

UCLA

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

Kikuyu Women in the Mau Mau Revolt: A Closer Look

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5s49z7wz>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 8(1)

ISSN

0041-5715

Author

Santilli, Kathy

Publication Date

1977

DOI

10.5070/F781017399

Copyright Information

Copyright 1977 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

KIKUYU WOMEN IN THE MAU MAU REVOLT:

A CLOSER LOOK

by

Kathy Santilli

The Mau Mau Revolt was the armed expression of the African nationalist movement in Kenya. Actual fighting began after the government's arrest of some 180 African leaders and declaration of Emergency on October 20, 1952. Fighting units, made up of primarily Kikuyu males, then began to form in the Mount Kenya and Aberdare forests. Although the Mau Mau Revolt was militarily unsuccessful, it forced the British government to make significant political concessions to the Kenyan Africans. Kenya was declared independent in 1963 under African majority rule.

Kikuyu women did not occupy a highly visible position in the nationalist associations preceding Mau Mau or in the armed revolt itself. Unlike their Algerian and Senegalese sisters, no Frantz Fanon or Ousmane Sembene¹ has dramatized their contribution to Independence. Indeed, this can be partly explained by limited female involvement in the nationalist struggle. The traditional aspects of Kikuyu nationalism, women's limited access to education and to the politicizing experience of urban wage labor limited the degree of female participation in the formal nationalist organizations. Likewise, women apparently never constituted more than five percent of the forest population in the course of the Mau Mau Revolt.² Here, too, traditional Kikuyu values shaped the forms the revolt took and acted as a brake on female involvement. But since Mau Mau was led and fought by primarily uneducated Kikuyu peasants, squatters, and urban lumpenproletariat³, restricted female education and wage employment cannot fully explain women's barely visible presence in the accounts of the Mau Mau Revolt. The factors which barred Kikuyu women from participating in Mau Mau are different from those which blocked their entrance into the formal nationalist associations. The lack of a sustained and coordinated female nationalist organization prior to 1950 itself predetermined a limited female response to Mau Mau. But limited participation does not signify negligible participation. This paper will attempt to show that Kikuyu women may have played a greater role in Mau Mau than is generally acknowledged. It will do so by examining the nature of the Kikuyu women's revolt both prior to and during Mau Mau.

Harry Thuku formed the first African nationalist organization in Kenya in mid-1921 - the East African Association. In 1924 the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) replaced the East African Association and by 1939 had a paid membership over 7,000.⁵ The KCA itself was banned in 1940 but continued to function as an elitist underground movement. In 1944, before, the Kenya African Union stepped into the role of the articulator of African grievances. Several years later, the East African Trade Union Congress was formed to coordinate activities of African trade unions.⁶ Finally, beginning in 1947 the underground KCA mounted a mass oath-taking campaign and broadened its base of support, which led to increasing government pressure and the Emergency Declaration. All of these were formal vehicles of African nationalist sentiment in Kenya. Some of the organizations strove to increase African wages, to improve African education, to dismantle the color-bar, to remove discriminatory restrictions on African economic advancement and to reform the land-holding system. As their attempts at peaceful political solutions to these problems were frustrated, the militancy of the Africans increased. The final result was the KCA's warrior oath which prepared those who took it for armed struggle against European rule.

Women are remarkably absent from these nationalist organizations, especially in any leadership capacity.⁷ In fact, when Kikuyu women did revolt against colonial rule, they by-passed these formal organizations and acted independently. The characteristic pattern which emerges is one of sporadic, spontaneous, and militant protest focused on specific issues. Fort Hall women in particular exhibit this tradition of militancy.⁸

According to an eyewitness, at least 200 women were part of the huge crowd which gathered outside the Nairobi Prison on March 16, 1922 to protest the arrest of Harry Thuku. Mary Muthoni Nyanjiry, leading a group of women from Fort Hall, challenged the men to release Harry Thuku by force. They were pushed forward "until the bayonets of the rifles (of the police) were pricking their throats and then the firing started." The police killed 21 Africans in that demonstration. Mary Mut Nyanjiry was one of the four women killed.⁹

In the late 1940's the government instituted a project to combat soil erosion by means of bench terracing. Both men and women were forced to work two mornings per week without pay and on penalty of fine. In 1947 the women from Fort Hall refused to work on this project and staged a demonstration which "nearly became a riot". Another source, Waruhiu Itote, is so meek in his nomenclature and refers to this demonstration as "The Women's Riots".¹¹ Because this demonstration and others like it are referred to with no elaboration in the sources

is unclear whether the women themselves initiated the demonstration. No judgement can be made as to how spontaneous or organized the demonstration was. The link between the women's protest and the then-existing nationalist organizations is also unclear, although M.P.K. Sorrenson suggests that the women did receive encouragement from the Kikuyu politicians.¹²

Rosberg and Nottingham note that in November 1951, Fort Hall women were engaged once again in large-scale agrarian disobedience, followed by mass arrests.¹³ But the two historians pay minimal attention to this "large-scale" revolt and give no details on the motivation and organization of the revolt. They do, however, cite the disturbance as evidence of KCA's stepped-up oath-taking campaign.¹³ The demonstration might have been linked to the Fort Hall women's demonstration early in 1952 against cattle dipping.¹⁴ Bildad Kaggia's brief mention of this incident suggests that it was female-initiated and female-organized. The male Kikuyu leaders, however, served as a buffer between the women and the colonial government. It was the male leaders who discussed the grievance with the District Commissioner, and not the women themselves.¹⁴

The series of protests staged by the Fort Hall women show that the women were not passive concerning issues that affected them. What the women lacked was a formal organization, a vehicle for sustained protest, an association that would articulate their specific needs.¹⁵ It is perhaps ironic that the only women's organization that existed prior to the Mau Mau was the government-sponsored *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* ("Women's Progress").¹⁶ Founded in 1950, the group's explicit aims were to educate women in the fields of childcare, nutrition, and hygiene. Despite the fact of its colonial sponsorship, *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* did bring women together under a black and white leadership. The story of Florence Wangui Kiguru, as related by Bildad Kaggia, shows how members of this overtly harmless group could use their position to further the nationalist cause.¹⁷

After World War II, an African Advisory Council was set up in Nairobi to acquaint the all-white Nairobi Municipal Council with African problems and viewpoints.¹⁸ The African Advisory Council also had some say over the distribution of trade licenses in African locations and the recognition of African social organizations.¹⁹ This council was composed of representatives from various African organizations, including the Luo Union, KAU, the trade unions, and church groups. Florence Wangui Kiguru was the representative on the Council from *Maendeleo ya Wanawake*. She helped Bildad Kaggia battle for the repeal of one Nairobi apartheid law circa 1951. This law created separate European, Asian, and African areas in Nairobi. Any African found in the European or Asian area

after 10:00pm was liable to prosecution.²⁰ In early 1952, Kiguru was also a member of the six-person delegation sent to the Superintendent of Police by the African Advisory Council. The delegation discussed security measures in Nairobi.²¹ She and two other members of the delegation had taken the Mau Mau oath of unity and thus emphasized the unjust brutality of the police. Florence Wangui Kiguru was unusual among Kikuyu women. She was a recognized leader of a women's organization, she actively supported the nationalist cause via Mau Mau and her work in KAU offices, and she was literate.

Even as late as 1954, women constituted only 26% of African primary school enrollment in Kenya.²² In 1960 women still only constituted 20-30% of the African primary school enrollment and only 10.6% of Kenyan Africans enrolled in secondary schools.²³ Projecting backward, even fewer women were educated prior to the 1950's, although their numbers must have increased somewhat after 1931 with the introduction of Kikuyu independent schools.²⁴ Considering the fact that the male nationalist leaders (Thuku, Kenyatta, and Odinga for instance) all had higher education, it is no wonder that Kikuyu women could not hope to compete with men for formal leadership positions in the nationalist movement.²⁵

In addition to their low exposure to education, women were shielded from the politicizing experience of the urban economy. Once again, Kiguru was unusual. In 1948 the Kikuyu constituted 45% of the African population of Nairobi. There were 23,354 Kikuyu males in Nairobi and 5,535 Kikuyu females. Kikuyu women thus constituted only 19% of the total Nairobi Kikuyu population. These figures reflect a pattern which was deeply entrenched in Kenya by the advent of the Mau Mau Revolt. Kikuyu men lived and worked in Nairobi (or on European plantations) while their wives and children remained on the family *shamba* ("small farm") in the reserve. Low wages for African labor and population pressure in the Reserves forced the Kikuyu to maintain economic ties in both the urban and rural context, simply in order to survive.²⁷ This pattern reinforced the traditional Kikuyu division of labor, whereby women maintained the family food supply.²⁸ Thus women's primary economic role remained largely intact under colonialism.²⁹ In 1948 African women constituted only 8% of African wage labor in Kenya.³⁰ Those Kikuyu women engaged in wage labor often worked in the agricultural sphere - on European coffee³¹ and tea plantations, thus minimally disrupting their traditional sphere of activity. The persistence of the traditional female economic role not only reduced the number of women involved in the formal nationalist organizations and the armed revolt, but also set the condition what roles women were allowed to fill in Mau Mau. This "conditioning" perhaps accounts for the unwillingness of male sources to recognize women who functioned adequately in

non-traditional roles.

Women did not have formal power in traditional, decentralized Kikuyu society, although their chance of wielding temporary, informal power was perhaps greater than it is at present. The five principal Kikuyu councils, according to Kenyatta, consisted exclusively of mostly men: the council of junior warriors, the council of senior warriors, the council of junior elders, the council of peace, and the religious or sacrificial council.³³ Women did, however, exercise power over decisions affecting other women. For instance, an advisory council of women elders (*ndũndũ ya atũmia*) dealt with the issues of female circumcision, births, and various religious duties.³⁴ Women thus occupied limited leadership positions in traditional Kikuyu society. The basis of this leadership was age and merit. The women formed a kind of sub-culture subsumed under the larger, male-dominated Kikuyu power system. This traditional organizational model re-emerged in the context of the armed nationalist revolt. In the forest, the freedom fighters organized themselves by districts. A council of warriors, whose leader was determined by experience and merit, served as the main decision-making body. It is possible that subordinate to these warrior councils with their male leadership, female squads (probably scouts) existed. Material presented later in this paper will suggest that these squads had their own leaders who made the quick, on-the-spot decisions. The premise that such a sub-culture pattern re-emerged during the Mau Mau Revolt, paralleling the one of traditional Kikuyu society, is worthy of further investigation.

Unfortunately, all of the existing first-hand accounts of Mau Mau forest fighting are written by men.³⁵ They are unable to address the issue of female organizational patterns, simply because of their limited exposure to them. In addition, certain male perspectives hamper their discussion of females involved in the Mau Mau Revolt.

The men seem to be unwilling to accept women's motives for participating in Mau Mau as similar and equal to their own. For instance, the only woman who does go to the forest to fight in James Ngugi's novel *A Grain of Wheat* does so out of love for one of the fighters rather than out of any sincere political commitment.³⁶ Also, Karari Njama attributes his step-sister's (Wambui) move into the forest to her position as Stanley Mathenge's mistress.³⁷ Donald Barnett assigns baser motives to the female freedom fighters. He supports Njama's view that women entered the forests to escape the hardships of the reserves. Once in the forest, he admits, they did aid the struggle, but "they were more concerned with personal safety and survival."³⁸ Karari Njama at one point even denies that

that women participated as actual fighters (*itungati*)³⁹ but sources contradict him.⁴⁰ Because some forest fighters' accounts question the validity of female participation in Mau Mau, they do not explore sufficiently the roles women filled.

In fact, male forest fighters spend more time in their books discussing the conflicts and tensions the women's presence generated in the forest, than they do examining any of women's positive contributions to the struggle. In the course of 1953 and 1954, for example, the Aberdare and Mt. Kenya leaders met to discuss what women's role should be in the forest.⁴¹ No woman spoke at those meetings.⁴² The leaders decided on a forest behavior code. The original code prohibited sexual relations between the *itungati* and the women in the forest camp. This prohibition satisfied the traditional warrior taboos against sexual intercourse⁴³ and reduced tensions in the fighting unit. This rule proved to be impractical, so the leaders authorized liaisons and required them to be formalized before the entire camp. The leaders also decided at these meetings to officially recognize women as "warriors". They decided that women should be allowed to receive ranks up to the rank of colonel.⁴⁴ Wanjiru Wambogo, the only woman colonel mentioned in any of the accounts by name, received her rank apparently because of her position as mistress to Dedan Kimathi rather than because of her own contributions to the struggle for Independence.⁴⁵ As of yet, historians can only guess whether other women attained this rank and the grounds on which they did so.

Male accounts of forest life do emphasize women's roles as mistresses and the way women used their sexuality to aid the forest fighters. While these sexual roles and tactics certainly existed, their possible over-emphasis leaves readers with a distorted view of female participation in Mau Mau. Consider for example one of the fifteen rules agreed upon in January 1953 by leaders from the Aberdares and Mt. Kenya: "An officer is not permitted to play about with girls in front of his soldiers and he should not fall in love with the girlfriend of a soldier; an officer may not hunt for a girl but must meet her through *our women commanders*."⁴⁶ (emphasis added) Waruhiu Itote also notes, "We urged our officers to exercise great caution in dealing with attractive but unknown women, who might easily be enemy scouts. Indeed, we advised our officers to restrict their relationships to *women leaders* only...."⁴⁷ (emphasis added) Itote mentions women leaders casually here, as an understood phenomenon. His statements suggest that women did indeed have their own leaders. But nowhere does he explain who these women were, and if they were elected or selected for their positions. Since these "women leaders" were supposed to have so many contacts, we can assume that they were scouts whose headquarters were in Nairobi or in the Reserves. But we cannot be certain that these women served any function beyond that of matchmaker.

Waruhiu Itote, Karari Njama, and J.M. Kariuki all describe how women accepted guns and ammunition as payment from the colonial forces for sexual favors. These women then transferred the supplies to the forest fighters.⁴⁸ Bildad Kaggia describes how women used their sexual favors (and bribes) prior to the Emergency to win government officials and others over to the side of the Mau Mau movement.⁴⁹ Karari Njama relates how at the August 1953 Mwathe River meeting of forest leaders, a woman was assigned to him as a *kabatuni* ("little platoon"). She was directed to cook and clean for Njama, and to serve as his mistress for the duration of the meeting. She was one of over twenty women to be so distributed. Njama quotes her as saying, "...it seems to me that the leaders consider this (sleeping with a fighter) as part of the women's duty in the Society."⁵⁰

Aside from her sexual duties, the *kabatuni*'s orders do illustrate the tasks women performed in the forest. Women did most of the camp's cooking and cleaning, they gathered firewood, and they transported water. They carried the luggage whenever the forest unit changed camps and they sometimes cared for the wounded in makeshift hospitals.⁵¹ In general then, women performed traditional tasks. Only that small percentage of women who served as fighters deviated from any traditional norm.⁵²

In line with the traditional aspects of women's participation in Mau Mau was the option of serving as a seer.⁵³ In traditional Kikuyu society the position of seer was one of the few prestigious and potentially powerful positions that women could occupy.⁵⁴ The seers were traditionally important members of the Kikuyu war councils and their job was to bless and cleanse the warriors and to determine the propitious time and place for raids.⁵⁵ The seers mentioned in the Mau Mau accounts did not help plan the military strategy of forest units. They did, however, help maintain the morale of the forest fighters, by sanctioning the fighters' actions in the name of *Ngai* (God) and their ancestors.⁵⁶ Mohammed Mathu describes one of his encounters with a female seer who said: "...we were not to have any contact with women while carrying our weapons and when we killed someone in battle we were to go to the nearest river, wash ourselves, and if possible be cleansed by a seer. Before being used again all our weapons were to be rubbed with the stomach contents of a sheep."⁵⁷ He also relates how a woman seer purified over 100 fighters in a traditional ceremony. The leaders believed that their misfortunes, including the loss of men in battle were being caused by failure to remove the evils contaminating them.⁵⁸ Although Donald Barnett suggests that the use of seers increased as the forest fighters were subject to more and more government pressure, it seems clear that the fighters could afford less and less to fulfill the measures

the seers called for.⁵⁹

The other major way in which women participated in the Mau Mau Revolt was as scouts, spies, and messengers.⁶⁰ Women subject to less suspicion and possessing greater freedom of movement than men, fit nicely into these roles. Paul Mahehu, a leader in Nairobi, organized a group of 220 women who hid and delivered guns, ammunition, and food to the Mt. Kenya forest fighters. These women also secured information concerning government military strategy.⁶¹ In May 1953, Mahehu assigned one of these women, Wamuyu Muciri, to the job of finding out the best time and method of staging an escape of certain Mau Mau prisoners from Nairobi Prison. She made arrangements with a warder to close but not to set the lock of the van's rear door which took the Mau Mau prisoners to trial. The escape that Muciri arranged was successful. Certainly such women took great risks. They were trusted members in the struggle for Independence, responsible for the lives of others and invested with organizational secrets.

The women who helped the forest fighters and lived on the African reserves suffered as much as any other participants in the Revolt. With the flow of young active men into the forests or into the detention camps, women increasingly bore the burden of government retaliation and the responsibility for sustaining their family members. Shortly after the Emergency Declaration, the government increased Kikuyu taxes, closed African trading centers, relocated squatters and the unemployed and forced the Kikuyu to build police posts in every location. Those Kikuyu who lived in the reserves found their food and livestock confiscated by both the Home Guard units and the forest fighters.⁶³ The fact that the Kikuyu men and women continued to supply the forest fighters with arms and information in the face of ever-increasing hardship is truly a testament to their dedication and sincerity. The women in the Reserves even organized themselves into a Mau Mau support group - the *Wangu Group* - in opposition to the government-sponsored female Home Guard unit known as *Hika Hika*.⁶⁴ Between 1953 and 1955 the government moved some 950,000 people into fortified concentration camps. The Kikuyu were forced to destroy their own homes and build new ones in the "villages" where the government could much more efficiently control the people's movements.⁶⁵ This government strategy virtually cut off the forest fighters from their support in the reserves. The men and women in the "villages" worked six days per week on compulsory labor projects and were subject to a 23 hour curfew. Women were allowed in some places only for one hour a day to fetch food and water for their families.⁶⁶ The government's program of forced villageization was instrumental in the military defeat of the Mau Mau Revolt. This in itself points

to the critical role women from the reserves played in the struggle. M. Tamarkin remarks in her article on Mau Mau in Nakuru that only one of the known Mau Mau leaders from that area had gone to fight in the forest after the Emergency Declaration. She explains, "It seems that the Mau Mau leaders realized that their main problem was not so much sending people to the forests as securing regular supplies...essential for carrying out a sustained resistance."⁶⁷ Although Tamarkin is not addressing the issue of whether women in the reserves contributed as much to Mau Mau as the forest fighters, her statement does tend to support that claim.

The colonial government, in contrast perhaps to many of the forest fighters, recognized how important the women who remained in Nairobi and the Reserves were to the Mau Mau Revolt. Many of the activities women performed for the forest fighters were punishable by death from 1953 on: possession of arms and ammunition, assisting in terrorist operations, providing supplies to terrorists, and consorting with armed men.⁶⁸ J.M. Kariuki refers to one woman detainee at Kamiti Prison, Miriam Muthoni, who was charged with carrying a pistol. Being a woman, her death sentence was commuted, but she was still in detention as late as 1960.⁶⁹

The government detention camps served many functions beyond the obvious one of punishing, often brutally, Mau Mau fighters and sympathizers. The government used information extracted from detainees to identify other Mau Mau sympathizers. The detainees also provided the government with free labor for major construction and irrigation projects. Men and women detainees were the objects of the government's rehabilitation program. T.G. Askwith, an African Affairs Officer in Nairobi, remarked in his 1953 report on Mau Mau: "Wives have in many cases persuaded their husbands to take the oath and are very militant... It is probably more important to rehabilitate the women than the men if the next generation is to be saved."⁷⁰

Kamiti Prison served as the detention camp reserved for women, but women were also held in small numbers at predominantly male detention camps. Karigo Muchai makes a reference in his account of detention camps to three women who were transferred to Athi River Detention Camp.⁷¹ Mohamed Mathu, in the account of his detention experiences, provides one example of how useful female detainees were. While being held at Embakasi Detention Camp in 1954, he organized a three-day boycott of the camp food by passing notes from prisoner to prisoner via the female detainees who collected eating utensil after each meal. Since the detainees were kept isolated in cages in groups of ten to thirty, there would have been no other way to communicate with each other.⁷² Although Mathu portrays the female detainees in a rather passive light, the women's coordinated effort may

suggest that some sort of decision-making organization existed among them and sanctioned the boycott.

Male detainees, for instance, did organize themselves. They elected camp leaders who served on a camp committee, made behavior rules, passed judgement on the breaking of those rules and presented the detainees' views to the camp officials.⁷³ J.M. Kariuki in *Mau Mau Detainee* describes in detail the rules the detainees made at Lodwar Detention Camp. A camp policeman reported any breach of these rules. A camp judge and a jury of five elders tried all such cases. Punishments included drawing 28 buckets of water, emptying and cleaning the sanitary bucket for a number of days, and making circuits of the compound on one's knees.⁷⁴ This elaborate system, designed to maintain the detainees' morale and reduce the possibility of collective punishment, may have been more effective in some camps than others, but it did exist.

It is therefore unfortunate that women were kept separate from the men in the detention camps, because the men's descriptions do not include references to any similar organization among the female detainees and because no female has written an account of her experience in detention, nor has any been aided in telling it.⁷⁵ Women apparently received no better treatment in detention than the men, although they were exempt from capital punishment. They were subject to the same cruel beatings, poor diet, and overcrowding, as well as sexual abuse. Women may well have responded to these same pressures in a similar manner, i.e. by organizing their own "government". This would not have been out of line with tradition and women must have felt the need to maintain their unity and morale. One of Kariuki's statements does suggest that some sort of hierarchy of authority existed among the female detainees: "The women were finally transferred from Kowop Detention Camp to Kamiti Prison where, we heard, Nyamathira, *their leader* later died."⁷⁷ (emphasis added) We can only conjecture in what sense Nyamathira was the women's leader.

Thus, traditional Kikuyu power structure and division of labor, and the lack of a strong women's nationalist organization prior to Mau Mau restricted and defined female participation in the armed revolt. However, this is no excuse for the research neglect of the contributions of Kikuyu women. Other factors, such as tendencies to focus on the sexual exploitation of women who served the cause, to denigrate women's motives, and to deny the title of "freedom fighter" to those women who actively supported Mau Mau in Nairobi and the Reserves, all exacerbate this basic source problem. As of yet, our knowledge of the Kikuyu women's roles and their organization in the Mau Mau Revolt is sadly inadequate.

Footnotes

1. Fanon. *A Dying Colonialism*. Sembene. *God's Bits of Wood*.
2. Barnett, Donald., ed., *Mau Mau from Within*. (N.Y.: Monthly Review Press, 1966), p.226.
3. *Ibid.*, p.325. see also C. Rosberg and J. Nottingham. *The Myth of Mau Mau*. (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1966), p.300.
4. Harry Thuku was the first African nationalist hero. His name had great symbolic appeal, as did Jomo Kenyatta's later.
5. Barnett, Donald, ed., *Mau Mau from Within*. p.39.
6. All of this background information can be found in the introductory chapter of *Mau Mau from Within*.
7. Very few women are referred to by name in the sources which were available to me, and fewer still are referred to as leaders. See Rosberg and Nottingham, p.247 for the claim of a KCA oath administrator that women took the oath prior to 1950 when the organization was still elitist.
8. I cannot explain satisfactorily why Fort Hall women seem to have been more militant. See M.P.K. Sorrenson, *Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country*. (London: Oxford U. Press, 1967), p.165. He states that Fort Hall was more conservative than either Nyeri District or Kiambu. Community control over the land remained stronger in Fort Hall than elsewhere, so resistance to any land reform was possibly more intense there. The resistance may have been largely a female phenomenon because of Fort Hall's location. Men from Kiambu who worked in Nairobi could commute, whereas such men from Fort Hall would have to live in Nairobi, leaving their wives in the Reserves. The women would thus be more intensely involved in land issues.
9. Rosberg and Nottingham, pp. 50-52. The eyewitness was one Job Muchuchu.
10. Sorrenson, p.75
11. Itote, Waruhiu. *Mau Mau General*. (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967), p.38. Itote dates these riots in 1949 without footnoting. Sorrenson took his information from the Fort Hall District Report of 1949 and I am

adopting his date for matters of convenience. The similarities in the two descriptions suggest that they are referring to the same incident (Itote from memory) but they may in fact be referring to two separate events.

12. Sorrenson, p.75.
13. Rosberg and Nottingham, p.273.
14. Kaggia, Bildad. *Roots of Freedom*. (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975), p.104.
15. Certainly the male-dominated nationalist groups concerned themselves with agrarian issues. But on the other hand the African nationalist leaders never expressed a comment to women's interests, they never addressed women's special needs. Part of this neglect may be due to certain aspects of Kikuyu cultural nationalism. For instance nationalists always defended female circumcision and polygamy.
16. Wipper, Audrey. "Equal Rights for Women in Kenya?", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, IX, (#3, 1971), pp. 432-433. All of the information on the goals, organization and organization of Maendeleo ya Wanawake is from this reference.
17. Kaggia, pp.98-107. See following paragraphs for details.
18. Kaggia, pp.93-94.
19. Kaggia, pp.93-94. These were indeed useful if limited powers. Only officially recognized groups could use Nairobi public facilities/halls. Kaggia points out that by making sure groups sponsored by Mau Mau members were recognized, Mau Mau had access to Nairobi facilities to the Emergency.
20. Kaggia, p.98.
21. Kaggia, pp.105-107 for all the details of this incident.
22. Gordon-Brown, A., ed., *Yearbook and Guide to East Africa 1954*. (London: Robert Hale L.T.D., 1954), p.48. This figure applies to all African women in Kenya and not just the Kikuyu. I am using it here to illustrate the general educational trend.
23. Little, Kenneth. *African Women in Towns*. (London: Cambridge U. Press, 1973), p.30.

24. Kikuyu independent schools were an expression of cultural nationalism and the rejection of mission-controlled education. Not only did these schools hope to end education as a tool of colonial oppression, but they made education available to more African women since circumcision was not a stigma in their eyes, nor did it bar women from entrance.
25. Women also did not benefit from the education men received in their World War II participation. Most of the forest fighters point to WWII as a radicalizing and enlightening experience.
26. Sorrenson, p.85.
27. Sorrenson, p.37 and Rosberg and Nottingham, p.205.
28. Routledge, W. Scoresby and Routledge, Katherine. *With a Prehistoric People*. (London: Cass & Co., 1968), p.179.
29. Wipper, "Equal Rights for Women in Kenya?", p.429. Wipper argues that women were thus shielded from westernization and modernization, positive processes. I prefer to argue that women were rather shielded from politicization and opportunities for organization on more than a district or local basis. Women did not participate as much as the man in trade unions, for instance, which were often more militant than the purely political nationalist associations.
30. *Reported Employment and Wages in Kenya 1948-1960*, Table 5.
31. Waciama, Charity. *Daughter of Mumbi*. (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969), p.51.
32. Ngugi, James. *A Grain of Wheat*. (London: W. Heinemann Ltd, 1967), p.166.
33. Kenyatta, Jomo. *Facing Mount Kenya*. (N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1962), p.197. Note that men were also the sole inheritors of land and thus economic wealth.
34. Kenyatta. p.108.
35. *Daughter of Mumbi* for instance does not describe forest life.
36. Ngugi. p.157.
37. Barnett, Donald. *Mau Mau from Within*. p.215.
38. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within*. p.151.

39. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within*. p.194.
40. Whittier, Robert, ed., *The Swords of Kirinyaga*. (Nairobi East African Literature Bureau, 1975), p.79. There were 96 women fighters in a group of over 2,000. Barnett, *Mau Mau from Within*. p.278. Twelve out of 288 warriors were female.
41. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within*. p.194, p.221, p.249.
42. Itote, pp.135-136. His secretary, Wamaitha asked to speak at a meeting held July 8, 1953. She said, "'We no longer live in the days when a young woman could not eat meat before a man. Although I'm not a leader, I am responsible for writing down your speeches and your secrets and I have never revealed anything...Besides, this is a war of men and women and since I am the only woman here, I must represent them...When you are discussing women, you've got to listen to their representative.'" She was allowed to speak over Itote's protests. This was a unique incident.
43. Barnett, Donald, ed., *The Urban Guerrilla*. (Canada: Liberation Support Movement Press, 1974), p.56. Barnett, *Mau Mau from Within*. p.242.
44. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within*. p.248.
45. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within*. p.443.
46. Itote. pp.289-290.
47. Itote. p.281.
48. Itote. p.100, p.101. Kariuki, J.M. *Mau Mau Detainee*. (London: Oxford U. Press, 1975), p.34. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within*. p.208.
49. Kaggia. pp.111-112.
50. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within*. pp.242-243.
51. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within*. p.176, p.183, p.226, p.249.
52. Traditionally, only men were warriors.
53. Not all seers mentioned in the Mau Mau accounts were women. Also, not all forest units wanted or required the use of seers. Some, like Karari Njama, saw the fighters' reliance on seers as a negative aspect of the revolt.
54. Routledge. p.228.

55. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within*. p.47.
56. Itote. p.296.
57. Barnett. *The Urban Guerrilla*. p.41.
58. Barnett. *The Urban Guerrilla*. p.30. This woman seer was arrested and sent to Kamiti Prison.
59. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within*. p.202.
60. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within*. p.341, p.350. Ngugi. p.23. Whittier. p.85. Itote. p.78. Barnett, ed., *The Man in the Middle*. (Canada: Liberation Support Movement Press, 1973), p.166.
61. Itote. pp.116-117.
62. Itote. pp.117-118.
63. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within*. p.209, p.210, p.319. Itote. p.145. Whittier. p.92.
64. Whittier. p.93. Except to mention their existence, the text does not comment on these two groups; they apparently functioned in 1955. It would be very interesting to know the class, education, religion etc. of the women involved in the two groups. Waciama. p.128 also notes the existence of a female Home Guard. She refers to these women's leaders, suggesting that women did have their hierarchy of command.
65. Rosberg and Nottingham. p.304.
66. For general descriptions see Waciama. p.163 and Rosberg and Nottingham. p.294.
67. Tamarkin, M., "Mau Mau in Nakuru", *Journal of African History*, XVII, (#1, 1976), p.133.
68. Sorrenson. pp.102-103.
69. Kariuki. p. 160. Kariuki points out that Margaret Koinange was also in Kamiti Prison. Whittier, ed., p.162 notes that women were exempt from the death penalty.
70. Rosberg and Nottingham. p.338.
71. Barnett, Donald, ed., *The Hardcore*. (Canada: Liberation Support Movement Press, 1973), p.41, p.42.

72. Barnett. *The Urban Guerrilla*. pp.64-65.
73. Barnett. *The Hardcore*. p.43. The accounts of this camp organization by men who were detained are amazingly similar, perhaps because the frequent transfer of detainees facilitated the spread of a fairly uniform system of organization.
74. Kariuki. pp.111-113.
75. Note that Donald Barnett provided the medium for Karari Njama's story, Karigo Muchai's story, Ngugi Kabiro's story, and Mohame Mathu's story. Robert Whittier edited H.K. Wachanga's account as did P. Ndoria for J.K. Muriithi in *War in the Forest*.
76. Whittier. p.162. Kariuki. p.160. A source which I was unable to profit from but must be very valuable:
Parliamentary Debates (Great Britain)
 Oct. 31, 1956, v. 558 1418-21
 June 25, 1956, v. 555 225-34
 July 31, 1956, v. 556 127
77. Kariuki. p.53.

Bibliography

- Barnett, Donald, ed., *The Hardcore; The Story of Karigo Muchai*
 Canada: Liberation Support Movement Press, 1973.
- Barnett, Donald, ed., *Man in the Middle; The Story of Ngugi Kabiro*,
 Canada: Liberation Support Movement Press, 1973.
- Barnett, D. and Njama, K., *Mau Mau from Within*, New York,
 Monthly Review Press, 1966.
- Barnett, D., ed., *The Urban Guerrilla; The Story of Mohamed Mathu*,
 Canada: Liberation Support Movement Press, 1974.
- Gorden-Brown, A., ed., *Yearbook and Guide to East Africa 1954*,
 London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1954.
- Itote, Waruhiu, *Mau Mau General*, Nairobi: East African Publishing
 House, 1967.
- Kaggia, Bildad, *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963; an autobiography*,
 Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975.

- Kariuki, Josiah Mwangi, *Mau Mau Detainee; the Account by a Kenya African of his Experiences in Detention Camps 1953-1960*, London: Oxford U. Press, 1975.
- Kenyatta, Jomo, *Facing Mount Kenya*, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1962. (first edition 1938).
- Little, Kenneth, *African Women in Towns*, London: Cambridge U. Press, 1973.
- Ngugi, James, *A Grain of Wheat*, London: W. Heinemann Ltd., 1967.
- Rosberg, C. G. and Nottingham, J., *The Myth of Mau Mau*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1966.
- Routledge, W. Scoresby and Routledge, Katherine, *With a Prehistoric People*, London: Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968 (first edition 1910).
- Sorrenson, M.P.K., *Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country*, London: Oxford U. Press, 1967.
- Tamarkin, M., "Mau Mau in Nakuru", *Journal of African History*, XVII, #1, 1976, pp. 119-134.
- Waciuma, Charity, *Daughter of Mumbi*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969.
- Watene, Kenneth, *Dedan Kimathi*, Nairobi: Transafrica Publishers, 1974.
- Whittier, Robert ed., *The Swords of Kirinyaga; the Fight for Land and Freedom* by H. K. Wachanga, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975.
- Wipper, Audrey, "Equal Rights for Women in Kenya?", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, IX, #3, 1971, pp. 429-442.
- Wipper, Audrey, "The Politics of Sex; Some Strategies Employed by the Kenyan Power Elite to Handle a Normative-Existential Discrepancy", *African Studies Review*, XIV, #3, 1971, pp. 463-482.

* * * * *

Kathy Santilli received her bachelor's degree in history from Wellesley College in Massachusetts in June, 1977. She is now in the Soviet Union doing extended studies.