And although the elders did not use power to enforce their judgements, it was common knowledge that they could resort to religious sanctions with dire consequences. Nothing was more feared than a public curse by the elders, some of whom it has been noted, were the highest ritual and ceremonial personalities in the land. Moreover, a person who persistently flouted the judgements of the elders could always be ostracized by the society or, worse still, arouse public vengeance such as having all his crops mowed down. Close relatives of a culprit would also put the maximum moral pressure on such a man to pay compensation, or else pay it themselves rather than risk the prospect of a public curse, the efficacy of which it was feared could not only affect the culprits and their immediate families but also their distant kinsmen as well. It was rarely, therefore, that a culprit deliberately disregarded the judgement of the elders. On that account, if for no other reason, the decisions of these courts were obeyed by common consent.[1]

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1. See the notes on Kiama in KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1.

In a situation where the elders could not determine the guilty party or where one of the parties persistently maintained his innocence, the normal course of action was to revert to trial by ordeal. The accused could take an oath, lick a red-hot knife, or else the medicine-man could use his skill to determine who was guilty. In the more serious cases, such as sorcery, theft and murder, the accused swore their innocence by killing a ram, kuringa thenge. Worse still, they took the more dreaded githathi oath, using a special stone used for the occasion. Habitual offenders, particularly those found guilty of what were considered to be serious crimes, were publicly put to death by the muingi or king'ore, the people. Before a person could be publicly put to death, consent had to be granted by his close relatives who, in any case, were the first to stone or set him on fire, depending upon the method of punishment. But for the lesser offences customary law decreed the appropriate compensation payable for each offence. Rules of precedence were particularly apt in such cases. Theft was considered to be a serious crime, especially theft of livestock or honey, which was comparable to causing bodily harm. Injury of a person, and theft of a goat or honey, were compensated for by payment of 10 goats and a ngoima. Much more serious was homicide. Compensation for homicide, however, depended upon the relation between the murderer and his victim and also the victim's sex. Compensation for murder of a man was 100 goats and 10 ngoima for the elders, whereas for the murder of a woman it was 30 goats and 3 ngoima for the court fee. Surprisingly no charge was preferred against any person who helped himself to cooked

food or any plants intended for replanting such as sweet potato vines and banana suckers.

It has been frequently mentioned that the various social segments and territorial divisions were under a muthamaki. It is time to examine how he was chosen and the extent of his power.[1] Firstly, it cannot be overemphasized that the muthamaki, spokesman, was no more than the chairman of a territorial unit or leader of his riika. His powers were very circumscribed and he could only act in accordance with the wishes of his peers who delegated power to him. He was not a chief; the idea of chiefs had no basis in the political institutions of the Kikuyu. Chiefs were a mere creation of the British administrators at the beginning of this century.[2] Dundas pin-pointed the heart of the matter when he concluded that "The history of the institution of these chiefs shows positively that they are mere creations of the Govt."[3] Equally important was the manner in which a muthamaki emerged. There were no formal elections and the Kikuyu believed that uthamaki nduoyagiruo iguru, uciaraguo na mundu, a leader is born not made.

From an early age, some of the boys showed a flair for potential leadership. They asserted themselves as leaders of their dances and the other exploits of the young boys. By the time that they neared initiation their aptitude for leadership was not only apparent but also generally recognized. It was, however, only after becoming junior

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1. Lambert, 1965, op cit. pp 100-6.
2. Routledge, op cit. pp 195; Cagnolo, op cit. pp 24; Dundas in the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Vol. 45, 1915, op cit. pp 238.
3. See a review of Chiefs and Ciama by C.C. Dundas, 1912, in KNA/PC/CP/1/4/1, pp 61-77.

warriors that their role was publicly acknowledged by their being made captains of their army contingents. If they acquitted themselves honourably at this stage, they become the leaders of the senior warriors on their promotion. As athamaki of the warrior corps they wielded considerable power and a distinguished leader of the warriors became widely respected. Normally they retained this status on promotion to eldership. But this was not always the case; the qualities essential to a war leader were not necessarily applicable to the elder status. In fact some became successful war leaders but failed as elders and vice versa. The emergence of and recognition as a muthamaki was a slow process and no single qualification was decisive - it was the general consensus of opinion that mattered. Rather it was an individual's personality and achievement that counted throughout his life. Self-assertion, courage, self-confidence and diligence were important assets for a warrior, while wisdom, tact, self-control and wide experience were some of the qualities looked for in an elder who aspired to be a muthamaki. As seen above, at the elder grade some elders specialized in particular fields - some became important in judicial matters (athamaki a cira or aciri), others in ceremonial rites (athamaki a kirira) and still others became general leaders (athamaki a bururi) with no special responsibility. All of them, nevertheless, were just "the prominent personalities in a democratic system, and there was nothing hereditary about uthamaki ..."[1] Athamaki were consequently neither chiefs nor kings. They were simply the first or leading

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1. Lambert, 1965, op cit. pp 105-6.

personalities among peers. Moreover their role was specific and rigidly controlled by the other peers. Naturally they could neither negotiate nor make treaties without the consent of the rest of the elders. The attempt by a few athamaki to be and act as chiefs landed them, and their British supporters, into serious trouble. This was the genesis of many of the administrative problems encountered by the early British administrators. The traditional leaders were simply ignored, and this alone was enough to lead to resentment and hostility on their part. Worse still, nonentities, including some who were not even Kikuyu let alone elders, were created into chiefs simply because they had ingratiated themselves with the British by being porters or presenting them with gifts.[1] Others had acquired "chits" from a passing and obliging Mzungu, European, and this was taken as a sign of their friendship to the white man who reciprocated accordingly. One of the so-called chiefs, Wangu Makeri, was a woman who became a chief simply because Karuri spent his nights at her house on his way to Murang'a, the district headquarters.[2] More often than not such chiefs became extremely unpopular, particularly when they had to enforce unpopular measures. In their turn, they upheld their authority by autocratic and high-handed methods which caused a lot of misunderstanding and bad blood on both sides. In the long run it became obvious that

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1. A notable example was Kibarabara, a Maasai, who had served the Government as leader of Maasai levies against the Kikuyu and as an office boy at Fort Hall. See autobiographical notes in KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1.
2. Scorn and malicious rumours were heaped upon Wangu. She was accused of behaving like a man by dancing kibata naked. No doubt her appointment outraged the conservatives.

the chiefs had backed the right horse and the Kikuyu, realizing that they had lost the day, came to terms with the new order. And in so doing some of their traditional values and norms - such as their egalitarian outlook, emphasis on hard-work and self-assertion - stood them in good stead. Gradually they adapted themselves and at the same time acquired some of the techniques henceforth demanded if they were to make headway in the new era. It was perhaps some of these traditional features that have made them play such a significant role in the political and economic life of Kenya.

To conclude, social and political interaction among the Kikuyu were based on descent groups and the age system or mariika. Or as they put it - Nyumba na riika itiumagwo, one cannot contract out of ones family or age set. While the descent group was the primary factor governing the social relationships, the age system was of equal importance. The system of age differentiation, and in particular the organisation of adult males into age sets, acted as a bridge which enabled individuals to become members of a wider community that surpassed the kinship or territorial relations. Recruitment into a new age set coincided with an individual's transition from childhood into adulthood. This phenomenon was marked by an important rites de passage - initiation. Consequently initiation was not a private concern but a public and communal rite. It was of crucial importance to the community as a whole because it conferred social status to the initiates. To the Kikuyu, initiation was of fundamental importance. "It stands," Prins has rightly noted,

"for the whole values embodied in the age-class system with all its 'educational, social, moral and religious implications'. It is a conditio sine qua non for being a real Kikuyu, and the visible and outward sign of adhering to the tribal culture."[1] It is small wonder, therefore, that failure to recognize this fact landed the missionaries into a quagmire of recrimination with their adherents, when the former demanded that the latter should renounce female circumcision or else face excommunication.[2] Circumcision was not merely a mutilation of the body, as the missionaries would have had them believe, but also a vehicle for the transmission and perpetuation of the norms and values of the Kikuyu cultural traditions. Through it individuals gained membership of an age set which provided them with "a new focus of identification with the society, a new frame of reference through which they relate(d) themselves to the total society and identify(ied) themselves with its values and symbols."[3] Furthermore the grouping of adult males into age sets provided a system of ranking on the basis of which important duties - such as military service, police and judicial duties - were allocated. It was therefore the basis on which to exercise authority in the regulation of public affairs. In this respect, it virtually constituted the Kikuyu system of Government, particularly because it was the basis of political organisation and interaction. Concomitant with the allocation of duties and responsibilities went privileges. Besides their religious and educational functions, the age

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1. Prins, op cit. pp 102.
2. C.J. Rosberg and J. Nottingham: op cit. Chapter 4.
3. Eisenstadt: African Age Groups: A Comparative Study" op cit. pp 107.

sets played another key role. In a society that was uncentralized and highly egalitarian, they had a vital integrative function. Finally, the generation and age sets were, as Lambert pointed out, "a series of dynasties with names of which important happenings in the tribal history may be associated. They take the place of reigns and to some extent dates in the histories of literate peoples."[1] In the event, they serve as a useful guide in the attempt to establish a framework of chronology for the history of the Kikuyu.

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1. Lambert, mss, op cit. pp 384.

Chapter 5 Prelude to British Rule

The course of the history of the Kikuyu was radically altered by the momentous events that took place in the last quarter of the 19th century. By the mid-19th century, only a handful of Kikuyu had managed to reach the coast, while others had had a glimpse of the outside world by coming across the white man and the Swahili nearer home in the Kamba villages. This trend, of increasing contact with the outside world, was one of the chief features of the second half of the 19th century and culminated in the last resort in the colonization of the Kikuyu country by the white man. The Kikuyu were steadily drawn into the orbit of Swahili commercial activity and enterprise, a process that was facilitated by the decline of the former Kamba commercial empire which had reached its nadir by the 1870s. Hard on the heels of the Swahili commercial intrusion into the hinterland, came the Imperial British East Africa Company (hereafter IBEACo.), founded by philanthropists, businessmen and empire builders, and which was granted a royal charter in 1888. In turn the IBEACo. paved the way for the subsequent establishment of the British administration, from 1895 onwards, and thereby opened the way for all the new forces that were to influence the development of the Kikuyu in this century. Administrators, settlers, traders and missionaries poured into the Kikuyu country bringing with them what was, in the Kikuyu's eyes, a new and strange way of life with its sometimes incomprehensible demands and ideas. Gradually the Kikuyu realized that they had to come to terms with the new order and the period between the last decade of the 19th century and the end of

the first World War witnessed the attempt, on their part, to adjust themselves to the rapidly changing circumstances and environment.

The attitude of the Kikuyu to all the newcomers - the Swahili, the Arabs and the Europeans - was largely governed by the initial behaviour of the Swahili caravans which penetrated into Kikuyuland. Traditionally, the Kikuyu are hospitable people who believe that "mugeni ni rui", a visitor is like a river that passes away. They were also particularly hospitable to the coastal traders, per se, because of the Kikuyu attitude towards trade. By the time that the coastal traders reached the borders of Kikuyuland, the Kikuyu had had a long tradition of trading activities with their neighbours. Moreover a few of their more adventurous traders had ventured as far as the coast and Kamba villages in search of trade. The Kikuyu were very much aware, therefore, of the profits that would accrue from having direct trade relations with the coastal traders instead of having to go through the Kamba middlemen. Yet despite their traditional hospitality and value for trade, by the 1870s they were hostile to traders and did their best to stop them entering their country. And even accepting that the coastal traders were wont to spread false and alarming stories about the interior people, in order to discourage the Europeans from venturing into the hinterland, it was evident that fighting between the Kikuyu and the foreigners had become common by the 1880s. Thomson, for example, heard stories of "some bitter lessons" that the Kikuyu had been taught by the traders "in several fearful massacres at Ngongo and other places" by 1883.[1] That there

1. Thomson, op cit. pp 306.

were increasing quarrels between the traders and the Kikuyu is borne out, too, by the genuine fear that appears to have been exhibited by the porters as they approached the borders of Kikuyu country. What then changed the attitude of the Kikuyu to the newcomers so decisively?

There were many grounds for friction. The truculence of some of the Kikuyu warriors was a contributory factor in spite of the elders' efforts to control them. On the other hand, the behaviour of the caravans was a major cause of friction - their failure to pay for goods, foraging for food in the Kikuyu shambas, or cultivated fields, taking sides in local affairs, or even attempting to overawe the Kikuyu by the Maxim gun. In any case, the coastal traders were generally noted for their outrageous behaviour in the interior of East Africa as a whole, and one would not expect them to have behaved differently in their dealings with the Kikuyu. But the crucial factor must have been the wild stories spread by the Kamba. Already the Kamba traders, in their attempt to dissuade the coastal traders from venturing into the interior, had impressed upon the traders that the people in the interior were hostile, wild, treacherous or even outright cannibals. The interior people were warned, in turn, that the coastal people - the Comba, Makorobai or Thukumu - were a bunch of human specimens best left alone. From the outset, therefore, each group was suspicious of the other and tended to behave accordingly. The Kikuyu, in particular, looked upon the white man with curiosity mingled with awe and fear. Indeed, after Teleki and von Hohnel had traversed Kikuyuland many rams were sacrificed because some believed

that these two were gods, and, according to their religion, one had to make a sacrifice if one saw god in person. Hence they were suspicious of these brown or white people. It is small wonder consequently that, by all accounts, the early contact between the Kikuyu and the coastal traders was not a happy one, and it grew worse as the 19th century drew to a close.

All the same, the hostility of the Kikuyu to newcomers should not be exaggerated: as much depended upon the behaviour of the individual caravans as on the temperament of the local inhabitants. Despite the chorus of the "inveterate hostility and treachery"[1] of the Kikuyu, it is significant that this did not deter the coastal traders themselves from trading with them, as one would have expected if the situation was as bad as it was painted. Caravans of 1200 to 1500 men were a common sight at Ngong, and all of them expected to get their provisions from the Kikuyu.[2] Of greater importance, however, is the fact that a number of the Swahili caravan headmen and guides were ivory traders in their own right and knew the interior very well. Jumbe Kimemeta, Teleki's guide, was himself an ivory trader who frequented Maasailand and the Kikuyu country. Thomson had met him at Mianzini "fairly well loaded with ivory from regions never before reached by a coast caravan".[3] And significantly, he did his best to dissuade Thomson from returning to the coast by the Kamba route.[4] It was from him, too, that rumours

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1. Lugard, Vol.1, op cit. pp 327.
2. Thomson, op cit. pp 307, 572.
3. Thomson, op cit. pp 571.
4. Ibid, pp 572-3.

of impending Kikuyu attacks on Teleki's caravan emanated, with devastating effect on the morale of the porters.[1] And right from the beginning he had expressed his doubts as to whether Teleki and von Hohnel's caravan would even be able to pass through Kikuyuland.[2] Unknown to the Hungarian travellers, Teleki and von Hohnel, Kimemeta was averse to seeing their caravan visit his trading haunts from where the bulk of his ivory came. He had in fact been to these parts only a few years before, perhaps at the time of Thomson's journey.[3] Certainly the head of Kimemeta's caravan, Kijanja, a man from Tanga, even knew the Kikuyu language,[4] as did Juma Mussa of Teleki's caravan.[5] This seems to suggest that these Swahili traders were frequent visitors to the borders of Kikuyuland, not only in search of food but also for ivory. It was primarily for this reason that they were not at all keen to see their lucrative trading haunts opened up to potential competitors. Thus they took up the Kamba chorus of the hostility of wild people in the interior, particularly the Kikuyu and the Maasai, in order to keep out the Europeans.

Surprisingly, every European traveller seemed to believe that "Fischer had had to fight every inch of his way" through Kikuyuland.[6] Yet not only did he never actually cross Kikuyuland but his reports were based on rumours spread by his own caravanmen. In fact, his

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1. von Hohnel, op cit. pp 326-7.
2. Ibid, pp 296.
3. G.K. James: "History ya ... Athungu Aria Mambire Gukinya Gikuyuini Tene" in Barlow Papers.
4. von Hohnel, op cit. pp 289-310.
5. Ibid, pp 291.
6. Ibid, pp 287.

reports refer to the experiences of Krapf in Thagicu.[1] And others who had close contact with the Kikuyu do not support such stories. Richard Crawshay, who was an administrative official among the Kikuyu, pinpointed the heart of the matter in his conclusion that travellers in "Kikuyu owe any rough treatment they have to complain of either to their ignorance of 'savoir faire' ... or much more frequently to the secret misconduct of their followers".[2] A similar conclusion was drawn by von Hohnel and Teleki after traversing the Kikuyu country. Their fortunes varied from ridge to ridge; in some they met with implacable and hostile opposition, while in others they were amazed by the assistance offered them, especially by the Kikuyu guides such as Mucia Muriithi and Gathu Waruiru. Teleki and von Hohnel were "always able in Kikuyuland to secure faithful guides who would even warn (them) of the designs of their people against (them)"[3] and the guides' "honesty and faithfulness to (them) in the midst of their own people struck (von Hohnel and Teleki) as being amongst the most remarkable facts of (their) journey through Kikuyuland."[4] This view was echoed by Mackinder, who found his guides remarkably loyal to him "in spite considerable temptations".[5] And despite the difficulties posed by the Kikuyu and their "excitable and restless nature", von Hohnel concluded that,

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1. Fischer, op cit. pp 98.
2. Crawshay, op cit. pp 39.
3. von Hohnel, op cit. pp 319.
4. Ibid, pp 338.
5. Mackinder, op cit. pp 457.

> "They were all so very friendly that we could not help thinking that the traders who had had such difficulties in these parts had only themselves to blame, probably because in their nervousness they always fired a few shots with a view to overawing the people before breaking up camp."[1]

To Teleki and von Hohnel, travelling through Kikuyuland did not seem to be fraught with any special danger, nor was it any more dangerous than in any other part of the country. If anything, they found the Kikuyu less hostile on the whole than they had been led to believe, in spite of their having had to fight the Kikuyu at mbari ya Minja in Riara, in Mang'u and just north of North Mathioya River, perhaps in Gaturi.[2] It did not pass unnoticed that on two occasions warriors who had snatched trade goods from the caravan were caught and publicly flogged on the spot by the Kikuyu themselves.[3] But the overriding factor was the attitude of the two groups of people involved. The Kikuyu were suspicious of and even feared the newcomers, while the coastal traders, European travellers included, believed that force was the only language that the Africans understood. Twice Kimemeta advocated that tough measures be taken against the Kikuyu[4] while von Hohnel believed that "to employ force is the only means of producing the necessary impression" by making oneself feared.[5] It is small wonder then that Kikuyu experience of the coastal caravans, led initially by the Swahili and the Arabs, was unpleasant from the outset. Yet it was on the very people who had acquired a bad reputation, in the eyes

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1. von Hohnel, op cit. pp 298.
2. Ibid, pp 318-21, 329-31, 339-43.
3. Ibid, pp 294, 310.
4. Ibid, pp 320-1, 343.
5. Ibid, pp 336-7.

of the Kikuyu, that the white man depended upon to a very great extent for guides, spokesmen and porters. If the Kikuyu and the white man approached each other with suspicion, their contact all but proved their worst forebodings about one another. The experiences of Thomson, and even von Hohnel and Teleki, reinforced the 'evil reputation' of the Kikuyu as hitherto spread by the coastal traders. In the event, this had a significant and far-reaching repercussion as it set the tone of the ensuing relationship between the Kikuyu and all the other newcomers, white or brown. The Kikuyu came to look upon all newcomers with the greatest suspicion and fear, while the white man saw hostility and treachery written on every Kikuyu's face. Gregory, travelling on the northern Mathira border in 1893, was warned by a Kikuyu elder that he would not be allowed to enter Mathira because:

> "Some white men came some few harvests back to our friends away there at Karthuri,[1] they stormed the villages, they seized what food they wanted, and then burnt the rest. When the elders asked for payment they were shot, while the young men were taken away as slaves into the land of the Masai, and we have heard of them no more."[2]

The reputation of the Kikuyu as a "thoroughly bad lot" was, however, clinched by the relations prevailing between them and the Company on the southern frontier after 1890. Three incidents highlight the Kikuyu-Company relations - the evacuation of the Dagoretti Fort by George Wilson, the death of Maktubu and the arrest of Waiyaki. Buganda

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1. Gaturi in Metumi.
2. Gregory, op cit. pp 158. This was undoubtedly a reference to Teleki and von Hohnel's expedition when a fight occurred and Teleki's caravan captured 90 heads of cattle, 1300 sheep and goats, burnt villages and took 19 prisoners. See von Hohnel, op cit. pp 339-43.

was the centre of attraction for the IBEACo. and for all practical purposes Machakos and Dagoretti, established 1889 and 1890 respectively, were built as provision stations for caravans bound for Buganda. For the Kikuyu to be harrassed by the passing caravans was one thing; to have a permanent station on their doorstep quite another. Already they had had a foretaste of what was to come at the hands of Thomson; the Swahili caravans had taught them some bitter lessons at Ngong; and Teleki and von Hohnel, passing through their country, had given them a thorough mauling only three or so years before. These episodes were too fresh in the minds of the Kikuyu for them to have accepted the establishment of a Company station in their midst with equanimity unless an all out effort was made to allay their fears and win their confidence. Given a firm administrator capable of controlling the caravans and the ill-disciplined soldiery, the situation might have improved, but none of the Company's agents - Wilson, Purkiss and Nelson - was capable of such firmness. Purkiss, young and inexperienced, was only intended to be an assistant, yet remained in charge till Hall took over. And Nelson's brief rule was marked by a mutiny of his garrison in 1892. Lugard had set them a good example by entering into blood brotherhood and making a peace treaty with a number of Kikuyu along the southern border when he established a fort at Kiawariua, Dagoretti, in 1890. He had also steered clear of being embroiled in local squabbles.[1] That laid the foundation and augured well for the future. But no sooner had Lugard turned his back, on his way to

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1. M. Perham: The Diaries of Lord Lugard, Vol.1, op cit. pp 316-344.

Uganda, than George Wilson, on the advice of Ernest Gedge, was forced to withdraw to Machakos on 30th March 1891. On his way to the coast he met Leith's caravan at Kikumbuliu, and with fresh reinforcements returned to Kiawariua only to find the station razed to the ground by the Kikuyu and all his goods, which he had buried, dug up. Thereupon Wilson demanded payment of 50 goats daily as compensation for the looted goods, free labour of 300 men to rebuild the destroyed fort, and he also enlisted 200 porters.[1] However, this only poured oil on the flames and Wilson was once again forced to evacuate Kiawariua on the advice of Eric Smith, who had arrived there on 13th June 1891. Wilson reached Machakos on 19th June 1891.

The apparently sudden change of attitude on the part of the Kikuyu was partly brought about by the rowdy behaviour of the ill-disciplined troops. That in turn resuscitated the suspicions of the Kikuyu and their aggressive hostility to outside interference in their affairs. Several factors sparked off Kikuyu-Company hostilities at the end of 1890 and early 1891. According to eye witnesses, Kikuyu warriors who had been engaged as porters absconded with their luggage or immediately after receipt of their pay, which appears to have been paid in advance sometimes. The Company askari, soldiers, attempted to arrest the deserters, without much success. On one occasion fighting broke out when the askari captured livestock and burnt houses while attempting to arrest Warari Njuni, one of the deserters. This is confirmed by Kinyanjui; he reported to Hall that in attempting to

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1. Lugard, Vol. 2, op cit. pp 535-6.

arrest the deserters the askari raided "Kicheka's" kraal, were driven off and one of them killed in the struggle. For this "Kicheka" had to pay a fine of 100 goats.[1] The warriors were upset by this and decided to do their best to stop the Company's employees from fetching water from the Dagoretti or Nairobi Rivers. Hence they adopted unpleasant tactics such as waylaying them or besieging the fort. Two askari were killed while fetching water, and it was then that Wilson felt he had no option but to evacuate Kiawariua since he had insufficient forces to embark on a punitive expedition.[2] Nevertheless, this was only the tip of an iceberg that lurked below the surface. The askari had already estranged the Kikuyu by their behaviour towards the local women. It is said that when the askari went to fetch water/firewood or to buy food they harrassed the women by frightening them or even attempting to rape them. The women raised the traditional danger-signal, mbu, whereupon all the warriors at hand assembled in full battle array. Such incidents were all too common: Hall reports that two of his men who were supposed to be herding the Company's goats and sheep tried to rape a woman on 25th October 1892. She resisted and one of them shot her. She died two days later.[3] Theft, too, was to remain a problem

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1. See Kinyanjui's account of George Wilson's occupation of Kiawariua (Dagoretti) in Hall's Diary for 1894.
2. James, op cit.: Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit. pp 271. Compare this with Lugard and MacDonald's accounts in MacDonald, op cit., chapter 8 and Lugard, Vol. 2, pp 534-7.
3. Hall's Diary, 25 October 1892. Hall gave a slightly different version to his father - two askari, he wrote, "went off foraging for sweet potatoes in the natives' land and when a woman remonstrated with them one of them cutely using the other man's rifle shot her and left her for dead." See Hall to Col. Hall, 22 October 1892.

as the soldiers could not resist the temptation of either foraging in the shambas or else forcibly taking food. Kinyanjui recounts another episode involving the soldiers: seven Swahili, who had been sent on an errand to Machakos, looted Kamwingo's goats and five of the looters were killed.[1] Pillaging of the crops in the shambas was one sure way of provoking the wrath of the Kikuyu womenfolk, who would for sure goad their menfolk into retaliating. Worse still, it became the habit for women to raise the danger-signal the moment they saw the soldiers near their shambas as much for their safety as for averting theft of their foodstuffs. Predictably this would result in fights between the askari and the warriors. From February to June 1894, no less than four theft cases were reported to Hall ranging from a seizure of goods or food to "levying of black mail" by his interpreter.[2] The behaviour of the soldiers at Dagoretti and Fort Smith was not an isolated case; Jackson's caravan was accused of stealing crops and violating women among the Kamba.[3] Besides, the soldiers got themselves embroiled in local squabbles at the instigation of those Kikuyu who were using the Company for their own interest, particularly those living in the vicinity of the fort, who were not slow to seize the golden opportunity of settling old scores or enriching themselves. In this connection Kinyanjui relates that, prior to Wilson's first evacuation of Kiawariua, a certain Kamau persuaded 80 of Wilson's men to accompany him to Ruiru to recover

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1. Kinyanjui's account, op cit.; Gedge's diary quoted by H.B. Thomas in "George Wilson and Dagoretti Fort" in Uganda Journal, Kampala, Vol. 23, 1959, pp 173-77.
2. Hall's Diary, February to June 1894.
3. Perham (ed), Vol. 1, op cit. pp 290, 299-300.

livestock which he alleged had previously been stolen from him. The expedition, which went under the pretext of buying food, was successful and returned with a lot of looted stock.[1] There was therefore plenty of inflammable tinder that only required a spark to set off a conflagration.

These episodes demonstrate not only the type of soldiers that manned Kiawariua, and Fort Smith later, but also the state of indiscipline tolerated by their superiors. Purkiss and Nelson, for example, were faced by a serious breakdown of their administrative machinery. They were faced by the truculent Kikuyu on one hand and a mutinous garrison on the other.[2] Drunkenness was and remained a serious problem. This is a problem that even troubled Lugard when he was building Kiawariua fort in October 1890. And it became such a vexing problem that Purkiss had to plead with his superiors to send him ten to twelve Somali soldiers whom he hoped would be able to prevent his men from buying tembo, the local beer. As he argued, "if men obtain it, there generally is trouble either with the Native or Swahilis themselves."[3] The situation was increasingly worsened, moreover, by the policy followed at Fort Smith as a result of the financial difficulties facing the Company. In 1892 the Company decreed that Fort Smith and Machakos must be self-supporting, a policy that was effected by a series of punitive expeditions and raids for food or stock. This dealt a death-blow to the Kikuyu-Company

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1. Kinyanjui's account, op cit.
2. Purkiss to IBEACo. Administrator, 27 December 1892, and Sir Gerald Portal to Lord Rosebery, 31 January 1893 in FO2/57.
3. Purkiss to IBEACo. Administrator, 28 February 1893 in FO2/57. Ainsworth also records that his askari went to buy food, got drunk and fired on Ndengi and his party. See Ainsworth's diary for 15 October 1898.

relations. As Lugard aptly observed, "Owing largely, I believe, to the want of discipline in the passing caravans, whose men robbed the crops and otherwise made themselves troublesome, the people became estranged, and presently murdered several porters."[1]

With the final evacuation of Kiawariua station, the Kikuyu thought that their troubles were now over. But to their dismay they discovered that the Company was not a spent force. Unknown to them, Kikuyu was too important to be so easily abandoned. Accordingly, before the end of 1891, Purkiss and Eric Smith were back with a strong force which defiantly pitched their tents in Waiyaki's kihingo at Mbugici till the new fort, on which Captain Smith bestowed his own name, was completed. The fort was built on the site where Lugard had pitched his first camp and overlooking Waiyaki's village.[2] Instead of improving, the Kikuyu-Company relations worsened, largely due to the machinations of the Kikuyu collaborators and the need for the new station to fend for itself to overcome the financial difficulties facing the Company. It was the interaction of these two factors that led to the death of Maktubu and the subsequent arrest of Waiyaki.

Due to the need for foodstuffs, the Company was in the habit of despatching Maktubu to the Kikuyu villages to buy or forage for food. Yet Maktubu, a former slave from Malawi, was in many ways the least

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1. Lugard, vol. 2, op cit. pp 535.
2. For an authoritative account of subsequent events see "The Passing of Waiyaki" by Brig.Gen. H.H. Austin probably written in 1929. It has not proved possible to find out where it was originally published but a carelessly typed copy is in the hands of Mr T.M. Waiyaki, to whom I am grateful.
3. [illegible] op cit. [illegible].

suited for this delicate operation, as events were to prove. Undoubtedly he was one of the most reliable and experienced askari at Fort Smith; he had seen service thrice with Thomson, and once with von Hohnel. Moreover he was highly thought of as steadfast, courageous, intelligent and hardworking. Unfortunately he was endowed with "an utter absence of tact in dealing with the men under him",[1] and he had a violent temperament which made him intolerable to work with.[2] For instance, during Thomson's expedition through Maasailand he had several quarrels; on one occasion he had a "bloodthirsty quarrel" with Martin, whom he almost shot; And during Teleki's expedition he "quarrelled perpetually" with Dualla.[3] He was, for this reason, an unfortunate choice to be entrusted with such food-buying expeditions. In August 1892, Kamaru Wamagata, one of the Kikuyu collaborators, induced him to accompany him to Githiga - known to the Company as Guruguru - to demand repayment of dowry from Kiarii Gathura. Kamaru had married Wanjiku Gathura, who had since left him when their marriage failed to work out well. Wanjiru had subsequently married a Kamba. Under the pretext of going to buy food, and against orders as it turned out, Maktubu and Kamaru were accompanied by fifteen soldiers and several Kikuyu. On arrival at Gathura's home, they peremptorily demanded prompt repayment of the dowry, otherwise threatening to take the goats by force.[4] Their threat was duly carried out; they seized the goats, a war-cry was sounded and

1. Thomson, op cit. pp 20.
2. von Hohnel, op cit. pp 33-4.
3. Thomson, op cit. pp 284-5, 296; and von Hohnel, op cit. pp 201-2.
4. James, op cit., Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit. pp 273, 275, 280-1.

a fight ensued. Outnumbered and far from Fort Smith, all but one or two of them were killed. One of those who escaped was an askari, Abdulla bin Omar, who took refuge with Wangengi, a vowed friend of the Company from the neighbourhood, who provided him with escorts to take him back to Purkiss.[1] Maktubu was not, therefore, murdered while buying food, as Omar reported and as the officials came to believe.[2] Still less was it planned by Waiyaki, who knew nothing about it at all. For such so-called outrages, the Company administration despatched a punitive expedition of five companies - under Pringle, Foaker, Austin, MacDonald and Purkiss - to punish the Githunguri people. This took place from 12 to 14 August 1892.

Meantime Waiyaki was nonplussed by the sudden turn of events, and particularly the billeting of the Company soldiery on his doorstep. He feared, and not without reason, that he might be punished in retaliation for the sins of the Kikuyu warriors who had had the audacity to ransack and raze down Kiawariua. He was apprehensive too lest his livestock be confiscated. As a result of these fears, he took the precaution of dispersing part of his flocks and herds. One part was taken to the vicinity of Muguga under Githagui, his son, while the other one was taken to the mbari ya Gikonyo in Githunguri under Munyua, his other son. For a while Waiyaki's forebodings proved quite unwarranted, as Purkiss soon proved to be a useful ally of the Kikuyu.

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1. Lugard reported that 7 out of 11 askari were killed and Austin 6 out of 10. See Perham, Vol. 3, op cit. pp 377-380; Lugard, Vol. 2, op cit. pp 537; and Austin, op cit.
2. MacDonald, op cit. pp 115; Perham (ed) Vol. 3, pp 377.

In May 1892 the Maasai launched a large raid on the Kikuyu and seemed to take all before them. The Kikuyu warriors were easily routed and livestock captured. At this juncture the Kikuyu appealed to Purkiss for help. He acceded to their request and, reinforced by the Company forces, the Kikuyu were able to launch a counter-attack on 23 May 1892. The Maasai were no match for the guns and consequently were defeated at Gicamu's, near Muguga, where they were caught jubilantly carousing to celebrate their success. This single act more perhaps than anything else contributed enormously, albeit temporarily, to the allaying of the Kikuyu fears vis-a-vis the Company. The Maktubu fiasco less than three months later, therefore, was embarrassing and unfortunate coming when it did.

Despite the elaborate precautions taken by the Company officials to ensure a surprise attack on Githunguri people, Waiyaki had somehow managed to be apprised of the details of the projected punitive expedition. He had no wish to see his livestock impounded together with those of the culprits who had murdered Maktubu. And it is only natural that he should have warned Gikonyo Maagu, his riika mate and the man who had temporarily harboured his livestock, in good time to the astonishment and exasperation of the punitive expedition. As Austin summed it up later:

> "The expedition was disappointing in one respect and that was our failure to capture herds of cattle and flocks of sheep which the Wandorobo were known to possess in large numbers. We secured no cattle and only fifty or sixty goats and sheep. For this we learnt later we had to thank Waiyaki who had by some means obtained

news of the impending punitive expedition and sent out warnings hot-foot to his Wandorobo relatives."[1]

To their dismay the punitive expedition, guided by Kinyanjui and Muiruri, discovered that prior to their arrival the Githunguri people had hidden their livestock in the adjoining forests. A captured woman, Nyagitathuru Muriithi, told them that they had been warned by Waiyaki, who had sent a messenger. The Company officials had neither the resources nor perhaps the time for a prolonged campaign in the inaccessible forests where poisoned arrows of the hostile people would have been at their most effective. On the afternoon of the third day, 14 August 1892, the expedition returned to Fort Smith, having burnt about 30 villages and "spoilt all their crops besides shooting every armed man (they) saw."[2] And on their return to the fort, Waiyaki, who had been drinking beer at mbari ya Mutiria's, came to Fort Smith apparently on his own initiative.[3] The encounter between the two men did not go well and their tempers quickly wore thin. Waiyaki was drunk and Purkiss furious with him for what he had done to make the expedition such a dismal failure. A row flared up and a scuffle ensued during which Waiyaki was wounded in the head with his own sword, which he had drawn from its sheath to attack Purkiss. Waiyaki was soon overpowered and "handcuffed to the flagstaff with a chain around his neck as an

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1. Austin, op cit. Austin makes reference to Dorobo because Githunguri is one of the areas where they had abandoned hunting and taken to the Kikuyu way of life.
2. Ibid.
3. It is not entirely clear whether Waiyaki had been summoned by Purkiss or not. The informants allege that he was summoned.

additional safeguard and in this state spent the night in the fort square."[1] On the following day a group of 19 or 20 "lesser chiefs" reluctantly agreed to come to the fort to discuss the fate of Waiyaki. They are reported to have concurred with the decision of the Company officials to take him to Mombasa to be tried by the Administrator General of the IBEACo. The efforts of Waiyaki's father, Hinga, to have his son released went unheeded, and on 17th August 1892 he was marched towards the coast "in chains under an escort of Indians with fixed bayonets."[2] But Waiyaki never reached Mombasa: he died and was buried at Kibwezi en route to the coast.

The role of Waiyaki in the events of 1891-2 was very much misunderstood by the Company officials, just as it has been misunderstood by the nationalist propagandists in this century. He was neither the "scheming rogue" - breathing treachery, fire and brimstone - of the Company officials, nor was he the martyr of the nationalist cause.[3] His conduct right from the beginning demonstrates that he was genuinely interested in cementing his friendship with the white man. As early as 1887-8, and though more of an elder than a warrior, he had personally supervised the passage of Teleki's caravan through that part of Kabete where he had influence. This largely contributed to their safe transit

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1. Austin, op cit.
2. Ibid.
3. Waiyaki has become a martyr of the nationalist cause; one of the nationalist songs describes him thus:

Andu amtu Waiyaki niakuire	Countrymen Waiyaki died
Na agitutigira kirumi	And left us a death-bed curse
Ati ithaka ici tutikendie	That we should never sell this land
Na ithui no guciheyana.	But we are giving it away.

around his sphere of influence. Waiyaki welcomed Lugard too with open arms and allowed him to build a fort on his own land; above all, both had undergone a ceremony of blood brotherhood, the highest expression of mutual confidence and friendship known to Kikuyu society. Lastly, when Wilson returned to Kiawariua, after the brief flight to Machakos, and again when Purkiss and Smith returned to Mbugici, Waiyaki spared no efforts to have the looted goods returned, a fact that even his bitterest opponents admitted. Far from fanning the flames of hostility against the white man, Waiyaki was a genuine and moderating influence on the Kikuyu warriors, some of whom were anxious to prove their manhood by driving away the intruders. Even after his arrest, he categorically forbade the Kikuyu warriors from attempting to secure his release. True he feared that he might be killed in the process of trying to effect his release forcibly, but he was equally concerned lest the situation worsened and the warriors were massacred. His request was acceded to, and this accounts for the absence of any fighting on the morning of 17th August 1892 rather than to the fright of the warriors as some of the Company officials were inclined to believe. Undoubtedly the warriors were capable of such a feat, as they were to prove in the following year when they besieged the fort. In any case, failure by Purkiss to take immediate action after the death of Maktubu had emboldened and given them the impression that he was afraid of them.

In retrospect, conflict between Waiyaki and the Company officials seems to have been inevitable. The officials believed that Waiyaki was the "Paramount Chief of the Wakikuyu" and treated him accordingly.

Understandably Waiyaki took no pains to undeceive them. No doubt he was aware that having the white man on his land meant that he was strategically placed for trading with them, a factor that might have tempted him to exaggerate his own power and influence. Even more, his position locally would be enhanced, since anyone who wanted to have access to the white man would have to come through him. Whatever Waiyaki's motives were, this mistake by the officials proved fatal to the mutual understanding initiated by Lugard. Sooner rather than later, it became apparent that the Kabete were not at the beck and call of any single individual, let alone Waiyaki. He was only one, albeit one of the most influential, of many athamaki, as we have seen in Chapter 4. It is true, though, that as the owner of a large ng'undu and kihingo at the frontier he wielded considerable power. On his own, however, he could neither make a treaty that affected the welfare of the community, nor even control the truculent warriors as he had undertaken to do. His authority was severely curtailed, and whatever agreement he came to with the officials had willy-nilly to be ratified by the council of elders, if not actually initiated by them. He does not seem to have consulted his peers before or after making treaties with the Company officials and it is not surprising consequently that he failed to control the warriors. This had even taken place long before; significantly he was unable to take Teleki beyond the vicinity of his home at Karura, and he had considerable trouble in controlling warriors even in those areas where he boasted to have been the muthamaki.[1]

1. von Hohnel, op cit. pp 298-317.

Ultimately the effects of the subsequent Kikuyu-Company conflict rebounded on him and formed the basis of the accusations of treachery levelled against him. The misunderstandings over his power and authority, which as an individual were minimal, led to his being held responsible and regarded as the chief instigator every time something went awry between the Kikuyu and the Company. Waiyaki was, therefore, a victim of circumstances, albeit partly of his own making.

Equally, Purkiss and MacDonald enormously increased their own problems by their refusal to accept the Kikuyu peace overtures. As events later proved, this was an error of judgement on their part. By all accounts, Waiyaki was drunk and could hardly have been in full enough command of all his faculties to realize what he was doing that fateful evening of 14th August. The failure of the officials to pardon him invited the full wrath of the Kikuyu, who made Purkiss "practically a prisoner with all his people".[1] Moreover this led to a general escalation of the situation and there was continuous fighting up to 1896.[2] This was disastrous for the future: the white man confirmed that the Kikuyu were hostile, treacherous and a "thoroughly bad lot". They were given, as Portal concluded, "a bad name, which sticks to them like a burr, and the stranger arriving within their gates treats them accordingly." He himself had been advisedly told "to shoot at sight" the moment he met a Kikuyu.[3] As for the Kikuyu, they could see no

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1. Portal to Sir Percy Anderson, 22 February 1893 in FO2/60.
2. For the state of Kikuyu in 1893 see G.H. Portal: The Mission to Uganda, London, 1894, pp 89-93; Portal's reports to Lord Rosebery of January and February 1893 in FO2/60; and Hall's diary for 1892-3.
3. Portal, op cit. pp 92-3.

difference between the slave dealers from the coast, the European adventurers and the Company or Government officials. They were men who could not be trusted and should be driven away at all costs. Only patient and determined efforts on both sides could have restored confidence in each other. This however was not forthcoming.

The arrest and death of Waiyaki, therefore, exacerbated the situation. The Kikuyu were more than ever determined to drive away the Company from Fort Smith. Time and again the Company found itself embroiled in the local affairs and had to mount expedition after expedition, at first against the recalcitrant Kikuyu near the fort, but later as far north as Mang'u, Ruiru, and indeed right up to the southern outskirts of Murang'a district. The situation was complicated even further by two elements. Some of the collaborators increasingly involved the Company in their personal and petty quarrels, and the lure of economic rewards led them to hatch quarrels even where none existed.[1] Already we have seen that this was the cause of the Ruiru expedition led by Kamau and the death of Maktubu. The success of their plots emboldened the "friendlies", who went directly to the Company or Government officials with a variety of stories all designed to have their enemies punished. Hall's friends - notably Wahero and Kinyanjui - reported in 1893 that their enemies were hatching plots against the Company, and that some of the friendlies' men had been killed because,

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1. It was Hall's deliberate policy to split the Kikuyu - "I have been backing up these friendly chiefs on one or two occasions, (and) so cemented their friendship, (and) also split the tribe into two parties, which considerably strengthened my position." Hall to Col. Hall, 24 November 1893.

so they argued, they had assisted Hall.[1] Kamaru, one of Hall's messengers, even "tried to recover some goats from some old enemy of his own by telling the people that (Hall's) men were coming to fetch these goats (and) if they were not given up there would be war."[2] By the end of 1894, Hall had come to realize that his "friendlies" had been telling lies, no doubt because they hoped to share in the loot captured. His own herdsman, Kiragu, alleged on three occasions that his house had been burnt. By then it had become obvious to Hall that the intention was "simply a plan to get (him) to go out to fight (and) get goats."[3] The chief collaborator - Kinyanjui, Hall's 'Fidus Achates' - had acquired a gun as a reward for his services to Hall. He then dispensed with the Company soldiery and raided on his own. One of his victims was a well-known elder, Muru wa Mugwe.

But the "friendlies" were not the only source of trouble; of equal importance, in this respect, were the Maasai refugees. The outbreak of the pleuro-pneumonia seriously reduced the Maasai herds. Their major source of livelihood seriously impaired, an epidemic of smallpox broke out, followed by a serious famine in the 1890s. As if these misfortunes were not enough, rivalry flared up between Lenana and Sendeyo, the two sons of the Maasai laibon, ritual expert, Mbatian. Thus very much reduced, some of the remaining Maasai groups sought

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1. Hall's diary, May 27-8 and 6 September 1893.
2. Ibid, 21 May 1894.
3. Ibid, 20, 24 October 1894. The friendlies had been handsomely rewarded in previous expeditions: for example, after the 'Chamore' (? Kiambu) raid they received 5 goats each, Kiragu 20, 'Laroba' 20, Muiruri 20 and Kinyanjui 20 on 26 January 1894.

refuge in Kiambu, as well as in Nyeri to the north. In Kiambu, Hall acted as an intermediary for Lenana, who sought peace with the Kikuyu and this paved the way for a substantial influx of refugees. It was necessary to make use of Hall's services, as an intermediary, because at this time the Gicamu's war had strained their relations with their Kikuyu neighbours. Obviously some of the Kikuyu were still chafing over this war and were all too anxious to despoil the Maasai of their belongings. Moreover some of the Maasai decidedly preferred living under the aegis of Hall at Fort Smith.

In January 1894, a group of 400 to 500 refugees had built their manyatta, kraals, around Fort Smith. This figure had increased to 1000 by July of the same year. Others who had settled among the Kikuyu earlier, but who were aggrieved or felt threatened, decamped too and settled in the environs of the fort.[1] Soon afterwards they became a constant source of quarrels between Hall and the Kikuyu. Cultivating was beneath a blue-blooded Maasai, and the only way of getting food was by foraging in the Kikuyu shambas. Hall had recognized that feeding them would be a problem, but he could do nothing to allieviate their shortage of food in view of the Company's financial predicament. Secondly Hall used the Maasai morans as levies to supplement his askari during the punitive expeditions. These two factors did not endear Hall or the Maasai to the already aggrieved Kikuyu. On the contrary, it inflamed their feelings even further. Matters came

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1. Hall's diary, 1893-4; Hall's monthly reports to IBEACo. Administrator, 13 February and 9 July 1894 in FO2/73.

to a head-on collision on 11 June 1894 when a Kikuyu was killed by a Maasai during a quarrel. The Kikuyu prepared for a showdown and, on 13 June, Hall had to send the Maasai to Ngong to avoid a major clash. It is not surprising therefore that there was continued conflict between the Kikuyu, the Company and the refugees. Punitive expeditions became the order of the day, and the Company forces stormed Kikuyu villages, burnt the houses, spoiled crops and captured livestock besides killing all those who opposed them. For example, after Waiyaki's arrest there was intermittent war until December 1892. In January 1893 the Kikuyu made a determined effort to storm Fort Smith, and Purkiss, despite the presence of 150 Zanzibari soldiers and armed porters belonging to Martin's caravan, was forced to seek much-needed help from Ainsworth at Machakos on 14 January 1893. Moreover the fort was besieged completely from 10-16 January.[1] On arrival at the fort, Sir Gerald Portal found that,

> "at Kikuyu the European in charge dare not venture 200 yards from his stockade without an armed escort of at least 30 to 50 men with rifles. He is practically a prisoner with all his people: & maintains the Company's influence & prestige by sending almost daily looting & raiding parties to burn the surrounding villages & to seize the crops & cattle for the use of the company's caravans & troops."[2]

Such expeditions were to continue throughout the Company rule and beyond. Hall continued with the policy set down by his predecessors until he cracked the resistance of the Kikuyu. In 1893 he is credited with

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1. Purkiss to IBEACo. Administrator, 20 January 1893 in FO2/57; Portall to Rosebery, 31 January 1893 in FO2/60.
2. Portal to Anderson, 22 February 1893 in FO2/60; E.L. Bentley to the Foreign Office, 9 February 1893 in FO2/57.

two expeditions in which 922 sheep and goats and 5 head of cattle were looted and about 90 Kikuyu killed. His casualties were 2 killed and 3 wounded. In the following year, he undertook another 3 major raids in which he looted 190 head of cattle and 4,400 sheep and goats and, at the same time, burnt many villages.[1] Lonely and sorely tried, Hall, though temperamentally jovial, became despondent and freely used the sjambok on friend and foe alike. And as for the Kikuyu, he felt that, "There is only one way of improving the Wakikuyu, (and) that is wipe them out; I should be only too delighted to do so, but we have to depend on them for food supplies".[2] And he threatened that "unless they took to work like other natives, they would eventually be wiped out (and) better people brought into the country".[3] There was no significant change of policy even after the British Government took over from the Company in 1895. Indeed, the Government continued to use the same personnel that had served the Company. Punitive expeditions continued in order to subdue the Kikuyu and force them to accept their rule.

In due course the resistance of the Kikuyu was weakened by a series of natural disasters. This demoralized them and sapped their will for further resistance. Between 1894 and 1899 there were intermittent invasions of locusts which caused extensive damage to the crops.

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1. Hall's diary, 1893-4.
2. Hall to Col. Hall, 5 July 1894.
3. Ibid, 6 August 1893.

Ainsworth, writing to his superiors in July 1894, commented that a "very serious state of things exists in (Machakos) district owing to the terrible swarms of locusts which have come in," and "Kikuyu is in a far worse condition than we are: there is absolutely no food in the country at present".[1] Swarms of locusts descended on the country again in 1895 and 1896, only to be followed by a severe drought in 1897/8, a cattle plague in 1898, a serious famine in 1898/9 and an outbreak of smallpox simultaneously. The famine was particularly disastrous and was exacerbated by the fact that the Kabete had sold enormous amounts of foodstuffs to the Company and the passing caravans at a time when cultivation had significantly decreased due to the disruptive state of affairs prevalent in the country at the time. Consequently there was a very high mortality and estimates range from 50 to 95% of the population.[2] Others took refuge among their relatives to the north, particularly in Metumi, their original homeland. It was the effects of these disasters that account for the apparently empty land which was alienated for European settlement in 1902-3.

But the effects of the natural disasters were not the only factors that undermined Kikuyu resistance to the establishment of the Company and Government rule. The emergence of a pro-Company faction had also begun seriously to corrode their resistance long before the natural disasters struck the final blow. The nurturing of the "friendlies"

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1. Ainsworth to IBEACo., 24 and 31 July 1894; Hall and Ainsworth's reports to IBEACo. in FO2/73; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit. pp 276.
2. KLC, Vol. 1, op cit. pp 723, 726, 746. Bernard estimated a mortality of 75%, Boyes 95% and Patterson between 50 and 66%.

owed their success to Francis Hall. He came to Fort Smith in October 1892 and, except for brief periods of leave, was the superintendent of the fort from August 1893 until he was transferred to Machakos in 1899. Recruiting collaborators was an easy matter for several reasons. Hall's force of personality, and in particular his bravery, was an important factor which earned him fear and respect. To the Kikuyu he was another brave warrior, but a warrior who, despite his successes, was prepared to make peace on certain conditions. His peace efforts earned him the nickname Wanyahoro, a man of peace. Even so, the decisive factor was probably the traditional rivalry and enmity inherent in Kikuyu society between the clans, ridges or even individuals, and which Hall so ably exploited. In addition, the presence of the white man on the southern border halted expansion southwards and for this reason a large number of ahoi had no hope of ever owning land of their own as migration had hitherto implied. The lure of economic rewards was eventually an important factor as the career of Kinyanjui established. It is relevant, in this respect, to point out that a good number of those who were to become pioneer mission adherents at Thogoto consisted largely of ahoi or people who had been displaced, for one reason or another, many of whom attached themselves to the mission during the Great Famine.

The Kabete had virtually been subdued by Hall by the end of 1895. Minor and sporadic punitive expeditions were still undertaken, but there was little determined resistance that was offered by the Kikuyu. The 1894 locust invasion led to a minor famine and many warriors offered

their services as porters to Eldamá Ravine in exchange for food, goats or cloths. As the 1895 Kedong massacre indicated, hundreds of Kikuyu warriors had swallowed their pride and volunteered as porters, a task they would have abhorred a year or so back. Others became askari and actively helped Hall and others to subdue their fellow Kikuyu to the north once economic rewards became a reality and whetted their appetite a stage further. Thus Hall was able to build up a clientele of mercenaries which proved very useful as porters or soldiers of fortune. Among his achievements was the fact that there was no significant resistance to the building of the railway. And the Kikuyu not only parted with the land needed for it but also offered themselves as labourers. In this period conflict was isolated and even that occurred only between the coolies and the Kikuyu. This was easily handled by Hall. The building of the railway, coinciding as it did with the famine, meant that there was no morale for effective opposition to its construction. Hence by 1897 along the southern frontier the Kikuyu had virtually resigned themselves to the existence of the white man close by. Slowly but surely, moreover, they were ceasing to be a mere source of food and increasingly becoming servants of the white man.

Be that as it may, until the turn of the century British jurisdiction was more apparent than real. The Government's influence, let alone effective jurisdiction, hardly went beyond the environs of Fort Smith. In Metumi and Gaki the coastal traders of all types and their European counterparts were having a field day. Their activities were having similar results and effects to what was happening around Fort

Smith. None more clearly symbolised the activities and behaviour of these adventurers than John Boyes. Despite grave warnings from the Government officials at Naivasha and the proverbial bad reputation of the Kikuyu, Boyes decided to enter Tuthu, Murang'a district, in June 1898, primarily because with a famine ranging in Kabete, the chief source of food for caravans and the railway building party, he saw a good chance of making a fortune by trading in food.[1] He certainly had no cause to regret this decision. He was "highly satisfied" with his first venture and followed it up by an even more successful trip, which so pleased the formerly reluctant officials that he was given a contract to supply Naivasha with provisions.[2] In course of time, Boyes - who was nicknamed Karianjahi, eater of dolichos lablab - discovered that ivory trading was even more profitable, since ivory was ridiculously low priced, especially in Mathira.[3] Encouraged by this new venture Karianjahi extended his activities to the Dorobo, who were then living in the Nanyuki-Naromoru area, in search of ivory.

Karianjahi was lucky to have Karuri Gakure as a chief ally. Karuri saw in Karianjahi a possible source of strength and prestige. Karuri was of lowly birth, the son of a Mwathi and had hitherto earned his living by selling red ochre and by acting as a medicineman in Kabete. During these trading expeditions he had come across Kinyanjui and it was probably the latter who influenced him to be friendly to the white

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1. Boyes, op cit. pp 74-75.
2. Ibid, pp 88-9, 114.
3. Karianjahi bought ivory for 8 to 10 shillings a tusk or even less and sold it at £10-15 each.

man. In any event, Karuri was introduced to both Hall and Ainsworth, to whom he paid several visits. By 1898 he had already visited Machakos and Fort Smith and even expressed a wish to have a white man at his home.[1] Clearly he was not blind to the prestige attached to wearing the "amerikani" and the consequences of having the "stick that spits fire",particularly when directed against his enemies. Karianjahi therefore found a man of his heart. Karuri was not disappointed in his calculations, and as his mentor commented,

> "As time went on Karuri was to become my friend and right-hand supporter, while I, in turn, was to have an influence over him and his people which was to raise him to the position of a great chief and myself to supreme power in the country - a virtual King of the Kikuyu."[2]

To achieve this Karianjahi had to interfere increasingly in the local affairs. And Karuri built up his influence by having his ally hammer his enemies or those who objected to their activities. Kariara is a case in point. Kariara objected to Karianjahi's presence in Tuthu and for this they were duly raided on several occasions. Karuri's neighbours were raided too on no less than three occasions.[3] Karianjahi had the ambition of extending his own influence and possibly carve out a kingdom. As he readily admits his aim was to see all the "chiefs" friendly to each other and of course under his own control. With his uniformed private army of Swahili and Kabete askari flying the Union Jack during all his expeditions, he was feeling more like a king

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1. Karuri visited Hall on17 December 1896 and Ainsworth on 8 July 1895 and 15 July 1899. See Hall and Ainsworth diaries for 1895 to 1899.
2. Boyes, op cit, pp 81-2.
3. Ibid, pp 85-7, 94-5, 110-16.

of the Kikuyu. And his successes and influence among the unsophisticated gave him a sense of elation and euphoria. After all, the Kikuyu who had "never seen a white man before ... likened (him) to their god Ngai, as (he) was a great medicine man, and they believed that (he) could make rain."[1]

However his "kingdom" did not last for long. His activities and those of the other traders had reduced the country to a state of turmoil, and fever and tension threatened to plunge the whole area into a major civil war. As McGregor found out, Murang'a district "was a happy hunting-ground for so-called traders, who seem to have spent their time raiding different parts of the country for the sake of ivory and cattle, setting one district against another, and carrying all before them."[2] Karianjahi, for example, had taken it upon himself to punish the Cinga for the murder of a Goan caravan. Meantime he had allied himself with Gakere and Wang'ombe of Gaki, who now sent several hundred warriors to supplement Karuri and his forces in attacking the Cinga. And "this army of warriors swept through the Chinga country from one end to the other, destroying the villages and wiping out of existence all who opposed them."[3] Further adventures of a similar nature were only ended when Karianjahi was arrested by Hall on 19 November 1900, and after the establishment of a Government station at Mbiri, later called Fort Hall. By the time of his arrest this "cheerful rogue"[4] had acquired three

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1. Boyes, op cit. pp 127.
2. McGregor annual report in Proceedings of CMS, 1903/4, pp 91.
3. Boyes, op cit. pp 232.
4. R. Meinertzhagen's Diary, 6 November 1903, in Meinertzhagen Papers housed in Rhodes House, Oxford.

Kikuyu wives, had looted cattle, sheep and goats from his opponents on more than six raiding expeditions which he had undertaken. He was accused of having "waged war, set shauris, personated Government, went on six punitive expeditions, and committed dacoity."[1]

But in fact Karianjahi was not alone in this venture. Gibbons, another freebooter, was to be active in Embu, Gicugu and Ndia later on. With an armed band of 30 Swahili, he too was "collecting hut tax, extorting ivory from the natives and had hoisted the Union Jack to give Government protection to his nefarious actions." On his arrest, on 16 November 1903, he is reputed to have had 14 Embu concubines. He was charged with "illegally collecting hut tax and despoiling the natives."[2] It was becoming clear that the situation to the north was becoming serious and was not calculated to make a government take over an easy matter, particularly as some of the traders were beginning to sell guns to the Kikuyu. And as McGregor summed it up, "In the past so-called traders have upset the people, plundering (and) robbing, consequently the people began to think that all white men were fair game for them."[3]

The establishment of Mbiri station by Hall in November 1900 marked a change of policy as far as the East Africa Protectorate Government was concerned. Kikuyuland was no longer regarded as a mere route to or provision depot for caravans going to Uganda. The need for annexing the Mount Kenya region had become apparent to Hall as early

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1. Boyes, op cit. pp 284
2. Meinertzhagen, Diary for November 1903.
3. McGregor to CMS, 22 October 1902 in CMS Archives, G3/A5/016.

as 1896, when he had requested sanctioning of the establishment of a station there. His request was not, however, acceded to, and by 1900 the situation had become rather urgent owing to the activities of the adventurers who were embarrassing the Government by claiming to act in its name. Furthermore their activities were not, in the long run, conducive to good relations between the Kikuyu and the newcomers. It was essential to end their disruptive activities and in particular their exploitation of the people nominally under the Government's charge. It was felt that failure to do this, as soon as was practicable, would only store up bigger problems for the administrators in the future. Already a number of incidents had indicated what might follow. A Goan caravan had been murdered in Cinga; Captain Haslam, a Government veterinary officer, had met the same fate in Muruka in June 1898; and Mackinder's porters had been murdered by Wang'ombe's people in Mathira in 1899.[1] Evidently friction between the traders and the Kikuyu was on the increase and was resulting in loss of lives.

Once the decision had been taken, the subjection of Murang'a and Nyeri was relatively swift. And apart from Muruka, Tetu and Mathira, there was no prolonged or bitter struggle between the two contestants. Two factors account for this. Partly it was due to the work of Karianjahi, who had built up Karuri into an influential friend of the white man. Karuri had a vested interest in the expansion of the

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1. Mackinder, op cit. pp 456, 467-8; KLC, Vol.1, pp 705 and Vol.3, pp 3336; Ainsworth, Diary for June 1898.

British rule to this area, and he himself was a shining example for the others to see of what advantages could be gained from associating and supporting the white man. In fact, when his friend was arrested he was ready to throw in his lot with the new power hoping, no doubt, to reap the rewards just as he had done under the tutelage of Karianjahi. But Karuri was not alone in the quest for the white man's friendship. Several men from Murang'a had requested Hall to establish a station in their area. Others such as Mbuthia Kaguongo and Wang'ang'a were frequent visitors to Hall and Ainsworth, whom they presented with gifts to cement their friendship.[1] Such men no doubt had heard stories about the arrest of Waiyaki and the innumerable raids that the Kamba and Kabete had experienced. They may even have witnessed them at close quarters during their visits. Moreover, the increasing fights between the traders and the Kikuyu drove home the lesson as the Gaturi fight by Teleki seems to indicate. Above all, with the migration of the Kabete back into Murang'a during the famine came stories of their experiences at the hands of the foreigners. There seems to have been a remarkable appraisal of the situation by some people who thereby decided to side with the white man for a variety of reasons and motives. Men like Karuri, Mbuthia and Wang'ang'a evinced friendship with the white man and acquired 'chits' as a sign of their loyalty. Karuri was such a keen collaborator that he desperately hankered to have a white man of any kind at his home. He was the first person to invite missionaries to enter Murang'a and also to send his children to be

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1. Hall and Ainsworth's diaries; Mackinder, op cit. pp 456, 458.

educated by them.[1] And he jealously guarded any access to them as McGregor's correspondence demonstrates. He was anxious that everyone else should come through him. His efforts paid dividends; he became extremely influential in official circles and was instrumental in building up most of the other collaborators, both in Nyeri and Murang'a. Most of those who aspired to be made chiefs came to his home with all manner of presents, since they knew that he had the ear of the Government. Among his proteges were Wangu Makeri, Wambugu Mathangani, Rukanga, and indeed nearly all the early chiefs from Murang'a and Nyeri. Many of these people played a key role in the Government's efforts to subdue the recalcitrant Kikuyu. Karuri was therefore a key figure and played an indispensable role in the subjection of the two districts. This accounts for the relatively fewer punitive expeditions that were undertaken in those areas, especially in Murang'a.

Several minor punitive raids were undertaken in Murang'a. In 1901 Boyes and Captain Wake punished Kariara once again for allegedly murdering the Swahili along the railway line.[2] Around Mbiri, too, Gaturi presented a modicum of resistance which was easily put down by Hall. Gaturi may have been smarting under the mauling that they had got from Teleki's caravan. Muruka was the only place to show their teeth and that area was not so easily cowed. Muruka had a bad reputation since murdering a Swahili caravan, Haslam and mail runners. Munge Matano's caravan, which was cut up, had brought the wrath of the

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1. McGregor's annual letter for 1902 in CMS Archives, G3/A5/016.
2. J. Boyes: The Company of Adventurers, London, 1928, pp 130.

Muruka on themselves by attacking a man in his shamba. In the ensuing fight only two of his people escaped.[1] Muruka had followed this up by killing three porters and a policeman in August 1901, as well as attacking McLellan's camp. A punitive raid was embarked upon under S.L.Hinde and Harrison.[2] In 1902 Muruka once more attacked and killed five Indian traders and a European settler. The Government could no longer stand this and a strong expedition, consisting of five British officers, 115 askari, 300 Maasai levies and Kikuyu warriors, was despatched under the command of Captain Maycock. Mbuthia Kaguongo acting as guide, the forces scoured the area from the vicinity of Thika Town to Kihumbuini on 2 September to 25 October, 1902. The expedition was successful and 200 Kikuyu were killed, 300 heads of cattle and 2,000 sheep and goats captured.[3] The Government losses were only one killed and 13 wounded. As the heavy casualties on the Kikuyu side indicate, this punitive raid was particularly vindictive because of the grisly manner in which their fellow countryman had been killed. On 8 September 1902 Meinertzhagen gave orders that, in Kihumbuini, "every living thing except children should be killed without mercy ... Every soul was either shot or bayonetted, ... We burned all the huts and razed the banana plantations to the ground."[4] This cracked Muruka's intransigence and there was little trouble afterwards.

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1. Hall's Diary, November 1896.
2. "History of Fort Hall, 1888-1944" in KNA/FH/6/1; Meinertzhagen, Kenya Diaries, op cit. pp 48-53; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit. pp 284-7
3. Report on Murang'a by Capt. F.A. Dickson in FO2/450 and 451; H. Moyse-Bartlett: The King's African Rifles: A Study in the Military History of East and Central Africa, 1890-1945, Aldershot, 1956, pp 204.
4. Meinertzhagen, Kenya Diaries, op cit. pp 51-2.

Towards the end of 1902 it became necessary too for the administration to attack Tetu in Nyeri. The immediate reason was to avenge the murder of a Goan caravan which had been murdered at Ithanji, near Kiandongoro. Basically there seems to have been a general dislike of the Makorobai, traders, in this region, largely due to their behaviour. But it is not exactly clear why this particular caravan got into difficulties with the local people. The quarrel however was a trade dispute. Be that as it may, the Tetu warriors attacked the caravan and the Goans were killed by Ngunju Gakere, Kimamo Kanai and Gacengo. The Government consequently despatched a two-pronged attack on Tetu. Meinertzhagen advanced from Naivasha across the Nyandarua Range, while Barlow, Hemsted and Sub-Commissioner Hinde advanced northwards from Mbiri Station accompanied by 200 Maasai levies, policemen and Kikuyu warriors from Kabete and Karuri's. Meinertzhagen reached the outskirts of Tetu on 2 December and had to fight every inch of the way, confiscating livestock and burning houses.[1] On that day alone he captured 665 head of cattle, many goats and sheep, and killed 20 Kikuyu, his casualties being two killed and five wounded. Fighting continued on the following day, 3 December, when he looted a further 60 head of cattle and 1000 sheep and goats. On the night of 4 December the Kikuyu warriors launched two daring attacks on Meinertzhagen's camp at Nyeri. Thirty-eight Kikuyu were killed, while the Government forces suffered four soldiers and five Maasai killed, eleven soldiers, fourteen Maasai and seven porters wounded. Meinertzhagen's company thus suffered "rather

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1. Meinertzhagen, Kenya Diaries, op cit, pp 64-75.

heavy casualties" and he felt that reinforcements of a further 200 Maasai levies was necessary. Undoubtedly the Tetu had shown their mettle, and even Meinertzhagen was more than surprised by their courage. "I must own," he admitted, "I never expected the Wakikuyu to fight like this."[1] However by 6 December resistance was drawing to an end. When the Government forces camped at the site where Nyeri Town now stands, "some friendlies" captured Gakere and one of his sons and handed them over to the officials. The campaign was now virtually over but Hinde thought otherwise. He was anxious to loot more livestock to give him sufficient revenue to build his new station. Consequently operations were extended towards Mahiga on 16 December for, allegedly, the people there had harboured Tetu livestock. The area around Nyeri Town, however, shouldered the brunt of official anger. From 16 to 18 December there were mopping-up operations, during which a further 184 head of cattle and 1200 sheep and goats were looted. Aguthi too did not escape unscathed; a raiding party scoured the area capturing 62 head of cattle and 6,000 sheep and goats. On 18 December the warriors made a final and desperate effort to dislodge the Government forces. They rushed the newly-established fort at Nyeri, were ambushed and 50 of them were killed. Further resistance seemed hopeless faced with superior arms and the fighting came to an end. The campaign over, Gakere was deported to Kismayu, but was soon afterwards repatriated to Mbiri in 1905. He died shortly afterwards, still defiantly against the invaders. Meantime on 20 December a group of about 60 elders

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1. Meinertzhagen, Kenya Diaries, op cit. pp 67.

from Tetu sued for peace, guaranteeing security to travellers and agreeing to make a road to Naivasha. By the end of 1902, therefore, open hostilities had come to an end. A moat was dug around the new fort and because of it Nyeri Town was nicknamed Mukaro, the trench.

Meanwhile, the Mathira people were not perturbed by what was happening elsewhere. Raiding between themselves, against their neighbours, especially those to their east, and attacks on the Makorobai still continued. In 1899 they had killed Mackinder's porters who had gone to look for food;[1] in May 1903 the Iria-ini cut up a caravan of six Somali and ten porters; and in November 1903 a party of 200 warriors had stopped McClure, a Collector, from counting huts in Githi, Mukurue-ini Division.[2] Besides, a few mercenaries who were anxious to curry favour in order to be made into chiefs, like their counterparts elsewhere, reported that the Mathira were defiantly vowing that they would never be ruled by the white men, the men who dressed like womenfolk. Obviously these people were in no mood to submit to the new administration at Nyeri. For these threatening and insulting messages that they allegedly sent to Hinde and their defiant posture they did not escape scot-free. In any case, with or without the defiantly threatening messages, the subjection of Mathira was just a question of time. It was a good pretext that taught a lesson to the collaborators as much as to the remaining pockets of resistance. The lesson was clear and simple - the white man meant business, and his word was law. In fact

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1. Mackinder, op cit. pp 467-8.
2. See historical notes on Iria-ini in KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1.

it was in this spirit that the military men approached their Mathira assignment. Since the "chiefs of (Mathira were) of doubtful loyalty," Meinertzhagen declared, a punitive expedition was necessary "to put them in the right frame of mind and to 'show them the flag'."[1] A three-pronged attack was undertaken in February and March 1904 under the command of Captain Dickson. Meinertzhagen and Humphrey led one column of 60 soldiers and 250 Maasai levies from Mbiri Station to Thiba River, from where they scoured Ndia through Kutus and Kabari to Embu. Hundreds of livestock were looted, hundreds of warriors killed and homes razed to the ground. The other two columns under Brancker advanced from Nyeri Town; one advanced via Mukurue-ini and camped at Icakahanya, while the other one crossed Thagana River by Muru wa Hiuhu ford and camped at Ruthagati. These two combed Mathira, particularly Konyu and Iria-ini, thoroughly, before advancing towards Ndia to join up with the other main column from Mbiri. Here they captured over 782 head of cattle, 2150 sheep and goats and killed 796 Kikuyu. At Icakahanya, now Ngunguru village, they collected firewood from the surrounding homesteads and lit a huge fire to roast the looted livestock. Even heavier casualties were inflicted on the Ndia, Gicugu and Embu. The casualties inflicted upon the Kikuyu group during this punitive raid were so heavy that none of the officials dared report the exact number. The official report put the number at 400, but Meinertzhagen estimated 1,500 to be a modest figure. No wonder there was a furore in the Foreign Office. The Mathira, having lost the day and realizing that spears and poisoned

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1. Meinertzhagen, op cit. pp 108.

arrows were of no avail in the face of superior arms, collected live-stock, ivory and sent them to the Government officials as a token of their genuine desire for peace.[1] Thus military operations came to an end.

1. Meinertzhagen, op cit pp 138-52; Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit pp 297.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

By the end of 1904 the East Africa Protectorate Government had made an all out effort to bring Kikuyuland under the Pax Britannica. And in the following years minor expeditions were undertaken to put the various Kikuyu groups under their control. Spears and arrows had proved no match for the superior weapons, and the Kikuyu quickly submitted in the face of stronger arms. In due course they learnt to conform with and accept the British rule, a lesson that they never forgot. This however was hardly the end of the Government's problems. The immediate concern was to establish a viable administration. But there was no visible traditional authority with which to work, and the administrative personnel was in short supply too. Faced by this problem the administrative officers turned to the motley crowd of mercanaries who had served them as porters, guides or askari, and created them into chiefs. The officials assumed that chiefs existed in the traditional society and thus some of the athamaki, or any other bold spirits who exaggerated their own importance, were made into chiefs as well. The so-called chiefs soon became local "tin gods" and a law unto themselves, more especially because very little control was exercised over them. According to all accounts, the hammering that the Kikuyu had experienced at the hands of the punitive expeditions was nothing compared to the constant harrassment inflicted upon them by the mercenaries now christened "chiefs". Many of these chiefs saw a golden chance to line their pockets while their hangers-on, the njama, flouted the traditional code of behaviour by harrassing all and sundry, and in particular the girls who had to sleep in the newly established bomas. Some, like Karuri, bent

traditional social organisation to serve their mercenary ends; Karuri decreed that before the traditional muhingo could be lifted any prospective initiate had to pay him a rupee, an idea that the others emulated. Any person who refused to obey the chief and his njama was severely beaten, his home burnt down or livestock looted; and there was no appeal to anyone else! No one had a better chance to observe this class of people at close quarters than McGregor, who gives a graphic description of their behaviour in 1906/7. He describes their activities thus:

> "Under the present arrangements, the njama consists of all the rogues of an enormous district who have the chief's permission to enter. It is an engine of oppression, because by means of it the Government headman can punish any district which does not, as he thinks, listen to him viz. allow his young men to do as they like there. The njama entering a district divide themselves up, and each decides upon the village where he will make his home for the time being. During the time he condescends to remain there, he is like the owner of the village; the owner himself is but his servant, and is condemned to sit up and watch that the fire does not go down while his lordship is sleeping smugly in his bed. If the fire goes down the poor man has to pay a fine of a sheep or is beaten by the whole band in the morning. The women of the village become for the time being the property of the visitor. Everyday a sheep has to be killed, and the njama live like kings."[1]

To McGregor's knowledge no fewer than six people were murdered on trumped-up charges of witchcraft. And one of them, he noted, was murdered because he had refused to give up his shamba which the chief wanted. McGregor was not alone in his condemnation of the chiefs and their hangers-on. Dundas, too, noted that "it had become a heinous crime to dispute the authority of the so-called chief", and that "their authority was only sustained through the fear of the Government". At

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1. McGregor: Proceedings of the CMS 1906/7, Vol. 52, pp 73.

the same time, "their chief aim was to enrich themselves and to secure their newly invented authority". It is small wonder, therefore, that by 1912 they were the "least in touch with their people."[1]

Already smarting under the hammering that they had had and the subsequent behaviour of the chiefs and their hangers-on, the Kikuyu found it difficult to adjust themselves to the new order due to other factors which aggravated the situation. Soon after subjection they were forced to pay a hut tax. The efficiency of a chief appears to have been measured by the amount of hut tax collected, and anxious to curry favour and please their masters the new chiefs harrassed their unwilling subjects to pay the tax under the pain of having their stock confiscated. In any case, in the absence of any money, they had to part with their precious livestock, which was already depleted by the punitive expeditions. This was a nasty pill to swallow, but having lost the argument in the battlefield they had reluctantly to obey or else face the consequences of official displeasure. But even more disturbing demands were to follow.

In 1896 Francis Hall welcomed three European families - Boedecker, Wallace and MacQueen - to settle around Fort Smith and amongst the Kikuyu. This initiated yet another development that had far-reaching repercussions for the Kikuyu people and their relationship with the Government and the European community as a whole. The problem of land alienation and its subsequent interplay with politics cannot adequately be discussed here. But a few salient comments will not,

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1. C.C. Dundas on review of Ciama in KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1.

it is hoped, be out of place. The construction of the Uganda Railway from Mombasa to Kisumu cost slightly over £5 million. Right from the start it was operating at a loss for lack of traffic, and its running costs had to be met by grants-in-aid from a close-fisted British Treasury. The Protectorate lacked mineral resources and hence it was essential for agricultural production to be stimulated. Anxious to reduce the deficit, Sir Charles Eliot, the evil genius behind the land alienation, proposed that if white settlers were brought into the seemingly empty land they would, within a comparatively short time, make the railway pay. The railway would be assured of adequate traffic resulting from the increased agricultural productivity of the Kenya highlands. Eliot saw his task as that of creating a white man's country not dissimilar to New Zealand or Australia. The acceptance of this policy by the British Government had a series of land laws following suit designed to facilitate land alienation to the Europeans. Land alienation really gained momentum in 1903, when there was an influx of prospective settlers from Britain, South Africa in particular, and elsewhere.[1]

During the second half of the 19th century and for a generation or so, the Kikuyu had been expanding at the expense of the weakened Maasai. This brought the Kikuyu closer to the plains and, although for agricultural purposes the plains were marginal, a period of reckoning between the two groups was in the offing. But the opportunity never presented itself as the two communities were isolated from each other by the

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1. For a detailed examination of the European Settlement see M.P.K. Sorrenson, Origins of European Settlement in Kenya, op cit.

Company and the Government from 1890 and 1902 at the southern and northern frontier respectively. In Kiambu district, the Kikuyu had hardly penetrated beyond Nyongera River when the Company established its fort at Kiawariua in 1890. Indeed, apart from grazing, Kikuyu cultivation had only extended as far as the vicinity of Mugumoini (Fort Smith) by that period. Waiyaki, who was at the vanguard of expansion along this area, had built his kihingo at Mbugici after 1887, since von Hohnel and Teleki found him at Mukui (Karura) on their way across Kikuyuland. The frontier was ringed by a line of fortified villages, and this to all intents and purposes could be regarded as roughly delineating the fullest extent of their effective occupation. At the frontier several well-remembered individuals had their ihingo at several points; Muru wa Mugwe was at Muthaiga, Gatama and Kiarii Ndemengo at the confluence of the Karura and Gitathuru Rivers, Waihumbu and Thairu at Kogoge, Mugi at Kabete, Mukiri and Waiyaki at Mbugici, Wamagata at Kinoo, Ngware at Gitaru (Kanjeru), Gatonye at Muguga, Ngeca at Ngeca, Njiriri, Cege and Kiragu at Rungai (Kabuku/Tigoni area), Kiratu at Limuru and Nding'uri and Nduti at Uplands. Beyond Uplands there were only a few ihingo at Korio, otherwise the rest of the area was an unoccupied forest except for Turuthi, a Dorobo, who lived there. And along the eastern border there was a no-man's land chiefly used for grazing because the land was relatively poor for agricultural purposes. The boundary along the eastern edge, therefore, closely followed the Kikuyu plateau and the Kaputie plains and more or less followed the present day large coffee farms that skirt Kiambu on the eastern edge.

The boundary along the eastern edge of Murang'a district also followed the present coffee farms too or ran more or less along the Nairobi-Nyeri road.[1] But the frontier was shifting all the time.

Along the northern frontier the Kikuyu had not expanded beyond the Thagana River in Mathira and the north Cania River in Tetu by the turn of the century. In July 1892 Gregory, who had journeyed from Mount Kenya towards the hinterland of Mathira, found that cultivation had only reached Gathuini salt-lick, and the Rui Ruiru "formed the frontier of the inhabited district." Kagati was by then empty and there were no signs of habitation.[2] Mackinder, 1899, and Karianjahi, 1900, saw no sign of habitation beyond the Thagana River, and the nearest homes were at Itiati and the Kiamuceru Hills.[3] The Kikuyu themselves readily admit that cultivation across the Rui Ruiru was only started after the cattle epidemic of the 1880s. And in Tetu expansion had only reached the banks of the north Cania River when the British Government established Nyeri station in 1902. Descriptions given by Routledge, Meinertzhagen and Karianjahi confirm this.

In the light of this evidence, there is no doubt that the hardest hit victims of land alienation were the Maasai and not the Kikuyu, the latter's clamour notwithstanding. True, the Kikuyu lost some land, but their loss should be seen in the right perspective. There is no doubt that in Kiambu, north of the Nyongera River, the incredibly high

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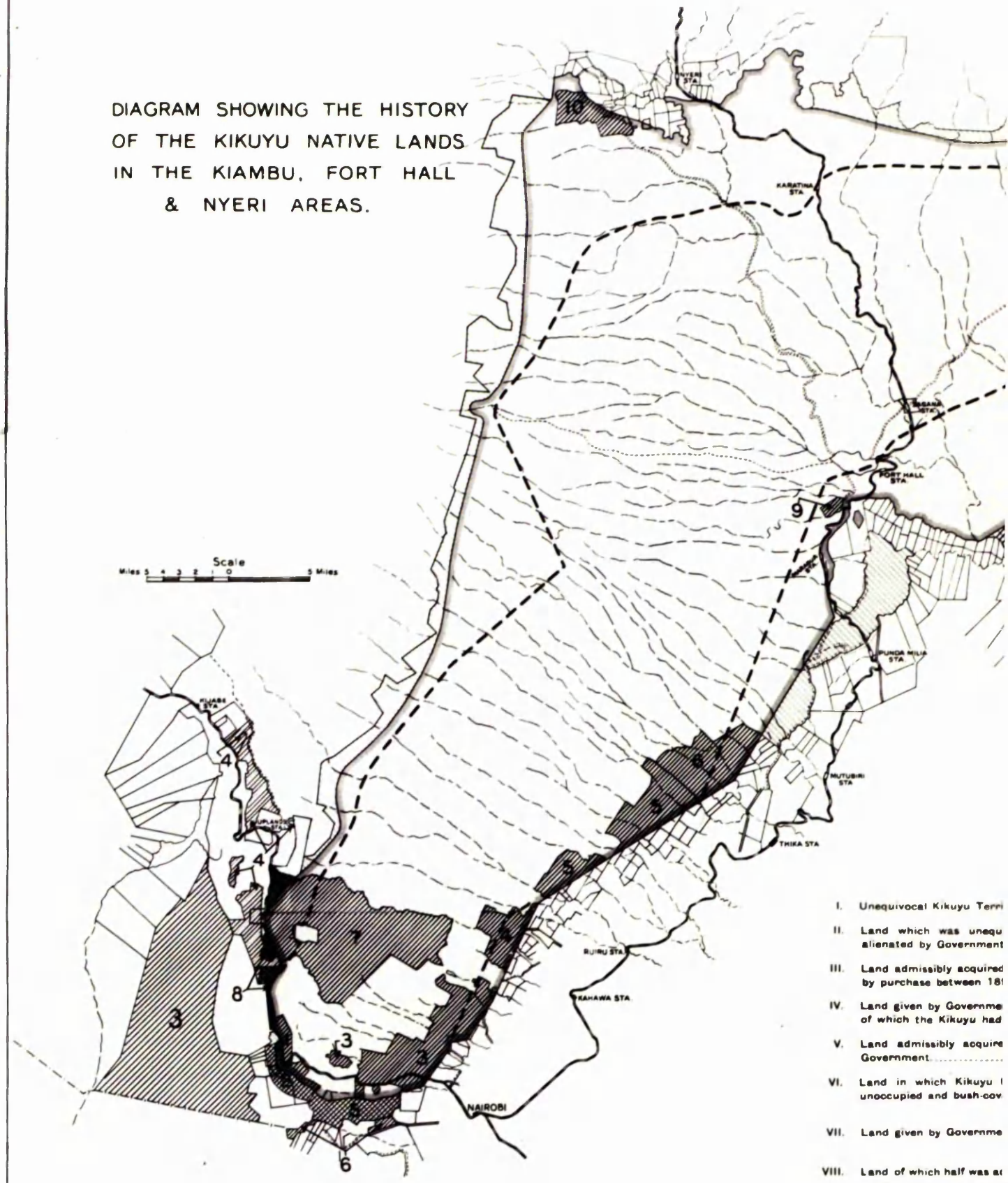
1. Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit, pp 119, 235. See also map 3.
2. Gregory, op cit, pp 190, and also pp 157-8 and 192.
3. See description of their journeys on the northern border on Boyes, op cit, pp 163-78, 180-99; and Mackinder, op cit, pp 462-3 and map.

MAP 3.

DIAGRAM SHOWING THE HISTORY OF THE KIKUYU NATIVE LANDS IN THE KIAMBU, FORT HALL & NYERI AREAS.



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Land Commission, Report,

mortality due to disease and famine left the newly occupied land vacant at the very time when the first lot of white settlers was just about to arrive in search of suitable land for alienation, egged on, no doubt, by an over-zealous government.[1] There is ample evidence to show that a number of families and mbari were actually moved from their land during the demarcation of the forest line or to make way for the white settlers. The greater source of dissatisfaction, on the other hand, arose from the effects of the procedure followed by the new settlers in acquiring land. As Hausburg, who had acquired land around Punda Milia in 1904, explained, owing to the absence of a land office in the area the procedure followed in the acquisition of land was that "You drew a sketch plan of a river and a tree, and whatever struck your fancy, and you drew a square round the particular bit of land and sent that in for approval."[2] In effect little attention was paid to the rights of the mbari. In most cases, the Kikuyu owners were temporarily left intact. They became squatters and a valuable source of labour, but otherwise life continued much as it had done, since they experienced no change in their lives initially. But in due course the new settler found them to be a nuisance or wanted to make use of the land that they were occupying. When such a situation arose he had them removed. By 1910 these dispossessed and displaced families had become a big administrative problem. Many of them, including the ahoi, found life to be intolerable either under their European master or the oppressive and autocratic

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1. See map 3.
2. KLC, Vol. 1, op cit, pp 394.

chief and his njama. And with official encouragement they migrated to the Rift Valley to become labourers and squatters in the newly established farms where, for the time being, they found life to be less demanding. Yet the plight of these families was not solely the result of Government policy; there were many Kikuyu opportunists, too, who feathered their own nests by selling their own mbari or even other people's land without their knowledge or consent. Still others disregarded the customary law regarding the status of the ahoi and drove them away as they came to realize the value of land. Kinyanjui Nugu was no doubt the most notorious offender in this respect, but there were many others. Kinyanjui was able to sell other people's land with impunity in the early stages of land alienation because he could threaten them that he could call on the Government wrath to descend on them as they had experienced not so long ago. He had no land of his own to sell or give, as he was a very poor man who at one time lived on wild animals. It is even alleged that he had been disowned by his family for waywardness while at Kiria (Kandara), after which he attached himself to Waiyaki, a distant relation. He became Waiyaki's njaguti, servant, until the arrival of the Company, when his fortunes suddenly altered for the better. He became the main collaborator helping the Company and Government, particularly Hall, in their struggle with the Kikuyu. Ultimately his association and identification with the European cause paid dividends handsomely as he was eventuallymade a Paramount Chief of the Kikuyu, the sole incumbent of that post.

With the Company and Government forces behind him, he had nothing to fear and could do much as he liked. On 8 June 1894, he signed a

memorandum giving the Company some land, land which obviously belonged to Kiarii Mũriithi. And in 1896 and with the arrival of the first settlers, his main chance of enriching himself had arrived. He sold land to Boedecker for five cows, three bales of amerikani, four 60 lb. loads of beads and four loads of wire.[1] In 1899 he gave P.E. Watchman 60 acres of land, at Westlands, and it transpired later that in fact the land belonged to Muya Kingi.[2] Sooner rather than later, even the Government officials realized what Kinyanjui had been up to all along. "It appears that nearly all the present ithaka owners south of (Nyongera) River," Beech observed in 1912, "were compelled in the days of Mr Hall to pay for their land to Kinanjui who is stated to have given out that all the land had been given him by the Serkali.[3] This may account for Kinanjui's wealth."[4] Other chiefs followed suit, and many of the early chiefs acquired large tracts of land, some by hook or by crook. Even today it is discernible that some of the families of the early chiefs are among the largest land owners. It was easy for the chiefs to get away with a lot of things, since the rank and file feared to report to the all-powerful Serikali, as a result of the hammering that they had experienced at the hands of the punitive raids and the chiefs themselves. In a way the chiefs had the Government backing so long as they hid from their superiors the true situation or their excesses. The Government was anxious to create the chiefs into an Establishment, and this could only be done if they acquired some wealth. It should

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1. Dr H.A. Boedecker's evidence, KLC, Vol.1, op cit, pp 695.
2. P.E. Watcham's evidence, KLC, Vol.1, op cit, pp 735.
3. Swahili word for government.
4. Notes by Beech re Dagoretti in KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1.

be realized that the chiefs had enormous power, even of life and death, which they abused for personal gain. Peculation became rife and as Low observed, "Abuses were rife; numerous headmen were broken reeds".[1] Hence there was real and genuine fear of the whole administrative machinery and in particular of the officials; "We are afraid," Beech was told in 1912, because "we think all white men must think alike."[2] Or as the Kikuyu laconically put it, "Gutiri muthungu na mubea", there is no difference between a white settler and a priest. Nevertheless, owing to the excesses committed and abuse of power by the mercenaries, some few Kikuyu invited and welcomed white settlers on to their mbari land in order to be protected by them against their oppressive chiefs. Still others were persuaded that the white settlers were visitors who temporarily needed hospitality and accommodation. The latter group genuinely believed that the settlers would soon be gone; after all, mugeni ni ruui (a visitor is like a river that passes away). In addition, the offer of amerikani and a load of beads by the visitor seemed to cement their friendship a stage further and made the visitor all the more welcome. Finally others decided to sell their land with or without their mbari consent or sanction, perhaps hoping to redeem it when the need arose. The hardest hit group were the ahoi, who were squeezed out by the new European land owners as well as by their brothers, the Kikuyu. A combination of all these factors led to a lot of recrimination over land, which became such a characteristic feature of Kiambu. The traditional ahoi became a new type of ahoi called squatters on farms

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1. Harlow, Chilver and Smith (eds), op cit, pp 47.
2. Beech re Dagoretti, op cit, in KNA/PC/CP/1/1/1.

now owned by the white settlers in exchange for their labour. They were joined by all those who had been dispossessed of their land, those who had miscalculated and thought that the white settlers were birds of passage or those who wished to escape the irksome and draconian rule of the new chiefs.

Compared to Kiambu, Murang'a and Nyeri lost even less land. On the eastern border of Murang'a there was a fringe of no-man's-land between the Metumi, Maasai and the Kamba. This area had been neglected largely because it was agriculturally marginal land that was only seasonally suitable for grazing.[1] It was this land that was alienated to the white settlers. But some Kikuyu families were removed from the slopes of Nyandarua during the demarcation of the forest line. The situation in Nyeri was, however, slightly different; there claim to 'lost land' was based on a spate of expansion which took place between 1902-10, immediately after the establishment of the British administration and after the subsequent removal of the Maasai from Laikipia and Nanyuki in 1904 to make way for European settlement. It was during this period that a number of families crossed the Thagana and North Cania Rivers into the Nyeri plains. Nderi Wang'ombe, for example, migrated into Kamaha, between Nyeri and Mweiga, in 1903 soon after his family had fled from Mathira. Another prominent collaborator, Wambugu Mathangani, migrated to Gatitu from Gikondi after 1902.[2] Others followed suit, until this expansion was halted in 1910, when all the Kikuyu beyond

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1. Kikuyu Historical Texts, op cit. pp 106-27.
2. KLC, Vol. 1, op cit, pp 520-39, 82-110.

the North Cania and Thagana Rivers were repatriated into the Nyeri District. Simultaneous with the northward expansion was vigorous clearing of the forests towards Kirinyaga and Nyandarua. This group was also moved back into Nyeri during the forest demarcation. In the region of Nyeri Hill, Kabage and Kiandongoro, Ndiyuini the local chief, burnt "well over 100 huts in this area when the (forest) line was marked about 1910, and the people inside the line were turned out."[1] Similar measures were taken along the Gura Valley, Ragati and the borders of Konyu and Magutu locations where 600 to 800 people were moved back into the Nyeri District. In appreciation of their services, many of the chiefs, then called headmen, and notably Ndiyuini, were permitted to continue grazing their livestock in the forests. Ndiyuini was not eventually removed until 1926.

It is evident, therefore, that land alienation initially affected a comparatively small group of people in Murang'a and Nyeri. Here the grievance that took pride of place from the outset was the behaviour of the newly-installed chiefs and their njama, who became a constant irritant to those under them. No sooner had the British administration been established than labour was called for to make roads or build bomas. That done, Hut Tax had to be paid for reasons that were inexplicable to the Kikuyu. Furthermore the demands for Hut Tax coincided with the settler demands for labour to work in their new farms. These two factors compounded a situation whereby some of the Kikuyu, faced with the loss of their ancestral land, became a mere reservoir of labour

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1. KLC, Vol.1, op cit, pp 517.

just as they had been a source of food for the passing caravans in earlier decades. Thus there was a marriage of interest between the new administration and the settlers. The Government officials encouraged their charges to work for the settlers in order to earn money to pay tax. Increasingly the administration seemed to be an adjunct of the white settlement. And the new chiefs, anxious to ingratiate themselves as well as to prove their loyalty, 'press ganged' anybody that they could lay their hands on as labourers for the European settlers. Anyone who refused to pay Hut Tax or be recruited for work in the farms was either flogged or fined a goat. Soon it became clear to the Kikuyu, especially those who fell foul of the new order, that it was not advisable to disobey the chief, however foreign that institution might be. The Government officials, and especially the white men, became the object of fear and it became the custom for people to bolt into the bush the moment an official was sighted. Confidence in the Government was clearly slow in coming, and perhaps never quite materialized throughout the colonial period. One of the major problems was communication between the Government and its subjects: there was no direct access to the District Commissioner, as between him and the ordinary citizen stood the chief or the ubiquitous interpreter, both of whom were barely in touch with the people. The two decades following the traumatic subjection of the Kikuyu by military force were therefore crucial. These years were to determine whether the sulky acquiescence in the British administration, by the Kikuyu, would be replaced by genuine confidence on both sides, or whether their mutual attitude would remain much as it

had been in the closing decades of the 19th century. For the moment a truce had emerged; the Kikuyu had learnt, through costly skirmishes and battles, that it did not pay to openly defy the Government and its local representative, the chief.

While the Government was busy forcibly subduing the Kikuyu and establishing the British rule and the European settler was taking up land for settlement, another equally important incursion was taking place. The East African Scottish Industrial Mission, which had hitherto operated from their base in Kibwezi, decamped in 1898 to establish themselves among the Kikuyu at Baraniki near Dagoretti. The arrival of the Scottish Missionaries at this juncture was particularly opportune. With famine and disease ranging in the land, the missionaries played a notable part in organising famine relief and caring for the sick. Both acts earned them a good name, and a lasting gratitude, and augured well for their evangelizing enterprise. When the Rev. Thomas Watson moved to Thogoto (Kikuyu) on a 3,000 acre site, he was joined by hundreds of the sick and hungry, amongst whom emerged future stalwarts of the missionary cause. But the Scottish missionaries were not to have the monopoly of winning the Kikuyu souls. In 1900 McGregor arrived at Fort Smith and in the following year founded a station for the Church Missionary Society at Kihuruko.[1] Following the expansion of British rule further north, McGregor hastened to Murang'a in 1903 at the invitation of Karuri and founded a number of stations centred around Withaga (1903) and Kahuhia.[2] Murang'a was to remain a stronghold of the

1. R. Oliver: The Missionary Factor in East Africa, London, 1952, chapter 4.
2. Proceedings of the CMS, 1900-7.

CMS which only founded Mahiga further north in January 1909.[1] In June 1909 the Scottish missionaries spread their activities to Nyeri, where A.R. Barlow founded Tumutumu station. Other competitors for the evangelisation of the Kikuyu were the Africa Inland Mission, which founded Kijabe in 1901 and the Roman Catholic priests who established a station at Kiambu (1902), Limuru (1903) and Mang'u (1906). The Roman Catholic missionaries also took advantage of Karuri's desire to have white men at Tuthu and established themselves there in June 1902. By the end of 1903 they had carved up a large sphere of influence and founded new stations at Mugoiri in Murang'a, Gikondi, Karima and Mathari in Nyeri.[2]

Thus the end of 1904 witnessed the eventual defeat of the last determined pockets of resistance to the establishment of British rule. By that date the elements that were to affect the development of the Kikuyu in the 20th century had also emerged. The British Government, through superior military power, had established its claim to rule the Kikuyu and brought with it the pax Britannica as an immediate boon. The warrior corps began to lose their functions and eventually became redundant. And as the traditional mechanism of law and order became obsolete, they were increasingly drawn into the cash economy. In order to fit into this, they had to be adept in the techniques of western civilization which were demanded. Gradually they were transformed into paid hands or servants of the white man to serve him as

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1. McGregor in Church Missionary Review, Vol. 60, January 1909, op cit, pp 35.
2. Cagnolo, op cit, pp 269-70, 272.

labourers, porters,low-grade clerks or chiefs. This modernization weakened the traditional religion, beliefs and habits, and culminated in a social upheaval. Faced by the whole gamut of western ideas, there was a rapid social regrouping and a new class of leaders emerged. Definitely it was the intention of the new power to set up a Kikuyu Establishment revolving around all those who had rallied to their standard from the very beginning, particularly the newly-created chiefs. Meanwhile, an increasing band of mission adherents learnt the three R's and a variety of skills which qualified them to be "readers" who spread the Gospel and set up the "bush schools". Their efforts and labour had important implications for the future. With the pax Britannica, came increased and better communications, which facilitated mobility and reduced the threat of famines. Medical facilities were introduced too, and these reduced the worst excesses of epidemics and child mortality. Soon the population began to increase and the increased population brought in its wake social and economic problems calling for new solutions which were beyond the scope of the traditional panacea. Furthermore the formalisation of the provincial and district boundaries not only halted the expansion of the Kikuyu but also isolated them from their cousins and their Maasai relatives and neighbours in particular. The Maasai-Kikuyu cultural fusion that had been going on for hundreds of years thence came to an end. It only remained to be seen whether the resourceful and egalitarian Kikuyu could adjust themselves to the problems and challenges posed by the new system of government, economy, religion and education.

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