

# 'WOMEN, COME AND ROAST YOUR OWN RAM!': RECOLLECTIONS ON MAU-MAU GENERAL CHUI WA MARARO (1927–1956)

'Women, come and roast your own ram!'

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## ABSTRACT

Little has been written about General Chui (1927–1956), the unique and charismatic fighter during Kenya's war of independence, yet he worked hand-in-hand with Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi Wachiuri, the overall commander of Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), also called Mau-Mau fighters. Kibara wa Mararo, later General Chui, who came from Meiria residence, Mugaya Estate, Kamuiru village of Mutira location, Ndia Division of the present day Kirinyaga County, Kenya, became a household name, and a hero to the then marginalised African populace, after the famous *Mbaara ya Rui Ruiru* (battle of river Ruiru). In this war of 1953, which took place on the border of Nyeri district (which was elevated to a County in 2010) and the old Embu district (which constitutes Kirinyaga and Embu counties), Kibara wa Mararo disguised himself as a regional inspector of the police. Clad in full colonial army uniform, he was able to trick some security officers and the loyalists who were derogatorily called *Tukonia* (empty sacks). This made them quickly rush to meet their boss. In a twinkle of an eye, the coded language (*kebunoko*) was sounded calling the Mau-Mau fighters who eventually turned their guns on the officers thereby wiping them clean in one blow. It is from there that the Mau-Mau high command declared him an army general. Since then, he became known as General Chui – 'Chui' meaning the sharp leopard. As Kenya marked its 50 years of independence (1963–2013), with pomp and colour, the sacrificial role of General Chui re-appears as one wonders: how was such a military genius finally ambushed at River Rwamuthambi's Riakiania mushy cave and subsequently shot dead by the colonial forces? Did the surrendering Mau-Mau soldiers betray him, General Magazine and the other fighters who died of gun shot wounds at the Riakiania scene? Again, what were his political ideals? In its methodology, the article begins by retracing the nature of Mau-Mau movement citing the key issues that possibly caused it. It then moves on to chronicle General Chui wa Mararo as a case study. The materials in this presentation are largely gathered through interviews and archival sources.

**Keywords:** General Chui wa Mararo, women and Mau-Mau war, freedom quest in Kenya, Kirinyaga County history, revolution betrayed

## INTRODUCTION

Among the major landmarks as Kenya celebrates 50 years of independence (1963–2013), in my view, is the Mau-Mau War of Independence. Indeed, it was a guerrilla war of emancipation; and waged mainly by the people of central and eastern Kenya, from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, in protest against the injustices of colonial rule. These injustices can be explained in various ways. Firstly, the five million Africans who lived in the British colony of Kenya had failed to gain any meaningful form of political representation. Indeed, the suppression and banning in 1940 of emerging political movements such as the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) worsened the situation. As David Anderson has noted, political dissent found expression for over three decades prior to the Mau-Mau uprising; for Africans voiced their 'plangent political concerns despite the obstruction of an unsympathetic colonial state' (Anderson 2005: 9).

Some of the issues that dominated African politics from 1903 to 1952 when Land Alienation and Squatter Problems dominated the social discourses, included the low level of African wages. The wages in particular were kept to a minimum by the European settlers, who were eager to remain competitive agricultural producers. A revealing statement attributed to Lord Delamere, the leader of the European settler farming community, regarding African labour, reads as follows:

We consider that taxation is the only possible method of compelling the native to leave his reserve for the purpose of seeking employment .... To raise the rate of wages would not increase but diminish the supply of labour. A rise in wages would enable hut and poll tax of a family, or sub-tribe to be earned by fewer external workers (Bogonko 1980: 1).

Taxation thus became a weapon for executing their plan of making Africans work for the white settlers. Moreover, this process built up a low paid and dissatisfied labour force on the white settlers' farms. To realise the dream of creating a white man's country in Kenya, the government sent for more white settlers from South Africa. Others came from New Zealand, Australia and England (Rosberg and Nottingham 1969: 19). By 1906 it was not only the lands to the north of Nairobi that were alienated from the white settlers but also lands far afield in the Rift Valley region of western Kenya. Some of the members of the Kikuyu (English usually prefers Gikuyu) ethnic group, who had lost their ancestral lands after it was forcefully taken by the European farmers, went into their neighbours' territories, the Maasai, to seek better opportunities there. Yet, other members of the Kikuyu nation remained on the alienated lands to become squatters; while others went to the Rift Valley and became squatters or indentured labourers.

Africans were also becoming agitated by the forced carrying of the *kipande* – that is, an identity card and passbook that was introduced after the First World War, without which no African could leave his or her home to seek employment. Frequently, European settlers would punish 'errant' African workers by tearing up the *kipande*, thereby making it impossible for them to get further employment (Anderson 2005: 9). In

addition, the European settlers punished their labourers with the *kiboko*, that is, a whip made of rhinoceros hide. They would flog their African workers from time to time and justify their cruel actions with trivial excuses. As Anderson notes, ‘by the early 1920s, the deaths of several African servants from beatings at the hands of their European masters earned Kenya’s white settlers an unenviable reputation for brutality’ (Anderson 2005: 78).

These injustices led Africans to retreat to the forests and form bands of guerrilla fighters. As the war went on, police brutality was experienced in the screening of suspects, the colonial government employing torture as a means of establishing who was an adherent of the Mau-Mau. As Caroline Elkins has noted:

Torture, or fear of it, compelled oath takers to give details about their ceremonies, including names or revealing the locations of the caches of arms or food supplies for Mau-Mau fighting the forest war. Some of this intelligence was accurate and some (was) pure fiction, fabricated on the spot by Mau-Mau suspects trying to save themselves. The colonial government nevertheless used the information to convict some thirty thousand Kikuyu men and women of Mau-Mau crimes and sentence them to prison, many for life (Elkins 2005: 87–88).

Upon returning from the battlefields, following the end of the First World War (1914–18), Africans began to talk openly about the ‘British propaganda and lies against their fellow clan mates, the Germans’ who, they had been told, were cannibals keen on capturing Africans for meat. In turn, this made many people to see the war to their own benefit and enrolled enthusiastically. Mzee Elijah Kimani Kiongo (1875–1985) was one of the enlisted fighters who travelled to fight Germans in Entebbe-Uganda, Bukoba-Tanzania, Mwanza-Tanzania, Mogandishu-Somalia, Tabora-Tanzania, Pemba Island, Ceylon, Burma, India and other places. On their return they narrated the secrets of the Europeans to those who had remained, particularly after having had the rare chance of interacting intensively as the war progressed. The ripple effect started. Africans began to question the policies of the colonial government, principally those which did not favour the masses. Likewise, the Second World War (1939–45) had the same politicising effect as the likes of Dedan Kimathi (later Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi, the slain Mau-Mau leader), ‘General’ Ndaya and Kibara wa Mararo (later, General Chui) not only set their mind on the freedom of the black majority but more importantly began the armed struggle. At this time the Mau-Mau oaths were initiated as preparations for guerrilla warfare that was to follow. Characteristically, oath-taking in African cultural heritage was administered from time to time to bind people together or to rally the members of the Kikuyu society for a particular cause. Typically, a person who had taken an oath was bound to his vow without failing or betraying it. There were stiff penalties for those who disobeyed the vows. Long ago, oaths such as the *Githathi* or the *Muma* were held in very high regard. In view of this, a person was very fearful of what would happen if he broke it.

During the war, three major types of oaths were administered. The oath of unity was the first oath taken by all Mau-Mau initiates. The oath inducted new members into

the Mau-Mau society and emphasised unity and solidarity of the members. The second oath, the *muma wa mbatoni* (platoon/warrior oath) was administered to those who were going to take up arms against the colonial state. It emphasised consecration of one's life to the cause of liberating Kenya and redeeming the alienated lands. The third oath, the leaders' oath, was administered to the leaders of the movement of all levels. The oath emphasised loyalty to the struggle and the people in it. It stressed secrecy and courage. The oaths were a stronger bond than commands from the leaders. Counselling was undertaken when the oath was administered. A code of conduct was also issued (Kinyatti 1986: 137–138).

As the Mau-Mau war began in the late 1940s, in various districts dominated by the Embu, Meru and Kikuyu ethnic groups, the colonial government began to take measures to contain it. Of interest to note is that in Ndia Division of Kirinyaga County (where General Chui came from), Mau-Mau activism did not take place immediately as in the neighbouring counties. Rather, it started in the early 1950s, but in a more brutal way than that of neighbouring counties. This brutality is particularly seen in the 1953 execution of one of the African leaders of the emerging elite in the locality. That is, in 1953, one group of *Mau-Mau*, the radicals, broke into the Mutira Anglican church, took church records, medicines in the local dispensary and then entered the home of the pioneer African nurse and laboratory technician, Reuben Kinyua's (1912–1953). They dragged him out of the house in full view of the traumatised family in order to conduct a kangaroo court trial. They accused him of being a sell-out, of failing to take the oath and of refusing to treat the fighters in the dispensary. They sentenced him to death. They shot him. They then slashed him across the stomach (see Gathogo 2011).

Indeed, these were the dark days of Kenya's history when the state of emergency was declared on 20 October 1952 following the arrival of Sir Evelyn Baring, as the Crown of the Kenya Colony of the British Government. Baring was thus the newly appointed colonial governor of Kenya in early October 1952. The immediate cause for its declaration was the brutal killing on 9 October 1952 of Chief Waruhiu from the present day Kiambu County, a known sympathiser and collaborator with the colonial government. Coupled with this, there was general tension in the country following skirmishes between Mau-Mau (freedom) fighters and colonial forces resulting in much bloodshed.

The situation for Kenyan nationals got worse day by day. Between January and April 1953, Governor Baring instituted dozens of extreme and wide-ranging laws, referred to as the emergency regulations. These included, communal punishment, curfews, influx control, and as Elkins relates:

The confiscation of property and land, the imposition of special taxes, the issuance of special documentation and passes, the censorship and banning of publications, the disbanding of all African political organisations, the control and disposition of labour, the suspension of due process, and detention without trial (Elkins 2005: 55).

It was clearly a state-organised reign of terror. In addition, emergency legislation controlled African markets, shops, hotels, and all public transport, including buses, taxis, and bicycles. Governor Baring created concentrated villages in the African reserves, and barbed-wire cordons in African towns, including the city of Nairobi. He also established mini-detention camps on settler farms in the so-called 'White Highlands'. Above all, he sanctioned treatment of Mau-Mau suspects devoid of any humanity (Elkins 2005:55). After the state of emergency was declared, people of central Kenya were put in villages, in what later came to be referred to as 'villagisation'. By June 1954, the War Council took the decision to enforce villagisation throughout Kikuyu land. Villagisation means 'the compulsory resettlement of people from their scattered, ridge-top farms, into centralized, regulated villages, situated at key points along the busier roads' (Anderson 2005: 294). While some villages were principally meant to protect the loyalists, most of the 854 established villages or camps were in reality mass detention camps intended to punish Mau-Mau sympathisers. In turn, this negatively affected the Anglican missions – as most of its members were the key targets and suspects.

In his confidential *Handover Report of [2<sup>nd</sup> July] 1956 for Ndia*, to the incoming District Officer (E.D. Gordon), the outgoing District Officer, Major Wainwright, says:

Mau-Mau broke out into active opposition to [the] Government in Ndia considerably later than in other Kikuyu districts – it must be appreciated that the Wandia are Kikuyu entirely and closely related to the Kikuyu of Mathira. Hence, when open violence broke out, it was more brutal and vicious than in Gichugu and Embu Divisions. When I took the Division in August 1954 the "war" was at its height and the Mau-Mau had virtually gained control of the whole population with the exception of a very small nucleus of loyal Tribal Police and Embu Guard. There were large armed Mau-Mau gangs all over the Division, varying in strength from 90 under "General" Ndaya to 20 under minor "Brigadiers" ... 75% of the Headmen were detained for their support of Mau-Mau ... It is still very difficult to find Headmen in Kiine when others fall by the wayside, and there are still several in Mutira who are not fit for their jobs, partly due to Chief Stephen [Ngigi Machere's] partiality for having weak men under him who will bow to his will in everything (Wainwright 1956: 32).

Major Wainwright also noted that the Kamuiru area, where General Chui came from, was the worst area in Ndia Division of the then Embu District. He noted thus:

This has been the worst village in the Division for a long time but is now, I think, improving. [Chief] Stephen [Ngigi Machere] comes from there and some of his relatives live there now. [General] "Chui", the toughest of our terrorists also came from Kamuiru, and it was he who kept the villagers on the side of Mau-Mau. They have been given every punishment I could devise, but the death of [Gen.] Chui [in May 1956] does seem to have brought them back into the Government fold (Wainwright 1956: 32).

Of importance to note is that while General Kimathi Wachiuri was the overall head of Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), otherwise called Mau-Mau fighters, General Itote China was the chief commander of the Mt Kenya front. His Generals were Kassam

Njogu (1920–2011), Muriuki Kimotho alias General Tanganyika (executed 1956), Gititi Kariba, Rui, Bamuingi and M’Kiribua M’Muchiri alias Musa Mwariama (1928–1989),<sup>1</sup> Kubukubu, Abasweni, Kanji, Montgomery and General Chui.<sup>2</sup> General Kimbo Mutuku operated in the European settled areas of the Rift Valley. General Kago Mboko operated in the reserves. General Enock Mwangi commanded the urban guerrillas. An unedited letter to the editor of the *Daily Nation* April 8, 1986, cites a statement by General Tanganyika during his trial and eventual execution in 1955. He told the European judge: ‘After you have killed me, where I go if I find you ruling my country [unjustly] [sic], I will go [back] to the forest and start fighting you again’ (*Daily Nation* 8 April 1986). Such statements show how the likes of General Chui wa Mararo, the leader of the Ndia platoon, understood their struggle for freedom and dignity. In other words, they could foresee their children and their grandchildren resisting injustices in generations to come – whether colonialism or neo-colonialism. It also shows how some of the Mau-Mau regarded injustice perpetrated by the state.

## GENERAL CHUI WA MARARO (1927–1956)

General Chui wa Mararo himself came from the Meiria home, Mugaya Estate, Kamuiru village of Mutira location, Ndia Division of the present day Kirinyaga County. As will be noted, Kibara wa Mararo, as he was called in the locality, was one of the few who were formally educated, working as a cleaner with King’s African Rifles (KAR) from 1947 to the end of 1952, in the capital city of Nairobi and who left their jobs, upon becoming Mau-Mau recruits, and went straight to the forest to join in the war of Kenya’s independence.

Kibara wa Mararo started his schooling at Kathuuri primary school, around the present day Mugaya area, in 1937. At Kathuuri he only did his nursery school education. It was later burnt by Mau-Mau fighters in May 1953. From Kathuuri, he later went to study at Mutitu primary school in 1940s and after successfully sitting for his Common Entrance Exam (class four), he joined Mutira primary school in 1943 for his upper primary education (class five to eight). He did not go up to class eight but reached class six.

After graduating from childhood to adulthood, after undergoing traditional circumcision, which had always been seen as a religious duty among the Kikuyu, on 20 October 1945, Kibara wa Mararo and his close associate, Gitari wa Kiura,<sup>3</sup> abandoned school, and Kibara in particular, joined the Kings African Rifles. In turn, the King’s African Rifles (KAR) was a multi-battalion British colonial regiment raised from the various British possessions in East Africa from 1902 until 1960. Soldiers (other ranks) of the King’s African Rifles were recruited from Somaliland, British East Africa (Kenya from July 1920), Uganda, Nyasaland, and following its transfer to the British after World War I Tanganyika (previously German East Africa). Officers were seconded from the British Army (rather than a permanent commission to the force). During World War II (1939–45) the KAR (Britain’s colonial African troops) saw action in Somalia and

Abyssinia against the Italians, in Madagascar against the Vichy French, and against the Japanese in the reconquest of Burma. By the end of World War II (1945), 43 battalions, as well as an armoured car section, artillery and other units, had been raised by the KAR. In 1957 the regiment was renamed the East African Land Forces with Queen Elizabeth II as Colonel-in-Chief. The KAR was terminated in 1960 with independence being granted to British colonies in East Africa.<sup>4</sup>

As a worker in the King's African Rifles (1947–52), Kibara wa Mararo learnt a lot about military techniques, the making of home-made (*gatuohoro*) guns and about African politics, and resolved to fight for freedom. Curiously, when he resigned his job in 1952 and joined other guerrilla fighters in Kirinyaga forest (renamed Mt. Kenya), General Chui did not immediately disclose this to the immediate family because he had already taken the *muma wa mbatooni* (platoon/warrior oath) – an oath which was administered to those who were going to take up arms against the colonial authorities. Again, Mau-Mau began and lived as a secret movement, which did not loosely reveal information to those who had not undertaken the ritual. According to Joseph Murage (Chui's brother, a veterinary officer by profession) and Loise Wanjiku (the Generals' sister) (Interview 28 January 2014), they noted the changing behaviour of their brother in early 1952, especially as he conversed with their father (Mararo wa Matumbi). In particular, his father would ask him: 'my son, why are you coming late at night to visit us rather than during day time as you have been doing in the past? Where are the presents that you bring to us from the city of Nairobi?' In one particular instance, General Chui answered, 'we were coming from work, we who are working with the Kings Africans Rifles, only to have our car broken down – as we travelled to the rural areas; hence this unusual night visits at odd hours' (Loise Wanjiku, Interview 28 January 2014). This explanation was, however, taken with a pinch of salt, particularly after he had snuck into his fathers' home compound late at night for the third time. How could he always be so unlucky that the vehicle he gets in gets broken whenever he sets out his journey home? Why does he always come with two men (read, bodyguards) who speak Nyeri-accented Kikuyu language, which is slightly dissimilar to the local Ndia-accented Kikuyu dialects? They would wonder.

Later, Kibara's siblings began to doubt him openly as suspicion grew. Or could rumours have done rounds hence providing a hint to his siblings? In an interview, Loise Muthoni and Joseph Murage (Interview 28 January 2014) recall that after the 'broken car' excuse, he later started lecturing his father about the problem with the kind of farming that they do. In his view, coffee farming benefits the European buyer who decides what to give in exchange of the produce delivered. He would explain to his unbelieving father that the European-controlled farming enslaved Africans just like in the earlier days of slavery and slave trade. He would insist that it is better to grow food crops such as maize, beans, bananas, green vegetables that 'you can eat even when you don't necessarily expect a buyer. For your stomach is more important than working without a clear aim and always being uncertain about the fruits of one's labour' (Loise Wanjiku, Interview 28 January 2014). During these night visits, the younger siblings<sup>5</sup> could hear

Kibara lecturing his father about the future of Kenya. He insisted that the better way out is for him (father and the rest of society) to disobey the colonial government in all ways possible, particularly in rejecting all the government-controlled agricultural activities. He would insist that when the envisaged African-dominated government will take over, the current farms would be confiscated and redistributed afresh and in a proper way. How 'will it be if you planted coffee stems in a land that will not be yours finally?' (Wanjiku, Interview 28 January 2014). The way forward, he explained, was that food crop farming or farming that would directly benefit the 'real owners' of the land should be encouraged as opposed to the so-called cash crops. This makes one wonder: was this part of the Mau-Mau manifesto that was being discussed among the warriors who operated from the forests of Njuki-ini, Aberdare's and Mt. Kenya, among others?

At first, Kibara's father dismissed his political rhetoric and plan of action. As a 'rich' man in the standards of the time where wealth was measured in terms of the number of wives, children, portions of land, granaries and the number of flocks among other considerations, Mararo wa Matumbi could not understand what his son was initially talking about. Hence he first rejected those 'adolescent nonsense' from his now 'wayward' son and his ideological 'madness of some sort' (Muthoni and Murage, Interview 28 January 2014). But as time wore on, the irritation and quest for human dignity had spread. At the same time their neighbours from Ndia subgroup had taken up the struggle of the Mau-Mau by entering the forest in 1948. By 1952 his own locality had started to back the Mau-Mau in large numbers. By mid 1952, most people in the locality had secretly taken the oath of unity that inducted people into the Mau-Mau society and emphasised the unity and solidarity of the members of the region. This made it hard for the local colonial administration to control this secretive movement.

Gradually, Mararo wa Matumbi found himself agreeing with his 'rebel' first born son, Kibara. After he 'understood' the whole philosophy behind the Mau-Mau war he began to offer the little material support he could afford to the combatants. Indeed, this was in terms of money and food. Characteristically, the forest fighters would sneak into the homes, in the quiet of the night, particularly now that Mau-Mau had been banned since 1950. Further, the state of emergency had been declared in October 1952. Under these circumstances, Mararo wa Matumbi (1889–1978) played it safe so as to hide from the colonial intelligence that he was siding with his son. Kibara, later General Chui, was widely seen as the toughest fighter from the locality. This is evidenced by the fact that the outgoing district officer of Ndia Division of the then Embu District, Major Wainwright, in 1956 described 'Chui', as 'the toughest of our terrorists' whose killing, he believed, would sway people back to the government (Wainwright 1956: 36). His colleagues in the Mau-Mau war, General Matene (also called, Nyamu wa Muria Kori) and Colonel Warehire (Thuo Ng'ang'a) (Interview 1 February 2014) also confirmed that Chui was extraordinarily brave.

Of interest to note is that whenever his forest battalion got very hungry, he would lead them to give a 'lightning strike' into targeted homes at night and drive animals and other eatables available to the forest. The targeted homes were those that belonged to the



wealthy. In turn, those who were categorised as ‘the very rich’ were mainly collaborators, civil servants or general friends of the colonial regime. In turn, they were favoured, allowed to grow cash crops such as coffee, tea, tobacco and cotton (though this depended on the particular area) before others. Again, they were aided or partly supported as they educated their children in some of the best schools available. In the nature of things, Chui’s military genius drove fear into the hearts of his enemies – particularly those who found themselves on the receiving end. Consequently, the process of demonising him began and the reluctant populace, including children in school, were constantly taught to hate ‘the bad creature’.

As time wore on, it was also discovered that Kibara’s father was also supporting his son. As a result, he and the entire family were targeted by the government. A case in point is Mararo wa Matumbi who was arrested in 1954, deported first to the notorious Manyani prison in the coastal land of Kenya. Later, he was transferred to Embakasi Prison near the capital city of Nairobi. In these prisons, forced labour was the order of the day. In turn, these forced labour camps provided a much needed source of labour to continue the colony’s infrastructural development plan. Probably the worst works camp for one to have been sent to was the Embakasi Prison; the Embakasi prison detainees’ free and forced labour was responsible for the construction of Embakasi Airport. This construction was set out for completion before the state of emergency came to an end (1960). The airport was a massive project with an unquenchable thirst for labour, and the short period of time ensured that the detainees’ forced labour was especially hard.

Likewise, General Chui (Kibara) wa Mararo’s mother, Mrs. Damaris Wanjiku Mararo (1894–2003), the daughter of Nderi wa Kibara, was captured and detained in 1954 for bearing ‘a bad child’. Before the arrest and detention, Damaris Mararo’s suckling breast was hit with a gun butt by the colonial government’s detectives who tried to force her to reveal her son’s whereabouts. In turn, the resultant breast injury remained, creating medical complications, for the rest of her life and led to her eventual death on 3 May 2003 (Loise Muthoni Mararo, Interview 27 January 2014). Interestingly, she was detained with two of her little children, who were oblivious to what was happening (Helena Wambura, born 1948, and Elizabeth Karuana, born 1952). General Chui’s wife, Gladys Wainoi, and her two children (Kinyua and Mwai) were also detained. As their grandmother and mother underwent torture, the little ones did not understand what was happening, but as their seniors screamed, the children must have felt equally tortured. They were only released after the killing and burning of the General. Certainly, General Chui and his boys had in 1953 attacked Mutitu chiefs’ camps as they targeted the chief Stephen Ngigi wa Macere. They, however, did not find him, though they managed to acquire guns and other ammunitions. Such bitterness, made both Senior Chief wa Macere and General Chui declare that whoever finds the other first would strike the other dead. Again, the local Anglican clergy, Reverend Johana Njumbi’s, house at Mugaya was burned by General Chui’s team in 1953, together with the then Kathuuri Primary School. Attempts to burn Kamuiru primary School in the same year were unsuccessful.

While working as a Cleaner in the Kings African Rifles (1947–1952), Kibara wa Mararo (later General Chui) had experienced discrimination because Asians and Arabs were treated much better than the Africans. They used to have the same job descriptions but with lower salaries than those of their counterparts. Additionally, African men used to be called boys while Asians and Arabs were excluded from such demeaning terms. As he joined the Mau-Mau fighters in 1952, he had lots of pain and bitterness. This may explain his extraordinary courage in battle. In particular, he and his boys could dare attack a police station and successfully steal guns and other ammunitions. The result of this was that both the local old Embu district (which comprised the current Kirinyaga and Embu counties before 1963) and the national Mau-Mau command admired him as a reliable soldier. He received ready acceptance across the military and socio-political divides. Indeed, his organizational abilities were clearly noted and admired, but also loathed in equal measure. Additionally, he became more famous during the so-called *Mbaara ya Rui Ruiru* (the battle of river Ruiru), which was fought on the border between Nyeri and the old Embu districts in 1953. In this war, the Haraka (swift) platoon of the then Embu district where Kibara wa Mararo came from teamed up with Hekaheka platoon (*Mbutu* or *Mbatuni*) of the then Nyeri district to fight the colonial forces with success. Characteristically, a Mau-Mau platoon had 500 soldiers; and in some cases where a platoon had 2 000 soldiers, a General was assisted by a Colonel and a Brigadier. In particular, Kibara wa Mararo became the head of the Haraka Platoon of the entire Embu district in late 1953 after the killing of General Odera from Kariti-Sagana. Afterwards, platoon's name was changed to Kimuri (the lightener) under General Chui as the overall head of the Embu district combatants. After Chui's killing, General Kassam headed it briefly before it was divided into Embu and Ndia-Gicugu platoons. The Ndia-Gicugu platoon divided later to form two groups, the Gicugu and Ndia platoons. At one time, General Kassam headed the Gicugu group while General Agha Khan (named after the Nairobi hospital where he had come from) led the Ndia platoon (Matene, Interview 1 February 2014). As more fighters joined the guerrilla war, more platoons were added with a General as the head.

In the battle of river Ruiru of 1953, Kibara and his team disguised themselves as colonial police. Once the home guards and/or police came to receive their leader, a sudden code language (*kebunoko*) was sounded and the real Mau-Mau came quickly, turning their guns on the colonial force. As a result, the colonial forces were crippled completely. There were a few casualties on the Mau-Mau side as well. After this, Kibara was decorated as General Chui (a Swahili name that means a leopard). In this battle, where the Mau-Mau battalion appears to have outmanoeuvred the colonial forces, the musician, Joseph Kamaro (1938–), describes it (in his book, *Nyembo cia weyathe or Hymns of freedom* 2012) as the most successful moment in the war of liberation. For him, it is the moment when 'sons and daughters of Gekoyo [Kikuyu]' played hide and seek with a national army, thereby embarrassing them all the more. Likewise, Maranga wa Gatonye, another artist and an eye witness, captures it all in his infamous song, *Mbaara ya Roe Roiro*, thus:

One day, around 9 pm, while at Karuthi estate, as we planned for the war, we heard that we were already besieged [or waylaid]. Rather than ran away, we fought back in an organised way thereby taking the European forces by surprise .... To our surprise, more soldiers of European descent were brought to fight us – an hour after the war began (4 pm, East African time). As for us, we repositioned ourselves militarily ready for a serious combat, particularly near the huge Mugumo tree .... Some of the European soldiers could be heard regretting in loud voices why they left the good Mombasa city where it was peaceful [only to come to the troubled central Kenya] ... at one stage, [Brigadier] Chui [one of our fierce and active soldiers under Major Rui then] got very much annoyed and wrestled down, one of the European soldiers [nicknamed Gateru] who was shot through the shoulder ....

It is of interest to note that the confirmation of Kibara wa Mararo as a Mau-Mau General coincided with the KLFA charter of 1953. Indeed, it is the only known communication between the Mau-Mau and the outside world. In turn, it attempted to explain the political position and programme of the movement; and was also sent to the British government. Copies were circulated to some foreign governments, such as Indian, Egyptian, French, American, and Russian. Pan-Africanists such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, George Padmore and W.E.B. Dubois were also sent copies. To whip up public support in Britain, a copy was sent to Fenner Brockway, who was a sympathizer of the Mau-Mau cause (Kinyatti 2009). The thrust of the charter was self-government for Kenya. To a certain extent, the launching of the KLFA Charter, coupled with the sustained armed struggle and the eventual creation of the Kenya Parliament in the forests on February 5, 1954, was in effect a unilateral declaration of independence for Kenya by the KLFA. This should be considered as the independence date of Kenya as the Mau-Mau had total control of the forest areas and some reserves in Central Kenya. This was a bold and determined step. It points to how the Mau-Mau perceived themselves and their national role in redeeming Kenya.

Soon after the battle of river Ruiru in 1953, he changed his area of operation from Mt. Kenya forest to Aberdare's mountains and the Western side of Mt. Kenya, though he would sneak home from time to time (John Mararo, Interview 30 December 2013). Why? He became a marked man; wanted either dead or alive. Whoever captured him would be paid handsomely. For three years he was able to dodge death, arrests and capture but was finally ambushed by the colonial forces near Riakinia Town, along the Rwamuthambi River after he was betrayed by captured soldiers. General Chui was shot by a European soldier nicknamed by locals as *Kariamburi* (the goat eater).

In this Riakiania incident, of early May 1956, General Chui, General Magazine and their body guards were all killed (Matene, Interview 1 February 2013). A few days before his execution General Chui had narrowly escaped death by a hand grenade, but he was injured. His body was brought to Kamuiru village near his ancestral home under a very heavy security presence. Why? It was partly because he was indeed a feared person whose soldiers could cause surprise ambushes and snatch the body from the authorities. Second, myths that General Chui was not an ordinary mortal; that he used to turn to a leopard at night and a human being during the day, were also a contributing

factor. Previously, a rumour had gone round that the swift General had been killed in an ambush only to rediscover that it was another Mau-Mau fighter who closely resembled him. Hence, the local authorities did not want to take chances. Third, there were also fears of 'resurrection' of the black 'messiah' in the locality. This fear was probably fuelled by his earlier declaration that even if he dies, he will be resurrected. To this end, the local authorities had to team up to see to it that he could not be resurrected. Hence the local administrator, Chief Stephen Ngigi Machere, decreed thus: 'I order that every woman must bring dry firewood to roast your ram!' (Mararo, Interview 30 December 2013).

## WOMEN, COME AND ROAST YOUR OWN RAM!

As General Chui's body was being moved over the local Kagumo Town in a police Land Rover, the local Chief (of Mutira location), Stephen Ngigi wa Machere, ordered an advertiser to announce loudly using a public address system mounted on the On His Majesty Service's (OHMS) Land Rover that women, the bearers of bad children should 'come, and everyone must bring a piece of firewood so that we can collectively roast your fat ram'. Certainly, this was a ploy by the government to conceal the plan to burn General Chui's body to ashes and thereby trick women to bring firewood in plenty, as if a feast had been prepared for them. Was the government attempting to punish women collectively for giving birth to a 'dangerous terrorist'? Can one really hold mothers responsible for what their children do? Who creates the environment for terrorism: women or society at large? Hence, in trying to punish women collectively for their 'very bad' children, the government was not helping the society either. After all, a child can not go back to the womb just because one has punished his or her mother. Nor can a mother know whether a baby will be irresponsible, responsible, bad or good.

As General Chui's body was placed between the heaps of firewood, some people, especially women who now understood the purpose of the firewood, attempted to cry but were badly censored through beatings by the colonial forces.

General Chui's compatriot and colleague in the forest, General Kassam Njogu (1920–2011), who was captured alive, expresses such forms of colonial abuses. In a petition to the British government for war and torture reparations, in 2006, he says in part:

I [Patrick wa Njogu alias 'General' Kassam Njogu] was born in the 1920s in [the old] Embu District and joined the Mau Mau in the Mount Kenya forest in 1952. In 1956, in Kirinyaga, I was shot in the left leg and subsequently arrested and taken to Embu. When I was taken to Embu General Hospital, I remained chained to the hospital bed in spite of my grievous bullet wound. I have never felt so much pain in my life. My leg was tightly bound until pus was flowing out freely. Eventually, my left leg had to be amputated above the knee. During the operation to amputate the leg, I was not fully sedated and I could feel each motion as the doctor cut through the bone with a saw. I was in hospital for about a month after the operation, all the while chained to my hospital bed. After the trial, I was taken to Thiba Camp in the Mwea. From there, I was

transferred to Athi River and then onwards to Manyani. Life was unbearable in Manyani, where we lived like animals. It was more difficult for me as I was now disabled by virtue of having lost a leg. I remember an instance when we were all thrown into the camp cattle dip, which was filled with acaricides. I was not thrown into the dip but a bucket full of the acaricides was poured on me. For a person with one leg, this was the height of cruelty. The guards on many occasions confiscated my crutches as a form of punishment. When I refused to work on account of my disability, I would not be spared the severe beatings that were the norm for refusal to work.<sup>6</sup>

During the time when the colonial administration was demonizing General Chui and his family, the locals were devastated by the death of their 'hero'. Some wondered why the government did not give his body to his family for an appropriate burial where they could pay their last respects. As the body burned in the massive fire, being energized by a gallon of paraffin that was poured on it and all the firewood, crying and wailing went on. Not even the beatings from the colonial home-guards could control such an upset crowd. To counter the fear that the locals may come and steal the ashes of the 'martyred' and 'roasted' General for a decent burial, the local administration ordered the security officers to force people to dig up the place and ensure that the ashes were mixed with the soil beyond recognition.

Curiously, the site where the body was burned is the same compound that hosts the present day St. Peter's Kamuiru Anglican church. Was it the case of Tertullian's (160–225 C.E.) aphorism that, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church'? He was addressing the Roman Governor of his province during the dark days of Christian persecution. Tertullian was a prolific early Christian author from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa (Tunisia) who refuted various false charges being made against Christians and the Christian faith. He argued that the followers of Christ were loyal subjects of the empire. For that reason, they should not be persecuted. At any rate, Tertullian observed that the persecution was not going to destroy Christianity. He wrote then:

Kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust; your injustice is the proof that we are innocent. Therefore God suffers (allows) that we thus suffer. When you recently condemned a Christian woman to the leno (pimp, i.e. accused her of being a prostitute) rather than to the Leo (lion), you made confession that a taint on our purity is considered among us something more terrible than any punishment and any death. Nor does your cruelty, however exquisite, avail you; it is rather a temptation to us. The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed (Brockman and Pescantini 1990).

But again, was General Chui a Christian or a believer of any shade? According to General Chui's sister, Loise Muthoni Mararo (Interview 28 January 2014), though he was never baptized, he attended Anglican-sponsored schools such as Kathuuri Primary school (near Kiawaruguru Town), Mutitu Primary School and finally Mutira Mission Primary school. Here, they were taught Anglican Christianity and attended catechism classes, which he could not complete and be baptized as it took between three and nine

years. In such scenarios, some impatient candidates for baptism could opt out. In his book, *A church comes of age: Fifty years of revival in the CPK Diocese of Embu, 1942–1992*, Jesse Mugambi (1996: 15–18) cites the case of Mr. Levi Kenda, an old man, who took nine years before he qualified for baptism in the neighbourhoods of General Chui's Mutira, Kigari-Embu mission. Accordingly, the students went through the following classes before they were baptized: a) Listener's Class (*Uthikiriria*), b) Seekers' Class (*Ucaria*), c) Readers' Class (*Uthomagi*), d) Confirmation Class (*Kirathi Kia Moko*). In such a rigorous process, someone like General Chui, then just Kibara wa Mararo, who was highly ambitious and committed to social issues, could not sustain this momentum as 'service to the nation' proved more urgent than waiting for nine years in order to be full participants in the church.

Again having been the first born son of a well-to-do Mzee Mararo wa Matumbi, according to the standards of the time, Kibara wa Mararo did not have the urgency or the passion to turn to Christianity. After all, it was the 'religion of the oppressor' or foreigner. Coupled with this, his father was more or less a leader in African religion as he administered traditional circumcision as a religious duty, and thereby accumulated a lot of wealth in terms of herds of cattle, goats and sheep as he carried out the task. Why then trouble oneself in trying to acquire somebody else's religion if 'African religion was not disappointing'? Despite this, his sister, Loise Muthoni, recalled that they, as Mararo wa Matumbi's children, still attended Sunday School and the ordinary church service at Emmanuel Anglican Church, Mutira, during the stewardship of Rev. Canon Johana Njumbi (1886–1991), particularly in the 1940s. Here, she recalls being with General Chui, then Kibara wa Mararo, in one of the catechism classes under the then evangelist and Njumbi's elder brother, Paul Kangi (1868–1956). Kibara did not, however, complete it and died before he was baptized, hence he did not convert to Christianity formally. Muthoni also recalls the various Christmas Eves when they would walk about the neighbourhood singing Christmas songs when many were already in bed. In these night vigils of some sort, and where Kibara participated actively, they propounded themes such as: 'how can you sleep tonight when Jesus is being born today?', and 'wake up and welcome Christ', among others (Loise Muthoni Mararo, Interview 28 January 2014). Nevertheless, whether this makes Kibara a religious person or not, it is critical to appreciate that the Mau-Mau were a very religious outfit that mainly prayed facing Mount Kirinyaga (Kenya) where the traditional myth proclaims is God's dwelling place. They corrupted Christian missionary hymns and fitted their ideas of struggle in the new songs.

## FREEDOM AND AFTER

With the political liberation achieved in 1963, General Chui's family regrets that they were not compensated; nor did they receive any recognition from either the local or the national governments or even from international community. His wife, Gladys Wainoi, and her three boys (Mararo, the late Kinyua and the late Muthee) and three daughters

(Wangu, Jane Nyawira and Karuana) did not get a piece of land in Mugaya's fertile crescent of Kirinyaga County. Reduced to abject poverty, they hardly received any reasonable education or quality life. Their father's dream of a *laissez faire* Kenya just remained a pipe dream. Luckily, later they got ten acres, though in a rocky and dry land in the Makima zone of Mbeere Land in Embu County, which did not help matters either. Hence perpetual poverty remained their defining characteristic to this day. As a result, two out of his three sons died by 2014 (refer to Kinyua and Muthee). Being separated from their ancestral land and made to permanently live far afield contradict the wish of their legendary father whose agenda was never achieved. Or is it the case of the Kikuyu saying that (*morimi tiwe morei*) 'he who tills the land is not necessarily the one who eats the produce of the farm'?

Another Mau-Mau general who never received any credit is General Bamuingi of the neighbouring county of Meru and who lived to see Kenya attain independence in 1963 under President Jomo Kenyatta. He, however, did not enjoy the fruits of independence. He was indeed killed by the new African government forces two years after independence and his family likewise remains in abject poverty. Immediately after independence in 1963, he came out of the forest with his over 2 000 soldiers, attempted to negotiate the terms of surrender with the Kenyatta government and was disappointed to hear that the capitalist system of willing-buyer-willing-seller is the policy on land issues. On learning that there would be no free land, he and his enthusiastic team declared 'freedom is not yet, let's go back to the forest and continue waging guerrilla warfare'. General Bamuingi (meaning, People's General), who was the chief negotiator for the guerrillas between 1963 and 1965, understood that the independence that had come to Kenya fundamentally benefitted the 'barren' of the land (collaborators and moderates). The moderate Kenyans who had been on the sidelines and the collaborators who had been fighting the Mau-Mau had stepped in to claim victory and that was why he and his Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA) team returned to the forests. However, and unfortunately for him, some guerrillas had laid down their arms because Kenyatta's government had convinced them that 'independence had been achieved'. Bamuingi and his guerrillas were routed in 1965. General Bamuingi and his team were killed on the battlefield by the Kenyatta government after independence in 1965. Their bodies were paraded in Meru Township for three days [as the last chiefs of the Mau-Mau terrorists]. Indeed, this drives us to wonder with Maina wa Kinyatti: was the Mau-Mau revolution a revolution betrayed?

It is noteworthy, however, that on 10 August 2002, the Mau-Mau Original Trust and Kenya Patriotic Trust Party visited the site where General Chui wa Mararo's body was burned to ashes. The visit was led by the chairman of the Mau-Mau Original Trust, General Ngacha Karani. The team also included Major Kabwere (Benson Mwangi Kanyari), General Matene (Mwembe Matuako), Brigadier Kubai (Dedan Gituke Kogie) and the Mau-Mau Original Trust Chaplain and Reverend Chabangui Ngatunyi who consecrated the site by conducting rituals in his honour. General Chui's mother, who was

present on the occasion, shed some tears as she asserted that she had 'not yet understood the reason for insanity and ruthlessness of the colonial forces against the person of my son' forty six years later (Muriuki 2003: 10).

Certainly, the Mau-Mau War of Independence (1952–1963) inspired many liberation movements in Africa and beyond. In particular, the United States of America's Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s is indebted partly to the Kenyan war. When Nelson Mandela visited Kenya in 1990, upon his release from 27 years in jail, he asked the then President publicly to be taken to the grave of Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi wa Chiuri, the leader of Kenya Land and Freedom Army (the Mau-Mau). Mandela went on to explain the inspirational law of Mau-Mau in enhancing *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the then military arm of the African National Congress (ANC) (Muiru 2013: 17).

## CONCLUSION

The article sought to provide the oral history of Mau-Mau war of independence in Kenya, which was one of the fiercest liberation battles in Africa and beyond. It has showcased Kibara wa Mararo, later called General Chui wa Mararo, who was burned to ashes after his execution at the hands of the colonial authority. The article has strived to speak for the whole of Africa by showing how the gallant sons and daughters of Kenya put their lives on the line when they chose to fight for independence under difficult circumstances, but with no worthy compensation or any reparation for that matter. The same case applies to the war veterans in various parts of Africa, namely Zimbabwe, Zambia, and South Africa, among others – where the family lineages of the former freedom fighters remain in abject poverty. Were Africans ready for freedom in the 1960s? What made the postcolonial African governments engage in greed, corruption, oppressing the new society of 'free people', mess up their respective economies and eventually forget their heroes and heroines? Tough questions such as these remain after fifty years of independence. General Chui's family lives in abject poverty yet he sacrificed his job with the KAR in order to join the forest fighters seeking freedom for the Kenyan masses. Was it necessary to sacrifice this much? Similarly, the same concern has been mentioned among the family of General Bamuingi of Meru County, Kenya, which suffered the same fate. This article has pointed out that it was inhuman to try to psychologically punish women because 'they bore a dirty person' as both good and bad people pass through the womb of a woman. The fact of the matter is that people's personalities are shaped also by society. Women can not be blamed or over-eulogized when they give birth to failures or successful individuals. Certainly, injustice somewhere is injustice everywhere in the world. Perhaps it is the high time that Africa and the rest of the world learn from General Chui's case and 'come and take care of "bad" and "good" Rams in our midst without discrimination whatsoever'!



## ENDNOTES

- 1 Field Marshal Musa Mwariama (1928–1989) is a former leader of the Mau-Mau in Meru and the highest ranking Mau-Mau who survived the war in the forests and jungles of Central Kenya from its inception to independence without being killed or captured. Together with Dedan Kimathi and Waruhiu Itote (General China), they comprised the core Mau-Mau leadership. By the time he left his bases in Mount Kenya and Nyambene Hills on the equator; he had about 2 000 fighters who had survived Operation Anvil in Kenya. He was decorated with the national order of Elder of the Burning Spear (EBS) after independence. The most famous photograph of him is with President Jomo Kenyatta on attainment of *Uhuru* (independence) in 1963 and most of the post war Mau-Mau video clips show him inspecting a Mau Mau guard of honour or with President Jomo Kenyatta. M’Kiribua M’Muchiri, alias Musa Mwariama, was born in 1928 at Muthara in Tigania division of Meru District. Musa Mwariama died in 1989 at Ukambani after he sucked the leg of a friend who had been bit by a poisonous snake. He was buried at his 15 acre farm in Kiambogo Village, in Timau, North Imenti Constituency, Meru County.
- 2 It is critical to appreciate that we have two General Chui’s. One was killed after independence together with General Bamuingi after they returned to the forest claiming full independence was not yet as land had not been given to them. The other one is General Chui who was killed in 1956 by the colonial forces and came from Kirinyaga County; while the former came from Meru County and was killed by the independent government forces during the leadership of President Jomo Kenyatta (1963–1978).
- 3 Gitari wa Kiura is the father to Hon. Joseph Gachoki Gitari, the Member of Parliament for Kirinyaga Central (2011–2017).
- 4 See Boddy-Evans, A. Kings African Rifles (KAR), British Regiment which recruited soldiers from East Africa. Retrieved from <http://africanhistory.about.com/od/militaryhistory/a/KAR.htm> (accessed 28 January 2014).
- 5 Kibara’s siblings included six sisters (Loise Muthoni w/o Gatimu, Mary Wangari, Margaret Wambui, Saweria Nyawira, Helena Wambura and Elizabeth Karuana) and two brothers (Joseph Murage also called Mbiti and Stanley Muriithi). By 2014 only the latter had passed on. In turn, Kibara’s father (Mararo) had three wives. His first wife died around 1950, out of food poisoning by some envious neighbours, after giving birth to Wanduru and Wangari, mother to Ven. Canon John Mararo. The second one, Wanjiku, the mother to General Chui (Kibara), died in 2003; while the youngest and/or third wife is Gladys Wangeci. Mararo wa Matumbi himself died in 1978.
- 6 See John Njigoya Kagwe, The Mau-Mau reparations case: claimant profiles. Retrieved from <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/55147/print> (accessed 27 January 2014).

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