

# Nahashon Ngare Rukenya and the Moral Re-Armament in Kenya: The Turning Point and the Post Mau-Mau War Reconstruction (1959–1970)

**Julius M Gathogo**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1718-0082>

Kenyatta University

University of South Africa

[jgathogom@yahoo.com](mailto:jgathogom@yahoo.com)

## Abstract

Nahashon Ngare Rukenya (1930–1996) was initially a Mau-Mau leader during Kenya’s war of independence (1952–60). Mau-Mau rebels were a militant group that waged guerrilla warfare against British colonialism in Kenya; and was largely seen as anti-Christian, anti-Anglican and anti-Presbyterian. As political advisor to the Mau-Mau, especially in their military offensives, Ngare Rukenya was once waylaid by the colonial forces, captured and detained. His turning point as Mau-Mau leader came when a Christian sect called the Moral Re-Armament (MRA)—founded by an American missionary Dr Frank Buchman in 1938—visited various detention camps to deliver counselling and teaching services. In particular, the MRA taught about the equality of all humans as children of God. They preached peace and reconciliation amongst all people living in colonial Kenya, while using biblical references to support their theological and ecclesiastical positions. After listening to their argumentation—while at Athi River detention camp—Ngare Rukenya’s politics of “land and Freedom” (*wiyathi na ithaka*—the core theme in Mau-Mau politics), changed to peace, reconciliation and resettlement of post-war Kenya. It re-energised his lay Anglican Church leadership, a church seen as pro-colonialism; hence hated by the local populace. This article sets out to unveil the problem in reference to Ngare Rukenya: How did the MRA influence socio-political discourses and eventually play its role in post Mau-Mau war reconstruction in Kenya (1959–1970)? The article is set on the premise that without Ngare Rukenya’s contribution regarding peace, reconciliation and resettlement, Central Kenya (as epicentre of Mau-Mau rebel activities) would have experienced civil war after colonialism in 1963. Ngare Rukenya and the MRA represent a major turning point in the Kenyan ecclesiastical history. The materials in this presentation are largely gathered through oral interviews, archival researches and limited consultation of published works.

**Keywords:** Nahashon Ngare Rukenya; Frank Buchman; Mau-Mau Rebels; Moral Re-Armament (MRA); post war reconciliation; resettlement of post war victims

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## Introduction

The turning point in Kenya's war of independence, by the Mau-Mau rebels (1952–1960) against British colonial rule, is clearly manifested in the coming of an American Christian sect called the Moral Re-Armament (hereafter MRA) in the mid-1950s. The rebels who waged guerrilla warfare while retreating to the Aberdares and Mount Kenya forests from time to time, were officially called the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (hereafter KLFA), but derogatorily called Mau-Mau rebels. KLFA's main concern was that the majority of Africans—who were by then constituting more than 5 million people in colonial Kenya and whose total population stood at around 8 million—had no meaningful form of political representation. Nonetheless, a European missionary by the name of Rev. Dr John William Arthur (1881–1952) of the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) had been appointed in 1924 as a member of parliament so as to represent African interests in the so-called Legislative Council (popularly called Legco) (Rosberg and Nottingham 1970). However, this did not impress the African majority at all. The disquiet among the Africans was partly informed by the fact that, although the European missionary representation in the Legislative Council (parliament) attempted to address African concerns such as inferior education, land acquisition and labour reforms, among others, it could not address cultural concerns such as female circumcision, indigenous forms of education and dispensation of medicine, polygamy, ghost marriages, sororate marriages, levirate marriages, and wife inheritance (Anderson 1977). Apart from meaningful political representation, African politics since 1903—when Kenya was just a British protectorate—were characterised by concerns about land alienation by settlers, the Kenyan version of apartheid which was called colour-bar, low wages on the European farms and the emerging factories, heavy taxation, and the forced carrying of an identity card (*Kipande*) (see Gathogo 2016).

It is along those lines that Nahashon Ngare Rukenya (1930–1996), a relatively educated man in the standards of the day, emerged as one of the voices of protest and eventually became one of the Mau-Mau rebel leaders in the then Embu district (1933–1963), now comprising Kirinyaga and Embu counties. Ngare Rukenya was subsequently captured and detained in various colonial detention camps. During his stints in the colonial jails, he was privileged to meet the American Christian sect, the MRA movement team, which was founded by an American missionary, namely Rev. Dr Frank Buchman in 1938. Being a justice-seeking ecclesiastical outfit, the MRA targeted both the “oppressed” and the “oppressor”; hence it had already “converted” some prison warders before it reached out to the inmates. As a result, inmates could observe the changing patterns in their prison life, because the prison officers became more understanding and reasonable as they handled them. By then, the MRA team was visiting various hotspots of the world where war was the defining characteristic, and sought to pursue peace and reconciliation. In colonial Kenya they were allowed by the colonial government to visit various detention camps, meet both the jailers and the detainees, preach and teach peace, and eventually explore ways of conflict resolution. Additionally, among other activities, they counselled war victims. After the major turning point, where Ngare Rukenya was converted to MRA ideals, he eventually became the leading proponent of

the MRA's ideals within the colonial jails. Upon his release from Mau-Mau colonial detention camps in September 1958, he continued this new task with great zeal.

### **Church against Mau-Mau Rebel Activities**

Through the activities of the MRA in Kenya and across the other hotspots of Africa, the church could now be seen as pro-African. Previously, the church (Presbyterians and Anglicans) was seen as pro-colonialism, hence the Kikuyu coined a slogan "*Gutire Muthungu na Mubia*"; meaning there is no marked difference between a European settler who was ruthless to the African labourers and the European missionaries—Anglicans and Presbyterians in particular. In other words, before the influence of the MRA, both Anglicans and Presbyterians were seen to harbour racism, hatred, and as favouring colonial malpractices on the Africans. A case in point could be seen during the Kiambu Ecumenical Conference of 1953, which condemned the activities of the Mau-Mau rebels and where the church threatened to take up arms against the Mau-Mau and the resultant Marxists ideologies of class struggle (Gathogo 2016). In addition, Mau-Mau rebel activities, including oath-taking which was a mockery of the Christian Holy Eucharist, were dismissed as antichrist, demonic, and foul; and against biblical teachings on God as the sole designer and architect of any established government—colonial or democratic (cf. Rom 13).

The Kiambu Ecumenical Conference of 1953 resolved to expel all children/pupils of the "bandit" families from their schools and churches (Maloba 1994). They raised the stakes further when they gave an ultimatum to the colonial government that if it did not act quickly and stop the "bandits," the church—as in the case of the Great Crusades (otherwise called the Christian Holy Wars, when the Latin church turned their guns on the Muslim "intruders" in their territories)—would engage in physical combat to flush out Mau-Mau rebels from the local forests. In the first Crusade of 1095, the Christian armies from Western Europe obeyed Pope Urban II's plea to go to war against the Muslim forces in the Holy Land. In 1099, the First Crusade achieved its goal when it successfully wrestled Jerusalem from Muslims. This resulted in the establishment of several Latin Christian states, as Muslims vowed to wage a Holy War (Jihad). To this end, the Kiambu Ecumenical Conference of 1953 was largely informed by Pope Urban II's model.

Certainly, this was a major turning point in an otherwise peaceful church that ordinarily emphasised the beatitudes (Matt 5:3–10) thus: "... Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth ... Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy ... Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The Ecumenical Conference of 1953 also went against Christ's teaching in Luke 6:29 to "give the other cheek for a slap" rather than the mosaic giving of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot; burn for burn, wound for wound, and bruise for bruise" (Exodus 21:24–25).

On 24 January 1954, various African lay church leaders turned colonial administrators, mainly Anglicans and Presbyterians, appended their signatures as a protest vote against the

Mau-Mau rebel activities. Like in the Kiambu Ecumenical Conference of 1953, they dismissed the rebel activities as a threat to public peace that is freely given by God. Curiously, they did not condemn some dehumanising activities such as settlers' tendencies to kill some "lazy" African labourers, and corporal punishments meted on the Africans. They were led by the Hon. Muchohi Gikonyo, M.L.C. and the Hon. E.W. Mathu, M.L.C. Others who represented the present day Kirinyaga and Embu counties (which were then one Embu district) were Anglican Church lay leaders: Chief Stephen Ngigi Machere, and Chief Richard Githae (interview, Matene 01:02:2014). From the present day Nyeri County the delegates were mainly Presbyterians: Senior Chief Muhoya, the Rev. Charles Muhoro, and Chief Eliud Mugo. From the present day Kiambu County, which had most of the anti-Mau-Mau delegates, were: Harry Thuku, Chief Magugu Waweru, the Rev. Wanyoike Kamawe (Presbyterians), Councilor Mbira, Chief Kibathi Gitangu, the Rev. William Njoroge (Anglican), Canon Samuel Nguru (Anglican), Div. Chief Josiah Njonjo (Anglican), and James S. Gichuru. The delegates from the present day Murang'a County were: Ex-Senior Chief Njiri Karanja, M.B.E., Chief Ignatio Murai, the Rev. Elijah Gachanja (Anglican), and Chief Samuel Githu. From the vast lands of Rift Valley (refer to Narok, Nakuru, and Laikipia counties), Permenas Kiritu, Chief Chrysostom Kihagi, J.F.G. Kanyua, and Chief Zedekiah Wambugu were the delegates (interview, Matene 01:02:2014, CMS: G3AS/1923/9).

As noted earlier, both Presbyterian and Anglican Church leaderships stood firm against the various types of binding oaths that were conducted by the Mau-Mau rebel administrators in various disguised centres across Central, Eastern, and Rift Valley areas of Kenya. This included: *Mungururio* (masses) oath, *Mbatuni* (soldiers) oath, *Mtogo kwa Mtogo* (inside the forest morale) oath, and *Muma wa Gikundi* (war councils) oath. As a leader who had not retreated to the forest as a combatant, Ngare Rukenya had only undertaken both *Mungururio* (masses) oath and *Muma wa Gikundi* (war councils) oath. After all, he was a leader in the political wing of the Mau-Mau rebel movement. In view of this, the church (Presbyterian and Anglican) was clearly seen as against Mau-Mau rebel activities and even though Ngare Rukenya received his education, as we shall see, from the church-sponsored schools (the Anglicans' Church Missionary Society), he found himself going against his church position and eventually becoming a leader in the political wing of the Mau-Mau rebel movement. This eventually caused his becoming a Mau-Mau detainee, where he met the MRA Christian sect which led him to have another turning point in his lifetime.

### **The Moral Re-Armament (MRA): What was it?**

The MRA, which officially came into existence in 1938, was the brainchild of an American Christian missionary, Dr Frank Buchman (1878–1961); and indeed an off-shoot of his earlier ecclesiastical outfit called the Oxford Group (Buchman 1955). In coming up with the Oxford Group that preceded the MRA, Buchman, an American Lutheran Cleric of Swiss descent, had had a conversion experience in 1908 while in the Keswick chapel, England, as he listened to an ongoing sermon by Jessie Penn-Lewis (Luttwak 1994). It is after this experience that he founded a movement called *A First Century Christian Fellowship* in 1921. In 1931, the fellowship was renamed Oxford Group. In 1932, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo

Lang, acknowledged the works of the Oxford Group when he said: “There is a gift here of which the church is manifestly in need.” Later in 1934, Lang said of the movement: “Oxford Groups are being used to demonstrate the power of God to change lives and give to personal witness its place in true discipleship” (Luttwak 1994, 52). In 1938, Buchman renamed his Oxford Group as “Moral Re-Armament.” Why? First, the renaming came out of his deep conviction that a moral re-armament was needed as a concern worth pursuing within his Oxford Group.

Second, as nations were rearming for the Second World War (1939–1945), a Swedish socialist and a member of the Oxford Group called Harry Blomberg wrote of the need for Christians to re-arm morally. This proposal was embraced by Buchman who subsequently launched a campaign for moral and spiritual re-armament, particularly in East London (Buchman 1955). Third, the MRA developed into an international moral and spiritual movement which he headed for a praiseworthy 23 years (1938–1961). The American President Franklin D. Roosevelt hailed the MRA as a major contribution to morale during the Second World War (Buchman 1955). In time, the MRA began its extensive use of theatrical reviews, plays, films, novel writing and other activities in order to communicate their messages across the continents. After World War II came to an end in 1945, the MRA played a critical role in building peace and reconciliation, particularly among neighbouring nations such as France and Germany (Luttwak 1994). Through conferences, boardroom meetings and shuttle diplomacy, the MRA played a critical role in resettling several hotspots globally (Luttwak 1994). In 2001, it was renamed Initiatives of Change, and currently has its headquarters in Caux, Switzerland.

In regard to Africa, the MRA equally played a critical role in counselling, reconciling, and uniting divided peoples; hence its reconstructive role is manifest. Its role in the peaceful decolonisation of Morocco and Tunisia in the late 1950s cannot be gainsaid. In the nature of things, the erstwhile Moroccan King, Mohammed V, acknowledged their efforts in 1956 thus: “I thank you for all you have done for Morocco, the Moroccans and myself in the course of these last testing years. Moral Re-Armament must become for us Muslims just as much an incentive as it is for you Christians and for all nations” (Lean 1985, 497). Similarly, the erstwhile Tunisian president, Habib Bourguiba, noted that “the world must be told what Moral Re-Armament has done for our country” (Lean 1985, 454). Sadly, while Tunisia and Morocco hailed the MRA, mediation in Algeria failed miserably.

As noted by the website for the Initiatives of Change International (IOFC), which became the new name for the MRA in 2001, the MRA began its activities in Kenya in 1954 when the Mau-Mau rebellion against the British colonial hegemony was in its peak. Men, women and children were killed in thousands; with the atrocities promising endless revenges and counter-reactions (Horne 2009, <http://www.iofc.org/history/Kenya>). By then violence in Rift Valley, Central, and Eastern Kenya regions was getting out of control, hence attracting international attention. Nevertheless, the MRA’s positive contribution came out clearly in 1955 when a European colonel officer in charge of the Mau-Mau rehabilitation camp at Athi River near Nairobi, openly sought forgiveness from the detainees whom he was superintending. Such

apologies were unimagined and unheard of. He apologised for his brutality, racism, arrogance, selfishness, and acknowledged that it was such vices that gave birth to the Mau-Mau rebellion against the British rule in Kenya. He pledged to work with everyone irrespective of race, origin, background, gender, and/or other biased considerations. Additionally, he promised to team up with everyone who had goodwill for Kenya so as to rebuild the country on the basis of moral re-armament. Such gestures led inmates to appreciate the MRA as the panacea to Kenya's current and future challenges. It is in light of this that the likes of Ngare Rukenya converted to this new creed.

Apart from the prison warders (the jailers) and the inmates, John Rukenya (interview 05.11.2016) conceded that the MRA in Kenya targeted ordinary civilians who were in and out of prison. In particular, President Jomo Kenyatta's brother, James Muigai, had joined the movement. Equally, Ngare Rukenya's jail mate and friend, the Hon. Gitu wa Kahengeri (later Member of Parliament for Juja constituency) had also joined the MRA outfit. According to Eliud Gicuki Gathumbi (interview 4.11.2016), who was an eye witness when Mau-Mau rebel skirmishes were at their peak, the MRA had managed to convert the local District Officer (DO) in Kerugoya, Mr Abraham—who despite his being seen largely as a racist European colonial administrator—reached his turning point after getting converted to MRA ideals. From 1954 onwards, he could be seen walking through the local streets without a gun or body guards, especially when attending to social functions. For sticking to the four key ideals or absolutes of the MRA (honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love), the European DO did not feel indebted to anybody, hence, he could walk without fear of the rebels' lightning attacks.

Why this strong attraction to the MRA? First, the MRA had effective teaching methods, where they used films, published literature, were passionate in their agenda to “remake the world” as a “small heaven” for all; and had indeed received international endorsement from most governments of the world. They also spent a lot of money in their bid to effect positive social change among individuals and societies. On a visit to Ngare Rukenya's home compound in Muragara village, Kirinyaga County, the researcher was impressed to see the magnificent house that they had built for him as the local MRA point man way back in 1959. They also paid for their air tickets (Ngare Rukenya, his wife Mary Wakathare and other active members) when they attended the burial of Buchman, the founder of the MRA, in 1961. As a result, Ngare Rukenya attended several MRA conferences globally in places such as England, United States, West Germany, Latin America, Belgian Congo (now Democratic Republic of Congo), and other places where he travelled to preach peace (Interview, John Rukenya 05.11.2016). In view of this, the movement appeared to have been well-funded by well-wishers globally. Moreover, the MRA's ideals addressed relevant issues that troubled people within their respective contexts. The content in their teaching was strikingly relevant and genuinely geared towards problem-solving. It targeted people who mattered most then: the colonial administrators, the jailers, the home guards, the political detainees, ex-Mau-Mau detainees, and those who were about to be released, prison warders, the governments—virtually everyone who was involved in the ongoing political conflict. In particular, the outgoing detainees (after serving 5–10 year jail terms for their involvement in Mau-Mau rebel politics), were largely demoralised, especially at the domestic domain. Owing to the

beatings, insults, malnourishment, starvation, jail trauma and all forms of torture, most of the ex-detainees were depressed beyond repair; hence they could not be relied upon to effectively participate in post-colonial reconstruction before they had been counselled by MRA operatives. Upon release in the late 1950s, some ex-Mau-Mau detainees would find their young wives with illegitimate children that were sired by the colonial home guards. Some committed suicide upon their return. Other ex-detainees were shocked to find their neighbours united against them for their past “atrocities.” Hence, the MRA stood in to bridge the huge gaping holes through offering counselling services in order to help them forgive their spouses, their neighbours and their jail tormentors now that their wasted lives could not be recovered (Interview, Mararo 04.11.2016).

In an MRA Conference of 1955 in Caux, Switzerland, Buchman requested some African participants to compose a play that summarised the day’s teaching. This eventually turned out to be another major turning point in the MRA’s discourses. It was hailed across the globe as reconciling and a uniting factor for all races. When the play *Freedom* was screened to the most celebrated colonial detainee in Kenya, later president Jomo Kenyatta, he greatly appreciated it (Lean 1985), as noted by the website for the Initiatives of Change International (IOFC) (Horne 2009, <http://www.iofc.org/history/Kenya>), which became the new name for the MRA in 2001:

Two of these men [Ngare Rukenya and another MRA activist, Stanley Kinga] visited Jomo Kenyatta in prison [in late 1959] and showed him the film *Freedom*, written by Africans inspired by IofC. The film, set in an African country coming to independence, carries a message that a change of heart [a turning point] is possible and necessary to overcome the arrogance, political intrigues and tribalism in people of all races. Kenyatta asked that a Swahili version of the film be made and used in Kenya. It was made, and in the months leading up to Kenya’s first elections *Freedom* was shown to nearly one million people, leading Nairobi’s *The Reporter* to write that “MRA has done a great deal to stabilise our recent election campaign.” In a conciliatory gesture after being elected President, Kenyatta asked the white settlers to stay to help build the country.

After Kenyatta was released from jail (1952–1961) in 1961, he encouraged the MRA to screen the film to millions of Kenyans, which ultimately happened. As the first general election was nearing in 1961, Ngare Rukenya, the Kenyan team leader of the MRA, had already imprinted a working phrase as a clarion call to Jomo Kenyatta through this film, and with the general teachings: *Tusahau yaliyopita na tunjenge taifa* (let’s forget the bygones and reconstruct the nation of Kenya). To the surprise of many Kenyans, Jomo Kenyatta left the colonial detention camp (1952–1961) with MRA ideologies, though he did not mention the latter. Clearly, it was not previously imaginable that the political firebrand, Jomo Kenyatta, would preach reconciliation with his tormentors, peace with a traitorous neighbour, and indeed suffering without bitterness. Asked by a European journalist (Ivor Davis) what his political philosophy was, after release from prison in 1961, Kenyatta paused a little and said: “Well, my political philosophy is, love your neighbor as you love yourselves” (Kenyatta 1961). The erstwhile British Governor of the Kenya colony, Sir Evelyn Baring (1903–1973), who in 1952 dismissed Kenyatta as the leader of darkness and death, must have been taken by surprise in his retirement abroad (Gathogo 2016). Of interest to note is that it was

Governor Baring who ordered the arrest of the African leaders, including Kenyatta, on 20 October 1952. In the post-colonial era, Baring was now seeing a God-invoking President Kenyatta who always reminded his audiences that “*ya Mungu ni mengi*” (God’s doings are greater than those of human beings) in most of his public speeches (1961–1978). Certainly, Ngare Rukenya and his MRA’s team visit to Kenyatta in his Maralal prison cell must have driven Kenyatta to a major turning point in his religio-political discourses. In my view, the Ngare Rukenya-led MRA became the Kenyan version of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) despite their huge differences. Unlike the South African TRC, which was established after the demise of apartheid in 1994, the MRA’s quests for national reconciliation and moral re-armament began before Kenya’s constitutional independence (in 1954) and continued during the post-independence reconstruction phase, though it remained a non-governmental movement. As a result, Kenya did not experience civil war despite having had two sides of the political divides that seemingly had irreconcilable differences (pro-Mau-Mau rebels vis-à-vis the collaborators). Conversely, prophets of doom had feared that Kenya would not recover from the civil war that it went through, especially in its central region (1952–1960).

In his book, *Mau-Mau in Harlem? The U.S and the Liberation of Kenya?* Gerald Horne (2009) recalls that when Buchman died in 1961, his funeral in Allentown, Pennsylvania, USA, was well attended by people from all walks of life, and across the various continents. Ngare Rukenya, while sporting an animal skin over his Western suit, addressed this international gathering. He eulogised Buchman for his un-comparable deeds to Kenya through his MRA activities. Equally, Colonel Knight—who was the Commander of Athi River Mau-Mau detention camp, where Ngare Rukenya underwent his major turning point that catapulted him into an international peace and reconciliation ambassador—was part of the tearful throngs that gave Buchman a warm send-off.

### **Teachings and Critics of the MRA**

As a movement geared towards peace and reconciliation, the MRA sought to offer apt practical theology and philosophy for the world that was befogged by fears of war and general conflict. Though a Christian outfit, it grew into an informal and international network of peoples across the various backgrounds, continents, nations and faiths (Buchman 1955; Lean 1985; Luttwak 1994). As noted earlier, it was philosophically grounded on four absolutes: honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love (Lean 1985). It strongly emphasised that changing the world begins with seeking to change oneself, a proposition that is in continuum with Mahatma Gandhi’s (1869–1948) famous dictum that “if one wants to preach *Satyagraha* (truth force/change) you must live *Satyagraha*.” Hence, change begins from the inner person.

In his dream of “remaking the world,” Buchman saw the solution as relatively simple: clean up all that in you is in conflict with the Christian belief and mirror yourself in the four absolutes (honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love). A person was also expected to open up to divine guidance, and share his or her sins with a person whom he or she trusts. In so doing, it was expected that the person would find a healthy and lasting freedom. To the MRA, sin was



seen as the disease which Christ came to cure; and the final result was seen as a miracle (Lean 1985). In regard to the social activities, under Christian convictions, the MRA was seen as capable of bridging the differences of opinion between antagonistic parties, all in search for the common good (Nkomo 1958).

In the Kenyan context, especially during the civil war era (1952–1960) that was occasioned by the Mau-Mau military activities, the MRA noted that “the wound of Mau-Mau [crisis] is of yesterday, and today it is neither fertile nor healed. Its causes are still to be cured” (Nkomo 1958, 30). In noting their progress by 1958, Ngare Rukenya’s MRA team noted that one member of the hard-core Mau-Mau organisation was by then working on the farm of a man who used to be the commandant of his detention camp. This occurred after the European Commandant had been converted to the MRA’s ideologies. The ripple effect was that the European Commandant could boldly confess that “Moral Re-Armament is the answer to the Mau-Mau [crisis] because it brings change to white and black” (Nkomo 1958, 30). The MRA’s activities in Kenya were also characterised by open and individual confessions, seeking forgiveness, corporate apologies, admission of past “sins” and the desire to move on. Its attempts to reconcile Europeans and Africans, African combatants and African collaborators, Africans and Arabs, and so on, caused it to be described as the hospital “that will cure Kenya” (Nkomo 1958, 31). In one of the centres of the MRA, a former hard-core Mau-Mau rebel wrote a moving letter to the daughter of a European man who had been murdered by Mau-Mau combatants (though now friends and propagating MRA ideals of reconciliation and healing):

The cause of this letter was to apologise for the death of your father for which as an ex-Mau-Mau, I am much responsible. The news came to me when I was in police custody and I was happy to hear a European settler had been killed. Although I was not at the scene when your father died, I feel I was much acquainted with the evil. I beg to tell you, you are not alone in this battle. I am with you shoulder to shoulder, step by step to bring this answer for the whole world. Bombs and bullets are being manufactured by many people. But a short quiet time in the morning is worth millions of bombs and bullets. Statesmen would do better with a quiet time in the morning to listen to God. I am happy I was in detention camp because God had prepared something very valuable for me there, a change of heart. (Nkomo 1958, 31)

Like any other reformer, Buchman had several critics. First, when he introduced the moral re-armament dimension, while it was Oxford Group, some of his colleagues abandoned him for indulging in politics. Second, as an evangelical-protestant movement, the pro-establishment theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Reinhold Niebuhr did not approve of his theological trajectory. In particular, Niebuhr saw the MRA and its leadership as a naïve movement and downplayed its efforts to save the world. Evangelist Dietrich Bonhoeffer saw naiveté in Buchman’s attempt to convert the German dictator, Adolf Hitler. Bishop Henson of Durham, UK, accused Buchman of “megalomaniacal self-confidence” (Lean 1985). Equally, the Labour MP, Tom Driberg, saw the MRA’s efforts as an intellectual wreck. Further, Buchman’s controversial statements such as “I thank heaven for a man like Adolf Hitler, who built a front line of defence against the anti-Christ of Communism” made him unpopular even to his own admirers such as the Swiss theologian, Emil Brunner, who constantly acknowledged that he was indebted to him (Luttwak 1994). Equally, Buchman’s efforts in the MRA received a huge boost from the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury,

Cosmo Lang; Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople; Canon B.H. Streeter; Cardinal Franz Konig; Orthodox Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus; Klaus Bockmuehl; and Gabriel Marcel (Lean 1985). In particular, Cardinal Franz Konig saw Buchman's efforts as "a turning point in the history of the modern world through his ideas" (Lean 1985, 2). Athenagoras saw Buchman as a "modern St Paul" (Lean 1985, 428). Conversely, Buchman's discourses are indeed the real foundation of the peace that Kenyans enjoy in the 21st century, especially in the MRA's emphasis on the power of forgiveness.

### **Nahashon Ngare Rukenya (1930–1996)**

Nahashon Ngare Rukenya (1930–1996), the first-born son of Laban Rukenya Ngare (1880–1970), was born at Gicuka Village, Mutira Location, in the then Nyeri District, on 5 March 1930. Laban, as his father was fondly called, and his wife Elizabeth Wakagio brought up Ngare wa Laban, as he was fondly called in a Christian environment. He was taken to the Church Missionary (Anglican) schools where he was introduced to critical virtues that helped him to easily absorb the teachings of the MRA, later as a Mau-Mau detainee in the mid-1950s. At this juncture, it is critically important to appreciate two things about the leading light in the MRA's activities in the late 1950s and 60s. First, his parents were pioneer Anglican Christians who participated immensely in the planting of Anglican churches and schools. In particular, the first church at Gicuka (near the current Mununga tea factory) was largely built by Laban around 1920 (interview, Harun Kabugua 13.02.2017). He also teamed up with the pioneer African clergy, Rev. Canon Johana Njumbi, and other elders such as ex-Chief Habel, Samuel Gicoya, Hosea, and Phenehas, among others, to shift Gicuka Church to the present day St Andrews Kiamaina Anglican Church in 1935.

Laban organised for his son's paedobaptism a year after his birth, on 12 June 1931. Certainly, this deep rooted Anglican Christianity was instrumental in Ngare Rukenya's future life, especially as the de-facto leader of the MRA in Kenya. Ngare Rukenya came from a much respected family that had educated parents. During those days, the few who had acquired Western education and religion were seen as the beacons of light; and indeed the pioneers of the new African society. They planted cash crops such as tea and coffee that made them lead a more economically stable life. As a result, they were largely imitated by the rest of society. In the case of Ngare Rukenya's father, he, like his elite contemporaries, educated their children who later returned as teachers, medical practitioners, accountants, surveyors and other professionals. In view of this, Ngare Rukenya also benefited from his father's "big" name that easily aided in catapulting him into higher echelons of society, especially as he sold the MRA's reconciliation agenda and as he conducted his political discourses in 1970s. This is clearly seen by the way he was fondly called by the villagers, "Wa Laban," which can be translated as the "great son of the respected elder" (Laban Rukenya Ngare). In particular, when he joined elective politics in the early 1970s, after public requests, it was common to hear him being referred to as *Tawa wa Ndia* (the bright lamp light of the Ndia sub-group of the Kikuyu nation). Hence, as "Wa Laban" met his death on 7 January 1996, after he had been involved in a motor accident the previous day; people could be heard openly mourning the "light of Ndia" (the people).

In regard to education, Ngare Rukenya attended Kiamaina Primary School (1936–1940) for his Standard 1–4; Mutira Intermediate School (1942–1945) for his Standard 5–8; and Kagumo High School, Nyeri (1946–1949) for his O-levels (secondary school education). He was subsequently trained as a banker by the Barclays Bank, Nairobi, who also employed him as a clerk (1950–1953). Before then, he briefly worked as a teacher in Meru County. His father took him for a medical course in radiography (X-ray course) at Kisumu City; and like teaching, he abandoned it owing to his calling to serve in a more public engaging environment (Interview, John Rukenya 05.11.2016). It is from there that he joined the banking industry and settled in the Bahati area of Nairobi City. He later studied economics and political science at the London School of Economics during his stint as the de-facto MRA leader in Kenya (1959–1963). Following his involvements in the national politics (Mau-Mau rebel movement), particularly as financier, strategist and political advisor, he was waylaid, captured, and eventually detained from 1953 to September 1958 (interview, Harun Kabugua 13.02.2017). In his six-year stints in Mau-Mau detention camps, Ngare Rukenya was shuttled from one camp to the other. That is: Manyani, Yatta, Karaba, and then Athi River.

Ngare Rukenya's release from the Mau-Mau rebels' detention camp in September 1958 was as dramatic as his capture in mid-1953. First, the Athi River European Commandant, Allan Knight, who had been converted into the Moral Re-Armament faith, brought him personally to his home, Kiamaina (interview, John Rukenya 05.11.2016). It was strange those days to see a European Colonel escorting an inmate from prison to his home, so as to ensure his safety. This drama clearly surprised the locality. Having seen him teach his fellow inmates about the benefits of MRA, Allan Knight had seen in Ngare Rukenya a future key ally in reconciling both Europeans and Africans on one hand, and the fighting African groups on the other hand. It is no wonder that Ngare Rukenya was invited to work as a farm manager/supervisor at Nakuru's Narosura Farm (present day Koibatek Farmers' Training Centre, Baringo County) in October 1958 (interview, John Rukenya 05.11.2016). By then Narosura Farm was administratively situated in the larger Nakuru area, as it lies 60 kilometres from the town centre. In turn, Narosura Farm was owned by a European settler, called Michael Low. It is here in Nakuru that his second-born child, Elizabeth Wakabari, was born in July 1959. Of interest to note is that both Michael Low and Allan Knight had converted to the creeds and ideals of the MRA movement. In Ngare Rukenya, they saw a promising reconciler owing to his relatively good education and his polished oratorical skills. They also rated another ex-Mau-Mau detainee and an MRA adherent, Leonard Kibuthu-Muturi, well. Kibuthu-Muturi worked on another farm in Kitale that also belonged to Allan Knight. Another leading African in the MRA was Stanley Kinga Mwendia, and an ex-Mau-Mau detainee. He hailed from the present-day Nyeri County. It is with the latter that Ngare Rukenya went to visit Jomo Kenyatta at Maralal detention cell, and sought to convert him to the ideals of the MRA in 1959. In a 1959 photo, taken in Maralal House, where Kenyatta was restricted, Ngare Rukenya is seen in deep consultation with Jomo Kenyatta and two other MRA leaders: Leonard Kibuthu-Muturi and Stanley Kinga. It is during this meeting that Kenyatta reached his turning point after being bombarded with MRA ideals and creeds.

While at Michael Low's farms, where Ngare Rukenya worked after stints in jail, the success of the MRA was manifest as the racial divide had been erased. At a time when colour-bar (the Kenyan version of apartheid) was in its zenith, Low encouraged his children to be friendly and play with the African children on his farm. In particular, there was a big conference centre at Narosura Farm where Low's children interacted with those of African descent. In addition, Low's son, Peter Low, was still living in Naivasha by November 2016 as a Kenyan citizen. He has documented the activities of the MRA (interview, John Rukenya 05.11.2016), as a tribute to Rev. Dr Frank Buchman, and also his father and others in the MRA movement; and who believed as in Isaiah 11:6 that "the wolf will live with the lamb; the leopard will lie down with the young goat. The calf and the lion will graze together, and a little child will lead them."

After Ngare Rukenya's employment at Narosura Farm in 1958, he later concentrated on MRA activities from 1959 and 1963. During this time (1959–1963) he travelled widely across the various continents, espousing the key pillars of the MRA. He also preached peace and reconciliation among the peoples of the world. Hence, he played the role of a roving speaker, peace ambassador and anti-racial crusader among other pillars of the MRA. In 1964, he was employed by the new independent government in the Ministry of Land and Settlement, as a Settlement Officer (SO) and was first posted in Njabini Settlement Scheme, South Kinangop, Nyandarwa County, where he acquired several pieces of land. In 1966 he was transferred to Ol-Aragwai Settlement Scheme (now called Murungaru), North Kinangop, in the present day Nyandarwa County (interview, John Rukenya 05.11.2016).

In 1968, President Kenyatta appointed Ngare Rukenya as the Coast Provincial Settlement Officer (CPSO). This was within his MRA philosophy of resettling post-war and post-colonial Kenya. In 1969, he resigned as the CPSO and contested Nyandarwa South parliamentary seat. He came third after the winner, the Hon. James Kabingu Muregi, and others. This probably led him to return to his native Kirinyaga district where he contested in both the 1974 and 1979 Kenyan general elections. In 1970, Jomo Kenyatta employed him again, now as a District Officer (DO). He served in both Makueni and Kikuyudivisions. In 1972, he joined the Treasury where he worked with the Hon. John Matere Keriri and the Hon. Mwai Kibaki, later president Kibaki (interview, John Rukenya 05.11.2016). He resigned in 1974 to contest Kirinyaga West (Ndia) parliamentary seat. After the 1974 elections, he became a full-time businessman and a farmer in cereals and dairy farming, especially on his 60-acre farm in Naivasha, Nakuru County.

Despite all these efforts, Ngare Rukenya did not win either the Ndia parliamentary elections of 1974 and 1979 in the then Kirinyaga West constituencies. In both cases, he came second after the incumbent, James Njagi Njiru, though claims of electoral malpractices were largely blamed for his loss. In the 1974 elections, James Njiru scored 7 977 votes while Ngare Rukenya scored 4 766. Others were as follows: Gitari Cyrus Muraguri 3 838; Mutugi Kori 3 121; Itugi Kabiru 1 468; and James Njagi Kibuga 302 votes. In the 1979 elections, Njiru scored 19 000 while Ngare Rukenya scored 14 000 votes (Katumanga 1997). As noted above,

there were claims of rigging in both cases. Nevertheless, his lessons from the MRA became his pillar; hence the reason why he did not get broken down till he was free at last. This again drives us to ask: Was he strong globally but weaker at the local level? What made him fail to succeed in the electoral contests? Clearly, as he taught forgiveness and reconciliation, as MRA leader, he greatly learnt how to suffer without bitterness.

### **The Influence of Moral Re-Armament (MRA)**

People from Ngare Rukenya's locality heard about the MRA for the first time in September 1958 after he was released from Athi River detention camp. Before his capture in 1953 he married Mary Wakathare, the daughter of early elite lay Anglican leader and sub-Chief, Manasseh Kimotho Githongo, in 1951 (interview, Jane Kabugua 13.02.2017). Together, they had sired John Rukenya Ngare in January 1953, before his arrest. Their other two children were Wakabari (born 1959) and Manasseh (born 1962). By the time of his arrest, Mary was teaching at Mutira Primary School.

After his release from detention in September 1958, Ngare Rukenya (and Leonard Kibuthu-Muturi, who were among the first ex-Mau-Mau rebels to be allowed to go abroad) travelled to various hotspots of the world, as MRA team, in their endeavour to broker peace. Hence they visited USA, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), among other places, and where necessary urged the locals to abandon "terrorism" and pursue freedom through peaceful means (1959–1963). In their DRC visit in December 1960 to broker for the immediate release of the populist DRC politician and the first democratically elected prime minister, Patrice Emery Lumumba (1925–1961), Ngare Rukenya and his MRA team managed to convince his captors to release him. Lumumba's communist-leaning government had been toppled by the capitalist-leaning team, seven months after independence from Belgium on 30 June 1960, by President Joseph Kasavubu and the military commander, Joseph Mobutu Seseko. They were surprised later, on 17 January 1961, to learn that US-Belgian-orchestrated assassins had killed Lumumba via firing squad, and eventually hacked his body into pieces. They later dissolved it in sulphuric acid—a job which was reportedly done by two Belgian police officials. He was, however, one of the last people to see Lumumba alive, in Lubumbashi, Katanga Province, as MRA members were always given a chance to meet detainees across the various hotspots globally (interview, Manasseh Ngare 26.11.2016). Hence, the MRA was not always successful in its mission to impart the four absolutes: honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love (Lean 1985).

At the Moral Re-Armament conference on Mackinac Island, Michigan, USA, on 6 August 1959, Ngare Rukenya warned the United States of America against racial strife. He said thus: "Without the uniting ideology of the MRA, both Kenya and America face internal strife which will lead to communism" (Jet 1959, 12). Ngare Rukenya's son, Manasseh Ngare (interview, 26.11.2016) confided to the researcher about his father's confessions regarding their visit (Ngare Rukenya and another MRA activist, Stanley Kinga) to the jailed Kenyatta in mid-1959. Apart from Jomo Kenyatta and the inmates who were greatly influenced by the *Freedom* film, noted above, students in high schools and university were also inspired by the

film after Ngare Rukenya and his MRA team had screened it to them. David Gitari (1937–2013), who later became the fourth Anglican Archbishop of Kenya in 1997, was deeply moved. He constantly credited Ngare Rukenya as an influence on his choice in studying theology.

Although the MRA was renamed as the Initiatives of Change International (IOFC), her influence continued to be felt right into the 21st century. The IOFC, on their web (Horne 2009, <http://www.iofc.org/history/Kenya>), has noted thus:

A few decades later, IofC activists launched a campaign in 1997 for clean elections without corruption. Civil society and churches joined the “Clean Kenya Campaign” before the 2002 elections, which led to a change of government without violence. The campaign led thousands of Kenyans to commit to a strong and united Kenya, free from corruption, poverty, crime and poor governance.

In the countdown to Kenya’s independence, in 1963, the colonial government teamed up with the MRA to restore peace in various parts of Kenya. Having spent a lot of money in working to stamp out the Mau-Mau rebellion, the colonial government strongly wanted to stop the costly war as fast as possible. The MRA under the leadership of Ngare Rukenya, especially in the old Embu district, became critical in this endeavour. In mid-1955 thus, the colonial government formed the Committee for Restoration of Peace (*Kiama gia gucokia thayu*). In this committee, which climaxed in the release of Ngare Rukenya from prison in September 1958, *Freedom* films were screened. Equally, themes that informed the socio-political narratives included: reconciliation, family reunion, suffering without bitterness, peaceful co-existence, searching rebels in the forest and convincing them to return home, returning to their farms and doing productive farming, among other reconstructive concerns (interview, Lydia Wanjiku 03.05.2015). In an interview, Lydia Wanjiku (03.05.2015) recalled how tempers ran high when an Anglican lay church leader, sub-Chief Michael Karuga, pleaded with both the families of collaborators (*ngati*) and the combatants’ families to pray for peaceful co-existence now that “freedom is coming soon.” Like the Jews in Babylonian captivity, as seen in Psalm 137, they initially could not understand how they could reconcile with the people who were tormenting them. How can I reconcile with somebody who killed my relatives? In time, Ngare Rukenya’s MRA was able to resettle them physically and spiritually; hence they were eventually reconciled with one another, and no more bloodshed was witnessed after independence in 1963.

## **Conclusion**

The article began by showing the nature of the MRA, where Ngare Rukenya was the chief co-ordinator in the vast region of Mount Kenya, and more specifically the Embu district (presently Kirinyaga and Embu counties). In its findings, the article was able to establish that president Jomo Kenyatta’s clarion call of “Let us forget the past and build the nation” was the brainchild of Ngare Rukenya’s MRA, especially after they had visited him in his prison cell, before his release in 1961. It has also established that through *Kiama Gia Gucokia Thayu* (Committee for Restoration of Peace), where the Mau-Mau detainees were counselled before release, Ngare Rukenya’s MRA was able to soften the hostilities that were mounting and

people were able to interact peacefully. Further, Ngare Rukenya's bold introduction of Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs)—for the first time in early 1960s, to enable the peasant farmers to share their farming proceeds—strengthened their unity. Ngare Rukenya's introduction of co-operative societies in the old Embu district (Kirinyaga and Embu counties), prepared people to accept one another—irrespective of their divergent schools of socio-political thoughts and practice; even though there were extreme cases that could not easily gain acceptance in the society. Equally, Ngare Rukenya's *Ka-Muingi* (unity) concept helped the new independent African government in pacifying a divided nation. Sadly, it made the released detainees to work on the collaborators' farms in order to earn a living. This interaction, however, reduced tension—even though historical injustices were not fully addressed. Hence, full healing was not arrived at if justice was not given to everyone. Certainly, one cannot forgive unless he or she is completely healed. True healing means we must always learn from history and address historical injustices as we seek reconciliation among the citizens. While the MRA armed the people morally, it did not necessarily arm them economically, hence the current quests for economic freedom. In the nature of things, true arming has to be holistic; hence the need for better schools, better remuneration, better health care, and better social services. Nonetheless, Ngare Rukenya's efforts through the MRA cannot be gainsaid.

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