

Unity and Divisions: The Secret Movement and Muma wa Uigano

At about six o'clock on an evening early in 1952, Kiboi Muriithi was taking a nap in his room in Nairobi near Burma Market when he was awakened by loud knocking. His good friend Kamau was at the door with an invitation to "take a stroll" and drink a beer together. After a walk of some distance to the middle of Bahati Location, Kamau knocked at a strange house and slipped behind Muriithi as they both entered. "Instead of following, I found myself in front, in one of the strangest rooms I had ever seen. It was pitch black, lit by only a candle in the furthest corner. The room was small, no more than twelve feet by twelve. And it was full of people, more than twenty men and women. There was no noise. Those speaking spoke quietly. I looked around for beer, but without much hope. It was dawning on me that I was now involved in something completely different from the beer I had been expecting." In fact, Kamau had led his unwitting friend Kiboi Muriithi to an oath-taking ceremony.⁵⁸

The oath of the secret movement (*muma wa uigano*) became the principal instrument to build the unity that Muhimu believed was so important to challenging British control of Kenya. The new oath that radicals like Waruhiu Itote organized and administered was different in certain

particulars from earlier Gikuyu oaths.⁵⁹ Let us look at its general characteristics. To begin with, the oath was strongly militant and implicitly threatened violence against Europeans and those who betrayed the movement.⁶⁰ Second, the oath was administered on a mass basis as well as to small groups, a departure from tradition; Karari Njama remembers dozens at his Nyeri oathing ceremony in September 1952, while Mohamed Mathu reports thousands of people at his ceremony on the outskirts of Nairobi in June 1952.⁶¹ Third, the oath was given to men and women equally and sometimes at the same gathering, both departures from Gikuyu tradition. During Karari Njama's first oathing, large numbers of prospective oathers of both sexes were assembled in a hut waiting to be called to the ritual.⁶² Fourth, the oath was compulsory; people called to oathing ceremonies were not allowed to refuse or leave and were beaten and threatened with death if they tried. Kiboi Muriithi's mother, tricked into attending an oathing, attempted to refuse to participate. "When the calabash came round my mother foolishly refused to drink. She was dragged out of the line and man-handled, taunted with being 'Black-White' and having sold her brothers and sisters. A slap across her face sent her sprawling. Kicks and blows were rained upon her."⁶³ She was thrown from the hut, and later threatened with death; only her son's intervention saved her. Fifth, the secrecy of the oath was enforced by cursing, physical pressure, and the threat of serious harm to anyone who revealed the ritual to outsiders.

Most of the Mau Mau authors made their oath-taking a central episode in the early chapters of their memoirs. They did not necessarily take the oath on their own initiative; half the authors were tricked into coming, generally by close friends or acquaintances from their home locations. The oathing place, usually a hut (though Mathu's group was oathed in the open), was dark and guarded by well-armed and often hostile men, who welcomed candidates with shows of bullying clearly designed to intimidate. While the ceremony administered inside varied from place to place, the memoirs indicate that certain details were generally consistent. The administrator tells the candidate to remove his clothes (all memoir descriptions of oathing are by men) and any European objects like watches or keys. Often, though not always, he is then tied with goat skin to other candidates. Naked, his wrists and neck encircled with goat skin, he passes with the others seven times through a banana stalk arch, takes seven bites from the hearts and lungs of a goat, and drinks from a gourd a mixture of goat's blood and other liquids. (Seven is a powerful number in Gikuyu cosmology.) He then repeats after the administrator a series of vows, each time saying that if he proves false, may the oath kill him. These vows commit him to struggle for freedom, never to forsake or sell the land to Europeans, to help the secret movement with firearms, money, or anything else needed, to obey superiors, and never to betray the movement to its enemies. For example, J. M. Kariuki and his comrades in the Rift Valley swore:

I speak the truth and vow before God
And before this movement,
The movement of Unity,
The Unity which is put to the test
The Unity that is mocked with the name of "Mau Mau,"
That I shall go forward to fight for the land,
The lands of Kirinyaga that we cultivated,
The lands which were taken by the Europeans

And if I fail to do this
May this oath kill me,
May this seven kill me,
May this meat kill me.⁶⁴

After the initiate repeats all the pledges, the oath administrator anoints his forehead with blood, and the initiate pays his fee (which in some cases can be substantial). Sometimes the administrator then gives a talk, instructing the initiates in colonial history and in the political purposes of the movement.⁶⁵

The unity oath had a profound impact on most oath takers. With the exception of Mohamed Mathu, all the authors who describe their oath-taking left the ceremony with a feeling of satisfaction and strong commitment. J. M. Kariuki reacted as if he had experienced a religious conversion. impact of oath

Afterwards in the maize I felt exalted with a new spirit of power and strength. All my previous life seemed empty and meaningless. Even my education of which I was so proud, appeared trivial and meaningless beside this splendid and terrible force which had been given me. I had been born again.⁶⁶

This theme of rebirth or fundamental change recurs again and again in the memoirs, and links the oath of the secret movement, taken as an adult, to the traditional second-birth ceremony of childhood and the initiation of adolescence.⁶⁷ Thus for its initiates the oath became a third experience of personal renewal. In the case of educated Gikuyu like Kariuki, *muma wa uigano* wiped out the deracinating, detribalizing effects of Westernization (transforming them back by re-Gikuyuizing them); in the case of uneducated men like Gikoyo, who had never left their communities, the oath, the ritual, and the instructions were the first phase in their political awakening. In addition, *muma wa uigano* bound the group together, as traditional oaths had done; as Kariuki explains, "The purpose of all these oaths was to give those participating a feeling of mutual respect. . . . Envy, hate and enmity would be unknown between them."⁶⁸

Muma wa uigano involved a culturally syncretistic ceremony containing elements of precolonial oath-taking, elements reminiscent of the Gikuyu second-birth and circumcision ceremonies, elements of the political oath of the KCA dating from the 1920s, and elements that were essentially

new. Rob Buijtenhuijs, supporting his points with details from the memoirs, has argued persuasively that *muma wa uigano* was above all an "initiation into a new and purified Kikuyu tribe, proud of its past and its personality, and freed from European domination and foreign influences."⁶⁹ This theme of individual and group purification and rededication comes through clearly in Gucu Gikoyo's *We Fought for Freedom*, when the administrator tells his group after oathing "that now we were good people as we had been cleansed and had become Gikuyu Karing'a (true Gikuyu) and warriors who would fight for the independence of our country."⁷⁰ The title of "Gikuyu Karing'a," which set Mau Mau initiates apart from the unoathed, is also historically significant, because it was the name chosen for themselves by the opponents of the missions' anti-cliterodectomy campaign of 1929, distinguishing them from others who accepted the missions' direction, the *irore* (thumbprinters). Moreover, as Bildad Kaggia points out, those who had taken the oath called themselves "circumcised," not just true Gikuyu but true adults, separate from the uninitiated, who remained children in Mau Mau eyes.⁷¹ Carrying this further, they had become genuine warriors of a true warrior age-group like those of precolonial times, with a real social purpose to defend the community against its enemies, not false men and sham warriors who accepted British rule.

The oathing ceremonies, with their potent ethnic symbolism and strong flavor of peasant irredentism, did much in themselves to further individual commitment. So did the new sense of group solidarity and community acceptance enjoyed by initiates. Ngugi Kabiro's close friend was "very pleased to hear that I too was now a true son of *Gikuyu* and *Mumbi*," and Kaggia discovered "a solidarity and closeness of all members, a confidence they had in one another, which was not evident in KAU," which he found "new and thrilling."⁷² Even before he was oathed, Gucu Gikoyo was deeply impressed by the self-sacrifice and group support shown by Mau Mau men he encountered in prison. "One thing that struck me as unusual was the unity of these people. If one of them was brought food by a relation or a friend, he served it along the line until it was finished."⁷³

Oathed people would not provide traditional communal support to, socialize freely with, or talk openly around those who had not taken the unity oath. Before he took his first oath, Karari Njama was shocked to find that when he and a person he later learned had already been oathed each called on friends to help him level ground to prepare to build a house, his friends failed to show up for him while the other man received all the help he needed.⁷⁴ Joram Wamweya remembers that if a person who had not taken the oath called his friends and neighbors to his home to drink beer, "nobody would decline, but he would have to drink it alone, for nobody would turn up."⁷⁵ This affected sexual interaction as well, for if a young man had not taken the oath, "No girl would so much as say 'Hullo' to him."⁷⁶ Bildad Kaggia, Karari Njama, and Kiboi Muriithi tell how the use

of special handshakes and code language both enabled oathed members of the movement to recognize each other and to exclude outsiders. "If a stranger entered a room during a secret discussion someone would utter the warning 'There are plenty of fleas in this house,' or 'This house is filthy.' The conversation would switch to a safe subject."⁷⁷ All this reinforced group solidarity, protected secrecy, and ostracized Gikuyu who had not taken the oath, brought peer pressure on some to take it, and stigmatized and isolated unreconstructed "loyalists." As more and more joined, pressure on the unoathed mounted, until some holdouts found themselves desperately applying for admission. Kaggia describes how the movement responded. "Some late-comers who had previously been against the movement were fined before they could be admitted into the family. For example, if a chief had persecuted our members, when he wanted to join us he had to pay a large sum of money."⁷⁸

The desperation of late joiners could be fueled by fear. In his appendix on oaths, Waruhiu Itote comments that "For most people, taking the oath was the final, not the first, expression of devotion to our cause."⁷⁹ Yet General China's account of his own use of compulsion when oathing civilians on Kirinyaga undercuts that assertion, as do references to intimidation and force in the narratives of Muriithi, Njama, Kabiro, and Wamweya.⁸⁰ Joram Wamweya recounts a conversation with his mother at their home in Kiambu shortly before he took his first oath:

"Since you have come," my mother told me after she had served the food, "there is one thing about which you must take care."

"What is it?" I asked.

"There are people who are killing others and burying them in the very house where they live."

"Why are they killing them?" I asked greatly puzzled.

"They kill those who refuse to take the oath."⁸¹

The stories of the sudden deaths or disappearances of refusers, the deceiving of initiates inveigled to oathing ceremonies, the gratuitous violence of oathing guards, and the threats against informers built into the oathing rituals all suggest that administrators created an atmosphere of intimidation and compulsion associated with the oath to reinforce the effects of ritual bonding and political conviction. Moreover, the oath increased the stakes of nonconformity by pitting the new Gikuyu Karing'a against the Christians and collaborators who would not take it. Thus, as John Lonsdale, drawing on Gikoyo's memoir, points out, its administrators both drew on history and distorted it by calling on violence against both Europeans and other Gikuyu to redeem the past and future.⁸²

Though disturbed by some aspects of the oathing ceremonies, the highly educated Karari Njama supports the necessity of oathing. "Though the oath clung on Kikuyu traditions and superstitions, yet the unity and

obedience achieved by it was so great that it could be our only weapon for fighting against the white community."⁸³ For the willing, the unity oath heightened their sense of Gikuyu identity and strengthened their commitment to the cause; for those initially unwilling, the oath usually ensured their passive cooperation and their silence. As Bildad Kaggia attests, it was the uneducated Gikuyu who responded most enthusiastically to the oath-taking campaign. "When 'Mau Mau' oath-taking started it was the uneducated who were the first to accept its radical gospel."⁸⁴ Unlike Karari Njama and Bildad Kaggia, many of the educated felt that their interests, especially their hard-won if precarious positions within the colonial structure, were threatened by the movement; most educated Gikuyu probably took the oath rather than run the risks of refusal, but their support for Mau Mau was minimal. A small percentage of Gikuyu refused the oath altogether, and an unknown number died because of their refusal. Those who died tended to be Christians, for while self-interested collaborators were not inclined to martyrdom, some Christians felt a strong ideological opposition to Mau Mau, as the cases of Mary Wangeci, Andrew Kaguru, Edmund Gikonyo, and others in Wiseman's *Kikuyu Martyrs* attest.⁸⁵ Christian refusers (especially members of Revival) formed a potential counterforce to Mau Mau infused by a similar spirit of commitment; such people were a real threat to the secret movement, and could be dealt with ruthlessly.⁸⁶

The oath also tended to separate the Gikuyu and their relatives among the Embu and Meru from other Africans. British propaganda would use this vigorously against the secret movement, particularly, Kahinga Wachanga suggests, among the Luo.⁸⁷ Gakaara Wanjau, a strong nationalist quite conscious of the need to involve other Kenyans in the struggle, was one of the leaders who recognized a need to develop oaths for other ethnic groups in order to draw them in.⁸⁸ Official evidence confirms appreciable success for the movement in oath-taking Kamba, many of whom lived in Nairobi and whose home area bordered Gikuyuland to the east, and less success among Maasai and among Luo in Nairobi.⁸⁹ The oath was the critical factor in building a high level of internal unity, but the movement still needed to take the next step to bring in large numbers of Africans from outside Central Kenya.

Infiltration, Intimidation, and Violence

The publication of the settlers' "Kenya Plan" (1949), the government crackdown on unions (1950), the move to elevate Nairobi to city status (1950), the banning of "Mau Mau" (1950), and the official endorsement of the unpopular Beecher Report on African education (1951) all exacerbated the tense political situation and increased the power of African political radicals. As the secret movement grew stronger and the stakes grew higher,

both its power to enforce its will on the oathed and its tendency to alienate unothed Africans increased. At the same time, divisions emerged within KAU between constitutionalists like Kenyatta and confrontationalists like Bildad Kaggia, and within Mau Mau between leaders like Kaggia, who had not fully committed to violence through armed revolt, and younger militants impatient for a test of strength with the government.

As more and more Gikuyu in Nairobi joined the secret movement, Gikuyu organizations originally established for other purposes soon became fronts for Mau Mau, a development clearly engineered by the radicals of the Central Committee, as Bildad Kaggia boasts in *Roots of Freedom*. Kaggia made the most of his position as a member of the African Advisory Council (AAC) in 1951–1952 to gain recognition for a number of Gikuyu sports and educational organizations that were really Mau Mau fronts, giving the secret movement a special ascendancy in Nairobi. "In those days having these societies controlled by 'Mau Mau' meant we could dominate the municipal halls. We could hold as many meetings as we liked without fear of being stopped. . . . These societies actually were engaged in educational activities as well. . . . But . . . were more important in recruiting new members to the 'Unity Movement.'"⁹⁰ In retaliation, the government attempted to set up front groups of its own to spy on Mau Mau; Kaggia used his position to deny AAC recognition to one of these, the "Kenya African Pointers Union."⁹¹

By 1952 Muhimu was establishing close links as well with the Gikuyu-dominated criminal underground of the capital city. Kaggia not only justifies this on grounds of expediency, but also claims that much of Nairobi criminal activity was politically motivated anyway. "By that time 'Mau Mau' had enlisted the help of all sorts of people, including thieves and robbers. 'Mau Mau' had a hand in almost every theft, robbery or any other crime directed against Europeans. Most of these crimes were political."⁹² From Muhimu's perspective, the most important political crimes involved obtaining guns for a possible confrontation with the government. Fred Kubai reports that Gikuyu veterans began training young recruits to shoot as early as 1949–1950.⁹³ Unlike Kariuki's account, Kaggia's memoir suggests that the recruits embraced the prospect of violence enthusiastically.

As membership swelled, the Central Committee became more and more aggressive. After uniting the people it was decided that if the government did not heed KAU's demands, we would be ready to fight for our rights. Word was sent out to the members to try and secure guns through all possible means—stealing, buying, robbing—according to the circumstances. Many impatient members enjoyed this, and they plunged into the job with great enthusiasm.⁹⁴

With money from oath-taking fees, from the fines assessed on late-coming initiates, and from collections from local members, the movement bought

guns, either directly from government workers who were oathbound members or by using such workers as go-betweens. Guns were also collected by burglary; Waruhiu Itote tells of breaking into a shop on River Road to steal twelve guns, a major coup that left his band "so elated that we did not bother with the nearby cashbox."⁹⁵ Mau Mau activists, or criminals working for Mau Mau, also attacked single policemen at night to seize their weapons. "Also our bands of strong men, led by Stanley Mathenge (Kamurwa, Gachago, and many others) used to spy on lonely policemen with guns. They snatched the gun and if necessary, killed the policeman too."⁹⁶ The Mau Mau would dismember the bodies of policemen in order to hide the evidence and deceive the government as to the men's whereabouts; eventually, a hasty killing squad left a leg with boot and puttees still on at the scene, alerting the authorities and leading them to strengthen police patrols and increase the number of posts in the Nairobi locations.⁹⁷

In spite of the emphasis on secrecy, informers soon became a serious problem. The memoirists cite betrayal, though the resort to mass oathing itself must have posed inherent security problems. Ngugi Kabiro blames unreliable new members (especially Christians and government employees like headmen and teachers) for the rash of raids on oathing ceremonies and suspected oathing ceremonies in Nairobi and Kiambu in 1952.⁹⁸ It was not only new members who could be lured into informing, however, for a member's betrayal compromised even the Central Committee itself. As Bildad Kaggia describes, when a special oathing ceremony for the entire Central Committee of about fourteen members was scheduled to be conducted at Kiambaa, members of the committee received a message just before they left Nairobi that soldiers had arrived at the Koinange home and were posted throughout the whole area; Kaggia and the others called the ceremony off and discovered the identity of the traitor two days later through their own informers in government offices. Their "strong men" arrested him and held him for trial.

Owing to the seriousness of the case, judgment had to be passed at once. The court session took place in a taxi, and the judges consisted of the chairman of the committee, myself and two others. The court decided that the man already knew too much. He was condemned to death. The sentence was carried out immediately. Then the postponed oath ceremonies for all members of the two supreme bodies took place.⁹⁹

Kaggia's account of informing within the inner ranks of Muhimu and Waruhiu Itote's strong defense of the necessary killing of informers in Nairobi both suggest that betrayal had become a major concern of Mau Mau leaders by mid-1952.

The problem of informers was offset by successful Mau Mau spying from within the government. African police, headmen, and even some chiefs took the oath of unity. China reports in his second book that

Muhoya, a powerful chief in Nyeri who had taken the oath of unity, intervened to release Dedan Kimathi when the latter was arrested in April 1952.¹⁰⁰ Soldiers were easy to bribe because of the British "starvation wages," and Mau Mau captives could escape "for as little as five shillings."¹⁰¹ In Nairobi and other administrative centers, government clerks, telegraphists, typists, and others were oathed into the movement so that Mau Mau could obtain information on official plans and weapons and ammunition from the government's own supplies. Paul Mahehu (a decorated veteran of Burma), the liaison between Nairobi and the Mau Mau bands that formed on Kirinyaga, became the main oath administrator to government employees, and his exploits of infiltration and subversion boosted morale and helped the movement in various ways.¹⁰²

As pressure mounted, the secret movement turned to attacks on loyalists. Kahinga Wachanga describes the first important attempts in Nairobi in April 1950 to assassinate prominent pro-government Africans Tom Mbotela, moderate leader of KAU and assistant superintendent of locations, and Muchohi Gikonyo, appointed councilor of the African Advisory Council, both of whom were wounded in the attacks. Dominic Gatu, a Muhimu activist and an ex-leader of 40 Group, shot Gikonyo and was arrested, tried, and sentenced to seven years in prison, though Fred Kubai was acquitted.¹⁰³ In the reserves, especially in Nyeri, violence against loyalists was also on the rise, from assaults on policemen to arson of the homes of headmen and chiefs.¹⁰⁴

As clandestine violence escalated, the Kenya African Union continued to operate in the open with Jomo Kenyatta at its head. By this time, the secret movement had thoroughly infiltrated KAU in Nairobi and Central Province. One indication is the change in the *nyimbo*, or political songs. The political song was hardly new to Gikuyu nationalism, ~~for some of the most influential were those sung in the 1920s, such as the *muthirigu* song and dance that had been used to rally *karing'a* in support of eliterodectomy and against the missionaries, chiefs, and *irore* in 1929.~~¹⁰⁵ In the late 1940s political songs were composed for rallies of the Kenya African Union. By the 1950s these KAU songs were intermingled with new ones composed by oathed men like Kinuthia wa Mugia, songs containing coded references to *muma wa uigano* and praise for the secret movement; these *nyimbo* were published in songbooks openly sold in Nairobi and at mass meetings of KAU, such as the Nyeri meeting of July 26, 1952, attended by Karari Njama.¹⁰⁶ While the songs were ambiguous, their intent was clear to initiates of the movement of unity, and ultimately to the police; when L. S. B. Leakey working for Special Branch obtained and translated the songbooks, the government stepped up its repression in Nairobi.

By 1952 the relationship between Kenyatta and the radicals of the secret movement was approaching a critical point. Although there was suspicion on both sides, men like Kaggia and Kubai needed Kenyatta as much

as he needed them, for Kenyatta could win the support of older Africans.¹⁰⁷ As the recognized leader of African nationalism in Kenya, Kenyatta conducted his last speaking tour in the spring and summer of 1952, addressing mass meetings at Kiambu in April, Naivasha in June, Nyeri in July, and again at Kiambu in August. In spite of the evidence Special Branch would present at Kenyatta's trial, the leadership of KAU and that of Mau Mau had "no organized link," only two common members, Kubai and Kaggia.¹⁰⁸ Kaggia comments on Kenyatta's equivocal position, "Although the 'Mau Mau' movement looked upon Kenyatta as the national leader, it was not under his direct control. . . . He deliberately knew little of what went on in the 'Mau Mau' Central Committee meetings. He was under constant supervision from the Special Branch and had he been more directly involved it would have been impossible for us to have preserved our essential secret anonymity."¹⁰⁹

The government pressured Kenyatta to prove his constitutionalism and his commitment to nonviolence by condemning Mau Mau in his speeches. Kaggia comments that Kenyatta had to give at least the public impression that he was sincerely attacking Mau Mau, "finding it politic to throw more dust in the eyes of the authorities," and Ngugi Kabiro observes that since "the Kikuyu people as a whole . . . believed beyond a doubt that men such as Kenyatta, Koinange, and other important Kikuyu leaders of KAU were strong supporters, if not leaders, of the underground movement," Kenyatta's denunciations were not taken seriously.¹¹⁰ But the Central Committee found Kenyatta's terms of condemnation—especially at the second Kiambu meeting (where he shared the stage with the despised Chief Waruhiu), when he claimed that "Mau Mau had spoiled the country" and should "perish forever"—too harsh and confusing to ordinary members of Mau Mau, most of whom also idolized Kenyatta. Muhimu asked Kenyatta to meet with them.

For the first time Kenyatta met the "Mau Mau" Central Committee. He was surprised to see Kubai and myself there. And he noticed to his further surprise that other leaders, whom he did not know, were running the meetings. E. Mutonyi and I. Gathanju were the chairman and secretary. The committee asked Kenyatta not to continue with the remaining meetings. After discussion he accepted the request and undertook to get the remaining meetings cancelled.¹¹¹

This incident has ironic overtones, for in a few months the government would arrest Kenyatta as the "manager" of Mau Mau.

The Declaration of Emergency

In the early afternoon of October 21, 1952, Mohamed Mathu was heading back to work after lunch when a group of African policemen rushed up and

pushed him into a line of civilians being herded, with "abusive language and occasional jabs in the back," into the Caledonia playing field across from the Coryndon Museum. As he entered the field, he could see that "screeners" (African loyalists) supervised by Europeans were passing down the long line of men to identify Mau Mau suspects. "Luckily none of the screeners from my location in Nyeri knew or suspected anything about my political activities. As they passed along the line they studied each man and then gave their opinions to the European officers accompanying them. Though I was soon released to return to the office, hundreds of others were identified as Mau Mau activists and sent into the detention camps."¹¹² The Kenya Emergency had begun.

In spite of all the secret preparations and the killing of police and loyalists, it was the government and not Mau Mau that determined the start of real warfare. By the summer of 1952, some bands were already in the forests, but "*Mau Mau* General suggests that even the well led (but poorly armed) group on Kirinyaga, which had entered in August under the orders of the Nyeri elders' committee, was not ready for revolt. Rumors circulated through the Gikuyu community in 1952 about a general uprising, the Utuku wa Hiu Ndaihu (The Night of Long Swords), during which all Europeans would be killed, but the rumors were vague and no concrete conspiracy seems to have existed.¹¹³ Certainly, as Kaggia indicates, there was pressure from the rank and file for action. "Many young initiates were very impatient. They were always asking when we were going to take up arms and fight for our rights."¹¹⁴ But were their leaders prepared to give the orders to rebel, and if so, when?

While the memoirs of Itote, Kaggia, and Wachanga indicate that Mau Mau leaders were getting ready for open conflict, they do not mention any particular plans for general revolt. Kahinga Wachanga refers to the forming of a "War Council" in early 1952 whose older members at first hoped to avoid violence but "finally agreed that without bloodshed our revolt could not succeed"; this group elected Stanley Mathenge "Chairman of the Mau Mau Movement . . . because of his experience and knowledge of modern army organization and guerrilla tactics," suggesting plans for guerrilla warfare.¹¹⁵ If the leaders were preparing for revolt, however, they had not communicated this to the members, and lower-echelon memoirists tend to see the stance of the movement as essentially defensive. Kariuki writes that "Africans began to prepare for the ultimate last-ditch stand that might be necessary to prevent the light of freedom being snuffed out."¹¹⁶ Mohamed Mathu observes, "While violent means had been adopted to eliminate traitors, to my knowledge we had no plan for an open clash with Government prior to the Emergency declaration. . . . The most talked-about means of putting pressure on Government was the general strike."¹¹⁷

The Central Committee, though it was aware from the evidence of well-placed sources that the government was making plans to arrest some of their members, did little to prepare to go underground or lay plans for an

uprising, even after the assassination of Chief Waruhiu on October 9. When a trusted spy passed a message to Kaggia during the Muhimu meeting of October 19, which told him that "all KAU leaders" would be arrested within thirty-six hours, the Central Committee scrapped its agenda, passed a resolution that if they were detained the members of the secret movement should "take up arms and courageously fight for their rights," sent messages to the district committees, arranged to hide some documents and burn others, sent out instructions "to shift weapon arsenals to new hiding places," and "made provision for our own arrest and laid down a number of directives for after our arrest."¹¹⁸

When Kenyatta, Kaggia, Kubai, Gakaara wa Wanjau, and over 180 others were rounded up on the night of October 20, 1952, and taken into detention, those who had escaped the "Jock Scott" sweep tried to pick up the pieces. Mohamed Mathu remembers a demoralized movement, with no plans for revolt and no leaders to carry out a plan, "on the defensive" and simply responding to government's repressive measures as they came.¹¹⁹ In places, the structure of the secret movement crumbled. Under the pressure of government repression, for example, the Kiambu District Committee "broke down" and for a period simply ceased operations, forcing the division committees to deal directly with the Central Province Committee.¹²⁰ In Nairobi, the escalating struggle after October 20 began to separate the sheep from the goats; Mohamed Mathu witnessed the defection from the movement of most of the educated Kikuyu, including KAU leaders who bore a share of responsibility for turning "the minds of the Kikuyu people" toward "violence and revolt."¹²¹ Ironically, however, others responded to October 20 quite differently; information from Kiambu collected by Greet Kershaw points toward a rapid increase in the oathing of Gikuyu who assumed that Kenyatta and the others would be judged not guilty and freed.¹²²

Meanwhile, the government sent police patrols and military units marching through Gikuyu communities to intimidate the countryside, extended night curfews, arrested more and more men and women for political activity, and confiscated hundreds of head of cattle in retaliation for Mau Mau actions.¹²³ Headmen's police began to extract oath confessions and names of activists by violent interrogation, endangering the Mau Mau networks. At the same time, the government began to close the independent schools and repatriated many thousands of Gikuyu from the Rift Valley, Tanganyika, and Uganda to the home districts, exacerbating overcrowding, unemployment, and poverty.¹²⁴ For Gikuyu in Nyeri, December 1952 was a terrible time. "Instead of the good Christmas songs, bullets echoed everywhere, [as well as] cries for the deceased, for blazing houses, for the robbing and raping; the cry of beatings and tortures in the chiefs' centers, in police and prison cells. Instead of feasts there were fasts enforced by sorrow."¹²⁵

Though this was a very bad period, Mau Mau was neither destroyed nor dramatically changed in character. Some entirely new leaders emerged, but others like Eliud Mutonyi and Stanley Mathenge had not been swept up by Jock Scott, and the flexible Mau Mau structure allowed committees to re-form and surviving committees to take over from those badly damaged. While government repression detained many and intimidated others, it also impelled hundreds of young men to enter the forests to join guerrilla bands "to escape the Home Guard and the security force brutality."¹²⁶ Even some Europeans criticized the harshness of the crackdown, as when C. C. Fowkes wrote to Michael Blundell, comparing the actions of the Kenya Police Reserve in the Rift Valley to the Black and Tans in Ireland and suggesting that KPR actions were likely to alienate ordinary Gikuyu and drive them toward Mau Mau.¹²⁷ The time of intermittent violence and sporadic repression was passing, and the stage was set for guerrilla warfare and counterinsurgency.

The Coming of War: Taking the Batuni Oath and Preparing to Fight

The young men and women preparing to join the guerrilla bands forming in Nyandarua and on Kirinyaga were expected to take a new oath of loyalty to prepare them for the responsibilities of fighting. *Muma wa uigano*, eventually taken (in British estimations) by 90 percent of the Gikuyu, was only a first step for most of the authors of the Mau Mau memoirs.¹²⁸ For those who were to fight for the movement, the first oath was followed by a second called *batuni* (platoon), "Warrior," "Action," or *muma wa ngero* (the oath for killing).¹²⁹

The *batuni* (or *mbatuni*) oath apparently varied from place to place even more than the unity oath, but oath takers agree that it was stronger, both in its use of substances and practices Gikuyu would consider *thahu* (taboo) and in its demands on initiates. Joram Wamweya and Karigo Muchai each report that their *batuni* oaths required them to wrap a strip of goat's meat around their naked bodies, either insert their penises into the meat or place the meat alongside their penises, and bite a piece of meat with each vow they swore.¹³⁰ Mohamed Mathu describes a *batuni* oathing ceremony in Kiambu in 1954 during which women swore on goat meat which they inserted into their vaginas, followed later and separately by men swearing while inserting their penises into strips of goat meat.¹³¹ After taking the second oath, Karari Njama discussed it with his friend David Wahome. "We resolved that it was a horrible oath, though typically Kikuyu."¹³²

The second oath committed initiates to risk their lives and to kill whomever the movement would require. The vows taken by Karigo Muchai were characteristically severe: