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Religion, politics and war: Recollections on General Ndaya and Kenya's quest for independence

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The mosaic law of advocating the paying of life with life, and an "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, [*and*] stripe for stripe" (Exodus 21:23-25), came out clearly on 15th and 16th October 1953, as the politics of land and freedom [*wiyathi na ithaka*] in the colonial Kenya brought their ugly faces through a deadly violence. While the 15th October saw the Mau Mau rebels attack and kill two Roman Catholic Sisters (Cecilia Wangeci and Rosetta Njeri) at the Baricho Centre, the 16th October 1953 saw the capture of the rebel's leader (Wanjagi wa Ndegwa, also known as General Ndaya) and his subsequent killing. In trying to understand the interface between religion, politics, and war in the African context, the research article has sampled the twin issues (the battle of River Ragati and the attacks on the Baricho Catholic Church of 1953)to alert the post-colonial Africa on the dangers of conflict among the trio.

Contribution: This research article contributes to the broad scope of *Theologia Viatorum* journal via a multidisciplinary perspective that interfaces religion, politics, and war. It utilises a theo-historical design, and oral history techniques, such as storytelling, archival sources, personal communications with selected individuals, and through an extensive review of relevant literature.

Keywords: Battle of River Ragati; Kenya's war of independence; land and freedom; religion and politics; war.

Introduction

Despite religion appearing to have played an implicit role in both colonial and post-colonial conflicts and wars, its place in history cannot be overlooked. In this context, the conflict between Kenya's Mau Mau rebels and the colonial authorities in the 1950s was largely seen as a contest between African indigenous religion and the Christian faith, as the key players were associated with both. In light of this, critical events prior to the 1950s' Mau Mau skirmishes can be recalled, particularly during the countdown to Kenya's constitutional independence on December 12, 1963. Among these events is the Kihumbuini massacre, which took place in what is now Gatanga Sub-County of Murang'a County. Here, Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, the newly installed District Commissioner of Fort Hall [*Murang'a*], decreed that all living beings, apart from children, be mercilessly killed. This was on 09th September 1902. This evil military 'genius' was working on behalf of the British government, though Her Majesty's government did not instruct him to kill with impunity (Meinertzhagen 1957). As he explains in his *Kenya Diary, 1902–1906*, he was protesting against the killing of a fellow European who was forcing Kihumbuini's daughters to have illicit affairs with him. In an indigenous society, which was ideo-morally sophisticated, illicit affairs were not easily forgiven, particularly where a person was seen to have coerced his women victims. As a result, Colonel Meinertzhagen's forces razed down all huts and banana plantations, and by 11th September 1902, the Kihumbuini area had been converted to a lifeless open space (Meinertzhagen 1957). Thus, the Kihumbuini massacre of 1902, among other cases of conflict and war, helps us to understand the background of the Baricho Roman Catholic attack of 15 October 1953 and the battle of River Ragati of 16 October 1953, where Wanjagi wa Ndegwa, renamed General Ndaya in 1953, the Mau Mau rebel leader, led his platoon in a military combat with the colonial forces. The continued bitterness for mistreatments and insensitivity kept on soaring among the Kenyan Africans till the 1950s when they took up arms in their quest for land and freedom [*wiyathi na ithaka*].

Another critical happening in the dark days of the colour-bar (Kenyan form of apartheid) is the Sotik massacre of 1905. In this episode, Major Pope-Hennessey's expedition killed over 2000 members of the Talai Clan (Kipsigis) (Sotik Expedition 1908). This was in response to their failure to surrender Maasai women, children and flocks, after a raid on the Maasai reserves (present-day

Narok County). With the low populations that were obtained then, the British expedition under Pope-Hennessey sought to solve the equation by failing to invoke the African concept of Ubuntu (humane ways) whenever a conflict emerged. The innocent young and old bore the brunt in the most bizarre way that has orally remained in the public discourses for decades (Sotik Expedition 1908). Likewise, the Chuka massacre of June 1953 remains another memorable moment that informs the background of the October 1953 events. During this attack, the Fifth Battalion of King's African Rifles (KAR) under the command of Major G. S. L. Griffiths, who were pursuing the members of Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA) (derogatorily called Mau Mau rebels), killed scores of people, including over 20 Loyalist African Home-Guards who were ironically fighting the Mau Mau rebels as well (Anderson et al. 2006; Anderson, Bennett & Branch 2006:20–22). King's African Rifles also tortured scores of people whom they accused of aiding Mau Mau rebels (freedom fighters) to crawl back to the forest. Although Griffiths later faced a court martial and was subsequently convicted of murder, his juniors were left scot-free (Anderson & Anderson et al. 2006). In turn, Mau Mau rebels comprised youthful Kenyans who had been educated in the missionaries' schools and attended catechism classes in the local churches, but whose religious inclination was paradoxically Christian and African indigenous religion, with the latter coming out more strongly (Gathogo 2017). The Christian aspect of Mau Mau rebels was seen in their appeal to the mosaic law of advocating the paying of life with life, and an 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, [and] stripe for stripe' (Ex 21:23–25). Or was the just war theory in Christian theology a motivating factor in their war against the British colonialism of the 1950s? (Gathogo 2017).

Nevertheless, the Chuka massacre of June 1953, among other noted forms of war and violence in colonial Kenya, compares with the Garissa massacre (1980), the Wagalla massacre of 1984 and the Islamic-inspired Garissa University attacks of 2015, in post-colonial Kenya. Did the spirit of war and destruction, which began during the colonial era (1887–1963), refuse to give way after independence? In the then-Kenyan North Eastern province, the Garissa massacre took place in 1980. It happened when the military forces set fire to a residential village which was referred to as Bulla Kartasi and killed scores of people (Naimasiah 2015). The government forces were initially looking for a 'local gangster' who was known as Abdi Madobe. After setting Bula Kartasi village on fire, they forcefully detained the masses at the nearby Garissa Primary School football pitch. In this mass detention, where residents were accused of aiding Madobe in his criminal activities, they remained without food, water, toilets and other necessities for 3 days. Ripples are that over 3000 deaths were recorded (Naimasiah 2015). Was not it a colonial hangover in post-colonial Kenya? In the case of the Wagalla massacre of 10 February 1984, the Kenyan security forces had descended the area to assist in diffusing clan-oriented conflict. Nevertheless, the religious connection does not come out clearly, though this northern Kenya area remains an Islam-dominated area, and indeed Abdi Madobe was a Muslim adherent.

In the Garissa University attacks of 02 April 2015, Gunmen, who claimed to be converted to the Islamic religion, forcefully entered the institution and killed 148 students, police officers, soldiers and security guards and injured 80 more. The attackers claimed to be from the Al-Shabaab militant group from neighbouring Somalia. They were allegedly retaliating over non-Muslims whom they claimed had occupied their land. They thus took scores of learners captive and freed Muslim students, but withheld Christians, resulting in over 500 learners whose whereabouts could not be accounted for (Fox News 2015). Prior to the Garissa University attacks of 2015, there were Mpeketoni attacks of 15–17 June 2014, in Lamu County of the coastal region of Kenya, where almost 100 people were massacred, and scores injured. In this postcolonial attack, about 50 masked gunmen raided a Police Station in a predominantly Christian Town, Mpeketoni, largely dominated by migrants from central Kenya, the Kikuyu. They also burnt down their businesses, hotels and restaurants, plus the government offices. By 18th June 2014, most of the deceased were members of the Kikuyu community who had settled in the area since the 1970s. Although the Al-Shabaab Muslim militants from neighbouring Somalia claimed responsibility for the attacks, the then Kenyan President, Uhuru Kenyatta, asserted that the massacre was organised by local politicians with ties to the attackers (Gander 2016).

Besides politics, the New Religious Movements, also called Alternative Spirituality (AS), have their share of conflicts, deaths and at worst massacres in post-colonial Kenya. This is certainly a carryover of societal dysfunctions in the religiously inclined Kenya (Gathogo 2022). In particular, the Shakahola massacre of April 2023 caught the local and international attention after it was discovered, albeit belatedly, that 'Pastor' Paul Mackenzie's *Good News International Ministries* had led to mass deaths through indoctrinating members to fast to death, as the best model of meeting the resurrected Christ (Theuri 2023). By the end of October 2023, more than 400 bodies had been recovered by the government of Kenya, from mass graves. Besides this, over 600 families had reported missing relatives who had earlier joined Paul Mackenzie's *Good News International Ministries*. Prior to their disappearances from their matrimonial homes, some of the religio-cultic victims would first sell their family properties and then join Paul Mackenzie's new religious movement (NRM), which was headquartered in the vast 800-acre Shakahola forest, of Kilifi County of the Kenyan coast. Secondary School and university students had equally abandoned schooling and joined this religio-cultic movement of death. It was in this vast Shakahola forest where Mackenzie's guards (co-pastors) were supervising their compulsory fasting for the dying adherents. It is these guards who ensured that parents supervised the deaths of their starving children; and that the order of deaths, from children, parents and then pastors, was strictly adhered to. Ironically, the supervising guards (co-pastors) were taking meals normally; hence they were the custodians of the religio-cultic massacre. They were eventually waylaid by the government forces, arrested and charges preferred against them, in April 2023 (Hardy 2023).

As Elle Hardy (2023) has noted, some of the 64 assistants of 'Pastor' Mackenzie, who were arrested in April 2023 for aiding the deaths of vulnerable people through fasting, died at Kenya's Shimo La Tewa Prison after a 10-day hunger strike. Further, as Hardy (2023) perceptively notes:

> The Shakahola Massacre is possibly the worst cult mass suicide since Jim Jones' Peoples Temple saw 900 followers perish at 'Jonestown' in Guyana in 1978. Both Jones and Mackenzie appear to have been inspired by the same obscure American preacher who died in the 1960s. An unalloyed tragedy in its own right, the events have many in Kenya as well as the wider African continent questioning the influence of rogue and radical preachers – and those from farther afield who have inspired them. (p. 1)

The Battle of River Ragati in 1953 is presented in this article as a significant case for understanding the interrelationship between religion, politics and war, from a theo-historical perspective. In this context, the Mau Mau rebels – Kenya's religio-indigenous freedom fighters of the 1950s – committed acts of violence against non-cooperating Kenyans. As we will explore in this research article, River Ragati was the site of bloodshed on October 16, 1953, when colonial government forces clashed with Mau Mau rebels in a deadly conflict. While the bloodbath at River Ragati cannot be attributed to one side, as all factions suffered heavy casualties, the true figures may never be known, as the swollen river swept away some fighters. The Mau Mau's view of the conflict as a contest between the European God (Christianity) and *Ngai* [the God of the indigenous society], helps in clarifying the interface between religion, politics and war, as religion gives a strong motivation to the politically inclined combatants. It eventually inspired a similar war in South Africa, on 16 December 1961, when uMkhonto weSizwe launched its first attacks against government installations (Gathogo 2014, 2017). Equally, the massacre of the Roman Catholic sisters and some security guards, on 15 October 1953, aids our interfacing of politics, war and religious motivation. During this October 1953 attack on Baricho Roman Catholic Church, Wanjagi wa Ndegwa (collated 'General Ndaya' by Nyeri's Heka Heka's Mau Mau Platoon in early 1953) was their de-facto leader (Itote 1979).

Conceptual clarifications and contextual setting

The post-colonial State in Kenya is largely informed by the activities of the KLFA, derogatorily called the Mau Mau war of independence of 1952–1960. In this war, the black Africans' clarion call was land and freedom [*wiyathi na ithaka*] (eds. Kalimi & Haas 2006). Viewing the religio-spiritual dimension of land (Kenyatta 1938) that had been taken by European settlers, the returnees of the Second World War (1939–1945) sought to employ the mosaic law of paying of life with life and an 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, [and] stripe for stripe' (Ex 21:23–25) (Itote 1979; eds. Kalimi & Haas 2006). In turn, Mosaic Law begins with the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20). It contains religious observance rules that are contained in the first five books in the Old Testament (Pentateuch). It is a most controversial call for an 'eye for [an] eye' [*ʿayīn taḥaṯ ʿayīn*, עַיִן תַּחַת עַיִן], found in Exodus 21:23–27, expresses the principle of reciprocal justice measure for measure; a trajectory that traces itself from the Code of Hammurabi. The latter precedes the Hebrew Bible (eds. Kalimi & Haas 2006). With African labourers reportedly dying out of the brutalities that were prevalent in the European Settler farms, the African returnees of the Second World War found themselves vouching for the law of exact retaliation. In this case, thus the Hebrew's concept of 'eye for [an] eye' in 'solving' human problems compares with the Babylonian legal text (Code Hammurabi, 1755–1750 BCE), a phenomenon where a person who put another one to death was equally killed (White 2014). Further, when it came to blasphemy or lèse-majesté (crimes against a god or a monarch), one was punished more severely (White 2014). In both the Hebrew and the Babylonian cases, it radically contrasted African-Christian concepts of hospitality and indigenous philosophies of care (Gathogo 2008).

In a sense, the Mau Mau war of independence of 1952–1960 was a quasi-religious and socio-political military activity that was anti-dialogical. To drive a socio-political agenda that finally led to the guerrilla warfare that sought land and freedom [*wiyathi na ithaka*], the African returnees of the First World war (1914–1918) first raised the political consciousness. It went a notch higher when the returnees of the Second World War (1939–1945) strengthened the agenda further (Itote 1979). As the Mau Mau General Kassam Njogu (pers. comm., with Kassam, 20 May 2008) explained, the returnees of the Second World War used to hold daily meetings at Majengo (now Gikomba Market of Nairobi city) in 1946. In these after-work-evening meetings, the youthful Africans, from both the central and Kavirondo (Luos, Luhyas, Teso, Kalenjins) of western Kenya (and part of the Rift Valley region), used to debate issues that led to the conclusion that armed struggle was the only solution for Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Kenya and South Africa, as they were earmarked for European Settlers' settlement.

The Majengo evening meetings could also debate the American policy after the Second World War that advocated negotiations with colonial agitators so as to stop communists from supporting freedom fighters (pers. comm., with Kassam, 20 May 2008). This was in reference to the European colonies in Asia and Africa. They could also discuss other historical cases where armed struggle became the only way of fighting colonialism and human dignity, as in the case of the American war of independence in 1776, the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and the Cuban Revolution of 1959 among others (Peacock 1987). 1946 was a unique year for individuals like General Ndaya (then Wanjagi wa Ndegwa) and others who were undertaking menial jobs in Nairobi, as they established the KLFA, which was later mocked and demeaned as 'Mau Mau' rebels (Itote 1979). Without negative ethnicity or ethnic bigotry, all Africans in the Majengo (Gikomba) meetings agreed to go out to the rural villages where they were to prepare the locals for the 'big war' of independence. In their war strategy, they first administered the binding oath to the society's rank-and-file. As it turned out, one wing of agitating

Kenyans (the Kavirondo peoples of western Kenya) abandoned the idea of armed struggle in 1952 after they were prevailed upon and given the option of dialogue. This dialogue option remained elusive or non-existent at all. The central Kenya peoples were thus left with the idea of armed struggle that largely began in 1952 and culminated in the Mau Mau war (1952–1963). By then, the likes of Patrick Gichimu Njogu (later called Gen Kassam) and Wanjagi wa Ndegwa (later called General Ndaya) had returned to their respective villages so as to administer the binding oath of the quest for land and freedom [*wiyathi na ithaka*] (Gathogo 2020a:1–7). Ndaya in particular had begun oath administration in the present day Kirinyaga West by late 1948 (pers. comm., with General Matene, 01 February 2014).

Ordinarily, oath administration was conducted in African indigenous societies whenever people faced a common enemy or danger (Gathogo 2014). The purpose of these oaths was to psychologically compel participants to keep the community's secrets and strengthen their patriotic zeal. In this context, a community patriot was expected, as stated in the biblical book of Revelation (2:10), to remain 'faithful' to its ideals, even to the point of death. With water mixed with various herbal concoctions, the oath participants drank the 'cup of unity' and were bound to the vows and instructions issued by their respective religio-cultic leaders. If one was ordered to kill, he or she was obligated to comply, just as with other duties. Consequently, the War Council could assign diverse duties to the rebels, as some became guerrilla fighters, others as intelligence officers, spies, food suppliers and fundraisers, among other roles; none could disobey, as the binding oath was too compelling. Like the ancient Githathi or Muma [oath], it came with numerous dos and don'ts, and stiff penalties were imposed on those who violated the rules. As a result, individuals were fearful of the consequences if they broke the oath. In view of this, Waruhiu Itote (1979) highlights the psychological importance of the binding religio-ritualistic oath, which compelled initiates to guard war secrets, when he says:

> The oath did a great job – the colonial government had little chance of survival for there were very few people in the police and the Kings African Rifles [KAR, Army] who had not taken the oath. The person who introduced the oath of Mau Mau was a very wise man and will be remembered forever. Through the oath, people became bold. (p. 194)

Critically important is the fact that the Mau Mau rebellion compares with the Huk rebellion, also called the Hukbalahap rebellion, which was seen in two major stages. The first one began in 1942, during the leadership of Manuel Roxas, and ended in 1945 (Sionil 1985). In this rebellion, the rank and file of Filipino society sought to remove the Japanese from their landmass [*Hukbalahap*], the *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon* [meaning, 'People's Liberation Army Against Japan'] (Kerkvliet 2002:113). Hence, Huk was a member of Hukbalahap, an anti-Japanese resistance movement in Central Luzon, Philippines. These peasants organised an armed rebellion to wrestle down the Japanese military as they had occupied their landmass in the midst of the Second World War (1939–1945). It was very active in Central Luzon. It ended in 1954 during the presidency of Ramon Magsaysay. The Huk rebellion as it was popularly known was well coordinated right from the villages and fought through guerrilla warfare, as was the case with Mau Mau of Kenya, 1952–1963 (Sionil 1985). At one stage, the Philippine government prompted the United States to disarm and arrest the Huks for allegedly being communists (Kerkvliet 2002:113). Apart from the Huk rebellion, Mau Mau rebels compared with La Violencia and/or the Colombian civil war fought in the late 1940s to mid-1950s. Despite the lack of religious motivation, *La Violencia* remained for about 10 years, mainly from April 1948 to 1958 (Livingstone 2004). In this war, the Liberals and the conservatives engaged in supremacy battles mainly in the rural areas. It can be said to have begun in 1946 when the majoritarian Liberal candidates (Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and Gabriel Turbay) split their vote, a phenomenon that saw the swearing in office of a conservative leader (Mariano Ospina Pérez). Following these elections, the conservatives who were previously harassed by the Liberals instituted a sequence of retaliations against the latter, an initiation period that was dubbed *La Violencia*. By the broad daylight killing of Jorge Gaitán, a Liberal, on 09 April 1948, at Bogotá, the civil war was clearly announced. The immediate response was endless riots, destruction of property and general lawlessness, which came to be known as *bogotazo*. *La Violencia* intensified during the reign of Laureano Gómez (1950–1953) who tried to make Columbia a fascist state (Nohlen 2005). Although the leadership of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, who took over in 1953, tried hard to end *La Violencia*, as he supported the ordinary peoples' complaints against the elites, his leadership fell after his polished oratory failed to yield fruits. Further, the fall of coffee prices in 1957 made him more unpopular with the masses, leading to a military takeover (Livingstone 2004).

In light of this, the Mau Mau movement, as a poor people's movement, compares with *La Violencia* of Colombia and the Huk rebellion in the Philippines. It is the politics of the lowly in society that sought socio-political space in a hostile environment. As they sought a laissez-faire society, they sometimes went overboard and resulted in civil war, shed innocent blood and intolerance replaced common decency. By assuming that war is a solution to human problems, they, sometimes, found themselves hurting their very own rather than the initial target. The Mau Mau attacks on the Roman Catholic Sisters at Baricho, in Kirinyaga County of Kenya, in 1953, was one such unfortunate case. The Battle of River Ragati of 1953, where both the colonial government forces and the Mau Mau rebels suffered heavily, is another case in point. The emergency of new leaders such as General Ndaya who led the rebel's side is equally comparable to Laureano Gómez who tried to make Columbia a fascist state, as he responded to the civil war concerns of the 1950s (*La Violencia*).

Research methods and design

Study setting

The study of religion, politics and war leads us to the Battle of River Ragati in 1953 and the deadly attacks on the Baricho

Roman Catholic Church. This primarily emerges as an oral historical recollection of Kenya's war of independence, largely gathered through personal communications with individuals who had first-hand knowledge of the events as they unfolded. One key figure the researcher engaged with extensively in 2014 was General Matene, also known as Nyamu wa Muriakori, who died 3 years later in May 2017. Additionally, insights from General China's book, *Mau Mau in Action* (Itote 1979), recounts General Ndaya's escapades as the religiously-inspired war of independence. It further illumine our exploration of religion, politics and war within the Kenyan context of the 1950s. In turn, understanding the *Mau Mau* movement, from an insider perspective, gives authenticity to this treatise. Further, Kirinyaga County of Kenya became a critical geographical area of concern, as this is the home of General Ndaya, the key character in the Embu district (now Kirinyaga and Embu counties) in the 1950s. The Roman Catholic Church attacks at the Baricho Mission Centre also took place within the present-day Kirinyaga County of Kirinyaga, Kenya. Between 1933 and 1963, both Kirinyaga and Embu counties of Kenya were administered as one Embu district. Since February 1963, they became two separate districts, as Kirinyaga took the Western side of the old Embu district. After the promulgation of the 2010 Kenyan constitution, they were elevated into two separate counties, out of the total 47 counties that constitute the Kenyan nation. Equally, River Ragati is a very critical river out of the seven major rivers in Kirinyaga County, as it forms a critical focus of this research article. Other major rivers in Kirinyaga County include Rwamuthambi, Rundu, Thiba, Nyamindi, Rupingazi and Sagana (Tana) (Gathogo 2021). As noted earlier, General Ndaya, the platoon leader, was killed during the infamous Battle of River Ragati of 17 October 1953 (pers. comm., with Festus Njomo Ndegwa, 21 October 2023) (Figure 1).

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the St. Andrew's College of Theology and Development.

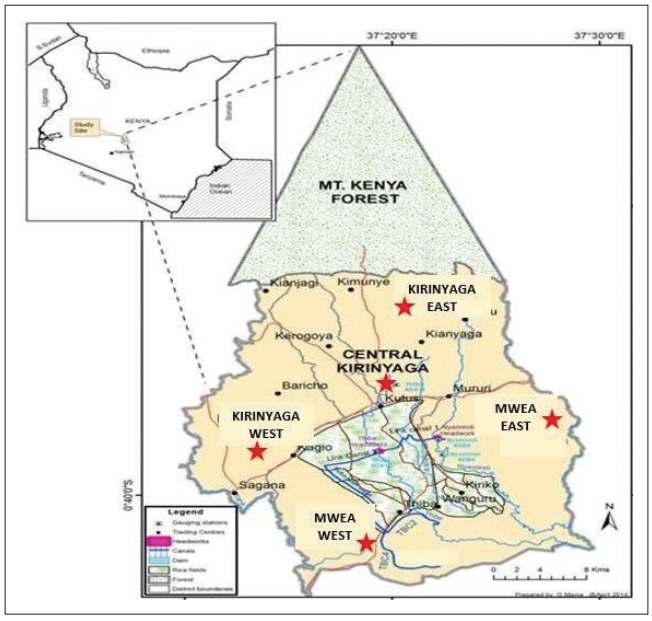
Results

Introduction

Although the then British-born District Officer (DO), Major Wainwright, who was the District Officer of Ndia Division of the then Embu District claims to be the chief architect in the killings of Mau Mau Generals Ndaya (October 1953) and Chui wa Mararo (May 1956) (Wainwright 1956:32), there is little evidence that shows that he was fully coordinating it. Being the head of the administrative Division, however, he could have had his way of coordinating the process since he arrived in 1953 and left the country in July 1956 after he had accomplished a 'huge task' on behalf of the British government. In his detailed Handover Report of 02 July 1956, Major Wainwright, the DO who was based in Kerugoya Town of Kirinyaga County, expresses his confidence that his 3 years stay (1953–1956) had succeeded in destroying the toughest terrorists in Ndia Division. As he told the incoming successor, E.D. Gordon, he had succeeded, from 1953 to 1956, in bringing down key 'troublemakers'. He said thus:

> 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 1953 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 … the death of [Gen.] Chui [in May 1956] does seem to have brought them back into the Government fold. (Wainwright 1956:32)

Firstly, this confidential report, which was retrieved from the Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, points to the fact that Major Wainwright had been deployed by the colonial government to deal with the tough agitators of land and freedom. Secondly, Wainwright succeeded in killing three tough Mau Mau Generals who came from his Ndia Division of the present-day Kirinyaga County, namely: General Ndaya, General Chui (real name, Kibara wa Mararo) and General Magazine (real name, Kathu wa Iburi). The latter (General Magazine) who hailed from the Kiaga area, near Kagio Town, was, like Ndaya, one of the first lot that joined the bush war in 1952 through Nyeri's Heka Heka Platoon. General Chui and General Magazine were in one area, in the Mushy Riakiania Town area when they were waylaid and shot and eventually captured in May 1956 (pers. comm., with Peterson Njiru Githere, 15 January 2019).



Source: Gathogo, J., 2021, *Imprints of NITD-Kabete in Mutira Mission, Kenya: Recollections on Josphat Kathogo wa Kamoni (1918–1978)*, p. iii, Kairos, Nairobi

FIGURE 1: Showing the context under discussion (Kirinyaga West), Kenya.

As it was noted in the course of the research, it is the Senior Chiefs of Mutira administrative Location (for Gen. Chui) and Mwerua (for General Ndaya) who appear to have played critical roles in coordinating the final defeat of the duo (pers. comm., with Festus Njomo Ndegwa, 21 October 2023). Does this reduce the Kenyan war of independence to a mere local-ethnic-clan battle for supremacy? Or does not this make it another form of the Columbian civil war of the 1950s (*La Violencia*), noted above? Nevertheless, in both cases, Major Wainwright's Land Rover car is seen as the one that came to pick up the bodies of the slain rebel leaders (pers. comm., with Cecilia Wanjiku Ndegwa, 02 February 2019); hence the latter's claims that he was the real commander operating from the background appears logical. In both the Baricho Roman Catholic attacks of 15 October 1953 and the battle of River Ragati, near Kibirigwi Town, on 16–17 October 1953, General Ndaya is seen in this research article as the de-facto leader (pers. comm., with Madarina Wangari Miano, 02 February 2019) and is indeed a major concern of this treatise (Figure 2).

Ndaya's persona

Firstly, he was the firstborn of Ndegwa wa Maguru and his wife Maria Wangui and was born around 1920. His official name was Wanjagi wa Ndegwa. His other names included: Muriuki wa Ndegwa and Wanjie wa Ndegwa. His younger siblings were Wangu, Wanjiku, Mutero, Gakono and Leah Muthoni. Born in a polygamous family, he had step brothers and sisters who were: Stephen Maguru, Cecilia Wanjiru, Wanjiku, Njoki and Festus Njomo. Overall, he was the eldest child. He briefly studied at Upper Baricho Primary School and then returned to the village. He later went to the city of Nairobi to look for menial jobs that he readily got in the early 1940s (pers. comm., with Cecilia Wanjiku Ndegwa, 02 February 2019).

At the family level, members of the immediate family saw a hospitable person who could not eat before his younger siblings had eaten. This was a religio-indigenous and/or responsible gesture that was well received by a firstborn in such a large polygamous household. Additionally, he was seen as a respectable person who would adhere to the societal norms and some critical elements of the indigenous society. Another example is seen in the fact that he could not drink liquor with his father, even when he became of age, as indigenous dictates viewed it as disrespectful (pers. comm., with Cecilia Wanjiku Ndegwa, 02 February 2019). Whenever he disagreed with anyone, he would just wake up and go rather than get stubborn with personal defences. As he returned to Mbogo-ini-Kianjang'a village, after stints in the city of Nairobi in 1948, and began oath administration, family and the locality viewed him as a leader whose decisions were for the good of the larger society (Ubuntu). Being viewed as a person who pursued communal needs rather than individual and/or selfish interests was a big plus for him, as it eased his leadership in the quest for land and freedom [*wiyathi na ithaka*] (pers. comm., with Madarina Wangari Miano, 02 February 2019). As villagers had gotten fed up with brutal taxation measures (hut tax and poll tax), colour bar (Kenyan version of apartheid), being equated with domestic animals, inferior education, land expropriation, arbitrary arrests and obscure deaths in the European settler farmers' lands, among other concerns, the emergency of Wanjagi wa Ndegwa with freedom rhetoric and oath administration saw him earn ready support (pers. comm., with Festus Njomo Ndegwa, 21 October 2023). Based on his persona, and his being revered, his 'boys' could go overboard by doing anything, including killing on his behalf (pers. comm., with General Matene at his Gitumbi home, Inoi Location, Kirinyaga, Kenya, 01 February 2014). In a nutshell, anyone who 'sang' a different tune, apart from his, was badly harassed by his 'boys'.

By the end of 1950, General Ndaya had already become a law unto himself, as it was very risky to question his decisions or challenge his paths. Upon realising that the colonial authorities were pursuing him and would eventually torture or kill him for his oath administration and other activities, he fled and joined the neighbouring Mau Mau's Heka Heka Platoon of the then Nyeri District. The latter had been very active by mid-1952, as they waged guerrilla warfare from the local forests. By then, Ndaya's district of Embu had not established its own Mau Mau rebel Platoon; hence the formation of Embu districts' (for current Kirinyaga and Embu counties) *Haraka* [meaning 'swift'] Platoon, in May 1953, found Ndaya who had already been collated a General. According to Matene, who was one of Ndaya's soldiers, he too and a few others, who had been conducting oaths since 1948, had already joined Nyeri districts' Heka Heka Platoon before the emergency of Embu's Haraka Platoon (pers. comm., with General Matene, 01 February 2014). As more and more youths joined the war of independence, more Platoons were created across the central Kenyan region. Equally, more Generals were collated to lead these emerging Platoons (pers. comm., with General Matene, 01 February 2014). Further, once a General was killed in the course of the battle, a new General was named immediately, as in the case

Source: Photograph by Prof Julius M. Gathogo, Kianjang'a, Kirinyaga, Kenya, 2019. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No unauthorised duplication allowed

FIGURE 2: Author (right) with Njomo (Ndaya's brother), Njomo's wife and Ndaya's sister, 09 February 2019.

of Ndaya whose Platoon got a new leader in the name of Odero (pseudonym) from Kariti-Sagana. Again, after Odero was killed, after an encounter with the colonial forces in February 1954, he too was immediately replaced as the rebels avoided creating leadership vacuums (Gathogo 2014:19–41).

Year of birth for General Ndaya and its implications

Born at Mutige village (renamed Mbogo-ini), Kianjang'a sub-location, Mwirua location, Ndia Division of Kirinyaga County, in 1920, neighbours were just recovering from the Influenza Pandemic scare of 1918–1919. Further news of the just concluded First World War (1914–1918) was part of the daily conversation that informed his formative factors. Expropriation of land by the colonial operatives, since 1901 when the Uganda Railway was completed. As noted in Gathogo (2020b):

> Upon the completion of the so-called Uganda Railway in 1901, European settler-farmers started arriving in the Kenya colony for large-scale farming. This went hand-in-hand with land acquisition and the creation of 'White Highlands'. The railway, whose construction began in Mombasa in 1896, reached St Florence (renamed Kisumu) Port of Lake Victoria in 1901; as Kisumu was geographically part of the then province of Uganda (in the so-called British East Africa) till 1903 when boundary review was done, and the present arrangements were made. Apart from Kisumu Port, the entire Nyanza, the Rift Valley, and western region were all transferred to Kenya from the then Uganda province of British East Africa in 1903. The opening of the Uganda Railway also saw the influx of European settlers from South Africa in 1904; and Kenya was never the same again. Other settler-farmers came from New Zealand, Australia and England. By 1906, it was not only the lands to the north of Nairobi that were alienated for the European settlers, but also lands far afield in the Rift Valley region of western Kenya. (pp. 2–3)

Besides this (Gathogo 2020b):

> [*T*]his clan land seizure by both the colonial government and the European settler farmers that came after the construction of the Uganda Railway was legally backed by the *Land Acquisition Act* of India (1894) that initially gave consent to the commissioner of the protectorate to appropriate land. (pp. 3–4)

Ndaya's birth in 1920 coincided with agitations that were well triggered by the returnees of the First World War (1914–1918) who had begun to demystify and deconstruct the European superiority mantra, as they had lived closely with them abroad. He also found himself immersed in the issues that dominated African politics, with land being the key concern. Other concerns included poll tax and hut tax that were executed brutally, from 1903 to 1952. These taxes compelled families to disintegrate as people were forced to move to distant lands and seek jobs as European Settler farmers. Other issues that went hand-in-hand with the above is the colour-determined low wages for the Africans. Further, the politics of the Influenza pandemic (otherwise called the Spanish Flu) also dominated the African politics of 1903–1952 (pers. comm., with Solomon Murani Karunji, 20 January 2020). Further, deaths that were occasioned by the Spanish Flu, regardless of race or creed, further fuelled the African politics of 1903–1952, as the assumed place of superiority was easily disputed. To some Africans, Spanish Influenza was a failure by the Europeans in Kenya to treat their own disease (Spanish Flu), though it was an erroneous remark. They would instead praise their own African medicine, which was seen to be effective (pers. comm., with Solomon Murani Karunji, 20 January 2020). Further, the effects of the Spanish Influenza fuelled religio-cultural contestations and further inspired political activism that finally led to the formation of political associations such as the (Gathogo 2020c):

> East African Association [1920, by Harry Thuku and Abdalla Tariara], Young Kikuyu Association [1921 by Harry Thuku], Young Kavirondo Association [1921 by Jonathan Okwiri Ezekiel Opindi and others], and Kikuyu Central Association [1925] among others. The formation of the Kikuyu Association is associated with Senior Chief Koinange, in late 1920. In February 1921, the East African Association held a meeting at Ndaguriti (Dagoretti, which means 'the great corner'). … [And that was also] the day when Harry Thuku [a leading African nationalist] was given the address of a senior British Government Minister and he sent a telegram to London telling of the difficulties that Africans were undergoing, including land expropriation and forced labour. (p. 5)

Besides political and medical contestations that were triggered by the stories regarding the European failure to 'treat their own diseases', the likes of Ndaya grew in an environment where even 'foreign' religions such as Christianity and Islam were openly criticised. Besides this, contestations on 'whose animal sacrifices (Goat or Sheep), *without blemish* or bodily *defect* or priestly holiness, among other considerations, reached God, now informed the conversations of the day' (Gathogo 2020b:2). As a result, 'a "re-emergence" of indigenous religion began in earnest, or was it a mere demonstration of the resilient characteristic of African religion?' (Gathogo 2020b:2). In such an ever-agitating society, from 1903 to 1952, Ndaya's upbringing was spoilt for war or was well prepared for freedom and land politics [*wiyathi na ithaka*].

Friends of General Ndaya

It is critically important to appreciate that General Ndaya was a close friend of General Kago from the neighbouring Murang'a County. In turn, General Kago became the first Mau Mau General to be burned to ashes upon capture in 1954. General Chui (Kibara wa Mararo) followed suit in May 1956 at Kamuiru, Kirinyaga County and General Kubukubu was also burned to ashes in September 1956 at Kianjokoma, Embu County. As Waruhiu Itote (1979) (General China) has explained:

> During the emergency, only [three] people were burned and this was done by the colonial government. In 1954, women and girls were made to fetch firewood to burn General Kago. General Kago [like Chui and Kubukubu] was put into the centre of the pile of firewood, paraffin poured over his body and he was burnt to ashes. The women of Kikuyu were made to shout a traditional praise chorus (*ngemi*). [Other men burnt] by the colonial government [were General Chui of Kirinyaga] and General Kubukubu who was burned in Embu. He is the one known

> to thousands of people. But Mau Mau did not set people alight. (pp. 193–194)

By 'friends of Gen Ndaya', it means some of the key leaders in the rebel's hierarchy that they worked with. General China (real name Waruhiu Itote), who survived capture in 1954, later wrote a book titled *Mau Mau in Action*, dedicating three pages (pp. 145–147) to him (Itote 1979:145–147). Others such as General Matene who were initially under him as the pioneer General and co-founder of Haraka Platoon of the then Embu district, which presently constituted Embu and Kirinyaga counties. These early co-founders of Haraka Platoon in May 1953 despite first joining Nyeri's Heka Heka Platoon included: General Magazine (Kathu wa Iburi), General Kubukubu (given name at birth, Njagi wa Ikutha), Njee Kambo and General Matene (Nyamu wa Muriakori) among others. It is General China's Heka Heka Platoon who collated Ndaya into a rebel's General in mid-1953 (pers. comm., with Peterson Njiru Githere, 15 January 2019).

Attack on Baricho Catholic Church

Ndaya and his rebels attacked the Roman Catholic Church at Baricho, Kirinyaga West sub-County on 15th October 1953. An evening before the bizarre attack on the defenceless religious society, a huge group of 50–70 passed through his father's Mbogo-ini home compound. As usual with African concepts of hospitality, his father, Ndegwa wa Maguru, welcomed his son's led group despite the challenge of providing hospitality to such a huge group. An eye witness explained that they were well-armed with Pangas (Machetes) and a few guns (pers. comm., with Festus Njomo Ndegwa, 21 October 2023). As they consumed fermented porridge, that was already stored in gourds, they informed Ndegwa wa Maguru's family that they had come from Ishiara, Mbeere (present-day Embu County), where they claimed to have cut off the outer ears of locals who had refused to partake the Mau Mau oath of commitment to the freedom struggle. This was punitive reprimand meant to 'punish' the collaborators (tukunia). As the family listened to these bizarre accounts of rebel activities, Ndaya's father suddenly intervened, cautioning them against these night visits, as the colonial forces, patrolling with Home Guards, would shoot them on sight. He reminded them that night vigilance by the colonial forces was the vogue until morning (pers. comm., with Cecilia Wanjiku Ndegwa, 02 February 2019). They later left in the wee hours of the night.

Prior to the Roman Catholic Church's attack on 15 October 1953, warnings had already been issued, as the local Priests and the Sisters openly condemned the Mau Mau oath. Deeply committed Christians did not participate in this binding oath, which appeared to mock the Holy Eucharist. Taking the Mau Mau oath, with its resulting condemnation of European religions and their cultures, meant that Priests, Sisters and other committed Christians had to deny their faith. As a result, the rebels kept on sending warning signals as they insisted that 'they [literally] wanted the Head of the Parish Priest of Baricho' (Mbugua 2020). Another bone of contention is that the:

> Priests and the Sisters in Baricho Parish encouraged their faithful to protect their faith by refusing to take the oath. Those who took the oath out of fear were brought back to sacramental life through the sacrament of reconciliation. (p. 18)

Besides this, Ndaya's team were annoyed with the Priests for accommodating some Christians in the Parish together with Home Guards whose task was to kill the rebels as a way of guarding homes. Further, the Roman Catholic Sisters were hated by Mau Mau rebels for the following reasons (Mbugua 2020):

> They refused to marry according to the custom of their people. Thus, they held back the birth-rate of their nation. [Second], they refused to take Mau Mau oath. [Third], they advised Christians not to take oath, and they gave them the message of hope and the mercy of God to those who repented. (p. 18)

Before the attack on 15 October 1953, the Sisters of Mary Immaculate first celebrated the feast of Jesus' name day. They also responded to a request, which was made by their Superior General, Sr. Teresa Wanjiku, and made the relevant celebrations that would uphold their faith. They asked the Parish Priest to offer the Holy Mass for the intentions of Mother Theresa (Mbugua 2020:18). In turn, Mother Theresa (1910–1997) was an Albanian-Indian Roman Catholic nun. She is also the initiator of the Missionaries of Charity. This religious congregation grew substantially and had almost 5000 nuns in over 133 countries by 2012. This Roman Catholic congregation has been managing homes that give pastoral care to persons suffering from terminal illnesses such as HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and leprosy among others (Poplin 2008).

At the time of the Mau Mau attack, the Baricho community consisted of five sisters, namely: Sr. Catherine Wanjiru, Sr. Conatanza Muthoni, Sr. Rosetta Njeri, Sr. Sebastiana Wangui and Sr. Cecilia Wangeci. After the evening prayers, Sr. Cecilia and Sr. Sebastiana were left behind before they went for supper. As if they were having a premonition of it, the Sisters were extraordinarily happy as they interacted as they took their evening meals. Sr. Sebastiana Wangui (2020), one of the survivors of the Baricho attack, recalls the situation, thus:

> Sr. Rosetta told the other sisters, 'This joy that we are experiencing tonight seems to be coming to an end'. I asked her, 'Do you want to die?' Sr. Rosetta replied, 'Yes'. Then I asked her, 'Have you reached the age of Jesus yet?' Sr. Rosetta replied, 'The duration I have lived is enough' … We all went to sleep around 10.00 pm. (p. 19)

Sr. Sebastiana Wangui (2020) goes on to explain:

> About 11:30 pm, we heard a sound of a horn. We thought it was the watchman blowing it. After three or four minutes, we heard the sound of many voices saying, 'Don't pass here!' Others were shouting '*Piga piga*!' (Hit hit). They used guns, pangas, machetes, knives and sticks. Shooting went on outside as they entered the house. Sr. Catherine, the Superior who had a bedroom of her own was the first target. They then entered the dormitory. I was hiding under the bed. The attackers seized Sr, Cecilia and they asked her: 'Where is your husband?' 'I have no husband' she

> replied. Sr. Catherine was dragged out [while] bleeding profusely. Sister Cecilia started screaming: 'leave her alone, she is a Sister!' … Without mercy they started beating her hard … In the dormitory, there were still three sisters … The attackers commanded them to come out. Sr. Rosetta tried to wear her religious habit [but] she received a heavy blow … Mercilessly, her body was slashed into pieces. Sr. Sebastiana approached the gangster who was keeping the door, ready to shoot her with his arrows. She strongly pushed him down and fell on the ground and the Sister ran away. All the gangsters ran away after beating her on the back with sticks but she was faster than all of them. Like a deer, she jumped over a fence and escaped from them and she hid where she fell. The gangsters searched for her but in vain. Sr. Constanza … sneaked out of the house … climbed a tree [and] she was able to see them returning to their position after their mission was over. (p. 19)

During this attack, one Home Guard by the name of Njoka was killed after he came out of the house so as to protect the Sisters (pers. comm., with Cecilia Wanjiku Ndegwa, 02 February 2019). Other Home Guards who were guarding the Parish ran away towards Baricho shopping centre where they notified the Police. By the time of the Police's arrival, Sr. Rosetta was still bleeding heavily. The three Sisters were taken by the Police to Kerugoya Government Hospital. Sr. Rosetta Njeri (at 39) died by 1.00 am while Sr. Cecilia (at 31) died at 4:30 am on the morning of 16 October 1953. The latter died after receiving the sacrament of the anointing of the sick from Fr. Ottavio Sestero, who had been urgently called by the presiding doctor. These two deaths inspired more Sisters to desire martyrdom for their faith. Sr. Cecilia Wangechi and Sr. Rosetta Njeri were viewed as martyrs for God. The brutal killings also tarnished Gen. Ndaya's team, as attacking women and children in a religious and cultural system that strives to protect them was certainly unacceptable despite the ongoing fight for land and freedom (pers. comm., with Madarina Wangari Miano, 02 February 2019).

The Battle of River Ragati

The Battle of River was a major, bloody and exhaustive conflict, comparable only to the Battle of River Ruiru in late 1952, where General Ndaya served as a junior officer in the Mau Mau ranks. This battle took place in broad daylight at Karuthi, near Karatina Town in Nyeri County, and was led by General China, who ordered his battalion to fight bravely and outdo the colonial forces. An interesting dimension in this war is that various rebel's Platoons and their Generals from a vast region had assembled to strategise on how to defeat colonialism in Kenya. Suddenly, a woman rushed and alerted them that the colonial forces had waylaid them. Regional leaders present included: General Kariba (real name Hituchi Kabutu), General Tanganyika (Muriuki Kimotho) and Brigadier Rui among others. The tough battles were bloody and deadly as all weapons were used on both sides of the divide (Gatonye 2019). Despite the government's mobilising forces from Nanyuki, Nyeri and other places, the rebels managed to get out of the battle zone with minimal casualties, courtesy of the local support from the ordinary members of the society (Ndugire 2023).

Though equally a major battle in Mau Mau historiography, the battle of River Ragati, near Kibirigwi Town, came by default as the colonial authorities were simply pursuing the attackers of Baricho Roman Catholic Church where two Sisters and one Home Guard were killed and scores of injured (pers. comm., with Festus Njomo Ndegwa, 21 October 2023). As the rebels were trying to cross over the swollen River Ragati, they noted the difficulty in doing so. General Ndaya ordered his soldiers to cut a tree 'so that it would fall across the river and then they could cross' towards Nyeri forests and hide there. Itote (1979) explains thus:

> They started cutting it and when it was almost down, the government forces started shooting. But there was no escape route for then; so Ndaya told them to go on cutting as the others engaged the colonial forces. The battle continued; and when one rebel was shot, another would take his axe and go on chopping. Finally, the tree was cut down and Gen. Ndaya told King'ori to cross the river because he was the one who had a Bren Gun [which gives multiple shots]. He could then cover the others as they crossed. Eight people had been killed whilst felling the tree. King'ori reached the other side, but was shot in the left thigh. Ndaya took the Bren Gun and went on firing. His company crossed the river, but eight men were drowned; and when he saw this, he got furious. [As] Kings African Rifles (KAR) began to cross River Ragati, three were killed [by the rebels] and no other person attempted to get across. (p. 148)

In a battle that was fought for 8 h, from 10 am to 5 pm East African time, Ndaya was shot in his left leg and was carried by his soldiers to a safe river Cave, on the banks of River Ragati. This was on 16th October 1953. In the air surveillance, the rebel's side was fired constantly. In some cases, the air strikes also hit the colonial government's side as well, as both soldiers were dressed in the same way. At that moment in time, Ndaya's soldiers were heavily cornered by aerial bombardments and more sophisticated weapons. This was further complicated by the swollen river Ragati that had broken its own banks and claimed lives of some fighting soldiers from both sides of the divide, and was compounded by their biting hunger and exhaustion. The fact that Ndaya's soldiers had not relaxed since the 11th of October 1953 when they went to administer the binding oath in Mbeereland (Ishiara) of the present day Embu County, and ended up cutting their outer ears as a punishment for the latter's reluctance to embrace the Mau Mau rebel's activities, means that they were already weakened. Besides this, they were being pursued by the government forces despite their ability to dodge capture or death for a couple of days. They nevertheless had fled the scene as they were pursued through various methods. Some succumbed to death after grenades were hurled at them, while others escaped with visible scars, as in the case of Nyamu wa Muriakori (later Gen. Matene) whose chin displayed a visible scab till he died in 2017 (pers. comm., with General Matene, 01 February 2014). It was in this hiding place that he was assigned a young woman rebel, later known as Mrs Nyambura Gatitu, who married Gatitu Ngucugua of Maitharui sub-location in the Mwerua Location of Kirinyaga County. Nyambura was responsible for taking care of General Ndaya by providing him with herbal dosages and other necessities until the rebels returned for him after the

situation normalised. The first night of spending the night for the injured General was fine (16th October) till the following day when the patrolling team visited the site. It included the Senior Chief, the Assistant Chief, local police boss and others. Upon seeing a woman rebel, they shot in the air and caused panic in Nyambura who was basking in the sun after leaving the recuperating General in the hiding Cave. This panic led her to say: 'Don't kill me. Let me show you the man you have been looking for', which followed automatically. Upon seeing the colonial officers, General Ndaya, who knew most of them, raised up his hands as an indication that he had surrendered. But having led some of the most bizarre attacks in the larger region, his surrender could not be given any merit (pers. comm., with Festus Njomo Ndegwa, 21 October 2023). They killed him instead. Hence, 17 October 1953, was the last day for the pioneer Mau Mau General in the present-day Embu and Kirinyaga counties.

Conclusion

The research article has addressed the interface between religion, politics and war and noted some cases of religious motivation in the latter two. This was methodologically done by retracing the bloody confrontations of the early 1900s, which spilt over to post-colonial Kenya. It showcased the Battle of River Ragati of 1953 (in Kenya) and the killing of the Roman Catholic Sisters at Baricho, of Kirinyaga County of Kenya as the climax in demonstrating the interface between, religion, politics and war. The role of General Ndaya, political architect and guerrilla leader in the area under consideration has also been given prominence, as he participated in the twin issues. As General Ndaya met his waterloo, on 17 October 1953, he had certainly prepared the ground for his own destruction after his leadership led to the killing of the Roman Catholic Sisters at Baricho Centre the previous day. Seen as a conflict between African indigenous religion and Christianity, the Mau Mau war of 1952–1960 became a complicated conflict, as the rebels were largely educated in Christian schools and went through catechism classes. Hence an appeal to the mosaic law of answering injustice with an injustice cannot be ruled out in their discourses. But again, did the Mau Mau lose their moral authority after attacking women and children, who are ordinarily protected by all contesting groups during times of war in Africa's religio-indigenous society? Did they offend African ancestral values by targeting the most vulnerable instead of standing as their guardians? Could that be the sole reason for the end of Ndaya on 17th October 1953? Certainly, the noble goal of the freedom struggle was severely undermined by the bizarre killings at the Baricho Roman Catholic Church, among other incidents. By employing the Mosaic law, which advocated the paying of life with life, and an 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, [and] stripe for stripe' (Ex 21:23–25), the cycle of violence made it horrible. This weakened Kenya's freedom struggle, which was at times seen from the prism of the Columbian civil war, which pitted liberals and conservatives in the 1950s.

With the post-colonial state in Kenya being littered with bloodshed and destruction, as in the case of the Garissa massacre of 1980, the Wagalla massacre of 1984, the Garissa University attacks of 2015, the Mpeketoni massacre of 2014 and the Shakahola massacre of April 2023, one is still bound to see a religious factor in these bizarre events. Certainly, violence begets violence; hence the colonial skirmishes such as the Kihumbuini massacre of 1902, the Sotik massacre of 1905 and the Chuka massacre of June 1953 have had their own share of informing the post-colonial state. Indeed, Kenya's post-December 2007 electoral violence remains a significant wound in our recent history, with over 400,000 people displaced and many killed in a situation leaning towards civil war. The intersection of religion, politics and war can be understood through the broad historical comparisons noted herein. We have a responsibility to build a sustainable society by addressing the role of religious motivation in war and politics and by rejecting the Mosaic Law as a panacea for resolving human conflicts.

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