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Death at Lari

The Story of an African Massacre

The settlement of Lari, nestling in the shadows of the Aberdares forest in the northern part of Kiambu district, was to be the site

of the greatest bloodletting of the entire Mau Mau war. Yet Lari appeared no different from many other rural Kikuyu communities in the early 1950s. The homesteads of local farmers were scattered along the ridge tops and clustered around the fringes of the high marshland. The mud-and-wattle buildings were mostly thatched, with the occasional corrugated-metal roof. Families gathered together in fenced compounds, each wife with her own hut, and buildings also for her sons. Water was plentiful in Lari, there was good grazing nearby and fuel wood could be gathered from the forest edge. Up here in the high country, at 7000 feet, soils were not as fertile as in the very best parts of Kiambu, but they were good enough. Vegetables were the mainstay of the local economy, grown as a cash crop for sale in the expanding market of urban Nairobi. Pyrethrum was also grown for cash, and everyone cultivated maize as a staple food. The hard-working and diligent farmer could earn a decent living at Lari. In 1952 this was a vibrant, energetic and economically thriving community.

An elaborate network of rural roads and tracks cut across Lari sub-location in every direction. These well-kept mud paths were the arteries that connected Lari's farms to the main highways of Limuru Road and Ruiru road, running along the ridges to the city of Nairobi to the southeast. Its economy was integrally linked to the urban commercial hub of the colony, less than two hours away by road. Many of Lari's peasant farmers had relatives in Nairobi and would make occasional journeys to the city by bus or by train. The great East African railway, from the Indian Ocean to Lake Victoria, ran through the area. At Uplands or Escarpment stations, its commercial farmers gained access to a wider world of market opportunities. In the fields round about, the day was regulated by the

sound of the trains approaching and departing – a reminder of the passage of time, and of the proximity of a colonial economy.

Lari was a place of wealth, and of poverty. Amongst the leading commercial farmers were a few prosperous elders with large acreages under their control. They were in the vanguard of what the colonial state considered to be 'progressive' African farming. They had moved beyond the traditional constraints of family labour and the obligations of kin, developing their lands with commercial tenancies, waged casual labourers and more intensive farming methods. This wealthy minority were beneficiaries of the active market in land that had been stimulated in Kiambu by commercial success and growing land hunger. At the other end of the economic scale stood the majority of Lari's residents. Most made their livings as tenants on the land of others, producing a small surplus for themselves and supplementing their household incomes with casual work. Others were poorer still, having no access to land through ownership or rent. These were compelled to sell their labour to earn a living. Waged labour was already a fact of life in Lari. Many families included members among Nairobi's pool of migrant labour, and many others had connections with Kikuyu squatters in the Rift Valley, far to the west.

Commerce was vibrant in Lari. There were many businesses, of various types and sizes, owned and run by local Kikuyu. Those with money to invest did so in the trading centres of the location, where licences could be purchased to build and run small hotels and eating houses, or trading stores, known as *dukas*, selling groceries, second-hand clothes, farming implements and household goods. Transport services were also popular with African investors. Taxis ran from most of the trading centres in the area, and buses, lorries and carts could be hired to move produce and people from place to place. Some of the more adventurous and successful of Lari's entrepreneurs owned shops in the African locations in Nairobi, or ran wholesaling businesses there, bulking produce for delivery to the urban markets. The most prosperous entrepreneurs had wider business interests, especially in retailing and transportation, as far afield as Kampala, Mwanza and Arusha.

Artisans of every kind were to be found in Lari's trading centres – tailors, cobblers, carpenters, painters, basket makers, mechanics, and stonemasons. The latter were especially numerous, employed at the several quarries in the forest fringe, some working on road construction with the government, others hewing building blocks for Indian or Kikuyu contractors. Fathers sought apprenticeships for their sons to learn such trades and paid for the privilege. Tailors rented space on the verandas of the larger *dukas*, and trained their apprentices by turns on the one machine they could afford to maintain. Cobblers worked from small carts that could be easily moved from market to market, and carpenters

set up their rough-hewn benches under spreading trees, making furniture to order. In the areas closest to the forest, many men worked as tree fellers, loggers and pit-sawyers. Much of this work was done under contract for Indian-owned firms, such as those run at Lari by Karjeet Singh and Musa Dad, whose Asian foremen and managers lived locally in the forest. Other Kikuyu worked on their own account in the same forests, gathering and cutting wood for charcoal burning. Every day the forest tracks were dotted with the filled grey sacks of charcoal, awaiting collection by the workers who would carry them into Lari trading centre for loading onto the donkey-carts bound for Nairobi. This was a rapidly growing and lucrative trade in the post-war years, as Nairobi's population expanded.

Lari also had its industrial labourers, mostly working at the Uplands Bacon Factory, in nearby Limuru. The factory horn bringing the day shift to an end also signalled the ending of the day for many of the farmers in the surrounding fields. Here, in 1930, Kenya had its first taste of trade-union protest, with the shooting of strikers by police and the imprisonment of the workers' leaders. Strikes and violence had again erupted at the factory in the late 1940s, stimulated by emergent trade unionism, and as recently as 1947 the local chief, Makimei, had assisted colonial officials in breaking a strike at the factory. Such radicalism had been driven by workplace concerns — poor conditions and low wages — rather than by political motives; but by the early 1950s the labour lines at Uplands were viewed with suspicion by colonial officials who thought that the factory was a seed-bed of radical, anti-government opinion. Lari's Kikuyu population saw the factory in simpler, material terms: jobs there were eagerly sought, especially by the landless. Work at the bacon factory brought a regular wage and the prospect of reasonable, if humble and overcrowded, housing. Other kinds of industrial work could be obtained through employment on the railway, either in the larger shunting yards at Limuru, or with the track-repair gangs that were assembled at Uplands or Escarpment stations. In the rainy seasons there was plenty of work of this kind, landslides being common along the precipitous incline of the escarpment, keeping the engineers and their labour gangs busy. Regular railway staff were properly housed by their employer, and although casual labour on gang work did not bring such benefits it was relatively stable employment; but it was heavy and unpleasant work, the kind of employment best suited for young, physically fit men.

Lari's women mainly worked within the domestic economy, tending their family farms. Every married Kikuyu woman whose husband owned or rented land would cultivate her own *shamba*, growing vegetables and maize for the kitchen. They would also hope to produce a surplus for

sale at the daily markets at Kirenga, or Githunguri, or at the larger weekly markets at Escarpment and Limuru. Some would also make wicker baskets or sisal bags for sale. A visit to the market was a social occasion as well as a commercial opportunity, a chance to catch up with relatives and friends. Unlike women in other Kiambu locations, closer to Nairobi, few Lari women would venture as far as the city. Those who did so risked their reputations. Even in this fairly progressive part of Central Province, male householders still preferred to dominate domestic matters and to restrict women to the homestead. Lari was a male-dominated community, traditional in its support of Kikuyu patriarchy. The most senior elders and the largest landowners were all polygamous, and the wealthiest men had three or more wives. The payments of brideprice from one family to another on the arrangement of a marriage built ties of reciprocity and obligation between families, and these ties gave Lari a dense and complex network of linkages with the wider Kikuyu community within and beyond Kiambu. In making a good marriage, parents would endeavour to make a match for their children that would secure the wider interests of their family and clan. In this process of building alliances, the land-holding unit known as the *mbari* was of critical importance. Upon marriage, a woman gained entitlement to the use of land for herself and her children within the *mbari* of her husband. A landless or dispossessed man, indeed any man who did not have secure access to *mbari* lands, was therefore a very unwelcome suitor for any family that hoped to use marriage as a means of brokering future security and prosperity. Obligations, and their reciprocities, were built through marriages, and their proliferation was traditionally a sign of wealth and status. In the desperate times of the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, more and more men found themselves unable to secure *mbari* land. The evicted squatters who returned to Central Province found that their entitlement to *mbari* land had long ago been forfeited, while at the same time *mbari* elders increasingly saw little reason to allow dependents to use their lands when far greater gains could be made through commercial farming. In the midst of these socio-economic transitions, the character of Kikuyu domestic life was beginning to change along with the role and status of women within marriages.'

Landlessness was the key factor. Its emergence since the 1940s had fostered severe social divisions among this Kikuyu community. The fear of landlessness was the moving force of Kikuyu politics; and it lay, like a cold shadow, over the whole community of Lari. Lari was in fact a relatively new area of agricultural settlement. The farmers here were recent immigrants. The first of their number had arrived in 1939, the last some ten years later. They had come from Tigoni, in southern Kiambu, where they had been evicted at the instruction of the colonial

government. Their removal and resettlement had been a fraught affair, resulting in the loss of land by many poorer families. These people were resentful about their fate. In the early 1950s, despite its appearance of tranquil prosperity, Lari was not a happy place.

Into this already combustible mix came others who were also landless. Lari lay near the escarpment edge, straddling the steep road from Kiambu down to the Rift Valley farms of Naivasha and Nakuru. The hundreds of evicted squatters who struggled up that road with what they could carry of their possessions drifted into Lari on their way 'home'. Soon learning that there would be no land for them, many remained in the Lari area, swelling the ranks of the landless and filling the bars and eating houses with an army of discontented souls. The nearby town of Limuru held a large concentration of such folk, some of whom had been evicted from the resettlement scheme at Olunguruone, in the Nakuru district, where the squatters had taken a stand against the implementation of government agricultural rules and where the Mau Mau oath-taking had begun. These migrants increased the local pool of casual labour, some finding irregular work with Lari's farmers and foresters and being sheltered by their kinsmen, others sleeping where they could among the shanties that fringed the larger trading centres and townships. With them came a new and far sharper politics of disillusionment.

Those ex-squatters who drifted into Lari tended to have had less formal education than the local people. Schools had not been easily accessible from many of the Rift Valley farms; nor had the work of the Christian mission churches made any sustained impact among the squatters, the majority of whom remained pagan. In Lari, churches had long been the source of literacy and remained the commonest marker of a political affiliation. The Anglicans of the Church Missionary Society were strongly represented in the area, and their schools had dominated the education of local Kikuyu until the 1930s. The African Inland Mission, from their base to the north at Kijabe, had a smaller and generally less well-educated following – the AIM established many fewer and much poorer schools; but some Lari residents would still make the two-hour walk to the AIM Hospital at Kijabe for the treatment of their ailments, whether professing Christians or not. In the wake of the clitoridectomy crisis the Kikuyu independent schools movement had made great strides in Lari and the surrounding locations from 1930 onwards, taking supporters away from the mission churches and schools. The resettlement of families from Tigoni brought several hundred Catholics into Lari during the 1940s, among them many wealthy families. No local church served them directly, but the devout among them made the journey every Sunday to the nearest Catholic church at Limuru. Although Christianity was popular in Lari, as elsewhere in Kiambu.

even by the end of the 1940s probably less than half the local population professed the Christian faith.

Lari's relative prosperity obscured sharp socio-economic divisions within the community. Well integrated with the colonial economy, but with a large and growing number of landless people for whom wage labour was essential, Lari was an educationally progressive and increasingly Christian community. Hard work earned advancement in this meritocracy, mediated by the patronage of Kikuyu kin groups; but it was a community with a marked streak of dissent, with a history of strong support for the independent schools and independent churches, and with a tradition of protest and non-conformity. In so many ways, this was as quintessential a Kikuyu community as you could hope to find on the eve of the Emergency in October 1952, an intense microcosm of the rest of central Kenya.

The violence of the Emergency exposed the raw tensions amongst this volatile community. The high proportion of ex-squatters in Lari by 1952, along with numbers of other landless peasants, marked it as an area where Mau Mau support was known to be strong. The local chief, Makimei, had a reputation for toughness. His methods were often rough and ready, but colonial officials considered him a reliable and secure ally in these difficult times. Mau Mau despised him, and he received death threats even before the declaration of the Emergency. Not surprisingly, Makimei was among the first chiefs in Kiambu to organize a Kikuyu Home Guard unit, to defend Lari against Mau Mau incursion. Makimei's predecessor, ex-Chief Luka Wakahangare, privately sponsored the establishment of a second Home Guard post at Lari during the early weeks of the emergency.² If Lari was a nest of Mau Mau influence, then it was also a place where loyalists were prepared to make a stand. By the end of November 1952 there were 3000 Home Guard in Central Province, a kind of 'Dad's Army' gathered around those loyal Christian chiefs, like Makimei, who feared that they and their clients might be the target of Mau Mau attacks. Self-preservation and personal security were a necessary response of these respectable Christian Kikuyu to the lawlessness of Mau Mau's hooligans. When the British decided to give their blessing to the Home Guard and to encourage recruitment, from December 1952, numbers rapidly increased. The 'Dad's Army' now became a formal militia, given authority to act in assistance of the police and army. The Home Guard would be the force that would confront Mau Mau head to head in the struggle for the hearts and minds of the Kikuyu people. Lari would be the critical site in that struggle.

By the end of January 1953 there were reckoned to be 7,600 Home Guard recruits, comprising 2333 in Nyeri, 1387 in Murang'a, 1083 in Meru, 1 000 in Embu, and 1863 in Kiambu.³ At Lari, the hundred or so

men who had by then joined the Home Guard were mostly drawn from the landed elite gathered around Makimei and Luka Wakahangare, the wealthiest man in the location and the person whose influence had been behind the resettlement of those who had moved from Tigoni. Makimei and Luka had numbered the murdered chiefs Waruhiu and Nderi among their closest friends and allies. As the Mau Mau murder count mounted, they knew that their own lives were under threat. For men such as these, combating Mau Mau was quite literally a matter of life and death. The dogs of war finally caught up with them some five months into the emergency.

Victims and Vengeance

*We are left alone with our day, and the time is short and
History to the defeated*

May say Alas but cannot help or pardon.

from *Spain*, by W H. Auden

Each night, at dusk, Lari's Home Guard unit gathered to begin their rounds, patrolling the main paths and principal properties in the location.⁴ Just after 8p.m. on the evening of 26 March 1953 the Lari patrol was summoned to investigate the discovery of a body in the location of Headman Wainaini, three miles to the east on the Lari boundary. When they arrived at the scene, they found the mutilated remains of a local loyalist, nailed to a tree alongside a busy footpath. The body had evidently been left there deliberately, with the intention that it should be found. It had taken the patrol almost an hour to get to the spot. As they now looked back to the west, just after 9p.m., they began to notice fires breaking out in the direction of their own homes in Lari. They hurried along in the darkness, first reluctantly fearing the worst, and eventually running as they realized the terrible truth. They had been purposely lured to Wainaini's location, leaving Lari undefended. The Mau Mau attack they so dreaded had come at last.

While the Home Guard patrol had hurried to the scene of the murder earlier that evening, some several hundred attackers had gathered at pre-arranged meeting places throughout the Lari location. In five or six separate gangs, each numbering one hundred or more persons, the attackers descended upon their targets. Their heads swathed to disguise their identities, armed with pangas, swords, spears, knives and axes, and with some carrying burning torches, they swarmed over the unprotected homesteads. They carried with them ropes, which they tied around the huts to prevent the occupants from opening the doors before they set

the thatch alight. As the occupants struggled to clamber through the windows to escape, they were savagely cut down. Most of those caught in the attack were women and children, but they were shown no mercy by the attackers, who seemed intent on killing every person in the homesteads. Shots rang out as some victims found their own weapons and made an effort to defend themselves and their families. But it was a hopeless cause. As the bodies were cut down and viciously hacked, the attackers threw them back into the blazing huts. The Home Guard patrol reached Lari just as the attack was coming to an end. They gave chase to some of the attackers, but they were too late to save the victims. By 10 p.m. some 120 bodies lay dead or grievously injured in the smouldering ruins of fifteen homesteads. The killers had disappeared into the night. In their wake, there was chaos, terror, shock, anger and indescribable grief.

Kenyans read about the attack in their newspapers two days later. The report provided by the Office of Information appeared in English and Swahili versions, and gave a vivid account of what had happened:

Armed terrorists stole upon the clustered huts of Lari, in the Kenya Highlands, in the dead of night. The sleeping Kikuyu people awoke to find flames roaring above them, as the Mau Mau fired the tinder-dry thatched roofs. Escape was impossible to most, for the doors had been securely fastened outside by the fanatical Mau Mau attackers. Men, women and children, forcing their way out of the windows, were caught and butchered. Some perished terribly in the flames; others were chopped and mutilated by the knives of their enemies – their own fellow tribesmen. Dawn revealed the macabre scene left behind by the bestial wave of Mau Mau; the mangled corpses, human remains literally chopped in pieces, all mingled with the smoking ashes of the burnt homesteads. The survivors, terror-stricken and helpless, told their pitiful stories to the police and government officials who rushed to Lari when the alarm was raised. They told of children being cut up with knives in the sight of their mothers; of others cut down as they tried to run to hide in tall maize, by terrorists insatiable for blood.'

These first press reports spread fear and horror throughout the Kikuyu communities of central Kenya. Where the events in Nyeri on Christmas Eve of 1952 had singled out leading male elders, the attack upon women and children at Lari was on a far larger scale and appeared less discriminate. No other attack during the emergency would have the tremendous impact on public opinion that came in the aftermath of Lari. The first reports stressed the murder of innocent Kikuyu civilians and stated that this was a 'loyalist community'. but it was not explained that the

homesteads attacked had in fact been very carefully chosen. The Lari attack may have seemed an indiscriminate slaughter of collaborators but was far from random in its violence. All of the victims were the families of local chiefs, ex-chiefs, headmen, councillors and prominent Home Guard. The male heads of these households were the leading members of Lari's loyalist community, and all were known as outspoken opponents of Mau Mau. Lesser members of the Home Guard, and those who were perceived as clients of wealthier men, were left alone. What shocked other Kikuyu most of all was that the vast majority of those killed were women and children. This was appalling to all, and even shocked many Mau Mau supporters, some of whom would subsequently try to excuse the attack as 'a mistake', or even try to blame it on the British. Assisted to some extent by government propaganda, Lari changed the way ordinary Africans thought about the conflict. If it was not recognized as such before, then at Lari the Mau Mau struggle had become a civil war — a struggle in which all Kikuyu feared for their survival. And in the hours, days and weeks following the massacre, the war sometimes appeared to be nothing less than a vendetta.

The principal victim in the attack at Lari was the loyalist community's senior statesman, Luka Wakahangare. At more than sixty years of age, Luka had continued to manage the affairs of his *mbari* after retiring from government office. An elder in the Catholic church, his extended family pursued a wide variety of business interests and dominated landholding on some of the most productive farms in Lari. As chief, and as the elder principally responsible for arranging the resettlement of the Tigoni people at Lari, Luka had profited from his association with the government. His murder was Mau Mau's punishment.' More than 200 attackers had descended upon his homestead, killing several of his wives, many of his grandchildren and other relatives. Luka, his younger brother, and one of his sons had fought bravely to defend the family. Armed with his shotgun, Luka had managed to break out of his hut to reach the cover of a lorry, parked in the compound. From there the old man had opened fire on his assailants, but had been quickly overpowered. Surviving members of his family would later describe how the gang, having recognized their victim, hacked repeatedly at his body, severing his head and detaching limbs, to carry them off in triumph. The torso was only identifiable after the attack by the distinctive clothing worn by the old man. Luka's youngest wife was the only adult survivor in the Wakahangare homestead, though she was horrendously slashed across the chest and head. As she fell to the ground with blood streaming down her face, the young woman saw both her children killed, one a toddler the other a baby.'

The attack on the homestead of Charles Ikenva's family was hardly

less brutal. Ikenya was one of the five headmen who worked under Makimei's command. He had led the Home Guard patrol that had gone to Wainaini's location that evening. His breathless dash back to his homestead had been too late to save his wives and children. All but four members of his entire extended family died in the attack.' A second, younger headman, named Paulo, also shared in the tragedy. Paulo returned to find the remains of his wife and all their children in the smouldering debris of his homestead. Samson Kariuki, another fellow elder in the Catholic church and a close business associate of ex-Chief Luka, was on Home Guard patrol when the attack began. Of the thirteen members of Samson's family at home that evening, nine perished, including a baby only a fortnight old who died in the flames and five other young children all of whom were hacked to death whilst running from the burning huts. The vivid testimony of one of Samson's wives, Mujiri, dominated the press reports in the days following the massacre, the young woman describing how she had watched one of her children being slashed, and then seen his murderers lick the blood from the blade that had decapitated the child.⁹

Several families of other prominent members of the Home Guard were also targeted. One of Lari's oldest and most respected elders, Kie Kirembe, was among the dead. Like Luka, he died trying to defend the women and children of his extended family. Four of Kie's sons were members of the Lari Home Guard!' The family of Machune Kiranga, another headman and Home Guard patrol commander, were also slaughtered." The same fate befell the families of Arthur Waweru,' Nganga Njehia'¹³ and Mbogwa Mumya.¹⁴ Aside from these men, who were directly linked to the Home Guard, prominent members of the African District Council were also among the victims. Councillor Isaka Kagoru" was killed with his family, as were Ndonga Karukoi and Kimani Wamboi.¹⁶ All were substantial landowners, and each had business connections with Luka Wakahangare. From the fifteen homesteads attacked, spread over an area of some 30 square miles, the final death toll was seventy-four. Another fifty victims were wounded:⁷

There was nothing random about these attacks. The victims had been selected with care, their homesteads identified and singled out. The raid had been well planned, and its perpetrators were well equipped. Neighbours were left unmolested as the gangs went about their business, each attacking group moving systematically between the two or three homesteads for which it had been assigned responsibility. The motive in the choice of victims seemed all too obvious: the male head of each household attacked was a government servant. All were Christian, and all were from Catholic families who had come to Lari from Tigoni in 1939. In one way or another, they had all been clients of either Luka or

Makimei, or both. One reason for the attack might have been Makimei's own vigorous pursuit of Mau Mau, or his cold rejection of the claims of the evicted squatters who presented themselves in Lari hoping to revive kinship and find shelter and support. Lari was reputed to contain many Mau Mau supporters, and Makimei's Home Guard patrols were known to be deeply unpopular with a large section of the local population, 'treating the Rift Valley repatriates with disdain'.²⁰ About a month earlier Makimei had got wind of a plot to attack the loyalists at Lari and had brought this to the notice of the district officer. He had warned Luka to build defences at his homestead, and Makimei had constructed a solid wooden fence around his own *boma*, with a stout gate that he bolted every night. On the night of the massacre this had surely saved the lives of his family. As the attackers battered at the gate of Makimei's homestead, the chief and his guards had opened fire on them. Over the next half-hour they had repulsed several attempts to scale the perimeter fence and torch the buildings. Others might have survived, too, had not the government made a fatal error of judgement only the day before the attack. Following rumours of the threat to Makimei and Luka, from 18 March a platoon of the KAR had been stationed at Lari to protect the loyalist community, patrolling the neighbourhood alongside the Home Guards; but on the morning of 25 March, this platoon had been withdrawn to other duties in Nairobi. The attack came almost as soon as they had gone. It was difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Mau Mau attackers had patiently awaited their opportunity. Once again, British intelligence had failed badly from a lack of coordination, exposing African allies to the worst possible consequences.²⁰ None of this was comforting to those other Kikuyu communities throughout Central Kenya whose members had taken a similar public stand against Mau Mau.

Loyalists at Lari at first sought vengeance, not comfort. They turned their anger and grief into violent reprisal. The Home Guard patrol returning from Wainaini's location saw members of the gangs making their escape and gave chase. Through the night there was sporadic shooting and skirmishing as the loyalists engaged what they thought to be groups of the attackers. Anyone abroad in Lari that night was taken as fair game. Other Home Guard from Lari, led by Makimei, were soon also in pursuit of the attackers. They were joined before midnight by Home Guard from neighbouring locations, by police from Uplands and Limuru, and by members of the KPR. The devastation and horror they witnessed on reaching the burned-out homesteads could not have been easy to take in. Samson Kariuki, Machune Kiranga and others among the survivors were there to give an account of what had happened. In their fear and anguish, the survivors were convinced that other Lari residents must have been among the attackers: how, otherwise, could

hundreds have disappeared so rapidly into the night if they had not taken shelter in the homes of Mau Mau supporters within Lari itself? Makimeji and his allies did not wait for corroboration of these suspicions, but set off immediately to seek out those they believed might have been responsible for the killings.

What followed between op.m. and dawn the next morning is not easy to describe precisely, for we have no detailed independent record of events, and there was never any official enquiry into the aftermath of the Lari attacks. We cannot therefore say with any certainty who did what to whom over the next few hours. All the same, there is no doubt that a second massacre took place at Lari that night. It was perpetrated by the Home Guard, later joined by other elements of the security services, who took revenge on any persons in the location they could lay their hands on whom they suspected of Mau Mau sympathies. There was anger, chaos and confusion; and there were beatings, shootings and brutal, cold-blooded killings. By the time the Lancashire Fusiliers arrived in Lari the next morning, to assist in the 'mopping-up operations', the Home Guard, police and KPR had exacted their bitter revenge. Some zoo bodies then awaited identification at the local mortuary – more than twice the number known to have been killed in the homesteads initially attacked. Many other bodies were left in the bush, and some would not be collected until four days later. The only contemporary European account of this second massacre, provided by the Irish lawyer Peter Evans, estimated the combined total dead from both massacres at more than 400.²¹

Evans's source for this estimate of the extent of the retaliation came from European settlers, including one notable individual of 'professional standing' (who may well have been a magistrate or judge). He described this informant as being 'as deeply shocked by the revelations of the reprisals as by the massacre'. According to Evans, most of the retaliation was carried out by Kikuyu Home Guard, but he had 'no doubt' that some of the killings were conducted under the supervision of European commanders.²² His certainty was in part based upon first-hand accounts. A man of strongly anti-colonial views, Evans had been among the lawyers who had volunteered to assist Kenyatta's defence team. In the months following the Kapenguria show trial, he busied himself in Nairobi assisting supporters of the KAU. They provided Evans with a list of persons who were said to have 'witnessed' atrocities carried out by the security forces. Among those named was a resident of Lari, who told Evans how he had been rounded up with other suspects on the morning following the massacre. After spending the night in Uplands police station, this witness explained that he and two others had been bundled into a lorry by a European police officer and taken into the forest. There.

the three Kikuyu prisoners had been ordered to walk away from the vehicle. As they walked, there was a burst of firing. While his two companions were killed, the witness miraculously survived unscathed. On the orders of the European officer, the assassins bundled their terrified prisoner back into the lorry, and returned him to Uplands police station, where he was instructed: 'Tell all your friends what happens to Mau Mau.' The witness to this atrocity was released from custody after two more days, and made his statement to Evans a month or so later."

Even the partisan Evans conceded that this story was insufficient evidence, on its own, to condemn the European police officers who had been involved in the aftermath of the Lari massacre, but other sources confirm that killings such as these did indeed take place, even if their circumstances cannot be described in the same detail. Gladys Kiriga's account of events at Lari provides the best examples, being based on numerous interviews conducted among the Lari community. All of Kiriga's elderly informants, interviewed by her in 1989, made graphic references to the summary murders of suspects. Kiriga was told that there were several assassinations of the kind described to Evans, that there was 'indiscriminate shooting' of any men who were known to have taken a Mau Mau oath and that wounded suspects were left in the bush to die. Mwangi Gatari told Kiriga that the suspects at Lari even feared that the government had a 'plan to eliminate all of those who had been rounded up'.²⁴ No such plan existed, but those who determinedly claimed there to have been two massacres at Lari were surely correct.

Another first-hand account of events at Lari, authored by an African, was published in 1973. Karigo Muchai was a KAU supporter who, early in 1953, was instructed to investigate atrocity allegations in Kiambu. Muchai went to Lari on the morning following the attack and spent the day on a ridge above the settlement, looking down on the security forces as they scoured the area in search of suspects. A round-up of 'all male suspects' had begun at around 4a.m. on the orders of the local district officer, John Cumber, and was carried out by contingents of Home Guard under the direction of police and KPR." Discreetly following the police and Home Guard patrols in the wake of these round-ups, Karigo Muchai walked amongst the smouldering *bomas* and saw the evidence of Lari's tragedy with his own eyes. There were still bodies left in the debris of the homesteads, and other corpses were scattered about in the surrounding fields and woodlands. These were not loyalist dead: they had by then been taken to the mortuary; but those suspected as Mau Mau had been left where they lay. Dogs roamed around, picking at the bodies, as if feeding on carrion.' Over the next three days, Muchai spoke with many people in Lari. He was told that the government counter-attack had been indiscriminate and severe involving the murder

of women and children as well as the targeting of men known to have Mau Mau sympathies. He came to the conclusion that most of the blood spilt at Lari 'was on government hands'.²⁷ Other sources confirm this view. The closest to an official reckoning of the extent of the killing came in a brief government statement, reported in the *East African Standard* on 5 April 1953, that 'the security forces had killed iso people alleged to have been involved in the massacre'.¹ Peter Evans's assertion that the score for Mau Mau and the security forces at Lari was about even therefore overstates the number of people finally acknowledged to have been killed in Mau Mau's attack (74), and understates the number officially reckoned to have been killed in retaliation (150). These figures do not include those who were declared 'missing'. The real numbers of dead may therefore have been a good deal higher. The grim truth was that, for every person who died in Lari's first massacre, at least two more were killed in retaliation in the second.

If the British were complacent about the character of the war against Mau Mau before 26 March, the events that night finally extinguished any lingering hope that the conflict might easily be snuffed out. The scale of the attack at Lari surprised even the most professional officers among the security forces, and its timing, after the withdrawal of soldiers from the area, showed that Mau Mau was still far better at gathering and making use of military intelligence than were the British. Moreover, at around the same time as the attack on Lari another Mau Mau gang had seriously embarrassed the security forces at Naivasha, where they mounted a brave and well-planned assault upon the local police post. The Naivasha raid was organized by the thirty-three-year-old Mbaria wa Kanui, a Mau Mau leader who operated mainly in the Kinangop.²⁹ The purpose of the raid was to acquire weapons and ammunition from the armoury at the police barracks. It was staggeringly successful. Using a stolen truck to break down the gates of the post, Kanui's gang, some seventy strong, stormed into the compound and opened fire on the unsuspecting garrison. Armed with only a few precision weapons, but including at least one Sten gun, the raiders killed one African policeman and wounded several others. The remainder of the garrison fled in terror. On breaching the armoury, the raiders seized eighteen automatic weapons and twenty-nine rifles, and as much ammunition as they could carry. Another contingent broke open the gates of the detention camp adjacent to the barracks, liberating some 170 prisoners, among their number several people being held for questioning in connection with the murders of European settlers in the Kinangop area.

Naivasha lay on the floor of the Rift Valley, some 3000 feet below Lari but less than 30 miles away. As the raiders fled northwards, with four platoons of the Lancashire Fusiliers in hot pursuit, they climbed up

the escarpment and passed close to the still burning homesteads in Lari sub-location. The coincident timing of the two attacks, and their geographical proximity, added greatly to the confusion of the security forces on the night of 26 March. By the early hours of the morning, the British soldiers pursuing the Naivasha attackers were running into the Home Guard and police patrols from Lari, and there were several incidents of 'friendly fire'. Boastful Mau Mau commanders would later claim that this double blow had been purposefully coordinated to cause maximum impact. The evidence from Lari suggests that this could not have been so. The slaughter at Lari was entirely contingent upon local conditions, and would not have taken place at all on 26 March had the soldiers not been withdrawn from the vicinity the previous day. For once, the Mau Mau units had enjoyed a significant stroke of luck. The combined impact of the two events severely rocked British confidence, and the confidence of their African allies."

Within a few days all of Kikuyuland knew the stories of what had happened at Lari and at Naivasha. The tales grew in the telling, with exaggerated claims of the scale of Mau Mau's Naivasha success and elaborate rumours of atrocity and barbarity on both sides at Lari. As the implications of these dreadful events dawned upon the population, the war became a more brutal and retaliatory affair than it had been before. After many months of murdering vulnerable white settlers and assassinating African collaborators in isolated but brutal moments of violence, Mau Mau had now shown itself to be a ruthless and coordinated military movement capable of operations on a far grander scale. The intensification of violence by the security forces now seemed more acceptable, as an angry but understandable response to the horror of Lari. The Home Guard, in particular, were encouraged to treat Mau Mau as Mau Mau had treated them. At this point, even the Kenya press briefly set aside its usual coyness in describing the circumstances in which Mau Mau suspects were killed, as if to emphasize the point that vengeance was merited and was being taken. The shooting of a gang of twenty-one terrorists by a Home Guard patrol in an area north of Lari — all killed and no prisoners taken — was reported in the *East African Standard*, on 3 April, for example, with the simple explanation: 'It is believed that the Home Guards' attack was a spontaneous act of retaliation against known suspects who have caused mischief in the district.'" The next night, twenty-seven more alleged Mau Mau were killed in similar circumstances, again reported as a simple matter of fact in the press." These killings appeared to amount to little more than political assassinations, not dissimilar from those carried out by Mau Mau. The loyalists of the Home Guard had learned a lesson from Lari: they were no longer prepared to wait for Mau Mau to attack them: and in the dark mood of

recrimination, no one was any longer taking prisoners. Nothing in central Kenya could ever be quite the same again.

For weeks after the attack, Lari was a place of intense conflict and bitter grievance. Seeing the pressing need to restore confidence among the Kikuyu loyalists, the colonial authorities were determined to bring prosecutions against those accused of participating in the massacre. This required the gathering of evidence, and especially the recording of witness testimonies from those who had survived the attacks, many of them grievously injured. It was a protracted and gruelling process. After the attacks the survivors had been directed to the police post at Uplands, where they were given shelter in the makeshift tented camp to the rear of the station and adjacent to the jail. The most seriously injured were moved to St George's Hospital in Kiambu township. Others were treated at Uplands. The medical staff were overwhelmed. One senior doctor, who had been in London during the Blitz, told reporters, 'This is just like the war.' No one in Kenya had been prepared for a disaster on this scale. While the doctors did the best they could to save the wounded, the dead were taken to the small, bleak mortuary at Uplands. When this was full to overflowing, other mortuaries, at Tigoni and Escarpment, had to be used. The mortuary buildings were primitive, to say the least, and even in the best of times there was little in the way of refinement or respect for the dead — and these were far from the best of times. The bodies reached the mortuaries on the backs of lorries and in cars, sometimes wrapped in blankets, sometimes heaped into gunny bags. Some had body parts missing, and very few of the corpses were labelled. If relatives accompanied the body, then identification could be established, but more often than not the corpse was given a number, not a name. Relatives who later came to seek the bodies of their loved ones must have found the scene difficult to bear. We have no first-hand description of the mortuary from these few horrific days, but the British military intelligence officer Frank Kitson did write about his visit to the Tigoni mortuary a few months after the Lari massacre, when conditions must have been a good deal better. His account is harrowing, all the same:

From the outside the mortuary looked inoffensive, so I was not prepared for what I saw when I opened the door. The shambles inside was past all describing. There had been a number of actions recently and altogether there must have been eighteen bodies in a place the size of a small summer house ... Some of them had been there for five days and were partially decomposed. They were all lying around tangled up on the floor as there were no slabs in the Tigoni charnel house."

There was to be no dignity in death for the Lari victims. It was not until four days after the massacres that the last of the bodies from Lari was finally collected and deposited at the mortuary in Uplands. By then, the dogs, hyenas, crows and vultures had all had their share.

In the aftermath of the attack, most of the survivors had fled to the police post at Uplands. There the families of Makimei, Samson Kariuki, Paulo and the other Home Guard commanders crowded into cramped temporary accommodation. Some of them would remain there for the next three years, living under constant police protection. The less seriously injured victims had their wounds treated here, and began to tell the stories of their ordeal. Next to the police compound, and within view of these shocked and still terrified survivors, a large enclosure had been hurriedly constructed from fence poles and barbed wire to hold the suspects rounded up in the hours following the massacre. By the evening of 27 March this enclosure already held 1500 men, and over the next few days the number rose to above 2000. Virtually every male resident of Lari sub-location who could be found, and who was not a member of the Home Guard or otherwise known to be an active loyalist, was taken into custody. Many of these men were badly beaten and abused by the Home Guard who arrested them, and this rough and ready treatment continued in the camp. Those arrested were not properly warned of their rights, and only a few were even questioned about their whereabouts at the time of the attack. Nor were the homes of these suspects searched for evidence — there was no collection of weapons, and no searches for blood-stained clothing or other clues, for example. This meant that the police were more or less compelled to rely upon a combination of identification evidence and confessional statements if they were to secure convictions. Before the police even began formal interrogations in the camp, on the second day after the massacre, Makimei and his senior headmen had already questioned some of the detained men, and had begun to compile their own lists of suspects from the evidence of the survivors. The figure of Chief Makimei loomed ominously over these proceedings, as he prowled the camp, at one moment seizing men for interrogation, at another moment pressing the survivors to recall the names of anyone they might have recognized. There were undoubtedly leading questions asked, and plenty of opportunities for collusion between the witnesses. As Makimei assembled his lists of names, it was often unclear who had first provided the name, or what exactly the person was to be accused of doing; but once a name was on the list, the interrogations began in earnest. Makimei's Home Guard began by beating the suspect, to encourage him to confess. Some of those in the camp would later claim that several suspects were beaten to death. The violence was unquestionably severe. When finally delivered into the hands

of the police for 'formal' questioning, the suspects were already in a sorry state. For police officers professionally trained in the systematic collection of evidence, this was a chaotic shambles, in which the truth was obscured by a burning desire for vengeance and retribution.

The vast majority of the men caught in the round-up would spend a month or more in the ramshackle detention camp at Uplands, herded like cattle into the open compound, with no shelter, inadequate latrines and no proper food. Even as the police interrogations began, on 27 March, no one had thought to compile an inventory of the names of those held. They were simply referred to, anonymously and collectively, as 'suspects'. The police investigation was itself poorly organized, and in the early stages it was undoubtedly led very deliberately by the Home Guard, who essentially identified those for questioning and provided a catalogue of accusations. Inspector Aubrey was put in charge of the police operation, but at various times two other senior officers, Poppy and Baker, took command. As the police stumbled through the fog of confusion in the Uplands camp, it was inevitable that they would come to rely upon Makimei as their guiding influence. The officers who began the task of interviewing and recording statements faced a number of challenges. Few of the suspects spoke good English and some had no Swahili. Translators had to be found urgently. There were few volunteers. Kikuyu-speakers who had adequate levels of English or Swahili were dragooned as interpreters wherever they could be found — a local worker with the forestry department, a clerk from the Kirenga grocery store, any person who had mission education and was literate. Again, inevitably, such folk were mainly drawn from the friends and families of the Lari Home Guard. These people approached the task with their own prejudices and opinions, and they were inexperienced in the work and untrained. Mistakes were made; the results were sometimes dismal; and the queue of suspects waiting to be interviewed seemed never-ending.

In frustration, European officers quickly resorted to crude methods, taking the lists of suspects provided by Makimei and working through these people first, in the hope of getting clues to the identity of other attackers. The individuals Makimei selected were brought to the tents near the camp entrance, or into the offices of the adjacent police station for interrogation. Richmond Dauncey, a solicitor, joined the CID at Uplands on 11 April to take sworn statements from the accused as they were charged. He was far from comfortable with his duties. 'In the very early days I considered the witnesses from whom I took statements were bewildered and angry,' he would later tell the court. 'We had to take special care to avoid inaccuracies due to emotion. Later they improved and we did not have to probe things out of them ... When I arrived

even on r i April I sensed that their minds were still shocked, which was not the case, say, one month later.'³⁴

To speed up the task, groups of suspects were loaded into lorries and taken to other police posts at Escarpment, Limuru and Kiambu. Others were taken further still. One group of prisoners who were suspected of deeper involvement in Mau Mau were sent to Kampi ya Simba, a notorious British interrogation centre on a farm in the Laikipia district. There, according to district officer Terence Gavaghan, they were 'severely mistreated by security forces'. The men were later briefly transferred into Gavaghan's care. Still outraged by events at Lari, Gavaghan later admitted that he 'made the mistake of having horrific published pictures of Mau Mau brutalities pinned inside the lorries carrying them', so that they could look at the results of their evil deeds." That violence was used against those being questioned is undeniable, and was repeatedly acknowledged in the evidence given before the courts as the Lari accused came to trial. Acting Justice Cram was also brought to Uplands in the weeks following the massacre, in his capacity as magistrate, to attest the extra-judicial statements made by the suspects. Again and again Cram acknowledged in his reports that suspects had been beaten or mistreated whilst in custody. With his usual scrupulous honesty Cram did his level best to establish that the statements that he then attested were freely made. But it was a dirty business.

Over the weeks following the massacre, more than 300 suspects would eventually make extra-judicial statements that amounted to confessions of guilt. The investigating officers knew that such statements were unlikely to be sufficient on their own to satisfy the courts. Firm evidence of identification would be needed in corroboration if convictions were to be secured. The Lari survivors were the key witnesses and they became crucial in the construction of the prosecution case. Within a few days of the massacre the police had conducted interviews at St George's Hospital with those who were well enough to speak. The women survivors from Lari, including the wives of Luka and Samson Kariuki, and younger girls from other homesteads, were all placed in a ward together at St George's. There, still traumatized by what had happened to them, these women were interviewed repeatedly by police officers who were keen to establish the identity of the attackers. What did the women remember? Had they recognized anyone? If they had not seen the faces, then perhaps some had worn distinctive clothing? The interviews were conducted at the bedsides of the victims, in the open ward and in full hearing of the other patients. The process was difficult for the police and distressing for the survivors. One of the senior police officers involved, John Baker, later recalled the interview with Luka's wife, Mbura: 'She was not too well,' said Baker. 'She had been cut about. She needed a lot of prompting and

appeared to be fed-up with it [the questioning] towards the end.' Mburu's bed was next to that of another of Luka's wives, Gacheri, who was also interviewed at this time. She, too, gave evidence only reluctantly at first; but eventually, and after much prompting and cajoling, both women provided a list of names of those they believed they had recognized during the attack. There was a strong congruence to the lists they provided. All those they named were residents of Lari, and neighbours of the massacre victims.^o

As the injured women recovered sufficiently, they were brought back to Uplands to join their families and to take part in identification parades in the camp. These parades were unusual, to say the least. Hundreds of 'suspects' would be made to stand in lines within the camp, while the women were led slowly up and down the rows. In one such parade Mujiri, Samson Kariuki's wife, picked out more than twenty men whom she accused of having murdered her children. In another parade, Luka's wife Gacheri selected fifteen men from among more than a hundred who were about to be released, accusing them of having participated in the slaughter in her homestead on the night of 26 March." Could these women really have had such a clear memory of the traumatic events of the massacre? Had the flames of the burning huts provided sufficient light to positively identify so many people among the attackers? Or had they sought vengeance by singling out their known enemies, and the known enemies of Luka and Makimei, for prosecution? The power of suggestion, collusion between witnesses, and the simple desire to punish might all have played a part in the identification of likely culprits. These would be questions for the courts to consider, but the combination of identification of this kind and a corroborating confessional statement would be all that was needed to send a man to the gallows.

By mid-April, after nearly three weeks of investigations, the police had compiled a picture of what they thought had happened at Lari. Their unpalatable conclusion was that the massacre had not been solely the work of a 'fanatical Mau Mau forest gang', but had been perpetrated in very large part by the neighbours of the victims. It seemed that part of Lari's population had fallen upon the other part. There was evidence that local Mau Mau supporters had been directed in the organization of the massacre by a small number of 'strangers'. These men may have been former squatters from the Rift Valley, but they came to Lari from the Aberdares forest, where they were active members of Mau Mau's forest gangs. These 'strangers' had infiltrated Lari in the weeks leading up to the attack, organizing meetings of Mau Mau supporters at which targets were identified and roles assigned. The assailants had then patiently waited for the departure of the soldiers of the KAR before launching their murderous attack. The slaughter had indeed been deliberate and

well planned. The round-up of suspects immediately following the massacre had caught many people who were part of the gangs who had attacked the homesteads of the Home Guard that fateful night, but the handful of 'strangers' were not among those detained. They had already fled back to the sanctuary of the Aberdares forest. The very nature of the investigation of the massacre made it more likely that those apprehended and accused of the crime would be persons known to the victims. These were the people named on the lists compiled by Makimei and his headmen, and these were the people singled out in the identification parades. Over the next six months, some 400 of the suspects would face murder charges, in a total of nineteen capital trials.

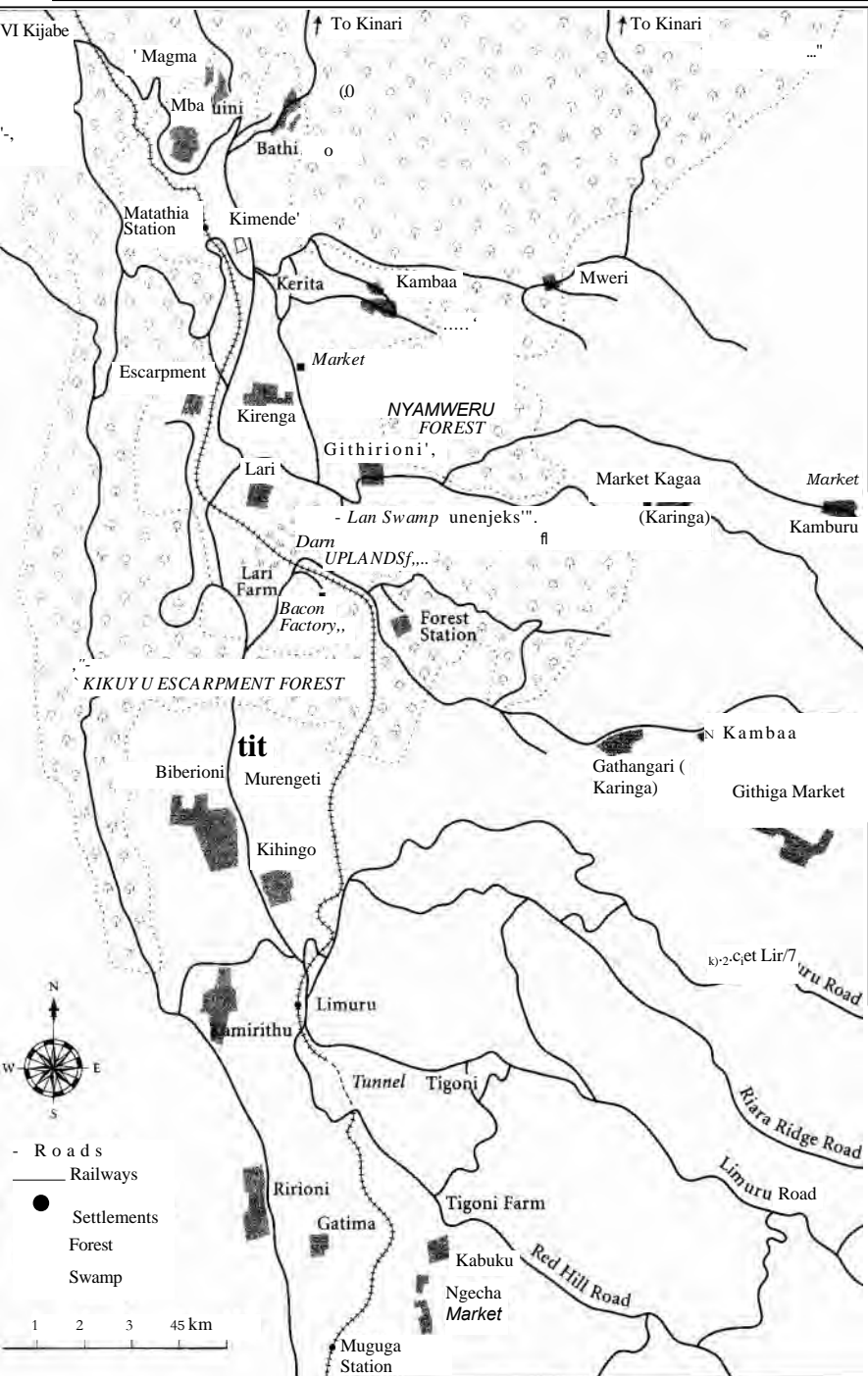
Before we follow this disturbing story into the courtroom, it is necessary to ask the question why this should have happened at Lari? The answer lies in the history of Lari's settlement, and of land disputes involving the various families brought to the area from Tigoni. Other writers have suggested that this prior history marks Lari as an exceptional event, prompted not so much by the Mau Mau war as by other, more deeply rooted historical currents. Those historical currents undoubtedly flowed strongly at Lari, but to suggest they were unconnected to Mau Mau is entirely misleading. The Lari massacre had *everything* to do with the Mau Mau struggle, and it was the history of Lari's land dispute that made the place, and its factional politics, the focus of such an intense and bitter struggle. Like Olenguruone in the history of squatter militancy, Lari had long been symbolic of resistance for those in the Kikuyu Reserves who campaigned against the expropriation of lands by the wealthy and the evictions of the poor. The deeper history of Lari's tragedy therefore has a great deal to tell us about the character and motive of the Mau Mau war.

A Deeper History

No doubt on platforms and in reports we declare we have no intention of depriving natives of their lands, but this has never prevented us from taking whatever land we want ...

Sir Charles Eliot, April 1904 (High Commissioner, British East Africa)

The deeper history of the massacre takes us some 20 miles to the south-east of Lari, to Tigoni, and back in time nearly half a century. Here, in April 1906, Italian Catholic missionaries took over a white farm and set up a church for local Africans. They occupied two plots, 1500 acres in extent, located in the midst of the White Highlands, surrounded on all sides by European-owned farms.^o This part of Kiambu was already



Map 4.i Kiambu District, showing Lari and Tigoni, c.1952

crowded with Kikuyu cultivators when the Europeans arrived to peg out their claims. Over time, these Kikuyu were gradually dispossessed, some retreating into what would become the Kikuyu 'Native Reserve' to the north, others becoming squatters and remaining on the land to work for the Europeans, others still migrating to the Rift Valley to work on European land there. Amid this prolonged turmoil, the land taken by the Catholic mission became a safe haven of relative stability and prosperity for its Kikuyu residents. The missionaries wanted Christian converts, not cheap labourers; and they seemed not to care how many Africans crowded onto the land belonging to their church." By 1911 ten Kikuyu *mbaris* were living at Tigoni. The leading spokesman for this prosperous, industrious, conservative and largely Catholic Kikuyu community at Tigoni was Luka Wakahangare.

Signs of trouble ahead first became apparent in 1915, when the white settlers living around Tigoni asked the government to remove the Italian mission and evict the Africans living there. They wanted the plot to build a social club and other facilities for the local European community. The land was considered too valuable to be left 'in the hands of natives'.^{4°} Over the next ten years or so, the Tigoni Kikuyu slowly gathered political support against the threatened evictions. The Catholic fathers ensured that the claims of the ten *mbari* at Tigoni were included in a register of Kikuyu land claims in Kiambu compiled in 1921, and Luka publicized the fears of his people to the Kikuyu Association and the Kikuyu Central Association. By the mid-1920s Tigoni had become a symbol of resistance against further land alienation.

Faced with dissent, the government sought to placate its critics. In 1924, when the Chief Native Commissioner toured southern Kiambu, he reassured the 'loyal' Kikuyu at Tigoni that there would be no further alienations. But these were weasel words: only two years later, surveyors arrived at Tigoni armed with theodolites, pegs and tape measures, to prepare for the sale of commercial plots in the new Tigoni township. When the alarmed *mbari* heads demanded an explanation, they were curtly informed that Tigoni was not a *new* alienation at all, having been first surveyed as a farm in 1906: the statement of 1924 gave them no protection. The Tigoni Kikuyu were learning not to trust the government's words.

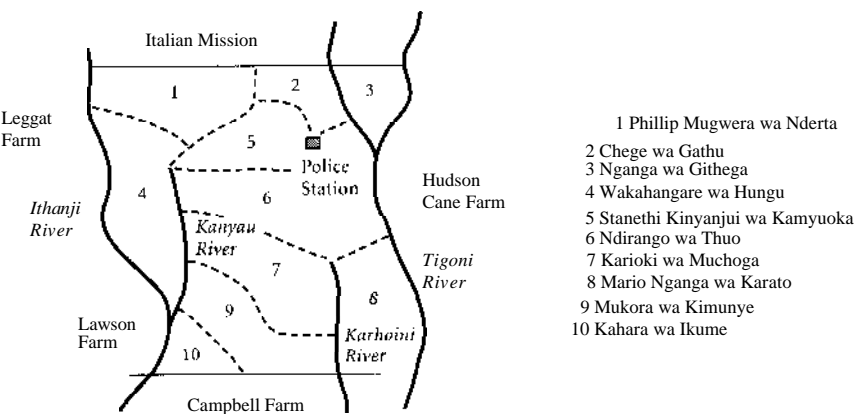
In the struggle to remain at Tigoni, the Kikuyu now found an unlikely ally. The Kiambu District Officer, Lydekker, had got to know the Tigoni people well. He considered them loyal, industrious and devout Christians. In January 1927 he set about encouraging the Tigoni Kikuyu in their own defence. Father Seraglio, the head of the Italian mission, organized a collection of sworn affidavits from the *mbari* heads, along with lists of the senior residents and their property. Other testimonies

were found on the files. Once assembled, these were typed up in Lydekker's office, and copies forwarded to Nairobi.⁴¹

From these documents we learn a great deal about the people at Tigoni.⁴² There were some 129 dwellings on the land in 1927, and though Lydekker guessed that only 20 per cent of the area was under cultivation, the rest of the land was given over to goat grazing. Settlement was dense, and the use of the land intensive. Each of the *mbari* heads explained that they had been living on the land before the Europeans came. Nganga Githanga was among those who was born at Tigoni 'before the 1898 famine'; he was able to describe negotiations with the first Italian missionaries." Some complained that the Italians had taken land from them to establish the church." Others told of how they had previously 'bought' the land from the forest-dwelling Nderobo people, giving details of the transactions." Among the testimonies is one from the young Luka Wakahangare, who had been born at Tigoni. He made the statement on behalf of his elderly father. Luka was in effect already the family head, presiding over some fourteen separate households comprising the *mbari*.

Regardless of their respective size, each of the ten *mbaris* was adamant that their rights at Tigoni were recognized in Kikuyu law *asgithaka*.⁴⁶ The distinction between *githaka-holders* and their tenants was to be crucial. Tigoni's residents numbered perhaps 600 by the late 1920s, around half being the direct descendants of the ten *mbaris* who claimed to have originally cleared and settled the land, and the other half being tenants. Under Kikuyu custom, the direct descendants of the original *mbaris* enjoyed the status of *githaka*. This meant they had inheritable rights that were unalienable. The tenants, on the other hand, who were collectively known as *muhoi*, did not enjoy these customary rights. Community consensus and social morality played an important role in protecting *muhoi*. 'None of us could sell any of this land without the consent of others,' stressed Wachuiru Kabatha, when commenting on the threatened evictions in 1926.⁴⁷ In the minds of the Kikuyu, *muhoi* were not a category whose rights could be collectively denied, but rather they were individuals who had negotiated their status and position within the *mbari*.

Kenya's colonial officials had no time to grapple with the labyrinthine network of relationships this implied. They sought to use the basic principles of Kikuyu custom to define who had rights in land and who did not. This led to a gross simplification of the position that worked to the grave disadvantage of the *muhoi* at Tigoni. The government thought that *githaka* holders had recognized rights that should be respected and compensated; *muhoi* had no such rights, and could be evicted at will and without compensation. At Tigoni, the 'protection of native rights' would therefore only apply to around half the residents.⁴⁸



Map 4.ii Tigon Township Reserve, c.1929, showing Kikuyu *githakas*

The Kikuyu were aware of the implications of this. Some senior elders utterly rejected the idea. Others, led by Luka, took a more pragmatic view, fearing that resistance might ultimately jeopardize the rights of *githaka*-holders to compensation. If evictions were to happen, then all wanted the best possible outcome for themselves and their families. In October 1927 Lydekker reported that Luka was 'willing to consider an exchange of land, provided that the new land were equal in every respect, acreage, fertility and most especially water supply, to their *githakas* on Tigon'. Given Tigon's exceptionally favourable location, this would be a tall order, but a search was begun to find land to which the Tigon people could be moved. In May 1928, Luka and other Tigon elders made their first visit to Lari.⁴⁹

It was Lydekker's successor as Kiambu's District Commissioner, the clever and determined Sidney Fazan, who finally brought matters to a head. A graduate of Christ Church, Oxford, Fazan was among the more academically inclined of Kenya's colonial officers. Diligent, serious and scholarly, he had little time for colleagues who refused to grapple with the complexities of African life. His copious reports on the social and political life of Kenya's African communities litter the archival record from the 1910s to the 1940s. At the time his influence upon government policy was probably greater than any other official. For Fazan, the devil was always in the detail; and he relished it all. His industry earned him an OBE in 1930, at the tender age of forty-two, awarded while he was stationed at Kiambu, still only a humble district commissioner.' In terms of colonial policy, Fazan was a conservative modernizer: though he was a keen protector of 'native interest', this meant pragmatic politics, not the preservation of bygone ways; and pragmatic politics in Kenya must

necessarily incorporate the European settlers, whose rights in the White Highlands Fazan resolutely defended. On returning to Kenya after wartime service, in 1948, Sidney Fazan settled among those European farmers with his second wife. Ironically enough, he would choose to make his Kenyan home at Tigoni.

Fazan was to have a decisive influence over the fate of Luka and his followers. By the time he arrived at Kiambu, in 1929, Fazan was Kenya's acknowledged authority on African land tenure. In May 1929 Fazan produced his first report on Kikuyu land issues." He was then nominated to serve on a committee on Kikuyu land tenure, under the chairmanship of G. V. Maxwell, the Chief Native Commissioner, and alongside Louis Leakey. Among the main recommendations of this enquiry was the recognition of *githaka* claims, the establishment of a register of claims, and the setting of limits to the rights of tenants within the *githaka* system.

In a minority report, Fazan went further, arguing for the recognition of title on small holdings — amounting to the beginnings of an economic land market within the African reserves. Maxwell and Leakey disapproved of this. Like most Europeans, they held firmly to the belief that Africans wanted no truck with private property, and that the tradition of communal ownership should be protected against those few individuals who might want to line their own pockets by acquiring rights to the disadvantage of their fellows.

Fazan had no time for this bucolic view of African society. Small-holdings were already being bought and sold among Kikuyu, Fazan claimed, and he cited examples. This was the product of demographic pressure and the closing of the frontier: Kikuyu practice was already modifying in response to the changed circumstances, most clearly in Kiambu. The trend towards individual tenure on holdings of decreasing size would inevitably mean that *githaka-holders* would become ever more reluctant to admit tenants, Fazan argued. Evictions were already being reported from some *githakas*. 'I am far from suggesting that these developments are bad in themselves,' wrote Fazan; 'they are the natural result of economic progress.'

Fazan now put this thinking into practice in his handling of the Tigoni problem, with a typical piece of pragmatic politics. In May 1930 he summoned the representatives of each of the ten Tigoni *mbaris* to a meeting. There, he proposed that they be given 1.5 acres at Lari for every acre given up at Tigoni, plus compensation in cash for all dwelling huts, planted trees and fencing. It was a tempting offer, and the elders retired to consider their position. Some felt that they might get 2 acres if they bargained harder, but when they returned to make the counterbid they found Fazan was unwilling to budge: 1.5 acres was a fair exchange, he argued, and they could expect nothing more. The impli-

cation was that the government had reached the end of the rope: it was Lari at 1.5 acres, or nothing. The elders retired again to chew things over. When they returned they were divided into two camps. Of the ten *mbaris*, a group of six, led by Luka, now expressed themselves willing to accept Fazan's offer, while the remaining four would not agree to the proposed move unless they received 2 acres for every one given up."

Before Fazan could push ahead with the move, it was announced from London that there was to be a wider commission of enquiry into African land requirements over the whole colony. Everything came to a halt. When the commission came out to Kenya, in 1932, Fazan was appointed as its secretary. His views shaped the deliberations of the commission at every stage, from the writing of a precis on each 'problem area', to the drafting of conclusions and recommendations. The Land Commission did not bring the Kikuyu any satisfaction. Luka Wakahangare and other elders from Tigoni dutifully paraded before the commissioners. All made a passionate case for being allowed to remain at Tigoni, carefully setting out the history of their settlement and demonstrating the extent and character of their occupation. It was all to no avail.

The Land Commission was the great missed opportunity of Kenya's colonial history. It was clear by the early 1930s that Kenya's Africans needed more good land than they had been left by the alienation of the White Highlands. The land commissioners accepted this in principle, but saw the solution to lie in improved African land husbandry, not in the restoration of the lost lands. Aside from a few thousand acres awarded in order to resettle peoples such as those at Tigoni, Kenya's Africans would simply have to make the best of what they had. The commission confirmed white ownership of the Highlands as inviolate and insisted that Africans must adapt to their changed circumstances. Fazan's 'economic progress' demanded that they must, and forcing changes to African land tenure seemed as good a way as any of bringing about this 'progress' more rapidly. The commission decided that all the 'islands' of Kikuyu settlement within the Highlands, including Tigoni, should be evicted, and those displaced should be resettled on lands to be added to the Kikuyu Native Reserve on its fringes.⁵⁴ The Tigoni people were to move to Lari after all.

Kenya's colonial officials smugly thought that the Kikuyu would soon 'come to appreciate' the wisdom of the judgments that had been made by the land commissioners. They were wrong. While their political leaders sent petitions of protest to London, resistance to the evictions now became *the* political issue of the day. Complaints about the proposals flooded in. Previously compliant chiefs, including Koinange, now became uncooperative." In May of 1936. the Central Province

Commissioner, La Fontaine, decided to tackle the grumbling head-on, and summoned a meeting. Old Koinange, Waruhiu and Luka were among those present. La Fontaine encouraged them 'to speak their thoughts and feelings freely'; and for over three hours they did just that. La Fontaine was taken aback by what he heard. In a long report written to the Chief Secretary in Nairobi the Provincial Commissioner began with humility: 'I am compelled to admit that the opinion which I held and expressed last year, that the settlement by the Land Commission had given general satisfaction to the Kikuyu and that any dissatisfaction expressed was merely the vagaries of individual agitators, requires considerable modification. It has not satisfied the Kikuyu of Kiambu district, and the dissatisfaction is deep and widespread.' Koinange and other leading chiefs felt the situation 'to be very serious.'" The 'compensation' offered by the Land Commission was 'woefully inadequate'; the land offered by the commission was of inferior quality; it was inaccessible and distant from markets. Kikuyu wanted title deeds, so that they could own land in the same way as Europeans.

If these views of the chiefly landed elite appeared to give sanction to Fazan's arguments for a market in African land, the concerns they expressed over what would be done with the tenants who would be rendered landless in the process got to the real nub of the problem. Fazan's vision of 'economic progress', endorsed by the Land Commission, was going to create a huge landless class. It was not clear to the chiefs how they would handle this, nor what its consequences might be. Their obvious anxiety alarmed La Fontaine, who now urged the government to look again at the problem, 'otherwise it might easily burst into a flame and have irrevocable results'.⁵⁷

He was not the only official getting nervy. E. B. Hosking wrote at length to defend the Kikuyu's claims. Kikuyuland was overcrowded, stated Hosking, and there was nothing to blame but British land policy, 'or the lack of it'.

I cannot stress too strongly the need for immediate action and for generous treatment of the Kikuyu [wrote Hosking], even if it entails the expenditure of a considerable sum of money. Apart from any question of justice, we cannot afford politically to leave a numerous and powerful tribe with a feeling of resentment and antipathy. We have not given the Kikuyu a square deal, and we are no longer in a position where we can retrieve all the mistakes we have made ... It is important to appreciate that it is no longer the Kikuyu agitators, who for political purposes or their own glorification are stirring up the natives, but that it is the responsible representatives of the tribe who are pressing for a settlement of the Kikuyu grievances.'

The only answer was to give the Kikuyu more land; and that meant restoring at least some of the lands taken by Europeans.

It was not a solution Fazan was prepared to entertain. The Kikuyu could not turn the clock back: they would be allowed a market in land, but *only* on the land assigned to them. In no circumstances could land be reallocated on the basis of historic claims. To do so would 'end not only in embitterment between groups ... but also in a clamour for more land'.⁵⁹ Both officials thus predicted future conflict — La Fontaine suggesting it was likely if outstanding claims were not acknowledged, Fazan arguing that it would occur only if they were. The salient difference was that La Fontaine saw the pressing needs of the Kikuyu landless, whose dissent might ultimately undermine the authority of the chiefs, while Fazan trusted in the chiefs to win the argument and contain the problem. Events would prove La Fontaine the wiser.

Luka Wakahangare had been amongst the more outspoken elders gathered in La Fontaine's office.' Like Koinange, Waruhiu and other Kiambu elders, Luka was aware of his responsibilities to those *muhoi* under his patronage. But he also knew that his first duty lay with his *githaka*; and if it came to a choice between the two, then it would be the *muhoi* who would suffer.' In fact, by the time of the meeting at La Fontaine's office, Luka had already grasped this nettle. In defiance of those Tigoni *mbaris* who still opposed the move, he had visited Lari in November 1935, with Koinange and two British officials, to mark out the boundaries of the land to be resettled.' It was an act of capitulation and betrayal for which some Kikuyu would never forgive him. The Tigoni people were now split right down the middle. The seeds of the Lari massacre had been sown.

It would be another five years before the move to Lari finally began, in 1940. Delays ensued as efforts were made to persuade the four recalcitrant *mbaris* to belatedly accept the offer. One *mbari*, that of Kararu Ikumo, comprising five households, managed to negotiate compensatory land at Muguga, and moved there instead. Though one or two families capitulated and accepted land at Lari, the bulk of the households in the Kimotho, Muchuga and Waikanya *mbaris* held firm. These forty or so families 'passively resisted all the orders of government' at Tigoni over the next few years, and swore an oath against ever settling at Lari.⁶³ While these families held out, Luka and his followers began to move to Lari, selecting the best of the available land for themselves. As time went by, the dissenters faced an increasingly unattractive choice. Resentment against Luka deepened. Finally, in 1949, eviction orders were issued against those remaining at Tigoni. A few now agreed to accept the Lari offer, and their possessions were taken north. Those remaining — some thirty-five families — were removed from their land by a contingent of

armed police, and then watched as their Tigoni homes were put to the torch.⁶⁴

The struggle of the dissenting *mbaris* told only part of the story of dispossession at Tigoni. Within those *mbaris* who agreed to the move there were many tenants who were not given land at Lari. Some of these people moved away from Tigoni to seek land elsewhere, often with other kin. Many more drifted into the wage-labour market around Limuru and Uplands. Others reluctantly went to Lari with Luka and his followers, where they settled in the trading centres or in the compounds of friends. They would have no land, but they would work for others as casual labourers. Their loss of status was a humiliation that became a lasting grievance.

If this pool of bitterness were not deep enough, there was further disquiet, even among those who had willingly gone to Lari, over the manner in which the land at the new resettlement area was allocated. Following the publication of the report of the Land Commission, a sub-committee of the Kiambu Local Native Council (LNC) had been formed in October 1935 to oversee all land allocations connected with resettlement.⁶⁵ Koinange served on this sub-committee, in his capacity as ex-paramount chief, alongside Divisional Chiefs Waruhiu and Josiah Njonjo, and Locational Chiefs Kioi and Luka. The job of this little group was to adjudicate upon which family should get which plot of land. This was a tricky business, in which European officers were disinclined to become embroiled. It was decided that 'custom should prevail'. The sub-committee was therefore left to its own devices, taking decisions as best it could, visiting the resettlement sites to hear the claims of various parties, and pacing out plots on the ground. They had no surveyor to assist them, but instead relied upon the limited plane-tabling skills of the LNC clerk, John Ngotho, to mark out and map the plots. For such an important matter, these were haphazard arrangements, to say the least. Disputes were inevitable, and every resettlement area was soon the subject of rancorous quarrels, amid accusations of the sub-committee's incompetence and rumours of favouritism, bias and corruption."

Among the many letters in the archival files from this period alleging 'shady' dealings over resettlement, one of the earliest is of particular interest. It dates from January 1935, just a few months after the publication of the Land Commission report, and its author was none other than Chief Philip James Karanja, who would later that year become clerk to the Kiambu land allocations sub-committee. A senior elder of the Church of Scotland and a chief of the 'old guard', the Presbyterian Karanja was a man of high principle. He wrote to the government to appeal that land should be given to *muboi* about to be evicted from a European farm. To emphasize the plight of such people, Karanja raised the case of Ndeiya,

an area designated for resettlement by the Land Commission. 'The state and conditions of Ndeiya are not yet laid down properly,' wrote Karanja in his rather halting English, 'For these reasons':

The rich people who have large areas of land in the Reserve have also better *shambas* [farms] there [at Ndeiya]. This is to prevent the poor people who got no land in the Reserve from getting place to live there. If it is possible the owners of lands in reserve should not get *shambas* at Ndeiya. This will give a chance to the poor to get *shambas* and live without trouble in the future. There are some who have already fenced very large areas and kept them for their own reserves. This is also another way of preventing others from getting *shambas*. I know that if those who got large *shambas* at Ndeiya hear of what I am talking about would be very angry on me, but I would not mind that. It is better to help the poor rather than to help the rich men.⁶⁷

Karanja was telling the District Commissioner that wealthy and influential Kikuyu *githaka* holders were already involved in a land-grab, carving up the resettlement areas among themselves in an effort to block the claims of others.

Though British officials were aware of these dangers from as early as 1935, they left it to the chiefs." The members of the committee became brokers, portioning out responsibilities between themselves, visiting resettlement schemes on an ad hoc basis and adjudicating disputes 'on the hoof'. Luka was therefore allowed oversight of decisions at Lari with little, if any, interference from his colleagues on the committee. The effect of this was to lessen the overall influence of Koinange and Karanja, who had fewer of their own people to resettle, and to expose Waruhiu, Josiah Njonjo, Kioi and Luka to the intense pressures of the multitudes for whom they were responsible. It was a system designed to fall prey to vested interests.

No colonial officer got around to looking closely at the process of land allocations until October 1943, when Wally Coutts finally became so irritated by the persistent complaints reaching his Kiambu office that he resolved to spend a few days at Ndeiya to see things for himself. When he got there he could scarcely find words to describe 'the scandalous state of affairs' that prevailed. Coutts discovered that only one in six of those settled at Ndeiya had a legitimate claim to land in the resettlement area. Around half the land was cultivated by people who did not live at Ndeiya at all, and a further 20 per cent was owned by only four *githaka*-holders, who included Chief Kioi himself. His clients and supporters, augmented by others from Josiah Njonjo's following, cultivated much of what remained of the Ndeiya land. As Karanja had warned, the allocations at

Ndeiya had been dominated by the rich and powerful, to the exclusion of the displaced Kikuyu for whom it was intended. Coutts did not mince his words in condemning the members of the allocations sub-committee for this state of affairs. When confronted by him they made no effort to disguise their activities. The means of acquiring a plot at Ndeiya 'was the offering of a fat bribe to the apportioners'. 'This was admitted freely by the members of the committee,' reported Coutts, 'and jokes were made about it.' One member of the committee unashamedly told Coutts that 'Ndeiya had been sold to the highest bidder'.⁶⁹

Each Kiambu resettlement area was subject to the deliberations of this same group of chiefs. Petitions, complaints and claims flooded into the district offices from every resettlement area." Lari was no exception. No report on the allocation of lands at Lari survives in the archive, so we cannot be sure; but the catalogue of complaints strongly suggests that Luka exploited the situation to enhance the interests of his own *mbari*.

John Mbugwa, of the *mbari ya* Kimothi, and Marius Ng'ang'a Karatu, of the *mbari ya* Muchogu, were Luka's sternest and most persistent critics at this time, both making claims that the chief had taken an excessive portion of land for himself and his clients." Mbugwa was the most vociferous supporter of the rights of *muhoi*, his own *mbari* having very large numbers of these dependents. He stayed at Tigoni until he was forcibly evicted. Even after his dispossession Mbugwa continued to send petitions to the government, demanding answers to an endless string of questions about the procedures surrounding land allocations at Lari. It was Mbugwa who won the admission from a somewhat ruffled District Commissioner that no record had ever been kept of the acreages allocated at Lari, as this was entirely in the hands of Luka.⁷² Karatu's motivation was to be found in the long-running dispute between his *mbari* and the Italian mission. He saw Luka as having dishonestly undermined his claims.⁷³ Luka had other critics besides. George Kimingi, an ex-squatter of the *mbari ya* Waikanya, who returned to Lari in 1948, was among many who alleged that Luka was guilty of having 'sold' land at Lari and allocated it to those who paid the highest price.⁷⁴ There was little doubt that old Chief Luka 'had done very well' out of the move to Lari.⁷⁵

None of the allegations made against Luka was ever investigated. None the less, it was widely accepted that his forced retirement from the chieftaincy, in June 1949, was intended as a gesture of reconciliation towards the many people who had lost faith in his leadership." At this point Luka's duties at Lari were transferred to Makimei Kuria, chief of the neighbouring location of Uplands. Once free from the burden of office, Luka became more outspoken against his opponents and critics — to the embarrassment of the British administration. In September 1949 he wrote angrily to the District Commissioner in protest at the suggestion

that a few remaining plots at Lari might be given to landless Kikuyu from elsewhere. Luka insisted that land should be given only to those who had come *with him* from Tigonu. The ex-chief blustered that no other solution would satisfy his people. He did not get his way. The District Commissioner wrote to tell him that his followers had 'already received their fair share of compensation'.⁷⁷ Many in Kiambu thought they had received far more than that.

Somewhere in the midst of these struggles it came to be widely believed that the land at Lari was cursed. Rumours of this began to circulate in the early 1940s, after Luka and the first families had relocated to their new farms at Lari. It was alleged that the land was claimed by other *mbaris*, and that their elders had placed a traditional and powerful curse upon anyone who took up residence there. In the later 1940s John Mbugwa cited the curse in defence of his own reluctance to go to Lari, stating that the curse would kill anyone who disobeyed.

In the Mau Mau war, those who had been involved in the corrupt distribution of lands in Kiambu would be called to account. The murder of Luka Wakahangare and his followers illustrated only too clearly how those who supported Mau Mau 'read' the deeper history of the Kikuyu people. Lari's tragedy was emblematic of the historic pattern of land alienation and dispossession that had driven the Kikuyu people into the Mau Mau revolt. The slaughter of women and children had its reason: it signified the denial of inheritance, a determination that those who had rejected their obligations toward dependents and subverted custom to claim land as property for themselves should not be allowed to benefit. It was a powerful message. And there could have been few in Kikuyuland who did not know precisely why ex-Chief Luka had been singled out.

Courtroom Dramas

Oliver Lyttelton visited Kenya again in May 1953 and was taken to see Lari for himself. There he met survivors and spoke with Chief Makime and other Home Guards. Lyttelton must surely have grasped the grim desperation of the struggle in these rural communities. He would later recall that he had never before 'felt the forces of evil to be so near and so strong as in Mau Mau'.⁷⁸ Back in the calm sanctuary of Government House, Lyttelton discussed the need for further legislative measures with Baring. Loyal Africans needed protection and if something were not done, Baring argued, Lari might dramatically lower morale among the government's African allies. Those wavering needed reassurance. Baring wanted to bring the Lari culprits speedily before the courts, see them convicted and take them to the gallows. Better justice through due

process than the retribution and vengeance of vendetta killings.

Some steps had already been taken. Within two weeks of Lari, and before Lyttelton's visit, the range of capital offences had been greatly extended. Kenya's judiciary had stubbornly resisted settler pressures to extend the death penalty, but in the wake of Lari even Whyatt gave way. Enactments issued between April and June 1953 made it a capital offence to administer or freely participate in the taking of a Mau Mau oath; to be known to be a member of a Mau Mau gang likely to carry out acts prejudicial to public order; to be in possession of any item of explosives, arms or ammunition; to consort with those likely to carry out acts prejudicial to public order; or to consort with persons whom it was reasonable to know were carrying arms or ammunition. The provisions to convict those 'consorting' had far-reaching implications. Anyone identified as having been with any Mau Mau group might now be hanged. Lyttelton had backed Baring's judgement. However, the new capital offences would hugely increase the number of cases coming before the Supreme Court, at a time when there was already a backlog of several hundred cases waiting to be heard. Officials in London had been very wary of the suggestion that Kenya should set up special courts, and before arriving in Nairobi Lyttelton had warned Baring that he would need to make a strong case if the legal changes were to get through.

Draft proposals for the creation of new Special Emergency Assize Courts had reached London in mid-April. The courts would have authority to hear only cases relating to Emergency Powers, clearing all Mau Mau cases out of the High Court. There would be no preliminary hearing — Mau Mau capital offences would come straight to the Special Assizes, removing them from the magistrates' courts altogether. The special courts would sit in Nairobi, Nakuru, Githunguri (in Kiambu), Thika, Nyeri, Nakuru and (latterly) Meru and Embu, so that cases could be heard in the localities where the offences had been committed. To staff these special assizes, several of Kenya's most experienced magistrates would be declared special acting judges, and given the full powers of a Supreme Court judge. Other judges might also be recruited from outside the colony. (In the event, two retired judges were brought in from London.) Special sittings of the appeal court would also be arranged, to prevent a build-up on death row. These changes were presented in neutral terms, with no suggestion that the accused would be in anyway disadvantaged.

Though Baring brusquely defended the proposals as a necessary 'gesture to public opinion', officials in London thought that any local advantage would be vastly outweighed by adverse response in Britain and internationally. There was a strong and growing lobby in Britain in

favour of the abolition of the death penalty, and there were sure to be questions asked in parliament about the nature of the Kenyan legislation. With this in mind, Lyttelton wrote on 28 April with instructions *not* to announce changes to legal procedures until London had agreed. After further pressure from Baring, Lyttelton wrote again on 7 May saying that he would support the proposals in principle, despite a number of serious worries. The threat of settler violence and Home Guard reprisals loomed large, with Baring giving the impression that Kenya was rushing towards mob rule. The colony's legal officers also stressed the tremendous strain on the legal system caused by the Lari massacre. Barclay Nihill, one of Kenya's most respected Supreme Court judges, warned that the whole legal system would collapse if there were to be another massacre on this scale. Baring reinforced the point by reporting rumours that other attacks were planned. This calculated brinkmanship nibbled away at the resolve of the anxious Lyttelton, who was reluctant to spike the guns of his Governor at a moment of real crisis.⁷⁹

Baring played upon the fact that the white highlanders were liable to take the law into their own hands. Officials in London were even alarmed by the 'liberal' settler leader Michael Blundell. When news of Lari broke, Blundell was in London and went at once to the Colonial Office. He demanded that the legal process be dramatically accelerated to get the culprits to the gallows as swiftly as possible. This could be achieved, he asserted, only if magistrates were given powers over emergency capital cases, if the appeal process was removed completely, and if the Governor reviewed the death penalty without reference to advice. Blundell presented these as the views of liberal, fair-minded settlers.' Meanwhile, his settler colleagues back in Nairobi had asked Baring for executions without appeal and within twenty-four hours of conviction." Roberts-Wray, the senior legal adviser to the Colonial Office, was outraged. Blundell argued that these measures would 'result in expeditious justice'; Roberts-Wray thought it more likely to lead to 'expeditious injustice'. 'He [Blundell] thinks in the present circumstances it would be better to hang an innocent African occasionally than to tolerate protracted legal proceedings,' commented Roberts-Wray. 'I cannot agree. I must adhere to the principle upon which I have been brought up, that it is better for io guilty men to go free than for one innocent man to be condemned.'"

The worst of the settler demands would be resisted by London. It was more difficult to dismiss the considered views of the Governor. Blundell's 'liberal' belligerence was echoed in Baring's dire warnings of settler reaction. On 11 May, just prior to Lyttelton's departure for Nairobi, Baring had written again to prepare him for the burden of their discussions over the need for legal reform:

You should know that the question of summary justice is still the most burning issue here, not only among Europeans, but amongst loyal chiefs, headmen, Home Guard, and loyal Africans generally, who are quite unable to understand why it should take weeks and months to complete criminal proceedings against the terrorists after arrest. Recent Mau Mau gangs have been operating in far greater force than ever before, and fighting has become far more fierce. The result is, that in the very near future, we shall certainly be faced by so great a number of capital cases that it will become more urgent than ever to devise a means to administer criminal justice more speedily than is practicable at present.⁸³

Faced with pressure of this kind, officials in London had little room for manoeuvre. By the time that Lyttelton left for Nairobi, the consensus had emerged that Baring's proposals should be reluctantly accepted *so long as* the Governor was able to give assurances about the appeals process. At his meeting with Baring at Government House, on 17 May Lyttelton therefore gave his verbal consent to the establishment of the special assizes.⁸⁴

On returning to London Lyttelton had now to explain the background of the scheme to his Cabinet colleagues. The strain upon the existing legal system as the crucial issue, he contended, telling the Cabinet that more than 200 people might be hanged as a result of the Lari incident alone. The point struck home, but the implications greatly alarmed the Prime Minister. Churchill reacted strongly to the suggestion that there might be anything resembling 'mass executions' in Kenya. To execute such large numbers was not in the PM's view either 'necessary or desirable'. Thrown onto the defensive, Lyttelton reassured the Cabinet: 'We should not wake up and find that large numbers had been hanged, since the accused had the right of appeal.' After the Cabinet meeting, Lyttelton sent an urgent telegram to Baring: 'All of this is likely to be a troublesome question,' he wrote, 'and I wanted to give you the earliest warning of the PM's attitude.' But Baring was undaunted by Churchill's political anxieties. He reminded Lyttelton: 'The main pressure for executions comes from the Kikuyu and not the Europeans.'" After Lari, Governor Baring now had the bit firmly between his teeth.

Regulations for the new Emergency Assize Courts were approved in Kenya on 12 June 1953, though London had not scrutinized the details." It was an oversight the Colonial Office would come to regret. Over the next six months the courts caused growing concern. It was not until July, in response to questions from MPs, that Roberts-Wray came to appreciate that the removal of committal proceedings had, in effect, denied the accused the opportunity to know the nature of the evidence

that would be brought before the court. Too late, Roberts-Wray declared this to be 'a cause for serious concern'.⁸ 'It needs no argument to demonstrate,' he now declared, 'that any accused person will be grossly hindered in his defence if he comes to his trial knowing nothing of the evidence to be given against him.' Attempts to alter the regulations brought a cool response from Baring, who pointed out that backsliding would be 'politically very difficult'.⁸⁸ Concessions were eventually made to allow the defence counsel to see witness statements for the prosecution in court, but in practice these were presented too late to be of much use.

Having allowed Baring to have his way, London could not now easily retract. Baring ruthlessly exploited the advantage. In August he pushed through a measure to allow summary dismissal of appeals if no obvious legal ground could be established, a measure the Colonial Office had earlier refused.⁸⁹ Lyttelton's promises to Churchill were already beginning to ring hollow. The Kenya situation was slipping out of London's control. While Lyttelton still backed Baring in public, his officials were increasingly anxious in private. As the Special Emergency Assizes began their work, other worries would surface, among them the inexperience of the acting judges brought onto the Bench to serve in these courts, and the indignity shown to the accused in mass trials, where more than fifty persons stood in the dock together. The Lari trials would feature very prominently in these criticisms.

Baring did not wait for the new regulations but pushed the first few Lari trials through the courts under the old system. As early as 7 April he had told London that up to 500 of the 2000 suspects then held 'in cages at Uplands' would face murder charges.⁹⁰ Before the end of the next week, on 13 April, the committal proceedings for the first Lari trial had begun. It was staged in converted buildings at the Githunguri Teachers' Training College, a few miles to the east of Lari. The college had been founded by Mbiyu Koinange, in January 1939, after his return from the United States. The Koinange family were the main benefactors of the college, but its running costs were raised from voluntary public contributions. Jomo Kenyatta had joined Mbiyu at Githunguri on his return to Kenya in 1946. Kenya's Europeans believed that the college was a front for raising funds for the Mau Mau cause. The government had closed the college, but it still stood as a symbol of Kikuyu resistance. Here, in the Kikuyu heartland of central Kiambu, two courthouses were set out for the Lari trials, with holding pens for the prisoners; and beside them, behind a high fence, a pair of gallows was constructed.⁹¹ The intentions of the colonial government were clear for all to see.

Though the shadow of the gallows darkened the Lari courtrooms, Attorney-General Whyatt did his best to see that the rudiments of justice were adhered to. Finding defence barristers proved tricky. A handful of

the wealthier among the accused were able to engage lawyers. For the others, counsel was assigned through the system of paupers' briefs. The administrative staff in Kiambu went out of their way to make life as difficult as possible for the barristers who came to Githunguri for the trials. Kenya's only African lawyer, Chiedo Argwings-Kodhek, was singled out for special attention. Argwings-Kodhek had been called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn in 1951, returning to Kenya with his Irish-born wife a year later. Offered a job in the Department of the Attorney-General, but at a third of the salary of his white peers, he had turned his back on government service and gone into private practice. He was a close associate of many KAU members, and at the outbreak of the Emergency he willingly took briefs to defend those accused of Mau Mau offences. By 1953 many of those who came before the courts charged with Mau Mau crimes requested that he defend them, even though they had no means to pay his fees. Much of the work Argwings-Kodhek did in the Mau Mau trials was therefore at the paltry rates of paupers' briefs — fees that barely covered his costs. So many of these did Argwings-Kodhek take that Kenya's white settlers called him 'the Mau Mau lawyer'.⁹²

At Githunguri he fought a running battle with officialdom. As an African, he required a special pass to visit any area affected by the Emergency, and this provided opportunities for repeated harassment by police officers and KPR demanding to 'see his papers'. In the worst example of interference, Argwings-Kodhek was arrested at Uplands on the grounds that he did not possess the relevant pass permitting him to visit Kiambu. When he presented instead his letter of authorization from the Registrar to the Supreme Court, it was brushed aside. The local magistrate, Mr Baxter, declined to acknowledge the letter from the Registrar, and promptly found Argwings-Kodhek guilty, fining him 50 shillings.⁹³ This was wilful obstruction, designed to humiliate and dispirit Argwings-Kodhek. Many of his Asian colleagues, including Ajeet Singh, A. R. Kapila and Fitz de Souza, also accepted paupers' briefs in Mau Mau cases. They were all roundly criticized for doing so, and all were subjected to the spiteful petty interference of police and European district officers; but it was Argwings-Kodhek who was most frequently the victim of the indignities imposed by a callous and disregarding administration.

Contempt for the rights of the Mau Mau accused was expressed in other, less subtle ways. In the midst of the Lari trials, Blundell tried to have the paupers' briefs withdrawn for all Mau Mau cases. He objected to the array of lawyers that sometimes gathered in the mass trials, with as many as seven or eight barristers defending groups of accused. Blundell argued that this was too costly, and that a limit should be set. He also

wanted means-testing introduced, so that those accused might pay for their own defence." It was not justice the settlers wanted: it was retribution; and they didn't much care how they got it.

The lust for retribution acted as a powerful force throughout the nineteen Lari capital trials. From April until December 1953 Lari dominated Kenya's courts. In the largest trial, eighty-three accused persons stood together, numbers draped around their necks to ease identification. Defence counsel took briefs for groups of defendants; the courtroom was crowded with barristers, jostling to challenge the prosecution and cross-examine the witnesses. Several senior investigating officers spent practically the entire five months in court, moving from one case to the next in rapid succession. Key witnesses found themselves in the dock for days on end. Many African witnesses appeared in several different trials. The larger trials all lasted for more than a month.

For the single judge presiding, the complexities of proceedings so large and prolonged demanded keen attention. It was exhausting. In the mass trials, each individual accused had to be disposed of in turn, so the judge needed to be diligent in keeping notes and tracking the precise evidence against each. The unfamiliarity of Kikuyu names often bamboozled the Bench. The evidence hinged upon simple questions of identification. The Crown relied upon the evidence of survivors. Among them were leading loyalists, men such as Makimei and Headman Paulo, who had fought for their lives on 26 March; but most witnesses were women, and many were children and teenagers. All had named their attackers, then picked them out in the many identification parades. Their eyewitness accounts of the death and destruction were the only real evidence. The people they had accused were well known to them — neighbours, old acquaintances, former workmates, people known on a casual, social basis, sometimes even members of their own extended families. For the victims and the accused alike, the trials were arcane and unfamiliar proceedings, but they were also intensely intimate and emotional. A whole community was drawn into the courtroom, and the scars of its past laid bare.

In the nineteen trials, 309 people stood accused of murders. Another 300 or so of Lari's residents appeared as witnesses, mostly for the prosecution. The stories revealed glimpses of Kikuyu daily life and the intricacies of relationships. Many defendants recounted the past quarrels that fuelled animosity and suspicions, citing land disputes and unfulfilled marriage arrangements. Others said they were accused because they had refused to join the Home Guard: in the intensity of Lari's politics, this implied Mau Mau sympathies. But alongside those who robustly defended themselves were others who appeared to accept their fate. They stood expressionless in the dock, refusing to speak, their dull eyes

revealing fear, sadness and resignation. In the yard behind the Githunguri courthouse the gallows awaited. For the most part, the court proceedings were sombre and deeply depressing.

In sharp contrast to the settler-murder cases, where confessions were the lynchpin of the prosecution case, extra-judicial statements rarely featured in the Lari trials. The reasons were pragmatic: the excesses of the Lari investigations were widely known and were at least in part acknowledged by many prosecution witnesses. To lead with confessional statements made before police officers in an investigation where beating and the ill-treatment of suspects were known to have taken place would open the door to criticism, and might result in easy acquittals. The prosecution only offered confessional evidence attested by the magistrate who had assisted in the Lari enquiry, Arthur Cram.

Wairitu Kanini was among the few who were convicted on this basis, from a statement made before Cram and corroborated in court by two Home Guards, both of whom were neighbours of Kanini and 'knew him well'.⁹⁵ Kanini was typical of those caught up in Lari's violence. 'On the Thursday night of the trouble I was called by Mwangi Njuna and Nduati,' Kanini told the magistrate. 'They asked me to go with them. We went to the house of Nganga Ngara.' There, Kanini took a Mau Mau oath, and then went with his accomplices to the homestead of the Waweru family. Kanini's account of what happened next is recorded in sparse, halting prose:

A woman inside the house opened the door and came out and began to run. She was Wangui Nganga. She was carrying a child. They killed her with pangas. I had no panga. The other men had pangas. They also killed the child. When I saw that I ran away. I was chased by Githito [a Home Guard] but he did not catch me and I got away and went home ... I heard of the rest of the killings next morning. This was a bad affair. ⁹⁶

In Kanini's own mind, and indeed in the minds of other Africans in the court, he was not guilty of murder: he had accompanied the killers to the Waweru homestead, but he had struck no blow. African assessors sat in each trial to assist the judge, and in this case they declared their opinion that Kanini should be acquitted as 'he had not killed anyone'. It was a distinction that the law did not acknowledge. As an accomplice to the crime, on his own admission, Kanini was as guilty as those who had severed in half the body of Wangui's child.

Ndutumi Nganga was another who went to the Githunguri gallows on the basis of an extra-judicial statement attested by Cram. Nganga was charged with the murder of Mbogwa Mumya, whose eleven-year-old

daughter identified him in court as the man who had slashed her father. The statement from Nganga, as recorded by Cram, unquestionably implicated him in the murders. Nganga told Cram how plans for the Lari attack had been laid one week before, on 19 March, when he was summoned to a meeting 'in the bush'. He went on to admit his part in the violence." Cram attested to this statement having been freely made, but he added his own commentary to the text before making his signature. Cram's 'explanatory note' was not read to the court. What it revealed was undoubtedly more than the prosecution wanted the court to hear:

The deponent [Nganga] was covered with dust and stated he had been beaten by the Home Guard and a European after being hunted and brought into camp. He was sick, vomited twice and had difficulty in moving his limbs. His lips were bleeding. I questioned him most carefully if he had been threatened to make a statement but he denied this firmly and said what he wanted to say was of his own free will. He spoke quite clearly and apparently lucidly and coherently. My impression is that he had some rough treatment on capture but none of this had been directed to making him come before me, at least that is what he says himself.^o

Cram took many such statements in similar circumstances. His carefully chosen words show him to have been a man struggling to do an honest job in trying conditions.

Another confession was made by Muranja Iguru, who stood trial for the murders of Samson Kariuki's family. In court, Iguru retracted his statement, and told of his interrogation at the hands of three European police officers, who he claimed were drunk. One of these men asked for a whip to be brought. 'When the European brought the whip he hit me with it on the back', Iguru said. 'He then told me that I was one of the people who drank the blood of children and he would shoot me with his pistol. Another European knocked me down and kicked me . . . Then two of them beat me severely ... [one of the officers] came with two knives and said that if I did not say everything about the crime he would remove my testicles.'"

Others told very similar stories. It must be doubted whether any statement made in the wake of Lari could really be said to have been 'free' from the taint of threat and coercion.

The prosecution built the cases against the Lari suspects primarily on the basis of the eyewitness evidence of survivors. This was powerful and often compelling evidence, but it needed to be grounded in secure identifications. The details of the police identification parades held at

Uplands were crucial. The details of these parades were earnestly disputed in the courtroom. Though the court never explored this issue, it became apparent that Makimei's Home Guard had conducted their own identification parades, usually working with members of the KPR. Josephine Becker, of the CID, referred to these as 'screening' exercises, by which she meant that Makimei was looking for people who were Mau Mau sympathizers.

In reality Makimei was doing rather more than this. He was selecting suspects and then carrying out his own interrogations. Many were beaten by the Home Guard in the Uplands camp. While it was admitted there had been 'rough handling' of prisoners — in the light of the comments of the magistrate, Cram, it could hardly have been denied — European witnesses told the court that they had no knowledge of systematic ill-treatment. This denial was utterly implausible. The geography of the camp at Uplands, and of the police post, meant that all of these activities were conducted in close proximity. Moreover, alongside the police investigation at Lari, intelligence officers, with a special operations role, were free to haul out suspects for questioning, and even to remove these suspects from police custody and take them to other places for interrogation. Among these officers was a Kikuyu-speaking member of the KPR, Dennis Kearney, who directed Home Guard interrogations and consulted with Makimei over suspects. Kearney was widely known by his nickname of *Twatwa*. The nearest English equivalent to this Kikuyu colloquialism is the word 'thwack', representing the sound of people being beaten on the legs by a flexible switch.⁹⁰ *Twatwa* was deeply involved in the Lari interrogations.⁹¹ Despite what European officers claimed, the excesses and irregularities of the investigation were by no means confined to the actions of African Home Guard.

The problem of identification plagued the Lari trials from start to finish. When they are viewed as separate, individual cases, it might seem that the many mistakes and uncertainties over the recognition of the accused were simply the product of genuine confusion amid the events of 26 March. It is hardly surprising that traumatized and grief-stricken witnesses, some of them children, should have had difficulty in recalling the precise details of what happened. The defence counsel also did their best to expose inconsistencies in evidence, and there is no doubt they succeeded at times in bamboozling otherwise honourable witnesses who were not used to the adversarial interrogations of the courtroom. Defence counsel such as Ajeet Singh, A. R. Kapila and Argwings-Kohdek all energetically pursued weaknesses in the Crown case, often gaining acquittals as a result. In the face of this hostile questioning the prosecution's case against some of the accused simply fell apart. When these nineteen trials are viewed as a group of related proceedings, however,

the individual mistakes, errors and uncertainties take on a more sinister meaning. How thorough was the prosecution in collecting and collating evidence? Did they verify and corroborate the evidence of witnesses? Were the identifications reliable? And were witnesses to be trusted? At best, the Crown was sloppy and hasty in preparing its evidence — there was immense political pressure to bring these cases swiftly to court. At worst, the accumulation of evidence from the courtroom suggests a random, scattergun character of the accusations, a tendency to assumptions of 'guilt by association', and, in the worst examples, strong suspicions of collusion among prosecution witnesses to fabricate evidence. To illustrate these aspects, we will now turn to the stories of the attacks on three of the Lari homesteads — those of Charles Ikenya, Machune Kiranga and Luka Wakahangare, as told in the dramas of the courtroom.

Charles Ikenya was one of the Makimei's staunchest headmen in Lari. Four trials arose from the attack upon his family. In these trials, we see the prominent role played by key witnesses in framing accusations and the grave inconsistencies of the legal system in evaluating these crucial testimonies.

The first Ikenya trial, heard before Acting Justice Salter, saw twenty-six accused in the dock, charged with the murder of Penina, the wife of Headman Charles." The evidence hinged upon the identification of the accused by Charles's surviving wife (Mathae) and daughter (Lois Wanjiru), four of his Home Guard patrol who had tried to fight off the attackers and the mother of his deceased wife. These witnesses gave powerful descriptions of the killing of their relatives and friends. It was a grim and emotionally charged story. But the witnesses were far from consistent. The evidence of Lois Wanjiru, Charles's daughter, was highly suspect. She had picked out several of the accused at parades at Uplands. She made detailed allegations against each man, describing what she claimed to have seen him do. This was dramatic and compelling evidence; but her testimony was immediately undermined: one of the accused could not have been present with the attackers, as she described, because there was 'unassailable and unchallenged evidence that he had been in police custody at the material time.'" The man was swiftly discharged.

Lois Wanjiru continued to give evidence against other accused. Salter noted further inconsistencies in her evidence, but on the whole considered her a 'credible witness'. Salter found seventeen men guilty of the murder of Penina. When the convictions came before the appellate court three weeks later, the evidence of Mathae and Lois Wanjiru was called into serious question. As a consequence, five of the men were freed — all of them having been convicted on the evidence of these two women.

Within a week of the first Ikenya trial finishing, Lois Wanjiru and

Mathea were back in the Githunguri courtroom again. This time they received a frosty reception. Judge Mayers was deeply disturbed by the character of Lois Wanjiru's evidence. He catalogued her principal sins: she had misidentified one of the accused in court, despite having claimed to know the man well; she then admitted, under cross-examination, that she had 'been informed by certain other people (including Mathae) of the presence at the scene of the crime of certain persons whose names she then specified'; and she persisted in altering her evidence in court, usually to the disadvantage of the accused. Mayers concluded that he regarded her evidence 'with such suspicion that I can place no reliance upon it at all and do not consider that it can even be treated as slight corroboration of the evidence given by other witnesses for the Crown'¹⁰⁴

Clive Salter would preside over two more trials relating to the Ikenya family. In each a single accused would stand in the dock, and in each Lois Wanjiru and Mathea would again be the principal prosecution witnesses. The first of these trials came before Salter on 3 July. It was to be a most extraordinary case. The accused man was Gatenjua Kinyanjui. A senior elder of fifty years of age, Kinyanjui was a prosperous man in the Lari area, with three wives and several children. He was not an associate of Makimei or of Luka, and the Home Guard at Lari suspected him of involvement in the administration of Mau Mau oaths. Kinyanjui was charged with the murder of a male child in the homestead of Charles Ikenya. Lois Wanjiru and Mathea told the court that they had seen him hacking at the body of the young boy, both again giving powerful eyewitness testimony. Salter praised the witnesses, stating that he had no reservations in accepting their account of events and in dismissing the alibi offered by Kinyanjui.

It was an alibi of a most unusual kind. Kinyanjui told the court that he had been arrested by Home Guard on 6 February 1953 and taken to Uplands police post, where he had remained in custody up until the time of the massacre. This was not disputed by the prosecution, who instead alleged that Kinyanjui must have escaped from police custody sometime during the day of 26 March, in time for him to take part in the massacre. They could not say how he had escaped; nor could they explain why no one appeared to have noticed that he was missing. They were only able to confirm that Kinyanjui was back in police custody a few hours after the massacre, taken in during the round-up of suspects.

This, then, was the second man to be accused by Lois Wanjiru who would seem to have been in police custody at the very time he was supposed to have participated in the Lari massacre. In the previous case Salter had immediately discharged the falsely accused man. This time the prosecution's extraordinary claims were corroborated by three Lari Home Guards. These men swore to having seen Kinyanjui at liberty on

the afternoon of 26 March. Their statements, combined with the evidence of Lois Wanjiru and Mathae, were the only basis of the prosecution case. Incredibly, Salter chose to disbelieve all the evidence offered by the defence and to accept the evidence offered by the prosecution, despite its many oddities. Kinyanjui was found guilty as charged and sentenced to hang.

The case did not come to appeal until 14 September. The judges sitting on the Appellate Bench could hardly disguise their contempt for Salter's findings. Reviewing the case papers, they found that the evidence as to the identity of Kinyanjui 'was certainly unsound', that the evidence of the Home Guards who claimed to have seen Kinyanjui at liberty was 'at least in part elaborated' and 'may even have been concocted', and that the claim of his escape from custody was 'utterly implausible'. Salter was sternly reprimanded for having neglected to give sufficient weight to the evidence put forward by the defence counsel, and the conviction quashed."

In the last of the Ikenya trials, one week after Kinyanjui's conviction, Salter, Lois Wanjiru and Mathea were back in court yet again. This time, the two women gave 'emphatic' evidence that they had witnessed Njehia Njuguna hack at the body of Charles Ikenya's wife Penina with an axe. Neither woman had named nor identified the accused until one month after the attack. Njehia was yet another 'enemy' of Makimei, who had refused to join the Home Guard and who had long been suspected of Mau Mau sympathies. Njehia spoke eloquently in his own defence, denying the charges and giving the court a detailed account of his activities on the day of the massacre. He admitted that he knew many people who had been involved in the murders, and made no secret of the animosities that had driven the community to this awful night of violence; but he strenuously denied his own complicity. He called a neighbour as a corroborating witness and this man was able to confirm everything Njehia had said. Salter was unmoved: Njehia's witness had been accused in another of the Lari trials, and although he was acquitted of the charge of murder, Salter thought this damaged the defence. In his summing-up the judge stated his opinion that both the accused and his witness were 'unconvincing and did not impress me as being truthful'. Stung by earlier criticisms from the appellate judges, Salter was now determined to defend his findings more categorically and thus reduce the likelihood of his verdict being overturned. This time he took greater care to deal with the inconsistencies in the prosecution evidence, quizzing Lois Wanjiru and Mathea and addressing any remaining ambiguities in his summing-up. Having carefully explained his reasoning in accepting the testimony of Lois Wanjiru, Salter declared her to be 'a most convincing witness. Her demeanour was quiet and straight-forward and her

evidence unexaggerated." This left little scope for the appeal judges to challenge the findings of the court. Njehia's appeal was dismissed on 9 September, and Salter's conviction confirmed.

In this woeful process, covering four separate trials over a period of two months, judges sparred with one another but the law did not learn from its own experience. The key prosecution witness, Lois Wanjiru, was dismissed by one judge as unreliable and deceitful, but praised by another as convincing and truthful. Her testimony, along with that of her close friend Mathea, had brought fifty-four men to trial, eighteen of whom went to the gallows. Traumatized by their ordeal, and fearful of further recriminations, the two women had spent the weeks after the massacre cooped up in the camp at Uplands police post. There they saw the processions of suspects being taken for interrogation, and watched the endless identification parades. They talked with other survivors and sat into the night with Makimei and his Home Guards. Their accusations had slowly emerged out of these interactions with survivors and other Kikuyu loyalists. Collusion, manipulation and suggestion may have been purposeful and deliberate, but it may also have merged imperceptibly into false memory, fuelled by anxiety, trauma, stress, grief and fear. Lois Wanjiru and Mathea were victims as well as accusers. In the evidence of these young women, the fine line between guilt and innocence was obscured in a fog of collusion, deceit, and past animosity.

The second example we shall consider focuses upon the single trial of fifty-two suspects charged with the attack upon the family of the Home Guard Machune Kiranga. This case opened before Acting Justice Harley on 29 June 1953, and was not completed until 18 September, when forty-eight of the accused were convicted and sentenced to death — more convictions than in any other Lari trial. This case reveals the many ways by which vengeance influenced the trials, the finger of accusation being pointed at all those who were suspected of rebel sympathies. For Machune Kiranga and his Home Guards the search for the Lari culprits became a kind of witch-hunt. In this they were supported by colonial officers and by the police, though, as we shall see, not by the senior judiciary, for, in a dramatic and defiant gesture, the appeal judges overturned all forty-eight of Acting Justice Harley's convictions in this case.

The attack on the Kirangas had been widely reported in the press coverage of the massacre back in March. Machune Kiranga's wife Wanjiru survived the assault; but her tragedy had been the slaughter of her two young children, one a baby, the other a boy of two years. In court, she told her story with a cold, quiet detachment. Her misery was palpable. Wanjiru's husband Machune was an entirely different witness. His fury still burned red-hot.⁷ A large and strong man of

around fifty, Machune was Chief Makimei's senior headman. A staunch Christian and loyalist, he proudly told the court that he had been a Home Guard 'since the beginning of the Emergency', describing the many troubles with Mau Mau supporters, who were in the majority among Lari's residents. He told the court that he knew of his danger, and had even dug a pit with a trapdoor under his bed, so that he might hide 'if Mau Mau came to kill me'. It was the pit that had saved Wanjiro and three of the children. They had managed to clamber down into the hole and pull the trapdoor shut before the attackers broke into their hut. But the pit was too small to hold all the family, and the other children had perished.

Unlike Wanjiro, Machune was talkative and animated, responding in a rush of words to the probing of the prosecution, but too easily goaded into anger by the five defence lawyers who lined up to quiz him. His story was filled with detail. Machune had been out with his Home Guard patrol on the night of the attack, visiting the homes of suspected Mau Mau supporters. As he spoke, he pointed to several of the accused in the dock, asserting they had been absent that night. The implication of their guilt was clear; and Machune had evidence to support his assertions: in each of the houses the Headman had taken a thumbprint or a signature from the wife of the missing man. Asked whether this was usual, Machune explained: 'No, there was no procedure in that respect, but what happened was that after visiting five houses and finding no man in the house I suspected there was something unusual and I began this procedure of taking thumbprints of all those who were absent.'

When Machune had seen flames rising from Luka's place, he had realized that an attack was indeed under way and rushed back to his homestead. He had arrived just before an army of some 200 attackers swarmed over his farm. Terrified, Machune and his Home Guard patrol had not rushed to the defence of the Kiranga family, but instead had scattered and fled. Only one man, Nganga Ngara, had hesitated as the attackers came through the gate. He had been caught not ten yards from the hiding place Machune had taken, in a thick hedge on the perimeter of the property, and mercilessly hacked down as his headman looked on. Machune was no hero. As he had cowered in the hedge he had watched the many atrocities committed against his family by persons he recognized as fellow Lari residents. When he could stand it no more, he had turned away and run to the Uplands police station.

Over seven days in the witness box, Machune's accusations poured out in a torrent. He named fifty men, and described the part that each took in the attack. Some were accused of murdering Ngara, others of slaughtering the children as they ran from a hut, others of setting light to the thatch. others of simply being in the compound. All of this he

claimed to have witnessed over the few minutes he had crouched in the hedge, watching the carnage in his compound.

It seemed implausible that he could have seen so much and remembered it so well. The defence counsel tried to unpick his evidence, but they were keener to undermine his character. It was not difficult. Machune was a man with an interesting past. He had a fiery temper and was inclined to acts of violence. He had been prosecuted for assault on several occasions. Though most of these cases had resulted in acquittal, he had once been fined and in another case sentenced to five months' imprisonment. Several of the accused claimed that he had abused them; some said he had victimized them because of past disputes over land, others that he had tried to extort bribes from them in return for not reporting minor misdemeanours, such as illegal trading in liquor — an activity in which Machune himself allegedly participated. Many claimed they had been beaten by Home Guards under Machune's direction. As this catalogue of accusations was put to Machune in cross-examination, he finally lost his temper. 'I came here to testify about my children and my family,' he exploded. 'The Indian advocates [the defence counsel] have advised their clients to come here and speak ill against me. The Indians are the people who are promoting Mau Mau in this country.' Acting Justice Harley told him to calm down, but the proceedings continued in an intense atmosphere of bitterness and distrust.

Of all the defendants, Duncan Mahinda produced the strongest alibi against Machune's accusations. Animosity between the two was acknowledged — Machune admitting to a long-running land feud that had been decided in favour of Mahinda's father. A well-educated and prosperous businessman, Duncan claimed that Machune had continued to persecute his family in revenge for this decision. On hearing that he was wanted in connection with the Lari massacre, Duncan had gone to a lawyer in Nairobi and made a voluntary statement. Duncan was the owner of the Nairobi General Provisions Store, in the city's Pumwani location. He produced invoices and stock books to show that he had been at the store all day on 26 March. Seven witnesses were brought forward to support his claim that he had eaten there at 8p.m. that evening, among them an Asian businessman, an Arab trader and a Luo friend from Nairobi.¹⁰⁸ Yet Machune said he had seen Duncan Mahinda directing the attackers and himself slashing at the victims. Machune had picked Duncan out at an identification parade on 11 April at Uplands.¹⁰⁹ The defence counsel put it to the court that this parade had been a farce, the final act in what amounted to a deliberate plot to frame Duncan — a plot in which even Chief Makimei was implicated, for he gave evidence to the court to contradict Duncan's alibi, claiming that he had seen the accused in Lari on the afternoon before the massacre. Acting Justice Harley preferred to

believe the evidence of the loyal Chief, and so dismissed the claims of Duncan's seven witnesses as an elaborate concoction.

Among the other accused men were several who, like Duncan, were in business on their own account. All owned shops or eating-houses in the Lari area, or dealt in supplying vegetables to Nairobi or other more distant markets. These retailers and wholesale traders had been subjected to investigation by Makimei and Machune earlier in the year, when their account books had been seized in an effort to identify those who might be acting as treasurers or fund-raisers for Mau Mau. None had been charged with any offence. In court these men now suggested that Machune had continued to harass and intimidate them. One or two made thinly veiled hints at extortion.

Among these accused was Mwangi, a business partner of Duncan Mahinda, to whom the prosecution paid close attention. The account books taken from Mwangi after the Lari massacre seemed to show 'deposits' made at his shop, without the apparent purchase of goods. 'Were you collecting subscriptions in the shop?' the prosecution asked Mwangi. He explained that he gave credit to regular customers, and acted as banker for others, who then received discounts. Mwangi was the local banker and moneylender." The prosecution thought he was collecting money for Mau Mau.

In no other Lari trial was the evidence so hotly contested. As accusations and counter-accusations swirled around the courtroom, Acting Justice Harley showed signs of losing track of events. He frequently interrupted both prosecution and defence counsel to ask additional questions and to seek clarification; but clarity was elusive — especially when it came to the crucial evidence of the principal witness, Machune. Harley plainly admitted as much in his summing-up. He conceded that it contained 'obvious and frequent discrepancies', that reports of his statements and the identifications of suspects 'did not tally', and that there were frequent 'contradictions and omissions'; but were these inconsistencies 'the result of normal human fallibility, or the product of deliberate dishonesty?' the judge asked. Harley gave Machune the benefit of doubt, finding forty-eight of the fifty-two accused guilty as charged."

The appeals were heard on 1 December 1953. The appeal judges were deeply alarmed when they reviewed the trial papers. Harley had openly and categorically contradicted himself, in highlighting the discrepancies in Machune's evidence in his detailed summing-up but then declaring his complete faith in the same evidence in his judgment. No fewer than twenty-nine of the forty-eight convicted men had been accused and identified by Machune and Machune alone. In all the remaining convictions Machune's evidence was a significant element in the prosecution's case against the accused. It had surely been incumbent upon

the judge to address the evidence against each individual accused man, but Harley had not done so. On this point alone the sentences were quashed.

The Times carried a full report of the verdict of the appeal court on 2 December, highlighting the doubts cast upon Machune's evidence and the criticism of Harley."³ Inevitably, Lyttelton was confronted by questions in parliament."³ This was the kind of scandal the Secretary of State had feared all along, and he now wrote to Baring asking for the figures on the other Lari trials. The reply was sparse, but reassuring: there had been no other case of this kind, and in the Lari trials to date acquittals greatly outnumbered convictions. A relieved Lyttelton was able to report that the appeal court had made no criticism of mass trials *per se*, and that in this case the outcome was due to errors of a technical nature, committed by a judge who had limited experience."⁴ As would become their habit over the next two years, Nairobi's senior officials had chosen to place the blame upon the wayward actions of an individual, rather than on the wayward character of the system over which they presided.

The fuss died down in London a good deal quicker than in Nairobi. A storm of settler protests blamed the government for having failed to adopt measures that would see justice done. Whyatt was again the butt of criticism, though he thought Harley's spectacular disgrace had long been an accident waiting to happen. The two had known one another as law students in London. Harley then left legal practice to join the International Brigade in Spain, their paths crossing again upon Whyatt's arrival in Kenya in 1951, where Harley had settled and become a magistrate. Only a few months before the Emergency, the Chief Justice had elevated him to Acting Judge – much to Whyatt's dismay: 'He has always been difficult and troublesome,' Whyatt wrote to Roberts-Wray after the appeal court ruling, 'but it is difficult to take any steps in regard to matters of this kind until the Judge concerned commits a grievous judicial error which calls down upon him the criticism of the Court of Appeal.' To keep him out of harm's way, Harley was now assigned work only on civil cases.'s

In all of this, the principal witness, Machune Kiranga, was quietly forgotten. Was his evidence against the accused men truthful? Or had he conspired with others of his family, and other Home Guards, to make accusations against those they suspected of being Mau Mau supporters? If he did so, as the defence counsel claimed, then he was guilty of perjury; but we should not imagine that all of those accused by Machune were innocent. Among their number is at least one man who has, in recent years, privately confessed to the part he played in the attack upon Machune's family."⁵ The sad truth was that in the Lari trials many of the innocent were hanged alongside the guilty, while many others among

the guilty walked free. It was little wonder that Kikuyu thought British justice to be a haphazard and random affair.

Our final example features the trial of those charged with the murders in Luka Wakahangare's homestead. This momentous trial began on 3 September, before Acting Justice Clive Salter. Judgment would not be delivered until three days before Christmas, on 22 December. It was a gruelling trial. The survivors from Luka's homestead had been more reluctant than most to speak after the massacre. Many of them had been severely wounded. Their evidence, with the accusations it contained, was only slowly pieced together. The parades at which the accused were picked out were among the last held at Uplands, on 19 and 25 April. The lateness of these parades, and the role of Makimei, Machune and other Home Guards in the compilation of lists of named suspects for the attack on Luka's *boma*, gave rise to suspicions that the Wakahangare family members might have had the opportunity for collusion in shaping their evidence. From this trial we gain a clear sense of the deep fear and bitter retribution that masked everything at Lari in the wake of the massacre.

Among the principal witnesses in this case was Luka's younger brother and driver, Benson Njenga. He identified twenty-nine of the accused brought to the court. Benson named some people immediately after the attack, but he did not give other names until several weeks later. Similar delays were apparent in the evidence given by other key witnesses. Luka's wife Kahuria eventually identified twenty-two accused, and she, too, did so over several weeks. Another wife, Gacheri, was another who took time to recall the names of her assailants. Gacheri had been savagely slashed in the attack, losing an arm, and her children killed. She was interviewed in hospital after the massacre, but she had been reluctant to say very much. She returned to Uplands early in May, to live in the police compound with other members of her family. A special identification parade was hurriedly arranged for Gacheri on 15 May, when she announced that she was willing to identify her attackers. At that moment a group of several hundred suspects were about to be released from the Uplands prison camp because there was no evidence against them. Instead of being released the men were lined up and prepared for the parade. Despite still suffering the effects of her wounds, and being barely able to walk, Gacheri spent four hours that afternoon, moving slowly up and down the rows of suspects. *Twatwa* — Dennis Kearney — accompanied Gacheri, translating her Kikuyu accusations into English, and recording the details against the name of each man she picked out. At this hastily arranged and prolonged parade Gacheri accused twenty-five men

The defence counsel were especially concerned about the circumstances in which Gacheri had picked out the accused, and the role of Makimei. In cross-examination it was put to Makimei several times that he had influenced other witnesses in making accusations. The Chief bluntly denied all such suggestions. Hurst, for the prosecution, upheld Makimei's integrity, and instead explained that fear and trauma were reason enough for the initial reluctance of the Wakahangare family to speak out. Only as they slowly recovered from their ordeal did they gain the courage to speak and to name their assailants, she contended. As the trial proceeded, this line of argument came to be known as 'the fear hypothesis'. For the prosecution, this useful catch-all explanation glossed over many otherwise puzzling aspects in the evidence — not least the peculiar timing of Gacheri's decision to speak out and accuse her attackers after many weeks of silence.

In his summing-up, Salter decided to accept the 'fear hypothesis'. It was a crucial decision. Benson Njenga and Gacheri were the only witnesses to name many of the accused, and Salter was able to deploy the 'fear hypothesis' to explain the delays and contradictions in their evidence. The appeal judges took the same view, stating that 'the witnesses were frightened to say very much at first because of the terrifying ordeal they had been through, and through fear perhaps that if they gave names, further punishment might overtake them'.⁷ 'So far as women witnesses are concerned,' the appeal judgment continued, 'we regard this "fear hypothesis", as it has been termed during the hearing of this appeal, not only as reasonable but as highly likely.'

The 'fear hypothesis' applied to the evidence of Benson Njenga in a rather different sense. He had avoided serious injury in the attack — although he narrowly escaped death when an attacker shot at him, the bullet grazing his ear — and had taken an active role in the investigation of the crime, assisting Makimei and the Home Guard in rounding up suspects; but Benson's initial enthusiasm for this task later waned. He became less talkative, and he mysteriously 'lost' the list of suspects' names he had earlier compiled. In court Benson's hesitant and nervous evidence betrayed a man who had lost his nerve. Reading the case papers, one cannot escape the thought that Benson's reluctance was prompted by intimidation and threat — that he had perhaps been warned against assisting in the prosecution.

Benson had reason enough to be fearful. During May, after the evidence against the Lukas' attackers had been compiled, one of the key interpreters who had assisted in recording the evidence of the family was found murdered. Then, in the midst of the trial, another interpreter from Lari was found dead. Venasio Wakahangare was Luka's eldest son, and stood to inherit a large portion of his father's estate. Well educated,

literate and with good spoken English, Venasio had come to Lari after the massacre to be with his family. He spent the following weeks working as an interpreter with the police at Uplands. He assisted in the interviews of many of his distressed relatives, compiling the lists of names of those who would be accused of the attack upon Luka's homestead." At the end of April, Venasio returned to Nairobi to resume his employment as a clerk and driver with a European businessman. Among his duties, Venasio drove a haulage van, supplying catering to the staff at Nairobi's Eastleigh Aerodrome. The van was well known in the commercial areas of Nairobi's Eastlands. On the afternoon of 22 October 1953, exactly one year after the declaration of the Emergency in Kenya and while the prosecution evidence was still being heard in the Luka trial at Githunguri, the Nairobi police were informed that Venasio's van had been abandoned beside a petrol station, on the edge of the Ziwani estate. Trussed up in a gunny sack in the back of the vehicle was Venasio's mutilated body.

Venasio had been warned to take greater care, but the police had not offered him protection. He was an easy target. On the day of his death he was seen by his employer before noon, and sent to Eastlands to collect goods for the aerodrome. The goods were never collected. Venasio died sometime that afternoon. He had been badly beaten, with multiple injuries to his ribs, to his internal organs and to his head. Having lost consciousness from the beating he would almost certainly have died from the blows, but his murderers finally put their victim out of his misery by strangulation."⁹ Venasio had been purposefully lured to his death, his murder the result of a well-planned scheme.¹⁰ Mau Mau's assassins had been waiting for the right moment, and the coincidence of the anniversary of the declaration of the Emergency and the process of the Lari trial was too good an opportunity to miss. The British might build gallows at Githunguri, but Mau Mau also knew how to instil fear.

As the Luka trial drew towards a conclusion, in late November 1953, Attorney-General Whyatt found himself seated next to Clive Salter over dinner at a Nairobi function. The two men had a respectful professional relationship, but they were not close. Salter, a Kenya settler and magistrate who had been elevated to the Special Emergency Assize Courts to meet the pressing need of the moment, was a man of robustly conservative views. He was just the kind of settler who was impatient with Whyatt's reluctance to institute special measures to deal with Mau Mau, and had been among those calling for the Attorney-General's head in the wake of the Ruck murders. On his appointment as an acting judge, London officials had worried lest these political attitudes be championed from the Bench." Salter's handling of the Lari trials gave substance to these anxieties, but he now surprised Whyatt by expressing grave misgivings about the conduct of mass trials such as the Luka case. Salter warned

Whyatt that his judgment in the case, soon to be delivered, would contain critical comments about the procedures of the Special Emergency Assize Courts. At seventy-two days' duration, the trial was then the longest legal proceedings in Kenya's history. Salter had found it exhausting, stressful and unmanageably complex. He thought that both defence and prosecution counsel 'had found it difficult to recall the demeanour of witnesses in so large a trial.'" With no fewer than ten different defence counsel representing the accused, the interruptions and cross-examinations had seemed interminable, repetitive and confusing.'" Salter thought there were very real dangers of a miscarriage of justice in these very difficult circumstances.

This was music to Whyatt's ears. The next morning he wrote privately to Roberts-Wray at the Colonial Office to warn of the possibility of adverse publicity. Though he did not say so, Kenya's Attorney-General must have been quietly satisfied that his own objections to the Special Courts were about to be echoed by one of the Colony's most conservative judges.

Whyatt was in for an unpleasant surprise. When Salter delivered his judgment in the Luka trial, on 21 December, he only briefly alluded to the technical difficulties of the trial that Whyatt had thought would be the target of his attack. Instead, Salter pronounced a guilty verdict against twenty-seven of the accused, and then gave vent to his irritation that fifty-six of those charged had *not* been convicted:²⁴

I do not hesitate to say [Salter declared to the court], that the evidence in most, if not all of those cases, gave rise to the strongest suspicion that the accused concerned was in Luka's boma as a member of that evil gang during that attack, and they may well count themselves lucky that justice in our courts is of a standard where suspicion, however strong, is insufficient to support a conviction ... I have reason to suppose that these men will not be allowed, at any rate for a period of time, to have their freedom, but they will be well advised to remember for the rest of their lives that they owe their acquittal in this case to the standards of justice which Our sovereign Lady the Queen commands shall be preserved throughout her Realms.

The hindrance to justice in these mass trials was not, in Salter's view, the danger of wrongful conviction, but the tendency to wrongful acquittal.

Fifteen of the twenty-seven men sentenced to death by Salter were condemned on the identification of a single prosecution witness. Salter, once again, placed complete faith in the evidence of the witnesses for the Crown. His final address to the convicted men in the Githunguri courtroom was typically forthright:

Each of you have been convicted of a foul murder. Not only did you take part in the brutal and savage killing of an ex-chief of your own tribe – Luka – but you took an active part in the butchering in the most bestial manner of women and children of your own tribe whilst they were asleep. That is a massacre which will always go down in history as a disgrace to the members of your tribe who took part in it. I do not deceive myself that any words of mine will have the slightest effect upon you; but let those who share your views realise that you cannot achieve your aims by resorting to unlawful and savage violence, and those who do so will sooner or later themselves be destroyed. There is only one sentence which the law permits me to pass upon you for this offence – and it is a merciful one compared with what you did to your victims. The sentence upon you ... is that you will be hanged by the neck until you are dead."

Learning from Harley's humiliation, Salter took enormous care to explore every possible inconsistency in evidence when delivering his judgment. Two of these twenty-seven men would die in custody before their appeals could be heard, and three others were determined upon medical examination to have been under the age of eighteen at the time of the offence, and so were spared the noose, to be detained 'at the governor's pleasure' instead. The appeals of the remaining twenty-two men were dismissed on 3 March. They would wait another three and a half months on death row before their executions.

Executions

After the trials, it was time to see the bodies swing. In the old British tradition, Baring's Emergency Committee had discussed the beneficial impact of public executions at Githunguri, to show the Kikuyu the full might of British justice. Though the idea had support, it would never have met with London's approval and no request was made; but Baring had skilfully used the spectre of lynch-law after Lari in forcing Lyttelton's hand to gain consent for the extension of capital offences and the introduction of the Special Assizes. Better the sanitized, procedural niceties of state execution than the vengeance of the mob, he had argued.

Yet even with the new laws on the statute book and the courts in place, getting the guilty men to the gallows proved tricky. By the end of September 1953, six months after the massacre, not a single person convicted of murder at Lari had yet been executed. On 8 October Blundell introduced a Legislative Council debate on the Emergency legal machinery with a scathing attack on Whyatt for the failure to hang

the Lari convicts. Blundell once again asked for an acceleration of procedures and the shortening of the right of appeal, while other white highlanders thought that Kenya would do better to adopt martial law, immediately shooting convicts by firing squad on the passing of sentence.' Whyatt defended the principles of British justice with his usual firm dignity. Though his speech received prolonged applause, it was the aggressive determination of the white highlander lobby that impressed Baring. The legal department were instructed to speed up the executions.

The problem lay in the East Africa Court of Appeal. By September 1953 it was still usual for there to be a gap of more than three months between conviction and the hearing of an appeal, and a month more might then lapse before the execution was finally carried out. An additional appeal to the Privy Council might add another three months' delay, though such cases were few in number owing to the expense involved (even Argwings-Kodhek charged a minimum of so guineas for each appeal to the Privy Council, a fee that might rise to 80 or even 100 guineas if the documents were bulky)." Though Whyatt could influence the order in which cases were heard in the Special Assize Courts, it was not so easy to press political considerations upon the judges of the East African Appeal Court, who vigorously defended their independence. It was fortunate for Baring, who was now keen to assuage settler opinion by seeing the Lari convicts hang as speedily as possible, that the appeal court had heard several Lari cases only in September.

Within one week of Blundell's tirade in the Legislative Council, the gallows at Githunguri despatched their first victim. In the bitter cold of the early morning of 8 October, in the hour of grey darkness just before dawn, twelve Lari convicts were hanged at Githunguri. They had waited on death row for five months since Clive Salter had sentenced them to death. The Githunguri gallows was shielded from public gaze, though the contraptions were visible behind the main buildings of the teachers' college. The hangman came up from Nairobi prison the day before to make the arrangements, measuring the drop and testing the mechanism with the grim, methodical precision of his trade. The prison doctor and the Kiambu District Officer were there with the hangman to witness the executions, conducted one after the other at fifteen-minute intervals — long enough to allow the body to be taken down and the gallows reset for the next victim. Once the sombre procession was over, the bodies were bundled into a lorry and removed to Nairobi's Kamiti Prison for burial in unmarked graves.

To publicize the execution of the twelve men, notices were printed in Swaili and Kikuyu and distributed widely throughout the colony that same morning. The condemned men were each named, and it was stated that their crime had been the murder of Penina, the wife of Headman

Charles Ikenya, part of the infamous Lari massacre.' The Githunguri gallows would be used on fourteen more occasions before the end of the month, and another fourteen Lari convicts would be executed there during November. The final Lari convicts, the twenty-two men convicted of the murders in Luka Wakahangare's compound, would not come to the gallows until June 1954.'²⁹

The hangings brought satisfaction to Blundell and his supporters, but they were not at all pleased with the overall outcome of the Lari trials. Given Baring's original estimates to London of how many persons might be hanged for Lari, the number of acquittals arising from the trials seemed very high indeed. From 309 accused persons, only 136 had been convicted, and of these only seventy-one men were finally executed. In the course of the nineteen trials, 120 men had been acquitted, and a further fifty-six were discharged. Fewer than one in four of those accused of murder at Lari had been hanged.

Baring was embarrassed by these figures, and did his best to avoid publicizing them for fear of renewed criticism in Kenya.³⁰ He had hoped for more hangings, and seemed disappointed that the legal machinery had not managed to achieve better results. Indeed, Baring seems to have shared Salter's view that the accused persons had escaped conviction owing to legal difficulties, rather than because they were innocent of the charges (see table 4.i, p. 349, for a list of the Lari hanged).

Like those who hanged for the murders of European settlers in their farmhouses, those executed for crimes at Lari did not conform to the received image of the heroic Mau Mau freedom fighters. This was no well-drilled army of young disciplined fighters. Lari's violence had been communal, enveloping a wide variety of people. Those who organized the slaughter had come in to Lari from the Aberdares forest, but they were not among the convicts because no one had recognized them. As on the farms, there were doubtless some willing participants among Lari's residents, including those who had been very active in oath-taking and in collecting funds for Mau Mau. Many others only reluctantly, and with great remorse, joined the mobs that swarmed over the homesteads of the loyalists on the night of 26 March 1953. The proceedings of the Lari trials do not allow us to differentiate easily between these categories of people: The law merely needed to establish to the satisfaction of the judge that the people accused were present at the scene of the crime.

It is difficult to generalize about the social status and background of the seventy-one men that hanged. Only one was a stranger to Lari, though several were men who had returned to the area from the Rift Valley over recent years. The majority were relatively poor, many being landless labourers and casual workers and most of these men had but

little education. These poorer men were generally young, mostly in their twenties. They included men who had worked at the bacon factory in Uplands, and others who sometimes worked in Nairobi. These were precisely the kind of people *we* might expect to have been supporters of the Mau Mau cause, those marginalized and dispossessed by the resettlement at Lari and the natural enemies of the acquisitive and self-serving ex-Chief Luka; but one in seven of those executed were much wealthier men, mostly of an older generation. These included land-holding farmers, and businessmen of various kinds, most of whom were better educated than their fellows. They represented Lari's 'respectable classes', but they, too, were people at odds with the heavy-handed and extractive behaviour of the Kikuyu chiefs and headmen who ruled over Lari as agents of the colonial state. It was these wealthier men who most often protested that they had been falsely accused on the basis of past disputes over land or commercial rivalries. All of these men had refused to join the Home Guard or identify themselves with the loyalist side. This alone made them suspects in the eyes of Makimei and his followers.

Were the convicted men guilty? This is a dangerous question to ask, but surely an essential one. The investigation of the Lari crimes was deeply flawed, and the court proceedings stripped down to a simple question of fact: was this person present on the night in question? A nagging doubt was present at the time, and has lingered since, that those outsiders who planned and motivated the attack were not amongst the accused. By the nature of the way in which evidence was collected and suspects identified, those prosecuted were inevitably going to be persons *known* to the survivors. Again and again in these nineteen trials the Kikuyu assessors asked for the acquittal of men who were known to have been present at the massacre but who did not use weapons against the victims. Among the local community there was certainly a strong sense that many of those present at the killings were not guilty of murder, and there are many indications that even the assessors thought that Makimei, Machune, Samson Kariuki and their kind had manufactured evidence against their known enemies. The trial transcripts by no means reveal everything there was to know. Lari still holds its secrets.

Whether a man was guilty or innocent, all of those accused of the Lari crimes were punished in one form or another. Those released by the court — the 120 men who were acquitted, the fifty-six who were discharged, and the fifty-eight who had convictions quashed on appeal — did not go free. On their release from custody all were immediately re-arrested and issued with detention orders. These orders allowed the State to detain them without trial under suspicion of Mau Mau activities. Some would be detained in the Emergency prison camps for only a few months: others would be incarcerated for the next five years. While in

detention, the property of these men was often seized by their loyalist neighbours. Many returned home to find their lands had been distributed to others, that their wives had been subjected to gross abuses, and that their children had fled to the forests to avoid persecution and exploitation. The harassment of the families of the accused, and of their witnesses, began even as the trials were in process, and drew stern complaints of interference and intimidation from the defence counsel. But the court could do nothing to prevent this victimization."

The State did what it could to protect and restore the lives of those who had been the victims of Mau Mau violence at Lari. An appeal fund was established by the Kenya Red Cross to raise money for the survivors, and by October 1953 L2220 had been collected. This money was spent on 'social work' at Lari among the survivors in the months following the attack, caring for the women and children, and eventually building new houses and providing furnishings and basic household utensils. The government provided pensions for Lari's widows, and paid the school fees of the numerous orphans of the massacre, many of whom were taken in by loyalist Christian families in other parts of Kiambu.³²

Colonial Consequences

The Lari massacre became the crucial turning point in the Mau Mau war. On a national scale it changed the character of the military campaign; at a local level it greatly intensified the conflict within the Kikuyu communities. Before Lari the majority of Kikuyu had done their level best to avoid taking sides. After Lari that became increasingly difficult. The fate of the Wakahangare family and their clients stood as a lesson to all; and the violence, having been unleashed on so terrifying a scale on both sides, would now be difficult to restrain. Fear and vengeance marked every aspect of the struggle.

Lari was the war's iconographic moment. The propaganda value of the horror was 'squeezed out to the last drop', in lurid press releases, accompanied, of course, by the gruesome photographs. Headlines around the world told the tale of Kikuyu 'primitive barbarism' and 'blood lust', and it was these images of charred, twisted corpses that provoked Robert Ruark to declaim Mau Mau's 'impulsive savagery'. At Lari, Mau Mau became something evil, to be despised and detested. This was how Mau Mau would for ever be remembered.

As the British propaganda machine exploited the opportunity to the full, the rebels were painted as pitiless souls who had lost any vestige of human dignity. They would now be hunted like animals, and this was no more than they deserved. But while the story of sickening brutality

was hashed and rehashed, the state's counter-terror in the aftermath of the attack was only vaguely hinted at, and then most often in terms that gloried in the idea of righteous vengeance against the culprits. The Lari trials revealed plenty of evidence about the mistreatment of suspects in the aftermath of the attack, but at no time was the implicit accusation of systematic state counter-terror explored. Lari's second massacre, conducted in the hot swell of grief and anger, was to be forgotten; British propaganda would see to that.

There were two principal targets for British propaganda over Lari. First, the attack was used to convince public opinion back in Britain of Mau Mau barbarity. Blundell always held the view that if the British public truly understood the character of Mau Mau, then they would better appreciate the need for 'stern measures' and 'appropriate reprisals'. The images of Lari seemed to make the point. Someone in the Office of Information made multiple copies of the prints and circulated them far and wide. It was hoped that the copies sent to Britain would have the greatest impact on the opinions of Kenya's critics, including Marjory Perham, Leslie Hale and Barbara Castle.

The second target for propaganda was Kenya's African population. Luka and his followers were presented as typical of the loyal Kikuyu who were now all potential targets of Mau Mau savagery. The Christian faith of the victims was emphasized (though their Catholicism was not). There were numerous articles in the local-language press, and for weeks after the attack the letters columns still carried commentary on the Lari events and their implications. In their largest venture to date, the Office of Information produced a sixteen-page pamphlet, entitled 'Mau Mau!', printed with a lurid red cover, giving an account in Swahili of Lari, and reproducing several disturbing photographs. The images of Lari were a cold reminder of vulnerability. After Lari no Kikuyu could feel safe.

Lari also had consequences for the colonial government's conduct of the war. The events at Lari and Naivasha shook London out of lingering complacency about the situation in Kenya, and brought about the first really significant changes in the command structure of the security forces. Both reversals were blamed upon a high degree of incompetence. The decision to withdraw British troops from the Lari area the day before the attack, and despite the protests of Chief Makimei, had cruelly exposed British allies to the failings of intelligence. At Naivasha the poor discipline of the police and the disregard for camp security appeared farcical. The ridiculing of the Mau Mau as 'Mickey Mouse', popular among both settlers and the security forces, now suggested an arrogance and complacency that seemed increasingly inappropriate.

A more professional approach was required in both the military and the police. Decisions were therefore taken, during April and May 1953,

to change the overall command structure in Kenya and to put in place a new military Commander-in-Chief and a new Commissioner of Police. Each would be required to direct operations effectively *and* possess the moral strength of character to tackle Nairobi's more extreme elements among the Europeans. By now London had realized that those elements were by no means confined to the settler community. Among the senior colonial administrators in Kenya were several hawks, keen to see a more draconian regime imposed under the Emergency regulations. These officials, typified by the likes of Windley and Johnson, lobbied against those doves who took a more cautious line. The Attorney-General, Whyatt, was a favourite target. Never popular with the settlers anyway, Whyatt was bitterly attacked by the hawks after Lari over his reluctance to support the extension of capital offences and new laws imposing increased communal punishments. In the clamour for new powers and sterner punishments, liberal doves such as Whyatt were in danger of being silenced altogether. These disputes added to the Governor's burdens as he looked around him for advice. Baring was notoriously slow in coming to any decision, and the deep divisions among his senior advisers hardly helped. He was anyway not in good health and, after Lari, Lyttelton even wondered whether Baring any longer had the stomach for the fight."

Lyttelton had already come to the conclusion that Police Commissioner O'Rorke certainly did not. O'Rorke was made the scapegoat for the Naivasha debacle, but the truth was that London had already recognized the dangers of an excessive and ill-disciplined police presence and wished to get to grips with the situation. A police commander in an older colonial style, O'Rorke was too ready to defend his men against all criticism and too slow to investigate allegations of excess. His stance reflected a long tradition of coercive methods within the Kenya Police, which London had been made aware of on several occasions in the past but had not, until now, considered to be sufficiently serious to merit interference. O'Rorke now had to go. To sugar the pill of the major shake-up that was required, a visiting Police Commission was appointed to report on the Kenya force and to make the necessary recommendations.³⁴

Changes on the military side were more rapidly achieved. 'Loony' Hinde had outlived his usefulness as director of military operations. Having been instructed on coming out to Kenya to 'jolly things along', Major General Hinde took his brief rather too literally. He made no secret of his sympathy for the 'hard-liners' among the settlers, and on his frequent tours of the White Highlands he energetically socialized among them. Once the uprising assumed significant proportions, he was out of his depth both militarily and diplomatically. His cavalier, pro-settler

bonhomie, coupled with some extravagant use of language, finally landed Hinde in hot water, when a remark made at a private function – 'that 100,000 Kikuyu should be put to work in a vast swill-tub' – was quoted too widely and became the subject of an embarrassing parliamentary question. The British Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, visited Nairobi in May 1953, only a few weeks after Lari, and informed the hapless Hinde that he was to be replaced."

The new appointee was General George Erskine. Having argued his corner before accepting the posting, Erskine began from a stronger position than Hinde had ever achieved. As Commander-in-Chief, Erskine assumed full command of all military units but only took operational control of police and all reservists, including the Home Guard. He had wanted more than this. He asked to be given powers of martial law in the districts affected by the Emergency, which would give him sole authority over the conduct of the campaign without reference to Baring.

For the Colonial Office, this looked too much like an admission of defeat, and they opposed the suggestion. Others in the British government were increasingly nervous in the weeks after Lari that the Kenya situation was slipping out of control, and there was growing support for the idea of a military administration, such as that successfully run by General Templer in Malaya. The Prime Minister had all along been uncomfortable with the approach and methods of the Kenya administration. Having allowed draconian legislation through after Lari, against his own better judgement, Churchill now saw Erskine's efficient calm and pragmatism as a foil to the excitable hawks surrounding Baring. Churchill took a hand in Erskine's appointment and saw to it that he was provided with a letter authorizing the assumption of martial powers, should the situation demand it. It was to be the ailing Prime Minister's only meaningful intervention in Kenya's sad story before giving way to Anthony Eden in April 1955.

Churchill's letter would be like the sword of Damocles dangling above Baring's head. On arriving in Kenya in June 1953 the wily Erskine let it slip that such a document existed, and that he kept it 'nice and handy' in his spectacle case. As he sat in meetings at Government House, he would snap the case open and shut as a useful device for concentrating minds." This did not endear him to those colonial officials and settlers with whom he had to work, but Erskine usually got his way.¹³⁷ The new commander would fight many battles in Kenya, political as well as military, and he would win them all. Though the white highlanders did not at the time realize it, Erskine's arrival marked the beginning of the end of their dominance in Kenya.

my land,' Muthumo declared to Judge Holmes, 'and I'm not afraid to die for that.'"

Muthumo's bold defiance told its own story of Mau Mau's strength in Nairobi. The number and severity of daylight attacks was still on the increase by January 1954.⁶⁹ While there may have been as few as 300 active Mau Mau fighters among Nairobi's residents," a majority of the city's African population were passive supporters of the movement. This urban population played a major role in supplying and supporting the forest fighters, as well as harbouring active 'terrorists' who launched attacks upon targets within the city and in the neighbouring locations of Kiambu district." Nairobi was Mau Mau's beating heart.

At the beginning of 1954 the commander of the British military in Kenya, General Erskine, decided it was time to confront Mau Mau's domination of the city. He had experience of urban terrorism, having served in Palestine at the time of the Jewish insurgency. There, the small, tightly knit terrorist cells had been able to operate with relative impunity, the local population either too afraid or too compliant to provide useful intelligence to the British administration.⁷² Erskine saw the similarities with Nairobi and resolved to crack the problem in the same way. His scheme was brutally simple: to mount a massive, sudden strike at the heart of the movement's organization in the city, if necessary removing every single Kikuyu from Eastlands. Over the next few months, a joint steering committee of police and military met in secret with senior administrative officers to piece together the plan.⁷³ Operation Anvil would be the largest urban cordon and search action ever mounted.

Operation Anvil

When dawn broke on the morning of 24 April 1954, Nairobi's citizens woke to find their city under siege. British troops and Home Guard units had ringed the suburbs. By 4.30a.m. every road, track and path was sealed, and no African was allowed to leave or enter. As those who made the daily trek into the city reached the roadblocks on the outskirts, they were turned back. Buses and trains leaving Nairobi were cancelled and African taxis were taken off the roads. By 6a.m. Eastlands swarmed with police, KPR and soldiers. Their trucks and armoured cars blocked the main junctions. Alongside each estate, barbed-wire enclosures were hastily erected. Machine-gunners took positions on rooftops, their ghostly silhouettes just visible in the early-morning gloom. As the first rays of the tropical sun penetrated Nairobi's grey smog, Africans emerging to yawn and stretch on their verandas saw the first signs that this would be no ordinary day. White settlers of the KPR stood about in

huddles, poised and energetic, as ever keen to get on with it; while the fresh-faced British squaddies, many of them conscripts of eighteen and nineteen years of age, sat in their trucks, smoking and talking, edgily nervous of what might happen next. No African would leave Bahati, Pumwani or Kariokor that morning, except in the back of a caged lorry. Operation Anvil had begun.⁷⁴

Nairobi would remain a 'closed district' for the next month. Five British battalions and one battalion of the King's African Rifles worked alongside more than 300 police and several hundred Home Guards, with a host of KPR staff to assist with interrogations – a total force of around 20,000 men. The military had gone to great lengths to keep Operation Anvil a secret: even the officers involved in the action had little idea of what was planned until taking up their positions. Rumours of an imminent 'clean-up' of the city had inevitably leaked out all the same, although the worst that the African residents expected was the usual lower-key focus upon one of the more troublesome estates. A few Mau Mau activists had taken the precaution of moving to hideouts in the urban fringes,⁷⁵ but for the most part Erskine had managed to maintain the element of surprise.

Over the previous four months an elaborate scheme had been worked out to systematically search the city and to 'screen' every African. Those estates and shanties where Mau Mau was firmly entrenched were prioritized. Bahati's 12,000 Kikuyu residents would be the most difficult to tackle, but the warrens of Pumwani, home to perhaps 8000 Kikuyu, and the Kariokor dormitories, where 4000 more lived, were also targeted on the first day. The industrial estates, particularly the railway *Ihandies* area came next, along with the African-owned commercial properties along the main thoroughfares of River Road, Grogan Road and Race-course Road. In later days the searches extended to other estates, into the commercial district, and then to the Asian-dominated residential areas of Eastleigh and Parklands. Finally, African labour quarters in the European areas were checked.

Four investigating teams were put in place as the estates were cordoned and searched. These 'screening teams' were each led by three European district officers, three labour officers and nine European members of the KPR. The intention was firstly to identify all those who were illegally resident in the city. Africans were hustled out of their houses and herded into the barbed-wire compounds, where they waited for the cogs of colonial bureaucracy to turn. Each Kikuyu male resident was required to carry five separate documents: an employment registration card; a card setting out his history of employment; an identity card; a poll-tax receipt; and a Kikuyu Special Tax receipt. Failure to produce any one of these documents was grounds for suspicion. Men with missing or faulty

documents were held for questioning at a holding camp outside the city, as were men who could not establish a place of residence in the city or whose papers revealed 'suspiciously frequent' changes of employment. The security forces also detained anyone whom they suspected of being a Mau Mau supporter. To identify the more important suspects, the screening teams were assisted by *gikunia* — the dreaded hooded informants — who sat quietly watching the multitudes being shepherded past them, from time to time leaning to whisper into the ear of a European officer, giving the name and alleged offence of any Mau Mau activist they noticed. The *gikunia* were loyalists and informants, mostly residents of the estates. Their silent and anonymous testimonies would condemn many men to the detention camps.

The capricious nature of this operation gave little room for the benefit of doubt. As the screening team sifted through the hundreds of Africans waiting behind the wire, they employed only the crudest of distinctions. The first step was to check the identity cards (*kipande*) of each person, and separate the Kikuyu (including the Kikuyu-speaking groups from Embu and Meru) from the other Africans. The union leader and political activist Tom Mboya, a Luo and a resident of one of the better non-Kikuyu estates, was caught up in Anvil when the soldiers entered the commercial district:

Leaving several colleagues in my office on the first floor of the Kundi Building, I went down to the street. Within a few seconds, I was challenged by a soldier pointing a gun at me. I raised my hands above my head as ordered and walked to him. He gave me a shove with the butt of his gun and ordered me to walk on. I was taken to a street island where other Africans were already sitting, and ordered to squat down ... For hours we waited until we were ordered into a lorry and driven to a reception camp which was cordoned by barbed wire. Here we again squatted for hours. Then we were lined up and European police officers asked each of us his tribe and separated us accordingly. Those of us who were non-Kikuyu ... were free to go home ...⁷⁶

The Kikuyu were not so fortunate. Though the instructions to the screening teams had made clear the undesirability of mistreating 'decent members of society', the routine of the process and the overwhelming numbers of people involved, combined with a strong disinclination to trust any Kikuyu, rapidly undermined the good intentions of the planning committee.⁷⁷ There were soon many more Kikuyu on their way to the transit camp than the 12,000 or so that preliminary estimates had suggested might be detained.

New prison camps had been constructed before Anvil at Langata,

Mackinnon Road and Manyani. Even as the operation got under way, the camps were barely ready to welcome their inmates. It was reckoned that the new camps would house 20,000 prisoners in total. Langata was intended only as a transit camp, where suspects could be interrogated and properly classified. All Kikuyu suspects were taken here first. At Langata, the *gikunia* went to work again, and more detailed notes were taken of the background and activities of individuals. Those who were implicated in Mau Mau were then transferred to the other, more permanent detention camps at Mackinnon Road and Manyani.⁷⁸ At these camps, teams of loyalist Africans from the reserves worked with the security forces to build up a dossier on each man, identifying which of them might be released and who among them should be committed for trial because they were believed to have participated in a known crime.⁷⁹

A crude grading system was put in place, categorizing suspects by their supposed degree of commitment to the Mau Mau cause. Borrowing from the experience of the Allies in Germany at the end of the Second World War, Africans screened in Anvil were classified as 'white', 'grey' or 'black' — the black colour used to connote that which was most negative or dangerous. 'Whites' were not considered a threat to security, and were usually repatriated to the reserve, or allowed to return to their employment in the city; but 'greys', who were suspected of being passive supporters of Mau Mau, and 'blacks', who were thought to be active terrorists, later to be termed 'hard-core', were taken to the camps for further interrogation. In practice, the only Kikuyu initially classified as 'white' were those whom the security forces knew to be members of the Home Guard, tribal police and police reservists, or those in other trusted government posts. Anyone whom the *gikunia* picked out, or who was named on the Special Branch 'wanted list' was graded 'black'. Everyone else — the bulk of people for whom there was no immediate evidence of loyalty or misdemeanour — was labelled 'grey'. This was hardly sophisticated, but the system would soon be modified and extended throughout all of Kenya's emergency detention camps.

The power of the screening teams was absolute. Under the emergency laws, suspects could be detained without trial on the basis of a Delegated Detention Order, signed by any official of the rank of district officer or above. These sparse documents set down the detainee's name, pass number, and location of origin, with a brief comment on the reason for the order. Nothing more was needed to condemn a man to incarceration for two years, or more. Suspicion that a man had taken an oath, or even that he was thought to be in sympathy with the aims of Mau Mau, was sufficient for detention without trial. Accusations made by others, such as the hooded informants used at Langata, needed no corroboration. The use of elders brought from the reserve in the screening of men at

MacKinnon Road and Manyani was intended to act as a check against any possible victimization, but it was impossible to prevent score-settling or personal vendettas. More serious offenders, who might be likely to come to trial later if evidence could be gathered for a prosecution, were subject to a Governor's Detention Order, signed by Baring. Later in the Emergency, all those persons who had been issued with Governor's Detention Orders would lose their rights to land, and their families would forfeit whatever property they had. In the chaos and confusion of Anvil, there were many, many cases of mistaken identity. Once labelled, it was exceedingly difficult for a man to challenge any detention order. During Anvil, Nairobi's district officers signed more than 20,000 detention orders.

Aside from the detained men, around 2150 women and 4000 children — the families of some of the detained men — were 'forcibly repatriated' to the reserves. A further 1050 women and 2000 children had gone back to Central Province 'at their own request'. These were 'either unattached women, who could not properly be described as dependants, or were families who earlier this year had sought refuge in the city from the more seriously disturbed areas of Fort Hall, Nyeri and Embu'.⁸⁰ These women may have expressed the wish to get out of Nairobi, but they did not accept their displacement passively. None of the women did. The Europeans and Asians who volunteered, through the East African Women's League, to help serve tea and bread to the African women as they were loaded onto buses and trains, found that their charity was not wanted. The Kikuyu women loudly sang protest songs, snarled abuse, or sat in silent, sullen resentment. The tea and bread were refused and thrown back in the faces of the welfare workers. The Kikuyu women displayed their own brand of defiance, and retained their dignity; they would not be patronized by the white highlanders or their Asian allies.

Nairobi's vagrant children posed a different kind of problem. Despite the 'repatriation' of thousands of Kikuyu juveniles to the reserves during Anvil, Eastlands was again swarming with vagrant juveniles only a few weeks later. It was a process that would continue over the next decade and beyond. Almost as quickly as they were removed to the rural areas, these youngsters seemed to return again. Some of the Kikuyu juveniles coming to the city were war orphans, others the children of parents who had been detained. The Mau Mau war marked the real beginnings of Nairobi's 'street-children' phenomenon. By 1955 youth camps were established on the city's fringes to accommodate these youngsters and attempt their 'rehabilitation'; but this limited welfare provision simply could not cope with the numbers involved. Aside from those admitted to the youth camps, in 1956 some 3547 vagrant juveniles were officially 'repatriated' from Nairobi back to the countryside.' This was yet another

indication of the massive scale of social dislocation among the Kikuyu communities caused by the war.

In the morass of Operation Anvil, bureaucratic procedure had taken over from common sense: with these numbers, what did it matter if one more Kikuyu was detained? And if in any doubt, it was surely better to detain the man than let him go? Anvil epitomized an attitude of mind that pervaded the security forces. The Kikuyu had come to be seen as a kind of sub-species, a group that could only make claims to an inferior kind of humanity. Over the following months of 1954 the Kikuyu population in Kenya's detention camps would swell to more than 70,000.

Anvil set the trend. In the first forty-eight hours of the operation, 11,600 Kikuyu taken from Bahati, Pumwani and Kariokor were screened, of whom 8300 were detained for further questioning, and another 1250 dependants and juveniles were returned to their home areas in Central Province. In that period alone, the police reckoned that they had identified 206 active Mau Mau terrorists, including two oath administrators, four intelligence officers, nine treasurers, one courier, twenty cash collectors, nine 'other officials', and 129 guards and gunmen.' By 26 May, when Anvil finally came to an end, the numbers screened had climbed above 50,000. Of these, 24,100 Kikuyu males had been detained. It was a simply astonishing number: nearly half the total number of Kikuyu in the city had been imprisoned without trial.

Of those detained, Special Branch reckoned that 700 were 'hard-core' Mau Mau, who had been involved in criminal activities on behalf of the movement. They considered this a great achievement; but the fact that this represented less than 3 per cent of the total number of people detained told a rather different story. Senior military officers acknowledged that the evidence against most of them was pretty slight, but no one seemed much concerned! The Kikuyu population had been reduced to only one-quarter of Nairobi's workforce." In its pervasive, all-encompassing magnitude, Operation Anvil had been both a bureaucratic triumph and a political disaster. The British had pilloried friend and foe alike.

When Lyttelton asked for a preliminary assessment, he was told that Operation Anvil had been 'thoroughly satisfactory'. Hooliganism had all but ceased in the city, and there had been a spectacular fall in crimes of violence. Eastlands was quiet, and law-abiding Africans [were] once again able to go about their day's work without fear of attack of intimidation'. The Mau Mau boycotts had been broken; buses were again running through the African estates, although even on the busiest routes use was still at less than 50 per cent of the pre-Emergency level; Africans were again to be seen smoking cigarettes in public; while the reassuring collection of empty bottles surrounding the beer shop in Pumwani indicated that the *tai-tai* again felt able to purchase their drink of

choice – European bottled beer was an icon of modernity for the African office worker!' Most important of all, every one of the dozen or so Mau Mau organizing committees in the city had been broken up. Without the impetus and direction given by these small cells of activists – it was reckoned there were no more than ten men on each committee – it was difficult to see how the movement would be able to mobilize its urban support again. For Erskine, this was as good an outcome as he could possibly have hoped for. It seemed that Mau Mau had been caught in the trap, and broken. Nairobi officials assured Lyttelton that the respectable African community had welcomed Anvil; indeed, it was claimed that 'the chief African criticism of Anvil [was] that it was neither wide enough nor tough enough'."

While Baring's government congratulated itself for having conducted Operation Anvil with such restraint, others took a less sanguine view. The loudest complaints were first heard from some of the larger employers in the city, who found their workforce decimated overnight. With the Kikuyu population of the city reduced by so per cent, the pool of unemployed job-seekers had been taken away. By reducing Nairobi's 'surplus labour', Anvil did more to raise African wages in the city than had two years of negotiation with employers. The stricter controls now placed upon the administration of passbooks, including the insistence that workers should have proper accommodation within the city, also increased the pressure upon employers to provide adequately for their staff.⁸⁷ All of this was costly, and deeply unpopular with European and Asian employers. They had no choice but to employ the new job-seekers who flooded into Nairobi from the Kamba areas, and from western Kenya, even though these workers were less experienced, less efficient and often far less reliable than the Kikuyu whom they replaced (see table 5.i, p. 352, for a breakdown of the African population in Nairobi)."

While the government had surely expected a backlash of complaint from employers, they were less well prepared for the criticism that poured down upon them from the leaders of Kenya's main churches. The churches had led the fight against Mau Mau even before the start of the emergency, and in Nairobi African Christians had been subjected to gross intimidation and violence. These were people who might have welcomed Anvil, but they were far from happy with what had happened. Late in June, Morrison, the General Secretary of the Christian Council of Kenya – representing all the larger Protestant churches in the colony – wrote to the deputy governor, Sir Frederick Crawford, about more than sixty Kikuyu Christians who had been rounded up in Operation Anvil. These were all persons for whom the churches vouched in unconditional terms: many were senior church elders, including several who had very

publicly opposed Mau Mau and some who had been victims of attempted assassination. The loyalty of these men was above question; yet it appeared they had been swept away into the detention camps as Mau Mau suspects. Other African Christians had gone to look for them, but found it impossible to penetrate the confusion of Langata, Mackinnon Road and Manyani. 'We are informed either that persons cannot be traced, or that they must be re-screened, or that they cannot return to Nairobi because they were self-employed, or some other reason is given which prevents or delays release,' wrote Morrison, barely able to conceal his frustration. 'Every time we raise the issue, we are informed that the security forces insist on this or that ... The effect on the churches and on the loyal Kikuyu is most depressing,' he continued. The government was in danger of alienating the one group among the Kikuyu on whose support they must ultimately rely as a nucleus for influencing the rest')

Crawford saw the dangers clearly enough. He gave instructions that the camp authorities should locate the named men, and wherever possible release them. His directive had little impact. Over the next month only a handful of the men emerged from the screening camps. Many more remained inside, and it soon became apparent that several had been classified as 'grey' or even 'black'. Archdeacon Peter Bostock, of the Anglican church, visited Langata in person twice during June in an effort to identify the 'missing' men. He was shocked and disturbed by the experience. The wire pens in which the men were held appeared grossly overcrowded and the Europeans in charge seemed to be only barely in control. There were no complete lists of names, and even when a man's dossier could be found, he could not. Allowed to wander through the pens on his own — a privilege he only exacted after a huge quarrel — Bostock eventually found eight members of his church, but could not persuade the camp authorities to release any of them. The officer in charge, Ellis, ignored the Archdeacon's pleas, and showed no interest whatsoever in the letters of recommendation he brought in support of each of the incarcerated men, nor in the directive from Crawford. It seemed that the camps were a law unto themselves, regardless of the Deputy Governor's instructions.

Angered by the rebuttal, Bostock got to work. Over the next nine months, he tirelessly pursued the matter at every possible opportunity, writing repeatedly to officials at all levels, and providing copious detail on the backgrounds of the men concerned. The Anvil detainees included evangelical Christians such as Rowland Kariuki, renowned for his opposition to Mau Mau in the slums of Kariobangi and the nearby sisal estates of Dandora; Peter Muceke, who had provided information against Mau Mau activists in Bahati; and Leonard Njeroge, the respected headmaster of an Anglican church school. Dedan Kihato was typical of the well-

educated, enterprising *tai-tai* Christians caught up in Anvil. A resident and shopkeeper in Bahati, he was known to be a wealthy man, and had been generous to his church, buying bibles and furniture, and giving money to assist the poor. Bostock considered it 'quite impossible' that Kihato could be a Mau Mau supporter. The screening team at Manyani agreed. Dedan Kihato was classified as 'white', but when he applied to be allowed to return to his shop in Bahati he was refused. Self-employed Kikuyu like Kihato were thought too vulnerable to Mau Mau influence, and were no longer welcome in Nairobi. Kihato's licence was revoked, and his shop given to another, non-Kikuyu trader. There is no record that Kihato was compensated for his loss of stock. An urban man through and through, Dedan Kihato had no land back in the reserve; in Operation Anvil this Christian loyalist lost everything he had built up in a life's work. Worse still, he was not released from custody at Manyani, but sent instead to the Fort Hall Works Camp, where he languished for the next year.⁹⁰ His experience was by no means unusual.

The other churches, too, now came forward with their own lists. Among those sought by the Church of Scotland were several revivalists, who appeared to have been classified as 'black' merely because they professed complete ignorance of Mau Mau. There was Leonard Waruingi, a deacon and Sunday-school teacher who had refused to allow his daughters to be circumcised and who had risked his life several times in opposition to Mau Mau; and Jonathan Kariuki, another school teacher and revivalist, whose wife had been molested by Mau Mau supporters. Waruingi was classified 'black', and held at Mackinnon Road; Kariuki had been graded only as 'grey', but it still took several months to extract him from Manyani.⁹¹ In September, Archbishop McCarthy, of Kenya's Roman Catholic Missions, joined the queue of plaintiffs, presenting his own list directly to Governor Baring. The Anglican Baring ordered that these cases be 'looked at immediately', but in his hesitant, almost apologetic tone, even the Governor appeared to be aware that this might be easier said than done.⁹² Baring already knew that Kenya's bureaucratic machinery had become unwieldy and uncontrollable. In practice, the camp commanders and their staff did much as they pleased.

Church leaders had been mildly critical of the government throughout the emergency; Anvil turned this into a unified chorus of dissent. For the most part, the criticism was measured and polite, only expressed in the privacy of meetings with senior officials. The missions did not want to be seen as giving succour to Mau Mau. Yet as their frustration mounted, the churchmen became increasingly outspoken. In January 1955 the Church of Scotland moderator in Kenya, David Steele, startled his Presbyterian congregation with an impassioned attack from the pulpit against the arbitrary callousness of government policies, taking Operation

Anvil as his principal case. Steele described how the government had alienated Christian support through its heavy-handedness, summarily throwing the innocent into detention, where they were contaminated by the wicked, and failing to protect decent people from the abuse of those whom the government armed as their protectors, the Home Guard.⁹³ Carelessness, and an utter disregard for the rights of Africans had resulted in many honest, law-abiding citizens being incarcerated during Anvil.⁹⁴

Steele also knew, however, that there were more sinister forces at work. False accusations had removed many people to the detention camps, and this had sometimes been deliberate and calculated. In the chaotic turmoil of Anvil it was obvious that this had happened more frequently than the security forces were prepared to concede. What the clergy knew only too well, but were usually too cautious to say outright, was that the system of informants run by the security forces was far from infallible, and that the Home Guard units who policed the Nairobi estates were hopelessly corrupt.

Home Guard units had been established on all of the estates of Eastlands in the early months of the Emergency with the direct support of the churches. Recruiting Kikuyu had not proved easy. People feared retribution. The missions did their best to foster a stronger Christian community against Mau Mau, holding confessional prayer meetings every Sunday, where those who had been compelled to take the oath were encouraged to recant. They did so at their peril. Mau Mau targeted the leading Christians in Eastlands, and especially those Kikuyu who joined the Home Guard. A typical example was Boniface Waweru, who survived several attacks before becoming head of the Bahati Home Guard in 1954. Without Waweru and his like it would have been impossible after Anvil to organize any Home Guard activity in those estates that were predominantly Kikuyu; but for every Waweru there were many more Christian Kikuyu in Pumwani, Bahati and Kariokor who were too afraid to take a public stand against Mau Mau.

Elsewhere in Eastlands the Home Guard comprised non-Kikuyu. There was a large Muslim Home Guard contingent in Pumwani, and in Kaloleni the Luo *tai-tai* had been recruited. Though notionally overseen by European officers, the city's Home Guard were left pretty much to themselves, under the authority of the chiefs and headmen appointed on the estates. After Anvil, with the establishment of closer administration in the city as a whole, the numbers of non-Kikuyu Home Guards greatly increased; and so, too, did their boldness. With Mau Mau's organization in disarray, Home Guard confidence grew. Many of them sought to exploit the opportunity to full advantage.

Home Guard corruption in Nairobi was hardly a secret. 'Most people

are aware of the system of bribes employed by the Chiefs and Home Guards,' commented one of Nairobi's European residents, observing that extortion 'to avoid arrest' and subsequent detention was 'rife in the African Home Guard'. The usual fee was 20 shillings, but if the victim was thought to be in better-paid employment, then larger sums might be demanded.⁹⁵ Even during Anvil, the Kikuyu relatives of men swept up and taken to the camps tried to bribe Home Guards and the police to effect releases. When the Nairobi District Commissioner resolved to send a small party of African Home Guards from Pumwani to Mackinnon Road to assist with screening, within two days of information about their posting being released the men 'received bribes amounting to k600 from the dependants and hangers-on of various wealthy shopkeepers arrested in Anvil'. On this occasion, the corruption came to light, but in other cases the classification of suspects in the Anvil camps was 'a matter of who ha[d] paid the most momey'.⁹⁶ In late colonial Kenya, justice was too often an expensive luxury.

The *tai-tai*, along with other Kikuyu business people remaining in Eastlands after Anvil, were at the mercy of the Home Guard, as European officials were well aware. [T]here are many Africans, irrespective of their status of government servant, Home Guard, or civilian, who are only too pleased to kick the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru when they are down,' wrote Nairobi's District Commissioner, 'especially if they can squeeze some financial gain out of it at the same time.'⁹⁷ Respectable people had more money, and wealthy Kikuyu made for especially easy pickings. The experience of a Kikuyu trader named Kabura was typical of many. Kabura was a prosperous vegetable vendor. She had been licensed to trade at the municipal market since 1948, and lived in one of the best houses Eastlands had to offer on the Gorofani estate. She was among the few Kikuyu who retained a licence to trade at the market after Anvil. One evening in June 1954, when Kabura was relaxing on the veranda of her home, four Home Guards burst in and demanded that she hand over the cloth bag in which she kept her earnings. Kabura refused. One of the Home Guard then seized the bag, and Kabura shouted for help. The neighbours who came running to her aid soon melted back into the night when they saw the Home Guard. No one dared intervene. By then, the leader of the group had removed the money from Kabura's bag, a sum of 1010 shillings. Waving the bundle of cash for all to see, he declared that Kabura 'must be a Mau Mau treasurer'. Kabura protested her innocence, and was told that their silence would be costly. When she indignantly refused to pay any bribe, she was arrested.

Kabura was detained at the Pumwani Home Guard post overnight. The next morning she was taken before the African court, where she was charged with being out on the road after the curfew. Despite her

protests, the Chief convicted her without hearing any evidence. Kabura paid her fine and left the court. She never saw her bag again, nor her week's earnings of Imo shillings. Over the next month Kabura was repeatedly menaced by the same Home Guards, who stole further belongings from her home. Complaints to the Chief brought no action. Finally, run ragged by intimidation, Kabura gave up her home and went to live with a friend in another part of Eastlands.⁹⁸ It was an all too familiar story.

Justice had a hard struggle for mastery in Nairobi's turmoil. Though Nairobi's European administrators regularly issued directives warning the chiefs, headmen and Home Guard commanders 'not to alienate Africans who were sympathetic to the government', harassment, bribery and corruption were indiscriminate and widespread. Anvil only made matters worse. It seemed that no one among the *tai-tai* was immune: even City Councillor Musa Amalemba complained of harassment 'by drunken Home Guards' at his home in Kaloleni in May.⁹⁹ Government staff living in Starehe reported that the Pumwani Home Guard stole property from their houses during searches, and regularly took any money they found in the pockets of people they searched. A Home Guard headman had told one resident: 'You people of Starehe know English very well, and consider yourselves to be very high people, and for this reason we are going to beat you.'¹⁰⁰ The Pumwani Home Guards were reputedly the worst offenders, making nightly rounds of houses occupied by Kikuyu and demanding 5 shillings from each to leave them in peace. Those who refused to pay were hauled before the African court the next morning – just as Kabura had been – where a fine would be summarily issued."¹⁰¹

Some employers were moved to register complaints on behalf of their workers. The traffic superintendent of Kenya Bus Service complained bitterly that his staff from Kariokor and Ziwani were being intimidated by the Home Guard, who said 'ammunition [would] be put in their rooms' unless they paid bribes. His workers were 'very frightened' that they would be framed. They knew only too well that the penalty for possession of ammunition was execution."¹⁰² The security officer of Block Hotels also wrote to complain of Home Guard intimidation of workers who were taken home by private bus after midnight. Home Guard in Bahati had formed the habit of waiting for the bus each night and harassing the workers for bribes once they were deposited at their homes. The management of the hotel had first written to the police at Shauri Moyo, but got no reply. They then wrote to the District Commissioner, who redirected them to the European in charge of the Bahati Home Guard, a Mr Purves. He refused to acknowledge the complaint. Finally, they contacted the district officer, Rvlands, who lamely confessed that

he was not empowered to take any action. This was typical of the maze of bureaucracy and official indifference that shielded the Home Guard from accountability."

Anvil broke the back of Mau Mau's organization in Nairobi, but at what cost? For the respectable Kikuyu middle classes, many of whom lived in fear and dread of Mau Mau intimidation, Anvil had been nothing less than a betrayal. Already threatened by Mau Mau, they had now been the victims of a state-sponsored raid. They had lost their livelihoods and their property. Those rounded up had been asked to clear their homes, labelling all of their belongings – tables, chairs, wooden beds and mattresses, cooking utensils, clocks, bicycles, ornaments and framed photographs, even their clothes. Their possessions had then been heaped onto lorries and transported to two huge military storehouses at Langata – but not before the Home Guard and police had taken a few things for themselves. At Langata the store was poorly guarded and was continually burgled. Though this was reported, no one seemed to care very much." Those Kikuyu who did return to collect their things after release from the camps were left to rummage through the remnants to recover what they could. At the end of 1957 the stores still held what was left of the treasure of mundane artefacts – a vast, disorderly museum to the urban lives destroyed by Operation Anvil.

Fighting Back

In the months after Anvil, Mau Mau fighters found it increasingly dangerous to operate permanently within the urban area. Movement in and out of the city was closely monitored through to the end of October and Mau Mau activists were constantly harried. By the end of June several remaining groups of fighters had already decamped from the city, forming into new gangs in the peri-urban fringe of Nairobi. The fightback was about to begin.

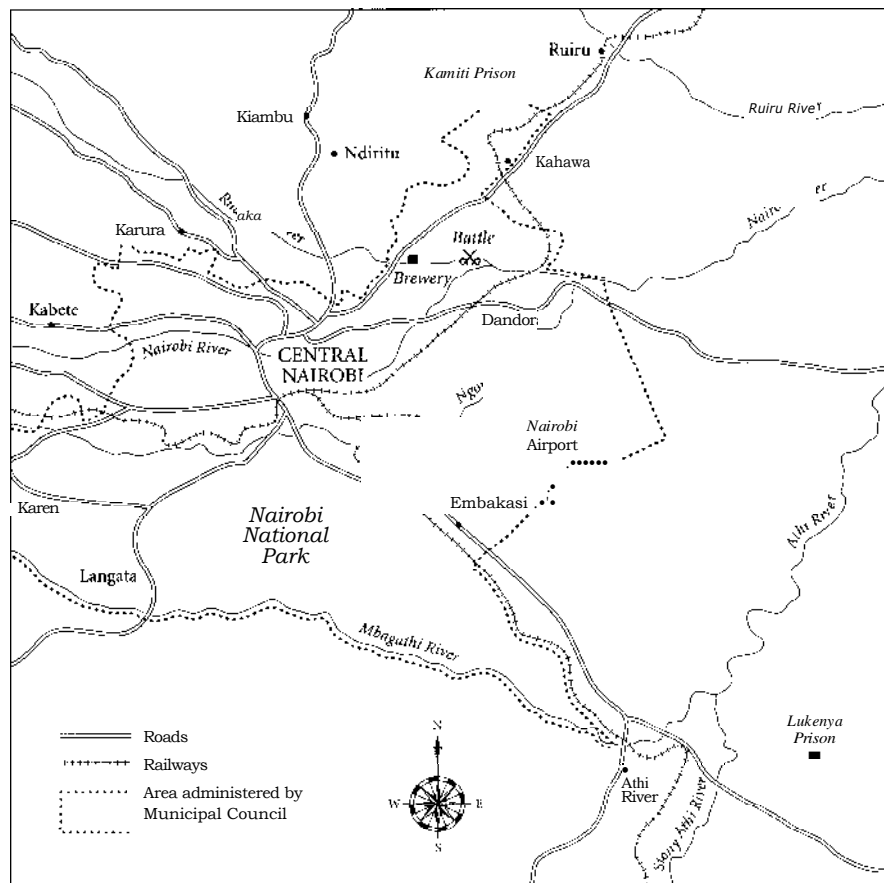
Among the leaders of these new gangs were David (Mohamed) Mathu, Mwangi Toto and Kariuki Chotara." These young, impetuous firebrands seized the initiative to mount their own counter-attack in the Nairobi area between June and December 1954. They were not controlled by any committee, nor did they liaise much with elders in Nairobi or Kiambu, who were slowly attempting to reconstruct the movement's organizational structure in the wake of Anvil. Mathu, Toto and Chotara were too impatient to wait for this: they cut loose on their own. Some Kikuyu thought of them as *komerera* – bandits or renegades – who were taking advantage of the rebellion for their own gain and glory, and who behaved irresponsibly, endangering local Kikuyu communities with their

recklessness. At whatever cost, they seemed determined to ensure that Mau Mau in Nairobi would not go down without a fight.

Throughout July, Mwangi Toto's gang carried out numerous attacks against police and loyalists in the settled area of Kiambu," and by early September other gangs had joined in what appeared to be a renewed Mau Mau offensive around Nairobi. Through September and October there was a spate of attacks to the north and south of the city, and in neighbouring locations of Kiambu. The Mau Mau fighters had their moments of triumph in this offensive, but it was ultimately to prove a costly final fling. On 1 September European farmers were attacked at Limuru, on the borders of the city; but three days later, six Mau Mau fighters were shot in a running battle with security forces to the north of the city. A further attack was launched against a Home Guard patrol in Kiambu on 25 September, in which Mohamed Mathu claims that six Home Guards were killed." But on the same day the security forces uncovered and destroyed a Mau Mau hospital and substantial food stocks, all well hidden on the edge of the city.¹⁰⁸ This discovery was a sure sign of continued Mau Mau activity, but its destruction indicated that it was the security forces that now had the upper hand.

In the midst of this flurry of activity came the most spectacular event of all: a daring raid upon Lukenya Prison, to the south-east of Nairobi. This attack was one of the great successes of the war for the Mau Mau fighters. A band of twenty, under the command of Mathu, made their way from Kiambu to Lukenya — a distance of more than 20 miles — skirting the northern and eastern fringes of the city, via the labour lines near the Tusker Brewery and Embakasi Airport, where supporters provided them with food and shelter. At Lukenya they launched the attack under cover of darkness. Some 296 Mau Mau detainees were freed from the prison, a guard being killed and others wounded; but the attackers failed to find the armoury: 'To our disappointment,' Mathu later wrote, 'we found only three rifles, two shot guns, a revolver and about 300 rounds of ammunition.'¹⁰⁹ This aside, the raid was a huge propaganda success, and tied down the security forces in efforts to recapture the escaped prisoners over the next week."

But the success at Lukenya brought an intensification of security operations in the vicinity of Nairobi that would see the capture of many of the leading fighters before the end of the year. Moreover, although the adventures of Mwangi Toto, Chotara and Mathu over this period can be presented as acts of glorious resistance, their activities served only to divert funds and supplies away from the increasingly beleaguered forest fighters in the Aberdares and Mount Kenya. By October 1954 many of the forest gangs were already splintered, isolated and in desperate need



Map 5.ii Nairobi and its environs, c.1954

of supplies and new recruits. Operation Anvil had achieved far more than the disruption of Mau Mau in Nairobi: it marked the turning point in the British campaign against the rebels.

The now fragile vulnerability of Mau Mau's Nairobi-based recruitment and supply networks was vividly exposed five months after Anvil, in the battle of Dandora swamp. On the afternoon of 25 October 1954 security forces on the north-eastern edge of the city received information that armed terrorists were on a nearby sisal plantation. The informant was a young Luo migrant worker. As dusk fell, a platoon surrounded the spot, in an uncultivated part of the plantation in Dandora, near the swampy junction of two rivers.' The gang were camped at the base of a spreading thorn tree. All around was thick papyrus, in which avenues had been cut leading to sleeping places. This was clearly a regular Mau

Mau base, a link in the supply chain that connected Nairobi to the forests. Amid the papyrus, the members of a Mau Mau unit could be seen, huddled together in groups of three or four."² As darkness fell, the platoon tightened their encirclement. As they did so, those resting in the papyrus became aware of their peril. When the attack began, just after 9p. m., the Mau Mau fighters were ready and returned fire with a ferocity that surprised the European commander. Now realizing that his adversaries were well armed and determined, he pulled his men back to take cover and summoned reinforcements. Later that night officers of the Kenya Regiment arrived with members of the local Kikuyu Home Guard, shortly followed by CID officers and police from Thika. Then came a platoon of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, who took up positions for an assault on the swamp. Before dawn the Mau Mau fighters were invited to surrender; but none did. The Mau Mau camp was then heavily mortar-bombed for over an hour, this being answered by constant sniping from the guerrillas holed up in the papyrus beds.

In the clear light of mid-morning, the Northumberland Fusiliers finally entered the swamp, whilst the other security forces maintained the cordon. The British soldiers moved slowly, cautiously searching amid the papyrus. The skirmishing in the swamp lasted most of the day, as small groups of Mau Mau were flushed out. When discovered, some stood their ground and died with their weapons in their hands — several shotguns, home-made pipe-guns, pistols, bottle-bombs and pangas. In the confusion, part of the gang slipped through the cordon, escaping to the north along the course of the Kamiti river, past the startled and ill-disciplined Home Guard. Others lost their nerve and ran from their hiding places, throwing away their weapons and ammunition as they ran, only to be shot by the Kenya Regiment officers or caught by the Home Guards stationed in the cordon. Some emerged from the papyrus with their hands aloft, and quickly surrendered to the British soldiers. Among them were a few women and young children."³

When the final sweep through the swamp was completed that afternoon, around fifty prisoners had been taken, some of them seriously wounded. More than thirty guerrillas lay dead, many having perished in the mortar attack before dawn. Among the prisoners was the gang leader, Captain Nyagi Nyaga, who defiantly proclaimed his authority. His accomplices included several fighters whom the security forces immediately identified by their appearance and attitude as 'hard-core' Mau Mau; poorly nourished, dressed in tattered remnants of military and police uniforms, and with their hair matted and uncut, they carried the signs of having spent a considerable time living rough in the forests.

In a campaign where the enemy usually melted into the bush and major engagements were a rarity, the defeat of Captain Nyagi Nyaga's army at Dundora was heralded as a notable success for the security forces. '4

The interrogations of Captain Nyaga and his followers lasted more than three weeks.^{iiis} When the evidence was gathered, forty-one of those arrested at Dandora came before the Special Emergency Assize Courts in seven trials. The thirty-seven men and four women who stood in the dock can be broadly grouped into three categories. The first comprised seasoned Mau Mau fighters, who had been in the Aberdares forest for many months. There were only five such fighters among the Dandora captives brought before the court: Kaburuki M'amamja, a married man of around twenty-two years of age from Meru; Irongo Mwangi, a former tailor from Ndegba in Fort Hall, who had been educated to Form II at a Church Mission Society (CMS) primary school; Jacob Maina Gituru, in his early twenties, another CMS affiliate, who had been employed as a clerk in Nairobi prior to the Emergency; Kirongochu Nyaga, a young man of twenty years, from Kirioniri, in Embu, who freely admitted his activities with the forest fighters in the Aberdares; and their leader, Nyagi Nyaga. It is striking that so few of this large gang fell into this category. Several other experienced forest fighters were certainly among those killed at Dandora, and we know that others were among the few who slipped through the cordon on the morning of 25 October; but there had been only around a dozen experienced Mau Mau fighters at Dandora.

The court heard that the 'talkative' Nyaga had been cooperative under interrogation. Carrying the insignia of a British army captain on his tattered, improvised military uniform, Nyaga made no effort to conceal his role as a freedom fighter. A married man in his early twenties, from Meru, with a little Anglican education, he had joined General Simba on Mount Kenya at the outbreak of the Emergency in October 1952, later coming under the command of General Kassam. He had come to Nairobi at Kassam's instigation in September 1954 with a small band of a dozen or so fighters, to secure supplies and to gather new recruits for the movement.' Nyaga told the CID of his life as a forest fighter, and gave general information on the activities of the Mau Mau gangs. During his interrogation, Nyaga had been promised 'that nothing bad [would] happen' if he provided useful information: 'If I make a true statement of my activities in the forest,' he later told the court, 'then I would be one of the members of the police.'" '7

He was even taken into Nairobi to be interviewed by Special Branch on his more recent adventures in and around the city. It was here, in Kileleshwa gaol, that Nyaga encountered Mohamed Mathu. The two

men had first met a fortnight earlier, when Nyaga had gone to visit Mathu and Mwangi Toto at their camp on the city's southern fringe. Captain Nyagi Nyaga impressed Mathu as 'a friendly, talkative man', telling 'many stories about Kimathi, Mathenge and the fight in the Aberdares forests'. Nyaga explained that he had come to Nairobi from the Aberdares because his forest battalion 'were urgently in need of arms, ammunition and other supplies'. Mathu gave Nyaga seven shotguns, a quantity of ammunition, clothing and some cash, and provided him with an escort to take him safely back to his followers camped at Dandora. The two comrades now exchanged news of the circumstances that had brought each of them to Kileleshwa. Mathu had been wounded and captured on 12 October, just after his first meeting with Nyaga. Six Mau Mau comrades met their deaths that day, including Mwangi Toto.'

Nyaga evidently believed that cooperation would save him from execution. Bargaining of this kind was effective in other cases, but it did not save Nyaga. He was sentenced to hang, along with the four other seasoned fighters amongst the Dandora accused.

The second element identifiable among Nyaga's army was former inmates of Lukenya Prison, who had escaped to their freedom in September as a consequences of the raid by Mohamed Mathu and his comrades. Prisoners at Lukenya were committed to detention for having taken a Mau Mau oath, for being in possession of false identity papers, or on suspicion of rebel sympathies; none were 'high risk'.⁹ On their unexpected release, these men found themselves in a predicament: having consorted with a Mau Mau gang in the escape, they were now liable to prosecution for what was a capital offence. Without pass papers, labour documents or certificates of release they could not return home; nor could they safely remain in Nairobi. These fugitives had little option but to go to the forests. Five Lukenya escapees now appeared in court with Captain Nyaga. All five were found guilty of consorting with terrorists and sentenced to hang, though two were reprieved because they were found to be only seventeen years of age.

The third category among Nyaga's followers was by far the largest. Of those before the court, twenty-nine professed themselves to be new recruits to the Mau Mau cause. Many claimed to have been taken by force from their homes and jobs in Nairobi. They told the court of their 'capture' by Mau Mau in Kariokor, Pumwani, Kasarani, Shauri Moyo or Mathare, of oathing ceremonies, and of being forced to move to the Dandora hideout. They included many who had been 'gathered up' by the men of General Mwairuthi, then Mau Mau's chief recruiting agent in the city. Others had been recruited directly by Nyaga and his men, as they administered oaths in the vicinity of Kahawa and Dandora during

October 1954.' Their employment records of several of the accused supported their claims, showing they had worked for local employers up to a few days before their arrest.

Among them were all varieties of people. Wanjiru Mugo was one of four women arrested at Dandora. Originally from Embu, she worked in Nairobi as a street vendor, at a kiosk close to the railway station. Unmarried, but with one child, she had been 'taken by Mau Mau' to Mathare to be oathed. M'Anambio M'Itara, a Catholic from Meru, worked at a city hotel before his capture, while Edwin Waiyaki Thoroba was a clerk with Express Transport. Kariuki Kimotho was the oldest amongst those arrested at Dandora. A twenty-eight-year-old Catholic, originating from Nyeri and married with a child, Kimotho worked at Ruaraka before being press-ganged.'" Karanja Kihara was a sixteen-year-old student at the Remington Business College, on Government Road in central Nairobi. Kihara told the court, 'Mau Mau abducted me by pretending to be policemen.' Mama Gatembu had worked in the main railway stockyards until 18 October. Literate and articulate, having been educated up to Standard III at a Church Missionary Society in Embu, Gatembu told the court that Mau Mau agents had seized him near his home in Kariokor. M'Minati M'Igiria also lived in Kariokor, working as a labourer and lorry turn-boy until 23 October.

As Kikuyu workers in Nairobi, all these men and women had been screened during Operation Anvil in April and May 1954. The fact that all had retained their employment indicated that the security forces had then considered them to be free from Mau Mau influence.

The remarkable courtroom testimony of another of the accused also supported the claims of Mau Mau coercion and press-ganging. A confessed Mau Mau forest fighter, Kirongochi told the court that he had been in the Aberdares for many months before coming to Nairobi to gather new recruits. He described how he had gone from place to place and 'arrested people'. Starting out from Shauri Moyo, where Captain Nyaga made contact with Mau Mau leaders in the city, they had split into two recruitment patrols. His had gone first to Majengo, then to Kariokor, then near to the Khoja mosque, and finally to Kasarani. 'We had over thirty prisoners' by the time Dandora was reached, Kirongochi told the court.'" He described how three of his fellow accused, Ngugi Njaguna, Marete Kilela and Gatuthu Gecha, were all in fact captives, and explained that he had personally been assigned 'to guard them'. His evidence was detailed and fitted well with the statements made by his co-accused; but it did not help any of them escape conviction. Justice Rudd declared that he 'did not believe Kirongochi's statement', as there 'was nothing else to support the contention'.²⁴ Nothing, that is, except the statements of his fellow co-accused in the dock. Kirongocha. and

the three reluctant recruits he had guarded, all hanged together in Nairobi gaol on 3 January 1955.

Justice Rudd saw no reason to show mercy to Kirongochi, but he did have doubts about some of the other convictions. He confided to Governor Baring that many of the gang 'were obviously new recruits'.²⁵ 'I think it possible', he wrote, 'that none of the accused in this case have done much, or any, actual fighting.'" And Rudd was palpably disturbed by the last of the Dandora cases, on 18 December 1954. In this trial five accused stood in the dock together, four males in their early twenties and a young, local Dandora girl of only twelve years of age, Njoki Macharia, who had become embroiled in the battle having brought food to the hideout. After questioning the prosecution counsel, Rudd speedily acquitted her.²⁷ Njoki Macharia was spared the ordeal of the trial, but her very presence in the courtroom exposed the haphazard and callous procedures of arrest, interrogation and prosecution that marked the Mau Mau war.

What does the battle of Dandora swamp tell us about the conduct of the Mau Mau war? In a campaign where sustained contact with the enemy was rare, the entrapment of so large a gang was certainly a notable event. The battle was hardly the glorious success that the security forces claimed, however, given the comparative youth and lowly status in the movement of the majority of those captured. From a gang of more than eighty strong, forty-one persons were brought to trial and thirty-eight were found guilty, no less than fourteen being juveniles. A total of seventeen convicts from the Dandora trials went to the gallows, all being hanged in Nairobi gaol between 3 January and 20 March 1955, and their bodies taken to Kamiti for burial in unmarked graves.²⁸ Acting Justice Rudd, who presided over six of the seven trials, accepted that only five of these executed men were in fact Mau Mau fighters. Under the law he had no choice but to find them all guilty as charged: all were undoubtedly 'consorting with terrorists'. The inability — or unwillingness — of the colonial government to distinguish between active Mau Mau fighters and those swept into the net by dint of fear and vulnerability fundamentally weakened the counter-insurgency campaign, and undermined the rule of law.

The Dandora trials also revealed a great deal about the impact that the success of Anvil was having upon the Mau Mau units beyond Nairobi. The fighters who had opened up a second front against the security forces around Nairobi in the weeks after Operation Anvil were speedily run to ground. By the end of January 1955 both Mathu and Chotara had been captured, and Mwangi Toto killed. Operation Anvil had successfully 'pinched off supplies to the forest bands and made it much more difficult for the passive wing to help the guerrillas'." Recruitment

of fighters from within the city became increasingly difficult, and this explains the high proportion among Captain Nyaga's army who were coerced into service. Those taken into the gangs after May 1954 were generally younger than those who had gone to the forests earlier in the emergency. This was symptomatic not so much of the radicalism of the young but of the growing desperation of Mau Mau's city-based recruiting officers.

Within the city the months following Anvil were relatively peaceful, with only sporadic signs of Mau Mau activity." Eastlands was then one of the most closely administered parts of British Africa, with its own District Commissioner, two district officers, and four European Home Guard commanders. No fewer than eleven chiefs reported to these officers, with thirty headmen and 300 tribal police working through the chiefs.¹³¹ For the first time since 1951 Kikuyu opposed to Mau Mau began to breathe a little easier; and as a consequence Special Branch was able to recruit a substantial number of Kikuyu informants. The flood of good intelligence this brought utterly transformed the war in Eastlands."

Mau Mau influence had been squeezed out of the urban economy. Virtually all hawkers' licences held by Kikuyu were cancelled after Anvil. Those few Kikuyu running tea kiosks, charcoal stalls, or shoe-repair carts after June 1954 were loyalists. Other than in the Kikuyu estates of Bahati and Kariokor, the majority of shops were transferred to non-Kikuyu. The business interests of the Kikuyu were worst hit in Pumwani, where some iso shop-owners were forced out. Pumwani was no longer in the control of Mau Mau, but the security fence built around the estate would not be taken down until 1957 (see table 5.ii, p. 352, for a breakdown of shop closures in Pumwani)."³

Mau Mau was on the back foot in the city after June 1954, but its influence had by no means been entirely expunged. Armed men still went about the town on the movement's business, many of them persons who had been screened during Anvil and found to be 'untainted by Mau Mau'. In mid-June, for example, a Kikuyu loyalist in Gorofani was shot by a man who had just been released from the Anvil screening camps; and in the first week of July, an armed man arrested near River Road was found to have been in Nairobi with forged identity documents since long before Anvil, but somehow had escaped screening altogether.¹³⁴ Nyaga and his recruitment parties had been able to operate throughout Eastlands without being apprehended in September and October. These incidents indicated that the struggle was far from over.

The war in Eastlands had moved into a new, more covert phase, as Mau Mau's supporters and Special Branch's army of informants gingerly circled one another in an elaborate game of cat and mouse."¹³⁵ As the

informers grew more confident, they targeted the gunmen and the 'enforcers', of whom they had previously lived in fear; and increasingly, and inevitably, the energies of the Mau Mau urban fighters turned inwards, as they sought to 'weed out' the informers in their midst. It was a grim and dirty business, sapping the morale and deepening the distrust among Nairobi's Kikuyu communities.

The murders of informers began even as the soldiers were departing from Eastlands. One of the first victims was a Kamba, Mule Ntheimi, who was strangled and stabbed near Dandora on 25 May 1954. His assassin, a butcher named Njeroge Muhoro, may have thought Ntheimi was the informant who, during Anvil, had directed police to a property in Dandora that was being used as a Mau Mau safe house.⁶ Muhoro was convicted on the eyewitness evidence of Ntheimi's wife. He hanged at Nairobi gaol on 5 July.⁷ From the same area, one week after Ntheimi's murder, other informants led police to the home of Kiiru Gauma, who was found to be in possession of ammunition. Gauma was convicted, and hanged in August.⁸ This sequence of events was not unconnected.

The game of tit-for-tat went on all over Eastlands. There were many examples of Mau Mau fighters who had long remained unmolested in the city now being picked out by the informers. One such was Kinga Migui, a powerfully built man from Embu and a leading personality among the municipal sweepers employed by the city council. He was arrested in August and prosecuted for possession of ammunition. Judge Holmes thought him 'a natural bully and a dangerous criminal'. Proud of his contribution to the anti-colonial cause, Migui showed no respect for the court or its justice. He was taken for execution on 4 October 1954. Nganga Kimani, another hardened Mau Mau rebel, was first arrested at the end of July after an informant gave away his hiding place in the roof of a Duke Street shop. Kimani then escaped from custody, and was only re-arrested two months later. He had remained in Nairobi all this time, using several different identity cards, all forged. The twenty-year-old son of a squatter, born in Laikipia, Kimani had come to the city as a teenager before the Emergency, when his family had been evicted from the white farm where they had lived. He was convicted and sentenced to hang. Another committed rebel, Gitau Kamau, was caught after being wounded in a running gun battle with police through the railway workers' quarters at Muthurwa. Kamau was identified after police received a tip-off from an informer. When confronted amid the houses at Muthurwa, he resisted arrest and fired his Smith & Wesson revolver repeatedly at the Home Guards and police chasing him. Kamau, a father of three from Murang'a district, was convicted in a brief trial on 20 September. and executed at Nairobi gaol on 12 November 1954. British

justice in Kenya was speeding up. By then, more than 700 Mau Mau convicts had gone to the gallows.

The housing estate at Muthurwa, known as the railway *lhandies*, where Kamau had been cornered, was a key site in the struggle for ascendancy in Nairobi after Anvil. The railways had been allowed to retain a higher proportion of Kikuyu workers than had other employers following the purge of the city's African labour, and the police suspected that Mau Mau sympathizers were still very prominent among the residents at Muthurwa. From August 1954, Special Branch infiltrated the railway *lhandies* with informants. As the supply of useful intelligence began to flow, the first raids began; it soon became obvious that the police had inside knowledge. As suspicions rose among the workers, the atmosphere on the estate became incredibly tense. Kamau's arrest in the *lhandies*, late in October, further deepened animosities among the residents. The cloak-and-dagger game played out between the informants and their suspects finally exploded, on the evening of 13 September 1954, in one of the most dramatic and intense acts of public violence of the entire Emergency.

The housing blocks occupied by the railway workers at Muthurwa were long, single-storey buildings. The doors of the living quarters opened onto a veranda running the length of each building and connecting to communal kitchens directly opposite. These facilities were basic and squalid, but there were tables and benches where meals could be taken in relative comfort. Latrines were located at the ends of the blocks. This was rudimentary, strictly functional housing, typical of the kind thought appropriate in Kenya for single, young male migrant workers. But the community occupying the railway *lhandies* by 1954 also included many women, the wives and daughters of workers. During Anvil, these women went through screening in order to be issued with a pass to remain in the city. The vast majority had been refused a pass and expelled from the city, and those who now remained were the family members of men who were loyalists or Home Guard. As tensions mounted in the *lhandies*, suspicion naturally fell upon the women residents. Among these were three girls, two sisters, Hannah and Wairimu, aged seventeen and eighteen, and their foster-sister, Ndururu, who was only fifteen, but looked even younger. Their father, Japhet, was an elderly and trusted railway employee who had long lived at Muthurwa.

On the evening of 13 September the three girls came to cook a meal at their father's home, Room 10 in Block Hi of the *lhandies*. As they sat preparing the food by the light of an oil lamp, two men they knew came and stood by the door, talking casually. Japhet, who was sitting in the kitchen gossiping with some friends, suddenly became aware of other men approaching, carrying *nanas* and knives. When he made as if to

move, they signalled to him to keep still. Japhet froze, his elderly mind in a panic of terror. He heard the men accuse his daughters of being 'friends of the Home Guard', before they lunged into the room. When the attack on his daughters began, Japhet fled to the police post to seek help. As he ran, he could hear the pitiful screams.

The twelve men who burst in upon Hannah, Wairimu and Ndururu hacked them to pieces. Hannah suffered twenty-two stab wounds and cuts, and Wairimu only slightly fewer. Both had struggled against their attackers. Hannah died outside the door of the room, Wairimu on the bed. When Inspector Mathews of the CID arrived at the scene twenty minutes after the attack, the doorway and veranda were swimming in blood. Some of that blood was Ndururu's. She had also been slashed several times, the worst wound being a deep and savage panga cut across her abdomen, whereupon she had fallen to the ground. Presuming all three to be dead, the attackers retreated from the scene, leaving the girls where they lay. Ndururu, miraculously still alive, somehow found the strength to pick herself up and, gathering her own entrails in her arms, made her way down the street, screaming and wailing as she went. A young Luo railway worker, Petro Ouma, came to her aid and helped her to a neighbour's house. Later, on her way to hospital, Ndururu provided the police with the names of those among the attackers whom she had recognized.

The terrified screams of the three young women had been heard by Kikuyu, Luo and Kamba workers in housing blocks up to 300 yards away from where the murders took place, yet the police could obtain no witness statements from any person living in the houses close to the scene of the crime. Many residents were evidently traumatized and appalled by what had happened, but none felt able to speak. The only witnesses of any use at all were the elderly Japhet and his foster-daughter Ndururu. When the case finally came to court, in December, it was Ndururu, barely recovered from her dreadful injuries, and visibly displaying the many scars from her ordeal, who was the crucial witness. Her evidence, coolly and intelligently delivered, led to the conviction of seven men. All but one of the convicts were railway workers, and the seventh was a student who was also resident at Muthurwa. This was a very 'local' affair. The bitterness of relationships among the community of the *thandies* was apparent in the courtroom. The convicted men were content with what they had done. Judge Holmes thought that one of the convicts, Douglas Kinene, 'even seemed to glory in his part in the murder, and never tried to conceal it'. Kinene, only seventeen, had known his victims well. He and another two of the convicts, also under eighteen years of age, had their death sentences commuted. Their four co-conspirators were hanged at Nairobi gaol on 4 March 1955.

The troubles in the railway *lhandies* did not end there. Only a month after the conviction of Hannah and Wairimu's murderers, Special Branch received further information of Mau Mau activity. They sprang a trap later that night and cornered a Mau Mau gunman in a lavatory at the end of one of the housing blocks. He refused to give himself up. When a tear-gas grenade was lobbed into the latrine, he burst out, wildly firing his revolver. A European inspector was hit in the leg, but after a chase through the *lhandies* the gunman was wounded and caught. His name was Gathuku Kinyanjui. He had come into Nairobi from Kiambu, where Special Branch believed he had been working with a Mau Mau gang. An informer had seen him entering the *lhandies* on the morning of his capture, with a revolver tucked into his waistband. He was convicted in February and hanged one month later.¹³⁹ Kinyanjui's arrest was the second big success the police had enjoyed in the *lhandies* that week. Two days earlier, only a short distance away, Mau Mau's General Mwairuthi had been captured. An informer had first spotted him in the late morning, walking close to Muthurwa. As a gust of wind blew his coat open, she had caught a glimpse of the butt of a pistol. She had followed him discreetly, taking careful note of the people he talked with and the number of the house he finally entered, before she rushed to the police post with her valuable intelligence. The police who arrested General Mwairuthi one hour later were full of praise for the young informer's calm professionalism. It was another good day's work for Ndururu.¹⁴⁰ Her vengeance was costing Mau Mau dear.

Corruption at City Hall

The Emergency was more intensely fought in the alleyways of Eastlands than in any other part of central Kenya. Even after Anvil had broken the back of Mau Mau's organization in the city, those Africans who refused to be oathed, who opposed violence or who were loyal to the government still went in fear for their lives. It was not until the latter months of 1955, by which time the forest war, too, was nearly over, that the killing stopped in Eastlands.

No one could pretend that the city had been governed in a 'normal' manner during the fight against Mau Mau. The harassment of African citizens in pursuit of Mau Mau suspects had been relentless, and many innocent souls had been caught up in the indiscriminate sweeps through the estates and the repeated 'cordon and search' operations. The ending of the rent subsidies in 1953 had brought greater hardship to all African tenants:⁴¹ and even as Operation Anvil had begun, in April 1954, the City Council announced yet another round of rent increases.¹⁴² The

economics of urban life threatened what fragile support the government had gained in Eastlands. African allies had come to expect rewards for their loyalty. The government gave proven loyalists remission from tax payments, and in some cases reinstated their housing subsidies. All hawking licences and retail tenancies were reserved to loyalists, and after Anvil the allocation of accommodation in all the government estates was subject to the 'screening' of applicants to weed out potential Mau Mau supporters.

At the higher levels, the colonial government was aware of the pressing need to reward its Kikuyu friends; but this was not a view that the white highlanders who still dominated Nairobi's City Council necessarily shared. When, at the beginning of 1953, the council had come to debate a further programme of house building on the African estates, there was massive opposition. The more vociferous European elected councillors saw no good reason to reward Africans with anything, least of all at a time when the colony's economy was on the slide. Governor Baring did his best to persuade them otherwise, working hard through officials in London to secure a grant from the Colonial Development Corporation. Several councillors were not easily convinced: Kenya's white settlers could always be relied upon to be parsimonious when it came to expenditure on African welfare. When the council finally put the new housing development to the vote, it was a close-run thing: the decision to accept the grant was taken by a margin of only one vote, 14 against 13. This was hardly a ringing endorsement for what was to be the largest housing development ever planned in British colonial Africa, with an investment of £2 million over five years, for the construction of 13,000 new bed-spaces each year.¹⁴³ As the project got under way, the government made no effort to disguise the symbolic and material place of housing provision in the struggle for 'hearts and minds', naming the new estates after the African city councillors who had been murdered by Mau Mau, Tom Mbotela and Ambrose Ofafa.

It was never going to be easy to manage a project as vast as this in the midst of the Emergency. The City Council was understaffed, and there were doubts that the local construction industry had the capacity for the task. The industry was dominated by a dozen larger European- and Asian-owned firms. These firms had little need to work on African housing projects, where budgets were tight and margins narrow, preferring corporate contracts or private work for Europeans. The remaining contractors were smaller firms, perhaps numbering thirty, nearly all of which were Asian. These were 'one-job-at-a-time operations', with only the most basic capital equipment, no workshops and a tendency to rely upon cheaper casual labour even for skilled work!" When the City Council put the first stage of the Mbotela and Ofafa developments out

to tender, all the most competitive bids came from these smaller Asian firms, and they were duly contracted to take on the work. Construction had got under way in the early months of 1954, only a few weeks before the commencement of Operation Anvil.

The scandal broke only a few months later, when, in June, the Nairobi CID informed the City Council auditors that allegations of corruption had been made against senior council staff. The whistle-blower was not named, but it was most likely someone fairly senior in the circles of the municipal government, perhaps a European member of staff in the accounts office. The tendering for and administration of the building contracts on the new housing developments at Ofafa and Mbotela estates featured prominently in the police investigation. A flurry of rumours now swirled around the city, suggesting that massive fraud had been discovered. The European councillors at first tried to play this down, rejecting calls for a public enquiry. As they struggled to keep the lid on things, colonial officials in London got wind of the brewing scandal; if the grant from the Colonial Development Corporation had been misused in any way, then Nairobi was told it would be imperative to hold a full public enquiry. In August the City Council reluctantly accepted the appointment of Sir Alan Rose to head a three-man commission, with a brief to examine accusations of corruption and malpractice in every aspect of the affairs of the Nairobi City Council. The implications were deeply alarming.

Never had a commission of enquiry been less welcome in Kenya than was that led by Sir Alan Rose. A distinguished barrister of the Inner Temple, and a confirmed bachelor with a reputation for probity, austerity and sternly conservative values, Rose was hardly the kind of man likely to find many kindred spirits among the robust, hard-drinking and womanizing white highlanders. He arrived in Nairobi during December to a frosty welcome. The commissioners declined the suggestion that their deliberations should wait until after the holiday, and began hearing evidence in the week before Christmas. It was a wise decision. They were immediately overwhelmed with petitioners. The commission was unable to finish its business until the end of March."

The scale of corruption unearthed by the Rose Commission surprised even Kenya's most cynical observers. The operation of the City Architect's office, and its supervision of the Ofafa and Mbotela contracts in particular, came in for savage criticism. At Ofafa the work was split into three contracts. The first, valued at L80,722, went to Chanan Singh. His company had no experience of large-scale contract work, and was badly under-capitalized. Local architects' reports on the tender were highly unfavourable, yet these were ignored. In June 1955 the Council had finally evicted the contractor from the site. the work still incomplete.

On inspection, numerous contraventions of the building specifications came to light — shallow excavation of footings, under-strength concreting in floors and lintels, substandard joinery, the use of cheaper, weaker materials throughout, and generally poor standards of workmanship. Yet, throughout the contract this work had apparently been inspected and approved by City Council officers. The cost of setting these matters right was k60,000. A similar sorry story was revealed on the second Ofafa contract, awarded to the firm of Ata-Ul-Haq at £85,475. Here again, the Council had only independently investigated the quality of work once the corruption investigation was under way, and had then swiftly moved to evict the contractor. It was estimated that a sum in excess of k60,000 would be required to make good the work on the Ata-Ul-Haq contract. On the third part of the Ofafa development, another Asian firm, the Colonial Construction Company, had undertaken a smaller contract of £60,568. Here the quality of workmanship was better, but the same deliberate shortfalls in specifications were discovered, and again all work had been inspected and passed fit by Council officials. The picture was very much the same on the Mbotela estate. X46

The implications of these revelations soon became clear. European officials had accepted 'gifts' from building contractors before and during the Ofafa and Mbotela contracts, entering false specifications and logging inspection reports when no inspections had taken place. Malpractice was found to be widespread in every aspect of the tendering and management of the Council's building contracts, and had evidently been so for many years. Among the senior officials named in the enquiry was the City Engineer, Harold Whipp. He was found to be implicated in fraudulent construction work going back to 1949, when he first came to East Africa from Bombay. The sums involved were considerable, running to thousands of pounds in some years. In Nairobi, Whipp lived in one of the smartest new suburbs of the city, enjoying a lifestyle that belied his relatively humble salary. On 13 February 1956, in the midst of the Rose Commission's deliberations and just after he was warned of the likelihood of prosecution, Harold Whipp's body was found on the railway line near to Nairobi. He had committed suicide:47

If Whipp was the most notorious official to be exposed in this scandal, he was by no means the only person to have his reputation tarnished. Following the example of Governor Baring, Nairobi's councillors protested that what failings there were lay only with 'a few rogues' on the city payroll — the kind of people who had found their way to East Africa only in the difficult conditions of the Emergency. It was a poor excuse.

The Rose Commission anyway came to a quite different view. It wasn't just African Home Guards who had cultivated a culture of bribery and extortion in colonial Kenya. The examples Rose listed covered

virtually every aspect of municipal government. Two European contractors, for example, were found to have conspired with city officials in a fraud costing the Council k16,154 in payments made for goods never delivered. The whiff of corruption also tainted the reputations of the highest aldermen of the Council: the Mayor of Nairobi, Israel Somen, and the former Deputy Mayor, Dobbs Johnson, were heavily criticized for having failed to declare their substantial interests in companies supplying goods to the Council. Somen was also accused of using council workers for his own enterprises, including the construction of his private swimming pool. Even in the City Fire Brigade, a group of senior European officers were involved in a longstanding scam to 'sell' city property, and then have it bought back at a margin. The profits earned were placed in a bank account by the group, for their personal use. At the city market, corruption was rife in the allocation of licences and plots, the senior African clerk taking bribes as a matter of course from all the traders, and the European Market Manager, Mr Burton, abusing his position to secure unpaid labour from the stallholders to work his own farm on the outskirts of the city.' Sir Alan Rose reached the unequivocal conclusion that bribery and corruption were 'by no means uncommon' among city office holders at 'all levels and in all departments'; that the scale of cash inducements involved to secure services or preference from the Council was often significant; and that such behaviour was accepted as the norm and widely tolerated.⁴⁹

The exploitation of traders at the city market was typical of a wide range of petty corruption that marred the daily life of Nairobi. Its victims, the stallholders and wholesalers who operated the market, were not the hardline supporters of Mau Mau but members of the aspirant African middle classes. These were the kind of people for whom the new houses on the Ofafa and Mbotela estates had been built. Their loyalty had been tested in Operation Anvil. They had won the right to retain their trading licences and urban work permits, and had remained in Nairobi despite the intimidation of Mau Mau threats. Like the office workers who staffed the government departments throughout the emergency years, they had been forced to make difficult choices. They might be applauded by Europeans on political platforms, and have eulogies written to their bravery in the government's propaganda pamphlets, but very few of Kenya's white highlanders would ever treat them with genuine respect. Their new 'model' homes had ill-fitting windows, doors that warped in the damp, and drains that flooded when it rained, and were built to standards that no European would have tolerated; and in their working lives, they were subjected to the abuse and exploitation of anyone who had authority over them. Europeans were as guilty of corruption and malpractice in colonial Nairobi as anyone else, and Africans, at the

bottom of the colonial racial hierarchy, were most often its victims, regardless of their politics.

This was the experience of the vast majority of those who stood on the loyalist side of Kenya's anti-colonial war in Nairobi. These people did not *like* colonialism. In taking a stand, these so-called loyalists were in fact motivated by more prosaic and personal concerns: by the interests of their families; by the need to protect their property; by their sense of social status; and by their own values. These people were not fools; and if they had ever been naive, then the harsh realities of African life in Nairobi in the 1950s had surely brought a sharper awareness. During the emergency, even the most ambitious *tai-tai* came to realize that they could never be the equal of the white man in Nairobi's rotten borough.