

**MILITANCY,
MODERATION, & MAU MAU:
A Reconsideration of Koinange wa
Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu Koinange**

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Brief Abstract

This thesis examines the lives of Senior Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu and his eldest son, Peter Mbiyu Koinange. It joins with the growing rise of biographical work within African Studies. It challenges the historical understanding of late colonial rule in Kenya and the role of official myth in pre- and post-independence historical narratives. Koinange wa Mbiyu was the patriarch of one of the most respected, wealthy, and politically influential Kikuyu families of Kenya's colonial and post-colonial period. His eldest son, Peter Mbiyu, received a prestigious education abroad and returned to Kenya where he became a prominent leader for African independent education African political action. Koinange and Peter bear frequent mention in academic discussions of collaboration, discontent, nationalism, and militancy in Kenya's colonial era.

This thesis challenges the widely held narrative that Koinange and Peter embraced militant politics opposing colonial rule during the 1940s. While fitting larger understandings of decolonisation, it is not an honest depiction of the Koinange's political actions. As a result, this thesis is intentionally a work of revisionist history that looks to the profound changes in the culture and nature of colonial rule during the 1940s, rather than a political shift in the Koinanges. In addition to challenging the prevalent understanding of Koinange and Peter's political action, this thesis raises a number of areas – gender, wealth, elite and family dynamics, to name a few – where the Koinange family history would further illuminate the historical understanding of the colonial era.

This thesis is a dual biography, crafted as a work of narrative history. It challenges a breadth of current scholarship, utilizing the largest collection of pre-Mau Mau archival records to date. This thesis engages with a number of historiographical challenges related to biography, the individual, the family, and the challenges of oral history shaped in the crucible of cultural crisis.

Detailed Abstract

The Koinange family was one of the most prominent, wealthy, and influential African families of Kenya's colonial period. As the patriarchs of this significant political dynasty, both Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu had a profound impact on the political and social developments of the 1920-1963 period. Over the course of a forty-five year career as one of the most lauded of colonial chiefs, Koinange established and led one of the first African political organisations (the Kikuyu Association), held unique positions of influence within his district and across the colony, and was an influential African voice in the pivotal parliamentary commissions of the early 1930s. His son, Peter was, if not the most highly educated, certainly the most diversely educated African in Kenya by the late 1930s, with multiple degrees from renowned academic institutions in the United States and in the United Kingdom. Upon his return to Kenya in the late 1930s, Peter took on a leading role in the development of independent African education and became a leader of the Kenya African Union (KAU) in the late 1940s. By 1952, with the beginning of Kenya's late-colonial Emergency period, both men were declared militant leaders of the violent uprising known as 'Mau Mau'. Over the course of a long decade, Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu's standing before the colonial government went from one of exaltation as progressive and faithful civil servants to the leaders and symbols of violent, militant rebellion.

What explains this shift in the Koinanges' relationship to the colonial administration? Over the last fifty years, scholarly research has largely embraced a narrative first offered in the post-Mau Mau 1960 Corfield Report. The report argued that both father and son turned to militant politics following their disappointment with the 1934 Kenya Land Commission report, the racial inequalities present in Kenya in the late 1930s, and the 1944 appointment of Eliud Mathu, over Peter Mbiyu, as the first African on Kenya's Legislative

Council (LegCo). This thesis, utilising the widest collection of archival records related to the Koinanges to date, challenges this narrative of disenchantment and militancy and calls for a radical revision, highlighting the consistency in Koinange and Peter's political engagement through this period. In the place of the "disenchanted Koinanges" framework, this thesis looks to the transformation that took place in Kenya's colonial administration in the 1940s to explain the shift in the Koinanges' standing.

This thesis joins with the recent rise of biographical and narrative historical work within the field of African Studies. Utilising the strengths of biographical research, this thesis evaluates the Koinanges' actions with a focus on their consistency over the breadth of their lives.

The chapter order is chronological. While most chapters present Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu in parallel to one another within the same historical period, chapters one and two begin by examining their early lives separately. Chapter one addresses the life of Koinange wa Mbiyu from the late nineteenth-century through the mid-1930s. This chapter emphasises the role colonial land policy and subsequent land alienation measures had in shaping Koinange's political trajectory.

Chapter two examines the first thirty years of Peter Mbiyu Koinange's life (1907-1938), focusing on the impact of his overseas education and experiences. Shaped amidst the racial tensions of the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, and by the African diaspora community in London in the mid-1930s, Peter Mbiyu returned to Kenya in the late 1930s poised to join the voices of opposition against British colonial rule. These first two chapters establish the context of Kenya's early colonial rule and the basis for Koinange and Peter's political actions in the 1940s and the 1950s.

Upon this foundation, chapter three brings the narratives of Koinange and Peter together for a discussion of Koinange and Peter's continued engagement with the colonial administration through the mid-1940s. Significant portions of this ongoing collaboration have gone unacknowledged in scholarly literature. The revisionist work of this thesis begins in this chapter by challenging the narrative that Koinange and Peter turned to oppositional and militant politics in the late 1930s and the early 1940s. In challenging the disenchantment and militant-turn narratives, this chapter initiates the broader discussion of the remaining chapters focus on the final two decades of colonial rule in Kenya.

Chapter four then examines the Koinanges' work with African independent education through the Kenya African Teachers' College (KATC) at Githunguri. This involvement with KATC took place at the same time as their ongoing work with colonial rule discussed in chapter three. Explicitly and implicitly, the Koinanges' role in the college, and its subsequent militancy, has been used to connect the Koinanges to the growing tide of militant activity in the late 1940s. As this chapter demonstrates, the rise of militancy at the KATC was the result of Jomo Kenyatta's tenure as headmaster rather than the outworking of the Koinange's disenchantment with colonial rule or engagement with militant activity. This chapter also highlights the rarely discussed tensions between the Koinanges and Jomo Kenyatta during the late 1940s.

Chapter five explores the Koinanges' role and involvement with the Kenya African Union following the appointment of the first African representative to the Legislative Council in 1944. Chapter five acknowledges that the Koinanges were prominent leaders in the KAU but argues that this was true for only a very specific period of the organisation's history (1947-1950). The years in which the Koinanges held leading roles with the KAU were, in fact, years of decline and moderate political activity for the organisation. Chapter

five discusses the radicalisation of both European and African politics in Kenya during the 1940s, closing with an examination of a year that was decisive for the history of colonial Kenya and the Koinange family: 1950.

The final chapter of the thesis focuses on the 'Mau Mau' period and the years leading to independence in 1963. In October 1952, the colonial administration declared Koinange wa Mbiyu a leading conspirator in the assassination of his former colleague, Senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kung'u. The colonial administration also declared Peter Mbiyu a prominent leader of the Mau Mau uprising. This chapter argues that Koinange and Peter remained noticeably committed to their non-militant activism of the 1930s and 1940s, while the colonial administration embraced and held fast to a myth of their own creation – that of the militant Koinanges.

This thesis challenges the scholarly portrait of Koinange and Peter as disenchanted, oppositional, and even militant political leaders of the late colonial period as incongruous with not only the context of their broader life stories, but also with the pre-Mau Mau period records. This thesis highlights the problematic nature of source material, whether oral or written, created during or after a major social and politic crisis.

In the wake of the Second World War, both European and African political activity moved to the extremes in colonial Kenya, with heightened expectations of what constituted loyalty and tightened boundaries of acceptable divergent behaviour. Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, the Koinanges were championed as educated, progressive African leaders, even as they challenged colonial policy of the day. However, by the late 1940s, they were deemed radical militants. Post-war African social and political developments increasingly favoured leaders who called for radical change and outspoken opposition of European rule. While African political groups came to freely trade on the notoriety of the

Koinange name, this obscured the fact that Koinange and Peter were marginalised figures within African political activity by the early 1950s.

The epilogue discusses the story of the Koinange dynasty in Kenya's post-independence era, paying particular attention to the recent embrace of Mau Mau militancy by the family. This final chapter argues that this embrace of the militant narrative is part of the wider social and political developments concerning the memory and place of Mau Mau in Kenya's social and political memory.

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responsibility requires an evaluation of the breadth of the historical record, both archival and oral. While the portraits herein offered of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu are very different than that offered of the family, I hope they will see that they are no less noble nor cause for pride or celebration of the family's legacy.

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DAO

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACoD - Advisory Counsel on Detainees
CID - Criminal Investigation Department, Police
CMS - Church Missionary Society (Anglican, Church of England)
CNC - Chief Native Commissioner
CO - Colonial Office
CSM - Church of Scotland Mission (Presbyterian, Scotland)
DC - District Commissioner
DG - Director General, MI5
DO - District Officer
EAA - East African Association (the Young Kikuyu Association for a brief period)
EAINC - East African Indian National Congress
GMS - Gospel Missionary Society (Evangelical, United States)
HOW - Home Office Warrant
KA - Kikuyu Association
KATC - Kenya African Teacher's College (at Githunguri)
KAU - Kenya African Union
KCA - Kikuyu Central Association (formerly disbanded in 1940)
KCA - Kenya Citizens Association (1951-1952)
KISA - Kikuyu Independent Schools Association
KLP - Kikuyu Loyal Patriots (formerly the Kikuyu Association)
KPA - Kikuyu Provincial Association
LegCo - Legislative Council
LNC - Local Native Council (c. 1925-1950)
MI5 - Special Branch
PAFMECSA - Pan-African Freedom Movement Central and South Africa
PC - Provincial Commissioner
SLO - Security Liaison Officer, MI5
UNO - United Nations Organisation

Archival Sources:

BDOHP - British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Churchill University, Cambridge
BIRM – University of Birmingham Library
BL - Bodleian Library, Special Collections
HIA - Hampton Institute Archive (Hampton, Virginia, United States of America)
JL - Professor John Lonsdale Personal Records
KNA - The Kenya National Archives (Nairobi, Kenya)
OWU - Ohio Wesleyan University Archive
STJ - St John's College Archive, Cambridge
TNA - The National Archives (Kew Gardens, United Kingdom)
WKK - Dr Wilfred Koinange's Private Archive Material (Nairobi, Kenya)¹

¹ A copy of each item referenced herein is held by the author of this thesis.

INTRODUCTION

Rethinking the Koinanges

Political dynasties are alive and well in contemporary Kenya. In 2013, Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of Kenya's first President, won his electoral bid to become the fourth President of the Republic of Kenya. His major opponent was Raila Odinga, the son of Kenya's first Vice President, Jarimogai Oginga Odinga. Here in 2017, the story is playing out yet again. As Nic Cheeseman notes, it is a reminder 'that dynastic politics is alive and well in Kenya'.¹ Like the Kenyattas and Odingas, other families have held prominent positions of political influence throughout the decades of the twentieth century. The names are familiar to most, and there are many. Kenyatta, Kibaki, Karume, Karanja, and Koinange are most familiar to the communities of Central Kenya. Over the course of the last fifty years, a small number of individuals within these dynastic families have been the subjects of biographical research, of which Presidents Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel T. Arap Moi are the most well-known.²

There has been a recent embrace of biographical research within the African studies field during the last ten years. In addition, there have been a few efforts at biographical studies of the broader family, although these are fewer in number. There is a troubling discontinuity between the rise of individual biographies and the dearth of dynastic biographical research within African studies. Biographical work focused on the individual

¹ Nic Cheeseman, 'Kenyatta or Odinga? Why Dynastic Politics is Alive and Well in Kenya', *The Conversation* (11 July 2017), <https://theconversation.com/kenyatta-or-odinga-why-dynastic-politics-is-alive-and-well-in-kenya-80732>. Accessed 10 Aug. 2017.

² A. Morton, *Moi: the Making of an African Statesman* (London, 1998); J. Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (New York, 1979).

is largely a product of European individuality – itself the product of the Reformation, Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment (e.g. the rise of the cult of the individual). However, the individuality of modern Europe contrasts starkly with the communal and familial identity of a majority of African communities. Michael Schatzberg highlights this discontinuity in reference to politics within Africa.³ Whatever the imperfections of Schatzberg's work, this thesis echoes the sentiment that Western frames of analysis are limited in their ability to reflect and understand the African context. Research of Africa must seek to consider Africa on the terms of its own priorities and cultural commitments.

This thesis is an experiment. It is a biographical study within the framework of African communal identity. It does so via a study of a father and son with the conviction that African social identity of family, kinship, and community is central to understanding the individual, as well as the community. A number of recent works from South Africa have demonstrated that taking the family as a key unit of analysis provides a valuable perspective on both the lives studied as well as the wider political and historical developments of which they were a part.⁴ This thesis is a study of one of the most powerful and noteworthy families of Central Kenya during the twentieth century, with an eye to how their specific history provides clearer understanding of the pivotal developments of the colonial period from the mid-1930s until independence in the early 1960s. Due to their prolific and prominent involvement in Kenya's social, economic, and political history, the Koinange family – and Koinange wa Mbiyu and his eldest son, Peter Mbiyu, in particular – offers an illuminating and compelling study of African agency in Kenya during the twentieth century.

³ M.G. Schatzberg, *Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa: Father, Family, Food* (Indiana, 2001).

⁴ C. Van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: the Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894-1985* (New York, 1996); R. Werbner, *Tears of the Dead: the Social Biography of an African Family* (Washington, 1991).

The Koinange Dynasty & Kenya's Modern History⁵

A highly educated, wealthy, large, and politically influential family, the Koinanges held a number of high administrative positions during the colonial era and have continued to do so in the decades since.⁶ Through their governmental roles, they have shaped policies on taxation, forced labour, land, the sale of coffee and tea, liquor licensing, and education. Family members, both men and women, received their education in Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States from the 1920s onward. In addition, the Koinange dynasty is entrepreneurial at its core – responsible for opening some of the first auto dealerships, petrol stations, bus services, farms, schools, churches, and saw mills owned by Africans in Central Kenya.⁷ Members of the family led several post-war trade union groups of both the colonial and post-colonial era.⁸ The Koinanges merged traditional Kikuyu life with European ideas of education, commerce, governance, religion, and family, offering a new vision of what it meant to be Kikuyu in colonial Kenya.

As early converts to European Christianity, the family supported Christian missionary and educational efforts by providing the financial and material sponsorship for the building of churches and schools and served as prominent church leaders. Each of Koinange wa Mbiyu's six wives served as the local head of the Mother's Union, while Obadiah Kariuki, son-in-law to Koinange, was a leading bishop in the Anglican Church of

⁵ Because a thorough discussion with detailed footnotes of the following pre-independence history of the Koinange family is the focus of this thesis, minimal referencing is provided here for pre-1963 events. Post-independence events not discussed in detail in this thesis are provided footnotes.

⁶ KNA JZ/7/17, Petition No. 162: Ex-Senior Chief Koinange Mbiyu, 30 Oct. 1953, item 8, p. 2; TNA CO/822/1245, Governor to SoS, 2 July 1957, f. 16; TNA FCO/141/6169, Takwa Detainees to Parliamentary Delegation, 19 Jan. 1957, item 211, pp 48-59; TNA KV/2/2540, J. Baskervyle-Glegg, 'Margaret Wangui Koinange', item 225b, p. 2; *The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 11 June 1963), Government Notice no. 2472; Ibid. (Nairobi, 8 Feb.. 1980), Government Notice no. 382; G. Weru, 'Karuga Koinange: the Director of Intelligence Who Never Was', *The Standard* (Nairobi, 27 Nov. 2004), p. 3; D. Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 213; 'Mbiyu Koinange', *Who's Who in East Africa 1965-1966* (Nairobi, 1966), p. 63.

⁷ KNA JZ/7/11, 'Chairman's Notes: Frederick Koinange', item 10; WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010*, 'Charles Karuga Koinange', p. 2; Ibid., 'Noah Karuga Koinange'; 'Mbiyu Koinange', *Who's Who in East Africa*, p. 63.

⁸ KNA MSS/35/3, KANTAFU Chairman to Kamau Njoroge, 13 Aug. 1964, item 19; TNA KV/2/2539, H.D. Wharton, 4 Nov. 1948, item 174a; 'Mbiyu Koinange', *Who's Who in East Africa*, p. 63.

Kenya from 1955 to 1976. Because of their widespread involvement in the political, economic, and cultural developments of the twentieth century, the Koinange dynasty bears frequent mention in the archival records, offering a uniquely accessible avenue for understanding Kenya's colonial and post-colonial history.

Where a majority of historical records address only individual lives (e.g. Harry Thuku, Eliud Mathu, or Jomo Kenyatta), the archival records for the Koinanges relate actions well beyond individuals into their dynastic family-wide influence. In addition, the longevity of the Koinange dynasty as influential political and social players left a legacy of archival records greater than most every other African political figure in Kenya's colonial history. The story of the Kenyattas or the Odingas begins between the 1930s and the 1950s, while the story of the Waruhius, Njonjos, and Mboyas fades from the narrative of Kenya's history between the 1960s and the 1970s. The Koinanges, on the other hand, maintained prominent involvement from 1905 through to today.

What this means for the researcher is that questions can be asked about Kenya's history, through the story of the Koinange family, that cannot be asked via many other dynastic families in Kenya's modern period. For example, the Koinange dynasty provides three generations of political leaders who became embroiled in and were forced to navigate their way through major controversies: Koinange wa Mbiyu was declared a leader of Mau Mau, Peter Mbiyu was involved in the 1975 murder of J.M. Kariuki, and Wilfred Karuga Koinange was charged with involvement in the Goldenberg Scandal of the 1990s. Likewise, the family provides three different perspectives of local Kiambu leadership at various moments in history, with Charles Karuga Koinange serving as local chief during the 1950s, Peter Mbiyu serving as representative in Parliament from 1963 to 1979, and now with Paul Karuga Koinange now serving in the same position since 2012. The scope

of the family's involvement throughout society (politics, business, education, religion, culture, etc.) and the breadth of the time frame for which research material is available (from the late 1800s through to today) afford a wider scope for potential study.

Because there is a significant volume of archival material related the Koinanges and because the dynasty is large with a wide-reaching impact in all areas of society, this thesis is focused in two specific areas. First, it is a political history, focused on political actions and involvement. It is also a patriarchal history, looking specifically at the father and eldest son of the family, who have the most pronounced presence in the archival material and held a unique position within their family. As such, the broader areas of academic – including business, religion, culture, and gender – are only discussed when necessary for understanding the history of Koinange and Peter's political actions. It is this writer's hope that the extensive referencing of archival sources throughout the text will aid other researches in pursuing these other important areas of Kenya's colonial and post-colonial history.

There are few individuals, African or otherwise, who had a more important role or exerted greater influence over the span of some sixty years of British colonial rule in Kenya than Koinange wa Mbiyu. Koinange was the grandson of the wealthy and influential Ithothia kana Gatheca (Njunu the Younger). From 1905 onward, Koinange served as headman, then chief, and eventually senior chief, before his forced retirement in 1949. As prominent historian David Anderson has rightly noted, Koinange wa Mbiyu was 'Kenya's most distinguished chief of the colonial era'.⁹ He received a 'Certificate of Honour' in 1930, the 'King's Medal for African Chiefs' in 1934, and the 'Coronation Medal' in 1937 before becoming Senior Chief in 1939. In parallel to this acclaim, he was

⁹ D. Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: the Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London, 2005), p. 11.

highest paid chief in Kiambu, out of all of the African colonial chiefs, from the 1920s through the 1940s.¹⁰ Koinange was involved with most of the major social and political development in Central Kenya from 1915 through 1950. He was involved in the litany of land, cattle, and commerce policies (and subsequent disputes), the *kiama* controversy (1919), the establishment of the local native councils (1926), the female circumcision controversy (1929), the Parliamentary Joint-Commission in London (1931), the Kenya Land Commission (1932-1934), African support for the war effort (1939-1945), the appointment of the first African to Kenya's Legislative Council (1944), and the eventual rise of the Kenya African Union from 1946 onward. There are few other individuals (including Kenyatta, Waruhiu, or most colonial officials) whose lives connect so many major political developments over fifty years of colonial rule. Koinange supported major shifts within traditional Kikuyu marriage practices, from calling for regulations to limit dowry costs and for shifting dowry payments from cattle to cash, to advocating for marriage and birth registrations, to even allowing his own daughters to forgo the traditional female circumcision ceremony, a major rite of passage for Kikuyu women with implications on marriage and authority, should they so choose. Many of the policies Koinange supported became colony-wide law in the 1937 Native Authority Ordinance. Koinange pioneered a moderate mode of African political protest with the establishment of the Kikuyu Association (KA) in 1920, which he then led into the mid-1930s. He shaped educational and religious practice in Central Kenya through his support of European missionary efforts, his financial sponsorship of church buildings, his embrace of traditional age groups for educational fundraising, and his personal commitment to the education of both boys and girls – beginning with his own family. As a uniquely distinguished colonial

¹⁰ KNA DC/KBU/11/2, Kiambu Chief and Headman Pay, item 115; Ibid., DC to PC, 'Senior Chief Koinange', 26 Sep. 1935, item 67; M.S. Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu: Mediator and Patriot', in B.E. Kipkorir (ed.), *Biographical Essays on Imperialism and Collaboration in Colonial Kenya* (Nairobi, 1980), p. 83; B.A. Ogot, *Historical Dictionary of Kenya* (Nairobi, 1981), p. 111.

chief, Koinange wa Mbiyu is an important case study into the actions, challenges, and opportunities faced by African chiefs during Kenya's colonial era. In addition, as the patriarch of a powerful and large dynastic family, his life serves as an example of how colonial rule shifted familial and cultural norms of leadership, authority, and family. His son, Peter Mbiyu, offers a similar case study concerning the rise and role of the educated, politically minded second-generation elite who led African education, political engagement, and activism from the 1930s into the independence era.

As was his father, Peter Mbiyu was a prominent figure in many of the social and political developments that shaped Kenya from 1920 through 1980. One of the first students to attend Alliance Academy High School (from which many of Kenya's elite independence leaders arose), Peter received a remarkable education, first from various missionary-run schools in both central and coastal Kenya, then abroad at academic institutions in the United States and the United Kingdom, including Columbia University and the University of Cambridge.¹¹ Peter Mbiyu provides a bridge between the history of colonial Kenya and global developments of Pan-Africanism, civil rights, and the African diaspora of London from the 1920s to the 1960s. Peter returned to Kenya in 1938 where he became a well-known politician and advocate for African independent education. Peter worked closely with the colonial administration on the Kiambu local native council and then on one of the governor's advisory councils into the mid-1940s. He was a leading figure in the formation of post-war African political actions, particularly in connection to the KAU, activism in London, and the eventual call for self-rule. By the 1950s, he was considered one of 'the big three of Kenya's Africans' by the British intelligence service.¹² Peter spoke before the General Assembly of the United Nations on at least two occasions,

¹¹ J. Lonsdale, 'The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: Wealth, Poverty & Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought', in B. Berman and J. Lonsdale (eds), *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa* (2 vols., Oxford, 1992), ii, p. 413.

¹² TNA KV/2/2540, DG to SLO East Africa, 1 Sep. 1949, item 226a.

first as a representative of the KAU and then as a notable member of President Kenyatta's cabinet.¹³ Peter served in Kenyatta's cabinet from 1963 to 1978 in official positions, as well as personal aid and 'gatekeeper' for the President.¹⁴ Peter's engagement in pre- and post-independence politics offers a useful lens and case study for this period of African political action.

As a result, and as is to be expected in light of their political prominence, the current secondary literature concerning the history of colonial Kenya mentions Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu frequently. This provides for opportunities for recently released archival, primary source material and the long-present secondary material to engage with one another. Current scholarly work offers Koinange and Peter as models of African engagement with British imperialism during the first part of the twentieth century, before then portraying them as militant, nationalistic leadership by the 1950s. This shift from collaboration to conflict in their political relationship towards colonial rule from the 1930s to the 1950s is reflective of the wider historical arch from colonisation to decolonisation in the historiography of Africa. The reason for Koinange and Peter's apparent shift is frequently tied to a series of deep disappointments in their individual and corporate lives that, it is believed, turned the two leaders and the Koinange family in general from cooperative civil servants to combative militant opponents. Utilising recently released archives, both public and private, this thesis challenges this narrative in the course of presenting the most thorough biographical narrative for Koinange and Peter's lives to date.

¹³ KNA KA/4/18, Minister of State, Office of the President, 1969, item 12; TNA KV/2/2539, H.D. Wharton, 4 Nov. 1948, item 174a; Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 130.

¹⁴ As evidenced in KNA MSS/74/2, 'An Open Letter from Henry Muoria', date unknown and KNA KA/1/68, Peter Mbiyu Koinange to Jackson Angaine, 7 July 1966, item 35 and affirmed in conversation with Professor Muriuki, University of Nairobi.

Reclaiming the Narrative in View of the Long Duration

In spite of their long-standing place in Kenya's moderate political and social history, and their frequent mention in scholarly research, existing research offers a narrow portrait of the Koinange dynasty. While Koinange and Peter are frequently mentioned in the literature, it is in connection to broader developments and not as the focus of the research itself. For example, Koinange's role in calling for an end to female circumcision in the late 1920s and the ensuing public ridicule he received, is offered as an example of a progressive chief or of the impact of African missionary converts and their role in changing social norms. Peter is most often discussed in relationship to African independent education, the Legislative reconstitution of 1944, or the history of the KAU from the mid-1940s onward. The wider Koinange dynasty is mentioned in research concerning the growth of African political action, militancy, and Mau Mau in the late 1940s and the 1950s. Due to the inclination within African studies, specifically, and modern academia, in general, to seek out broad observations and implications of scholarly research, glimpses into the Koinanges' lives and actions are, as a result, brief and utilised for specific broader claims and purposes.

The result is that the current portrait of Koinange and Peter's lives is constructed from disconnected vignettes in service to narratives of Pan-Africanism, nationalism, militancy, and collaboration, as well as a number of other broad trends and themes within the historiography. Unfortunately, these broader trends within the discipline have led to conclusions that, while fitting larger disciplinary metanarratives and themes, may actually be in conflict with specific examples they employ. For those moments in which the narrative of the individual is misconstrued or misrepresented, this thesis seeks to be a corrective and caution by prioritising the specific, individual narrative (and thus the

archival records) as the centre of the work, placing theory, discussions of memory, or meaning in an ancillary position. To this end, this thesis is intentionally a work of narrative history.

The narrative of individual lives is the foundation for broader historical understanding, theorising, and extrapolation. Narrative history, as defined by E.M. Tamura, is ‘the telling of a story to explain and analyse events and human agency in order to increase understanding’.¹⁵ Such narratives provide the material often used in support of various theoretical frameworks for understanding history – from the *Annale* School to White’s philosophy of history to Foucault and Derrida’s focuses on discourse analysis. The current narrative understanding of Koinange and Peter is tragically flawed in multiple instances, as this thesis will demonstrate. As such, the broad theories and analyses in which the vignettes of their lives are used are, to the extent that they misrepresent Koinange and Peter’s past, weakened by their use rather than strengthened. The commitment to narrative history in this thesis, while antithetical to the prevailing trends of African Studies since the 1960s, finds synergy within the recent and growing embrace of biographical work within the discipline, given that biography is, in its typical form, primarily a work of narrative. However, the dangers in biography are many and will be discussed shortly.

Because the focus of this thesis is the historical narrative (providing a fuller portrait than has been available over the past fifty years and challenging the current narrative through a revisionist narrative), this thesis intentionally limits theoretical discussions of wealth, gender, generation, family politics, etc. There are, at minimum, two reasons for this. First the scope of this work, the depth of archival work involved, and the revelation

¹⁵ E.H. Tamura, ‘Narrative History and Theory’, *History of Education Quarterly*, 51, 2 (May 2011) p. 150.

during the research phase that it would, by necessity, be heavily revisionist in nature, challenging assessments now more than fifty years old, required that the focus be on the narrative rather than the theoretical interpretations or connections of that narrative. Second, theoretical work is often tightly focused in scope to allow for its detailed examination across a breadth of comparative studies and theoretical literature. The scope of a single chapter in this present thesis could rightly be the focus of an entire thesis examining the broader implications, theories, etc. of that chapter's development. Discussions concerning how the Koinanges help to better understand gender, wealth, power, family politics, etc., especially in relation to African education, political action, or social and political challenges to families and communities during the colonial period, will have much to offer the broader disciplinary conversations. Indeed, these are some of the very topics this author hopes to pursue over the course of post-doctoral work, building upon the foundation presented in this thesis. It is also the author's desire that the reader will identify these opportunities over the course of reading this thesis and use the footnotes and discussion to pursue these ideas further. This, then, points to the reason this thesis is intentionally narrative in its commitment, so that future research might use individual episodes in Koinange's or Peter's life in ways that are authentic and integrated into the broader narrative of their lives. By telling as complete a story as possible, the presence of recurring actions or words highlight consistency or change over time. Attention to revealed consistency over the long duration of their lives illuminates elements of the Koinanges' history that is at odds with current scholarship.

The prevailing scholarly narrative posits that the Koinanges turned to militant activity in the mid-to-late 1930s and early 1940s. The problem with this narrative is that the Koinanges remained noticeably consistent in their actions and beliefs after these events – a consistency that is ignored in current research. This same approach raises questions

concerning widely held understandings of Koinange and Peter among scholars, by the Koinange family, and in Kenya's press. For example, it is widely believed in scholarship, family history, and within popular understandings that the Koinanges founded the Kenya African Teachers' College (KATC) at Githunguri. Chapter four discusses the challenges raised against this understanding by the archival documents of the late 1930s and 1940s. When this thesis is not challenging the presently held understanding of Koinange and Peter's history, it reveals key elements of the Koinanges' lives ignored or simply unknown within current scholarship. For example, there is no mention in current scholarship of Peter Mbiyu's appointment to the Governor's Standing Advisory Committee on Local Native Councils from 1940 to 1946, an important advisory role in a period in which there was a growing call for African representation within the government. This thesis is decidedly revisionist, challenging the current narrative, and offering, in many instances, a radically different portrait of Koinange and Peter's lives.

Literature Review

Before looking to the detailed narrative of the Koinanges' lives, there are a number of connected areas within current literature that need to be considered. The first is an examination of the state of current literature related to Koinange and Peter. The scope of current scholarship provides the context to which this thesis offers a revisionist alternative. Second, because this work is predominantly biographical in its approach, there is a discussion regarding the place of biography in contemporary African Studies, as well as a reflection on the broader historiography concerning biographical work, namely the benefits and challenges raised by undertaking biographical research. Third, in the vein with which this introduction began, there is a brief examination of the broader scholarship

regarding dynastic political families and family politics in Africa. This review of the corresponding literature provides the framework for this thesis.

The Koinanges in Historical Scholarship

While various members of the Koinange family receive brief mention throughout wider Kenyan scholarship, only the two members of the family who are the focus of this thesis have been the topic of extended biographical work to date. The only research exclusively focused on the story of their lives is from the 1980s and both are contributed chapters to larger works.

The most commonly referenced work is Marshall Clough's essay entitled 'Koinange wa Mbiyu: Mediator and Patriot' which is part of a collection edited by Kenyan historian B. E. Kipkorir. Clough's chapter provides an analysis of the challenges Koinange wa Mbiyu faced in his role as an African chief during Kenya's colonial period. Narratives of the 1980s portrayed colonial chiefs, derided as colonial 'collaborators' in the decades prior, as the founding fathers of the independent colonies. This historical trend underpins Clough's portrait of Koinange wa Mbiyu as a 'patriot' and nationalistic leader. Admirably, Clough rightfully sought to rebut the ahistorical representation of African chiefs as nothing more than government stooges, out for their own gain.¹⁶ While an important contribution to our historical understanding of Koinange, Clough's work fails to consider the larger family and stops short of the pivotal political period of the late 1940s and the 1950s. This thesis not only fills in these gaps, but also reconsiders Clough's assessment in light of this additional material.

¹⁶ Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 58.

A similar work, but this time focused on Peter Mbiyu, was published a few years later and was written by St. Claire Drake, a classmate of Peter's at the Hampton Institute in Virginia during the late 1920s. This essay is one of many in a volume, edited by R. A. Hill, focused on prominent Pan-African figures.¹⁷ Drake's chapter is helpful in understanding Peter's Pan-African involvement with Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana's office of African Affairs and his brief tenure as general secretary of the Pan-African Freedom Movement for East and Central Africa (at Nyere's invitation) in the early 1960s. However, apart from Drake's reflections on his time with Peter at the Hampton Institute in the 1920s, Drake's history of Peter is tangential to the focus in this thesis of how Peter navigated the political changes within Kenya. These two chapters by Clough and Drake, both now thirty years old or more, represent the only academic and biographical work on a member of the Koinange family over the last one hundred years.

Thankfully, the family's high level of engagement in political and social developments over the last century produced a rich archival story through which to glimpse their history. Nearly every discussion of Kenyan colonial politics references Koinange for his involvement in the colonial administration, the Kikuyu Association (KA), multiple Parliamentary Commissions, and the Kenya Africa Union (KAU).¹⁸ The Koinanges likewise bear mention in the cultural controversies surrounding Kikuyu traditional practices, such as the female circumcision debate in the late 1920s and the political developments of the 1940s and the 1950s.¹⁹ The broad narrative concerning the Koinange

¹⁷ S. C. Drake, 'Mbiyu Koinange and the Pan-African Movement', in R. A. Hill (ed.), *Pan-African Biography* (Los Angeles, 1987), pp 161-208.

¹⁸ G. Bennett, *Kenya: a Political History - The Colonial Period* (London, 1963), p. 65.; B. Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: the Dialectic of Domination* (London, 1990), pp 210, 213, 227; K. Kyle, *The Politics of the Independence of Kenya* (New York, 1999), p. 34; W. Maloba, *Mau Mau and Kenya: an Analysis of a Peasant Revolt* (Nairobi, 1994) pp 46, 60.

¹⁹ Kyle, *Politics*, p. 32.

story as offered in current secondary literature is referred to throughout this thesis as the militant-turn narrative.

The Militant-Turn Framework in Current Scholarship

In current scholarly work, colonial documents from the 1950s, and in oral material collected since the outbreak of the Mau Mau Emergency, a widely held narrative arises. The consensus maintains that Koinange and Peter shifted from progressive, colonial collaborators to militant opponents of the colonial regime some time in the late 1930s and early 1940s. While there is some disagreement concerning elements of the argument, the narrative's culmination is one in which Koinange and Peter were prominent leaders of the Mau Mau uprising of the 1950s.²⁰ This militant-turn framework broadly holds the following elements in common:

1. The disappointing results of the 1932-1934 Kenya Land Commission (aka 'The Carter Land Commission') resulted in deep bitterness and disenchantment for Koinange wa Mbiyu.
2. Peter Mbiyu embraced oppositional politics upon his return to Kenya in 1938 both as a result of his friendship with Jomo Kenyatta, as well as out of frustration with the government offer of a teaching position at a lower rank than less well-educated European teachers.
3. Both Koinanges were then bitterly disappointed by the appointment of Eliud Mathu, rather than Peter Mbiyu, to serve as the first African appointed to the Legislative Council (LegCo) in 1944.
4. During this same period, the Koinanges founded the Kenya African Teacher's College at Githunguri, leading it into becoming an institution of African militancy by the late 1940s and early 1950s.
5. Furthermore, the Koinanges also assumed prominent positions of influence in African politics of opposition by the late 1940s, especially as leaders within the KAU – an organisation subsequently proscribed as militant and subversive during the Emergency period of the 1950s.
6. Koinange and Peter's leadership in what became known as the Mau Mau uprising was the result of more than a decade of frustration, bitterness, and

²⁰ Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, p. 213; D. Branch, N. Cheeseman, and L. Gardner, *Our Turn to Eat : Politics in Kenya since 1950* (London, 2010) p. 170; M. Clough, *Fighting Two Sides: Kenyan Chiefs and Politicians, 1918-1940* (Colorado, 1990), pp 165-6; Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 81.

disenchantment with colonial rule – the culmination of numbers three through five above.

These six pillars form the broad consensus within literature (and public opinion) concerning the Koinanges' eventual engagement with militant action in the late colonial era.

Current scholarship points to the outcome of the KLC as the most important development for understanding the Koinange family's eventual embrace of militancy. The family received a mere one tenth of the land they claimed was wrongfully taken from them.²¹ Clough, who has led this assessment embraced in current scholarship, writes that these disappointing results marked Koinange's rejection of the 'moderate road' and entry into 'Kikuyu militancy'.²² In *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya*, Bruce Berman offers that Koinange was 'the most important convert from collaboration [with the colonial government] to anti-colonial struggle'.²³ Anderson, with a more moderate assessment, puts forth that Koinange's 'enthusiasm for British justice waned' and 'in the wake of the Land Commission, Koinange ceased to be the government's loyal servant'.²⁴ Others have embraced this narrative of disappointment in the KLC leading to militancy or oppositional politics.²⁵ Popular memoirs, family histories, and newspapers over the last half-century have also emphasised the KLC report as a pivotal moment in time.²⁶ Four years after the report was released, Peter Mbiyu returned from eleven years abroad.

²¹ Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 91.

²² Clough, *Fighting Two Sides*, pp 165-6; Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 81.

²³ Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya*, p. 335.

²⁴ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p. 22.

²⁵ Ogot, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 111; D.W. Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau, 1945-1955* (London, 1988), p. 274.

²⁶ D. Ndegwa, *Walking in Kenyatta Struggles: My Story* (Nairobi, 2006), p. 170; J. Ngumba, 'The Life and Times of Senior Chief Koinange...as Narrated by His Wife', *The People's Digest* (Nairobi, 14 Dec. 2007), pp 4-5.

In conjunction with his return, Peter was offered a government teaching position, paid at an Asian salary rate, which was less than a European teacher who had less formal education than Peter returned with. Peter's frustration with the racial inequality experienced upon his return is often seen as his first major disappointment. According to Anderson, it was Peter who brought his father into 'the fold of the KCA' in the late 1930s.²⁷ Clough also points to the years following Peter's return to Kenya as the time when he pulled his father into the 'militant cause'.²⁸ Fuelling Koinange and Peter's growing disenchantment was the disappointment that came with the appointment of Eliud Mathu to the Legislative Council as the first African member, instead of Peter.²⁹ Jeremy Murray-Brown, representative of a broad consensus within scholarship, writes that following 1944 Peter 'abandoned all attempts at co-operation with the colonial regime and retired into nationalist opposition'.³⁰ The similarity of language to that used of Koinange's believed response to the KLC report is striking. Such pivotal turns are the norm in the scholarship concerning the Koinanges. These three developments – the KLC report, the teaching offer, and the appointment of Eliud Mathu – are the three pillars of disappointment. In response to this growing disenchantment, scholarship offers three areas of militant political engagement in response to the disappointment and disenchantment.

In their disappointment, Koinange and Peter are said to have turned to the KATC, the KAU, and to Mau Mau as avenues of opposition and militancy. According to the Corfield Report, Peter Mbiyu founded the KATC, which later became 'the storm centre of

²⁷ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p. 29.

²⁸ Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 82.

²⁹ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p. 29.

³⁰ JL *Personal Correspondence*, U. Dodge to J. Lonsdale, 16 May 1990; Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 266; C. Rosberg, Jr. and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya* (New York, 1966), pp 83-4.

the Kikuyu political scene'.³¹ According to John Lonsdale, the KATC was a joint project between the father and son, while Carl Rosberg and John Nottingham put forward that 'it was [Peter] Mbiyu Koinange who thought to turn the Githunguri KISA school into a higher college, not just for the Kikuyu but for all Kenya Africans'.³² By the late 1940s, so offers the Corfield Report, 'the web of Mau Mau was spun' at the college.³³ Greet Kershaw's *Mau Mau from Below* reflects the author's oral testimony research claiming that 'prominent Kikuyu would later regard the start of the college as the opening salvo of a more public resistance, later to become Mau Mau'.³⁴ In addition to their work with the KATC, Koinange, Peter, and other family members, held leading positions within the KAU. Anderson argues that the Koinange family members were 'prime movers' within the KAU.³⁵ David Throup and Bethwell A. Ogot point to Peter as a founding member of the organisation.³⁶ In *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya*, Daniel Branch goes further, stating that Koinange, Peter, and John Mbiyu, another of Koinange's sons, were all 'at the forefront of the establishment of the Kenya African Union' in the mid-1940s.³⁷ According to Murray-Brown, by 1952 the KAU possessed a network of 'secret cells throughout Kikuyuland' in support of violent action against the colonial government.³⁸ When the Emergency period was declared in late 1952, notable KAU leaders, including Jomo Kenyatta and Koinange, were detained and the organisation was proscribed.³⁹ Colonial officials justified the elderly Koinange's arrest and detention on the basis that he was 'a

³¹ TNA CMD/1030, F. D. Corfield, 'Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau', May 1960, pp 47, 182.

³² Lonsdale, 'The Moral Economy of Mau Mau', p. 399; Rosberg and Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau'*, pp 179-180.

³³ Ibid., p. 190.

³⁴ G. Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below* (Oxford, 1997), p. 193.

³⁵ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp 28-30.

³⁶ Ogot, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 110; Throup, *Economic & Social Origins*, p. 273.

³⁷ Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, p. 212.

³⁸ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, pp 282, 297.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 297.

leader in the organisation of Mau Mau'.⁴⁰ Peter evaded detainment at the time only because he was resident in London in October 1952. Along with other justifications, the colonial administration noted the inclusion of Peter Mbiyu's name, alongside that of Kenyatta's (whom the administration believed was the leader of Mau Mau) in 'Mau Mau hymns' in their case against Peter.⁴¹ In addition to Koinange and Peter, nearly a dozen Koinange family members were arrested for Senior Chief Waruhiu's murder.⁴² John Mbiyu, Peter's stepbrother and the eldest son of Koinange wa Mbiyu's second wife, was arrested and charged as the mastermind behind the Waruhiu assassination.⁴³ According to Daniel Branch, Nic Cheeseman, and Leigh Gardner, Mau Mau money, firearms, and munitions were stored at the Koinange home.⁴⁴ Branch writes that Peter Mbiyu and other family members were likewise 'committed to Mau Mau'.⁴⁵ During a research trip in 2012, a member of the Koinange family related how, like 'Al Capone', Koinange wa Mbiyu would flick a button on his shirt in someone's direction in front of his Mau Mau generals and that person would be murdered a short while later.⁴⁶ Jeff Koinange, the grandson of Koinange wa Mbiyu, provocatively entitled his book *Koinange-wa-Mbiyu: Mau Mau's Misunderstood Leader* – echoing the widely embraced family narrative.⁴⁷ An epilogue to this thesis will address the role of Mau Mau in Kenya today and provide an explanation for the embrace of the Mau Mau narrative by the Koinange family in recent years. For many, the idea that the Koinange family served as important leaders of the Mau Mau rebellion is very much an accepted truth.

⁴⁰ WKK *Suspension of Detention Order 1958-1960*, R. G. Wilson, 'Special Restriction Order: Mbiyu Koinange', 11 Jan. 1960, p. 2.

⁴¹ M. Blundell, *So Rough a Wind: the Kenya Memoirs of Sir Michael Blundell*, (London, 1964), p. 268.

⁴² KNA AC/1/3514, Criminal Case No. 5089/52, 1952; 'Ex-Senior Chief and Others Acquitted', *East African Standard* (Nairobi, 16 Apr. 1953), pp 1, 5; 'Waruhiu Trial', *East African Standard* (Nairobi, 10 Apr. 1953), p. 9.

⁴³ KNA AC/1/3514, Criminal Case No. 5089/52, 1952.

⁴⁴ Branch, et. al., *Our Turn to Eat*, p. 107.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 213.

⁴⁶ Interview with P. Koinange, April 2012.

⁴⁷ J. Koinange, *Koinange-wa-Mbiyu: Mau Mau's Misunderstood Leader*.

The militant-turn narrative, whether implicitly or explicitly, is embraced widely in current scholarship. This narrative focuses on the shift among the Koinange family from prominent collaborators with colonial rule in the 1920s and 1930s to militant leaders of violent oppositional politics by the 1950s. The cause for such a pronounced shift begins with their deep disenchantment with the disappointing results of the KLC report in 1934, the insulting offer to Peter Mbiyu of a teaching position at less pay than less qualified European teachers in 1938, and the deep disappointment following Eliud Mathu's appointment, instead of Peter, as the first African appointed to the LegCo in 1944. The Koinanges subsequently turned to oppositional – and eventually militant – politics through the KATC, the KAU, and, finally, as supporters of the Mau Mau rebellion to oppose colonial rule. This militant-turn narrative faces two significant challenges – one of time and the other of method. Both of these challenges are shaped heavily by the context of their source materials' creation.

Problems of Context in the Secondary Literature

In Clough's work, the dominant source is the 'Chief's Character Book' — a collection of annual assessments by local colonial district administrators.⁴⁸ These assessments are brief in nature, with entries present for two out of three years on average. Based on the entries in this book, Clough concludes that Koinange wa Mbiyu's 1942 appointment to 'chief without location' was an indication of official displeasure with Koinange.⁴⁹ In fact, as will be demonstrated in chapter three, it was a reward for Koinange's district-wide work and his uniquely esteemed value to the colonial administration.⁵⁰ Just as written sources

⁴⁸ Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 81, footnote 129.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 82.

⁵⁰ KNA DC/KBU/11/2, DC to PC, 'Senior Chief Koinange', 26 Sep. 1935, item 67.

that are given too much weight in historical analysis lead to inaccurate conclusions, so too can oral interview sources created during specific periods of crisis.

Oral testimonies recorded during the 1950-1960s and those from contemporary Kenya are inherently problematic when discussing pre-Mau Mau developments. In the middle of the twentieth century, Kenya's colonial administration interrogated and detained tens of thousands of Kikuyu through a campaign of fear in Central Kenya. This prolonged crisis and abuse established the official narrative of Mau Mau in public memory. This narrative shapes the oral testimonies from those in government camps, as well as the official documentation that underpins the Corfield Report. Likewise, interviews with family members and friends over the last two decades in Kenya are guided by a resurgence of interest and political capital offered to those who can connect their story to the Mau Mau uprising. Kershaw's widely cited and influential work, *Mau Mau from Below*, suffers from this challenge in its attempt to understand pre-Mau Mau realities through Emergency and post-Emergency oral interviews.

While Kershaw's work was not published until 1997, a major component of the material upon which its analysis and conclusions are based is a collection of interviews conducted within the context of the Emergency and detention camps of Kenya in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵¹ While these oral sources provide rich texture, Wunyabari Maloba's critique that Kershaw fails to critically think about the context within which she gathered her material — namely, sources living under fear and a clear, constant, official narrative within government detention camps and government-controlled villages, is appropriate.⁵² The result is that Kershaw's work reveals the prevailing narrative shaped by instruments

⁵¹ Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below*, pp 1-2.

⁵² W.O. Maloba, 'Review of *Mau Mau from Below* by Greet Kershaw', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 32 (1998), pp 224-5. Kershaw acknowledges a lack of sufficient supporting evidence for several of these claims throughout the work. For example, see pp 188, 206 footnote 33.

of torture, intimidation, and abuse. Attempts to understand the Koinange narrative by relying on the Corfield Report and Kershaw's, inherently inclines the narrative towards one that echoes the colonial administration's assessment of Koinange family militancy, as held by the government in the 1950s.

Likewise, recent developments in Kenyan society and politics have led to the Koinange family and friends championing the militant Koinange and Peter Mbiyu Mau Mau narrative – something Koinange and Peter worked so hard to rebut in the 1950s and the 1960s. Until recently, as W.R. Ochieng noted in 2005, it was 'extremely painful to discuss Mau Mau in Kenya' because of the contested nature surrounding public memory of the events.⁵³ In recent years, the memory of Mau Mau in modern Kenyan society, particularly among the Kikuyu, has become a means of enshrining Kenya's founding heroes. This development offers an alluring opportunity for political gains. The erection of a statue commemorating Mau Mau leader Dedan Kimathi, hung by the colonial administration in 1956, the erection of a UK-funded memorial to Mau Mau in Nairobi in 2015, the growing political voice of the Mau Mau Veterans Association, and the 2012 London High Court case charging the British government with systematic and government-endorsed abuse are just some of the most recent and well known examples of the ongoing discourse concerning Mau Mau memory in Kenya today. There are social and political gains to be had for those who can link their family's history to the Mau Mau rebellion. The publication of Jeff Koinange's book in 2000 is the most prominent example of how the Koinanges are attempting to capitalise on the opportunity. Public support has joined the family narrative including from former Secretary for Kenyatta's Cabinet and longest serving Director of the Central Bank of Kenya, Duncan Ndegwa, whose

⁵³ W.R. Ochieng, *Place of Biography in Kenyan History, 1904-2005* (Kisumu, 2005), p. 88.

autobiography claims that Koinange was at 'the forefront of Mau Mau'.⁵⁴ A newspaper article published in 2007 echoes the claim of a Koinange family member that it was Koinange who gave Dedan Kimathi and General Mathenge 'the swords of war'.⁵⁵ The Koinange families, through interviews, the press, and written word have embraced the militant Mau Mau narrative in recent years.

This has proven problematic with the typically judicious Branch using Jeff Koinange's hagiography as support for the claim that Koinange was 'a prominent patron of the radical activists by the 1950s'.⁵⁶ Oral interviews shaped by both the Emergency context and modern discussions that give Mau Mau a celebrated place in public memory, prove unreliable foundations for understanding pre-Mau Mau realities. In addition, there are other reasons that scholars and the public alike have embraced the militant-turn narrative.

Research from the 1950s and 1960s conforms to the narratives of independence and nationalism that were so prominent during that period. The clearest example of this is Rosberg and Nottingham's defining work from the 1960s, *The Myth of Mau Mau: Nationalism in Kenya*. Within their discussion of nationalism, Rosberg and Nottingham claim that 'by the late 1930s Senior Chief Koinange' was committed to 'the struggle for land, education, and freedom'.⁵⁷ Kershaw echoes this assessment in a discussion of Koinange wa Mbiyu's involvement with local Kiambu politics (i.e. the *Mbari*) and his involvement with the KATC as 'two sides of the same coin', together a nationalist driven 'rallying cry [...] to prepare for the future' freedom from the British empire.⁵⁸ The problem with both of these narratives is that they are driven by frameworks of nationalism and

⁵⁴ Ndegwa, *Walking in Kenyatta Struggles*, pp 256-290.

⁵⁵ Nyumba, 'The Life and Times', pp 4-5.

⁵⁶ Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, p. 24.

⁵⁷ Rosberg and Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau'*, p. 179.

⁵⁸ Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below*, p. 187.

independence that, while prevalent in the 1950s, are absent from the historical records related to Koinange or any member of the Koinange family before the conclusion of the Second World War.

The Corfield Report, the work of Rosberg and Nottingham, Clough, and Kershaw, oral interviews from the 1950s and today, and the Koinange family's own narrative have served as the foundation upon which the militant-turn framework has developed. This foundation is problematic given the context of the time, creating echoes within scholarship as scholars continue to return to the Corfield Report, Clough, Kershaw, the Koinange family, and others. This thesis is intentional in allowing sources created prior to Mau Mau to shape the historical narrative of pre-Mau Mau developments in order to counter these challenges of current secondary material and oral interviews.

Biographies and Historical Research

As already mentioned, this work is a joint biography of a father and son.⁵⁹ Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, academic biography work was scarce within the field of African Studies. This period is bookended by an initial interest in the 1960s and a resurgence of interest in the power of biography to illuminate African history over the last twenty years.⁶⁰ In his reflection on the challenges of biography, the problems of autobiographies, and the possibilities of biographical research, Ochieng writes that 'serious biographical and clinical studies [...] may lead us to a fresher reassessment of our past'.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Colin Bundy's seminar paper, 'Some Thoughts on History and Biography and Govan Mbeki as Subject', *African Studies Seminar* (Oxford, 10 Feb. 2011) was influential in the formation of the following thoughts.

⁶⁰ B. Davidson, *Black Star: a View of the Life and Times of Kwame Nkrumah* (Oxford, 2007); K. King and A. Salim, *Kenya Historical Biographies* (Nairobi, 1971); Morton, *Moi*; Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*; K. Murungi, *In the Mud of Politics* (Nairobi, 2000); O. Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru* (New York, 1967); W.W. Otieno and C.A. Presley, *Mau Mau's Daughter: a Life History* (Boulder, 1998); H. Thuku, *Harry Thuku: an Autobiography* (Nairobi, 1970).

⁶¹ Ochieng, *Place of Biography in Kenyan History*, p. 105.

Ochieng arrives at his conclusions only after having discussed the problems and challenges of biographical work.

Broadly speaking, biographical writing in academic work was marginalised in the second half of the twentieth century, overshadowed by the rise of social history, the impact of the structural approach of sociology and anthropology, and the emphasis on 'history from below' in the latter part of the twentieth century.⁶² As the venerable historian and biographer David Nasaw notes:

Biography remains the profession's unloved stepchild, occasionally but grudgingly let in the door, more often shut outside with the riffraff. Graduate students are warned away from writing biographies as their dissertations. Assistant professors are told to get tenure and promotion before taking on a biography [...] and the leading journals in the field, this one included, 'rarely, if ever, publish articles that are biographical in nature [and often refuse] to review biographical studies.' This characterization of biography as a lesser form of history extends far and wide.⁶³

In contrast to this, there has been a renewal in recent years of historians arguing for the important role biographies have to play in scholarly discourse – in American history, global history, as well as African historical work.⁶⁴ In 2009, the *American Historical Review* published a collection of articles born from a roundtable discussion on the role of biography in modern historiography. Rebutting the general criticism that biographical studies distort historical understanding through their narrow focus on an individual, Nasaw wrote that 'Historians are not interested in simply charting the course of individual lives, but in examining those lives in dialectical relationship to the multiple social, political, and cultural worlds they inhabit and give meaning to'.⁶⁵ Alice Kessler-Harris offers that in his own work he seeks 'to ask how the individual life helps us to make sense of a piece of

⁶² Nasaw, 'Introduction', p. 573; S. Weinberg, 'Biography, the Bastard Child of Academe', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54, 31 (2008), p. 15.

⁶³ D. Nasaw, 'Introduction', *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009) p. 573.

⁶⁴ J. Brown, "'Life Histories' and the History of Modern South Asia", *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), p. 587; J.B. Margadant (ed.), *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, 2000), p. 1.

⁶⁵ Nasaw, 'Introduction', p. 574.

the historical process [...] to see through the life'.⁶⁶ Judith Brown, with reference to her own work on the Gandhis of India, writes that "life histories" of individuals and groups of individuals' provide the historian an opportunity to approach a multitude of historical issues in a unique way.⁶⁷ Research from across the African continent has joined this renewed interest in what biographical work might offer to the wider discipline in recent years.

Until recently, there was a noticeable lack of academic biographical work within the African Studies field, as compared to other regions of the world. This has led Giacomo Macola, in his own biographical work on the life of Simon Jilundu Chibanza III, to note the 'overall dearth of African historical biography'.⁶⁸ In agreement with Nasaw, Kessler-Harris, and Brown, Macola offers that biography 'throws much light on the complexity of the world'.⁶⁹ Ochieng makes a similar observation:

'some thoroughly researched biographies yield a lot of information that is central to historical formulation. Ultimately, however, a well-researched biography, like a well-researched historical inquiry, can only stand the test of time because of the care, diligence, and dedication and craftsmanship of the author.'⁷⁰

It is into this void, and with the hope of accomplishing something of what Ochieng notes is possible of biographical work, that this thesis speaks.

The place of biography in African historiography has grown dramatically in the decade or more since Ochieng's and Macola's reflections. What has occurred is a rich blending of the methodologies and commitments which have developed within the field of African Studies over the last half-century with the broader global trends of biography

⁶⁶ A. Kessler-Harris, 'Why Biography?', *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), p. 626.

⁶⁷ Brown, "Life Histories", p. 587.

⁶⁸ G. Macola, 'The Historian Who Would Be Chief: a Biography of Simon Jilundu Chibanza III, 1899-1974', *Journal of African History*, 45 (2004), p. 24.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ochieng, *Place of Biography in Kenyan History*, p. 6.

research. The result is a growing subset of African historical and political research in the area of biography that challenges what history has been elsewhere in the world, as well as offering new insights into the narratives, concepts, and theories of understanding within the academic field. This growing genre spans from the more traditional political biographies to works of biography only recoverable through the oral history traditions of Africa. F.A. Mouton's *Prophet without Honour: F.S. Malan – Afrikaner, South African, and Cape Liberal* (2011) and Bea Lundt and Christoph Marx's recent work on Kwame Nkrumah's leadership (*Kwame Nkrumah, 1909-1972: a Controversial Visionary*, 2016) are two recent examples of what may be considered more traditional biographies of political leaders. A prime example of where African methodologies have blended fruitfully with the biographical framework is Nwando Achebe's 2011 work, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Akebi Ugbabe*, in which oral history provides the foundation for a work that seeks to reconstruct gender, gender roles, and the changing dialectic of the oppressed and the oppressor. Danelle van Zyl-Hermann notes the commonalities of a trio of 2014 biographies – Lindie Koorts' *DF Malan and the Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism*, Jacob Dlamini's *Askari: a Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*, and Jonny Steinberg's *A Man of Good Hope* – in taking the historical narrative form, so typical in biographic work, further into the realm of 'creative nonfiction' – a genre of writing established on a bedrock of extensive research, but excelling in its form and literary prose style.⁷¹ What these three works hold in common, highlighting one of the strengths of biography, is how each utilises the focus on an individual to initiate a reconsideration of both the historical past and of the present in light of that past. While this present thesis lacks the evocative prose of these three works, this thesis joins with them in forcing a reconsideration of the 1940s and 1950s in Kenya in a way that highlights the contested

⁷¹ D. van Zyl-Hermann, 'History Made Human: Confronting the Unplatable Past Through Biographical Writing in Post-apartheid South Africa' *African Historical Review*, 47, 2 (2015), pp 115-131.

nature of the past in modern Kenya. While there is a growing interest in biographical work, its presence is overshadowed by the emphasis on the larger developments and broader topics ranging from apartheid to violence to gender. And yet, as recent biographical work has demonstrated, biography may have much to offer to the understanding or reconsideration of these prevailing conversations. However, biography within African Studies is, like its global counterparts, not without its critics. As Nasaw has noted, and Ochieng has echoed, biography is often seen as the riffraff or the stepchild of true historical work. After decades of being shaped by its focus on 'history from below' and the voiceless, it is likely that many within African Studies remain sceptical that biography is little more than the distorted focus on 'the big man' of the past, extending the power they held in their lifetime to silence those under them into the present. One criticism of current biography is its tendency to reflect a uniquely Western individualism in historiography rather than the African communal identity of an individual.

Biographical writing focused on a family, or multiple members of a specific family, continues to be a rarity within African Studies. One of the few examples is the late Terence Ranger's work, *Are We Not Also Men? The Samkange Family and African Politics in Zimbabwe*, which examines the political developments of Zimbabwe through the lives of a father and his two sons.⁷² *Are We Not Also Men?* provides two important models emulated throughout this current thesis. Ranger intentionally frames the Samkange family with the language of dynasty.⁷³ The Samkange home is referred to as the 'dynastic base' and Samkange and his wife are the co-founders of the 'Samkange dynasty'.⁷⁴ For Ranger, 'dynasty' appears descriptive of a family intentionally influencing their political and social contexts at a local and national level. It is not requisite that the family hold the leading

⁷² T. Ranger, *Are We Not Also Men?: the Samkange Family and African Politics in Zimbabwe* (Harare, 1995), p. 160.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 32.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp 33, 62.

offices within the political context but, rather, simply serve as leaders of some sort within their specific context. Second, in contrast to the aforementioned typical framework of biographies, Ranger's choice to study a father and his two sons provides a model for how the study of multiple members of a family helps to explain one another's actions, while also illuminating the wider social and political changes of which they were a part. Ranger begins with the father's story, before branching off into the stories of his two sons. This progression from one generation to the next, followed by the parallel study of the brothers' lives, provides a strong example of the benefits of studying relationships, joint-efforts, and contrasting the lives and actions of different individuals within similar historical contexts. This thesis attempts to emulate these two elements of Ranger's *Are We Not Also Men?* in discussing the Koinanges' dynasty and examining the history of two generations within the same family.

There are other prominent studies of families worth considering: Charles Van Onselen's *The Seed is Mine* and Richard Werbner's *Tears of the Dead*. Van Onselen's monumental work on the life and family of a sharecropper – Kas Maine, the fruit of a decade of field interviews and comparative work on other sharecroppers, is unparalleled and reflects the ability of scholars of Africa to uncover histories from limited source material.⁷⁵ He opens his work with these memorable words: 'This is a biography of a man who, if one went by the official record alone, never was'.⁷⁶ Van Onselen argues that Maine's life provides important lessons for the reader: Maine's is 'a life that often tells us as much about ourselves as it does about Kas'.⁷⁷ In contrast, Werbner's work focuses on 'several generations of an African extended family'.⁷⁸ As with Van Onselen, Werbner relies heavily upon oral history to recount the family's history 'largely in their own

⁷⁵ Van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine*, p. 10.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Werbner, *Tears of the Dead*, p. vii.

words'.⁷⁹ Werbner's primary concern is a study of how the family has remembered their own history and how they reworked 'the past in light of the present'.⁸⁰ Both *The Seed is Mine* and *Tears of the Dead*, with their focus on oral history, stories of those who were not among the political elite of their day, and concern with how a family remembers their own history are the embodiment of broader thematic topics within the field. While these two works provide significant contributions, their methods, sources, and goals are largely disparate from the present thesis in a number of areas.

Unlike Van Onselen and Werbner, this thesis intentionally avoids telling the narrative as the Koinange family history recounts it. As already discussed, this is in large part due to the challenge posed by the social and political gains offered in contemporary Kenya through linking one's family to the Mau Mau rebellion. As a result, this thesis takes a more conservative approach in focusing on archival records rather than oral history or anthropological analysis of memory. Unlike Van Onselen's subject who did not exist in official records, the Koinanges feature prominently in primary and secondary source material. Because the Koinanges are attempting to reclaim their political and social prominence in Kenya today, the family is not only very guarded about their personal history, but also intentional about the ways in which they portray it. This thesis is also not written to inspire in the way that Van Onselen hopes his work will. The objective of this thesis is to present the historical narrative of Koinange and Peter's lives from the late nineteenth century through to 1961, one which intentionally addresses the discord between current secondary literature and the archival records, resulting in a revisionist narrative of their lives during this period. While not seeking to emulate Van Onselen or

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. viii.

Werbner, this work reflects the broader developments within biographical writing in recent years.

As biography, this thesis seeks to better understand colonial Kenya through the particular lives of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu. Biographical research, as Ochieng and Macola would assert, has much to offer in expanding our understanding of Africa's rich and complex history. This thesis embraces the idea that biographical studies of multiple generations and multiple members of a specific family can provide a unique and helpful tool for understanding historical actions and wider developments. And while it shares some qualities with the more recent studies of family memory and oral history, it intentionally refrains from embracing either of these models fully due to the difference in objective and the nature of available source material.

Dynasties and Political Theory

To bring together the dynastic nature of the Koinange family and the dominant role the Koinanges held in the development of African politics during Kenya's colonial period for this thesis, a brief examination of dynastic political theory is helpful. The language of dynasty is neither foreign to the scholarship of Africa nor to popular discourse across the continent. As mentioned previously, Ranger has framed his work on the Samkange family as a study of a political dynasty. Lonsdale examines the various attempts of individuals and families to reclaim local 'dynastic authority' within the changing context of Kenya's colonial period.⁸¹ Across the African continent, scholars have further utilised the language

⁸¹ J. Lonsdale, 'Authority, Gender and Violence: the War within Mau Mau's Fight', in E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo and J. Lonsdale (eds), *Mau Mau and Nationhood: Arms, Authority, and Narration* (Oxford, 2003), p. 58.

of dynasty to speak of the history of power and kinship.⁸² Furthermore, conversations in the press across the African continent today frame discussions about cultural and political dynamics in dynastic language.⁸³ This comfort with dynastic language in the study of Africa reflects, as Schatzberg has noted, the close relationship in the understanding of family and politics.

The role of politics and political leadership is formed in the language of family across Africa. In 1931, Koinange wa Mbiyu told members of Parliament in London that he regarded the British government as a father and 'Land as our Mother'.⁸⁴ In 1953, Koinange, in a letter to his son Peter, described 'H.M. the King as a father trustee'.⁸⁵ Schatzberg highlights, in *Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa*, the pervasiveness of paternal and familial language and metaphors in relation to government, political leadership, and heads of state across the region.⁸⁶ Whether in Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, or Cameroon, the nation is portrayed as a large family guided by its paternal leader. Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz echo this thought in their claim that 'power in Africa is exercised essentially along personalised, patrimonial lines'.⁸⁷ While Schatzberg, Chabal, and Daloz have been criticised for reductionism, their work reflects the very real presence of family identity and the way it is intertwined with the language of politics and political expectation. As a result of this norm and the widespread presence of

⁸² G.W.B. Huntingford, "'The Wealth of Kings" and the End of the Zague Dynasty', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 28, 1 (1965), pp 1-25; G. Lynch, 'Courting the Kalenjin: the Failure of Dynasticism and the Strength of the ODM Wave in Kenya's Rift Valley Province', *African Affairs*, 107, 429 (2008), pp 541-568; T.C. McCaskie, 'Power and Dynastic Conflict in Mampon', *History in Africa*, 12 (1985), pp 167-185; F. Nyamnjoh and M. Rowlands, 'Elite Associations and the Politics of Belonging in Cameroon', *Journal of International African Institute*, 68, 3 (1998), pp 320-337; R.J.J. Yidana, 'Controlling Narratives, Controlling Histories: Political Discourses of Anticolonial Nationalism' (Binghamton Univ., PhD thesis, 2006).

⁸³ M. Muiruri, "Dynasties Take Root in Kenyan Politics", *The East African Standard* (27 July 2006); P. Mwaura, 'Koinange's Death Marks the End of a Dynasty that Reigned in Kiambu', *The Daily Nation* (7 Sep. 2012).

⁸⁴ 'African chiefs appeal against discrimination: plead cause in British Parliament', *The Chicago Defender* (9 May 1931), p. 2.

⁸⁵ TNA KV/2/2546, K. Mbiyu to M. Koinange, 7 Sep. 1953, item 515a.

⁸⁶ Schatzberg, *Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa*, p. 8.

⁸⁷ P. Chabal and J. Daloz, *Culture Troubles: Politics and the Interpretation of Meaning* (Chicago, 2006), p. 230.

dynastic political families in Africa, one would expect significant academic discourse on the nature of dynastic politics across the continent.

Surprisingly, there is a noticeable lack of scholarly work examining and applying dynastic political theory in relation to modern Africa. Such studies abound for North America, South America, Europe, and East Asia.⁸⁸ Interestingly, while recognising the personal and paternal nature of African politics, some political theorists have claimed that no “republican dynasties” akin to those of Asia or Latin America [...] have emerged’ in Africa.⁸⁹ In spite of this, the breadth of analysis concerning political dynasties made elsewhere prove helpful within the African context. For example, Ernesto Dal Bo, Pedro Dal Bo and Jason Snyder argue that, within the context of family, ‘political power is self-perpetuating’.⁹⁰ This is true for studies in Mexico, India, the United States, and Africa as well.⁹¹ Prior to 1960, sons, establishing this cycle of perpetuating political power, frequently succeeded colonial chiefs of Africa.⁹² Across Africa today, spouses, sons, daughters, uncles, aunts, and other family members have followed in the footsteps of well-known predecessors. The head of the African Union (Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma), the ex-president of South Africa (Thabo Mbeki), the president of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Joseph Kabila), and the president of Liberia (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf) are just a few examples of the prominent dynasties across modern Africa.

⁸⁸ The following authors note the lack of research on African dynasties: T. Besley, ‘Political Selection’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 19, 3 (2008), pp 43-60; R. Camp, ‘Family Relationships in Mexican Politics: a Preliminary View’, *Journal of Politics*, 44, 3 (1982), pp 848-62; E. Dal Bo, P. Dal Bo, and J. Snyder, ‘Political Dynasties’, *Review of Economic Studies*, 76 (2009), pp 115-42. Studies of dynastic families around the world abound, from work on the Kennedy and Bush families in the United States to the Duvalier’s in Haiti to the Gandhi’s in India to the dynastic families of China or Japan.

⁸⁹ M. Bratton and N. Walle, ‘Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa’, *World Politics*, 46, 4 (1994), p. 459; A. Hughes and R. May, ‘The Politics of Succession in Black Africa’, *Third World Quarterly*, 10, 1 (1988), p. 14.

⁹⁰ E. Dal Bo, et. al., ‘Political dynasties’, p. 115.

⁹¹ T. Besley, ‘Political Selection’, p. 51.

⁹² KNA DC/KBU/11/2, DC to PC, ‘Salaries of Chiefs and Headmen - Kiambu’, 4 July 1936, item 74; KNA MSS/74/2, ‘An Open Letter from Henry Muoria’, date unknown, p. 25; KNA VQ/16/77, 1945 Annual Report, pp 5-7; Clough, *Fighting Two Sides*, p. 84; Ndegwa, *Walking in Kenyatta Struggles*, p. 421.

What this means for a biographical study of different individuals within a single family is that family members benefit from and become components in this self-perpetuating inheritance of dynastic political power. Understanding Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu in relationship to one another provides an opportunity to see this dynastic perpetuation of power at play within the context of colonial Kenya.

Methodology

Archival research for this thesis occurred on three different continents over the course of three and a half years. The vast majority of material comes from archives in Kenya, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Much of this source material is from government collections, although there are several items from institutional (e.g. the Hampton Institute, St John's College (Cambridge)) and personal archival collections (e.g. Dr Wilfred Koinange, Dr John Lonsdale). The archival material is supplemented with a small collection of oral interviews from the 1990s, shared with the author by John Lonsdale, and interviews personally conducted by the author of this thesis between 2011-2012.

Archival Sources

A large collection of written and printed archival material provides the foundation for the narrative presented in this thesis. Kenya's National Archives (KNA), located in the capital city of Nairobi, provide a significant majority of this material. Almost equal in scope is the material consulted at the United Kingdom's National Archives at Kew (TNA).

A smaller collection of source material was gathered from the Rhodes House Library in Oxford (now part of the Special Collections held by the Weston Library), as well as the St John's College (Cambridge University) archive, and the archives of the Hampton Institute, where Peter Mbiyu attended as a student in the 1920s. Each of these archival collections presents strengths and weaknesses some of which they hold in common and some that are unique to each collection.

The KNA provides the largest source of material related to the Koinanges' engagement with the British colonial administration in Kenya. The vast majority of this material was created by British administrators for British administrators to fit into a decidedly British imperial narrative. This bias is demonstrable. For example, items created during the 1940s are noticeably shaped by the context of the Second World War, India's nationalism and independence, and trade unionism and African political action. Some issues that were of great interest in the 1930s drop off the historical record almost completely during certain periods of the 1940s. Similarly, when issues reappear, they are framed not within the continuity of the previous decade's discussions but within the context of their renewal. For example, chapter three discusses Peter Mbiyu's role on the Local Native Council and then on the Governor's Standing Advisory Committee on Local Native Councils during the Second World War. The information about Peter's engagement with these groups is very limited, while the dominant conversations of the texts in which they are mentioned discuss questions of soldiers, food supplies, and the immediate concerns of wartime Kenya. After the war, official documents rarely refer to Peter's involvement with these two organisations, but frequently refer to Eliud Mathu's appointment over Peter to the Legislative Council near the end of the war. There are other periods in which the archival record is noticeably limited. For example, the years of British involvement in East Africa before 1910 offer noticeably fewer records due to the

smaller European administrative presence in central Kenya at the time. The result is that the story of the Koinange family prior to the 1910s has little basis for reconstruction apart from Koinange family history.

In the United Kingdom, the National Archives at Kew provided a wealth of official documentation related to British intelligence (MI5, KV files) work and the functioning of the Colonial Office (CO). The Special Branch investigation of Peter Mbiyu during his time in England initially began out of concerns regarding his potential link to the Communist Party of Great Britain, not because of Peter's political activities in Kenya. When MI5 concluded that Peter Mbiyu was not a security threat, they moved to close their investigation. Kenya's colonial government protested, and the investigation remained open for a further five years. The only reason records exist from these final five years is because the colonial government in Kenya was convinced that Peter was a leader of Mau Mau.⁹³ The Colonial Office records have a different focus and cover a much longer period of time. Responsible for events occurring in the colonies, as well as the actions of colonial subjects living in England, the Colonial Office records contain copies of memoranda, records from visits to Kenya by official delegations, correspondence concerning Peter Mbiyu's education at Cambridge University and the University of London, records of the Lancaster House Conference in 1960, as well as a host of other topics pertinent to political developments in Kenya and interested parties in the United Kingdom. When using these records, it is important to pay attention to the political party in power in Britain at the time, the party's colonial agenda, and the specific leadership in place in the colonial office.

Institutional archives in the United States provide a small portion of material used in this thesis given that its primary focus is the Koinanges' weathering of political changes in

⁹³ TNA KV/2/2550, 'Peter Mbui Koinange', 17 Nov. 1954, item 629a.

Kenya. Starting in 1927, Peter Mbiyu spent nine years in the United States, first graduating from the Hampton Institute in Virginia, before going on to Ohio Wesleyan University and then on to Columbia University. Material provided by the archives of the first two institutions is helpful in understanding how the developments of race relations and African consciousness in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century may have influenced Peter Mbiyu's views of colonialism, race, and Africa. In addition to the material held by these institutions, the availability of digitised newspapers from Chicago, New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania likewise provide insight into Peter Mbiyu's time in the United States. Peter then spent two years in England following completion of his work at Columbia University. Records from the archive at St John's College, Cambridge, as well as the Colonial Office, shed light on this part of his story.

A narrative constructed primarily from archival records is only possible because of the prominent roles both Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu held in colonial Kenya and the very public nature of many of their actions. It is the hundreds of collections and thousands of pages, many of which have only become available in the last decade, that enable this narrative of Koinange and Peter's lives to be the most detailed recounting of their histories available within academic research to date. To this rich archival foundation was added supporting details from oral interviews.

Oral Interviews

Outside the immediate community of the Koinange family and friends, mentioning the topic of this thesis to Africans in Kenya produced a frequent response of wide eyes, a look of concern, and the incredulous question, 'Why?'. Due to post-independence scandals and political assassinations with which the family is associated, many in Kenya

today know the Koinanges only through their political scandals. At the same time, many within the Koinange family are unwilling to discuss their family's story, weary of what might be written about them and ever conscious of this negative public image. In addition, and in spite of their progressive character, the family remains traditionally Kikuyu in many ways. In spite of numerous attempts to meet with the family or friends, this author received only a handful of interviews over the course of a twelve-month period. These interviews were with three members of the Koinange family: Elizabeth Gathiomi, the sole remaining widow of Koinange wa Mbiyu, Dr Wilfred Koinange, and MP Paul Koinange, both grandsons of Koinange wa Mbiyu. It took six months to arrange the first of these meetings.

After meeting with these family members, it became clear that sorting family myth from historical truth would prove more difficult than was initially anticipated. Family and personal political agendas were clearly present in nearly every conversation. As a candidate for the Kiambu seat in Parliament at the time, Paul Koinange was most interested in how this author could support his election efforts or his future ambitions for developing further educational opportunities in Kiambu. Dr Wilfred Koinange had been the subject of an ongoing, twenty-year old court case for his alleged role in Kenya's Goldenberg Scandal - an early-1990s political event that fleeced the country for over 400 million dollars through a fictional diamond and gold selling scheme.⁹⁴ In just our second meeting, Dr Koinange spent the lunch hour presenting his side of the Goldenberg scandal. Perhaps to his credit, and in support of his recounting of the Goldenberg events, he was cleared of seven of the nine charges brought against him in early August 2012, just weeks before his unexpected death.⁹⁵ It was clear throughout that Paul Koinange and Dr

⁹⁴ 'Kenyan Official Charged with \$126 Million Theft', *Reuters News* (14 Dec. 1994).

⁹⁵ S. Njenga, 'Koinange Had No Hand in Goldenberg', *The Star* (Nairobi, 4 Sep. 2012). Accessed 27 Sep. 2012. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201209050030.html>.

Wilfred Koinange had specific areas they wished to discuss in relation to the family's story, while there were other areas they were unwilling or hesitant to explore. This complexity is the ever-present challenge of oral history.

As Donald Ritchie notes, historians must be careful with oral history, just as they are with every other source of history.⁹⁶ 'Some interviewees' remarks are self-serving,' writes Ritchie, 'they remember selectively, recall only events that cast themselves in good light, and seem to always get the better of opponents.'⁹⁷ As this author attempted to reconcile the narratives from the interview material with the narratives arising from the archival material, it became clear that the two were directly in opposition to one another — particularly when related to the pivotal period of the late 1940s and the 1950s. In addition, gathering enough oral interview material from various family members to clarify the history of the family proved impossible. In light of these challenges, this thesis rests most heavily on the archival material as the primary source for its historical narrative. This approach is at odds with the majority of current African historiography that embraces oral history. As a result of the wealth of written archival material and the challenges of wisely discerning the veracity of the oral interview material, the information from the oral interviews functions in a secondary role throughout this thesis, providing details and additional support to the narrative. It is only in the case of the early history of both Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu's lives that information from oral interviews takes the leading role in constructing the narrative.

In spite of these difficulties with the Koinange family history, this work is indebted to Dr Wilfred Koinange – the unofficial Koinange family historian (until his unexpected death in 2012) – who so generously shared a collection of his records and photos with me.

⁹⁶ D.A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: a Practical Guide* (Oxford, 2003), p. 117.

⁹⁷ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, p. 117.

I am aware that the conclusions reached in this thesis are at odds with the modern Koinange family narrative of their history. There is a concerted effort to place the Koinanges at the centre of the contemporary praise of Mau Mau fighters as liberation heroes, after decades in which they were pushed to the periphery (Jeff Koinange's *Koinange wa Mbiyu: Mau Mau's Misunderstood Leader* is a prime example of this effort, though not the only one). This modern narrative placing Koinange wa Mbiyu in a prominent position related to Mau Mau is in direct conflict with the archival records of the time. I have treated Jeff Koinange's book as if it was an oral interview. Where Koinange is not quoting, word-for-word without appropriate citation, from the work of Clough or Ralph Bunche, his book veers into family propaganda and myth, driven to present a specific image of Koinange wa Mbiyu, rather than an academic commitment to rigorous scholarship and research.

In addition to the family archival material shared by Dr Wilfred Koinange, this author is grateful to Emeritus Professor John Lonsdale, of the University of Cambridge, for sharing his records from a series of interviews conducted for him in the early 1990s by Evanson N. Wamagatta. The information from these interviews is used in the same way I have made use of my own interview material — as secondary support details and only as a primary source in a situation where no other source of information is available.

Thesis Structure

The structure of this thesis is broadly biographical and chronological in nature, but targeted at the two specific goals of this research: providing a broader narrative of the Koinanges' lives through a long-perspective approach and offering a revised explanation

for the Koinanges' political actions in the late colonial period. Given these objectives, the chapters progress chronologically, rather than topically (Figure I.1). Chapters one and two begin by examining Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu separately, given the separate nature of their pre-1930s lives. Chapter one addresses the life of Koinange wa Mbiyu from birth to around the age of fifty. Chapter two addresses the life of Peter Mbiyu Koinange from birth to roughly when he was thirty. Together, these chapters carry the reader through the pivotal years of the 1920s and 1930s, but in different contexts. Through the early life of Koinange wa Mbiyu, the developments shaping colonial Kenya are highlighted. It is within this context that the first pillar of the militant-turn narrative is examined: the Kenya Land Commission of 1932-1934. Through the early life of Peter Mbiyu, transformational developments in the West during the 1920s and 1930s are discussed. Chapter three then addresses the father and son in parallel, following Peter's return to Kenya in 1939. It focuses on the forgotten years of the Koinanges' continued engagement with the colonial government from the late 1930s through the mid-to-late 1940s. Chapter four addresses Koinange and Peter's work in the establishment of the Kenya African Teachers' College at Githunguri. While current literature claims they worked closely together in this endeavour, this chapter challenges this widely held assertion. Chapter five then examines Koinange and Peter's response to the 1944 appointment of Eliud Mathu and their subsequent involvement with the Kenya African Union. Once again, the collaboration is more limited than previously assumed due to Peter's travel abroad and Koinange's hesitant involvement with the KAU. Chapter six then examines Koinange and Peter's actions and involvement with Mau Mau militancy, in light of the long perspective of their lives and the revisionist narrative of chapters one through five. Each chapter not only builds sequentially on the narrative covered in the previous chapter, filling in the historical gaps in the Koinange narrative, but also addresses

the pertinent historiographical issues in questioning the current understanding and offering a revised framework for understanding Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu's political actions in colonial Kenya. The epilogue then provides a brief discussion of the Koinange family's role in independent Kenya, including their attempts to claim the militant Mau Mau narrative for the family in light of contemporary public debate concerning the place of Mau Mau in Kenya's independence story.

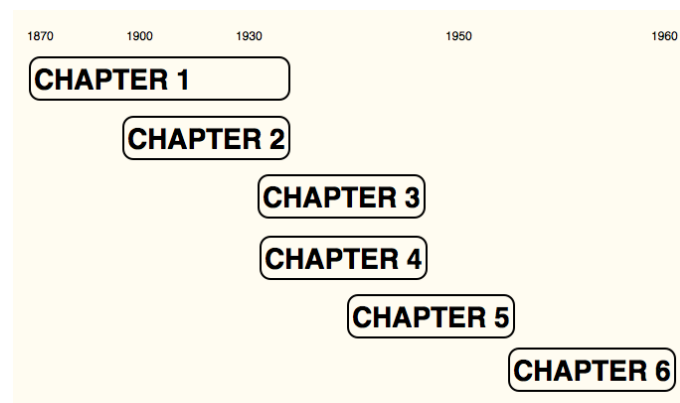


Figure I.1: Chapter overview.

The main objective of each chapter is to offer a fuller narrative and understanding of the lives of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu than is currently available in the vignette-based narrative of scholarship. The body of each chapter focuses on continuing the developing narrative. Because each chapter covers a historical period that may itself be the sole focus of scholarly research, each chapter's developments exist within a unique historical, political, and economic context to which the Koinanges were responding. This has presented a challenging dilemma for the writing process.

There is a need for the reader to be aware of the historical context of each chapter and of how existing scholarship has presented the Koinanges within that specific context, especially if the revisionist nature of this work is to be clearly evidenced. To present

contextual background for colonial Kenya's history from the late 1800s to the late 1950s in this introduction would have resulted in an unwieldy and lengthy discourse disconnected from the specific period in the lives of Koinange and Peter. In order for the reader to grasp how the narrative presented in this thesis both expands on the current Koinange narrative, as well as how it challenges the current scholarly analysis, each chapter provides a brief overview of the historical context of the chapter before progressing into the narrowed historical narrative concerning Koinange and Peter's lives that is at the heart of this thesis.

Filling the Gaps and Challenging the Status Quo

The chapters to follow are shaped by the themes, theories, and frameworks discussed in this introduction. In the first, it is inspired by the realisation that political dynasties are powerful and influential in Kenya today, as they are for countries across the African continent and around the world. Koinange and Peter's histories provide a way to examine a specific dynastic story within a set context (i.e. Kenya's colonial period) distant enough in the past that archival sources are available, and for which scholarship is available to offer a framework for specific analysis at points. The current vignette-based understanding of the Koinanges' history is too disjointed for the purposes of such an undertaking. It is only through a long-perspective study, one focused on filling the gaps in current scholarship, that the histories of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu become clear enough to demonstrate the continuity between their decisions and actions, even as they navigated the political and social changes of their day. The fruit of this narrative approach to the Koinanges raises the need for a revision of the prevailing militant-turn narrative and offers an entirely different framework through which to understand the

Koinanges' decisions during this period. In the end, the study of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu provides a way, to borrow from Kessler-Harris, 'to make sense of [...] the historical process'.⁹⁸ In the process of seeking a clearer and more coherent narrative for the Koinange family, the understanding of the broader context of colonial Kenya in which they lived is challenged, illuminated, and expanded upon.

⁹⁸ Kessler-Harris, 'Why Biography?', p. 626.

CHAPTER ONE

Opportunities in an Imperial Colony: Koinange wa Mbiyu's Rise (1870-1934)

I was born near Kyambaa; the shamba (garden plot) was named Njono, and it is now occupied by Europeans. The first European came to my country when I was a small boy herding cattle, at which time the Kikuyu and Maasai were frequently engaged in war [...] I was told that many more European farmers were coming, and that I should help them to take care of their property and see that they got labour [...] a house was built by a European on Ngaria's (my first wife's grandfather) land at Riara. Although the house was there, we never realised that the land belonged to the Europeans, whom we thought were tenants at our will [...] I was told that since I was on European land I must be paid by the European farmers and not by the Government. This was the first time I knew that the land belonged to Europeans and not to me. [...] I was sorry to move from my ancestral lands, but we could do nothing when the whites moved on our lands, because we were afraid of being killed by them.¹

The arrival of British (and other European) explorers, administrators, and settlers radically transformed East Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century. As Koinange wa Mbiyu revealed during his 1930s interview with the African-American sociologist Ralph Bunche, these early experiences brought with them conflict, new European methods of farming the land, the use of African labour by European farmers, and the loss of African land to European settlers under the new laws and norms of colonial governance. Fearful of these new European settlers and confused by British legal norms, the native African communities had little recourse to protest the theft of their land. The intimate relationship that existed between native social identity and their land meant that alienation from their

¹ R.J. Bunche, 'The Land Equation in Kenya Colony: (As Seen by a Kikuyu Chief)', *The Journal of Negro History*, 24 (1939), pp 38-40.

land impacted every area of life — from social expectations to religious practice to economic opportunities to political engagement. Koinange's life provides a unique, yet significant, example of African agency in the midst of pre-colonial and colonial changes and the advent of formal colonial rule.

Koinange grew up in a large and wealthy Kikuyu family in the late nineteenth century. They were some of the first Africans to engage with European explorers in Central. Koinange was appointed a headman of the administration in the first decade of the twentieth century. Over the next three decades, he rose to become the most highly paid and most highly decorated African chief within Kenya. Koinange's first fifty years of life (and the first thirty years of his work with the colonial administration) reveal Koinange's political and social priorities — in particular, those which remained consistent and central to his socio-political involvement. These early years reveal a consistent embrace of European political, educational, and religious norms and practices. They also reveal a determined pursuit of reform regarding land policies. What arises is a determination, on the part of Koinange, to a political activism that sought changes from within the governing structure of European colonial society, while embracing many of the advantages and opportunities that same society had to offer.

This chapter is presented in two parts. The first presents the broad nineteenth and early twentieth century history of Central Kenya, with a focus on the advent and impact of European colonisation and administration. Building upon this historical context, the second part of the chapter examines Koinange wa Mbiyu's social and political actions during this period.

Colonial Rule in Central Kenya

During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the Kikuyu migrated into Kenya's Central Highland area, where they met a forest dwelling ethnic group often referred to as the Dorobo.² Land exchanges took place (whether through force or agreement is unclear), and the Kikuyu established themselves among the rolling hills, ridges, and elevated highlands of Central Kenya. Land was central to Kikuyu social and historical identity, fully intertwined in the concept of *mbari*. The word is often translated as 'kinship group', but encompasses the multi-faceted and interdependent relationship of kin, land, and the historical bond between them.³ One's *mbari* embodied the story of one's people, passed from generation to generation. Thus, land was of central importance to the Kikuyu when European settlement began in the 1880s and 1890s. By 1890, these Kikuyu *mbari* may have represented as much as three quarters of Kenya's estimated population of three million.⁴ Any action that impacted local land claims impacted a family's historic and present identity.

European and British settlement of East Africa, which followed the 1884 Berlin Conference, began with the arrival of the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC), based at Zanzibar and at the port of Mombasa. The first British missionaries and settlers arrived in the region during the 1890s.⁵ In 1895, the British Colonial Office took over from the IBEAC, establishing a British administration within the East African Protectorate (Map 1.1).⁶ Construction on the East African railroad began in 1896. The

² G. Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu, 1500-1900* (Oxford, 1974), p. 62; KNA DC/KBU/4/3, 'Land Tenure - Githaka System', 1924-1928, p 1.

³ Muriuki, *A History of Kikuyu*, p. 9.

⁴ J. Lonsdale, 'The Conquest State of Kenya: 1895-1905', in B. Berman and J. Lonsdale (eds), *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa* (2 vols., Oxford, 1992), i, p. 19.

⁵ KNA N/M/1/790, Letter to the Editor, *East African Standard*, 16 Aug. 1947; J. Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (New York, 1979), p. 262.

⁶ R.M. Maxon and T.P. Ofcansky, *Historical Dictionary of Kenya* (Lanham, 2014), p. xviii.

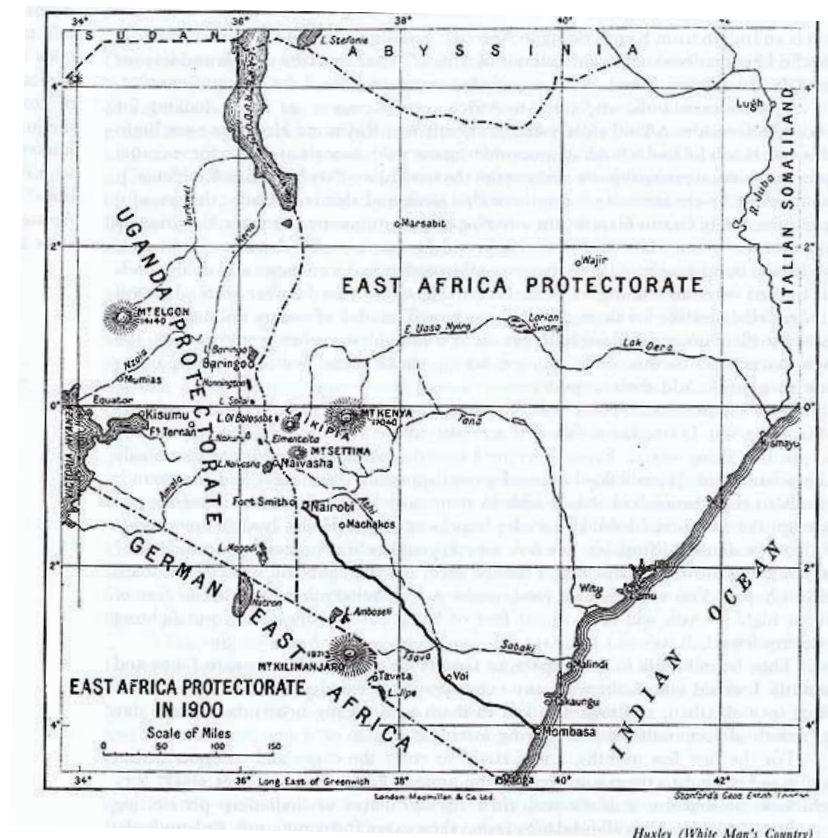
work of building the railroad took five years, eventually connecting the sea trade of the Indian Ocean, via the port of Mombasa, with the interior trade of Uganda's Lake Victoria region. Over the more than four hundred mile journey, the train passed through the Central Highlands and the modestly-sized trading town of Nairobi. Burdened by the £6.6 million investment in and the need for maintenance of this 'Iron Snake', Kenya's colonial administration and London's Colonial Office undertook significant efforts to increase European immigration into Kenya's Central Highlands. European settlers were offered land for farming or cattle ventures, under generous lease agreements, with the promise of great future returns for their investment and the incumbent risks involved in such an undertaking.⁷ European settlement came into immediate conflict with Kikuyu *mbari's* — laying the foundation for continual conflict over land in Central Kenya for the seventy years of Britain's colonial rule in Kenya. The recently arrived Europeans worked to enforce their control through military action, the rule of law, and social pressure. John Lonsdale mentions twenty-nine known violent engagements between European and African communities from the late 1880s to 1910, with nearly a third of these taking place among the Kikuyu.⁸

In the midst of these land disputes, Kenya's inhabitants were hit by a series of disasters and conflicts. Famine and an accompanying epidemic of smallpox struck Central Kenya in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Rinderpest in 1890-1 and 1898 devastated cattle herds (particularly among the Maasai), and an outbreak of jiggers left its victims either crippled or dead.⁹ By the turn of the twentieth century, tensions over land continued to rise as the native population recovered from the impact of famine and disease in the midst of rising European settlement.

⁷ KNA DC/KBU/4/3, 'Land Tenure', p. 2.

⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

⁹ Lonsdale, 'The Conquest State', p. 23.



Map 1.1: The East African Protectorate (c. 1900).¹⁰

Colonial Entrenchment

The British colonial administration's need to address the challenges brought by famine, disease, conflict, and the need to regulate land disputes led to the establishment of governing laws for the East African Protectorate. Written in English and with minimal consideration for the effect they would have on the majority native population, these early laws and regulations favoured the European settlers over the African native communities. A 1902 ordinance designated all unoccupied land (whether or not it was claimed by a nearby *mbari* or community) as 'Crown Land', bringing it under the administration of the colonial authorities. Colonial administrators, after deciding what land was unoccupied, then offered this land to European farmers and settlers, along with the added incentive of

¹⁰ E. Huxley, *White Man's Country: Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya* (New York, 1968).

99-year leases.¹¹ Due to the host of late nineteenth-century challenges and local customs (from famine, disease, conflict, and traditional practices of allowing fields to lie fallow), a significant amount of land appeared ‘unoccupied’ to colonial administrators at the end of the nineteenth century.¹² An official survey in 1904 designated 4,000 acres of land in Kenya’s Central Highlands for European settlement, land that local *mbari* and native communities had long held as their own. The amount of unoccupied land available for European settlement grew threefold by 1937.¹³ In 1906, a law was passed that allowed the establishment of ‘observation stations’ on a person’s land without requiring the landowner’s consent.¹⁴ Within the first decade of the twentieth century, the colonial administration, recently established in 1895, utilised the coercive power of law to gain control of the land in Kenya’s fertile Central Highland region. A host of other enacted laws indicate a similar invasion into all areas of life for Africans living in the East African Protectorate.¹⁵ Each law enlarged the government’s powers and affected native cultural norms. The *coup de grace* concerning native land usage came in 1915.

The 1915 Crown Lands Act, an expansion of the 1902 unoccupied land ordinance, established that *all* native land was now ‘Crown Land’, placing it under the management of the colonial administration. This 1915 Act solidified the existence of the Native Reserves (bounded areas — many of which were in place by 1904 — for African settlement in which population densities were significantly higher than those of the European areas).¹⁶ By 1915, the colonial administration had effectively seized the best farm land of Central

¹¹ TNA CO/533/538/1, ‘Land Management and Utilisation in Kenya’, July 1947, p. 1; J. Lonsdale, “‘White Kikuyu’ and ‘Cursed Reader’ 1890-1929”, unpublished manuscript (Cambridge, 2013), p. 7; M.P.K. Sorrenson, *Origins of European Settlement in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1968), p. 63.

¹² *Kenya Land Commission Evidence* (Nairobi, 1933-1934), p. 682.

¹³ V. Morell, *Ancestral Passions: the Leakey Family and the Quest for Humankind’s Beginnings* (New York, 1995), p. 111.

¹⁴ KNA *Official Kenya Gazette*, 1906, p. 202.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

¹⁶ TNA CO/533/538/1, ‘Land Management’, p. 2.

Kenya and offered it exclusively to European farmers, leading to this areas appellation of the 'White Highlands'.¹⁷

By 1920, when the protectorate was officially declared the Kenya Colony, traditional land practices had been fundamentally redefined under British administrative rule. Replacing historic agreements or long-held family claims to land was a new bureaucratic process of power and violence. As a result, a new generation of leadership arose due to their willingness to serve the colonial administration, upending prior politics of generation and the communal recognition of its own leadership. Wealth and opportunity were now the result of ones engagement with European economic, social, and political opportunities. This rupturing and reforming of economic, social, and political expectations and opportunities provided the avenue for Koinange's rise.

As the colonial administration faced growing unrest over the land alienation, they also faced increasing pressure from London to seek local funding for their expenses. In order to facilitate the gathering these funds through taxation, the administration sought to collaborate with members of the local African community. These headmen and chiefs aided in the recruitment of native labourers for European farms, aided in collecting taxes, and were charged with keeping the native population peaceful and content.¹⁸ Lonsdale rightly notes that the administration's reliance on this new class of native leadership led to both a new social division and to eventual corruption via new positions of power. Koinange was one of these early collaborators who benefited from new opportunities under colonial rule.¹⁹

¹⁷ M.S. Coray, 'The Kenya Land Commission and the Kikuyu of Kiambu', *Agricultural History*, 3 (1978), p. 180.

¹⁸ Lonsdale, 'The Conquest State', pp 36-7.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

By 1907, nearly one-third of the taxes collected from African communities in Kenya came from the Kikuyu of central Kenya — a result of the group's physical proximity to Nairobi and of their engagement with the colonial administrative system.²⁰ A new 'hut tax' requiring payment in shillings was enacted in 1919, forcing African labourers to seek employment within the European economic system, whether on European farms or in growing urban towns.²¹ By the 1920s, these developments resulted in increased conflict between and within the various racial communities.

Africans who collaborated with European settlers or European missionaries were increasingly perceived as a threat to many within their local communities. African Christian converts began to complain that the African tribal courts actively prevented them from inheriting from their family's lands.²² African converts, with the help of their new mission allies, protested this mistreatment and engaged with the new governing system.²³ A mediation in 1919 resulted in Koinange wa Mbiyu being placed on the local native court in Kiambu, along with three other leading Christian converts. It was these four men, converts of local missions work, who went on to establish the Kikuyu Association, one of the first political bodies representing Kikuyu land interests, with Koinange wa Mbiyu as President. All four men became leading African chiefs within the colonial administration.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

²¹ Morell, *Ancestral Passions*, p. 111.

²² M.S. Clough, *Fighting Two Sides: Kenyan Chiefs and Politicians, 1918-1940* (Colorado, 1990), p. 39.

²³ BL MSS.Afr.s.633, *Coryndon Papers*, J.W. Arthur to H. Leakey, 23 May 1916, Box 2, ff. 58-61.

Responses in the 1920s and 1930s

There were two significant developments within Kenya in the early 1920s that set the tone for the decades to follow. These were the institution of the *kipande* and the establishment of the first African political organisation, the Kikuyu Association (KA).

Kipande laws required all African labourers to wear a metal cylinder around their neck containing a record of their employment history. This record of previous wages was, in part, a response to settler protests that wages in the colony were too high.²⁴ While it prevented wage inflation (welcome by European employers) it restricted wage growth for African workers, increasing discontent and rural-to-urban migration. The institution of the *kipande* led to the formation of the first African political organisations. In 1921, the East African Association (EAA) and the Young Kavirondo Association were established to protest the *kipande* system, as well as the growth of land regulation, increased taxation, and high unemployment.²⁵ Political actions of protest were birthed from the economic frustrations of daily life.

In 1922, a crowd gathered outside of Nairobi's Kingsway Police Station to protest the arrest of the EAA's leader, Harry Thuku.²⁶ Police fired on the gathered crowd, leaving twenty-five dead, including a fifteen-year-old boy.²⁷ Following the protest and police shooting, Thuku was exiled to Kisumu from 1922 to 1930.²⁸ Thuku's political following, the symbolic significance of the EAA, and the protests of 1922 were significant moments in the growth of political activism. For a number of years following the 1922 shootings,

²⁴ T. Zeleza, 'The Establishment of Colonial Rule, 1905-1920', in W.R. Ochieng' (ed.), *A Modern History of Kenya 1895-1980* (Nairobi, 1989), p. 51.

²⁵ R. Maxon, 'The Years of Revolutionary Advance, 1920-1929', in W.R. Ochieng' (ed.), *A Modern History of Kenya 1895-1980* (Nairobi, 1989), pp 79-80.

²⁶ Ibid., pp 80-1; Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 46.

²⁷ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 102; W.R. Ochieng, *Place of Biography in Kenyan History, 1904-2005* (Kisumu, 2005), pp 81-2.

²⁸ D.W. Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau 1945-1955* (London, 1988), p. 283.

district administrators in Central Kenya were expected to report on the level of political agitation (or calm) among the local African population and within the Reserves.²⁹ The incident served as a warning bell for the same colonial government that African grievances and protests could not be ignored. Thuku's arrest, the protests, police shootings, and subsequent tensions in Central Kenya revealed the limits placed on African political action by the colonial government. These events also indicated that African politics of protest could not be ignored.

In response to the growing protests and unrest, new opportunities for African involvement in governance were initiated, albeit at a limited and local level. In 1925, the administration established the local native councils (LNC) to model what the administration considered desirable civic engagement, as well as a means to salve the clamour for African representation.³⁰ Reticent of what would come of this, the colonial administration retained control and oversight of the LNCs. The local District Commissioner (DC) served as president and nominator of the majority of the council's members, allowing control over the general direction and the official actions of the council.³¹ African council members were forced to navigate two worlds: the limited purview over which they had influence as LNC members and the expectations of their fellow Africans that they would address issues of land security, the *kipande* laws, taxes, etc. As a result, most LNCs focused on local land issues and education efforts.³² As various actors attempted to navigate both the challenges and the opportunities, conflicts arose between defenders of tradition and proponents of change.

²⁹ Clough, *Fighting Two Sides*, p. 61.

³⁰ M.D. Njagi, 'Imperial Education and the Crisis of Political Leadership in Postcolonial Kenya' (Stony Brook University Ph.D. thesis, 2011), p. 122; D.G. Schilling, 'Local Councils and the Politics of Education in Kenya, 1925-1939' *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 9 (1976), p.p 220-2.

³¹ Njagi, 'Imperial Education', p. 123.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 123; BL Micr.Afr.515, 'Annual Report: Kikuyu Province, 1927', Reel 1, AR64, pp 27-30.

In the late 1920s, a long-standing controversy concerning the traditional Kikuyu practice of female circumcision heightened conflict between Kenya's ethnic communities, particularly among the Kikuyu. Broad public debate erupted after three young girls were hospitalised when a circumcision ceremony went awry.³³ European missionaries, through their churches and converts, pressured local Kikuyu communities to cease the traditional practice. Kikuyu converts to Christianity were required to choose between Kikuyu tradition and European ideals. Kikuyu political groups, including the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), publicly criticised missionaries and their converts for undermining indigenous cultural practices.³⁴ Christian converts who sided with European opposition to female circumcision were labelled *kirore*. Meaning 'thumbprint', the name referenced the act of placing one's thumbprint on the church pledge to forsake the traditional practice.³⁵ *Kirore*, of which Koinange wa Mbiyu was one of the most prominent, were publicly mocked in KCA songs.³⁶ The circumcision controversy of the late 1920s further revealed the divisions between Kenya's ethnic communities and within the Kikuyu community as well.

During the 1920s, the idea of a 'closer union' between Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika through a centralised administrative body was considered on numerous occasions.³⁷ A Parliamentary Commission in London was established to look into this idea of a 'closer union' for Eastern Africa. Koinange was among a small group of African chiefs invited to London to address the commission. Following their testimony, which raised the

³³ E. Wamagatta, 'The Presbyterian Church of East Africa' (West Virginia University Ph.D thesis, 2001), pp 221, 223.

³⁴ Clough, *Fighting Two Sides*, p. 145.

³⁵ D.R. Peterson, "'Be Like Firm Soldiers to Develop the Country': Political Imagination and the Geography of Gikuyuland', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 37 (2004), pp 83-4.

³⁶ Clough, *Fighting Two Sides*, p. 146.

³⁷ 'Unification of East Africa', *The Times* (London, 18 Mar. 1931), p. 9.

African protests against colonial land policy, the Committee recommended that a commission be established to look into Kenya's longstanding land disputes.

The very next year, Parliamentary delegates of the newly established Kenya Land Commission (KLC) travelled to Kenya.³⁸ Over the course of the next year, the commission collected evidence through testimony and memoranda from Kenya's European and African communities. One of the most active African contributors to this process was then Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu. The KLC issued its report in 1934. The recommendations of the KLC report were disappointing for Kenya's African community. As this thesis shall discuss, the disappointing recommendations from the Commission are often considered a key moment in furthering the growth of African politics of opposition to colonial rule.

By the 1930s, Kenya faced both high unemployment within the African community, as well as growing conflict and tension between and within Kenya's ethnic communities. In 1931, the *New York Times* noted the growing bitterness of the African population toward the 'discriminatory policies of British settlers in Kenya'.³⁹ These were the developments of the 1895 to 1935 period to which the 1935 through 1963 period was, in large part, an ongoing series of reactions and public responses. So significant were the challenges facing Kenya's African population, stemming from land policies, taxation, and cultural disputes that Ralph Bunche, noted political scientist and the first African-American to receive the Nobel Peace Prize (1950), wrote that in 1939 life for Africans in Kenya was 'confusing,

³⁸ T. Kanogo, 'Kenya and the Depression, 1929-1939', in W.R. Ochieng' (ed.), *A Modern History of Kenya 1895-1980* (Nairobi, 1989), p. 128.

³⁹ 'African Chiefs Appeal to "British Father"; Visit House of Lords to Voice Grievances', *The New York Times* (29 Apr. 1931), p. 8.

contradictory and often relentlessly brutal'.⁴⁰ It was within this context that Koinange wa Mbiyu rose to political and social prominence.

Koinange wa Mbiyu: the First Fifty Years

Koinange's navigation of the social and political changes and challenges, as discussed in the preceding chapters, was remarkable. These developments not only provided opportunity for Koinange's rise, but also served as the motivation for a life-long protest against colonial land policy and in favour of greater African involvement in colonial rule. The eviction of Koinange's family from the *mbari ya Njunu* lands resulted in the family's move closer to the burgeoning administrative capital of Nairobi. It was this proximity and the family's active engagement with the economic, social, academic, and political possibilities it offered that led to their rise in wealth, power, and prestige. Life-altering opportunities and life-long motivations for Koinange was planted and watered within these early decades of colonial rule.

***Mbari ya Njunu* and Koinange Family History**

Koinange oral family history provides the only record of their history during the nineteenth century. The family's retelling of their own history presents a coherent narrative that corresponds to what else is known about this period in Central Kenya. The following narrative of the family's history comes primarily from family documents, including a series of biographies compiled by the Koinanges for the fiftieth anniversary of

⁴⁰ Bunche, 'The Land Equation', p. 33.

Koinange wa Mbiyu's death, observed in 2010. Added to this are the records of Koinange wa Mbiyu's statements before the Kenya Land Commission in 1932 and 1933.

Koinange's ancestors settled the forested highland areas of Central Kenya, along with others families who migrated south from northern Kenya, during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries.⁴¹ During the first half of the nineteenth century, Koinange's grandfather, Ihothia kana Gatheca (often referred to as Njunu the Younger) left his father's land, on the border of modern day Murang'a and Kiambu, and moved further south into Kiambu. Bringing with him considerable wealth, Ihothia purchased nearly 3,000 acres for the price of as many goats, sheep, and cattle from four local Dorobo land owners: Kimukuri, Kimondoni, Gitoki, and Ndimothi.⁴² Koinange told the Kenya Land Commission members that:

From the beginning we were buyers and sellers. Almost all our lands we bought from Dorobo, who were the original owners. The Dorobo were a part of the Kikuyu tribe who were dwelling in the forest [...] most of the customs connected with the purchase of land from the Dorobo are still kept up in the cases of land sales between Kikuyu and Kikuyu to-day.⁴³

Koinange's statement confirms the wider recognition that ethnic boundaries were fluid. Groups intermarried and adopted each other's practices in the centuries before the colonial period. Ihothia's wealth grew and by the middle of the nineteenth century, Ihothia was a husband to nearly thirty wives, father to some sixty sons, and the holder of a considerable amount of land in Kenya's Central Highlands (Figure 1.1).

Ihothia kana Gatheca established *mbari ya Njunu* amongst Kenya's most fertile land. As a result, the *Njunu* family wealth grew considerably over his lifetime. One of Ihothia's sixty sons was Mbiyu, father to Koinange wa Mbiyu. Koinange wa Mbiyu was thus born

⁴¹ Muriuki, *History of the Kikuyu*, p. 62.

⁴² *Kenya Land Commission Evidence*, pp 308-9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

on *mbari ya Njunu* land in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. As a young boy, he herded the family's cattle on his father and grandfather's *mbari* lands.

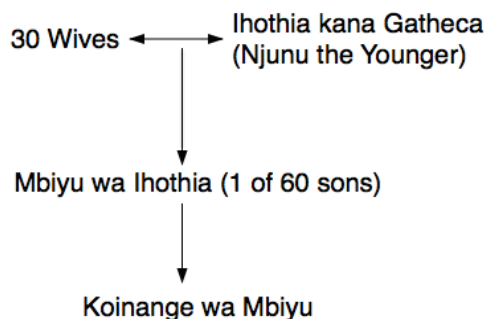


Figure 1.1 Ihothia kana Gatheca to Koinange wa Mbiyu.

Koinange told the Commission that he witnessed his father and grandfather's negotiations with some of the first European explorers to arrive in Central Kenya. This included with Count Teleki's expedition, whose visit in the late 1880s brought with it conflict between the European explorer's contingent and the local African communities.⁴⁴ Negotiations between Teleki and some local leaders, perhaps including Ihothia, brought a resolution to this early conflict.⁴⁵ According to Koinange family history, the local African communities lost forty-six African fighters, one thousand goats, and one hundred head of cattle in their conflict with Count Teleki's party.⁴⁶

These early stories of the *mbari ya Njunu* lands are important to the Koinange family and are retold on the occasion of family memorials and celebrations. The repetition of these early events speaks to their significance in shaping the Koinange's *mbari* identity. Koinange wa Mbiyu, from an early age, experienced African-European conflict, as well as

⁴⁴ *Kenya Land Commission Evidence*, pp 170, 309; L.S.B. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1905* (London, 1977), i, p. 66.

⁴⁵ Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, p. 66; KNA JZ/7/17, 'Notes by Mr. Fazan', ii, item 4a, p 2.

⁴⁶ WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010*: 'Senior Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 3.

the possibility of peace through mutual agreement. This early experience set the tone for Koinange's later engagement with European settlers in East Africa.

Conflict Over Land

In spite of this, *mbari ya Njunu* lost land to European settlers early in the colonial period, just as other *mbari* surrounding them did.⁴⁷ Koinange pointed to 1903 as the year when parts of *mbari ya Njunu* land were first given to European settlers.⁴⁸ This was a year after the 1902 'Crown Land' ordinance and its accompanying rise in European settler immigration into the Central Highlands.⁴⁹

Initially, the relationships between *mbari ya Njunu* and the European settlers was one of cooperation, rather than hostility. Koinange's eldest son, Peter Mbiyu, herded both the family's and a European neighbour's cattle on the family's land.⁵⁰ When service in the First World War called a neighbouring European settler away, Koinange and his sons tended to the European farmer's cattle and farmland during his absence at war.⁵¹

However, by 1915, *Mbari ya Njunu* land was surrounded by European settlers:

My father's (Mbiyu [sic]) land was on the left bank [of the Riara River]. One of the same two Europeans later built a house on the left side of the river on Mbiu's [sic] land, and then came a third and a fourth and then three more. Mbiu's [sic] land and mine were just between these Europeans. All the Europeans engaged in

⁴⁷ For more information on land alienation, see L. Hughes, *Moving the Massai* (New York, 2006), C. Ambler, *Kenyan Communities in the Age of Imperialism: the Central Region in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, 1988).

⁴⁸ RH Micr.Afr.515, 'Annual Report: Kikuyu Province, 1926', Reel 1, AR63, p. 5.

⁴⁹ *Kenya Land Commission Evidence*, p. 859.

⁵⁰ J. Koinange, *Koinange-wa-Mbiyu: Mau Mau's Misunderstood Leader* (Lewes, 2000) p. 25; M.S. Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu: Mediator and Patriot', in B.E. Kipkorir (ed.), *Biographical Essays on Imperialism and Collaboration in Colonial Kenya* (Nairobi, 1980), p. 61.

⁵¹ Bunche, 'The Land Equation', p. 40.

farming. They soon settled on land that we had been cultivating and pulled down our banana trees to plant wheat.⁵²

This increased encroachment by European farmers led to a loss of land previously used for crop cultivation and cattle grazing, thus threatening both substance and traditional wealth.

As land increasingly came under the ownership of new European settlers, available space for grazing cattle dwindled.⁵³ Twice Koinange's cattle, along with that of his European neighbour, were confiscated for straying on to neighbouring farmland — land that had only recently been a part of *mbari ya Njunu*.⁵⁴ Increasingly, the loss of these lands and the Europeans' strict control of land use had a detrimental impact on Koinange and his extended family. On the eve of the First World War, the District Commissioner (DC) of Kiambu wrote:

The loss of land is therefore keenly felt; Koinangia[sic] for instance owns seven European farms and now has to rent land from others if at any time he should be turned out by the European landlord of his own land. The landowners must be a superior class of persons and the more land they have the more important they become. Koinangia[sic] must have been among the principal of these but he is now only a tenant.⁵⁵

As a result, in a letter to the District Commissioner, Koinange wrote that he had become 'a prisoner' on his own land.⁵⁶ Koinange and his family were eventually evicted from the *mbari ya Njunu* lands some time after the First World War began in 1914.⁵⁷

Koinange and his family moved south to an area that became known as Upper Kiambu. There, he received a small piece of land from a relative, Gichuri, with which to begin anew.⁵⁸ Their eviction from the *mbari ya Njunu* lands ruptured the family's historic

⁵² Ibid., p. 39.

⁵³ KNA DC/KBU/4/3, 'Land Tenure', p. 2.

⁵⁴ Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 61.

⁵⁵ KNA DC/KBU/3/3, 'Political Record Book', 1912, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Sorrenson, *Origins*, p. 285 as cited in Clough, 'Koinange-wa-Mbiyu', p. 61.

⁵⁷ Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 61.

⁵⁸ WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010*: 'Senior Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 3.

connection to the land. It freed Koinange to establish a new land identity for the family — with implications for the traditional politics of land, identity, and wealth. Koinange successfully established this new identity of ‘Koinange land’ (significantly, never once in the course of this research was it referred to as *mbari ya Koinange* by either the family or in archival records — signifying the rupturing of a traditional norm). By the early 1930s, the ‘Koinange land’ was host to 216 men, 250 women, and 533 children — a portion of which were extended family members also pushed off of their traditional lands.⁵⁹



Image 1.1: The stone house Koinange wa Mbiyu had built in the 1920s.⁶⁰

Koinange enlarged his initial parcel of land through acquisition and marriage. Within a decade, his land holdings encompassed a large section of modern day Kiambaa. Koinange’s land was expansive enough to provide for his own crops, as well as fields and homesteads for his children, land for the local church and for the local school, as well as a donation for a public burial plot for those without family lands. As a result of this growth in numbers and in space, as well as their philanthropic gifts of land, the Koinange family became one of the most influential Kikuyu families in the Kiambaa area. In 1920, Koinange built a cottage-style stone house on a prominent hill at the centre of his land

⁵⁹ *Kenya Land Commission Evidence*, p. 309.

⁶⁰ WKK *Koinange Homestead Photos*, c. 1990.

(Image 1.1).⁶¹ This house symbolized Koinange's tremendous wealth and influence, as well as his embrace of European ways of living and demonstrating power. Koinange's decision to embrace European culture and technology made him the poster child for progressive, wealthy, and ambitious African chiefs. However, it was this foundation of wealth, the stability that came with significant land holdings and a large family, and the growing public support he garnered from his generosity that allowed Koinange to protest colonial policies throughout his life. His social security, as it were, was not dependent on the British colonial administration. While employed by it, Koinange's wealth offered him an independence of action and movement known by few other Africans in Kenya at the time.

Marriages and the Growth of the Koinange Family

That Koinange had the ability to move and re-establish his entire family in Upper Kiambu is a statement to what his wealth enabled that was not an option for those of lesser means. Upon this foundation, Koinange continued to build and add new acquisitions of wealth and enlarge the family. As Kenyan historian Godfrey Muriuki notes, 'A large wealthy and influential clan — and the three normally went together — augmented its ranks by acting as a magnet which attracted non-clan and non-Kikuyu elements [...] into their fold'.⁶² This pre-Kiambu and Kiambu wealth building is clearly seen in Koinange's six marriages (Figure 1.2).

⁶¹ This date is on a plaque on the front of the home. While it is possible that it is incorrect, there is no known reason to doubt its validity.

⁶² Muriuki, *History of the Kikuyu*, p. 114.

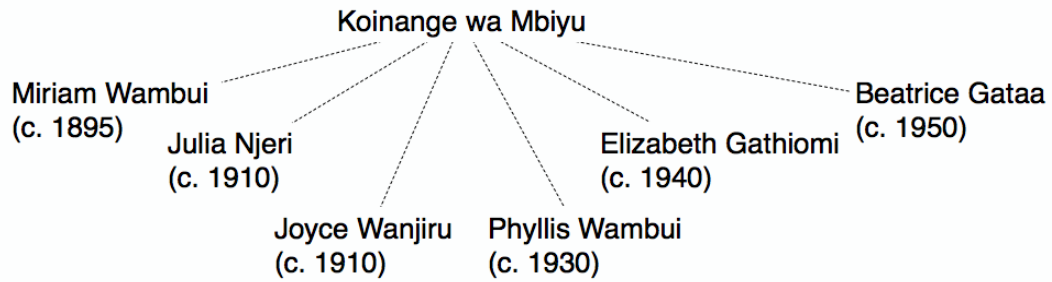


Figure 1.2: Koinange wa Mbiyu, his six wives, and the approximate dates of marriage.⁶³

Koinange married his first three wives prior to the move and was father to, at minimum, a dozen children. Koinange married his first wife, (Miriam) Wambui, some time before the turn of the century.⁶⁴ Wambui was from the family of Kihara wa Ngaria, a local family living near the *mbari ya Njunu* lands.⁶⁵ There are discrepancies between the sources as to whether or not Wambui was from a wealthy family.⁶⁶ If she was from a wealthy family, a first marriage uniting two wealthy and leading families allowed Koinange to demonstrate his wealth even as he established his own family.⁶⁷ Given the wealth of the Njunu extended family, this demonstration would have been an important consideration in this first marriage. At some point during the first decade of the twentieth century, Koinange married his next two wives, (Julia) Njeri Njoroge and (Joyce) Wanjiru Kagendo.⁶⁸ A single marriage, given the costs of dowry, a home for the new wife, and provision for the growing family, was costly enough. To marry twice within a short period is clear indication that while Koinange lost land with European settlement that loss came

⁶³ All dates are approximates based on two sources: a booklet prepared by the family for the Golden Jubilee celebration of Koinange wa Mbiyu's death (WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010*, 2010) and discussions between the author and Professor John Lonsdale.

⁶⁴ Wambui took the Christian name 'Miriam' following her baptism in 1919.

⁶⁵ Koinange, *Koinange-wa-Mbiyu*, p. 14.

⁶⁶ Ibid.; WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010*: 'Senior Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 1.

⁶⁷ For work done on this in West Africa, see K. Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status, and Social Change Among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge, 1985).

⁶⁸ WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010*: 'Juliah Njeri wa Koinange' and 'Joyce Wanjiru (Kagendo) Koinange'. As with Miriam Wambui, both Njeri and Wanjiku took Christian names following their baptism in 1919 (WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010*: 'Joyce Kagendo', p. 1).

with financial compensation and opportunity. The loss of the *mbari ya Njunu* lands would have been keenly felt, but its loss likely increased Koinange's immediate wealth, providing the resources for the family's move to Upper Kiambu.

It appears to have been quite some time before Koinange married his fourth wife, Phylis Wambui. Family history dates their marriage somewhere around 1930.⁶⁹ The nearly two-decade gap between Koinange's third and fourth marriage was the result of the forced move from the *mbari ya Njunu* lands to Kiambu. It would have taken time for Koinange to re-establish himself in the new community, build relationships with the local community, and to reacquire some of the wealth expended in moving the family. Koinange married his fifth wife, Elizabeth Gathiomi Nyakamini, in the late 1930s or early 1940s. She was the daughter of a fellow colonial collaborator, a headman named Tharuba from Thimbigua.⁷⁰ This fourth marriage, in the midst of the Second World War, united two families led by patriarchs engaged with the colonial administration — the marriage was likely as much a statement of mutual loyalty to the colonial administration during a period of great suspicion as it was an alliance of two political families. It appears that Koinange then married his sixth wife, Beatrice Gataa, in the years just prior to the Mau Mau Emergency. While polygamy was not uncommon, the six marriages, uniting politically and socially prominent, and thus likely wealthy and influential, families is a testament to and aided in the further establishment of Koinange's wealth, his social standing, and his political influence.

In making the most of the forced move from the *mbari ya Njunu* lands, Koinange seized new opportunities, re-established his social prominence, and increased his wealth exponentially from the second decade of the twentieth century onward. The period known

⁶⁹ WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010: 'Phylis Wambui Koinange'*, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Koinange, *Koinange-wa-Mbiyu*, p. 18.

as the 'Roaring Twenties' elsewhere in the world was a period of significant personal, social, and political growth for Koinange. Koinange was eventually the father of thirty-six children and grandfather to one hundred and seventeen grandchildren.⁷¹ In terms of numbers, Koinange's family is dwarfed in contrast to the size of Ihothia kana Gatheca's family. It is an indication that, while famine, disease, and conflict had taken its toll on the family, European colonialism had radically transformed the image and avenues of wealth for the Kikuyu in central Kenya.

Christianity, Politics, and the Colonial Administration

By the 1920s, Koinange was the image of what wealth and social prominence looked like for an African chief in this 'new' Kenya of a European making. The traditionally large family of a wealthy Kikuyu patriarch was replaced with European signs of wealth: a stone house, an automobile, a farm tractor, and a water pump — the material possessions of a wealthy member of European society. By the 1920s, and perhaps earlier, the European restructuring of social norms meant that Kenya's African leaders had to embrace these new modes of living if they were to maintain a prominent social and political position within this new paradigm. Koinange's exposure to European cultural and political norms came primarily through three areas: the Christian faith, political organisation, and via his employment with the British colonial administration.

⁷¹ See family diagram in Koinange, *Koinange-wa-Mbiyu*, pp xvi-xviii.

Christianity, Koinange, and Canon Harry Leakey

Christianity and Christian missionaries, particularly Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary Canon Harry Leakey, provided Koinange with his the most important avenue into the European social and political context. The relationship between Harry Leakey and Koinange formed the pillars of Koinange's Christian faith, his political engagement, and the emphasis he came to place upon Western education for his family. Because early colonial administrations were chronically understaffed and ill equipped, missionaries held important roles in bridging the gap between the administration and African communities in early colonial rule. It was these missionaries who initially represented native interests on colonial legislative councils.

Canon Harry Leakey arrived in Kenya early in the twentieth century and met Koinange wa Mbiyu soon thereafter. Leakey settled in Kabete with his young family.⁷² It seems that Leakey made his home not too far from Koinange's homestead, prior to the latter's move to Kiambu in 1914. As John Lonsdale so clearly puts it, Leakey 'needed Koinange's patronage' if his mission efforts were to be successful, and Koinange 'needed an intermediary with the dangerously unknowable British. Harry Leakey became *mzungu ya Koinange*, "Koinange's white man".⁷³ In this role, Leakey became Koinange's tutor, mentor, and guide into the economic, social, and political realities of European colonialism.

Koinange embraced the Christian message, as shared by Leakey, at some point 1915, following his move to southern Kiambu.⁷⁴ His first three wives were baptised in 1919, a rite withheld from Koinange due to his polygamy.⁷⁵ He travelled with Canon Leakey

⁷² Lonsdale, "White Kikuyu", p. 5.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010: 'Joyce Kagendo'*, p. 1.

throughout Central Kenya, introducing the missionary to Kikuyu communities and recruiting attendees to church services and schoolrooms.⁷⁶ Koinange, who described Canon Leakey as the 'light of the Kikuyu', was an ardent supporter of Leakey's mission efforts.⁷⁷ Koinange provided a portion of his own land for the establishment of a CMS church and the erection of a mission school.⁷⁸ This church and school still serve the local community in Kiambaa to this day. Koinange's embrace of the Christian was more than support for a Leakey, for it reshaped the life of the Koinange family.

According to the family's oral history, Koinange woke his wives and children at 4am every morning for prayers, before heading into the field or to one of the nearby towns for business.⁷⁹ All six of Koinange's wives were baptised and served as leaders in the local Mothers' Union.⁸⁰ Koinange's future son-in-law, Obadiah Kariuki, became the first African bishop of the Mount Kenya Diocese.⁸¹ Kariuki, alongside the Archbishop of Kenya, officiated Koinange's funeral in 1960.⁸² The Archbishop's decision to preside over the funeral, in spite of the colonial administration's denouncement of Koinange as a leader of Mau Mau, reveals a sharp contrast between how the administration's assessment of Koinange and that of the church community. In addition to introducing Koinange to the Christian faith, Leakey was Koinange's most important guide into political engagement within the framework of colonial rule. A defining development in this area came in the 1920s, during the period of growing tension between Christian converts and local native courts over native land.

⁷⁶ JL Wamagatta *Interviews 1991-1992*, 'A Summary of the Research Findings', p. 1.

⁷⁷ Morell, *Ancestral Passions*, p. 24.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Interview with W.K. Koinange, 22 Mar. 2012; Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 62; S. Mburu, 'Forced to Marry Colonial Chief in Place of Her Sister', *The Sunday Nation* (Nairobi, 1 Oct. 2006), p. 6.

⁸⁰ Interview with W.K. Koinange, 22 Mar. 2012.

⁸¹ WKK *Eulogy for Bishop Obadiah Kariuki*, p. 5.

⁸² WKK, *Koinange wa Mbiyu Funeral Photos*, 1960.

In 1916, Leakey served as the Church Missionary Society (CMS) representative on a joint-mission committee itself a response to the abuse of young converts, like Koinange wa Mbiyu, in land case decisions handed down by the local native tribunal.⁸³ Over the next three years, Koinange distinguished himself during the course of these discussions as a key leader among the *athomi*, or Christian converts.⁸⁴ In 1920, an agreement was reached to place four *athomi* on the native court. Koinange, along with three other prominent *athomi*, were selected to protect the interests of Christian converts on the court.⁸⁵ By the end of the decade, Koinange was the *de facto* head of this native tribunal.⁸⁶ Koinange's rise to a position of profound social influence was the result of colonial and missional efforts, rather than traditional Kikuyu culture — an indicator of the profound changes brought by European rule. Leakey, a champion of native Kikuyu interests, then propelled Koinange and the other *athomi* appointed to the tribunal into establishing a political organisation.

In 1919, Leakey wrote to the secretary of the state for the colonies in protest of a proposal to remove land from the Native Reserve and offer it to ex-soldiers as a part of the aforementioned post-war Soldier Settlement scheme.⁸⁷ 'If carried out', Leakey wrote, the scheme 'would be nothing short of an act of treachery to the Kikuyu people'.⁸⁸ Leakey then encouraged Koinange, and the three other Christian Kikuyu converts appointed to the local native tribunal in 1919, to establish a political association to protest the government's actions. This marked the creation of the Kikuyu Association (KA). Given Koinange's own history with land alienation, his prominence on the native tribunal, and his close relationship with Leakey, Koinange was appointed the group's first and only President.⁸⁹

⁸³ BL MSS.Afr.s.633, J.W. Arthur to H. Leakey, 23 May 1916, Box 17, file 1, ff. 58-61.

⁸⁴ Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 64.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ KNA DC/KBU/11/1, 'Headman - Koinange wa Mbiyu', 1922-1949, f. 53.

⁸⁷ See C.J.D. Duder, 'The Soldier Settlement Scheme of 1919 in Kenya' (Univ. of Aberdeen Ph.D. thesis, 1978) for more information on this post-First World War plan.

⁸⁸ BL MSS.Afr.s.633, L.S.B. Leakey to SoS for the Colonies, 12 Feb. 1919, Box 17, file 2.

⁸⁹ Duder, 'The Soldier Settlement Scheme', pp 100-345.

A 1924 letter submitted to the to the visiting Ormsby-Gore Commission reveals the close political support of Leakey for Koinange and the KA. Leakey wrote a letter, giving his support to a KA memorandum submitted at that time: 'I have promised Koinange that I would write to you about [this] matter that he says is very much disturbing the minds of the Kikuyu elders and he says, and I think rightly, that until it is put right it practically nullifies the assurances which have been recently again reiterated' about land security.⁹⁰ By the 1930s, Koinange and Leakey had collaborated in religious, political, and social endeavours for nearly two decades.

Through these collaborative efforts with Leakey, Koinange gained a practical, if informal, education on British political engagement, both in Kenya and in the United Kingdom. For during the 1930s, Leakey served as Koinange's translator before a commission in London (1931) and again before the Kenya Land Commission in Kenya (1932-1933).⁹¹ As close friends and collaborators, Leakey and Koinange came to hold a mutual belief that working within the British political system and its norms of petitions, protest, and political organisation would bring about changes in land policy and colonial laws. With two decades of work together, there was an acceptance that the process would be slow, but that the democratic framework could be relied on to bring about change. Leakey, whose son studied at Cambridge University thanks to Koinange's support, impressed upon Koinange the importance of a Western education in order to engage the new political, social, and economic paradigms and possibilities of British imperialism.

Koinange became a keen advocate of education, both for his family and for his local community in Kiambaa in the 1920s and the 1930s. This commitment to education began

⁹⁰ BL MSS.Afr.s.633, Letter to Unknown Recipient, Box 17, File 2, f. 48-9. The name of the individual to whom the letter is addressed is indiscernible in the original archive file.

⁹¹ KNA JZ/7/17, 'Notes by Mr. Fazan', p. 1; TNA CAB/24/248, 'The Kenya Land Commission Report', 1934, p. 131; Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 79; Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 175; Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 75.

with the family's *thingira* hut. Traditionally used for Kikuyu religious activity, it became the one-room schoolhouse for Koinange's wives and children.⁹² Increasingly too small for the growing family, Koinange donated a portion of his land for the construction of a CMS school within walking distance of the family's homestead.⁹³ Koinange's wives and children helped carry the building supplies Koinange donated for the school's construction. Nearly all of Koinange's children and grandchildren received their initial education at this school. Honouring Koinange's embrace of education for his wives and daughters, the school today is named after him and provides education for upwards of one thousand girls in the Kiambu District. Following their early education at this school, Koinange's progeny then gained further formal education in Nairobi, Mombasa, Uganda, South Africa, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Koinange consistently embraced the new opportunities, even the new expectations, brought by European colonial society. He frequently did so even if and when it put him at odds with the norms, expectations, and traditions of Kikuyu culture and the local African community. Koinange's decision to educate both his wives and daughters was controversial. The idea of educating young girls was strongly opposed by many within the Kikuyu community.⁹⁴ Koinange never learned to read or write himself, but rather recognising the necessity of these skills in the new European paradigm, he relied heavily on his children and others educated Africans to aid him in personal, political, and business matters.⁹⁵ In the mid-1920s, Canon Leakey encouraged Koinange to send Peter, Koinange's eldest son, to the United States for further high school and college education.

⁹² WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010*, 'Mbiyu Koinange: 1902-1981', p. 1.

⁹³ JL *Wamagatta Interviews 1991-1992*, 'A Summary of the Research Findings', p. A1; Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 62.

⁹⁴ JL *Wamagatta Interviews 1991-1992*, 'Margaret Wangui Koinange', p. 1; JL *Wamagatta Interviews 1991-1992*, 'Mrs Mary Njeri Mbatha', p. 1.

⁹⁵ JL *Wamagatta Interviews 1991-1992*, 'Margaret Wangui', p. 1.

As the eldest son, Peter Mbiyu was his father's most direct representative within Kikuyu society. In the absence of his father, Peter would have been expected to function as the head of the family. Furthermore, traditionally, Peter was expected, as the eldest son who would take over as patriarchal leader upon the death of his father, to be present for major rights of passage for other family members, including circumcisions and weddings.⁹⁶ The idea of sending Peter overseas threatened the traditional structures and practices of Kikuyu families. Koinange's willingness to embrace new social opportunities and expectations brought by colonial rule, even when they threatened to undermine traditional expectations, is evidence that Koinange recognised and embraced the ways European society was redefining familial norms, priorities, and understandings. Koinange's progressive social and political will went well beyond an embrace of material opportunities.

Koinange wa Mbiyu's relationship with Canon Leakey shaped Koinange's religious faith and the family's engagement with colonial society. It was Leakey who introduced Koinange to the Christian message. It was Leakey who had encouraged Koinange to engage with the colonial government concerning land policies. It was Leakey who emphasised the importance of education for Koinange's children. The two worked together closely throughout the 1920s and the 1930s. However, no political action they undertook was as important in shaping the course of Koinange's political career then the establishment of the Kikuyu Association and Koinange's subsequent leadership of the organisation.

⁹⁶ Muriuki, *History of the Kikuyu*, p. 115.

The Kikuyu Association

The Kikuyu Association provided direct engagement with the governing colonial system in a way that neither the local tribunal nor work as a headman allowed. All four of the group's founding members (Koinange, Philip James Karanja, Josiah Njonjo, and Waruhiu wa Kung'u) became significant African leaders in their own right during the colonial period whose children and grandchildren profoundly shaped Kenyan politics of the twentieth century.

Koinange dominated the KA as its President for the entirety of its existence (1919- c. 1935). Under Koinange's leadership, the KA submitted petitions of protest toward colonial land policies to the colony's administration, to visiting delegations from England, and even, rather boldly, sending petitions directly to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. The 1924 petition to the East African (Ormsby-Gore) Commission provides an illustrative example of the KA's approach and commitment:

The matter that above all else continues to give us grave concerns is the question of the security of our tenure of our tribal lands, now known as the Kikuyu Reserve. Deprived of our land, we Kikuyu should be dispossessed wanderers, dependant upon the Whiteman for home and livelihood. We feel we have reason, as we hope to show, still to feel insecure about this matter, despite the many appeals we have made and the answers we have received.⁹⁷

The KA members gave voice to the importance of *mbari* lands for the Kikuyu community in providing identity, security, sustenance, and a fixed homestead. The writers went on to write of how the African Reserve land, the limited land available to the writers' community, was given to the 'increasing numbers of Whitemen' who arrived in East Africa following the turn of the century.⁹⁸ While emphasising their loyalty to King George V, making clear that they understood political expectations within imperial Britain, the KA's

⁹⁷ KNA DC/KBU/4/3, 'Land Tenure', p. 1.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

memorandum strongly protested land alienation. Protest against land policy dominated two-thirds of the nine-page memo.

At the heart of their petition, the writers specifically criticised the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915, its subsequent reaffirmations, and the subsequent legal expansions they allowed. The letter highlighted a recent ruling issued in Kenya's High Court by Judge Barth:

In my view the effect of the Crown Lands Ordinance 1915 and the Kenya Annexation Order-in-Council 1921 [...is that] all native rights in such reserved land [...] disappeared and the natives in occupation of such Crown Land became tenants at will of the Crown.⁹⁹

The KA leaders rightly interpreted Judge Barth's ruling as confirmation of their concerns and 'apprehensions' regarding the long term security of the Reserve lands.¹⁰⁰ The KA asked that firm boundaries be demarcated for the Native Reserves. They believed that an overall title deed entrusted to those living in the Reserve might prevent any future sale of the Reserve lands to European farmers. The KA further requested that all land exchanges related to Native Reserve land be restricted to members living on the Reserve, restricting a person's ability to sell Reserve land to European farmers living along the Reserve's edge.¹⁰¹ The petition from the KA demonstrates an effort to work within the legal norms of colonial law to overturn past decisions and to protect from future land alienation. While their requests were denied, they gave voice to the petitions and refrains of African communities for decades to come.

While the KA had few major political accomplishments, it offered a prominent platform for its members to challenge colonial land policies from within the bounds of what was politically allowed at the time. From the *mbari ya Njunu* land to the Native

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp 1, 7.

Reserves, whether leading his family or leading the Kikuyu Association, Koinange's social and political efforts were focused on land alienation, land policy, and land recovery. The KA provided the earliest platform for Koinange to protest specifics of colonial rule, utilising European political norms, while retaining his favour before the government in his roles as chief and member of the native tribunal.

Koinange and the Colonial Administration

During his nearly forty-five years of civil service with the colonial administration, Koinange served as headman, chief, leading member of the Local Native Council, as Senior Chief in Kiambu, and as 'Chief without Location'. He quickly became an astute politician who, by necessity, attempted to balance the demands of the African community in which he lived with the expectations of his employer. Given the longevity of his service, it was an effort of which he was largely successful. He was a vocal proponent for the development for African communities and an outspoken critic of colonial land policies. It was his persistence and the advocacy in the latter matter that resulted in his forced resignation in February 1949. While this present chapter focuses on the first thirty years of Koinange's work with the colonial administration, the final fifteen years leading to 1949 are the focus of chapters three through six.

Koinange began as a local headman, perhaps following in the footsteps of his father.¹⁰² As with personal decisions concerning religion and education, Koinange frequently undertook actions for the colonial government that were at odds with the norms, desires, and expectations of the local Kikuyu community. Prior to the First World

¹⁰² B.A. Ogot, *Historical Dictionary of Kenya* (Nairobi, 1981), p. 111; Bunche, 'The Land Equation', p. 34; Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 61.

War, Koinange assisted in the forced removal of African cattle from land then occupied by European farmers.¹⁰³ In this, he was part of enforcing the very policy for which he was later himself fined. He was praised in 1915 for his role in helping to reduce drunkenness.¹⁰⁴ He was lauded for his success in persuading the local African community to embrace European education and farming techniques.¹⁰⁵ In 1921, he was officially gazetted as an African chief.¹⁰⁶ In 1922, the local DC reported that Koinange was, 'distinctly able and intelligent and loyal'.¹⁰⁷ In 1925, having distinguished himself in the eyes of the colonial administration, Koinange was then nominated by the local DC to the newly established local native council. By this point, Koinange was a prominent member of the native tribunal and the KA. This additional role marked the beginning of a 26-year stint of serving as both an appointed and the leading African member of the Kiambu LNC.¹⁰⁸

As had the Kikuyu Association, the LNC provided another avenue for Koinange to protest colonial land policy.¹⁰⁹ While described as a 'distinctly able [...] and loyal' colonial chief, Koinange did not shy away from using this new position to continue his previous advocacy against land alienation. He repeatedly requested that the LNC undertake land surveys and *githaka* registrations.¹¹⁰ The year after the LNC was established, the DC's Annual Report noted that Koinange was 'still pressing his [land] claim'.¹¹¹ In 1928, Koinange publicly opposed a land proposal made by the Kenyan

¹⁰³ *Kenya Land Commission Evidence*, p. 129.

¹⁰⁴ Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 62.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ KNA DC/KBU/11/1, 'Headman - Koinange wa Mbiyu', 1922-1949, f. 53.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 54.

¹⁰⁹ BL MSS.Afr.s.633, 'Memorandum: Presented by the Kikuyu Association, Kenya Colony, to the Members of the East Africa Commission, November, 1924', Box 17, file 2, ff 57-64.

¹¹⁰ KNA VQ 5/57, 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 10-11 Oct. 1934, item 2; *Ibid.*, 19 Sep. 1936, item 7; *Ibid.*, 24 Oct. 1936, item 8; KNA VQ/5/59, 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 3-5 May 1938, item 1; *Ibid.*, 3-5 Aug. 1938, item 2.

¹¹¹ BL Micr.Afr.515, 'Annual Report: Kikuyu Province, 1926', p. 72.

Governor.¹¹² It was not the sort of action one would undertake if they were worried about the displeasure of the colonial administration. Koinange's boldness stemmed from his understanding of European political action, developed under Leakey's leadership, as well as from Koinange's social stability as a wealthy and influential African leader. Koinange was not merely a dutiful colonial chief who blindly supported the colonial regime. He was, instead, consistently committed to opposing colonial land policies, but from within the boundaries of European political practice. Koinange's masterful ability to balance loyalty with his protests is reflected in his standing by 1930, when he became the highest paid chief in the district.¹¹³ He maintained this position through the mid-1940s.

Controversy, Cooperation, and the Commission

There were three major developments during the 1920s and the 1930s that clearly reflect Koinange's support of the colonial administration, balanced by his resolute opposition to further land alienation or harmful land policy. These three events were: (1) the female circumcision controversy of 1929, (2) the Parliamentary Committee on 'closer union' in 1931, and (3) the Kenya Land Commission of 1932-1934. A clear understanding of Koinange's engagement with these three developments is vital for then understanding Koinange's actions in the late 1930s through the 1950s (the focus of chapters three through six of this thesis).

¹¹² Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 124.

¹¹³ KNA DC/KBU/11/2, 'Petition: re Chiefs and Headmen: Traveling Allowance', 5 Sep. 1930, item 19; Ibid., 'Chiefs' Pay', 20 Feb. 1941, item 143.

The Female Circumcision Controversy and the Kikuyu Central Association

During the female circumcision controversy of the late 1920s Christian missions and churches pressured their African converts to oppose the traditional practice of female circumcision or be denied attendance and participation in church activities.¹¹⁴ African converts to Christianity were between the proverbial rock and a hard place: for signing the documents would put them at odds with their African community, while not signing the document meant forsaking their fellowship with their faith community. Underpinning this discussion, highlighted earlier in this chapter, was the suspicion already cast on African converts (e.g. the 1919 *kiama* accord) and the very real conflicting loyalties between the Church and their native communities.

Koinange, who had embraced European modernity (a car, electricity, a brick home), education, and Christian faith, chose to remain in communion with the church, even though it threatened his relationship with the local community. In opposing female circumcision, Koinange believed that education would enable women to arrive at the conclusion ‘that circumcision has no bearing on their lives’ and, according to Koinange, will then choose to ‘stop it voluntarily’.¹¹⁵ Koinange left the decision of whether to undergo the ceremony to each of his daughters: ‘I believe that it should be left to the girls themselves to decide. I do not want any of my daughters forced into either circumcision or marriage or forced to forego them, against their desires’.¹¹⁶ Koinange’s stance called for a radical rethinking of a core traditional Kikuyu practice. As Koinange notes, his daughter’s decisions had practical implications on their own social stand and opportunity. One *muthirigu* song reflected this risk explicitly: ‘I have heard a great wonder — that

¹¹⁴ Maxon, ‘The Years of Revolutionary Advance’, p. 101; Kershaw, *Mau Mau*, p. 191.

¹¹⁵ R.J. Bunche, ‘The Irua Ceremony Among the Kikuyu of Kiambu District, Kenya’, *The Journal of Negro History*, 26, 1 (Jan. 1941), p. 64.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Koinange's [uncircumcised] daughter has given birth to a dog.¹¹⁷ The words were both a public shaming indicating how their place as adult women in Kikuyu society was threatened by their father's decision. Louis Leakey's seminal tome, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1905*, devotes nearly 100 pages to the central *rites de passage* of circumcision.¹¹⁸ Other scholars have further highlighted the ceremony's significance.¹¹⁹ Koinange's uncircumcised daughters would not be viewed as adult women nor seen as proper wives for a traditional Kikuyu man. Koinange's decision placed his daughters at odds with elements of the Kikuyu community, making them and the entire family the targets of the KCA's ridicule. S. H. Fazan, the DC of Kiambu at the time, noted that Koinange, along with the other KA leaders, was instrumental in 'restoring order and a cooperative spirit'.¹²⁰ Koinange received a certificate of honour for his role in the efforts. While the European community applauded his work in resolving the conflict, it also marked the first public conflict between Koinange and the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA).

The KCA claimed that it represented the will of the Kikuyu community and that it alone was the defender of Kikuyu traditions and culture (this was ironic, given that the KCA was itself culturally radical with its leadership comprised of young men, rather than the senior men of the community). In parodying the *muthirigu* dance-songs, a traditional component of the Kikuyu circumcision ceremonies, the KCA sought to undermine the *kirore*. Koinange and his family, as well as Waruhiu wa Kung'u, who was also a prominent colonial chief and a fellow leader of the KA alongside Koinange, were singled out by the KCA for public ridicule.¹²¹ 'Elders Koinange and Waruhiu,' went one song, 'when John

¹¹⁷ K. Kyle, *The Politics of the Independence of Kenya* (New York, 1999), p. 32.

¹¹⁸ G. Muriuki, 'Leakey on the Kikuyu', *Journal of African History*, 22 (Jan. 1981), p. 120.

¹¹⁹ Wamagatta, 'The Presbyterian Church', p. 220; D.W. Throup, 'Kenyatta and the Political Origins of Mau Mau, 1944-1952', unpublished manuscript, p. 9; T. Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau* (Nairobi, 1993), p. 77; Maxon, 'The Years of Revolutionary Advance', p. 101; Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu*, p. 134.

¹²⁰ KNA JZ/7/17, 'Notes by Mr Fazan', p. 1.

¹²¹ C. Cagnolo, *The Agikuyu: Their Customs, Traditions & Folklore* (Nairobi, 2006), pp 88-92.

Kenyatta comes you will be given women's loincloths and have to cook his food'.¹²²

Further lines singled out Koinange in particular: 'Koinange was a big man, but when John comes he will have to wear prisoner's clothes.'¹²³ As Terence Ranger has highlighted, the KCA's public defence of female circumcision was motivated by the desire to gain political influence, rather than their loyalty to traditional practice.¹²⁴ The repeated comparison between Koinange, a colonial chief, and Kenyatta, ten-years Koinange's younger, indicate that this was much more than a controversy over the cultural practice of female circumcision. This contest over political and social authority continued well into the 1930s with Kenyatta's defence of female circumcision practices.¹²⁵

Prior to these events, Koinange had suggested that the KA and KCA band together to accomplish their joint political aims of land and education reform. As leading elders, Koinange argued that he and the other chiefs of the KA would lead the new organisation.¹²⁶ The KCA's public criticism of Koinange and the other KA leaders who opposed forced female circumcision was a public rebuff of this earlier proposal. Koinange publically distanced himself from the KCA following the 1929 controversy.¹²⁷ The mutual distrust that had developed between Koinange and the KCA remained well into the early 1930s. Their public contest for authority revealed itself during the meeting of a Parliamentary Committee tasked with considering a closer union between the East African territories in 1931.

¹²² TNA CO/533/394/10, 'Kenya: Kikuyu Circumcision Ceremony - Part 1', 1930, p. 100; Wamagatta, 'The Presbyterian Church', p. 225. John Kenyatta, formerly known as Johnstone Kamau, later adopted the name Jomo Kenyatta. The remainder of this thesis will refer to him with the latter designation.

¹²³ TNA CO/533/394/10, 'Kenya: Kikuyu Circumcision', p. 100.

¹²⁴ T. Ranger, 'African Attempts to Control Education in East and Central Africa, 1900-1939', *Past and Present*, 32 (Dec. 1965), p. 66.

¹²⁵ Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 92; Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 222; J. Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: the Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (London, 1938), p. 73; C. Zabus, *Between Rites and Rights: Excision in Women's Experiential Texts and Human Contexts* (Stanford, 2007), p. 38.

¹²⁶ Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 75.

¹²⁷ Bennet, *Kenya*, p. 81.

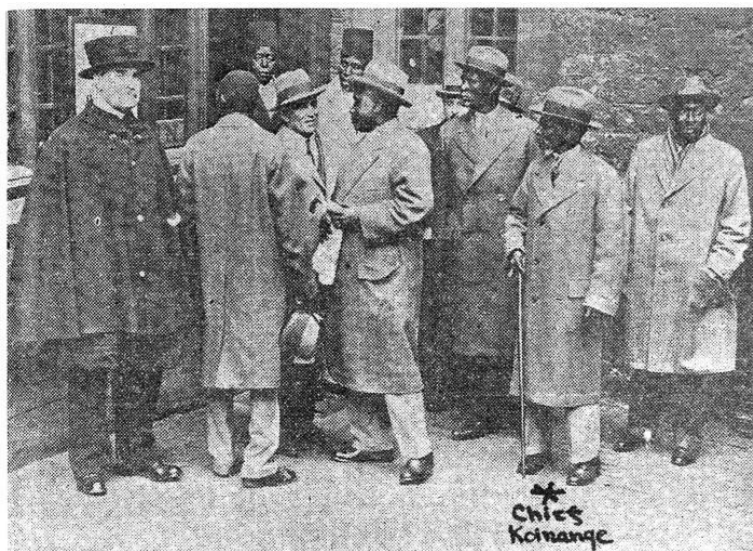


Image 1.2: Chief Koinange and the other African chiefs in London in 1931, as part of the Parliamentary Commission into closer union.¹²⁸

Closer Union and a Parliamentary Committee Hearing

Proposals concerning a closer union between Uganda, Tanganyika, and Kenya, in which the various administrative entities would be centralised into a single governing body, originally arose in the 1920s. These discussions continued throughout the 1920s, culminating in an official Parliamentary inquiry in 1931. The colonial administration in Kenya nominated Koinange to a delegation of African chiefs sent to London to address the Committee (Image 1.2). His appointment was the immediate result of his actions during the female circumcision controversy, but more broadly a reflection of the esteem in which he was held by the administration. District Commissioner S. H. Fazan and Canon Harry Leakey, both of who had a long-standing relationship with Koinange, accompanied the Kenya delegation.

¹²⁸ Koinange, *Koinange-wa-Mbiyu*, image plate 7.

Prior to his visit to London, Koinange led the KA in changing its name to the Kikuyu Loyal Patriots (KLP), a political move designed to distance the KA from the KCA and publicly reaffirm their commitment to seeking change through the governing political structure.¹²⁹ In the 1950s D.C. Fazan wrote that the change was Koinange's idea and was directly related to the KA's 'opposition to the KCA'. Fazan advised Koinange and the KA leadership against the change. While Fazan believed Koinange's desire to affirm the KA's commitment to the British administration was 'sincere', he feared that the change 'would only make the opposition more extreme'.¹³⁰ Point in fact, the KCA did respond by sending their own delegation to London to speak with members of Parliament, publicly declaring Koinange unfit to represent either Kikuyu or wider African interests.¹³¹ It was a public attack not only against Koinange, but also against the colonial administration, Koinange's most ardent supporter. The KCA delegation included Jomo Kenyatta, giving performance to the *muthirigu* threats of the late 1920s.¹³² Not even two years on from the female circumcision controversy, the Parliamentary meetings were the stage for yet another public contest for political legitimacy between Koinange the KCA.

Continuing the prominent role Koinange had assumed on the native tribunal, within the KA/KLP, and on the LNC over the previous decade, Koinange served as the leading spokesman of the delegation in the meetings with members of Parliament. With Koinange's long time political ally and mentor, Canon Harry Leakey, serving as his translator, Koinange told the committee of the historic challenges that faced Kenya's African community. He placed his emphasis on the impact of colonial land policy on

¹²⁹ KNA JZ 7/17: 'Notes by Mr. Fazan', p. 1.; *Kenya Land Commission Evidence*, pp 171, 381; Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 81.

¹³⁰ KNA JZ/7/17, 'Notes by Mr. Fazan', p. 1.

¹³¹ M. Koinange, 'Jomo: Colleague in the Struggle for Freedom and Independence', in A.H. Patel, N.S. Thakur and V. Dhar (eds), *Struggle for 'Release Jomo and His Colleagues'* (Nairobi, 1963), pp 20-1.

¹³² C. Rosberg, Jr. and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya* (New York, 1966), pp 140-1.

native land and communal identity.¹³³ Koinange spoke of his loyalty to Britain and the close tie he, and the Kikuyu, had to their ancestral lands: 'While I regard the British Government as my father, my mother is the land in which I was born. If my father were to die I would cry, and if my mother were to suffer equally I would cry'.¹³⁴ The imagery evinces the very tensions Koinange had faced over the previous two decades and the challenges he still faced as a colonial chief. Koinange returned to this imagery of mother as land and father as the British government over the course of the next thirty years. Twenty-five years later, Koinange, while detained by the British government as a leader of Mau Mau, wrote to Peter, then living in self-imposed exile in London. In this letter to his eldest son, Koinange wrote:

I would also remind you of my words to His Majesty the King and Parliament in 1931, while we attended the Joint Select Committee for Closer Union, that 'we regard H.M. the King as a father trustee, and land as our Mother, and that if and when either is disturbed we would cry and lament the more.'¹³⁵

In London, Koinange, as was his practice in Kenya through the *kiama*, the KA, or the LNC, spoke plainly and boldly in opposition to colonial land policy. He did so from within the British governing system, demonstrating a continued belief that political change would come through the governing political structures.

Koinange's statements to the committee were well received by British officials. Two years later (during the Kenya Land Commission), an official within the London colonial office noted that Koinange's testimony had 'impressed the Joint Select Committee on Closer Union'.¹³⁶ In the midst of the 1950s Mau Mau Emergency era, S.H. Fazan wrote

¹³³ 'African Chief a Football Fan: 5ft. Warrior Who Wants to See the Cup Final', *The Daily Mirror* (London, 23 Apr. 1931), p. 4; S.C. Drake, 'Mbiyu Koinange and the Pan-African Movement', in R.A. Hill (ed.), *Pan-African Biography* (Los Angeles, 1987), p. 168; L.S.B. Leakey, *White African: an Early Autobiography* (Cambridge, 1966), p. 282.

¹³⁴ TNA KV/2/2546, K. Mbiyu to M. Koinange, 7 Sep. 1953, item 515a; 'African Chief a Football Fan: 5ft. Warrior Who Wants to See the Cup Final', *The Daily Mirror* (London, 23 Apr. 1931), p. 4.

¹³⁵ TNA KV/2/2546, K. Mbiyu to M. Koinange, item 515a.

¹³⁶ TNA CO/533/437/16, C.A. Grossmith, internal minute, 4 July 1933.

that Koinange's testimony before the committee in 1931 was 'very temperate, much more than that of the Uganda witnesses'.¹³⁷ These comments reflect both Koinange's political acumen and the respect held for him by colonial administrators in Kenya.

Upon his return to Kenya, Koinange requested that he be allowed to tour the colony to give a report among the various African communities of what had transpired in London. His request was approved and, according to Fazan, it 'was a pronounced success'.¹³⁸ Koinange's visits in each area and his accompanying speeches would have been observed by local administrators. Koinange actively sought this opportunity to represent the British administration to African communities beyond the Kikuyu. Whether or not the tour was an intentional rebuttal of the KCA's claim that Koinange did not represent African interests, it was Koinange publically voicing his support for British governance.

Koinange's testimony in London and his traveling tour of the colony following his return were indicative of Koinange's consistent commitment. At the age of fifty, he could be depended on to speak boldly concerning colonial land policy. He repeatedly did so in a way that indicated trust and a commitment to European governance. To speak boldly against policy, while maintaining and increasing one's standing before the colonial administration, was no small feat for any civil servant, let alone an African chief in the 1930s in Kenya.

Following the testimonies of Koinange, Kenyatta, and others, the Parliamentary Committee recommended that the proposal for closer union be put on hold. The idea of closer administrative collaboration between Britain's East African communities was raised nearly fifteen years later after the Second World War. The committee recommended, in

¹³⁷ KNA JZ/7/17, 'Notes by Mr. Fazan', p. 1.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

light of what they had heard concerning the conflict over land in Kenya, that a subsequent committee be established to look into past land settlements made with native Africans. The recommendation stated that reparations should be made where land was purchased far below its value or illegitimately taken from native landholders.¹³⁹ This was a significant victory for Koinange and the KLP. It validated Koinange's post-London praise of the British government following his return from London. Koinange's political beliefs, developed under the tutelage of Harry Leakey, had paid dividends. The British government had responded to the various petitions and protests. London's Colonial Office established a Kenya Land Commission the following year.

The Kenya Land Commission

The Kenya Land Commission (KLC), established in 1932, visited Kenya during 1932 and 1933 and submitted their final report to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1934.¹⁴⁰ The commission was tasked with investigating the appropriateness of past payments for native lands and recommending either the return of or the further compensation for past land sales. In addition, the KLC was further tasked with examining the cause of the tensions in Kenya, to consider future needs for the colony, and to offer a recommendation for changes to land policy that might address standing complaints and government plans for future growth.¹⁴¹ Theirs was an unenviable task. The commission would wade into decades old disputes. Over the course of their work, they received copious amounts of material in maps, petitions, memoranda, and in-session testimonies.

¹³⁹ TNA CAB/24/248, 'The Kenya Land Commission', 1934, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.; M.S. Coray, 'The Kenya Land Commission and the Kikuyu of Kiambu', *Agricultural History*, 52 (1978), p. 183.

The commission considered testimonies from 736 witnesses (487 of whom were from Kenya's native African population) and over 500 memoranda.¹⁴² Their final report, issued in 1934, was 340 pages in length. Koinange appears frequently among the volumes of testimonies and memoranda.

Between November 1932 and March 1933, Koinange addressed the KLC's members on at least six recorded occasions.¹⁴³ Half of Koinange's meetings with the Commission were connected to larger claims brought by the Kikuyu, while the other half involved Koinange's personal petitions on behalf of his own *mbari ya Njunu* lands. Koinange coordinated personal statements and memoranda in support of the broader claims and concerns of the African community.¹⁴⁴ Working within the confines of the Commission, Koinange advocated for and support African petitions and land claims. He also served the Commission as a leading local expert in matters of historic border disputes and land sales.¹⁴⁵ In addition, Koinange petitioned for the return of his family's land through a number of memoranda (including maps) and through the testimonies of European settlers, the Leakey family in particular.

For the purposes of this thesis, there are two particular developments worthy of closer examination. The first concerns the groups that Koinange worked with, including the KCA from whom he had received much public ridicule over the past half a decade or more. Second, while Koinange's petitions were resolute, his efforts continued his commitment to working through the governing political structure.

¹⁴² TNA CAB/24/248, 'The Kenya Land Commission', p. 1.

¹⁴³ *Kenya Land Commission Evidence*, pp 128-31, 167-170, 650-1.

¹⁴⁴ Ogot, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 111; Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 81.

¹⁴⁵ TNA CAB/24/248, 'The Kenya Land Commission', pp 86, 91.

While native African social and political groups held a wide array of differing complaints against colonial rule by the 1930s, grievances towards colonial land policy were ubiquitous. The unprecedented nature of the Commission, the scale of its remit, and the hope for redress it conveyed resulted in unprecedented collaboration that overlooked historic political differences. Of the more than five hundred memoranda presented to the KLC, more than one third of them were from the Kikuyu. These nearly two hundred submissions represented 350 separate *mbari*.¹⁴⁶ Collaboration was common, creating joint-submissions in which Koinange played an advisory role.¹⁴⁷ Marshall Clough claims that these collaborative efforts saw Koinange and the KCA work together in common cause.¹⁴⁸

The KCA underwent significant changes between 1932 and 1935. Harry Thuku, the former radical turned moderate following his forced exile, became the KCA's leader in June 1932. Following this, there was a major split in the organisation's leadership in August of that year. Jesse Kariuki, another prominent leader, broke away from the KCA as the KLC delegation arrived in Kenya.¹⁴⁹ Indicative of the split within the organisation, in 1933 Kenyatta became stranded in London when his fellow KCA returned to Kenya with what remained of their KCA funds.¹⁵⁰ In 1935, Kariuki claimed in court that Thuku had misused KCA funds.¹⁵¹ As a result of the disputes between the KCA's top leadership, its local branches of the KCA were left to make their own decisions regarding their engagement with the KLC. Derek Peterson notes that the KCA branch in Nyeri abstained entirely from working with the KLC on the basis that the members of the commission were inherently biased against native land interests.¹⁵² The Embu and the Kiambu

¹⁴⁶ Coray, 'The Kenya Land Commission', p. 183.

¹⁴⁷ Ogot, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 111.

¹⁴⁸ Clough, *Fighting Two Sides*, p. 159.

¹⁴⁹ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 200.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹⁵² D.R. Peterson, "'Be Like Firm Soldiers to Develop the Country': Political Imagination and the Geography of Kikuyuland', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 37 (2004), p. 72.

branches, on the other hand, submitted memoranda to the Commission.¹⁵³ Internal division and a crisis of leadership marked the KCA during the 1932 through 1935 period. Because of this context, any collaborative action between Koinange and the KCA would have been between Koinange and specific members of the KCA. It does not indicate a broader reconciliation regarding the public attacks of the prior years. When not supporting the efforts of other *mbari* and communities or serving as an expert community before the committee, Koinange's focused on continuing his own historical claims, begun thirty years earlier, regarding *mbari ya Njunu*.

These efforts resulted in a memorable and heated debate between Koinange and two European settlers. Mr Tait and Mr Block, who claimed the land was rightfully theirs, argued that their arrival on the land pre-dated Koinange's arrival in Central Kenya. Tait and Block's claim was dubious, given Koinange's role as historic advisor to the commission. In response to a claim from Tait that Koinange knew 'nothing about that district,' the elderly chief pointed to his family's long-standing connections with the area.¹⁵⁴ Block then claimed that it was he, not Koinange, who had settled the area in 1902 or 1903 and been given the name 'Njuno' by the local Kikuyu community. The dispute placed Koinange's word against that of two European settlers. Koinange had spent nearly three decades building the admiration and respect of the colonial administration in his work as a headman and chief. However, before the commission, it was his word as an African against that of two European settlers. Koinange was not oblivious to the fact that his was a context in which a European's testimony was held in higher regard to that of an African. The very presence of a European missionary on the Legislative Council to represent native

¹⁵³ *Kenya Land Commission Evidence*, pp 192, 204-9, 249.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 630.

interests, rather than an African, was a constant reminder of the racial divisions within British imperialism.

It was in light of this that Koinange provided addendums, in the form of further memorandum and maps, and persuaded other European members of society to speak in support of his petition. Canon Harry Leakey and Louis Leakey testified to their trust of Koinange and his claims. Canon Leakey, noting that he had 'known Koinange intimately now for nearly twenty years,' spoke in support of Koinange:

I have never found him to be untruthful, and I have not the slightest doubt that his ancestor *Njunu* who gave the name to the property which is now divided up into some ten or so farms did actually buy it from the Dorobo. I have questioned lineal descendants from the same ancestor and made all kinds of inquiries from different sources, but I have never been able to find anything which gave the least indication that the story was a made up one. There is not the slightest doubt whatever that Koinange was born in the district and probably his ancestors for at least three generations.¹⁵⁵

This was a direct rebuttal of Tait and Block's claims. Canon Leakey's son, Louis, spoke of Koinange's wealth and the general insecurity of land for natives, noting that Koinange purchased his present land for the sum of 'Shs. 10,000 [...] to ensure that his future descendants might have something to call their own, and not have to go on to somebody else's land'.¹⁵⁶ Louis' testimony harkened back to Koinange's dependence on the generosity of Gichuru in starting over in Upper Kiambu and the loss of *mbari ya Njunu*. The Leakey's were prominent and long-standing members of colonial society. The elder's religious authority and the younger's scholarly expertise provided compelling support for Koinange's claim to the *Njunu* lands.

Echoing Canon Leakey's claim of three generations of ownership, Koinange that several generations of his ancestors had been born and buried on the land. Koinange

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 868.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 671.

offered to exhume the bodies of his grandparents in support of his. In Kikuyu culture, the exhumation of an ancestor's corpse was a desecration of the dead, threatening the eternal status of their spirit.¹⁵⁷ In spite of the commission's insistence that the exhumation of his grandparents' bodies was not unnecessary, Koinange went ahead with his offer. It serves as a poignant declaration of how important *mbari ya Njunu* was to Koinange and his family. Under the supervision of Canon Leakey, the body of Ithothia kana Gatheca (Njunu the Younger) was exhumed in late February 1933 from the very spot Koinange indicated it could be found.¹⁵⁸ A second mound, believed to be that of Koinange's great-grandmother, was also identified. Leakey deemed the excavation of this second site unnecessary, arguing that the physical sign of a second burial location was sufficient support for Koinange's claim.¹⁵⁹ Koinange provided a coffin for Ithothia to be reburied in — not according to Kikuyu custom but rather according to Christian practice.¹⁶⁰ Whether guided by his Christian faith or European social norms, Koinange's decision reflected his political wisdom in acting within European norms. Koinange was declaring that he was like Tait, Block, and the members of the commission — a British subject, following European social and religious norms. With numerous memoranda, supporting maps, the testimonies from the Leakeys, and the exhumation of his grandfather's body, Koinange mounted as compelling and robust of a claim as anyone else before the Kenya Land Commission. Koinange's actions were consistent with his actions during the 1920s and the early 1930s. S. H. Fazan, who had travelled with Koinange to London in 1931 and served as a colonial District Commissioner, served as the commission's secretary during its time in Kenya. He

¹⁵⁷ J. Lonsdale, 'The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: Wealth, Poverty & Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought', in B. Berman and J. Lonsdale (eds), *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (2 vols., Oxford, 1992), ii, p. 378.

¹⁵⁸ *Kenya Land Commission Evidence*, pp 638-9.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 639.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 638-9.

was an eyewitness of Koinange's engagement with the KLC. Twenty years later, he described Koinange's testimony before the KLC as 'helpful and temperate'.¹⁶¹

Koinange expended tremendous time and effort during his engagement with the KLC. When the Kenya Land Commission's recommendations were published in mid-1934, it recommended that Koinange receive one-tenth of the land he claimed was taken from *mbari ya Njunu*.¹⁶² Koinange's disappointment must have been significant. Having returned from London in 1931 touting the responsiveness of the British government to their claims and then exhuming his own grandfather's body in support of his own claim, how would he respond to the disappointing recommendations of the commission? Would he continue to work within the bounds of the British governing system, or would this, as most scholars have accepted, mark the beginning of Koinange's disenchantment with colonial rule and increasing embrace of oppositional, even militant, political efforts? These questions can only be answered by an examination of Koinange's actions in the years and decades that followed the commission's report.

A Pivotal Moment and a Partnership with the KCA

Koinange's actions after the KLC report reflect not a deep bitterness or disenchantment with colonialism but rather a determined and consistent commitment to working with the government, while maintaining his historic protests of colonial land policies. For his work with the commission, Koinange received the King's Medal for African Chiefs in 1934 in recognition of his 'outstanding merit and ability'.¹⁶³ That same

¹⁶¹ KNA JZ/7/17, 'Notes by Mr. Fazan', p. 1.

¹⁶² Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 91; Kyle, *The Politics of the Independence of Kenya*, pp 34-5; Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 266.

¹⁶³ KNA JZ/7/17, 'Notes by Mr. Fazan', p 1; KNA ARC(MAA)/6/86, P. Wyn Harris, item 9, 22 Nov. 1948.

year, he was selected to serve as the African advisor to the District Commissioner and the Director of Education to aid in the disbursement of Shs. 10,000 towards the improvement of African primary school education.¹⁶⁴ Over the next fifteen years, Koinange became the highest paid and most highly decorated colonial chief of Kenya's colonial period. It is clear that, given these accolades and new responsibilities, the colonial administration maintained their high regard and trust in Koinange in the wake of the commission.

Koinange came from a large and wealthy Kikuyu family. He experienced conflict between the European newcomers and the indigenous African community at an early age. By the First World War, European settlement and land alienation forced him and his family to migrate closer to Nairobi — the burgeoning centre of the colonial administration and economy. This loss of the *mbari ya Njunu* lands served as a driving cause for Koinange's entire life, but so too did those early opportunities for positive engagement with European colonialism. He and his family moved to Upper Kiambu, where Koinange established himself as a wealthy, progressive Kikuyu leader and colonial chief. Early in the twentieth century, he converted to Christianity and began to work with the colonial administration. Due to his involvement with the 1919 *kiama* agreement, the subsequent establishment of the Kikuyu Association, and his appointment to the Kiambu LNC, Koinange was the leading colonial chief by the end of the 1920s. This, along with his embrace of Christianity and European norms (often choosing these over Kikuyu tradition), made Koinange and his family the target of the KCA during the 1929 female circumcision controversy. Despite the public criticism by the KCA, Koinange's statement before the 1931 Parliamentary Committee revealed that he was neither the administration's puppet and neither was he hostile to colonial rule. During 1932 and 1933, he worked tirelessly with and in response to the Kenya Land Commission, on behalf of the

¹⁶⁴ KNA VQ/5/57, 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', item 2, p. 3.

claims of his own family and other African communities. These first fifty years of Koinange's life, thirty of which were spent in service with the colonial administration, reveal a noticeable and consistent political approach in action and belief.

The narrative that emerges is of a political leader who consistently pursued change through civic engagement in the LNC, by leading one of the earliest African political associations in Kenya (the Kikuyu Association), and via protest and petition, whether in Kenya or the United Kingdom. This embrace of European norms (particularly in politics) was the result of Koinange's relationship with Canon Harry Leakey. Even as he took radical positions on education and female circumcision, he remained an advocate for Kikuyu land interests, as well as further educational, economic, and political opportunities. His work as a colonial chief was defined by his progressive embrace of much that was new, paired with a resolute defence of native land interests. Resolute in his convictions and flexible in opportunity, Koinange successfully navigated the challenges and changes brought in the early decades of British colonial rule. Significantly, his eldest son, who most directly represented him in Koinange's absence, was himself absent for most of what led to Koinange's political rise.

After eleven years abroad, Peter Koinange returned to Kenya four years after the commission issued its report. Scholars have posited that Peter began to support the KCA while abroad and brought his father into the KCA in the late 1930s.¹⁶⁵ As an organisation banned during the war for subversive action, understanding the Koinanges' connection to the KCA is import for understanding the possibilities of a growing collaboration between the Koinanges and militant or oppositional politics. Before these late 1930s developments can be considered (for they will be picked up once again in chapter three), the next

¹⁶⁵ KNA MSS/74/2, 'An Open Letter from Henry Muoria', date unknown, p. 7; Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 192; Clough, *Fighting Two Sides*, p. 165.

chapter turns to the story of Peter's early years in Kenya and then to his eleven years abroad.

CHAPTER TWO

Destined for Greatness: Peter Mbiyu's First Thirty Years (1907-1938)

In November 1931, *The Pittsburgh Courier* carried the following front-page headline: 'African Chief's son in College: Attends Ohio Wesleyan That He May Rule Better'.¹ Four years later, *The Washington Post* interviewed the 'Future Ruler of 3,000,000'.² This 'future ruler' and 'African chief's son' was none other than Peter Mbiyu Koinange, the eldest son of Koinange wa Mbiyu. Peter Mbiyu was of little consequence to the average reader of *The Pittsburgh Courier* or *The Washington Post*, but his link to imperial Africa in a period of growing Pan-Africanism and anti-imperial sentiments was of great interest.

Peter Mbiyu's life was somewhat unique. He was the first-born son of a progressive and active Kikuyu leader who embraced much of what British colonialism had brought to Kenya: Christianity, technology, the colonial chieftain structure, and more. Arguably, the most important aspect of European colonialism that Koinange wa Mbiyu embraced for the formative years of Peter Mbiyu's life was an emphasis on Western education. Rather than tending to the family's agricultural or herding needs, Peter Mbiyu spent much of his early life in a number of mission and government schools before travelling abroad for further education. Few other African children would be offered such an opportunity for many years still to come.

¹ G. Wright, 'African Chief's Son in College', *The Pittsburgh Courier* (7 Nov. 1931).

² 'Future Ruler of 3,000,000 to Get Diploma', *The Washington Post* (9 June 1935), p. B12.

Born in the first decade of the twentieth century, Peter was still a young man when his family moved from the *Njunu* lands and re-established themselves in Southern Kiambu. He experienced the growing tensions between Christian converts and African traditional leadership as seen in the 1919 Kiama compromise. As the result of his father's growing belief in the importance of education, Peter attended a number of the most promising schools for Africans before his departure to the United States in 1927. Peter spent nearly a decade in the United States (1927-1936), followed by two years in the United Kingdom (1936-1938) during which he received his secondary, undergraduate, and graduate education.

It is these first thirty years of Peter Mbiyu's life, and particularly his time abroad in the late 1920s and 1930s, which are the focus of this chapter. It is during this period that Peter's ambitions for leadership and his vision for his role in the future of Kenya develop and can be clearly seen in his words and actions. Relationships built during these years shaped his perception of British colonialism and laid the groundwork for his activities in Kenya during the 1940s and his actions abroad during his exile from Kenya in the 1950s. This is the very reason that this thesis is a biography of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu over the long duration — questions concerning Peter's actions in the 1940s, 1950s, and beyond can only be accurately answered when they take into account the story of the first thirty years of Peter's life and his connection to his father and family. Without careful consideration of these earlier years, any understanding of later actions is limited to the immediate context of the time or interpretive trends, both of which, in their narrowness, result in skewed interpretations of the past.

Context and Sources

Peter Mbiyu grew up during a period of tremendous change across the globe. This context of change is reflected in his own endeavours and changing actions. Peter Mbiyu's first thirty years can be broken down into three different periods: (1) his time in Kenya from 1907 to the mid 1920s, (2) his time in the United States from 1927-1935, and (3) his time in the United Kingdom from 1935-1938. It is important to understand the context of these three areas during these three periods of the early twentieth century. Following a presentation of the historical context, there will be a brief discussion of the archival sources used in the remainder of the chapter.

Historical Context

Born around 1907, Peter grew up during a period of expanding British rule, increased conflict over land policy (e.g. the 1902 and 1915 Crown Land Acts), and tensions between African traditional practice and the growing group of African converts to Christianity (e.g. the 1919 *Kiama* compromise). Politically, this period saw the rise of African political expression (e.g. the Harry Thuku riot in 1922), the establishment of new forms of African political involvement (e.g. the establishment of the Local Native Councils (LNC) in 1925), and the establishment of the formal Kenya Colony in 1920. The development of education for the African community in the East African Protectorate (known as the British colony of Kenya after 1920) is intimately tied up in the history of Christian missionary work, African politics, and the development of a new class of African elite. During the first decade of the twentieth century, missionary organisations established stations around the coastal, in the central, and in the western areas of the

protectorate. Schools for African converts were among the first things these groups established. The 1920s saw the growth of government involvement in mission education, as well as the creation of the first African independent schools.³ In the wake of land transactions and colonial laws that favoured Europeans over the course of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, it was clear that literacy and education were essential to function and survive in the British empire.⁴ Throughout the 1920s, demands for greater education by the African community appeared frequently in memoranda submitted to the East African Commission (1924), the Hilton Young Commission (1928), and others.⁵ In 1930, Peter Mbiyu Koinange — then a student at the Hampton Institute in Virginia — wrote a letter addressed to ‘the Elders and Public Leaders, Kenya Colony, East Africa’. Seeing education as essential, Peter wrote, ‘Education alone is capable of carrying us to our goal; because it is the key by which we can gain admittance to happiness, true loyalty, citizenship, liberty, and usefulness; in addition it is the base upon which rests the power and light that illuminate the whole world’.⁶ Peter here reflects the growing sentiment among the African elite in colonial Kenya. Education proved to be the gate through which one could pursue political opportunity.⁷ Alliance High School, established in the mid-1920s, became the premier secondary school (and only secondary school for some time) for Kenya’s elite political leaders of the late 1950s and post-independence years.⁸ As the importance of, demands for

³ S.N. Bogonko, *A History of Modern Education in Kenya: 1985-1991* (Nairobi, 1991), pp 19-20, 26; J. Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (New York, 1979), p. 171.

⁴ The playwright Ngugi wa Thiong’o reflects this common belief in his work, *Weep Not, Child* (N. wa Thiong’o, *Weep Not, Child* (Nairobi, 1964), pp 37-8, 104-5). Peter Mbiyu echoes this sentiment in relationship to his father’s own land deals with European settlers (‘Future Ruler’, p. B12).

⁵ BL MSS.Afr.s.633, ‘Memorandum: Presented by the Kikuyu Association, Kenya Colony, to the Members of the East Africa Commission’, Nov. 1924, box 17, file 2, ff 57-64; BL MSS.Afr.s.633, ‘Memorandum Presented by the Kikuyu Association, Southern District of Kikuyu, for the Hilton Young Commission’, 1928, box 17, file 2, ff 65-6.

⁶ BL MSS.Afr.s.633, P. Koinange, 7 Feb. 1930, box 17, file 2, ff 69-71.

⁷ D.G. Schilling, ‘Local Native Councils and the Politics of Education in Kenya, 1925-1939’ in *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, ix (1976), p. 247.

⁸ B.E. Kipkorir, ‘Carey Francis at the A.H.S., Kikuyu - 1940-1962’, in B.E. Kipkorir (ed.), *Biographical Essays on Imperialism and Collaboration in Colonial Kenya* (Nairobi, 1980), p. 143; B.E. Kipkorir, ‘The Alliance High School and the Origins of the Kenya African Elite, 1926-1962’ (Cambridge Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1969), p. 2.

more, and increased opportunity for education grew in Kenya, the United States was going through an increasingly tense period of race relationships and cultural expression during the 1920s and 1930s.

It was a period of tremendous economic and cultural growth for the United States, following on from the industrialisation of the latter years of the First World War, followed by a period of economic crisis after the 1929 stock market crash. Along with economic woes, racial tensions defined much of the conversation.⁹ The Ku Klux Klan reappeared with a broader agenda and geographical reach than they had in the late nineteenth-century reconstruction period.¹⁰ This was the period of New York City's Harlem Renaissance. It ushered in the rise of African-American music, art, and culture to a wider portion of American society. The culture and arts were forever transformed by the writings of Langston Hughes, the entertainment of Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson, and the musical performances of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. Leading figures like W.E.B. DuBois, the first African-American to earn a doctorate and co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Marcus Garvey, a leading voice in the Pan-African movement, both featured prominently in conversations of African identity and Pan-Africanism. With the rise of the KKK, it was not a development that was always welcome by the white communities in America. These and other leading figures were also giving words to the experience of the African-American population, as well as to Africans within the empires of the early twentieth century. Ideas spread quickly throughout the diaspora communities in the major cities of North America and Europe. Peter Mbiyu's time in the United States was filled with these ongoing challenges and

⁹ S.C. Drake, 'Mbiyu Koinange and the Pan-African Movement', in R.A. Hill (ed.), *Pan-African Biography* (Los Angeles, 1987), p. 169; M. Garvey, 'Black Pride,' in I. Unger and R.R. Tomes (eds), *American Issues: a Primary Source Reader in United States History Since 1865* (New Jersey, 1999), p. 135.

¹⁰ 'The Ku Klux Klan (1924, 1921),' in I. Unger and R.R. Tomes (eds), *American Issues: a Primary Source Reader in United States History Since 1865* (New Jersey, 1999), pp 182-5.

conversations regarding race and African (and African-American) cultural identity. By the mid-1930s, Great Britain's focus was on Russia, with the rise of Stalin, and the growing unease settling over continental Europe before the Second World War. At home, protests against British imperialism were also becoming more prominent.

From Stalin's Soviet government to the international interests of the Comintern to the rise of Hitler and Mussolini's fascist governments, the growing threat of European communism and fascism dominated social, political, and, especially, governmental concerns in England during the mid-1930s. It was during this period that Jomo Kenyatta, among others, became the focus of Special Branch (MI5) investigations.¹¹ MI5 closely monitored the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) through the use of informants, wire taps, the interception of postal mail, etc.¹² Meanwhile, support for Great Britain's Labour Party was growing. Members of the Labour Party often provided political support for leaders from around the British empire. Problematic developments in the colonies following the First World War, such as the Amritsar Massacre in India in 1919, led to the Labour Party, church groups, and other social organisations criticising or opposing British colonial policy. It was within this context that Peter Mbiyu became a member of London's African diaspora community and during which Peter Mbiyu first appears in MI5 security files.¹³

This context of a growing emphasis on education in Kenya, the racial tensions of the United States during the 1920s and 1930s, and the political tensions of England in the 1930s, as shall be demonstrated, profoundly shaped the Peter Mbiyu who returned to Kenya in 1938.

¹¹ TNA KV/2/1787, *Jomo Kenyatta*, 1930-1946.

¹² See chapter B2 in C. Andrew, *Defend the Realm: the Authorized History of MI5* (New York, 2009).

¹³ TNA KV/2/2535, *Peter Mbiyu Koinange*, 1937-1956.

Archival Sources

Developing a narrative of Peter Mbiyu's life during this period relies on material from archival collections on three different continents, bridging a wide array of perspectives and purposes. As with all historical research, the sources provide an incomplete picture of Peter Mbiyu's life from the mid-1920s until the late 1930s. The sources utilised in this chapter range from institutional archival material from the schools and universities Peter Mbiyu attended, as well biographical sketches written by those who knew Peter Mbiyu in the decades that followed.

In the case of the former, the Hampton Institute, Ohio Wesleyan, and St John's College at Cambridge University all possess historical source material related to their former student, Peter Mbiyu. While somewhat limited to the interests of their educational context, many of these archives gathered information from newspaper articles and scholarly publications mentioning Peter Mbiyu even after his departure from their institution.

The second group of source material is biographical in nature. One item is a chapter in a collection of biographies published in 1987, edited by R. A. Hill and entitled *Pan-African Biography*. The author of the chapter is St. Claire Drake. Drake and Peter Mbiyu both attended the Hampton Institute in the 1920s and 1930s and kept up contact over the following decades. Drake's work is helpful for providing a window into Peter's activity at the Hampton Institute and the growing discussions related to African and Pan-African identity. However, given the collection of which it is a part, Drake's work serves the purpose of portraying Peter Mbiyu as a prominent Pan-African leader and, as such, is prone to make too much of Peter's life and actions. A second biographical source suffers a similar weakness. A 2010 booklet compiled by the Koinange family for the fiftieth

anniversary of Koinange wa Mbiyu's death includes a biographical sketch of Peter. Four pages long, the document provides helpful detail that only a family might be privy to. However, like Drake's work, it too presents a very positive assessment of Peter Mbiyu.

In order to understand Peter Mbiyu's actions and words during this period, archival records of newspapers from the 1920s and 1930s, as well as papers from the colonial office form an important part of creating the following narrative. In each turn, these sources have their own inherent challenges and strengths but together form an interconnected story of an ambitious and bookish young man from Southern Kiambu.

The Early Years (1907-1927)

As with his father, there is not much that is certain about Peter Mbiyu's early life, though there are a few significant developments worthy of examination. Peter was the second-born child and first-born son of Koinange wa Mbiyu and his first wife, Wambui.¹⁴ Peter's elder sister was Isabella Kabia Wanjiku. They were the eldest children when Koinange moved his family to Kiambu in the second decade of the twentieth century. As the eldest son and a young boy, Peter Mbiyu shepherded his family's cattle, goats, and sheep.¹⁵ When the first of the European settlers arrived, a Mr Krieger settled on *mbari ya Njunu* land.¹⁶ Peter Mbiyu then began to shepherd Krieger's cattle alongside those of his father. On one of these occasions, both his father's and Mr Krieger's cattle were

¹⁴ The exact date is, as with his father, a matter of some debate, although the possible date range is much narrower than it is for his father. Peter's gravestone in Kiambaa marks his birth as 1902, while a Kenya News Agency biography in May 1966 notes his birth year as 1907. The majority of sources, and Peter Mbiyu himself when giving interviews in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, place his year of birth in 1907.

¹⁵ K. Mutunga, 'Koinange Was One of the First Kenyans to Get Degree Despite His Shaky English,' *The Sunday Nation* (5 Nov. 2011).

¹⁶ *Kenya Land Commission Evidence* (Nairobi, 1933-1934), p. 169.

confiscated by the colonial officials after they wandered onto a nearby European farm.¹⁷ Ironically, the land upon which the cattle were trespassing had recently belonged to *mbari ya Njunu*. As a young boy, Peter Mbiyu experienced the growing tensions between the races in colonial community — especially with regard to land.

Following the family's move to southern Kiambu around the First World War, Peter Mbiyu's education began in the family's sacred *thingira* hut (traditionally reserved for family religious ceremonies) which his father turned into a one-room school house and required the attendance of Peter, his older sister, his mother, and, later, his father's other two wives for daily lessons.¹⁸ It was an important early demonstration of Koinange's willingness to remould traditional Kikuyu norms and adapt them to fit the new paradigms of British colonialism. While it is unclear who taught this first group, it is more than likely that either a missionary convert or one of the missionaries themselves met with Koinange's family. Shortly thereafter, Peter's education moved out of the *thingira* and down the hillside to the mission church and school built on his family's land.¹⁹ Along with this education, came the family's growing involvement in the Christian church. Peter Mbiyu would have attended Canon Leakey's nearby church, or a similar church, from a young age. This formative experience as a child led to Peter Mbiyu's faithful attendance and engagement with local church communities during the 1920s and 1930s while living in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Peter's early years were further impacted by his father's engagement with the colonial government. Koinange's role as a sub headman, later chief, began about the same time as Peter's birth. Peter was a teenager at the time that his father was appointed to the

¹⁷ M.S. Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu: Mediator and Patriot', in B.E. Kipkorir (ed.), *Biographical Essays on Imperialism and Collaboration in Colonial Kenya* (Nairobi, 1980), p. 61.

¹⁸ WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010*, 'Mbiyu Koinange: 1902-1981', p. 1.

¹⁹ Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 62; JL *Wamagatta Interviews 1991-1992*, 'Nelson Chege Murakaru', 20 June 1991, p. 1.

kiama in 1919 and became a leading figure of the Kikuyu Association (KA). As a teenager and young adult, Peter Mbiyu witnessed his father's work with cattle resettlement, with the recruitment of African labourers for European farms, and with responses to the growing tensions between and within the European and African communities.

Furthermore, Peter was the son of a wealthy father whose adoption of European technology and lifestyle — from a stone house to electricity to a plough to a car — shaped young Peter's concepts of the benefits of engaging, rather than resisting, European settlement and British colonialism. A couple of years before leaving for the United States for further education, Peter Mbiyu's father was appointed to the newly established Local Native Council (LNC) for Kiambu. By the time Peter departed for the US, he had spent twenty years watching his father's social and political rise within colonial Kenya. However, the most significant influence of British colonialism on Peter's early years was the growing opportunity and importance placed on a formal Western education.

The Importance of Education

Peter's birth in 1907 placed him among one of the first age groups to grow up in missionary schools and receive a European education. According to family and community interviews, Koinange wa Mbiyu's emphasis on education was the result of his relationship with Canon Harry Leakey.²⁰ Peter Mbiyu attended a series of CMS schools in Kiambu, Nairobi, and Mombasa. After beginning in the family's *thingira* hut, Peter Mbiyu attended the CMS school built on his family's land.²¹ Following a recommendation

²⁰ JL Wamagatta *Interviews 1991-1992*, 'A Summary of the Research Findings', p. 1.

²¹ WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010*, 'Mbiyu Koinange', pp 19-22; R.M. Gatheru, *Kenya: From Colonization to Independence, 1888-1970* (Jefferson, 2005), p. 177; D.W. Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau 1945-1953* (London, 1988), p. 273.

from his teacher, Rev. Josiah Matejwa, Peter then transferred to the nearby CMS school at Kabete — the birthplace of CMS work in Kiambu.²² While at Kabete, Canon Leakey taught Peter Mbiyu, as well as several other African converts, including Elia Karago and Matayo Kaetu.²³ A classmate from these early years described Peter Mbiyu as ‘very obedient, unassuming, quiet and good soccer player in school who was popular with his fellow pupils’.²⁴

Early on in the 1920s, Peter Mbiyu moved from Kabete to Mombasa, Kenya’s bustling port city.²⁵ Mombasa was a hub of migrant labour and home to Arab, Swahili, Asian, and European communities. Peter attended Buxton High School.²⁶ Established in 1904, the school grew quickly, with a body of 170 students (mostly Asians of Indian origin) by 1911.²⁷ Peter Mbiyu’s exposure to this community would prove useful when Peter served as a bridge between the Kenya African Union and the East African Indian National Congress in the 1940s. From Mombasa, Peter returned to Central Kenya to attend the newly established Alliance High School.

The mid-1920s brought noticeable growth in African education in Central Kenya with the establishment of a number of new schools. In 1926, the Alliance High School was established for the most promising African students in Central Kenya. Peter Mbiyu returned from Mombasa and was accepted to the new high school in its first year.²⁸ When the school opened that year, it was significantly understaffed and the first classes met in

²² WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010*, ‘Mbiyu Koinange’, pp 1-2; J. Lonsdale, “‘White Kikuyu’ and ‘Cursed Reader’ 1890-1929’, unpublished manuscript (Cambridge, 2013), pp 2, 5.

²³ WKK *Golden Jubilee Celebration 1960-2010*, ‘Mbiyu Koinange’, pp 1-2.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., pp 19-22.

²⁶ R.W. Strayer, *The Making of Mission Communities in East Africa: Anglicans and Africans in Colonial Kenya, 1875–1955* (London, 1978) p. 63.

²⁷ Strayer, *The Making of Mission Communities*, p. 62.

²⁸ M.S. Clough, *Fighting Two Sides: Kenyan Chiefs and Politicians, 1918-1940* (Colorado, 1990), p. 110; M. Koinange, ‘Jomo: Colleague in the Struggle for Freedom and Independence’, in A.H. Patel, N.S. Thakur and V. Dhar (eds), *Struggle for ‘Release Jomo and His Colleagues’* (Nairobi, 1963), p. 18; Gatheru, *Kenya*, p. 177.

unfinished buildings. The only full-time staff member was the interim principal, who had been appointed to the role the day the school doors opened. By the end of the first year, six of the original twenty-seven students had left — including Peter Mbiyu.²⁹ In spite of this mediocre beginning, Alliance High School did go on to become the premier educational institution for high-achieving African students in Central Kenya.³⁰ While Peter was one of the six who did not complete their first year at Alliance High School, the year at Alliance was important for Peter's future. It marked his personal introduction to Johnstone Kamau (later known as Jomo Kenyatta), it placed him among classmates who would become Kenya's future leaders, and it provided an important link to Kenya's educated elite who would pass through the school's doors in the subsequent decades.

During the year Peter spent at Alliance High School, the Leakey family encouraged Koinange to send Peter overseas for a better education.³¹ In the mid-1920s, James Aggrey, the Gold-Coast-born missionary who travelled and spoke widely in Africa, had visited Kenya on a trip funded by the Phelps-Stokes Fund. Aggrey's eloquence and vision spurred Koinange's interest in sending his son to the United States for further education.³² The choice to attend the Hampton Institute in Virginia owed much to G. A. Grieve, the headmaster at Alliance High School, and Earl Cromack, a Hampton Institute teacher working at the Scots Mission in Kikuyu in the mid-1920s. Grieve had recently returned from a Phelps-Stokes funded trip to the United States where he visited two prominent schools for African-Americans: Alabama's Tuskegee Institute and Virginia's Hampton Institute.³³ In 1926, Peter Mbiyu left Kenya for the United States to attend the Hampton

²⁹ M.D. Njagi, 'Imperial Education and the Crisis of Political Leadership in Postcolonial Kenya' (State University of New York at Stony Brook Ph.D. thesis, 2011), pp 112, 114-115.

³⁰ Lonsdale, "White Kikuyu" and "Cursed Reader", p. 4.

³¹ JL *Wamagatta Interviews 1991-1992*, 'Michael Gatenjwa Munge', 26 June 1991, p. 1; JL *Wamagatta Interviews 1991-1992*, 'Nelson Chege Murakaru', 20 June 1991, p. 6.

³² K. King, *Pan-Africanism and Education: a Study of Race Philanthropy and Education in the Southern States of America and East Africa* (Oxford, 1971), p. 233; Drake, 'Mbiyu Koinange', p. 164.

³³ King, *Pan-Africanism and Education*, pp 233, 246.

Institute, equipped with his missionary-school education in Kenya and the encouragement of European missionaries and educators alike.

Race Relations, Education, and Future Opportunities

When he moved to the United States, Peter arrived to a nation wrestling with race relations, with a growing emphasis on African and Pan-African identity and culture among the African-American community. His early years in the United States were spent at the Hampton Institute. From there, he attended Ohio Wesleyan University for undergraduate studies in sociology, exposing Koinange to increased criticism of European imperialism and offering an opportunity for his first engagement with the British Government regarding issues of colonial policy. A single year spent at Columbia University in New York City followed Peter's time at Ohio Wesleyan. In New York, Peter obtained a graduate degree in teaching — which would prove key upon his return to Kenya in the late 1930s — as well as personal exposure to the Harlem Renaissance, having taken up residence in the Harlem area of New York City. Beginning with his earliest days at the Hampton Institute, it is clear that a vision of returning to Kenya and taking up a leading position in society, like his father, was at the forefront of Peter's ambitions.

The Hampton Institute: Race and Kikuyu Identity

Peter Mbiyu left behind the racial tensions of Kenya, only to be introduced to the racial tensions at play in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. He attended the

Hampton Institute from 1927 until 1931. Hampton was birthed during the Reconstruction period that followed the American Civil War, the same period during which the Klu Klux Klan was established. In the late nineteenth century, Booker T. Washington was a student at Hampton, and in the 1950s, Martin Luther King Jr. would be invited, along with other African-American leaders, to speak at the Institute. During Peter's time at Hampton, a wave of discontent was sweeping through African-American colleges. Within days of his arrival in 1927, students undertook a 'general strike action against [...] petty restrictions imposed by the white staff on campus life'.³⁴ The 'ever-growing thunderheads of student dissent at Hampton Institute finally broke in a storm that would shake the foundations of the college as nothing had ever shaken them before,' writes Edward Graham.³⁵ According to Drake, the protests of 1927 included the 'the whole student body [...refusing...] to perform their famous Negro spirituals in front of Sir Gordon Guggisberg, ex-governor of the Gold Coast'.³⁶ The racial tensions of America and British imperialism came into conflict at the Hampton Institute. Over the four years during which Peter Mbiyu attended the Hampton Institute, numerous strikes and petitions resulted in a number of concessions to the students' demands. These events, Drake rightfully notes, 'must have had *some* effect on Koinange'.³⁷

During his time at Hampton, Peter was a member of the Society for the Study of Negro History, established in 1925.³⁸ Influenced by African-American writers and the increasingly influential and prominent NAACP, strands of Pan-Africanism, African identity, and African consciousness began to take root in the young Peter Mbiyu. As

³⁴ Ibid., p. 246.

³⁵ E. Graham, 'The Hampton Institute Strike of 1927: a Case Study in Student Protest', *The American Scholar*, 38, no 4 (1969), p. 668.

³⁶ K.J. King, 'African Students in Negro American Colleges: Notes on the Good African', *Phylon*, 31 (1970), p. 29.

³⁷ Drake, 'Mbiyu Koinange', p. 169. Emphasis in original.

³⁸ HIA 'Historians Celebrate 5 Years of Existence', *The Hampton Student*, 10 May 1930.

Barrows argues, the NAACP had a significant influence on Peter Mbiyu during this period.³⁹

Academically, Peter struggled in his courses. This was not altogether surprising given how different his education in East Africa was from a US education. His challenges with the English language form a recurring theme during the eleven years spent pursuing education abroad. In spite of academic challenges, he was very actively engaged in the social arena through playing soccer, singing, and dancing.⁴⁰ Noteworthy, Peter appears to have developed few close relationships, with even fewer lasting beyond his time in Virginia.⁴¹

During his time at the Hampton Institute, Peter gave speeches, sometimes paid, to academic, civil, and religious audiences on topics related to Africa. During his time at the Institute, he travelled to Connecticut and presented three speeches, entitled 'The Coming [of] Missionaries to Africa', 'Work in Africa', and the 'Present Need of Foreign Missionary Work', to the Gospel Missionary Society (GMS) convention.⁴² The GMS was one of three mission groups, with the other two being the CMS and the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM), actively engaged in mission work in East Africa by the second decade of the twentieth century. The titles of the talks indicate a favourable perspective on missionary work in Africa. They also serve as an indication of the impact the Leakey family had made upon the Koinange family. A yearbook from the time that Peter was at

³⁹ L.C. Barrows, 'National Association for the Advancement of Colored People', in F.A. Irele and B. Jeyifo (eds), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought* (New York, 2010), pp 151-2.

⁴⁰ 'African Chief a Football Fan: 5ft. Warrior Who Wants to See the Cup Final', *The Daily Mirror* (London, 23 Apr. 1931), p. 4; HIA 'Koinange Makes Hit', *The Hampton Student*, Dec. 1930; 'Education: Dancer's Son', *Time* (24 June 1935). Accessed 20 Oct. 2011 at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,754926,00.html>; Drake, 'Mbiyu Koinange', p. 166.

⁴¹ Drake, 'Mbiyu Koinange', p. 167. Even Drake, who met Peter at Hampton, visited him in London, and wrote about him later in life notes that "We were friends - yes - but not close" (167).

⁴² HIA 'Peter Koinange Attends Convention', date and original source unknown. See note in Bibliography about further information on the source.

the Hampton Institute supports this assessment, predicting that Peter would one day serve 'as head of a missionary society'.⁴³



Image 2.1: Used in a 1933 article for the Hampton Institute, the original caption read, 'Peter M. Koinange, Son of a Paramount Chief, Kenya Colony'.⁴⁴

The Hampton Institute took great pride in Peter Mbiyu as one of its alumna. Hampton repeatedly pointed out that Peter Mbiyu was one of their renowned 'Hamptonians'.⁴⁵ Throughout the 1960s, Jerome Holland, President of the Hampton Institute, was in frequent contact with Peter Mbiyu in Kenya, asking Peter to meet and welcome members and donors of the Hampton Institute during an upcoming visit to the newly independent nation.⁴⁶ In 1965, the Institute established a scholarship for East African students in honour of Peter Mbiyu, then Kenya's Minister of State. A 1992

⁴³ Drake, 'Mbiyu Koinange', p. 167.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ HIA 'Peter Mbiyu wa Koinange: Alumni Update, 1935-1936', 14 Dec. 1935, p. 2.

⁴⁶ HIA 'The Honorable Mbiyu Koinange', Office of the President, 31 May 1965; KNA OP/KA/1/68, *Hon. Mbiyu Koinange Correspondence*, J.H. Holland to M. Koinange, 20 Oct. 1966, item 149; Ibid., J.H. Holland to M. Koinange, 1 Dec. 1966, item 217.

exhibit at the Hampton Institute Museum entitled 'Faces of Kenya', for which Peter Mbiyu's daughter Isabella Koinange was an honoured guest, prominently featured a photo from 1929 of Peter in Kikuyu chiefly dress (see Image 2.1).⁴⁷ This image conveyed the important role the Hampton Institute played in Peter's connection to Kenya and his Kikuyu identity during his time at the Institute in the late 1920s and early 1930

There are clear indications that while Peter Mbiyu attended the Hampton Institute, he was intentional about maintaining connections to Kenya. There is evidence, from early on, that this connection was linked to Peter's ambition that he would one day return and become a prominent leader in the colony. A letter to his former classmates at Alliance High School about his experience at the Hampton Institute provides of this commitment:

Pull yourselves together with the help of your teachers and you will be surprised at all that the Lord will do with your strength to raise dear old Kenya. Forget you are coloured students and try to observe and invent new things like boys and girls of other countries.⁴⁸

Peter's words indicate a perception of his own role as example and leader. This perceived leadership role is even more evident following his father's donation to the Hampton Institute's Museum in the late 1920s. During his early years at Hampton, Peter Mbiyu noticed a lack of artefacts related to the Kikuyu of East Africa in the Hampton Institute's Museum.⁴⁹ He arranged a solution for this with the help of his father during his second year at the Institute. In 1929, his father donated twenty-five items to the school's museum, including 'six different head dresses, each with a special significance; implements of war; arm ornaments, old and rare; baskets and belts and an old trumpet made from a large antelope horn'.⁵⁰ Peter posed for a series of photographs for the museum, dressed as a Kikuyu elder in the items given by his father — it was these images that the Hampton

⁴⁷ WKK 'Faces of Kenya', Hampton Institute Museum, 1992.

⁴⁸ King, *Pan-Africanism and Education*, p. 247.

⁴⁹ HIA S. Lane, 'African Treasures in the Hampton Museum', *Southern Workman*, May 1933.

⁵⁰ HIA 'Chief Mbiyu Koinange Sends Valuable African Relics to Museum', source unknown, 26 Oct. 1929.

Institute utilised in the 1992 exhibit mentioned earlier.⁵¹ The similarity between the image Peter presented to the museum curators and the images of his father in the chief's honorific regalia is striking (see Image 2.2). This self-presentation as a Kikuyu chief foreshadow Peter's claims in the 1930s that he expected to one day 'succeed my father' as the leader of '3,000,000 Africans'.⁵²



Image 2.2: Koinange wa Mbiyu in the dress of a Kikuyu elder.⁵³

When Peter finished his four years at the Hampton Institute, the Depression was in full swing. The Black Friday stock market crash occurred at the beginning of Peter's second-to-last year. So formative were these years that when Peter met Jomo Kenyatta in London in 1937, Peter later noted that the Depression, the work of the United States government's response via the Tennessee Valley Authority, and Roosevelt's New Deal were three of the eight topics they discussed during their visit.⁵⁴ The Depression Era

⁵¹ HIA S. Lane, 'African Treasures'; WKK 'Faces of Kenya'.

⁵² 'Future Ruler of 3,000,000', p. B12; HIA 'African Chief's Son Gets Degree from Wesleyan U.', *New York Age*, 15 June 1935; HIA 'African Chief's Son Works Way Through Ohio College', *Afro-American*, 15 June 1935; HIA Koinange, *Peter M*: Untitled, *Southern Workman*, Sep. 1935.

⁵³ Koinange, *Koinange-wa-Mbiyu*, image plate 4.

⁵⁴ Koinange, 'Jomo: Colleague', p. 22.

made life abroad much more difficult for the young Peter Mbiyu, and yet he pursued additional academic opportunities in the United States.

Ohio Wesleyan: Colonial Criticism and the British Government

Peter had planned to return to Kenya following the completion of his time at the Hampton Institute in 1931. Instead, on the encouragement of a teacher at the Institute, Peter Mbiyu moved to Ohio where he pursued a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology at Ohio Wesleyan University.⁵⁵ He relied on financial help from his father, income as a personal cook for Professor Fatio (a professor of French language who had worked in West Africa), gave paid speeches, worked at a camp during his summers, and received a financial grant from the colonial government in Kenya.⁵⁶ His time at Ohio Wesleyan provides evidence to support the idea that Peter was a capable academic and an active socialite. More importantly, his time there shaped his understanding of colonialism, while the belief that he would hold a prominent role in Kenya upon his return continued to grow.

As it had been at the Hampton Institute, apart from English, Peter's academic performance at Ohio Wesleyan was strong. A note from Peter's professors during his first year at Ohio Wesleyan mentioned his 'unusual ability to grasp their lectures despite the fact that his knowledge of English [was] limited'.⁵⁷ Peter persevered in his engagement with a variety of religious and social groups in his extracurricular activities. He served as Vice President of the Cosmopolitan Club and was a member of a number of other groups,

⁵⁵ Wright, 'African Chief's Son'.

⁵⁶ Ibid.; HIA 'African Chief's Son Gets Degree'; HIA 'African Chief's Son Works Way Through Ohio College'.

⁵⁷ Wright, 'African Chief's Son'.

including the Ohio Wesleyan Union, the Sociology Club, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the International Friendship of Christians, a theatre group, and the Student Welfare Committee.⁵⁸ He joined over 40 million other visitors in attending the 1933-1934 World's Fair 'Century of Progress Exposition' in Chicago, with its emphasis on technology and the increasingly global nature of the twentieth-century world.⁵⁹ In addition to these extracurricular opportunities, Peter's four years at Ohio Wesleyan furthered his education in areas of race relations and colonialism through his study of sociology.



Image 2.3: Sociology club at Ohio Wesleyan in 1934-1935.⁶⁰

Sociology was the academic hot topic of the 1920s and 1930s, first taking root in continental Europe before crossing the Atlantic and growing in influence within the academic institutions of North America. While distinct in practice, sociology heavily influenced anthropology. Sociology and anthropology esteemed the cultural differences and practices of non-Western communities. In undertaking his course in sociology, Peter

⁵⁸ OWU 'Peter Mbiyu Koinange', *Le Bijou*, 1935; OWU 'Sociology Club', *Le Bijou*, 1935; OWU 'Ohio Wesleyan Union', *Le Bijou*, 1935.

⁵⁹ HIA 'After Graduating from the Academy', unknown source, 1934.

⁶⁰ OWU 'Sociology Club'.

Mbiyu chose a prominent degree that was shaping conversations related to Africa, colonialism, and Pan-African identity. In addition to studying sociology, Peter was a member of the university's sociology club (see Image 2.3).⁶¹ In addition to his study of sociology, and indicative of his continued aspirations of future leadership in Kenya, Peter took a minor in political science.

His education and experience in the United States led to a growth in criticism towards European involvement in Africa. In an interview given his first year at Ohio Wesleyan to a reporter for the *Chicago Defender* — a newspaper focused predominantly on African-American issues — Peter said he was 'disappointed at the white man's justice'.⁶² He hoped to 'mix the good of [the white man's justice] with that of his own people's fairness and administer ideal laws in his tribal colony'.⁶³ Peter developed this further, applying it specifically to race relations and his father's own challenges in Kenya. Peter hoped his American education would enable him 'to deal with the white friends back in his home when he succeeds his father', particularly important because he believed his father had been 'handicapped in dealing with whites' due to a lack of education.⁶⁴ Race relations, tensions over land, and a future role in leadership upon his return to Kenya were at the forefront of Peter's actions during his time at Ohio Wesleyan. This is clearly evident in 1933.

During his time at Ohio Wesleyan, Peter Mbiyu wrote a paper examining the issue of land and land security in Kenya. In the summer of 1933, he sent this paper, along with a very strongly worded cover letter, to the Prime Minister of Britain, James Ramsay MacDonald. It was an ambitious move for a young undergraduate student. Entitled 'The

⁶¹ Wright, 'African Chief's Son'.

⁶² HIA *Chicago Defender*, Fall 1931.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ HIA 'African Chief's Son Gets Degree from Wesleyan U.'.

Agrarian Problem of Kenya', the paper echoed the same concerns his father was voicing in Kenya through the KA, through the local native council, and before the colonial commissions. In his cover letter to Prime Minister MacDonald, Peter wrote:

It is an undeniable fact that the natives of Africa have been benefited by British administration [...however...] The people of my tribe and other tribes are being compelled to question their faith in the British Government. [...] I, on behalf of the African youth, whom I love so dearly, appeal to His Majesty's Government through you to redress these wrongs and promote a policy by which both races can live together harmoniously in Kenya. I know that many of your countrymen understand and align themselves with my people on this matter. I am therefore submitting to your consideration my views on the problem.⁶⁵

The very language of the paper demonstrates the influence of the Pan-African movement and the racial discussions taking place in the United States, as well as indicates Peter's role as a representative, if not leader, of the 'African youth'. Peter begins his academic paper with words that strongly reflected the importance of land to the Kikuyu and to his family: 'the land is the mother of all the inhabitants of the earth'. In outlining the history of European colonisation in Kenya, Peter's confrontational language reflects the boldness of DuBois, Garvey, and others: 'The white man's burden' which he bears is a burden of perpetual fear, fear of a native rebellion provoked by a native sense of ill-treatment'. Peter continues: 'If there was a reciprocal give and take between the races — if both would cooperate, as the natives are willing to do — Kenya could be developed to be an excellent home for members of both races'. Peter referenced the 1928 Hilton-Young Commission which stated: 'The material prosperity of the white community is inseparably and permanently bound up with that of the black, and white settlement enterprise can be maintained only through the cooperation of the native races'.⁶⁶ Two things are evident in, and very significant about, Peter's 1933 academic paper sent to the British Prime Minister.

⁶⁵ TNA CO/533/437/16, P. Koinange to J.R. MacDonald, 12 June 1933, f. 6.

⁶⁶ Ibid., P. Koinange, 'The Agrarian Problem in Kenya', no date, ff 8, 12-13.

First, in spite of a criticism of European action in Kenya, Peter's solution for Kenya's future is one of multiracial cooperation — not one free of British colonial rule. This reflects his own experience with multiracial relations with the Leakeys, at Braxton High School in Mombasa, his experience in the United States, as well as the model set by his father. It foreshadows a commitment to multiracial cooperation that would define Peter's political actions in Kenya during the mid and late 1940s. Second, the language and the cover letter reflect a self-identification as a leader, free to speak boldly to the British Prime Minister and challenge colonial policy. Following the arrival of Peter's letter, there was a debate within the Colonial Office in London about how to respond to Peter that is worth closer examination.

The debate within the Colonial Office presents an interesting point of comparison between Peter's perception of himself and the opinion of colonial officials of this young undergraduate student. One official suggested that any acknowledgement of the letter would be undesirable and that 'the whole thing is 'Negro Worker' stuff'. Reflecting Britain's concerns over the rise of Communist influence, the 'Negro Worker' was a publication of the Communist party with which George Padmore, a noted communist and leading Pan-African figure in Europe, was involved. The British Under-Secretary of State cautioned that the danger of not responding to Peter's letter was that while 'he may not be a person of special importance [...] some day he may return to Kenya and it cannot be to any one's advantage that he should return with an unnecessary sense of unkind treatment from the Government here'.⁶⁷ The Under-Secretary's argument held sway and the colonial office sent a brief acknowledgement of Peter's correspondence, not because Peter was yet the leader he hoped to be, but rather because colonial officials feared stoking the fire of disconnect in the Kenya colony.

⁶⁷ TNA CO/533/437/16, J.E.W. Flood, internal minutes, f. 2.

The four years Peter Mbiyu spent at Ohio Wesleyan, from 1931 to 1935, was a time of several significant developments: his interest in the field of sociology, a bold narrative about his future leadership role in Kenya, and evidence of a boldness in engaging with British officials concerning British colonial rule in Kenya. As one classmate of Peter's from the Hampton Institute put it, in reference to Peter: 'a noble person goes on his way, conscious of his nobility'.⁶⁸ There is a strong sense from Peter's time at Ohio Wesleyan of his own importance.



Image 2.4: Peter Mbiyu Koinange featured prominently in 1931 on the front page of *The Pittsburgh Courier*, one of the top black newspapers of the 1930s.⁶⁹

Columbia University: a Turn Towards Teaching

Following his graduation from Ohio Wesleyan in 1935, Peter Mbiyu moved to New York City for a one-year master's programme in teaching at Columbia University's Teachers College.⁷⁰ Peter also continued to pursue his study of sociology by enrolling in a

⁶⁸ 'Education: Dancer's Son', *Time* (24 June 1935).

⁶⁹ Wright, 'African Chief's Son'.

⁷⁰ '182d Annual Commencement Exercises Will Be Held at Columbia Today', *New York Times* (2 June 1936), p. 30; B.A. Ogot, *Historical Dictionary of Kenya* (Nairobi, 1981), p. 110.

few courses as well.⁷¹ This move towards preparing to teach is a pivotal moment in Peter's life. In large part, it was a pragmatic choice — there were few options open to an educated African for employment in Kenya. The decision may also have been guided by his own interest in academia and his father and family's emphasis on education. It was an important decision for Peter's future. His most prominent leadership role upon his return to Kenya in the late 1930s would be connected to teaching and education via the Kenya African Teachers' College.

Just as the Hampton Institute and Ohio Wesleyan had offered extra-curricular opportunities for Peter, so too did New York. Peter lived at the International House in Harlem. It was a home established by the YMCA in 1924 to provide housing for international graduate students attending universities in New York City.⁷² Interestingly, when asked by the Hampton Institute's annual alumni survey of his current address, Peter wrote 'Kiambu, Kenya Colony, East Africa' rather than New York City.⁷³ While in New York, Peter enjoyed more opportunities to speak about Africa, serving as the African respondent on a panel discussing the ongoing Italo-Abyssinian conflict and as a member of a panel on 'the political implications of imperialism in Africa' at Howard University.⁷⁴ Peter attended Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church where he taught a Sunday school class and served as a member of staff.⁷⁵ He spoke at various churches in the area concerning developments in Africa.⁷⁶ These were all important opportunities in developing Peter's confidence in public engagement and as a representative of African

⁷¹ HIA 'Peter Mbiyu wa Koinange: Alumni Update', p. 1.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ 'Educator to be Heard: Dr. Bentivoglio of Australia to Address Beekman Hill Group', *New York Times* (17 Nov. 1935), p. N6; 'What Is Going on This Week', *New York Times* (17 Nov. 1935), p. N8; 'Church Programs in the City Today', *New York Times* (13 Oct. 1935), p. N12.

⁷⁵ HIA 'Peter Mbiyu wa Koinange: Alumni Update', p. 1.

⁷⁶ 'Church Programs in the City Today', *New York Times* (13 Oct. 1935), p. N12; 'Church Programs in the City Today', *New York Times* (10 Nov. 1935), p. N10; 'Church Programs in the City Today', *New York Times* (17 Nov. 1935), p. N8.

interests. Peter graduated from Columbia University in June 1936 and shortly travelled to England.

In the United Kingdom: Teacher or ‘Agitator’?

In 1935, before his decision to attend Columbia University, Peter had anticipated returning to Kenya after graduating from Ohio Wesleyan, with a brief stopover in London. According to a 1935 interview for the *Southern Workman*, Peter hoped to meet with four members of parliament who had met his father during the 1931 hearings in London on closer union.⁷⁷ Peter planned to ‘plead’ with the parliamentary members ‘for admission into the British legislative councils’.⁷⁸ Peter’s boldness in approaching British Parliamentary members with the request that he be placed on a council that would not have an African member for another nine years is startling and yet, revealing about the growth of his own ambition during his tenure in the United States. With a one-year delay, due to pursuing his master’s degree at Columbia University, Peter did eventually travel to London, but for much longer than he had anticipated in 1935.

During Peter’s year at Columbia University, the Leakeys had raised a concern that due to the way an American education had come to be viewed within the British empire, Peter’s undergraduate and graduate degrees from the United States needed to be supplemented with a British degree or certificate if he was to have any advantage upon his return to Kenya.⁷⁹ During the 1920s, Koinange wa Mbiyu had vouched for Louis Leakey’s proficiency in Kikuyu for the latter’s application to St John’s College at the

⁷⁷ HIA ‘African Chief’s Son Works Way Through Ohio College’.

⁷⁸ HIA *Southern Workman*, Sep. 1935.

⁷⁹ TNA CO/533/467/12, Chief Koinange, ‘Interview for his son P. Koinange’, 1936.

University of Cambridge.⁸⁰ In a return of the favour, Louis Leakey sponsored Peter Mbiyu's 1936 application to St John's College and wrote to the Rhodes Trust asking for funding for Peter's education. Peter's applications to both were successful. In the autumn of 1936, Peter Mbiyu matriculated at St John's College, under the supervision of Mr Guillebaud, with the desire 'to de-Americanise himself'.⁸¹ Peter would complete the year at St John's and then move to London to attend the University of London before returning to Kenya in 1938.

St John's College, Cambridge

Cambridge appears to have suited Peter well. Building on his work at Columbia University, Peter pursued a certificate in teaching. One colonial office note about Peter's time at Cambridge stated that Peter was a 'very good specimen of an educated blackman [...] not at all aggressive, as so many educated Africans are'.⁸² While offensive to modern readers, the comment says much about Peter Mbiyu's relationship with his English professors, classmates, and community. It is also helpful as an insight into whether or not Peter's time in the United States and his boldness in protesting colonial policy manifested themselves in anti-British behaviour and potential signs of leanings towards oppositional or militant politics. Halfway through the year, Guillebaud reported that Peter's time at Cambridge 'has been a complete success'. Peter's lecturers were 'impressed by his

⁸⁰ V. Morell, *Ancestral Passions: the Leakey Family and the Quest for Humankind's Beginnings* (New York, 1995), p. 28.

⁸¹ TNA CO/533/484/19, Maffey to Guillebaud, 21 Jan. 1937, item 2.

⁸² Ibid.

keenness and intelligence'.⁸³ Peter proved himself academically successful in a British academic setting, demonstrating the strength of his education in the United States.

It was during his year at Cambridge that Peter reconnected with Jomo Kenyatta, and through Kenyatta, connected with the African diaspora community in London. Kenyatta, stranded when his KCA partner left him in London in 1933, was a university student in London. In 1936, he visited Peter Mbiyu at Cambridge. Understandably, Peter was concerned about the KCA's treatment of his father during his time away — both in the female circumcision controversy of 1929 and in London in 1931. Kenyatta explained the KCA's harsh treatment of Peter's father during the 1929 female circumcision controversy as a 'misunderstanding' of the 'old man'.⁸⁴ Peter and Kenyatta offered each other a familiarity of background, experience, and history in the face of the cultural, social, and financial challenges of living in England in the 1930s. The most important development of Peter's year at Cambridge — although the teaching certificate would open up employment possibilities in Kenya — was the development of this friendship with Kenyatta. Over the next forty years, Peter would enjoy many prominent positions in colonial and post-colonial Kenya due to his relationship with Kenyatta. At the same time, his relationship with Kenyatta would also raise serious questions in the late 1940s and during the 1950s with the rise of militant African politics and Mau Mau violence.

In early 1937, during Peter's year at St John's College, a series of letters were exchanged concerning Peter between the Colonial Office, Guillebaud, and Kenya's colonial administration. In January 1937, Kenya's colonial government offered Peter a teaching position in Kenya following the completion of his time at St John's College. The Deputy Governor of Kenya's letter outlined that the position would be at the same pay

⁸³ TNA CO/533/484/19, C.W. Guillebaud to Lord Lothian, 1937, item 3.

⁸⁴ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, pp 226-7.

scale as that of a Grade III Asian teacher and would include free medical care.⁸⁵ The fact that teaching pay scales varied dependent on one's race — European, Asian, or African — is indicative of the racial divide that continued to characterise Kenya's colonial society in the late 1930s. The offer of a Grade III Asian salary meant that Peter would receive more than his African peers but less than his European counterparts. Wisely, Peter did not refuse or accept the offer outright. Rather, fuelled by a desire to pursue further study at the University of London, he waited to respond until after he received his acceptance to the University of London's Institute of Education a few months later. Peter's reply indicated he was willing to accept the government's teaching offer on the condition that they would provide financial support for further education at the University of London. Writing on his behalf, Guillebaud told the Colonial Office that Peter saw the problems in Kenya 'as an educationist and not as pro-Black or pro-White'. He is 'very anxious to improve the conditions of his people', wrote Guillebaud in support of Peter's request. In August 1937, the Secretary of State for the Colonies wrote to the colonial government in Kenya lending his support in favour of Peter's request.⁸⁶ The Rhodes Trust offered to pay half of Peter's financial cost, if the colonial government would pay the other half. Kenya's colonial government, reluctantly, agreed.⁸⁷ Peter moved to London in the early summer and, weeks before the academic year was to start, the finances were in place to begin his studies at the University of London — his fifth academic institution in just ten years.

This episode warrants some reflection. The colonial government's offer of a teaching position at exceptional pay, for an African teacher, recognised both Peter's education and the significant role they expected Peter to have upon his return to Kenya. In this moment, Peter's ambitions for a leading political role following his return to Kenya are met by the

⁸⁵ TNA CO/533/484/19, Deputy Governor of Kenya to SoS for the Colonies, 11 Jan. 1937, item 6.

⁸⁶ Ibid., Guillebaud to Tomlinson, 15 Mar. 1937, item 10.

⁸⁷ Ibid., SoS for the Colonies to Governor of Kenya, 11 Aug. 1937, item 32; Ibid., Flood to Guillebaud, 26 Aug. 1937, item 37.

recognition of the colonial administration that such a prominent role was likely, due to Peter's education and connection to his father. Furthermore, Peter's garnering of the support of the Secretary of State for the Colonies and of the Rhodes Trust indicates that Peter was winsome in his work with Europeans, not altogether unlike his father. Peter's ambitions during his time in the United States and the United Kingdom were becoming, perhaps, becoming reality.

The University of London

By the end of June, Peter had moved from the university countryside town of Cambridge, with its winding river and academic air, to the bustling metropolis of London, with its vibrant diaspora community. As he had in New York City, Peter was accepted to stay at an international student house on Russell Square overseen by the Student Movement.⁸⁸ Kenyatta had lived in the house just a few years earlier in 1934.⁸⁹ Peter officially pursued a teaching certificate at the University of London, but in reality, the year was more about developing his friendship with Kenyatta than pursuing further academic learning.

During Peter's year at Cambridge, Kenyatta invited Peter to attend Professor Malinowski's weekly seminars at the University of London, where Kenyatta presented a paper on female circumcision in Kenya. The paper formed the basis for Kenyatta's 1938 anthropological, polemical, and political work on the Kikuyu, entitled *Facing Mount Kenya*. If Peter's account is to be believed, he and Kenyatta worked together in completing and

⁸⁸ Ibid., E.W. Flood to Crown Agents for the Colonies, 28 June 1937, item 18; Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, pp 212-3.

⁸⁹ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 212.

submitting *Facing Mount Kenya* for publication. They wanted the book to carry an air of legitimacy and so they decided on the name ‘Jomo’, instead of Kenyatta’s official name of Johnstone Kamau, because they believed Jomo sounded more African. They dressed Kenyatta up in the clothing of a Kikuyu elder for the book’s cover (see Image 2.5).⁹⁰ Together, they created a facade of authority — the image of a Kikuyu elder, providing the sense of legitimacy the book needed in London. It was marketing and politics in the same act.



Image 2.5: Jomo Kenyatta and Peter Mbiyu worked to give Kenyatta the image of a Kikuyu chief.

While in London for a year, Peter’s network of relationships with the African diaspora community and groups interested in developments in Africa grew significantly. In 1938, Peter hosted Fred Neugebaum, from the NAACP’s Council of African Affairs,

⁹⁰ Koinange, ‘Jomo: Colleague’, p. 21. While Kyle also tells this story, he references Koinange’s own telling (K. Kyle, *The Politics of the Independence of Kenya* (New York, 1999), pp 35-36). No additional support to affirm or deny Peter Mbiyu’s account of these events is known of at this time.

and Peter Blackman, a member of the Communist Party and Britain's Negro Welfare Association, for a meeting one evening.⁹¹ At the time, MI5 classified Blackman as 'an anti-imperialist agitator'.⁹² It was contact with Blackman, Kenyatta, and other leading 'agitators' that increasingly placed Peter under the suspicion of the security services. Had Peter's time abroad, and especially his recent collaborations with Kenyatta, turned him from educator to political agitator? The possibility that Peter was also involved with Communist elements in London was of great concern to the Security Branch and kept Peter on their watch list throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Peter met Prince Nyabongo, of Toro, Uganda, a Yale and Oxford graduate, while in London. When the Prince founded a London chapter of the 'Alpha Phi Alpha's', an American-style fraternity for 'colored students and graduates of Oxford, Cambridge, and London universities' living in London, Peter was one of the association's first members.⁹³ Through Kenyatta, Peter met other prominent figures, including George Padmore, Kingsley Martin, a reporter for the *New Statesman*, and Arthur Creech-Jones, future Labour Secretary of State for the Colonies.⁹⁴

Time spent with Kenyatta and the diaspora community in London meant time not spent on Peter's studies at the University of London. The result was poor academic performance to a degree unprecedented in Peter's ten years abroad. Within two months of the start of term, the Colonial Office received 'a series of adverse reports on [Peter's] teaching practice' with the tutors concerned that Koinange would be 'very unlikely [...] to pass his examination'.⁹⁵ These were the first disparaging remarks of Peter's academic performance in the decade he had been abroad. It is unlikely that the University of London was proving too academically daunting for Peter. He was a graduate of both

⁹¹ TNA KV/2/2535, 'Telephone check on Holburn 8915', 2 July 1938, item 2a; H. Adi and M. Sherwood, *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora Since 1787* (London, 2003), p. 135.

⁹² TNA KV/2/2535, 'Telephone check on Holburn 8915', item 2a.

⁹³ 'Alpha Phi Alphas Set Chapter in London', *The Pittsburgh Courier* (1 Oct. 1938), p. 6.

⁹⁴ Koinange, 'Jomo: Colleague', p. 22.

⁹⁵ TNA CO/533/484/19, W. Mumford to Major Vicher, 24 Nov. 1937, item 54.

Columbia University and the University of Cambridge, receiving recent praise for his academic performance at the latter institution. His new extracurricular activities in London, and the relationships that came with them, were proving to be a higher priority for Peter than his academic work. Peter failed to complete his academic course at the University of London.

When, in the late 1940s, Peter applied to undertake doctoral work at the London School of Economics, Louis Leakey pointed back to this earlier period in London. Leakey wrote, 'I have always attributed the failure to get his diploma in Education to the fact that while he was studying in London for it he was too much distracted by his interest in and activities with a group of Africans which included Jomo Kenyatta'.⁹⁶ Given Peter's recent academic successes and the time he was spending with Kenyatta, Leakey's assessment was astute.

The culmination of Peter's two years in England was significant. On the one hand, he had obtained a certificate from St John's College, proving his academic ability within the British context, but he subsequently failed at the University of London, an education paid for, in part, by Kenya's colonial administration. On the other hand, his failure at the University of London was the direct result of a growing connection to other African leaders, including groups opposed to British imperialism. Peter's relationship with Kenyatta was the most significant and longest lasting legacy of this period. Peter's failure to complete his studies at the University of London, and his relationships with African leaders perceived as 'agitators' by many in the British government, put Peter in a very awkward position when he returned to Kenya in late 1938.

⁹⁶ KNA N/M/1/790, Curator to A. Richards, 26 June 1947, f. 36; KNA N/M/1/790, A. Richards to L.B. Leakey, 20 June 1947, f. 38.

Returning to Kenya

Peter Mbiyu returned to Kenya more educated than his European counterparts, but, as the Kenya's colonial administrators had demonstrated in their offer of a Grade III Asian salary, he returned to a social context which, despite his advanced education, put him at a disadvantage to his European counterparts. More educated than his African peers; his experiences in the United States during the Depression and Harlem Renaissance exposed him to experiences and ideas unknown to Kenya's African communities. Having experienced the racial tensions of the United States, seen the activities of the NAACP, and built relationships with the African diaspora in London, Peter Mbiyu's understanding of Pan-Africanism, racial tensions, and his perspective on colonialism were shaped in the West, rather than in the daily challenges and experiences of colonial Kenya.

Furthermore, Peter's ambitious vision of the prominent role he would have following his return to Kenya had motivated his educational pursuits at five institutions, earning four academic degrees. His confidence had grown and, as he told American newspapers in the early 1930s, he aspired to one day lead '3,000,000' of his fellow Africans. This driving ambition, paired with his exposure to Pan-Africanism and anti-colonial sentiment in the United States and the United Kingdom, made many nervous about Peter's return to Kenya — just as Peter's connections in London had placed him on MI5's watch list.

Peter returned to Kenya on the eve of the Second World War. Questions of loyalty to the British empire and possible associations with Communist or Fascist elements were cause for concern and at times led to official monitoring of individuals by security services. As the 1930s drew to a close, public opposition to the colonial government, Britain, or the British empire increasingly put one at odds with the very same governing structures. Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu found themselves in an increasingly difficult social

and political context with growing African discontent towards British rule and British rule increasingly concerned with loyalty to the empire. On the heels of the disappointing results of the Kenya Land Commission for Koinange wa Mbiyu and coming from exposure to the African diaspora in London, both Koinange men were, it appeared, poised to enter militant and oppositional politics and join with the KCA.

CHAPTER THREE

The Forgotten Years: The Koinanges' Continued Colonial Engagement (1938-1946/9)¹

Why did you bring shame to the Agikuyu and enslave them in the worst kind of slavery? Isn't the bloodshed and suffering that you have caused to so many Agikuyu more than enough to compensate for the insults hurled at you and your father during the *Mutbirigu*?²

Following his return to Kenya in 1938, Peter Mbiyu went about betraying the Kikuyu by collaborating with the colonial government. Or so claimed a 1960s open letter seeking to undermine Peter's influence as the 'gatekeeper' of then President Jomo Kenyatta. According to the letter, Peter's betrayal of the Kikuyu was a direct response to the public criticism brought against his father and family during the controversies of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Henry Muoria, editor of the vernacular Kikuyu publication *Mumenyereri wa Maundu Mega am Ugikuyu* ('Guardian of Kikuyu Culture and Traditions') of the 1940s, wrote the letter attacking Peter during the period of heightened inter-Kikuyu discord of the 1960s. What does this letter have to do with understanding the lives of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu over twenty years earlier?

Muoria's letter pointed to the events of the late 1930s and the 1940s for his evidence that Peter sought the 'annihilation of [his] own Agikuyu' people.³ Muoria's perspective on the Koinanges' actions of the late 1930s and 1940s stands in direct contrast to the narrative

¹ The dual dates represent the end of Peter Mbiyu's engagement with the colonial administration (1946) and the end of Koinange wa Mbiyu's engagement with the administration (1949).

² KNA MSS/74/2, 'An Open Letter from Henry Muoria', date unknown, p. 1.

³ Ibid., p. 5.

of Koinange engagement with Kikuyu militancy found in current scholarship. This stark contrast highlights the significance of the 1938-1949 period in both popular and scholarly discourse.

During the long decade from 1938 to 1949, the Koinanges held prominent positions with the colonial government. Koinange wa Mbiyu was appointed Senior Chief in 1938, a position established specifically for him in Central Province, and he remained Senior Chief until his retirement in 1949.⁴ In 1940, the governor, following the advice of colonial officials, missionaries, and European settlers, appointed Peter to his advisory committee on local native councils.⁵ Peter was continuously appointed to the post from 1940-1946.⁶ Academic narratives and popular memory have largely ignored these elements of the Koinanges' stories.

Because narratives of rising militancy have dominated academic work on the war and post-war era, assessments of the Koinanges' actions during this period have focused on possible involvement with nationalistic or militant political developments. By starting with the Koinanges' intentional engagement with the colonial administration in the late 1930s, rather than working backwards from the militancy of the late 1940s and incorporating the Koinanges' ongoing engagement with the colonial government into this discussion, this chapter argues that the current understanding that the Koinanges turned towards more militant activity following the results of the Kenya Land Commission (KLC) in 1934 and Peter's return to Kenya in 1938 is fundamentally flawed.

⁴ M. Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu: Mediator and Patriot', in B.E. Kipkorir (ed.), *Biographical Essays on Imperialism and Collaboration in Colonial Kenya* (Nairobi, 1980), p. 83; KNA JZ/7/17, Particular Incidents, i, item 4b, p. 3.

⁵ M. Koinange, *The People of Kenya Speak for the Themselves* (Detroit, 1955), p. 18.

⁶ *The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 17 May 1946), Government Notice no. 409.

As this chapter will demonstrate, Koinange and Peter intentionally engaged with the colonial administration as a reflection of a continued commitment to working within the governing system, rather than against or outside of it. This revision is critical for rightly understanding the Koinanges' actions in the late 1940s and 1950s. Building upon the historical narrative developed thus far, this chapter first examines the Koinanges' engagement with the colonial government from 1938 to 1944. It then examines shifts in colonial leadership and the affect these had on the Koinanges' political possibilities from 1944-1949. This chapter begins an analysis, further built upon in the chapters to follow, of the real shift the Koinanges made in the 1940s; a shift away from engagement with the colonial government in Kenya towards actively seeking change to colonial policy through petitions and protests via political activism in Central Kenya and London.

The Wartime Context

The transformative impact of the 1940s on life in Kenya was second only in impact to the period of land legislation and European settlement from 1910-1920 that had so shaped the colony's politics and community boundaries. From the late 1930s onward, the colonial government implemented a series of laws and regulations related to African education, economic activity, and political activism, actions that constricted opportunities for African political expression and engagement. Wartime concerns led to increased government regulations which necessitated greater levels of intrusion into a wide range of daily activities including wages, work opportunities, cattle, land, farming, and education. Some administrative officials began to expect unquestioned support for colonial policies. Wartime concerns of Italian- or German-inspired seditious activity further increased the expectations concerning loyalty and led to a shuttering of political dissent.

Wartime and post-wartime changes increased the economic burdens placed upon Kenya's African population.⁷ Throughout the 1940s, the *kipande* system, requiring African adult males to wear a record of their past wages around their neck, further restricted the tightening of employment opportunities and wages for African labourers.⁸ Low wages for Africans were an ever-present reality, including for government employees. In the 1930s, District Officers and government chiefs frequently communicated the need for pay increases for chiefs, noting that the average wages for houseboys in Nairobi paid better than a chief's salary.⁹ The low wages paid to chiefs were especially problematic during the war period, as chiefs were the administration's main instruments of enforcement for unpopular policies. The 1940 Defence (Native Personnel) Regulations bill enabled provincial administrators to conscript wartime labour to meet manpower quotas to provide for 'military and essential services'.¹⁰ African chiefs were responsible for recruiting labour for their local administrators. With the able-bodied young men shipped overseas or conscripted into government labour, the demand for wartime food and resource production fell on the old, the young, the women, and the children still at home. Farming priorities, skewed by the needs of the war, led to food shortages that, along with low wages and increased demands for labour, placed increased burdens on the African communities.¹¹ For those who remained in Kenya, the colony's colour bar was yet another barrier to

⁷ J. Lonsdale, 'East Africa', in J.M. Brown, W. Roger Louis and A. Low (eds), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1999), iv, p. 540.

⁸ T. Zeleza, 'The Establishment of Colonial Rule, 1905-1920', in W.R. Ochieng' (ed.), *A Modern History of Kenya 1895-1980* (Nairobi, 1989), p. 52.

⁹ KNA DC/KBU/11/2, K. Mbiyu and K. James to CNC, 22 July 1933, item 39; Ibid., DC to PC, 24 July 1933, item 40; KNA VQ/5/57, Kyambu LNC Meeting Report, 28 Mar. 1935, item 3; KNA VQ/5/59, Kiambu LNC Meeting Report, 25-28 Feb. 1942, item 13.

¹⁰ T. Zeleza, 'Kenya and the Second World War, 1939-1950', in W.R. Ochieng' (ed.), *A Modern History of Kenya 1895-1980* (Nairobi, 1989), p. 147.

¹¹ Zeleza, 'Kenya and the Second World War', p. 150.

employment.¹² These wartime policy and culture changes resulted in a growing discontent and frustration among many in the African community.

Beyond their impacts on food and employment, the colonial government implemented new policies of proscription and prescription concerning African political activity.¹³ The 1939 Defence Regulations Act allowed for the proscription of suspect political associations and gatherings.¹⁴ The colonial government proscribed the KCA in 1940 due to rumours they were in contact with the Italians in Ethiopia and the Germans in Tanganyika.¹⁵ Police and security forces arrested the association's leaders and all former members were required to report their whereabouts throughout the war.¹⁶ Similar groups among the Kamba and Taita were similarly proscribed during this period.¹⁷ Political associations not proscribed, like Thuku's Kikuyu Provincial Association (KPA), worked to portray themselves as 'more co-operative' and loyal to the colonial government, publicly voicing their support for the war effort and its wartime initiatives (e.g. soil conservation, terracing, etc.).¹⁸ Those not willing to kowtow to these administrative expectations were driven underground, thus emptying the public square of opportunities to speak out against government initiatives. Out of necessity, these conversations of opposition moved into the shadows, further increasing the appearance of militancy. In 1945, the DC of Kiambu commented on the extra suspicion placed on African groups and its impact on radicalisation:

¹² E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo, 'The Formative Years 1945-55', in B.A. Ogot and W.R. Ochieng' (eds), *The Decolonization and Independence of Kenya: 1940-1995* (Nairobi, 1995), p. 32.

¹³ B. Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: the Dialectic of Domination* (London, 1990), p. 245.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ KNA DC/KBU/10/3, Intelligence Report, 5 Apr. 1940, item 14; TNA CMD/1030, F.D. Corfield, 'Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau', May 1960, p. 48; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 244; J. Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (New York, 1979), p. 242.

¹⁶ KNA VQ/16/18, Monthly Intelligence Reports, June 1945; C. Rosberg, Jr. and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya* (New York, 1966), p. 186.

¹⁷ Rosberg and Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau'*, pp 185-7.

¹⁸ G. Bennett, *Kenya: a Political History - The Colonial Period* (London, 1963), p. 110.

Why an African political association should always be regarded with suspicion I cannot imagine. [...] As far as I am aware no European or Asiatic Association has ever been put in the same position [of having to register for meetings], and to treat African associations in this way is in my opinion a most dangerous practice. It merely means that they are driven underground.¹⁹

The government repression of African political activity drove dissent into hiding during the 1940s, with disastrous results by the 1950s. The ways in which colonial administrators changed their engagement with local native councils (LNC) provided further indication of how suspicion and tightened expectations were reshaping colonial rule.

The colonial government established LNCs to provide an acceptable avenue for the airing of disagreements with official policy and to assuage African demand for involvement in the administration of the colony. Following the outbreak of the Second World War, the Kiambu LNC was increasingly expected to support government policies, to report complaints to colonial officials, to stop supporting African grievances, and to refrain from airing their own grievances.²⁰ During the 1940s, the Kiambu LNC experienced less freedom to pursue initiatives and to undertake their own ideas than they had experienced in the previous decade or more.²¹ The District Commissioner repeatedly denied requests by the council members to meet with the chief native commissioner (CNC) or the governor.²² Colonial officials expected the LNC to serve as a conduit for disseminating information and enforcing government policy, but no longer would it serve as a political outlet or avenue of opportunity for local governance. As members of the LNC, colonial chiefs experienced similar constrictions on their actions and changing boundaries of permissible activity during the war era.

¹⁹ KNA VQ/16/77, 1945 Annual Report, pp 1-2.

²⁰ Ibid., 1944 Annual Report, p. 1.

²¹ KNA VQ/5/59, Kiambu LNC Meeting Report, 16 Aug. 1939, item 5; Ibid., Kiambu LNC Meeting Report, 14 Dec. 1939, item 6.

²² Ibid., Kiambu LNC Meeting Report, 16 Aug. 1939, item 5; Ibid., Kiambu LNC Meeting Report, 14 Dec. 1939, item 6.

In the decade prior, ineffectiveness and laziness were the character traits that could cost a headman or chief their position.²³ As chapter one demonstrated, during the first three decades of Kenya's colonial rule, civil servants had room to voice their dissent, as long as they continued to fulfil their duties. This tolerance for disagreement disappeared as a result of the war. The demonstrative change in official assessments of Koinange wa Mbiyu versus Waruhiu wa Kung'u, provides a specific example of this broader trend.

The Changing Assessment of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Waruhiu wa Kung'u

Koinange and Waruhiu had similar histories. Both came into colonial politics through the 1919 *kiama* compromise, were heavily involved in the Kikuyu Association (KA), and served as long-standing members on the Kiambu local native council.²⁴ During the 1920s and the 1930s, they were the recipients of frequent praise from local colonial officials for their work as chiefs. A 1929 report described Waruhiu as 'an extremely useful headman. Knows his duties and responsibilities and carries them out'.²⁵ A report nearly a decade later described him as 'intelligent, progressive and loyal'.²⁶ These two comments, a decade apart, highlight the shift in emphasis beginning in the late 1930s from praise for the completion of duties to praise for assessed loyalty. Koinange received nearly identical praise during this same period.²⁷ In 1937, the District Commissioner described Koinange as 'the most remarkable African I have worked with in over 20 years in Africa'.²⁸ While

²³ KNA DC/KBU/11/2, DC to PC, 30 Mar. 1931, item 35.

²⁴ M.S. Clough, *Fighting Two Sides: Kenyan Chiefs and Politicians, 1918-1940* (Colorado, 1990), pp 48-9.

²⁵ KNA DC/KBU/11/1, 'Headman - Waruhiu wa Kung'u', 1922-1952, f. 31-2. Subsequent entries indicate continued praise of Waruhiu's performance.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 31.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 'Headman - Koinange wa Mbiyu', 1922-1949, ff 52-4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 53.

Koinange and Waruhiu's stories are comparable, their stories highlight that even similarly praised chiefs were not treated the same.

Koinange's wages set him apart from Waruhiu during the 1930s. Koinange received wages twice that of Waruhiu, or any other Kiambu chief, for much of this period.²⁹ While Waruhiu looked after his own district well enough, Koinange's exceptionalism lay in his value as an advisor to the various communities (e.g. administrators, settlers, missionaries, African residents, etc.) across the district, leading to his, and not Waruhiu's, appointment as Senior Chief in 1938.³⁰ Up until the war, Koinange was senior to Waruhiu in every way. Near the end of the 1930s, the criteria for assessing chiefs began to change. As a result, Koinange's prominent status also began to undergo a change.

In 1939, the DC criticised Koinange for straddling the fence between the colonial government and the African community.³¹ However, two years later the DC requested the extraordinary measure of increasing Koinange's salary to a Grade 1 level, well above the pay received by any other chief.³² In addition, that same year, Koinange was allowed to appoint a sub-headman of his own choosing to care for his local duties while Koinange engaged with provincial matters.³³ Both are indications that in 1939, Koinange retained his elite status. In 1942, the concerns from 1939 arose once again. A report that year described Koinange as an 'opportunist and self seeker'.³⁴ In 1949, colonial officials forced

²⁹ KNA DC/KBU/11/2, 'List of Official Headmen of Kiambu District Showing Their Names, Salaries and Population of Each of Their Location', 8 Oct. 1935, item 68; Ibid., 'Statement of Salaries of Chiefs and Headmen, Kiambu District', c. 1937, item 92; Ibid., DC to PC, 'Pay and Position of Chiefs', 29 Mar. 1938, item 107; Ibid., DC to PC, 'Expenditure Estimates, 1939 - Central Province', 24 Apr. 1939, item 128.

³⁰ Ibid., DC to PC, 'Senior Chief Koinange', 26 Sep. 1935, item 67.

³¹ KNA DC/KBU/11/1, 'Headman - Koinange wa Mbiyu', 1922-1949, f. 52.

³² KNA DC/KBU/11/2, DC to PC, 'The Salaries of Chief and Headmen', 3 Mar. 1939, item 123; Ibid., DC to PC, 'Expenditure Estimates, 1939 - Central Province', 24 Apr. 1939, item 128.

³³ Ibid., DC to PC, 9 May 1939, item 131.

³⁴ KNA DC/KBU/11/1, 'Headman - Koinange wa Mbiyu', 1922-1949, f. 53.

Koinange into retirement.³⁵ While Koinange's standing declined in the later 1940s, Waruhiu's esteem before the colonial government increased.

Waruhiu, who refrained from publicly voicing disagreement with official policies, was described as 'the best man in the district' in 1940 and 'the best chief in the district and one of the best in the colony' by 1944.³⁶ Official praise for Waruhiu's performance grew amidst claims of corruption and abuse of power from the African communities Waruhiu oversaw.³⁷ By the late 1940s, if a chief showed unquestioning loyalty to official policy, colonial officials overlooked such abuses of position. In the wake of Koinange's forced retirement in early 1949, it was Waruhiu who next held the most senior position for an African chief – appointed Senior Chief in 1951. That same year Waruhiu was made a Member of the British Empire (MBE) in the New Years Honour roll.³⁸

The image that emerges of colonial policy during the 1938 to 1949 period is one of increased authoritarianism, which in turn fed the growth of urban and rural discontent that characterised the latter half of the 1940s. With shifts in what was expected and what was allowed, opponents of colonial policy were forced to look for other avenues for their protest and petitions.

Engaging with a Changing Colonial Administration

In the midst of these changes, Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu remained in their work with the colonial government. Official reports from the years immediately

³⁵ KNA JZ/7/17, 'Particular Incidents', Vol II, item 4b, pp 1-2.

³⁶ KNA DC/KBU/11/1, 'Headman - Waruhiu wa Kung'u', 1922-1952, ff 31-2.

³⁷ KNA ARC(MAA)/6/86, CNC to AG, 30 July 1948, item 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 32.

following the KLC show that the colonial administration held Koinange in high esteem for years to come. The esteem with which Koinange was held by the colonial administration in the 1930s had led to his participation in the 1931 Joint Select Committee in London and in the 1932 meetings with the KLC commission members. This esteem continued after the events surrounding the. In 1935, the local administrators deemed Koinange's work assisting 'the Administration, the Medical Department, the District Officer, Settled Area, the Superintendent of Police, Settlers, Native Tribunals and sundry natives from all over the Reserve' as 'invaluable'.³⁹ In recognition of Koinange's contribution to the 'Government and the Reserve as a whole', the DC recommended that Koinange be released from his responsibilities as a location chief and that he be appointed to a new post as 'Chief without Location', as this would free him to focus on these broader engagements.⁴⁰ In 1937, the DC's annual report stated that:

Koinange is without a doubt the outstanding personality in the Kiambu District. His influence is paramount [...] his opinion is always worth listening to. I cannot stress too strongly the great help he has been to me [...as...] a sober and moderating influence over the Kikuyu in times of potential trouble and *generally backing in any scheme which he is satisfied is for the good of his tribe*. Koinange is in my opinion the most remarkable African I have worked with in over 20 years in the Administration. A sub headman attends to Koinange's location work so as *to free him for more important matters*.⁴¹

This praise was not predicated upon Koinange's unreserved support for government policies and stands in contrast to the emphasis on loyalty in Waruhiu's 1937 evaluation discussed earlier. The DC accepted that Koinange's support of government initiatives was contingent upon Koinange believing the actions were 'for the good of his tribe'. Commensurate with their praise of Koinange, colonial administrators petitioned for Koinange to receive unparalleled high wages.

³⁹ KNA DC/KBU/11/2, DC to PC, 'Senior Chief Koinange' 26 Sep. 1935, item 67.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ KNA DC/KBU/11/1, 'Headman - Koinange wa Mbiyu', 1922-1949, f. 53.

NAME	SALARY
Koinange wa Mbiyu	125/-
Waruhiu wa Kung'u	80/-
Wandie wa Karuga	49/-
Gathingo wa Karuru	45/-
Remungi wa Gachema	60/-
Kahehu wa Mimi	50/-
Mugugu wa Waweru	60/-
Makimei wa Kuria	42/-
Josiah Njonjo	80/-
Philip Karanja	75/-
Mukoma wa Njiriri	56/50
Kihiko wa Ngware	60/-
Daudi wa Kinyanjui	50/-
Muhoho wa Gatheca	70/-
Kibathi wa Gitangu	60/-
Gachango wa Kinene	60/-
Gakuo wa Runana	40/-
Gachukia wa Chege	60/-
Waruiru wa Mukui	60/-

Table 3.1: Salary of Official Headmen in Kiambu District in 1935.⁴²

Throughout the 1930s, Koinange's wages were higher than most of his peers. In 1935, Koinange's salary of 125/- was twice that of the majority of the other chiefs and a full fifty percent more than that of Waruhiu wa Kung'u's salary (see Table 3.1).⁴³ In 1937, the District Commissioner requested wage increases for his chiefs for the second year in a row. Included in his request was a petition to double Koinange's already exceptionally

⁴² KNA DC/KBU/11/2, DC, 'List of Official Headmen of Kiambu District', 8 Oct. 1935, item 68.

⁴³ Ibid., DC, 'List of Official Headmen of Kiambu District showing their names, Salaries and Population of each of their Location', 8 Oct. 1935, item 68.

high salary.⁴⁴ For the DC in 1937, the ‘important work’ Koinange was doing was of tremendous value. In 1938 and in 1939, the DC requested an exception be made so that Koinange could be paid at a 1st grade salary level.⁴⁵ In addition to his wages as a chief, Koinange was the highest paid member of the Native Tribunal, at twice the salary of Waruhiu wa Kung’u by 1939 (see Table 3.2).⁴⁶ By the end of the 1930s, a full five years after the KLC report, Koinange was the most valuable chief in Central Kenya for the colonial administration. As a result, Koinange was also the recipient of a number of awards during this period recognising his valuable role in the government.

NAME	SALARY
Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu	140/-
Chief Waruhiu Kung’u	70/-
Chief Josiah Njonjo	70/-
Chief Muhuhu wa Gatheca	70/-

Table 3.2: List of Chiefs Native Tribunal Salaries in 1939.⁴⁷

As was the case with his wages, Koinange received unique acclaim. In 1935, he was awarded the King’s Medal for Native Chiefs in honour of his district-wide work, as well as for his work in 1931 and 1932.⁴⁸ In 1937, he received the Coronation Medal with acclaim from both ‘Councillors and Spectators’ alike.⁴⁹ It was in 1938, as mentioned previously, that he was made Senior Chief of the Kiambu District, the culmination of the 1935 request

⁴⁴ Ibid., ‘Statement of Salaries of Chiefs and Headmen. Kiambu District’, c. 1937, item 92.

⁴⁵ Ibid., DC to PC, ‘Pay and Position of Chiefs - Report of the Sub-Committee of Provincial Commissioners’, 29 Mar. 1938, item 107; Ibid., DC to PC, ‘Expenditure Estimates, 1939 - Central Province’, 24 Apr. 1939, item 128.

⁴⁶ Ibid., DC to PC, ‘List of Chief and Headmen Drawing Salaries from Native Tribunal’, 21 Mar. 1939, item 125.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ ‘Honours and Awards’, *The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 14 May 1935), Government Notice no. 257.

⁴⁹ KNA VQ/5/57, ‘Kyambu LNC Meeting Report’, 24-25 Aug. 1937, item 11.

to appoint him 'Chief Without Location'.⁵⁰ From archival records, this appointment appears to be the first of its kind in Kiambu, analogous only to the one-time title of Paramount Chief held by Kinyanjui during the 1920s.⁵¹ In 1939, Leakey praised Koinange as 'the leading chief of Kikuyu'.⁵² From comments made in official documents to exceptional pay to official awards and appointments, by the end of the 1930s Koinange was, without question, the most prominent and well-respected African chief in Central Kenya in the eyes of the colonial administration.

This high praise from the administration is incongruous with the idea that Koinange had given up on the colonial administration after the disappointing KLC report. Such conclusions necessitate an oblivious administration and a cunning, disingenuous Koinange. The reality is that Koinange's engagement with the colonial administration increased in the years after 1934, rather than decreased. Peter Mbiyu's return to Kenya in 1938, after eleven years abroad, took place within this context of his father's rise and deeper engagement with the colonial administration.

The Governor's Standing Committee and the Legislative Council

In light of Koinange wa Mbiyu's stature before the colonial administration, when Peter returned in 1938, colonial officials, European settlers, and African communities,

⁵⁰ Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu', p. 83; P. Nowrojee, 'The Paradox That Was Chief Koinange', *The Star* (Nairobi, 13 Jan. 2010); B.A. Ogot, *Historical Dictionary of Kenya* (Nairobi, 1981), p. 111. There are two mentions of Koinange wa Mbiyu referred to as Senior Chief prior to 1938 (KNA VQ/5/57, 'Kyambu LNC Meeting Report', 14-16 Aug. 1934, item 1; KNA DC/KBU/11/2, DC to PC, 'Petition re Chiefs and Headmen', 5 Sep. 1930, item 19). Whether these earlier mentions were an unofficial recognition of his prominence or indication of a later edit is unclear. Scholarly consensus dates Koinange wa Mbiyu's promotion to 1938.

⁵¹ It was a title only used of one other chief in the Kiambu District: Waruhiu wa Kung'u who held the title from February 1951 until his assassination in October 1952. (KNA DC/KBU/11/1, 'Headman - Waruhiu wa Kung'u', 1922-1952, f. 32.)

⁵² TNA CO/533/484/19, Brooke-Popham to Maffey, 21 Jan. 1937, item 1.

alike, anticipated a prominent and promising role for the now highly educated Peter. In anticipation of Peter's return to Kenya, the Kiambu DC proposed in 1935 the appointment of Peter as an assistant headman to aid his ageing father.⁵³ Two years later, the government offered Peter the teaching post discussed at the end of the previous chapter.⁵⁴ In 1939, the colonial government recommended that the Boy Scouts of Kenya consider appointing Peter as the organisation's first African representative to their governing committee.⁵⁵ And in 1940, Peter became a member of the Kiambu LNC, alongside his father.⁵⁶ The following year, the Governor of Kenya appointed Peter to the governor's standing advisory committee on local native councils.⁵⁷ The purpose of the committee was to advise the governor concerning the activities, initiatives, and proposals put forward by the local native councils throughout the colony.⁵⁸ Within two years of his return, Peter was in a post that transcended the local politics of Kiambu, allowing him to build broad connections across the colony. In this way, he mirrored and expanded on his father's own colony-wide travel and work on behalf of the colonial government.

While Peter Mbiyu's appointment to the governor's committee has gone unmentioned by scholars, it is of considerable significance.⁵⁹ As with his father, Peter was

⁵³ KNA DC/KBU/11/1, 'Headman - Koinange wa Mbiyu', 1922-1949, f. 52.

⁵⁴ TNA CO/533/484/19, Governor to SoS for the Colonies, 11 Jan. 1937, item 6.

⁵⁵ T. Parsons, *Race, Resistance and the Boy Scout Movement in British Colonial Africa* (Ohio, 2009), p. 138.

⁵⁶ KNA VQ/5/59, 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 5-6 Sep. 1940, item 8.

⁵⁷ *The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 7 Nov. 1944), Government Notice no. 900; *The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 20 Nov. 1945), Government Notice no. 970; *The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 7 May 1946), Government Notice no. 409; Koinange, *The People of Kenya*, p. 18. *The Official Gazette* fails to indicate who was appointed to the Committee in 1942-1943. Spencer indicates that the Governor's Standing Advisory Committee on Local Native Councils did not begin until 1942 (J. Spencer, *The Kenya African Union* (London, 1985), p. 121). However, Peter Mbiyu wrote that he began serving in 1940, which coincides with his abrupt departure from the Kiambu LNC following his appointment to the local council (Koinange, *The People of Kenya*, p. 18). I have gone with the 1940 date, given that it is the most likely explanation for Peter Mbiyu's abrupt departure from the LNC, it explains his short tenure on the Kiambu LNC, and there is no indication of his involvement elsewhere from 1940-1942.

⁵⁸ Spencer, *The Kenya African Union*, pp 121-2.

⁵⁹ The following three notable biographical overviews of Peter Mbiyu Koinange all fail to mention his participation in the Governor's Advisory Council: D.W. Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau 1945-1955* (London, 1988), p. 273; 'Mbiyu Koinange', *Who's Who in East Africa 1965-1966* (Nairobi, 1966), p. 63; Ogot, *Historical Dictionary of Kenya*, p. 110.

widely trusted and respected by the colonial regime in the decade following his return. A 1938 article written by European missionaries in Kenya stated, 'Messrs. Mathu and Koinange [...] are keen Christians, who have a great future ahead of them in the uplift of their people'.⁶⁰ The Director of Education wrote of his esteem for Peter in a 1939 report: 'I, personally, consider that Mr Koinange is activated by good motives and there is no reason to mistrust his intentions' regarding his involvement at KATC (the focus of the next chapter).⁶¹ During this period, settlers encouraged the colonial government to appoint Peter to a post within the colonial government.⁶² His appointment to the governor's committee was a part of a wider story of European and government trust of Peter. When, in 1944, a position for the first African member of the Legislative Council (LegCo) was created, the fact that Peter was one of two persons considered for the post is further indication of Peter's political and social standing.

In 1944, Governor Moore dissolved the colony's Legislative Council, previously appointed in 1938, and reconstituted it with a seat allocated for an African member. This was a momentous change, replacing the long-standing European missionary who had represented the African community's interests. Governor Moore invited nominations and input from all 26 LNCs concerning the future candidate.⁶³ While the appointment of this first African member did not involve direct elections, the governor's invitation was a welcome development towards wider African participation beyond the local district.⁶⁴ The two individuals considered for the post were Oxford graduate Eliud Mathu and the US-educated, Cambridge graduate Peter Mbiyu. This Oxbridge match between two highly

⁶⁰ As cited in Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 426, footnote 24.

⁶¹ KNA DC/KBU/10/3, 'Re: Outschools in Native Reserves - Githunguri', 10 Mar. 1939, item 39, p. 3.

⁶² 'Kapenguria', *Manchester Guardian* (9 Apr. 1953), p. 4.

⁶³ Bennett, *Kenya*, pp 97-8.

⁶⁴ Zeleza, 'Kenya and the Second World War', p. 155. TNA CO/533/487/7, Senior Chief Koinange to SoS for the Colonies, 9 Nov. 1938, ff 10-13; TNA CO/533/544/2, 'Memo from The Luo Union, Kisumu', 24 July 1946, item 1; Ibid., 'South Nyeri Local Native Council', item 3 are reflective of the petitions from across the colony for greater African representation within the government.

educated Africans was itself a sign of the changing times, the new opportunities afforded within the empire, and the rise of a new generation of leadership.

When the opportunity for an African member was announced, Koinange and Peter were keen for Peter to be the governor's choice. Koinange had petitioned for such a change for well over a decade. The *Daily Mirror* reported that Koinange called for the addition of an African member to the LegCo during his visit to London in 1931.⁶⁵ During 1944, the father and son travelled throughout the colony together, campaigning for the support of the various local native councils to whom Moore had extended his invitation for input.⁶⁶ While campaigning, Peter helped his father garner signatures for a petition against continuing colonial land policies.⁶⁷ Koinange and Peter received wide support, especially from the districts in the Central Province among whom Koinange was well known.⁶⁸ In time, in money, and in effort, the campaign for Peter's appointment was a joint effort between father and son. Irrespective of the money and effort invested and his qualifications, it was Mathu, not Peter, that Moore appointed in 1944.

Mathu, the son of a witch doctor, had risen during the 1930s due to, much like Peter, his educational accomplishments but also to his work with the colonial government.⁶⁹ Following his attendance at Alliance High School, Mathu went on to attend Fort Hare University in South Africa and then on to England where he attended Exeter University and the University of Oxford.⁷⁰ Upon his return to Kenya, he served on the Kiambu LNC and was heavily involved in educational developments during the 1930s.⁷¹ Come 1944, Mathu was widely known throughout Central Kenya. That both candidates were from

⁶⁵ 'Chief's Parables: Kenya Ruler's Speech in Peers' Robing Room', *The Daily Mirror* (29 Apr. 1931), p. 6.

⁶⁶ Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 110.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ G. Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below* (Oxford, 1997), p. 196.

⁶⁹ D.W. Throup, 'Kenyatta and the Political Origins of Mau Mau, 1944-1952', unpublished manuscript, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Throup, *Economic and Social Origins*, p. 276.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Kenya's Central Province was a vivid reminder of how closely connected the province was to colonial rule and to the administrative and trade centre of Nairobi.

Eliud Mathu held a similar educational pedigree to Peter, but he did not exist underneath the shadow of an outspoken, politically prominent father during a period of changing expectations regarding loyalty. David Throup notes that Mathu's political rise owed everything to the colonial government.⁷² Peter's political position existed outside the government's endorsement. This was not the case for Mathu. In addition, Peter lacked Mathu's refinement: 'there was something bumbling about Mbiu [sic]; he lacked Mathu's polish. Most important, Mbiu [sic] was outside the system. [...] He had been to America, while Mathu had gone to Oxford, which helped the latter both with the Government and influential Africans'.⁷³ Mathu, for a number of reasons, was the more conservative choice. This was important given the opposition Moore faced following his decision to add an African member to the LegCo.

Moore received significant protest from Kenya's conservative settler community following his decision to dissolve the legislative council and an African representative to the council.⁷⁴ The Electors' Union, which would quickly become a vocal, influential, and conservative European political organisation, was established that same year to oppose further 'threats' to European interests in the colony.⁷⁵ The establishment of the Electors' Union and its vocal settler-first agenda was part of a wider growth of racial tensions in the colony. The head of the Alliance High School, which both Mathu and Peter had attended, wrote in 1944 that racial tensions in the colony had grown noticeably worse.⁷⁶ Due to the tense racial context, it was incumbent on Moore to choose an appointee that would receive

⁷² Throup, 'Kenyatta and the Political Origins of Mau Mau', p. 3.

⁷³ Spencer, *The Kenya African Union*, p. 125.

⁷⁴ Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 97; Throup, *Economic and Social Origins*, p. 45.

⁷⁵ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 262.

⁷⁶ BIRM A/5/E/6/2, Report by the Headmaster on the Kikuyu Alliance High School, Apr. 1944, p. 2.

the broadest support in an effort to calm European fears and prevent further controversy. The appointment of Peter Mbiyu and his relationship to a father willing to speak out against settler priorities in defence of African interests would only encourage further opposition. The choice of Mathu over Peter was the most prudent choice for Moore. It was not an intentional rebuff of Peter for any sort of militancy or political radicalism. Rather, it was the result of the particular political realities of the time. In spite of Moore's appointment of Mathu, Peter still served Moore and his successor, Governor Philip Mitchell, on the governor's advisory council through 1946.⁷⁷ Were Peter and his father disappointed with Moore's selection of Mathu? Certainly. Did they abandon working with the colonial government as scholars have argued? Absolutely not.

Consistency in the Midst of Changes & Crises

The complexities of individual agency are some times lost in the dichotomous narratives of loyalist versus militant that dominate the scholarly conversation of the late-colonial period. Koinange's willingness to support and oppose government initiatives based on his own assessment of each proposal was a defining act of his own agency, as was his continued commitment to work within the colonial system in seeking change. As will be seen in chapter five, even when Koinange began working with Kenyatta and the KAU, he maintained this approach – unwelcome as it was – and criticised or opposed the actions of Kenyatta or the KAU leadership, when he deemed it necessary. As with his father, Peter spent 1938 through 1946 working with and pursuing further engagement with the colonial government. He appears to have embraced a similar mode of engagement as his father – working through the governing political system to pursue change. However, by

⁷⁷ *The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 17 May 1946), Government Notice no. 409.

the mid-1940s, Koinange's, and now Peter's, longstanding approach to political engagement faced new.

Ongoing Engagement in the 1940s

Until his retirement in 1949, Koinange maintained a leading role on the Kiambu local native council. He was frequently the first appointed by the local DC to committees, education boards, and delegations.⁷⁸ Honouring his seniority, other members deferred to Koinange in raising concerns and proposing resolutions.⁷⁹ It was Koinange who presented reports to the council on war measures, land exchange committee investigations, and chaired LNC committees in the DC's absence.⁸⁰ In 1942 he was tasked with overseeing the writing of a memorandum on education.⁸¹ In 1944, he led a delegation of Kikuyu elders in meeting with the Maasai over land disagreements.⁸² In 1945, he provided support in an LNC initiative to double the education budget for 1946.⁸³ That same year he hosted a visiting LNC delegation, who were 'much impressed' with Koinange's Kiambu district.⁸⁴ Beyond his active and guiding role on the LNC, Koinange continued to give his support to unpopular government initiatives throughout the final decade of his service as a chief.

⁷⁸ While this is present throughout the Kiambu LNC meeting reports, specific examples include: KNA VQ/5/59, 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 7 Nov. 1940, item 9; Ibid., 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 16-17 Sep. 1943, item 20.

⁷⁹ While this is present throughout the Kiambu LNC meeting reports, examples include: KNA VQ/5/59, 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 23-24 June 1942, item 14; Ibid., 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 17-18 June 1943, item 19; Ibid., 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 16-17 Sep. 1943, item 20.

⁸⁰ KNA VQ/5/59, 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 2-3 Dec. 1942, item 16; Ibid., 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 17-18 June 1943, item 19; Ibid., 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 16-17 Sep. 1943, item 20; KNA VQ/16/77, 1943 Annual Report.

⁸¹ KNA VQ/5/57, 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 23-24 June 1942, item 14.

⁸² KNA VQ/16/18, 'Monthly Intelligence Report', Jan. 1944, item 14; KNA VQ/16/77, 1944 Annual Report, p. 1.

⁸³ Ibid., 1945 Annual Report, pp 6-9.

⁸⁴ KNA VQ/16/18, 'Monthly Intelligence Report', Feb. 1945, item 34.

Koinange supported a wide array of unpopular government actions and policies in the 1940s, just as he had throughout the 1930s. He endorsed the conscription of African labour for both the overseas war effort as well as unpopular wartime road maintenance and farming initiatives.⁸⁵ He repeatedly made unpopular proposals to increase the district's financial contribution to the war – an action requiring an increased taxation of Koinange's own community.⁸⁶ In 1943, he visited the British fleet off the coast of East Africa. He returned with a positive report and requested permission to travel throughout the colony to share what he had observed of the war effort.⁸⁷ In 1947 he assured attendees at a public meeting in Githunguri 'that the Government wished to help them'.⁸⁸ A year later, Koinange urged a crowd 'to cooperate with [the] Government and make themselves into good citizens by hard work'.⁸⁹ The KAU newspaper *Mumenyereri* printed an article in July 1948 that was assumed to be from Koinange by the colonial government. It praised the government's soil conservation efforts, encouraging the readers to give the efforts their full support.⁹⁰ This was something Koinange had supported since the early 1940s.⁹¹ The government's forced soil conservation efforts were immensely unpopular at the time.⁹² The late 1940s marked a period of increased racial tensions, which further increased the growing political agitation among African communities. In spite of this context, Koinange still chose to publicly support unpopular government initiatives he believed were 'for the good of his tribe'.⁹³

⁸⁵ KNA VQ/5/59, 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 3-5 May 1938, item 1; Ibid., 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 5-6 Sep. 1940, item 8; Ibid., 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 25 and 27-28 Feb. 1942, item 13.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 12-13 Aug. 1941, item 11; Ibid., 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 2-3 Dec. 1942, item 16.

⁸⁷ KNA VQ/16/77, 1943 Annual Report, p. 1.

⁸⁸ KNA JZ/7/17, 'Particular Incidents', i, item 4b, p. 2.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

⁹¹ KNA VQ/16/77, 1941 Annual Report, p. 1.

⁹² Throup, *Economic and Social Origins*, p. 76. The fact that the KAU would publish such an article is indicative of the KAU's 'moderate' phase from 1948-1950 (Spencer, *The Kenya African Union*, p. 145). This is discussed in further detail in chapter 5.

⁹³ KNA DC/KBU/11/1, 'Headman – Koinange wa Mbiyu', 1922-1949, f. 53.

To this extent, Koinange still served as a dutiful government chief. It was not for his support of government initiatives that Koinange began to fall from favour, but rather his continued opposition to the initiatives he deemed detrimental to his own or his tribe's interests. In 1938, the government adopted the Native Land Trusts Bill, which built on the 1902 and 1915 Crown Land Acts and further entrenched Crown ownership of the Native Reserves. Koinange adamantly protested the adoption of the bill, leading the members of the LNC in a lengthy debate of the new law.⁹⁴ Following the debate, the DC gave his approval for a delegation, which included Koinange, to meet with the CNC to discuss the proposed bill.⁹⁵ At the same time, Koinange joined with several other prominent leaders in writing a petition to the governor of Kenya and Secretary of State for the colonies to protest the bill.⁹⁶ Following a positive evaluation of the petition by the Colonial Office, pressure was placed upon the Kenyan Governor and administration to make changes to the bill.⁹⁷ Koinange's approach had brought about change, but his steadfast opposition and willingness to petition London directly became increasingly troublesome to an administration looking for unquestioning obedience and loyalty. Prior to the war, as evidenced by the pay, praise, and position given him, Koinange's protest of government initiatives did not undermine the administration's estimation of his value as a chief. The records concerning Peter's activity during this period are limited; there is indication that both father and son shared a common approach to political action throughout the 1940s.

⁹⁴ KNA VQ/5/59., 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 3-5 Aug. 1938, item 2. It was the Native Land Trusts Bill that changed the designation 'Crown Land' to 'Native Land', a change in name, but representing minimal change in practice (Ibid., 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 3-5 May 1938, item 1).

⁹⁵ Ibid., 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 3-5 Aug. 1938, item 2.

⁹⁶ KNA JZ/7/17, 'Particular Incidents', i, item 4b, p. 1; TNA CO/533/487/7, Senior Chief Koinange to SoS for the Colonies, 9 Nov. 1938, ff 10-3.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 'Internal Minute', 30 Feb. 1938.

Throughout the better part of the 1940s, Peter continued to work with and be esteemed by the colonial government. Even after the appointment of Eliud Mathu, Peter served on the governor's standing advisory committee for local native councils in 1944, 1945, and 1946.⁹⁸ As late as the summer of 1947, there is no indication of concern regarding Peter from the colonial government in Kenya. Louis Leakey, a long-time family friend of the Koinange family, held the position of Officer in Charge of the African Intelligence Section of the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) during the war – an important post in which he would have been aware of official concerns regarding the Koinange family's activities.⁹⁹ In a 1947 letter to Audrey Richards at the London School of Economics (LSE) concerning Peter Mbiyu's application to study there, Leakey states that he had not seen Peter since before the war but knows of no reason he would not be a worthy doctoral candidate for the programme.¹⁰⁰ In connection with his 1947 sojourn in London, the Colonial Office indicated in June of that year that Peter Mbiyu was not a person of concern for them. Internal memoranda indicate that that they did 'not regard him as dangerous'; rather, he was well educated with 'advanced ideas'.¹⁰¹

While detailed documentation of Peter Mbiyu's work on the governor's committee is not available, unlike the wealth of documentation for LNC meetings involving his father, what is available provides indication of ongoing trust of Peter and Peter's continued engagement with the colonial government. The reasons for the shift of Peter and his father from trusted allies of the colonial government to leaders of Mau Mau is to be found in the

⁹⁸ *The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 7 Nov. 1944), Government Notice no. 901; *Ibid.*, (Nairobi, 20 Nov. 1945), Government Notice no. 970; *Ibid.*, (Nairobi, 7 May 1946), Government Notice no. 409.

⁹⁹ KNA N/M/1/679, Superintendent of Police CID to Commissioner of Police, 11 July 1945.

¹⁰⁰ KNA N/M/1/790, Richards to Leakey, 20 June 1947. While an argument from absence is problematic, this certainly is the sort of context, given Leakey's recent role with the CID, to raise concerns about Peter Mbiyu.

¹⁰¹ TNA KV/2/2535, DG to Security Liaison Officer – Nairobi, 10 June 1947, item 15a.

developments of the 1947-1952 period. Prior to 1947, they were engaged, respected, and valued African participants with the colonial administration.

During the 1940s, important shifts took place in Kenya's administrative personnel. The war period saw a number of individuals with strong opinions regarding African political activity take up prominent roles in the government. These individuals held much narrower expectations of what they deemed appropriate political activity among the African community, especially for those working within the colonial administration's ranks.

Colonialism's Changes During Crisis

The war and its attendant changes in policies and politics drastically transformed life in the Kenya colony, as it did throughout the British empire. Some indication of these changes has already been seen with Moore's reconstitution of the LegCo, the increase in racial tensions, and the changing opinions of Koinange versus Waruhiu. Added to this was the wartime focus on espionage, subversion, and external and internal threats. Official concerns of possible opposition and sedition resulted in a contraction of the boundaries of tolerated political discourse. For the Koinanges and others willing to criticise administrative policies, Kenya became an increasingly difficult place to do so and still retain one's social and political standing. Koinange's continued willingness to go around local officials and appeal directly to the Colonial Office and members of parliament in London resulted in a rapid decline in official approval of his performance. Peter's decision in 1947 to travel to the Colonial Office in London brought an end to his tenure on the governor's standing advisory committee. Changes in personnel and their changes in expectations further reshaped the expectations of the colonial administration during and

immediately after the war. The shift in the Koinanges' political standing by the late 1940s was not, as previous scholarship has largely posited, due to the Koinanges' bitterness following the KLC report, the teaching post offered to Peter Mbiyu at less than a European salary, or even the appointment of Mathu over Peter to the LegCo in 1944. While all of these incidents brought their share of dissatisfaction, the Koinanges' ongoing and further engagement with the colonial regime a decade later indicates that their disappointment did not lead them to abandon working with the administration and pursue nationalism, self-rule, or militancy. Instead, the shift in their standing is best tied to the changing expectations of the administration. These changes are reflected through the writings of a number of prominent individuals: Kiambu's District Commissioners, the Chief Native Commissioner, and a new Governor to Kenya.

According to the reports of Kiambu's various DCs through the 1940s, there was a growing weariness of Koinange's tendency to protest or petition for issues he considered in his own interest or that of his people. Besides a mid-1930s' concern regarding Koinange's old age, the first negative evaluation of Koinange appears in 1939 and has already been mentioned in part:

Koinange has not lived up to the high character given him above. He tries to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds and is not very successful in either capacity [...] He has frequently made points in public debate for the benefit of the gallery that have been carefully explained to him in private [...] He is displaying singularly unstatesmen like peculiarities at the moment [...] placing his Mbari before the Kikuyu.¹⁰²

The DC at the time, E.H.S. Anderson, highlights Koinange's tendency to try to work for both the government and his people. In particular, Koinange's unwelcome habit of voicing his disagreement with government policies. In many ways, Koinange's behaviour was what might be expected of a member of parliament in London, but it was not welcome

¹⁰² KNA DC/KBU/11/1, 'Headman-Koinange was Mbiyu', 1922-1949, f. 52.

from a chief of the colonial government. Significantly, the next year Anderson wrote, 'Some improvement was noted on the outbreak of war [...] It appears he may regain his position in regard of Govt. and his people'.¹⁰³ Two years later, a new DC described Koinange as 'an opportunist and self seeker – still has authority but not like what, apparently, he once had'.¹⁰⁴ Certainly, in the eyes of some officials, Koinange's value was beginning to wain by the middle of the 1940s.

The 1943 evaluation from Kiambu's new DC, H.E. Lambert, clarifies both the concern regarding Koinange's behaviour and the changing nature of colonial rule during the war:

Has been dubbed the 'evil genius' of the district, but this, I think, is going slightly to far. To my mind he is loyal to Government and only treads consciously on its corners for his own advantage or that of some other Kikuyu or group of Kikuyu [...] he will side in secret with the internal enemies of Government but not with the external ones. [...] Has many likeable qualities – politeness, hospitality, and generosity, for instance. Is still influential and could, if he would, do a power of good. A better farmer than most Europeans, and if he would turn his predilection for propaganda from politics to agriculture he would begin to earn his salary. [...] I believe the only way to deal with Koinange is to put all your cards on the table and turn your sleeves up (not in aggression but as evidence that you have nothing to hide) and then to invite him to follow suit. Mutual distrust is the great stumbling block to good administration in Kiambu and is apt to be epitomized in the relations between the D.C. and his 'Principal African Adviser'.¹⁰⁵

First, there is the affirmation of Koinange's continued loyalty to the government and engagement with it. Second, Lambert indicates that Koinange's fall from favour was his political activeness – pursuing his or the Kikuyu's advantage and speaking out on political issues – and that the administration would be much happier if he would simply be a successful farmer, rather than a vocal critic. This is important, for even as the government was growing tired of Koinange's penchant for speaking out for himself and his people, Lambert still considered Koinange loyal to the government. Indeed, Lambert's criticism

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., f. 53.

that he would prefer Koinange was a successful, yet politically quiet, farmer is evidence of the tightening boundaries of expectation on colonial chiefs' behaviour. Certainly, Koinange had long petitioned for his own *mbari* lands and for the Kikuyu through the Kikuyu Association.

Koinange was resolute in his unwillingness to give up this long-standing commitment to this political activity. The 1947 evaluation notes that Koinange 'devoted less and less time to his official duties and more and more to his complaints about his saw mill, his various land cases, and sponsoring the causes of various bodies of Kikuyu against Govt'.¹⁰⁶ As will be seen shortly, Koinange was forced to retire in 1949 due to his unwillingness to be the quiet, subservient African chief the government desired. A 1958 evaluation of Koinange's activity from 1938 to 1948 serves to highlight the main reason for Koinange's decline in the eyes of the administration:

[...] while it was no doubt his duty as Senior Chief to make himself acquainted with his people's grievances [...] he increasingly used undesirable political channels instead of going to the District Commissioner [i.e. direct contact with London's Colonial Office or the Governor] and, in land matters at least, tended to lead the demands instead of merely reporting them. This became increasingly irritating to Government and by the end of the period, the Chief Native Commissioner, the Provincial Commissioner and the District Commissioner all concluded that he had outlived his usefulness as Senior Chief and should retire or be removed.¹⁰⁷

The government grew tired of Koinange's complaints about his land, his business, and other causes and grew increasingly frustrated with his willingness to go around the administration in Kenya in his protest and petitions. The use of political groups and petitions to London directly (referred to as 'undesirable political channels' when undertaken by Koinange) were common tactics among the European settler community. Avenues of protest previously available to Koinange — the LNC, the DC, and the local

¹⁰⁶ KNA DC/KBU/11/1, 'Headman - Koinange wa Mbiyu', 1922-1949, f. 54.

¹⁰⁷ KNA JZ/7/17, 'Ex-Senior Chief Koinange's Record: Volume 1 General Nature of Contents', item 4a, p. 1.

administration – grew increasingly untenable or profitable. A key reason for this is indicated at the end of Lambert’s entry above in which Lambert highlights the growing distrust between the administration and their African chiefs and the African communities in Central Kenya. The leadership of the mid-1940s – particularly that of Chief Native Commissioner Percy Wyn-Harris and the governor of Kenya, Sir Phillip Mitchell – fuelled this growing distrust.

Distrust is a prominent theme in Wyn-Harris’ evaluation of Koinange. In 1948, Wyn-Harris acknowledged in a letter to the Provincial Commissioner that he had ‘always regarded Chief Koinange’s loyalty as being more than suspect’.¹⁰⁸ Wyn-Harris had known Koinange for the better part of a decade, serving in various administrative posts. From 1939-1940, Wyn-Harris’ role as the Kikuyu land claim settlement officer placed him in frequent contact with the outspoken Koinange, as would his role as Central Province PC from 1945 to 1947, and then in the post of CNC from 1947 to 1949 (see Table 3.1).¹⁰⁹ As a result, Wyn-Harris’ earliest experience with Koinange was in relation to land, the issue that garnered Koinange’s most impassioned rhetoric and political action. Such a beginning did not portend a positive, long-term working relationship. By May 1948, official reports indicate that it was CNC Wyn-Harris who pushed for the ‘resignation or deposition of Koinange’.¹¹⁰ An eight-month prolonged discussion between Koinange, Wyn-Harris, and the Governor followed this recommendation.¹¹¹ Koinange protested his forced retirement, desiring to remain in his position. When he finally resigned himself to the fact he would not be allowed to remain in the government’s employ, Koinange petitioned for his son, Charles Karuga Koinange, to be appointed in his place following his retirement. It was a

¹⁰⁸ KNA ARC(MAA)/2/5/228, CNC to PC, 6 Feb. 1948, item 198.

¹⁰⁹ A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, ‘Harris, Sir Percy Wyn- (1903–1979)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004). Accessed 12 June 2013 at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31861>.

¹¹⁰ KNA JZ/7/17, ‘Particular Incidents’, i, item 4b, p. 3.

¹¹¹ TNA FCO/141/5900, Kenya: ex-Senior Chief Koinange Mbui, 1950-1960, ff 2-26.

request that was also denied. In February 1949, colonial officials forced Koinange to retire after 45 years of service in the colonial administration.¹¹² While forced to retire in February 1949, the official decision was made by mid-1948. Wyn-Harris was appointed governor of the Gambia in 1949, where his actions indicated an ongoing reticence to accept African political organisations. His later work with the Nyasaland inquiry of 1959 revealed a resolute unwillingness to entertain criticisms of British colonial rule a full decade after leaving Kenya.¹¹³ Wyn-Harris, with his distrust of Koinange and of African political activity, shaped administrative expectations in his roles as District Commissioner, Provincial Commissioner, and Chief Native Commissioner. When a new governor arrived in Kenya in 1944 with similar predilections towards African political activity, the culture of distrust and suspicion continued to grow.

Year	Government Post
1926	Posted with Colonial Government in Kenya
1926-1941	District Officer (Various Posts)
1939-1940	Kikuyu Lands Claim Settlement Officer
1941-1943	District Officer, Nyeri
1944-1946	Labour Commissioner
1945-1947	Provincial Commissioner, Central Province
1947-1949	Chief Native Commissioner
1949 - 1958	Governor of the Gambia

Table 3.1: Sir Percy Wyn-Harris, Colonial Career 1926-1958.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Ibid., p. 2.

¹¹³ Kirk-Greene, 'Harris, Sir Percy Wyn- (1903-1979).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.; 'Wyn-Harris, Sir Percy', *Who Was Who: 1920-2016* (Oxford, 2014). Accessed 23 June 2017 at <http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U161251>.

After Moore's work to re-establish the LegCo with a seat for an African member in 1944, Philip Mitchell, formerly the governor of Uganda and of Fiji, was appointed governor to the Kenya colony (see Table 3.2). According to Throup, it was Governor Mitchell's personal 'hostility to African politicians' that soured moderate politicians, like Eliud Mathu and the Koinanges, from engaging with the colonial government, resulting in shifts towards active involvement in African political activity outside of the administration.¹¹⁵ Mitchell's hostility towards African political leaders further encouraged distrust and suspicion towards outspoken African leaders of the war and post-war years by other colonial administrators. Mitchell's tenure polarised Kenya's increasingly tense political climate. Mitchell's tenure was responsible, in large part, for the political developments that underpinned the outbreak of the Emergency in the 1950s.

Period	Governor
1940 - 1944	Sir Henry Moore
1944 - 1952	Sir Philip Mitchell
1952 - 1959	Sir Evelyn Baring
1959 - 1962	Sir Patrick Renison

Table 3.2: Governors of Kenya, 1940s-1950s.

The theme that runs through the critiques of Koinange's performance from 1939 onward is that Koinange was unwilling to toe the Government line and far too willing to voice his protests and petitions. While Koinange's complaints against land policy were ever present, by the late 1930s and 1940s he was airing these complaints in the context of an administration growingly distrustful and hostile to African politics. More and more,

¹¹⁵ Throup, *Economic and Social Origins*, pp 44-5.

Koinange's petitions went straight to London, rather than through the colonial administration in Kenya. As boundaries of loyalty and political expression tightened, Koinange and Peter, among others, were forced to look to other avenues for protest outside of the LNC and Kenya's local administrators.

Over time and under the leadership of DCs, a CNC, and a governor disinclined to tolerate African political protest, the possibilities for political action narrowed considerably. As the following chapters will demonstrate, Koinange was forced into retirement for pursuing alternative avenues of protest (petitions in London, correspondence straight to the Colonial Secretary, and work through British political organisations), and thus became an 'irritation' to the colonial administration. His efforts to raise 12,000/- in the 1940s to bring members of Britain's Labour Party to Kenya, his calls for the publication of government laws in Kikuyu, and his hosting of political meetings at his home (such as one in 1946 with over 200 chiefs, LNC members, Indians, Eliud Mathu, and Jomo Kenyatta present) were but a few of the increasingly 'undesirable' actions Koinange undertook.¹¹⁶ As this shift in expectations marginalised Koinange, it also led Peter to move away from the governor's committee, now under a hostile Mitchell, to pursue other avenues of political engagement. By 1949, engagement with the colonial government was no longer a tenable route to pursue political change for the Koinanges. In 1947, Peter would leave Kenya for England and Koinange would retire less than two years later.

The year 1946 marks a number of important developments in Kenya's post-war political history. The year began on the heels of Governor Mitchell's public 'breakdown'

¹¹⁶ KNA VQ/5/59, Kiambu LNC Meeting Report, 25-28 Feb. 1942, item 13; KNA JZ/7/17, 'Particular Incidents', i, item 4b, p. 2.

in December 1945.¹¹⁷ In addition, major shifts were taking place in African political leadership. That year, Peter's friend and acclaimed political figure Jomo Kenyatta returned from a decade abroad. The presidency of the Kenya African Union passed from Harry Thuku, a vocal supporter of the colonial government, to James Gichuru, its outspoken critic.¹¹⁸ Opposition to the appointment of an African member to the LegCo in 1944 had led to the establishment of the racially vocal Electors' Union. The troubled early years of Mitchell's tenure as governor and his hostility to African politics had taken their toll. The return of the politically divisive Kenyatta to Kenya marked the arrival of the very embodiment of Mitchell's distrust and hostility. It is within this context that Koinange and Peter decided that London, rather than Nairobi, was the place to effect change in colonial policy. It was a political truth revealed in the events of the late 1930s that was to be reaffirmed in the controversies to come in 1947 and 1948 (to be discussed in chapter five).

By the late 1940s, it was the significant shift in the colonial administration and the shuttering of avenues of protest within the Kenya colony that brought an end to Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu's work with the colonial government. Through new partnerships with the KAU and London's Labour party, they shifted the focus of their protest. As they did so, they maintained their approach and commitment to work within the British governing system, rather than against it. It was not a repositioning of antagonism, hostility, or disappointment but rather a reasoned response to the constricted bounds of what was possible within the changing social and political realities of Kenya's late colonial period.

¹¹⁷ Throup, *Economic and Social Origins*, pp 34-5.

¹¹⁸ W.R. Ochieng, *Place of Biography in Kenyan History, 1904-2005* (Kisumu 2005), p. 83; Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 270.

A Pivot to London, Not A Shift to Militancy

Historical scholarship is, by necessity, a process of elimination and synthesis. The result is that there is and always will be material which scholars must choose to excise from their narrative. With a literature dominated by narratives of nationalism and militant politics, Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter's sustained involvement with the colonial government has gone undiscussed. The consideration of forgotten or new material challenges the current scholarly consensus and forces a reconsideration of the underlying causes for a shift in their political standing.

In the case of the Koinanges, colonial officials respected and trusted Peter Mbiyu through the mid-1940s, before the return of Jomo Kenyatta in 1946. Jeremy Murray-Brown's claim that Peter 'abandoned all attempt at co-operation with the colonial regime and retired into nationalist opposition' after the selection of Mathu in 1944 fails to consider Peter's ongoing work from 1944-1946 by appointment of the governor.¹¹⁹ As of 1947, Peter was not yet connected to radical or militant politics in the eyes of the administration – although they were wary of Koinange's relationship with Kenyatta, as shall be discussed in the following chapters.

Reports, wage discussions, and the conferment of official awards indicate that Koinange wa Mbiyu was held in high esteem into the 1940s. While Marshall Clough is correct when he notes that the colonial government became increasingly critical of Koinange wa Mbiyu as early 1939, he errs in considering this comment a turning point. Rather, it was an early indication of a decade long transition in official perspective and opinion. And while there are concerns regarding Koinange's penchant for pursuing his own interests and being vocal about opposition, it is from 1946 onward that Koinange's

¹¹⁹ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 266.

historic action becomes too great of an irritant for those inclined to distrust African political leaders – CNC Wyn-Harris and Governor Mitchell, in particular.

Neither Koinange wa Mbiyu nor Peter Mbiyu gave up on the British imperial system of governance or Western model of political engagement. In the 1950s, Peter told a story of a time in 1944 that voices the perspective on political engagement he shared with his father:

In 1944 some three Africans and myself started to debate by the roadside on the African political status [...] The debate became a bet as to whether Africans could gain what they want if they go about it in the right way. I bet 500/- (\$75) that we could win a demand *if we went about it properly*. Three of the others offered the same amount in opposition to me, claiming that the British Government had invested too much in racism ever to honour its political promises.¹²⁰

In his public criticism of Peter in the 1960s, Muoria noted that Peter often ‘disagreed with other leaders about African politics [...] advised that if Africans behaved responsibly their demands would be met.’¹²¹ In spite of attempts to force Koinange and Peter into narratives of militancy or opposition — whether by the Corfield Report, popular memory, or within academic scholarship — the Koinanges’ pursuit of change through collaboration continued to increase until 1946.

The displeasure that began to develop towards the Koinanges was the result of changes to the nature of the colony’s political context — with its decreased room for vocal criticism and opposition, the arrival of Governor Philip Mitchell, and the increased influence of specific individuals, such as Percy Wyn-Harris. Koinange’s late 1940’s decline was the result of a Governor and Chief Native Commissioner who distrusted African politicians in general and Koinange in particular. Neither Koinange nor Peter would be able to maintain their positions with the government and still pursue active

¹²⁰ Koinange, *The People of Kenya*, p. 7.

¹²¹ KNA MSS/74/2, ‘Open Letter from Henry Muoria’, pp 8, 24.

political protest within the constricted boundaries of colonial rule. This change in the political context of their day explains why the Koinanges' involvement with the colonial government came to an end in the mid-to-late 1940s. The history of the Koinanges ongoing engagement with the colonial government offers insight for our broader understanding of colonial Africa during the 1940s.

Colonialism in the 1940s: War, Personalities, and Dominant Narratives

The developments that brought an end to colonial rule in Africa in the middle of the twentieth century have long been a focus of African historiography. This present discussion offers three challenges for that ongoing work. First, the impact of wartime concerns on political expression and administrative expectations. Second, the impact of individual colonial administrators on what was expected and allowed by African chiefs, organisations, and communities. Thirdly, the reconsideration of narratives of disappointment and militancy, in light of these first two issues, offers an opportunity to discover other explanations for colonial-era shifts in culture, politics, and leadership.

The Second World War changed life everywhere. In England, it impacted daily life through rations and the Blackout. In Western Europe and the United States, the legacy of the communism of the 1930s and the rise of fascism fed suspicions, fuelled the growth of intelligence services, and impacted political expression. Likewise, the war changed the rest of the world, especially imperial colonies. Demands for resources, expectations of service, and the need for labour required much of individuals, families, and communities. In Kenya, the proscription of political groups and the labelling of individuals as agitators were but two signs of the constricted boundaries of loyalty and expectation. The language in official documents changed from an emphasis on duty to an emphasis on loyalty and

trustworthiness. Perhaps examination along these same lines elsewhere in the empire will reveal similar constrictions of political boundaries and reveal how these changes fuelled developments of militancy, political activism, and calls for independence in the 1950s and 1960s.

The idea of agency has long held an important place in the research of Africa, and rightly so. History is the story of communities, of the individuals that made up those communities, and of how these individuals shaped one another. The story of the Koinanges' continued work with the colonial government in the 1930s is one of agency – both the intentional actions of the Koinanges in politically tense times, as well as the agency of colonial leadership in shaping the character of colonial rule. Bruce Berman's work *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: the Dialectic of Domination* is one of the clearest demonstrations of such work on the history of Kenya. As researchers continue to interrogate the questions of the end of colonial empires, consideration needs be directed at the impact of specific individuals on historic and political developments. While African historiography has, as noted in the introduction, tended to be shaped by the influence of 'history from below' and a general dislike for biography, historians must not ignore the influence that these eminent and powerful individuals had in shaping policy, possibilities, and the political culture of their day. The influence of these individuals ought to be considered within the ongoing discussions of changes in politics, ex-soldier discontent, and rural unrest.

Finally, keeping in mind the impact of the war and the shaping influence of prominent individuals, there is value in reconsidering why individuals rose or fell in official favour in the years before independence. Far too often the dominant narratives of nationalism, self-rule, and militancy have held tremendous sway in these discussions. As

with the Koinanges, apparent changes in a person's official standing and their subsequent behaviour may have less to do with disappointment, bitterness, disenchantment, or a host of other responses, and more to do with the impact of leaders reshaping political expectations and possibilities.

Henry Muoria's open letter, mentioned at the outset of this chapter, portrays Peter Mbiyu as a schemer who sought to manipulate the colonial government, the Kikuyu Central Association, and the independent school movement for his own ends. Muoria points to Peter's relationship with the Leakeys, his work with the colonial government, and his desire to see a political party which represented more than just the Kikuyu as indicators of Peter's betrayal of the Kikuyu people.¹²² Muoria's perspective contrasts starkly with the prevailing scholarly narrative that Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu withdrew from the colonial government and moved into oppositional political action out of disappointment and disenchantment. While scholars have ignored Peter Mbiyu's six-year involvement on the governor's standing advisory committee, Muoria uses this very fact as evidence of Peter's collusion with the colonial administration and his betrayal of the Kikuyu.¹²³ Similarly, while scholarship has tried to emphasise a shift in Koinange toward militancy following the KLC report and 1944 appointment of Mathu, in truth, Koinange worked closely with the government until forced to retire in 1947.

This chapter has reconsidered that which has been ignored in academic writing, arguing that personnel changes in the colonial government reshaped official expectations and forced the Koinanges out of their work with the colonial administration. It is upon this conclusion (that the Koinanges continued to seek ways to protest from within the British political system, rather than embrace nationalism or militancy) that the next two

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 13.

chapters consider the Koinanges' involvement with the Kenya African Teachers' College during the 1940s and the Kenya African Union at the end of that same decade.

CHAPTER FOUR

Education, Militancy, and Mismanagement: The Koinanges and the Kenya African Teachers' College (1939-1948)

[Peter Mbiyu Koinange] first came to our attention in February 1941 as head of the Kenya Teachers College, Githunguri, Kiambu. This college was *originally founded by Jomo KENYATTA* with the assistance of an intertribal Committee. Once established, however, efforts were made by the *Kikuyu Central Association* — with a *certain measure of success* — to convert it into a school for their own followers. In this connexion you will recall that the Kikuyu Central Association was banned during the war for its subversive influence amongst the natives [...]¹

Lt. Colonel Percy Perfect, MI5's security liaison officer in East Africa during the 1940s, wrote the above assessment of Peter in a May 1947 memo to the Director General of MI5. This 1947 report highlights the focus of this chapter: the relationship between the Koinanges, Jomo Kenyatta, the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), and the Kenya African Teachers' College (KATC) at Githunguri. The KATC was the first of its kind in Kenya — an entirely African-led, African-funded college to train African teachers for schools teaching African students. A beacon for African independent education in the 1940s, the colonial government closed the college in 1953 as part of 'the web of Mau Mau' and turned it into a place for the truncated trials and executions of the Emergency period.² This chapter runs parallel to the last, examining the Koinanges' engagement with the KATC from the end of the 1930s through the 1940s, a period during which they continued

¹ TNA KV/2/2535, P. Perfect to Sir P. Sillitoe, 'Peter Mbiyu Koinange', 22 May 1947, item 16x, p. 1; C. Andrew, *Defend the Realm: the Authorized History of MI5* (New York, 2009), p. 323.

² TNA CMD/1030, F.D. Corfield, 'Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau', May 1960, p. 190; D. Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: the Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London, 2005), p. 155.

the work with the colonial government discussed in the previous chapter. As the above report indicates, Peter Mbiyu held an influential role at the KATC by the early 1940s. Discrepancies are widespread in both popular history and scholarly work regarding the Koinanges' engagement with the KATC, although there is a general acknowledgement that they held a prominent role in its development. For example, Carl Rosberg and John Nottingham present the college as Peter Mbiyu's creation, while Sorobea Bogonko indicates that Peter joined a pre-existent KATC, although Greet Kershaw indicates that the KATC was Koinange's creation rather than Peter's.³ Unravelling these discrepancies clarifies the Koinanges' history, reveals much about the development of militancy at the KATC, and illuminates the wider developments of the 1940s.

Understanding the nature of the relationship between the KCA and the KATC, and where the Koinanges found themselves in this relationship, sheds light on the tripartite argument that links the Koinanges to the KCA and subsequent militancy (Koinanges — KATC — KCA). The 1960 Corfield Report described the KATC as 'the storm centre of the Kikuyu political scene' prior to Mau Mau.⁴ Were the Koinanges instigators and leaders of this growing storm? Duncan Ndegwa writes that the KATC 'was a cell of sorts for training those who were later to lead the cause against white domination in Kenya'.⁵ If the Koinanges did indeed hold prominent positions of influence at the KATC, was their leadership an embrace of anti-white or anti-colonial engagement on their part? The specifics of the Koinanges' engagement with the KATC provide clarity in understanding their overall political actions, loyalties, and commitments beyond their engagement with the colonial administration.

³ S.N. Bogonko, *A History of Modern Education in Kenya: 1985-1991* (Nairobi, 1991), p. 54; G. Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below* (Oxford, 1997), p. 187; C. Rosberg, Jr. and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya* (New York, 1966), p. 179. Kershaw acknowledges a lack of clear supporting evidence for this claim in her footnote.

⁴ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 47.

⁵ D. Ndegwa, *Walking in Kenyatta Struggles: My Story* (Nairobi, 2006), p. 290.

In addition to furthering the understanding of the Koinange's history, this chapter is also a study in the rise of militancy at the KATC and its transition from educational centre to political symbol. In challenging the understanding present in current scholarship, this chapter brings clarity to this period and the ongoing changes in Kenya's social and political realities. The result is a picture of Peter as an earnest headmaster (1939-1947), of a fiscally irresponsible and distracted Jomo Kenyatta (1947-1950), of a Koinange wa Mbiyu with priorities elsewhere, and of tremendous challenges for both the longevity of the KATC as well as the Koinange-Kenyatta relationship.

Education and Opportunity in Kenya in the 1940s

The establishment of the KATC occurred within the wider context of a growing African independent school movement, itself the result of the growing demand from Kenya's African communities for additional educational opportunities for African students. African demand for greater educational opportunity was voiced as early as the 1920s. Some successes were achieved in this area with the establishment of a number of additional mission and government schools during the 1920s. The creation of the Alliance High School in 1926 serves as the most prominent example of the response to this demand. During the 1929-1930 female circumcision controversy, missionary entities used their control of churches and mission schools to force pledges of support from their African congregants. The establishment of independent African churches and schools was one response to this controversy.⁶

⁶ G. Bennett, *Kenya: a Political History - The Colonial Period* (London, 1963), p. 77; D.G. Schilling, 'Local Councils and the Politics of Education in Kenya, 1925-1939', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 9 (1976), p. 234.

The African independent school movement faced a wide array of challenges at the outset, from a lack of finances, to the lack of formal training for the teachers, to an inability to meet colonial educational standards, to ongoing disputes concerning the land on which the schools were built. Koinange wa Mbiyu and his fellow LNC members voted to close several independent schools throughout the 1930s over a lack of funds, land disputes, or the inability of the schools to meet government academic standards.⁷ In spite of these challenges, the independent school movement grew significantly by the early 1950s. In 1948, there were 300 African students in schools around the colony for every one European student.⁸ By 1952, some of these students were attending the more than 200 schools established by the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (KISA) in Central Kenya.⁹

During the 1930s, two of the most significant problems facing independent schools were its lack of trained teachers and a dearth of opportunities for further education beyond primary school. Therefore, in 1939, a KISA school at Githunguri added a teacher's training college and renamed itself the Kenya African Teachers' College.¹⁰ In a letter to the Editor of the *East African Standard*, the KATC college secretary wrote: 'Establishment of the said College came as a result of [a] long-felt need for [sic] the trained teachers in elementary, primary and secondary schools in every tribe throughout the country'.¹¹ The 'every tribe' in the letter oversold the appeal of the KATC but rightly expressed the widespread nature of the desire for further education among Kenya's African communities.

⁷ KNA VQ/5/57, 'Kyambu LNC Meeting Report', 24-25 Aug. 1937, item 11; Ibid., 'Kyambu LNC Meeting Report', 15 Dec. 1937, item 12; KNA VQ/5/59, 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 3-4 Apr. 1939, item 4.

⁸ R.D. Pearce, *The Turning Point in Africa: British Colonial Policy 1938-1948* (London, 1982), p. 165.

⁹ B.A. Ogot, *Historical Dictionary of Kenya* (Nairobi, 1981), p. 106.

¹⁰ KNA DC/KBU/10/3, DC to PC, 'Kenya Africans Teachers' College - Githunguri, 26 Jan. 1939, item 20; Rosberg and Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau'*, p.180. The KCA were unsuccessful when they attempted this same thing in 1930 (Bogonko, *A History of Modern Education*, p. 54).

¹¹ KNA DC/KBU/10/3, A. Gathea to Editor of *East African Standard*, 'Kenya African Teachers' College', 11 Jan. 1939, item 19.

The KATC was open for thirteen years. During those thirteen years, Peter Mbiyu and Jomo Kenyatta served as the college headmasters, with Peter holding the post for the better part of a decade. As mentioned, the college was closed by the government early in the Mau Mau Emergency due to links with militant activity. Led by Peter Mbiyu, Kenyatta – two prominent African leaders of the time — and linked to the proscribed KCA, the KATC bears frequent mention in the scholarship of this period.

Frederick Cooper's Warning and the KATC

Narratives of militancy, nationalism, and independence shape the historical work of Kenya in this period and they have coloured the understanding of the Koinanges' involvement with the KATC. Informed by Frederick Cooper's challenge in *Africa Since 1940: the Past of the Present*, this chapter proceeds with the conviction that scholarship inherently risks taking ideas of militancy, nationalism, and independence and imposing them as dominant influences on the lives of individuals and organisations too early in the history of decolonisation.¹² Individuals held a myriad of conceptualisations of what their future might hold — some which may have included self-rule or freedom but more often than not were shaped by the immediate and daily needs of adequate land, wages, food, and housing.¹³ In Kershaw's research, Koinange's work with the KATC and in local developments in Kiambu are presented as 'two sides of the same coin', together a nationalist driven 'rallying cry [...] to prepare for the future' free of the British empire.¹⁴ This echoes the earlier claim by Rosberg and Nottingham that 'by the late 1930s Senior Chief Koinange' was committed to 'the struggle for land, education, and freedom'.¹⁵ While

¹² F. Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: the Past of the Present* (Cambridge, 2002), pp 38-9.

¹³ See J. Lonsdale, 'Mau Maus of the Mind: Making Mau Mau and Remaking Kenya', *The Journal of African History*, 31, 3 (1990), pp 393-421 for a similar point made regarding Kenya's Mau Mau period.

¹⁴ Kershaw, *Mau Mau*, p. 187.

¹⁵ Rosberg and Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau'*, p. 179.

Koinange frequently spoke regarding land and education, support for the idea that he desired political independence from the British empire is nowhere to be found in the historical sources of this time period. As this chapter will argue, there is, in fact, no indication in the historical sources of the 1930s and the 1940s that the KATC figured prominently in Koinange's political activities at all. Later developments of militancy, nationalism, and independence have incorrectly guided conclusions concerning the Koinanges' engagement with the KATC and have had a distorting influence on the source material of the 1950s and 1960s used to understand these developments.

The Kenya African Teachers' College at Githunguri

For the past fifty years, scholars and public memory alike have credited the Koinanges with the founding of the KATC.¹⁶ Perhaps no other scholarly work has so authoritatively presented the narrative of the father and son's involvement as the work of Rosberg and Nottingham from 1966:

It was [Peter] Mbiyu Koinange who thought to turn the Githunguri KISA school into a higher college, not just for the Kikuyu but for all Kenya Africans [...] In 1938 Senior Chief Koinange brought together a number of age-groups to help raise funds for the new college.¹⁷

While Rosberg and Nottingham fail to cite their source for these claims, they were likely repeating similar claims made in the 1960 Corfield Report.¹⁸ Marshall Clough indicates that the college was Peter's idea.¹⁹ David Anderson, representing the continued

¹⁶ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 47; 'The Legacy of Koinange', *The Peoples Digest* (Nairobi, 24 July 1998), pp 1-2; Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 92; R.M. Gatheru, *Kenya: from Colonization to Independence, 1888-1970* (Jefferson, 2005), p. 177; Kershaw, *Mau Mau*, pp 187, 193; J. Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (New York, 1979), p. 239; Ndegwa, *Walking in Kenyatta Struggles*, p. 255; Ogot, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 110; D.W. Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau 1945-1955* (London, 1988), p. 273.

¹⁷ Rosberg and Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau'*, pp 179-180.

¹⁸ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 190; Rosberg and Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau'*, p. 179.

¹⁹ M.S. Clough, *Fighting Two Sides: Kenyan Chiefs and Politicians, 1918-1940* (Colorado, 1990), p. 173.

acceptance of this perspective in current scholarship, writes in his 2005 *Histories of the Hanged* that 'the college had been founded by [Peter] Mbiyu Koinange, in January 1939, after his return from the United States. The Koinange family were the main benefactors of the college'.²⁰ Both popular press and popular memory in Kenya maintain to this day that the Koinanges established and led the development of the KATC.

Kenya's press, ranging from the tabloid *The People's Digest* to the official *Standard*, credit the Koinanges with founding the KATC. According to the *Standard*, Peter Mbiyu 'started [the] Kenya Teachers College, Githunguri, and a total of 400 independent schools teaching 62,000 students'.²¹ In a 1998 article heralding Koinange's legacy in Central Kenya, *The People's Digest* states that 'Koinange was instrumental in founding the first African run Teachers Training College, the Kenya African Teachers' College (KATC)'.²² Charles Karuga Koinange, Peter Mbiyu's younger brother, echoed this claim in a 1974 interview.²³ All of the sources that support the narrative that the Koinanges founded the KATC are supported by source material created during or after the Mau Mau Emergency of the 1950s (e.g. interviews, official reports, etc.). While the 1950s and 1960s source material has driven the accepted narrative, documents from the 1930s and the 1940s (such as the MI5 report with which the chapter opened) reveal a different genesis to the KATC.

²⁰ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p. 155.

²¹ A. Kareithi, 'Married and Detained for Kenya's Sake', *The Standard* (Nairobi, 27 Aug. 2011). Accessed 24 Feb. 2012 at <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/article/2000041720/married-and-detained-for-kenya-s-sake>.

²² 'The Legacy of Koinange', p. 1

²³ Clough, *Fighting Two Sides*, p. 210, footnote 114.

The Koinanges and the Founding of the KATC

When the Kenya African Teacher's College opened in January 1939, it occurred under the guise of a district-wide sports day for African independent schools, to which European and colonial leaders were invited. Two key colonial officials attended: the Director of Education and Chief Native Commissioner Sydney La Fontaine (CNC). Reports from both of these officials, as well as documents from the District Commissioner of Kiambu and a letter to the editor of the *East African Standard*, provide contemporary, first-hand accounts of the day's events and the developments of the first four months following the January 1939 opening of the KATC. If, as scholars and family alike have posited, the Koinanges were involved in the founding and funding the KATC, then these documents will provide clarity of their roles in these early days.

The first official mention of the KATC is found in a 26 January 1939 report from the DC of Kiambu to the Provincial Commissioner (PC) of the Central Province. The DC had received an invitation to the 'Inter-District Sports' day scheduled for 7 January.²⁴ After some inquiry, he chose to not attend the event due to the vagueness of its purpose. His suspicions were confirmed when the CNC and Director of Education did attend the ceremony 'and found the meeting not what they had been led to expect'.²⁵ After a morning of sporting events, a ceremony announced the opening of a new college to train African teachers. A letter from the secretary of the college, Andrew Gathea, offers an account of the day's events:

The Ceremony was officiated by an old man of the Kikuyu people. He renamed the Institute the Kenya African Teachers' College, he held a microphone on the left hand and on the right hand carried his elderly staff and the 'Maturanguru' leaves [...] He stated that youth from all corners of earth will hereafter find their educational need fulfilled here [...] The Ceremony took place before a large crowd of people which was gathered from many districts in Central Province to attend

²⁴ KNA DC/KBU/10/3, DC to PC, 'Kenya African Teachers' College - Githunguri', item 20, p. 1.

²⁵ Ibid., DC to PC, 'Kenya African Teachers' College - Githunguri', item 20, p. 1.

the Inter Districts' Sports meet. Among other visitors were the Honourable Director of Education and Honourable Chief Native Commissioner and Mrs La Fontaine.²⁶

This eyewitness account from Gathea is one the earliest documents that raises doubts concerning the Koinanges' involvement in those early days of the college. Who was the 'old man of the Kikuyu people' and could it have been Koinange wa Mbiyu? For a number of reasons, this is unlikely. First, if it had been Koinange wa Mbiyu, the newly appointed Senior Chief, it would have been to the advantage of the writer to mention him by name. Koinange was widely known in both African and European circles, including the paper's readership. In addition, Koinange was personally known by CNC La Fontaine whose writings concerning the KATC provide no indication that the old man who spoke that day was Koinange.²⁷

The DC later arranged to meet with Gathea to discuss plans for the future of the college following its opening.²⁸ When they met, the DC:

was surprised to see [Gathea] had summoned Jessie Kariuki, a leading figure in the Kikuyu Central Association and others who I recognised as Kikuyu Central Association members to help him through [...] Andrew Gathea professed to be responsible for the sports only and *only to have a vague idea of what was to follow*. The first part of the conversation took place in English but it was requested that we should speak Kiswahili for the others to follow [...] From this moment Andrew Gathea was given little opportunity to talk and Jessie Kariuki carried on [...] He said that Africans all over Kenya had met in the Fort Hall District and decided that the most pressing need was to train teachers [...] so they decided that the best thing to do was to raise funds, find a suitable centre and then invite the Director of Education to carry on. The method in which he was to do so was clouded in verbiage and similes but *stress was laid on the desire for active co-operation with the Government* [...] Githunguri had been selected because Kiambu natives were anxious to have the establishment in their District and because the Githaka owner was anxious and willing to hand over the land.²⁹

The DC was surprised at the presence of the KCA men. As well, it appears that in this early vision of the relationship of the KATC and the KCA, Gathea, a mission convert, was

²⁶ Ibid., A. Gathea to *East African Standard*, 'Kenya Africans Teachers' College', 11 Jan. 1939, item 19.

²⁷ See KNA DC/KBU/10/3, *KCA Schools (GTC)*, 1939-1946.

²⁸ KNA DC/KBU/10/3, DC to PC, 'Kenya African Teachers' College - Githunguri', item 20, p. 1.

²⁹ Ibid., item 20, pp 1-2.

overshadowed and uncomfortable with the presence of Kariuki. It appears that the KCA had a hand in the KATC in these early days. However, KCA involvement disappears in 1939 with the organisation's proscription and does not arise again in connection to the college until the late 1940s.

There is absolutely no mention of Koinange wa Mbiyu or Peter Mbiyu in the letters, reports, or meetings detailed above – or in any other documentation from 1938 or January 1939 in relation to the founding of the KATC. This absence is conspicuous, especially if Peter Mbiyu or his father were instrumental in founding the college. If the Koinanges were involved, either Gathea or Kariuki should have mentioned the support of these two prominent African leaders. Public and clear support from the District's Senior Chief and the well-respected Peter Mbiyu would have given legitimacy and support to the claim that the KATC desired 'active co-operation with the Government'. Furthermore, the Kiambu DC was very familiar with his most accomplished chief (Koinange wa Mbiyu) and the chief's family, and he would most certainly have mentioned any overt involvement by the Koinange family in the KATC's early days. When the Koinanges do appear in the historical records related to the KATC, they do so only after January 1939 and only in their roles as Senior Chief and as a Form 1 teacher at the college.

There are two instances in February 1939, a month after the opening ceremony, which indicate that Koinange's relationship to the KATC was in his new role as Senior Chief, not as a supporter of the college. In February 1939, Koinange delivered a letter to the college from the colonial government. The letter outlined the changes the KATC was required to make in order to receive the government's approval. Official approval was needed in order for students to be able to move on to other government or mission schools following their time at the KATC. Less than two weeks later, the DC arranged a meeting

between the KATC's managing committee, CNC La Fontaine, and himself. Having arranged the meeting, he then invited the local chief, then Divisional Chief Waruhiu, and the senior chief of the district, Koinange wa Mbiyu, to the meeting as well.³⁰ It was appropriate for the chiefs of the area to be a part of such a meeting. Had Koinange held a prominent role with the KATC in these early months, the invitation would have been redundant and his presence at the meeting expected. While post-Mau Mau sources have made much of Koinange's support of the KATC, there is not a single indication in the district reports or intelligence files from the 1940s that Koinange was involved with the KATC in any capacity other than as the senior chief of the district.

Scholars have emphasised Koinange wa Mbiyu's role in organising age-groups to help raise funds and support the college in 1938.³¹ This would have been a highly public act occurring at the same time as Koinange's rise in official opinion at the end of the 1930s. It would have also provided a clear connection between Koinange, the KATC, and the KCA – something the government tirelessly sought to demonstrate during the 1950s.³² Such activity should appear somewhere in the records of the 1930s and early 1940s. Yet, it does not. In fact, the only connection between Koinange and the KCA during this period is a document recovered by the Special Branch following a raid of the KCA's main Nairobi office in 1940.³³ The intelligence files simply mention that Koinange's name appeared in a document but provide no specifics of this mention. Most likely the document was related to the joint efforts between Koinange and the KCA concerning the Kenya Land Commission, as discussed in the first chapter. Had the details provided

³⁰ KNA DC/KBU/10/3, DC to Koinange and Waruhiu, 17 Feb. 1939, item 34.

³¹ Clough, *Fighting Two Sides*, p. 173; J. Lonsdale, 'The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: Wealth, Poverty & Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought', in B. Berman and J. Lonsdale (eds), *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa* (2 vols., Oxford, 1992), ii, p. 399; Rosberg and Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau'*, p. 235.

³² KNA JZ/7/17, *Ex-Senior Chief Koinange Mbiyu*, 1953.

³³ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 48.

evidence of Koinange's support for the KCA, then the reports of the 1950s would have highlighted the details to justify Koinange's ongoing, yet hotly disputed, detention.

What is important in all of this is the complete lack of evidence in the archival material – including the breadth of Kenya's intelligence work – supporting the post-1950s claim that the Koinanges were involved in founding, funding, or in any way serving as patrons or supporters of the KATC at its inception. Koinange's proclivity to support shuttering independent schools in the 1940s (and his own support for mission schools where he sent his own children) further casts doubt on the likelihood that Koinange embraced the KATC in any significant way. Claims that Peter Mbiyu founded the college are even more oft repeated, including by Peter himself.³⁴

Peter Mbiyu's Tenure at KATC

There is no indication that Peter was involved with the college prior to his return from England in December 1938, nor indication that he was involved in the January 1939 ceremony. Peter began his work with the KATC in mid-to-late January as a Form 1 teacher.³⁵ In the last week of that month, the DC reported that he was 'aware that Peter Koinange has been offered the Head Mastership of the "College", but that he has so far not committed himself'.³⁶ Peter was offered the role of headmaster, but hesitated in his acceptance of the position.³⁷ By March 1939, when the Director of Education made an

³⁴ M. Koinange, 'Jomo: Colleague in the Struggle for Freedom and Independence', in A.H. Patel, N.S. Thakur and V. Dhar (eds), *Struggle for 'Release Jomo and His Colleagues'* (Nairobi, 1963), p. 24. A friend of the Koinange family made this same claim at a Koinange wedding reception held at Senior Chief Koinange's homestead in 2012.

³⁵ KNA DC/KBU/10/3, R.H.W. Wisdom, 'Re: Outschools in Native Reserves - Githunguri', 10 Mar. 1939, item 39, p. 1.

³⁶ Ibid., DC to PC, 'Kenya African Teachers' College - Githunguri', item 20, p. 2.

³⁷ Ibid. While both 'principal' and 'headmaster' are used to refer to Peter Mbiyu's role in the college in the source material, 'headmaster' is used exclusively in this thesis for consistency.

unscheduled visit to the KATC, Peter was a prominent leader at the college, still teaching the Form 1 class, but it is unclear if he was yet the headmaster.³⁸ If Peter was the headmaster by the end of January, he would certainly have been included in the various meetings with the DC at the DC's request, yet he was not. Initially committing to teach the Form 1 class, it took him some months to accept the headmaster position. Peter was likely well aware of the daunting task the college faced.

The challenges were great. Primary classes, taught by teachers who lacked official training or certification, struggled to teach in classrooms filled with nearly one hundred students.³⁹ Unable to meet governmental education standards, the primary-aged students were unable to sit for the government's primary exam, and therefore found themselves ineligible to continue on with secondary schooling in government or missionary schools. Parents were so frustrated with the situation, especially given they were paying the highest school fees required by any African independent school, that they began pulling their students out of the college and enrolling them in nearby mission and government primary schools by the early 1940s.⁴⁰ Underfunded and under resourced, the college struggled to provide food and adequate lodging for its boarding students.⁴¹ 'Hastily erected' temporary buildings became long-term dormitories and inadequate classroom spaces.⁴² The college constantly verged on the edge of financial ruin throughout its existence, with financial shortfalls resulting in an occasional inability to pay teachers and challenges in meeting government regulations and providing basic services for its boarding students. It is

³⁸ Ibid., R.H.W. Wisdom, 'Re: Outschools in Native Reserves - Githunguri', 10 Mar. 1939, item 39, p. 1.

³⁹ Ibid., item 39, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 3, point 14; KNA VQ/16/77, 1944 Annual Report, p. 5.

⁴¹ KNA VQ/16/77, 1943 Kiambu District Annual Report, p. 4; Ibid., 1945 Kiambu District Annual Report, p. 10; KNA DC/KBU/11/2, *Chiefs and Headmen*, item 125; KNA DC/KBU/10/3, R.H.W. Wisdom, 'Re: Outschools in Native Reserves - Githunguri', 10 Mar. 1939, item 39, p. 3.

⁴² KNA DC/KBU/10/3, R.H.W. Wisdom, 'Re: Outschools in Native Reserves - Githunguri', 10 Mar. 1939, item 39.

remarkable that the college remained open for thirteen years. It was due, in large part, to Peter's efforts as headmaster for the better part of a decade.

When the KATC opened, it anticipated 25 students, but nearly ten times that number (225 students) are said to have enrolled at the college in its first year.⁴³ Students came from a number of area schools. Peter's Form 1 class included students from a government school in Kagumo, the Church of Scotland mission school in Kikuyu, the Church Missionary Society school in Kabete, the Gospel Mission school in Kambui, and the Catholic High School in Kabaa.⁴⁴ Only 8 of these first 21 students in Peter's class came from the African independent school system. The KATC offered an answer to a need unmet in the limited opportunities available through government or mission schools. In spite of the overwhelming numbers that first year, a March 1939 report from the Director of Education noted that 'discipline [was] good. The boys and girls were clean and neatly dressed [...] The atmosphere was friendly and quite different from that of some independent schools'.⁴⁵ The Director of Education attributed these early signs of strength to Peter's influence and leadership at the KATC. In spite of the odds, things looked promising for the KATC as they made it through that first year

Under Peter's leadership and with the approval of the colonial administration, the KATC remained open throughout the war.⁴⁶ From 225 students in 1939, enrolment at the

⁴³ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 182; M. Koinange, *The People of Kenya Speak for Themselves* (Detroit, 1955), p. 27. This number is contradicted by other sources, such as the Director of Education's 1939 report that stated 500 students were enrolled (KNA DC/KBU/10/3, R.H.W. Wisdom, 'Re: Outschools in Native Reserves - Githunguri', 10 Mar. 1939, item 39). However, the Corfield Report is the only source that provides numbers over a decade that are consistent with plausible growth. For example, according to the Corfield Report, the College had 562 boys and 11 girls enrolled by 1947 (p. 183). This growth seems more plausible than beginning with 500, although the school did lose significant numbers in the early 1940s when parents removed their students when KATC was unable to provide Government Primary Certificates (KNA VQ/16/77, 1944 District Annual Report, p. 5).

⁴⁴ KNA DC/KBU/10/3, R.H.W. Wisdom, 'Re: Outschools in Native Reserves - Githunguri', 10 Mar. 1939, item 39, p. 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, item 39, p. 2.

⁴⁶ KNA DC/KBU/10/3, DC to PC, 'Githunguri Teachers' Training School', 1 Mar. 1939, item 35.

KATC more than doubled by the end of the war (Table 4.1).⁴⁷ The Corfield Report noted that during Peter's tenure at the KATC, he earnestly sought to turn the college 'into a centre for advanced studies and ultimately into a university'.⁴⁸ Given that the Corfield Report provides this assessment in the context of its focus on militancy would indicate that Peter's sincere effort was clearly demonstrated, even within the context of the Corfield's post-Mau Mau context. The results of these efforts were a broad approval of the KATC as an educational institution throughout the 1940s.

Year (Headmaster)	Approx. Number of Pupils
1939-1940 (Peter Mbiyu)	225 ⁴⁹
1944 (Peter Mbiyu)	400 ⁵⁰
1946 (Peter Mbiyu)	500 ⁵¹
1947 (Peter Mbiyu/Kenyatta)	573 ⁵²
1949-1950 (Kenya)	1,000 ⁵³
1951-1952 (Kenya)	800 ⁵⁴

Table 4.1: Growth in enrolment at the KATC from 1938-1951 for years in which data is available.

During the mid-1940s, Peter undertook an ambitious plan to erect permanent buildings in place of the temporary dorms and classrooms. A committee was established and plans were developed for new classrooms and permanent lodging for boarding students.⁵⁵ It was during this fundraising effort, rather than for the 1939 establishment of the school, that Peter and his father looked to the *mariika*, or Kikuyu age groups, for

⁴⁷ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', pp 182-3.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 182.

⁴⁹ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 182.

⁵⁰ KNA VQ/16/77, 1944 District Annual Report, p. 5.

⁵¹ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 182.

⁵² Ibid., p. 183; Bogonko, *A History of Modern Education*, p. 55.

⁵³ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 188.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ KNA VQ/16/77, 1945 Kiambu District Annual Report, p. 10; KNA VQ/16/2, 'Monthly Report', Feb. 1951, item 25.

assistance.⁵⁶ Koinange called on older age groups to provide funds for the building, while Peter looked to the younger age groups for help with specific materials and tasks — from piping water to the college to gathering stones for the buildings from the local quarry to coordinating the lorries used to carry the stones to the college grounds.⁵⁷ This is one of the few and only instances where Koinange was involved with the KATC — as a father in support of his son's efforts. By 1948, the college had raised £8,000.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, as will be seen shortly, Kenyatta gained control of these funds in late 1947 and they were never utilised for their intended purpose.

Peter made demonstrable efforts, some more successful than others, to recruit staff, provide scholarships for students, and increase the resources available to the college. He attempted to recruit staff from within Kenya, West Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States.⁵⁹ As a result of Peter's efforts, the Government of India established five scholarships for KATC graduates to study in India.⁶⁰ In a 1947 meeting with the Secretary of State for the colonies in London, Peter requested books for the college, scholarships for students to study in the UK, and for university status for the KATC.⁶¹ Peter sought to raise the notoriety of the college by hosting special groups at the KATC. During the war, the college hosted a group of African-American soldiers from the United States 812th Engineers.⁶² Fenner Brockway, a member of Parliament and prominent Labour party official, visited the KATC in 1950.⁶³ In 1951, Peter invited the Secretary of State for the colonies to visit the college.⁶⁴ From fundraising for buildings to scholarships to global

⁵⁶ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 182.

⁵⁷ Koinange, *The People of Kenya Speak*, p. 32; Lonsdale, 'The Moral Economy of Mau Mau', p. 400.

⁵⁸ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 91.

⁵⁹ Gatheru, *Kenya*, p. 180; JL *Personal Correspondence*, U. Dodge to J. Lonsdale, 16 May 1990; KNA KV/2/2539, H.D. Wharton, 'Professor St. Clair DRAKE', 10 Nov. 1948, item 176a.

⁶⁰ KNA KV/2/2539, H.D. Wharton, 'Peter Mbiyu KOINANGE', 1 May 1948, item 174, p. 3.

⁶¹ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 183.

⁶² 'The Story of Mugo', *Chicago Defender* (22 Nov. 1952), p. 1.

⁶³ KNA ARC(MAA)/2/5/229, F. Brockway to J. Griffiths, 22 Mar. 1951, item 114.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

recruitment of staff to official recognition, Peter Mbiyu worked earnestly, as the Corfield Report rightly acknowledged, for nearly a decade to turn the KATC 'into a centre for advanced studies and ultimately into a university'.⁶⁵ This, rather than radical politics, was the main focus of Peter's time and energy during the 1940s.

Kershaw rightly notes that the only link between Peter Mbiyu and the KCA in the late 1930s and early 1940s is that both worked to raise money for the KATC.⁶⁶ From the proscription of the KCA in 1940 to Peter's departure for London in 1947, there is no evidence of KCA involvement or other militant developments at the KATC in the intelligence files or official reports. During the Emergency period, the government worked tirelessly to prove the case of both Koinange and Peter as militant leaders. Chapter six will argue that they never were able to provide compelling evidence in support of these claims.⁶⁷ In the years immediately preceding the Mau Mau Emergency, Peter either hosted or encouraged the visit of high ranking European officials to the college. Either Peter was foolish and reckless, risking discovery of subversive political elements at the college, or the narrative of KATC militancy is not connected to Peter or his father.

In addition, this was also the same period during which Peter served on the governor's standing advisory committee, and Koinange was appointed and then served as Senior Chief. In light of the Koinanges' continued involvement with the colonial government and the lack of historical evidence from 1938-1946 supporting the broadly held claim of the KATC as a Koinange family project, the current narrative regarding the Koinanges' role at the KATC is untenable. If Koinange wa Mbiyu had negligible

⁶⁵ While it presents the story as Peter Mbiyu wants his reader to see it, the fourth chapter of his small booklet is worth consulting concerning Peter Mbiyu's intentional and concerted efforts at the KATC (Koinange, *The People of Kenya*, pp 25-37).

⁶⁶ Kershaw, *Mau Mau*, pp 194-5.

⁶⁷ See KNA JZ/7/17, *Ex-Senior Chief Koinange Mbiyu*, 1953 and TNA KV/2/2535-2552, *Peter Mbiyu Koinange*, 1937-1956.

involvement with the college from 1939 to 1946 and Peter Mbiyu's leadership did not set the college up to become the 'storm centre' of Kikuyu oppositional politics, when and how did the KATC become connected to militant politics? The answer is to be found in the tenure of Jomo Kenyatta, who served as the headmaster of the KATC during the 1947 to 1950 period.

Kenyatta, the KATC, and the KCA

In May 1947, Peter flew to England to meet with the colonial secretary and members of parliament concerning legislation proposed for East Africa.⁶⁸ Following his departure, Jomo Kenyatta, recently returned from England himself, took over as headmaster of the KATC.⁶⁹ As discussed in chapter two, Peter and Kenyatta's relationship was established during Peter's time in England in the mid-1930s. Peter returned to Kenya in late 1938, while Kenyatta remained in England until 1946. When Kenyatta returned, it had been fifteen years since his original departure in 1931. Kenyatta reconnected with Peter and married Peter's sister, one of Koinange's daughters, in 1947. Unfortunately, she died the following year while giving birth to their first child; it is difficult to imagine that her death would not have placed some strain on Kenyatta's relationship with the Koinanges.⁷⁰ Kenyatta's relationship with the Koinange family, connected through both friendship and marriage, provided a connection to traditional Kikuyu leadership and post-war politics following Kenyatta's fifteen years abroad. Peter invited Kenyatta to join him at the KATC. When Peter left for London in 1947, Kenyatta assumed leadership of the college and oversight of the funds for the building campaign.

⁶⁸ The reasons for this will be discussed in the next chapter, as Peter's actions from 1947 onward are most directly connected to his role with the Kenya African Union.

⁶⁹ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 67.

⁷⁰ Throup, *Economic and Social Origins*, p. 273.

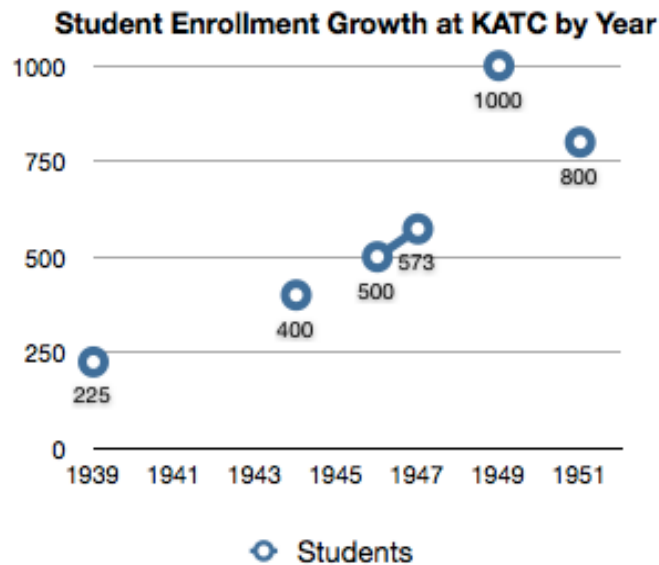


Figure 4.1. Growth in enrolment at the KATC from 1938-1951.

Under Kenyatta's leadership, the college grew rapidly from almost 600 students in 1947 to an enrolment of nearly 1,000 students three years later (Figure 4.1).⁷¹ The college grew as much in three years as it had over the previous eight years under Peter Mbiyu's leadership. On enrolment numbers alone, Kenyatta's short tenure appeared more successful than Peter's. However, these enrolment numbers mask what were the most troubled years of the college's history. Many of the problems were of Kenyatta's own making – his mismanagement of the college, his pilfering of the college purse, and his part in the re-emergence of the KCA at the KATC.

As discussed in the previous chapter, by the end of the 1940s, prominent colonial leaders such as CNC Wyn-Harris and Governor Mitchell did not trust African political leaders. As David Throup notes, many in the European community regarded Kenyatta 'with profound suspicion as a dangerous communist agitator'.⁷² In 1947, the DC of

⁷¹ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 188.

⁷² Throup, *Economic and Social Origins*, p. 272.

Kiambu described Kenyatta as 'the most accomplished agitator of them all'.⁷³ Kenyatta took over as leader of the KATC at a time when the social and political situation in Kenya was deteriorating. It was, in part, this changing nature of politics that had motivated Peter's departure from the governor's standing advisory committee for London. However, Kenyatta's own actions further undermined his standing before the government and, eventually, threatened to undermine his relationship with the Koinanges. The greatest danger for Kenyatta lay in the newfound access he had to the college funds.

A 1948 letter to Peter Mbiyu from a member of the college's staff reported that 'The [building] plans for the Githunguri Teachers College are all complete and [...] Enough money also has been raised'.⁷⁴ All that was left to do was for Kenyatta to officially launch the construction phase of the campaign. Kenyatta never did so, even though fundraising efforts continued. Another £2,500 was added in 1949, bringing the grand total to well over £10,000 in funds raised – a significant sum in 1949.⁷⁵ Instead of providing the funds for the construction of new dormitories and classrooms, as they were intended, these funds provided a new home for Kenyatta and financed his penchant for alcohol.⁷⁶ In July 1950, the DC described the KATC under Kenyatta's headmastership, as 'a major financial swindle at the expense of the African public'.⁷⁷ As a result, the Government demanded that the KATC turn over reports of their financial accounts. When reviewed, these reports revealed that the joint account shared by Peter and Kenyatta was nearly empty, while the account solely in Kenyatta's name was 'rich' with funds.⁷⁸ The Corfield Report provides insight into how these funds were spent:

⁷³ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 275.

⁷⁴ TNA KV/2/2535, D.N. Nene to P.M. Koinange, 12 Jan. 1948, item 84f, p. 2.

⁷⁵ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', pp 91, 187.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

Rumours of speculation intensified as [Kenyatta] appeared to be more interested in his new house and in the consumption of liquor than in the Teacher's College, and the curious were wondering why he, with larger sums available, was unable to extend a school which Peter Koinange had funded with minimum capital. One prominent politician went so far as to say that Jomo Kenyatta was consolidating his own finances before Peter Koinange's return.⁷⁹

The year following Kenyatta's return to Kenya had its challenges. Until Peter's May 1947 departure, Kenyatta lived in Peter's home as a guest.⁸⁰ He married, but within the year his wife, Peter's sister, passed away. The KATC building fund and general fund proved too great an opportunity for Kenyatta. Kenyatta's short tenure (1947- c. 1951) introduced overt financial corruption, a halt to the educational development of the college, and placed a noticeable strain on his relationship with the Koinanges.

According to intelligence reports, by late 1950, 'Peter Koinange was [...] seriously perturbed by the financial position' of the college under Kenyatta's leadership.⁸¹ In addition to tensions with Peter, Kenyatta grew increasingly worried that Koinange might 'ask awkward questions about his administration of Githunguri Teachers College funds'.⁸² Within two years of Kenyatta becoming headmaster, his financial mismanagement of the college's funds risked undermining his relationship with the Koinange family, one of the wealthiest and most influential African families in Central Kenya. It was during this period of financial mismanagement under Kenyatta that subversive political activity, namely a re-emergence of the KCA, found an opportunity at the KATC.

MI5 noted that within a year of Peter Mbiyu's departure for the UK, there had been a resurgence of the KCA at the college. The MI5 liaison in Nairobi wrote in 1948:

I have no doubt that Jomo Kenyatta is *one of the principal sources of inspiration for the re-emergence of the Kikuyu Central Association* although he [sic] will sufficiently acute

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 184.

⁸⁰ TNA KV/2/2535, P. Perfect to Sir P. Sillitoe, 'Peter Mbiyu Koinange', 22 May 1947, item 16x, p. 1.

⁸¹ Ibid., 186; KNA/JZ 7/17, 'Particular Incidents', ii, item 4b, p. 4.

⁸² KNA JZ/7/17, 'Particular Incidents', ii, item 4b, p. 4.

to discourage any blatant and overt K.C.A. propaganda being disseminated at the School, *although it will doubtless be encouraged underground*.⁸³

It was during this period that Kenyatta appointed militant political figures to staff at the college. Dedan Kimathi, one of the first arrested, tried, and convicted for administering the illegal Mau Mau oath in the 1950s, was but one example of Kenyatta's staffing decisions.⁸⁴ By July 1950, just a few months before the financial row that threatened Kenyatta's relationship with the Koinanges, officials concluded that there was a direct link between the rise of secret oaths, the leadership at the KATC, and the leadership of the resurgent KCA.⁸⁵ According to Henry Muoria, Leakey believed that the KATC under Kenyatta became a 'centre for teaching subversive politics'.⁸⁶ It was under Kenyatta that financial corruption and militant political elements came to the KATC. While the Koinanges were upset over Kenyatta's abuse of the college funds, were they involved in the growth of militancy at the college?

The Koinanges and Militancy at the KATC

As mentioned previously, between his departure in May 1947 and the Emergency Declaration of October 1952, Peter spent more time outside of Kenya than he did in the colony (see Table 4.2). Twenty months passed between his May 1947 departure for England and his return to Kenya in January 1949.⁸⁷ He was in Kenya for seven months before leaving for India in August 1949 on a three-month speaking tour at the invitation of

⁸³ KNA KV/2/2539, H.D. Wharton, 'Peter Mbiyu KOINANGE', 1 May 1948, item 174, pp 4-5.

⁸⁴ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 91; Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 279. See chapters five and six of this thesis for more about information on oathing before October 1952.

⁸⁵ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 91.

⁸⁶ KNA MSS/74/2, 'An Open Letter from Henry Muoria', date unknown, pp 11-2.

⁸⁷ TNA KV/2/2535, G.T.D. Patterson, 'Peter Mbui KOINANGE', 31 May 1947, item 12a; Ibid., DG to Security Liaison Officer - Nairobi, 10 June 1947, item 15a; TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 185; Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 266.

India's independent government.⁸⁸ It was during the 1947-1949 period that Kenyatta established his habit of using college funds for his personal desires. He also provided an opportunity for the re-emergence of the KCA. Peter returned to Kenya in October 1949 for two years before travelling to the United Kingdom in November 1951.⁸⁹ Following Peter's October 1949 return, a growing awareness of Kenyatta's abuse of the college funds led to growing distrust between Peter and his father towards Kenyatta. It was during these years that Peter hosted Brockway at the KAC and extended the invitation to the Secretary of State for the.⁹⁰ Both of these invitations were extensions of Peter's work in London from May 1947 to January 1949. This two-year period also saw Peter help establish the non-racial Kenya Citizen's Association. The Association attempted to foster stronger relationships between the African, Asian, and European communities with the hope of stemming the growing tide of inter-racial distrust (discussed in detail in the next chapter).⁹¹

Period	Location
May 1947 – Jan. 1949	London
Jan. 1949 – Aug 1949	Kenya
Aug 1949 – Oct 1949	India
Oct 1949 – Nov 1951	Kenya
Nov 1951 – 1958	London

Table 4.2: Peter Mbiyu, Location from 1947 to 1958.

⁸⁸ 'Akola Market', *Times of India* (26 July 1949), p. 4; 'African Leader in Bombay', *Times of India* (1 Aug. 1949), p. 3.

⁸⁹ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 188; TNA KV/2/2540, Security Liaison Officer, 19 Nov. 1951, item 268a; Ibid., Security Liaison Officer, 1 Nov. 1951, item 255a; Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 266.

⁹⁰ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 102.

⁹¹ Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 127.

By the time the college was shut down by the colonial administration in 1953, there is evidence that Kenyatta had not been involved with the college's leadership for over a year. When Peter left for England in 1951, Kenyatta resumed position of headmaster.⁹² Kenyatta's old ways resumed, with staff complaining in January 1952 that they had not received their wages and that student enrolment had dropped twenty percent between 1951 and 1952.⁹³ G. W. Waiyaki replaced Kenyatta as headmaster some time between November 1951 and October 1952. In October 1952, a college staff member was surprised that the police believed Kenyatta to be a member of the college leadership: 'It is interesting to note that under the Order [...] for closure it is stated that Mr Jomo Kenyatta is a member of the managing board of the College'.⁹⁴ By the Emergency period, Koinange had long since ceased his involvement with the college and Peter had been abroad for almost two years. Kenyatta, on the other hand, held a prominent position for much of the 1947 to 1951 period – a time of financial scandal and growing militancy for the KATC. The Corfield Report was correct when it concluded that it was Kenyatta who had spun 'the web of Mau Mau' at the KATC.⁹⁵

Revising the Historical Narrative of the Koinanges and KATC

Over the last fifty years, official reports and historical scholarship have argued for a three-part link between the Koinanges, the KATC, and the eventual development of

⁹² TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 188.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ TNA KV/2/2541, J.K. Cauri to Mr. Mbiyu, 18 Nov. 1952, item 353b.

⁹⁵ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 190.

subversive or militant elements at the college. This connection has relied heavily on interviews from the mid-1950s, from the Mau Mau Emergency onward.⁹⁶ In spite of the popular myths reflected in oral interviews and scholarly writing, the KATC was not, to borrow Kershaw's imagery, one element of Senior Chief Koinange's attempts to raise a 'rallying cry' for freedom and independence.⁹⁷ Nor was it, as one of Kershaw's interviewee's claimed, a training ground for *micuthi wa Mbiyu*, or 'Mbiyu's little snakes'.⁹⁸ The KATC was only of interest to Koinange to the extent that he supported his son's efforts. For Peter, the KATC was about using his formal education to meet a need for African education, rather than as a political platform. Peter remained a governor-appointed member of the standing advisory committee through 1946, and Koinange remained a chief through 1949. There is no criticism, prior to the Mau Mau Emergency, that links the Koinange's to the KATC or its late-1940s militant elements.

Archival sources from the 1930s and the 1940s indicate that, in spite of post-1950s claims, the Koinanges were not involved in the founding of the KATC. Peter Mbiyu became involved early on as a Form I teacher, followed by a hesitant acceptance of the headmastership at the college. The Corfield Report rightly concluded that Peter was 'genuinely interested in education' and its advancement through the KATC.⁹⁹ Peter spent nearly a decade, most of it during the war, trying to recruit faculty and staff, launching a building campaign, seeking scholarship opportunities for students, and pursuing university status for the university – all in a sincere effort to see the KATC succeed. It is very likely that it is this level of earnest effort and Peter's justified pride in the KATC that explains

⁹⁶ The reason that the militant-turn narrative concerning the Koinanges arises from sources in the mid-1950s and the 1960s is discussed in chapter six.

⁹⁷ Kershaw, *Mau Mau*, p. 187.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁹⁹ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 190.

Peter's 1950s claims that he founded the college.¹⁰⁰ In reality, he did not found the college, but he did pour more effort into seeing it succeed than anyone else. If Peter's father was involved at all – and there is very little evidence he was – it was by giving his support to the raising of funds for his son's building project.

This chapter has challenged the broadly held claims that the Koinanges were prominently involved in establishing the Kenya African Teachers' College. By examining documents contemporary to the events discussed, this chapter rebuts narratives that arose via the oral histories and works of scholarship following the Mau Mau crisis. These conclusions and the methods used in arriving at them provide two important applications for broader scholarship.

Dominant Narratives and Post-Crisis Sources

The first is the application and reiteration of Frederick Cooper's warning that historians must take care to not force later developments on preceding events too early. *Mau Mau from Below* makes this mistake in linking the KATC and Koinange to the development of freedom and independence. The Corfield Report and *The Myth of Mau Mau* are, likewise, prone to the same shortcoming. These works continue to profoundly influence the foundational assumptions of continuing scholarship. Across the continent of Africa, as scholars pursue a clearer understanding of the decades prior to independence and the story of pre-independence developments, this caution still needs to be heeded. It is far too easy to assume latter trends too early, obscuring reality, rather than offering clarity to our understanding of the past. The inclinations towards proto-independence, self-rule,

¹⁰⁰ M. Koinange, 'Jomo: Colleague in the Struggle for Freedom and Independence', in A.H. Patel, N.S. Thakur and V. Dhar (eds), *Struggle for 'Release Jomo and His Colleagues'* (Nairobi, 1963), p. 24.

or militant trends regarding the Koinanges has shaped the way scholars have misunderstood their history in the 1930s and the 1940s, and has led to assumptions of the nature of their involvement that proves untenable in the context of documents contemporary to the events. The challenge of seeking historical understanding of a pre-crises period using sources created during or after the crises presents an even greater challenge.

End of empire conflicts changed everything. The more drawn out the duration of the conflict, the more violent the uprising, the more draconian the response, then the greater the distorting impact of the event on oral histories (e.g. memories) and the documentary relics of the event and those created afterwards. This is the case with the story of the Koinange's engagement with the KATC. Claims from 1950 onward incorrectly credit Koinange and Peter with establishing the KATC, supporting the school throughout its duration, and using it as a training ground for militancy.¹⁰¹ In reality, Koinange had precious little involvement with the college, while Peter joined after the college was already established. Post Mau-Mau oral interviews and public memories provide sometimes-flawed views on pre-Mau Mau developments. Koinange family claims to the founding of the KATC aligned them with a powerful symbol of African independent action and eventual rebellion. At the same time, the colonial government's concerted efforts to discredit the KATC as a stronghold of militancy justified their detention of former KATC students during the Emergency period.¹⁰² Post-Mau Mau narratives reflect Emergency experiences and political ambitions, but in this case they fail to reflect pre-Mau Mau realities.

¹⁰¹ Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below*, p. 193.

¹⁰² KNA KA/1/68, W. Muchema to P.M. Koinange, 17 Oct. 1966, item 108.

Critical examination of conflict and post-conflict sources and comparison to pre-conflict sources is a necessity for discerning historical reality from conflict-era myths. As research continues regarding the end of empire period in Algeria, Cyprus, Malaya, and elsewhere – including the late apartheid era in South Africa – documents contemporary to pre-conflict events offer helpful correctives to source material heavily influenced by the conflict. Crises shape memories as they create unique and powerful motivations for reshaping an individual's understanding of their own past and their shared past. As this chapter closes, this final point begins to illuminate the underlying source for the growing dissonance between the stories of Koinange family involvement in pre-Mau Mau and Mau Mau militancy as presented in scholarship and popular discourse and the historical narrative which is developing over the course of this present work.

Koinange wa Mbiyu will be one of the first to be arrested in connection with Mau Mau and Peter Mbiyu, away in England, will be listed as one of the top leaders of the rebellion. A study of the Koinanges' involvement with the KAU will shed further light on this growing divergence between the militant Koinange myth and historical reality. The next chapter examines this part of the Koinanges' history in the lead up to the Emergency declaration of October 1952.

CHAPTER FIVE

Moderation and Mischief: The Koinanges and the Kenya African Union (1944-1952)

In April 1950, David Gathiomi, the eldest son of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Joyce Kagendo (Koinange's third wife) disappeared. Rumours as to why immediately began to circulate. A Special Branch report summarised some of these early rumours: 'he is dead; hanged himself, shot himself, that he had been murdered and finally that he had gone to Uganda to contact the Bataka'.¹ The disappearance of David Gathiomi and the ensuing rumours reveal a context of growing militancy and social unrest by the late 1940s and early 1950s. The most elaborate explanation came in 1952. If true, it challenges the present understanding of the place the Koinange's held politically and socially in the pre-Mau Mau period:

It has been stated that prior to the arrival of the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester in Nairobi [for the 1950 Royal City Charter ceremony], the Governor had to attend a certain ceremony in the Ngong area. John Mungai, Fred Kubai and Kharusi alias Guy had plotted to assassinate H.E. during the ceremony and had a rifle and two .45 revolvers. To check whether their guns were O.K. David Gathiome [sic] was taken and was shot at point blank range on the Magadi Soda road behind the Ngong hills and his body was left in the open to be dealt with by hyenas and jackals. On the way back to Nairobi their car broke down and they could not get to the ceremony.²

I will return to this story later in this chapter to hear an account of what happened to David Gathiomi given by Koinange wa Mbiyu in 1953. For now, the story of David Gathiomi's death and this particular rumour of an assassination plot targeting the Duke

¹ KNA JZ/7/17, 'A note on the disappearance of David Gathiomi Koinange', item 4e, p. 1.

² Ibid., p. 2.

and Duchess reveals two developments of import. First, that David Gathiomi was a part of pre-Mau Mau violence hints at the political division within the Koinange family concerning militant activity by the late 1940s. Second, if by 1950 Koinange wa Mbiyu's son can be unceremoniously killed and his body left to wild animals (and there is no indication of fear of reprisal over the murder of the chief's son), a significant shift in the political leadership of Central Kenya has taken place. As this chapter and the next reveal, political differences within the Koinange home led to division amongst the family. Furthermore, the story points to the fact that the Koinange family did not escape the rise of radical and militant activity in Central Kenya in the late 1940s.

In order to understand the Koinanges' changing situation and role in the political and social developments of their time, this chapter examines the six years before the declaration of the State of Emergency. A key development of this period was the rise of the Kenya African Union (KAU) following its establishment in 1944 to support the appointment of Eliud Mathu to the Legislative Council (LegCo). The Koinanges held prominent positions in the KAU during the latter half of the 1940s. The nature and the extent of their role within the KAU has, understandably, assumed that prominence equalled influence. This chapter addresses this assumption, investigating the extent of their involvement with the KAU during this period. The analysis to follow challenges the prevailing narrative that the Koinanges were at 'the centre of the Kenya African Union'.³ The Koinanges' engagement with the KAU was limited, and by 1950 they no longer held effective leadership to shape or guide the KAU's actions. In the years following 1950, the influence they once asserted had dissipated and claims to leadership reveal influence that was primarily symbolic and pragmatically ineffectual.

³ D. Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: the Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London, 2005), p. 30.

This chapter adds to the historical context of the previous two chapters, building upon the wartime changes in colonial expectations and developments in African independent education, by examining developments in African political action during the 1940s and early 1950s. Within this context, this chapter recounts the generally accepted narrative and periodisation of the KAU's history.⁴ Following this presentation of the present consensus, the majority of the chapter examines the nature of Koinange and Peter's engagement with the KAU from 1944 to 1952. Recently released historical source material revises the narrative previously presented within scholarly work. This chapter then looks at the events of 1950 as one of the most significant years in the life of the Koinange family and for the history of the Kenya colony. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of this chapter's analysis on the scholarship of militancy, leadership, and family politics.

African Political Action in the 1940s

The hallmarks of the mid-to-late 1940s include a growing urban population, rising unemployment, depressed wages among Kenya's African community, and an increasingly vocal urban population of ex-soldiers, youth, and the unemployed.⁵ Soldiers who returned from overseas deployment with newly acquired skills faced high unemployment and limited opportunity. Unemployed, disenfranchised, and increasingly frustrated, ex-soldiers led a significant part of Kenya's growing trade union movement and African political action.⁶ In the Koinange family, John Mbiyu and Frederick Mbiyu, both ex-

⁴ This periodisation of the KAU is drawn from John Spencer's authoritative work on the KAU (J. Spencer, *The Kenya African Union* (London, 1985)).

⁵ E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo, 'The Formative Years 1945-55', in B.A. Ogot and W.R. Ochieng' (eds), *The Decolonization and Independence of Kenya: 1940-1993* (Nairobi, 1995), p. 32.

⁶ KNA VQ/16/77, 1945 Annual Report, p. 19; KNA, VQ/16/2, Monthly Report, Mar. 1950, item 15; Ibid., Apr. 1950, item 16; J. Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (New York, 1979), pp 276-7. While official numbers

soldiers, founded businesses and helped establish trade unions in the years following their wartime military service.⁷ Kenya's urban centres, primarily Nairobi, drew in rural youth and ex-soldiers with promises of jobs, education, and like-minded community. The rise of prostitution and impoverished African urban areas during this period fuelled further discontent.⁸ It also increased criticism of these urban areas by those in the rural countryside from whence the youth, women, and ex-soldiers had come. Koinange repeatedly petitioned for the shuttering of these African urban areas through the LNC.⁹

The *kipande* laws, discussed in previous chapters, had served their function in suppressing wages but only added to the growing unrest and frustration among native labourers. As a result of growing opposition to labour laws more broadly, both militant and non-militant leaders targeted labour conditions, with the *kipande* used as one of the most prominent examples of colonial suppression of African opportunities. While rural labourers were understandably frustrated with the *kipande* regulations, the greatest challenge facing Kenya's rural population was one that had long proved challenging under colonial rule – the loss and alienation of their land.

In keeping with British post-war colonial development policies (part humanitarian effort and part post-war fiscal necessity), Kenya's government invested in social development and welfare schemes. In 1950 alone, the government undertook forty land development programmes.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the additional land offered in these plans was often nutrient-poor and unfarmable, resulting in only further frustration between

recognised nearly 5,700 ex-soldiers from Central Province, official reports also acknowledged that this number significantly underestimated the actual number of African natives who had served in the war.

⁷ 'Mbiyu Koinange', *Who's Who in East Africa 1965-1966* (Nairobi, 1966), p. 63.

⁸ L. White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, 1990).

⁹ KNA VQ/5/57, 'Kyambu LNC Meeting Report', 19 Sep. 1936, item 7, p. 14; Ibid., 'Kyambu LNC Meeting Report', 24 Oct. 1936, item 8, p. 1; KNA VQ/5/59, 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 3-5 May 1938, item 1; Ibid., 'Kiambu LNC Meeting Report', 6-7 Dec. 1938, item 3.

¹⁰ H. Swanzey, 'Quarterly Notes', *African Affairs*, 49 (Jan. 1950), p. 12.

disenfranchised African communities and the colonial administration. Many sought jobs as waged workers on European farms. However, as the European farms became increasingly mechanised in the 1940s, the need for farm labour dropped, leading to a growth in squatter populations and increased rural to urban migration. There were few options for protesting these cultural shifts, and most found the response they received disappointing when they petitioned through the local administration. The discontent that increasingly characterised both the urban and the rural areas culminated in widespread political unrest in Kenya's Central Highlands in the late 1940s. Throughout the 1940s, there was a growing need for organised political efforts from the African community to press for change.

Established following Mathu's appointment to the Legislative Council (LegCo) in 1944, the KAU was born from the recognition of this need by both the African community and Moore's administration. Its early leadership comprised the largely moderate, mission-educated elite of the day, including Eliud Mathu, Peter Mbiyu Koinange, Harry Thuku, and Tom Mbotela.¹¹ According to John Spencer, the KAU was the first political body that could legitimately claim to represent every major region or ethnic group in Kenya (with the exception of the Kalenjin).¹² While other smaller political organisations arose during this period, Tiyaambe Zeleza rightly claims that the KAU was 'the most significant'.¹³ Noteworthy is the fact that the KAU received the blessing of the administration when it first began.¹⁴ However, by 1952 it was considered an instigator of militant violence.¹⁵ After a series of three presidents in three years, Kenyatta took over as the third president, holding the position for longer than anyone else. His presidency began

¹¹ Spencer, *Kenya African Union*, p. 128.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ T. Zeleza, 'Kenya and the Second World War, 1939-1950', in W.R. Ochieng' (ed.), *A Modern History of Kenya 1895-1980* (Nairobi, 1989), p. 155.

¹⁴ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 262.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 297.

in the midst of a tense discussion on closer administrative union between Kenya, Tanganyika, and Uganda.

Administrative reforms for the region were proposed as Colonial White Paper No. 191 (often referred to simply as '191'), and its successor, Colonial Paper No. 210 (or simply '210'). The KAU and the East African Indian National Congress (EAINC), both voiced their support for 191. This proposal set forth plans for a central administrative board made up of the East African governors, as well as a legislative assembly comprised of equal representation from the various racial communities (European, African, Asian, Arab) within each territory with the purpose of coordinating infrastructural and economic cooperation within the region.¹⁶ Kenya's European settler community, and the Electors' Union in particular, had long resisted racial equality on legislative bodies and vociferously opposed the proposal, protesting 191 in both Nairobi and in London. Such protests in London were part of a growing tendency to look to the metropole to protest colonial policy. Caving to settler pressure, the Colonial Office issued a revised version of the proposal: 210.

On the surface, 210 maintained equity for the largest three racial groups (European, African, Asian) with each receiving a single representative on the central council. Each colony's local legislative council would then vote on a fourth representative. Because European settlers controlled Kenya's LegCo, this ensured a European majority on the central administrative council. The proposals in 210 won the support of the settler community but forfeited the support of the KAU, EAINC, and the communities they represented. Peter played a leading role in subsequent London-based protests against 210 for the KAU and the EAINC. Despite their protests, the revised proposal went into effect

¹⁶ D.W. Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau 1945-1955* (London, 1988), p. 48.

in January 1948.¹⁷ It was approved through the East African colonies and protectorate on European votes alone.¹⁸ Not a single non-European from any of the legislative councils voted in favour of the bill. The passing of 210 was a powerful reminder, in the shadow of India's independence, that East Africa's European minority population continued to wield tremendous political influence. Following the disappointing results of the 191 and 210 controversies the KAU struggled to find a new unifying focus in the immediate years that followed. The results were a noticeable lack of cohesion, growing internal conflict, and a decline in the KAU's influence.

The passing of 210, the accompanying loss of a clear, unifying objective, and Kenyatta's lacklustre leadership combined to create the lowest point in the KAU's history from 1947 to 1950. David Anderson attributes the decline in the KAU's influence directly to Kenyatta's mediocrity.¹⁹ As with the KATC, Kenyatta proved to be a poor leader of the KAU, providing opportunity for the rise of more dynamic, and in this context, more militant leadership. The leadership among the unemployed ex-soldiers, youth, and trade unions of Nairobi's urban centre, rather than Kenyatta, became the leaders of the discontent. Urban and rural communities, the latter in places like Olengurone and Murang'a, rallied to this new generation of younger leaders.²⁰ Kenyatta, the Koinanges, and others in the KAU attempted to win the support of the discontented populations by using their relationship with the colonial government to mediate agreements between these discontented groups and the administration.²¹ These attempts failed and managed to further the distrust of the colonial administration and forfeit the support of the rural

¹⁷ 'East African Assembly: an Experiment in Colonial Coordination - A Variety of Common Services', *The Times* (London, 7 Apr. 1948), p. 5.

¹⁸ Bennett, *Kenya*, pp 102-109.

¹⁹ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p. 30.

²⁰ See Throup's *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau* for more information on Olengurone (Throup's chapter 6) and for more information concerning the peasant revolt at Murang'a (Throup's chapter 5).

²¹ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 278.

communities they had promised to help. The rising calls for rapid, even violent, change from Nairobi's radical, outspoken, and increasingly militant leaders drowned out the more moderate approaches of mediation that sought change through the governing imperial bureaucratic system.

In the context of the KAU's weakness, militant leadership based in Nairobi began reshaping social and communal bonds for their purposes.²² They took cultural oaths of unity and transformed them into radical oaths of violent rebellion. Zeleza rightly notes that this marked a pivotal shift in leadership 'from the conservative Kiambu elders to the Nairobi militants'.²³ Elders, such as Koinange wa Mbiyu, lost their former influence, while the likes of John Mbiyu, Frederick Mbiyu, and their peers gained greater influence. In June 1951, Nairobi's radical leadership wrested control of the KAU's Nairobi branch.²⁴ The District Commissioner (DC) of Kiambu described the impact of these changes in his report the following year, saying it was 'a year of mounting tension, turbulence, and terrorism, with the sinister shadow of Mau Mau' hanging over the community.²⁵ The stringent boundaries of loyalty and expectation, the subsequent forcing of African politics of dissent into the shadows, and the growing frustrations among a number of disenfranchised African communities (squatters, ex-soldiers, unemployed youth, etc.) set the stage for a violent uprising.

²² This is covered in detail in J. Lonsdale, 'The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: Wealth, Poverty & Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought', in B. Berman and J. Lonsdale (eds), *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa* (2 vols., Oxford, 1992), ii, pp 409-428.

²³ Zeleza, 'Kenya and the Second World War', p. 167.

²⁴ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p. 389.

²⁵ As cited in M. Theuri and W. Kanina, 'The Making of Kikuyuland', *The People's Digest* (Nairobi, 24 July 1998), pp 1, 4; KNA ARC(MAA)/6/86, CNC to Attorney General, 30 July 1948, item 1.

The KAU and the Koinanges

Kenyatta's belief that change would come not through violent rebellion, rather through London, as David Anderson and E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo have pointed out, was the KAU's counter offer to the path of militancy in the late 1940s.²⁶ The KAU sent a series of delegations to London in the late 1940s and early 1950s (of which Peter Mbiyu was frequently a member) to protest colonial policy and petition for change. However, the strategy required patience, and working through the slow bureaucratic process put Kenya and the Koinanges at odds with the growing demand for immediate change. The promises of Nairobi's urban leadership for more rapid change held far greater sway among the discontent. As a result, as George Bennett, Carl Rosberg, and John Nottingham note, Kenya lost influence within and control of the KAU to more militant leadership following 1950.²⁷

It is widely accepted that the Koinanges held prominent positions of leadership in the Kenya African Union during the late 1940s.²⁸ David Throup and Bethwell Ogot agree that Peter Mbiyu was a founding member of the organisation.²⁹ Throup elaborates on his comment, noting that Peter's involvement prior to Kenya's return was minimal, and increased significantly following Kenya's return.³⁰ According to Anderson, the Koinanges were 'prime movers' behind the new party.³¹ Daniel Branch notes that Koinange wa Mbiyu and two of his sons, Peter Mbiyu and John Mbiyu, were 'at the

²⁶ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp 29-30; Atieno-Odhiambo, 'The Formative Years', p. 34.

²⁷ Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 115; C. Rosberg, Jr. and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya* (New York, 1966), p. 215.

²⁸ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p. 12; D. Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 212; B.A. Ogot, *Historical Dictionary of Kenya* (Nairobi, 1981), pp 110-1.

²⁹ Ogot, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 110; Throup, *Economic and Social Origins*, p. 273.

³⁰ Throup, *Economic and Social Origins*, p. 273.

³¹ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp 28-30

forefront' of the KAU's establishment.³² As a result of their central role in those earlier years, John Lonsdale has posited that Kenyatta's 1947 marriage into the Koinange family provided further support for Kenyatta's appointment as president of the KAU.³³ The general consensus among scholars gives the Koinange family a pre-eminent role in the KAU from its inception.

Within this broad acceptance of Koinange involvement with the KAU, the details of their involvement, as well as the nature, extent, and meaning has not been fully considered. This chapter fills that gap in the literature, questioning what their noted role meant, given the social and political changes of the time, and what influence they may have had over the years. As with the previous chapters, the narrative that arises here is revisionist in nature. This chapter highlights the necessity of attention to context, the importance of phases of development within organisations, and the way radical and violent politics, fuelled by discontent, transform social and political norms.

The Koinanges and the KAU's Moderate Years

If the Koinanges were involved in the founding of the KAU, as scholars have posited, it is odd that neither Peter nor Koinange held active or distinguished roles within the KAU from 1944 until Kenyatta's return in 1946. In these first two years, Peter and his father continued their involvement with the colonial government, with Peter also heavily involved with his work at the KATC. Koinange and Peter only actively engaged with the KAU after Kenyatta became president in 1947. Evidence of this delayed engagement by

³² Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, p. 212.

³³ J. Lonsdale, 'KAU's Cultures: Imaginations of Community and Constructions of Leadership in Kenya after the Second World War', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 12 (2000), p. 114.

Koinange and Peter is to be found in an examination of the organisation's early leadership, Peter Mbiyu's activities in the mid-1940s, as well as via records from the Colonial Secretary's visit to Kenya in 1946.

The first indication that the Koinanges' early engagement with the KAU was not as important as has been claimed is reflected in the changes to the KAU leadership from 1945 to 1947. In 1945, Harry Thuku — the former radical turned moderate politician of the 1930s — served as the KAU's first president.³⁴ James Gichuru, a former chief of Dagoretti, then succeeded him in 1946.³⁵ In June 1947, Kenyatta took his place as the KAU's third President after Kenyatta and Peter, among others, brought public allegations of financial scandal against Gichuru in court.³⁶ As mentioned in the previous chapters, many in the African community and in the colonial government were optimistic regarding Peter Mbiyu upon his return to Kenya in 1938. As the son of a prominent and influential Kikuyu elder, headmaster of the first all-African staffed and led teacher's training college (the KATC), and one of the most highly-educated Africans of the time, the question arises, why was Peter Mbiyu not selected as president of the KAU prior to Kenyatta's return?

Along with other scholars, Kershaw proposes that Peter Mbiyu was not considered for the position due to his long absence abroad, as well as his 'presumed ties to the KCA'.³⁷ This explanation is problematic. While Peter Mbiyu had been absent from Kenya for over a decade, by 1944 he had been in Kenya for over five years and was widely known. When Kenyatta returned to Kenya in 1947, he had been away longer than Peter Mbiyu had been in the 1920s and 1930s, and Kenyatta possessed more explicit links to the KCA than Peter ever had. The more likely explanation for Peter not serving as the KAU president was

³⁴ Spencer, *Kenya African Union*, p. 131.

³⁵ T. Gavaghan, *Of Lions and Dung Beetles* (Ilfracombe, 1999), p. 142.

³⁶ TNA KV/2/2535, Extract from Kenya Colony Intelligence and Security Summary, 12 May 1947, item 6a.

³⁷ Kershaw, *Mau Mau*, p. 209, footnote 63; Ogot, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 110; Throup, *Economic and Social*, p. 273.

that he altogether lacked the dynamism required of African political leaders by the late 1940s.

Peter was a student by nature, having spent the better part of three decades with various academic institutions. Despite his attempts at political grandstanding, he was not a particularly compelling political leader among the African community. Indeed, his melancholy and academic nature was drastically different from the more engaging and dynamic personalities of Kenyatta, Thuku, or Mathu. Furthermore, there was little personal advantage to Peter for investing energy and time into the KAU. Before 1946, the KAU was primarily the political support wing for Eliud Mathu, who held the seat on the LegCo Peter had so ardently campaigned for. Peter Mbiyu's activities as headmaster of the KATC and his position on the Governor's advisory committee were promising enough prospects for social and political advancement and were a better fit for his own strengths and inclinations. Peter voiced his support for the KAU in these early days but refrained from active participation or leadership in the organisation. There is further indication that neither Peter nor Koinange held prominent roles or personal commitments to the KAU prior to Kenyatta's return.

Memoranda from 1946 indicate that for Koinange and Peter, the priorities of their local Kikuyu community superseded any involvement with the KAU. When a colonial secretary made a visit to Kenya, a number of memoranda were presented to him from a wide variety of social and political groups. In 1946, Secretary of State Arthur Creech-Jones visited Kenya and received a number of such letters. Two of these memoranda — one from the KAU and another from the 'Agikuyu of Kiambu District' — indicate that Koinange and Peter's relationship with the KAU in 1946 was negligible at best.³⁸ The

³⁸ TNA CO/533/537/21, Memorandum, 17 Aug. 1946, item 1, pp 1-53; TNA CO/533/544/2, The Agikuyu of Kiambu District, 16 Aug. 1946, item 21.

signatures, rather than the contents of the letters, are what is most revealing about these letters.

The memorandum from the KAU bore a number of signatures but only one from a member of the Koinange family: John Mbiyu Koinange. John Mbiyu was an ex-soldier (served from 1943 to 1947) who became a farmer after the war. John was by far the most radical member of the Koinange family during the 1940s and 1950s.³⁹ One intelligence report from the early 1950s described John Mbiyu as ‘a protagonist of extreme violence [...a] direct link between the Koinange family and the terrorist element’.⁴⁰ John was not the only politically radical member of the family.⁴¹ In the post-war years, stark political divisions within the family arose. Over the next decade, the most conservative wing of the family was embodied in and led by Charles Karuga Koinange. While not as conservative as Charles Karuga, Koinange and Peter found themselves right of centre, inclined towards Charles’ political stance. In line with Koinange’s tendency to grant the individuals in the family freedom to pursue school or choose female circumcision (or not), there seems to have been considerable freedom among his children and wives to hold a variety of political perspectives. John Mbiyu embodied the more radical political positions within the family. Those left of centre, more inclined towards the politics of John Mbiyu, included Joyce Kagendo (Koinange’s third wife, an alleged Mau Mau treasurer), her eldest son David Gathiomi (alleged to be Mau Mau’s chief armourer), and Frederick Mbiyu, another of Joyce’s sons, who was known for wielding a ‘pearl-handled revolver’ in the months before the State of Emergency.⁴² There is no indication that any of Koinange’s other wives were politically active or inclined towards militancy in the way that Joyce Kagendo and her

³⁹ KNA JZ/7/17, Petition No. 162: Ex-Senior Chief Koinange Mbiyu, 30 Oct. 1953, item 8, p. 3.

⁴⁰ KNA JZ/7/48, Petition No. 161: John Wesley Mbiyu Koinange, 8 Oct. 1953, item 3.

⁴¹ TNA KV/2/2539, H.D. Wharton, 4 Nov. 1948, item 174a.

⁴² KNA JZ/7/11, Kiambu DC to Executive Officer, ‘Petition Frederick Mbiyu Koinange’, 6 July 1953, item 13, pp 12; Ibid., JZ/7/48, (John Wesley) Mbiyu Koinange, 1953, item 5; Ibid., Petition No. 161: John Wesley Mbiyu Koinange, 8 Oct. 1953, item 3; TNA CO/822/1245, Ex-Senior Chief Koinange, f. 7.

sons were. By 1952, Koinange wa Mbiyu noticeably distanced himself from his son John Mbiyu due to the latter's militant activity.⁴³ While this internal political division is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, it offers some explanation as to why John Mbiyu, and not Koinange or Peter, attached his signature to the KAU memorandum submitted by the Gichuru-led KAU of 1946. The second memorandum further underlines these political differences within the Koinange family in 1946.

Rather than signing the KAU memorandum, Koinange and Peter signed the memorandum from the Agikuyu. It is evidence of an intentional choice to petition the colonial secretary on behalf of Koinange's district, rather than to support to the KAU memorandum. Beyond indicating a lack of embracing the KAU, this Agikuyu memo also emphasises the mutual political perspective and political action shared by Koinange and Peter (especially as contrasted to John Mbiyu). It was not the KAU that they chose to work through, but rather through their ongoing work with the colonial government and their local district. There is no apparent reason they could not have signed both memoranda in 1946.

If Koinange and Peter, alongside John, were important figures in the early years of the KAU, their support would have lent the KAU memorandum legitimacy with the endorsement of a Senior Chief and of a member of the governor's standing advisory committee. There are a number of possible reasons to explain the absence of their signatures. First, their involvement with the KAU may not yet have begun. Or, they may have actively disagreed with the memorandum or its authors. Or, within the constrained boundaries of acceptable political action in 1946, representing one's local district or tribe may have been more readily accepted by the administration than supporting a political

⁴³ KNA JZ/7/48, (John Wesley) Mbiyu Koinange, 1953, item 5.

association. Regardless of the reason, Koinange and Peter did not sign the KAU's memorandum in 1946.

Koinange and Peter were not engaged with the KAU under James Gichuru's leadership in the months before Kenyatta's return. What this means is that it was not the Koinanges' connections that supported Kenyatta's engagement with the KAU upon his return, but rather it was Kenyatta's connection to that generation of political leadership and his political prominence within African politics that led Koinange and Peter into engaging with the KAU in an active way as leaders. As Peter intentionally shifted away from his work on the governor's standing committee and Koinange found working with the colonial government ever more challenging, Kenyatta provided an opportunity for them to work with and through the KAU.

Inter-territorial Organisation and KAU Engagement

While neither Koinange nor Peter feature prominently in the pre-Kenyatta period of the KAU, this changed beginning in late 1947.⁴⁴ In September 1946, Peter hosted a celebration in honour of Jomo Kenyatta's return from 15 years abroad.⁴⁵ As Peter recounts the events, Kenyatta received a hero's welcome: 'Excited people had thronged the Railway Station hours before the train arrived [...] Dagoretti Road was lined up on both

⁴⁴ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 265.

⁴⁵ M. Koinange, 'Jomo: Colleague in the Struggle for Freedom and Independence', in A.H. Patel, N.S. Thakur and V. Dhar (eds), *Struggle for 'Release Jomo and His Colleagues'* (Nairobi, 1963), p. 24; Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 265. There is a discrepancy about where Peter Mbiyu met Kenyatta. The *Corfield Report* says that Peter Mbiyu met the returning Kenyatta at Mombasa (TNA CMD/1030, F.D. Corfield, 'Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau', p. 50). I have chosen to use Peter Mbiyu's own telling, in which he meets Kenyatta at Dagoretti (see the reference to Peter Mbiyu's own words in Ambu H. Patel's collected work above).

sides by children who were waving salute to Jomo'.⁴⁶ Within a year of Kenyatta's return, Peter and his father became notable members of the KAU.

In May 1947, infighting over the use of the organisation's funds split the KAU leadership. Financial disagreements were a common occurrence in KAU power struggles throughout the 1940s and 1950s (as they would be for KANU and KADU, the KAU's successors, in the 1960s and 1970s). Kenyatta, Peter Mbiyu, Frederick Nganga (the Executive Officer of the KAU), Harry Thuku, James Beuttah (a leading figure in the Forth Hall/Murang'a branch of the KAU), and Henry Muoria all demanded an inquiry into alleged financial mismanagement of KAU funds by James Gichuru (President of the KAU), J.D. Otiende (Vice President of the KAU), Francis Khamisi, and H.S. Gathigira.⁴⁷ The results of the outcry were two-fold: Jomo Kenyatta was appointed President of the KAU the next month, following Gichuru's 'voluntary' resignation, and Peter Mbiyu joined W.W.W. Awori (who became Vice President of the KAU) on the latter's trip to London to petition against 210.⁴⁸

It was the developments concerning 191 and 210 that catapulted Peter Mbiyu into a prominent role within the KAU – although an absent one, in which he spent the majority of 1947 to 1952 outside of Kenya as a KAU representative. Utilising his connections with the Asian community and his relationship with Kenyatta, Peter led the joint response between the KAU and the EAINC to 191 and 210.⁴⁹ There is evidence of a friendship between Peter and A.B. Patel, a Mombasa barrister, influential businessman, and

⁴⁶ Koinange, 'Jomo: Colleague in the Struggle', p. 26. Henry Mouria's account of Kenyatta's return coincides with Peter Mbiyu's recollection of these events (W. Muoria-Sal and H. Muoria, *Writing for Kenya: the Life and Works of Henry Muoria* (Boston, 2009), p. 301).

⁴⁷ TNA KV/2/2535, Extract from Kenya Colony Intelligence and Security Summary, 12 May 1947, item 6a.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Extract from Kenya Colony Intelligence and Security Summary, 12 May 1947, item 6a.; TNA, KV/2/2536, F.M. Nganga to M. Koinange, 20 Jan. 1948, item 89a.; Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 270.

⁴⁹ TNA KV/2/2535, P. Perfect to Sir P. Sillitoe, 'Peter Mbiyu Koinange', 22 May 1947, item 16x, pp 1-2; S. Aiyar, 'Nation, Race and Politics Amongst the South Asian Diaspora: From Colonial Kenya to Multicultural Britain' (Harvard Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2009), pp 240-1.

politician.⁵⁰ When the proposals were revised and reissued as 210, Kenyatta and Peter Mbiyu, representing the KAU, became vocal opponents and leading critics of the revised proposal.⁵¹ It was Peter and Kenyatta's conviction that change would come from London that led Peter to travel there in May 1947 as a representative for both the KAU and the EAINC.⁵² Following his departure in May 1947, Peter remained in England and away from day-to-day work with the KAU and the KATC until early 1949.

During Peter's absence abroad, Kenyatta's poor leadership of the KAU led the organisation into troubled years of social and political decline. According to Spencer, whose work provides the clearest periodisation of the KAU's history, the KAU under Kenyatta:

reached the nadir of its strength and influence from the end of 1947 to early 1950. Its membership decreased dramatically, and its leadership disintegrated; some officials left; others remained but became steadily less involved in party affairs or squabbled among themselves. KAU had spurts of activity in these years, but most were more knee-jerk reactions to outside stimuli than executions of party policy. It was, in sum, *a time of shrinkage, confusion, and uncertainty* for the party.⁵³

The approval of 210 occurred in late 1947 and its passing marked the genesis of this low point in the KAU's history. Representative of the KAU's poor political engagement during this period was its relative silence in 1950 when the Electors' Union published the 'Kenya Plan', a document outlining the group's ambitions for a white, minority controlled future for Kenya.⁵⁴ Eliud Mathu, still the African representative on the LegCo, described

⁵⁰ Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 103; P. Evans, *Law and Disorder: or, Scenes of Life in Kenya* (London, 1956), pp 32-3. Apa B. Patel repeatedly sent money to Peter Mbiyu from 1947-1948 to support him while in the UK (TNA KV/2/2536, A.B. Patel to M. Koinange, 24 Sep. 1947, item 48a).

⁵¹ 'Colonial Paper 210: Kenya Protest', *The Times* (London, 9 Aug. 1947), p. 3.

⁵² TNA KV/2/2536, A.B. Patel to M. Koinange, 14 Oct. 1947, item 52a; Atieno-Odhiambo, 'The Formative Years', p. 34; S.C. Drake, 'Mbiyu Koinange and the Pan-African Movement', in R.A. Hill (ed.), *Pan-African Biography* (Los Angeles, 1987), p. 181.

⁵³ Spencer, *Kenya African Union*, pp 178-9. Emphasis added. Anderson echoes this same perspective (Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p. 30).

⁵⁴ Spencer, *Kenya African Union*, p. 183. While Murray-Brown gives some indication that the KAU and EAINC attempted a joint-response to the Kenya Plan, it appears that little came of it (Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 280).

the Kenya Plan as 'a declaration of political war'.⁵⁵ In contrast to Mathu's heated denunciation, there was little response from Kenyatta or the KAU. This contrasts starkly with the response in 1947 to 191 and 210 with its attendant vocal protest and the sponsoring of Awori and Peter Mbiyu's trip to London to protest. Kenyatta's impassioned speeches from 1946-1947 were noticeably absent by 1950.⁵⁶ As a result, the KAU's credibility in representing African interests declined and provided opportunity for militant leadership to seize control of African political action from 1950-1952.⁵⁷ In contrast to the tepid period of 1947 to 1950 under Kenyatta, the KAU under this new leadership oversaw the organisations most active period.⁵⁸ While arguably the dominant African political organisation in 1947, under Kenyatta's leadership and during a period of greater involvement for Peter Mbiyu, the KAU lost its public standing.

Peter's highest level of engagement with the KAU, from 1947 to 1950, was during a period of decline in the KAU's ranks and a period of ineffective and meek political action. The KAU's adoption of the long game of change through the governing bureaucratic structure – the political approach of Kenyatta, Koinange, and Peter – during the 1947 to 1950 period was a poorly suited response for the growing unrest and attendant demands for immediate political change of the late 1940s.

⁵⁵ As cited in Spencer, *Kenya African Union*, p. 183.

⁵⁶ Edgerton, *Mau Mau*, p. 49; D.W. Throup, 'Kenyatta and the Political Origins of Mau Mau, 1944-1952', unpublished manuscript, p. 86.

⁵⁷ Spencer, *Kenya African Union*, pp 202-49.

⁵⁸ Throup, 'Kenyatta and the Political Origins', pp 29, 41.

Peter Mbiyu's Fall from Grace

Peter's decision to actively engage with the KAU, to travel to London to protest 210, and his decision to reconnect with Kenyatta resulted in increased suspicion of Peter's loyalty by the eyes of the colonial administration. It was within the context of 191 and 210 that official reports began to describe Peter as a 'prominent political agitator'.⁵⁹ In addition, reports pointed to Peter's relationship with Kenyatta as the main cause for concern in both London and Nairobi. In May 1947, a report from the Nairobi-based MI5 agent noted that Peter's personal actions and history did 'not appear to be a particularly damning history, but it is fairly typical of a number of semi-educated natives who come under KENYATTA's influence'.⁶⁰ That same month MI5 in London requested a Home Office Warrant (HOW) against Peter (which would allow them to intercept his post correspondence) on the basis that Peter was in London 'on a mission for KENYATTA and his henchmen'.⁶¹ By 1948, a year of postal intercepts indicated, according to the translator of the Swahili and Kikuyu correspondence, that Peter was 'really fairly harmless', that he was 'well spoken of', and that he appeared 'to be nothing more sinister than a reasonably ardent nationalist'.⁶² Just over a year after their initial HOW request, officials in London recommended discontinuing surveillance of Peter.⁶³ However, for the colonial government in Kenya, Peter's relationship with Kenyatta was far too troubling by 1948, and the colonial government protested the proposal to discontinue surveillance.

As mentioned in chapter four, during Peter's 1947 trip to London to protest 210, he applied to undertake a doctoral programme at the London School of Economics (LSE).

⁵⁹ As cited in Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 275; TNA KV/2/2535, Extract from Kenya Colony Intelligence and Security Summary, 12 May 1947, item 6a.

⁶⁰ TNA KV/2/2535, item 16x. Capitalisation in original.

⁶¹ Ibid., G.T.D. Patterson, 28 June 1947, item 23. Capitalisation in original.

⁶² TNA KV/2/2538, Dorothea to P.M. Koinange, 11 July 1948, item 136b.

⁶³ TNA KV/2/2539, H.D. Wharton, 4 Nov. 1948, item 174a.

His protest of 210 was only part of his reason for wanting to travel to the UK.⁶⁴ It was on this trip that Peter worked to recruit African-American faculty to teach at the KATC, sought university status for the college, petitioned for scholarships for African students, and appealed for book donations to the college library.⁶⁵ Eight months after his return to Kenya, he travelled to India at the invitation of Nehru's government.⁶⁶ It seems that during the 1947 to 1950 period, Peter was driven more by his academic work than by an embrace of political activism. Peter and Kenyatta, along with Mathu, were considered the 'big three of Kenya's Africans' by MI5 in 1949, but that did not accurately reflect their political and social decline.⁶⁷ Because Peter was abroad for much of the 1947 to 1950 period, this was not a period of close, personal collaboration with his father. Following his forced retirement in early 1949, Koinange engaged more directly with the KAU.

Consistently Koinange

Koinange's direct engagement with the KAU occurred late in the 1940s and his actions, while occasionally heated, were consistent with his historic political priorities. After his retirement, issues of land, taxes, and representation remained the focus of his political protests. As discussed in chapter three, what was politically acceptable had constricted during the 1940s, with administrative personnel increasingly suspicious and critical of African protest, especially by the government's own employees.

⁶⁴ KNA N/M/1/790, A. Richards to L.B. Leakey, 20 June 1947, f. 38.

⁶⁵ TNA KV/2/2535, G.T.D. Patterson, Internal Note, 2 July 1947, item 26.

⁶⁶ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 223; 'Akola Market', *The Times of India* (26 July 1949), p. 4; 'African Leader in Bombay', *The Times of India* (1 Aug. 1949), p. 3.; 'Mr. Koinange in Kashmir', *The Times of India* (9 Aug. 1949), p. 7.

⁶⁷ TNA KV/2/2540, DG to SLO East Africa, 1 Sep. 1949, item 226a.

Intelligence files on Koinange from this period speak to his consistency in priorities, even as he shifted to work with the KAU rather than the government. Between 1946, when Kenyatta returned to Kenya, and 1950, there are six recorded events of Koinange engaging directly with the KAU. The first mention is of a July 1946 meeting, before Kenyatta's return. The next recorded activities concern meetings related to uniting socio-political groups in Uganda and Tanganyika.⁶⁸ The remaining three events listed in the intelligence files were KAU meetings at which Koinange was a speaker. In these six-recorded instances, Koinange's words and actions are consistent with his long-term protest against land policy, his collaborative approach to working with Europeans, and his desire for greater African representation. Here in the late 1940s, his protests were made not through the Kikuyu Association or the Kiambu local native council but increasingly through the KAU.

The first recorded incident linking Koinange with the KAU occurred in 1946. During a meeting with the visiting colonial secretary, Koinange voiced his agreement with James Gichuru (then president of the KAU) in protesting the Carter Commission as unfairly favouring European settlers.⁶⁹ Vocalising his support of the KAU's criticism, while still Senior Chief, was not a deviation from his historic norm. The senior Koinange had protested the Carter Commission report since it was first issued in the mid-1930s. This particular incident is connected to the earlier discussion in this chapter in which Koinange signed the petition on behalf of the Kikuyu, rather than the KAU. While refraining from signing the KAU memorandum, when in camera with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Koinange voiced his support for this one aspect of the KAU's memorandum. Here Koinange demonstrates a boldness to support ideas with which he

⁶⁸ KNA JZ/7/17, Particular Incidents, i, item 4b, pp 2-3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

agrees, even while choosing to abstain from full support of the KAU memorandum.

Koinange's support of Gichuru's critique of the Carter Commission in 1946 should be seen as a single event, not as a representation of a continuous commitment or prominent engagement with the KAU (as discussed earlier). Offering further indication that this was Koinange's support of a specific issue, rather than an embrace of the KAU, is the fact that Koinange does not publicly engage with the KAU for another two years.

October of 1948 marks Koinange's first public speech at a KAU meeting. This was well over a year after his son-in-law, Kenyatta, became president of the KAU and during the period when Peter was still in the United Kingdom. In the speech, Koinange 'castigated his hearers for work-shyness and drink'.⁷⁰ He then went on to tell those gathered that 'the man who is keeping the African down is the African himself'.⁷¹ That same month, Koinange visited South Nyanza and told the disgruntled Kikuyu settlers there that they should obey the government's instructions.⁷² Both speeches reflect Koinange's ongoing belief that the best way forward was by working within the governing system to bring about change. While this first speech for the KAU was characteristic of Koinange's past actions, a speech he gave the following year was far less so.

The context of late 1948 and 1949 is Koinange's forced retirement, which had been the topic of a heated dispute with the CNC throughout the last half of 1948.⁷³ CNC Wyn-Harris was the main proponent behind the decision, with Koinange's retirement taking place in February 1949. As chapter three argued, Koinange's retirement was primarily a response to his ongoing willingness to speak against government policies with which he disagreed. According to a 1953 report, Koinange joined the KAU around this time.⁷⁴ An

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 1.

⁷¹ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 272.

⁷² KNA JZ/7/17, Particular Incidents, ii, item 4b, p. 1.

⁷³ TNA FCO/141/5900, Kenya: ex-Senior Chief Koinange Mbu, ff 2-26.

⁷⁴ KNA JZ/7/17, Petition No. 162: Ex-Senior Chief Koinane Mbiyu, 30 Oct. 1953, item 8, p. 2.

intelligence report noted that 'the principal effect which his retirement seems to have had during this period was a loss of touch with Government and subsequent closer approach to KAU'.⁷⁵ The colonial administration may not have had to deal with Koinange's persistent protest from within the government, but when they pushed him out, they left him with but one non-radical or non-subservient outlet – the KAU. It was within this 1949 context that Koinange gives his first public speech at a KAU meeting.

In January 1949, Koinange spoke at a KAU meeting at Kaloleni. In his speech, he stated that the Kikuyu wanted their land back.⁷⁶ This was not unusual, given his long-standing petition, but on this occasion Koinange delivered the demand with stronger rhetoric than he had used in the past. Offering some context to this KAU speech, Peter returned from England that same month. At a welcome back reception for Peter at which some 2,000 people from the European, Asian, and African communities were in attendance, Koinange praised Europeans for bringing education and praised Indians for bringing trade to Kenya.⁷⁷ There continued to be two things Koinange always held in tension – a protest of colonial land policy and an embrace of European educational, social, and political norms. In January 1949, even in the midst of deep frustration over his looming retirement the following month, Koinange was who he had always been – a strong proponent of land reform who embraced Kenya's multi-racial colonial context. However, Koinange's frustration with the colonial government did grow in the months following his retirement.

Speaking once again at Kaloleni, this time in April 1949, Koinange called for European settlers to leave Kenya. 'The influx of Europeans has caused the African to lose

⁷⁵ Ibid., 'Notes by Mr. Fazan', ii, item 4a.

⁷⁶ KNA JZ/7/17, Petition No. 162: Ex-Senior Chief Koinange Mbiyu, 30 Oct. 1953, item 8.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

his land', said Koinange, 'and because of this Europeans should leave the colony'.⁷⁸ Such brazen hostility was, compared to his previous action, uncharacteristic for Koinange. When interrogated about this occasion while detained during the Emergency, Koinange responded that he 'had never made any secret' of wanting his land back', but said that 'he did not speak against the Government'.⁷⁹ In this, Koinange is correct. His statement was focused on land abuse from European settlers and did not specifically target the colonial government. Certainly, though, his comments could be, and were, construed as a direct threat to the colonial administration. Does the statement finally reveal a militant shift in Koinange? If it is to be seen as an overt sign of militancy, then it must be corroborated with other similar activity. There is one other mention of Koinange calling for Europeans to leave Kenya during the 1949 to 1952 period. It was made in November 1951, more than two years after the above April 1949 statement.

In November 1951, according to a CID report concerning yet another KAU meeting at Kaloleni, 'Koinange spoke of the good old days [and] all that was wanted to bring them back was to get rid of the Europeans'.⁸⁰ As with the previous statement in the context of Koinange's forced retirement, the broader context in which this speech is made is significant. For the third time, Koinange attempted to plant coffee on his land in order to profit from an industry previously restricted to European farmers. Koinange's investment in this third endeavour was significant, with a purchase of 10,000 coffee seedlings from a European neighbour.⁸¹ Koinange received a fine for growing coffee without a licence and the 10,000 seedlings were confiscated.⁸² The lower court ruling and its attendant fine were issued in July 1951. Koinange appealed the decision to the colony's High Court. In a

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ KNA JZ/7/17, Particular Incidents, iii, item 4b, p. 2.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 2; S.N. Waruhiu, *From Autocracy to Democracy in Kenya: Past Systems of Government and Reforms of the Future* (Nairobi, 1994) pp 24-5.

⁸² Waruhiu, *From Autocracy*, pp 24-25; KNA JZ/7/17, Particular Incidents, iii, item 4b, p. 2.

judicial win for Koinange – and a powerful reminder that the governing system did provide a way forward — the High Court found in Koinange’s favour, overturning the lower court’s verdict and fine. However, in spite of the Court’s decision, Koinange’s seeds were never returned nor was he compensated for the financial loss he incurred when the seedlings were confiscated.⁸³ Koinange’s frustration over the loss of his coffee crop is, in part, responsible for the uncharacteristic vitriol of his statement at Kaloleni in November 1951. The other component that explains the hostility in this speech was the elderly Koinange’s increasing inclination to unpredictable and uncharacteristic speech.

In March of the previous year, both Peter and Charles, Koinange’s eldest and closest sons, noted their aged father’s increased tendency to brash speech. The year following Koinange’s retirement had taken a noticeable toll on the elder statesman. No doubt, added to this were the divisions within the family, the loss of his son (David Gathiomi), and the rapidly evolving social and political dynamics of Kenya in late 1940. An intelligence file from the 1950s notes that in 1950:

the D.C. Kiambu reported that Koinange seemed to have aged about 10 years in the year since his retirement. His son Charles is reported as saying that the old man lets his tongue run away with him, and his son Peter said he never knew what the old man would say next.⁸⁴

As an example of Koinange’s aged irritability and single-minded focus on the *Njunu mbari* lands, Koinange took an official invitation from the colonial government to attend the City Charter celebrations as an opportunity to protest his land boundaries.⁸⁵ Koinange’s age and his frustration over the loss of his coffee seedlings account for the uncharacteristic public remarks in November 1951. A speech made in October 1950 provides indication that even in the midst of the challenges of those years, Koinange retained his embrace of

⁸³ KNA JZ/7/17, Particular Incidents, iii, item 4b, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the British governing system and his belief that change would come through working within the colonial political structures.

During a public meeting in Karinga in October 1950, Koinange referred to his long-standing positive relationships with his European neighbours, and other settlers, in calling Africans and Europeans to work together. The evidence that Koinange retained positive relationships with his European neighbours into early 1950 can be seen in the incident referred to earlier concerning the 10,000 coffee seedlings. Koinange had purchased the seedlings from Mr de la Poer Trench, a European neighbour who, according to the wry administrative assessment, was 'of the opinion that the sun shines out of' Koinange.⁸⁶ Koinange's praise for Europeans was not duplicitous but rather an honest reflection of his relationship with Europeans. Koinange warned the same gathering in October 1950 that 'trouble was brewing entirely through the misbehaviour of the young Kikuyu'.⁸⁷ This statement is revealing in a number of important ways.

Koinange was quite aware of the growing militant activity in the colony, particularly among the youth. A little over six months before this speech, Koinange's son, David Gathiomi, died from a gunshot wound. The militancy among the youth – and its potential cost – was ever-present in Koinange's own loss. In embracing his friendship with Europeans and denouncing the rising militant youth, this October 1950 speech serves as an important counterweight to the hostility of Koinange's April 1949 and November 1951 speeches calling for European settlers to leave the colony. In addition to this speech, the year in which it was given was perhaps the most important year in the life of the Koinange family and the Kenya colony. It marks a tipping point at which time the colony might move away from or further into militancy.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

The Turning Point of 1950

Nineteen fifty was a year of acclaim for Kenya, including progressive strides in development, recognition, and imperial status. The colony celebrated Nairobi's official charter as a city in March, to which Koinange received an official invitation.⁸⁸ The colonial government proposed at least forty separate development plans to address the long-standing issues regarding African land.⁸⁹ By April of that year and in response to post-war petitions, over 700 ex-soldiers received medals in recognition of their war service.⁹⁰ In May, a government-sponsored Swahili newspaper was launched to communicate more directly with the African population.⁹¹ In October, Grace Fred Kago, the daughter of Chief Philip K. James, became the first woman appointed to the Kiambu local native council.⁹² Most of these developments were direct responses to the long-standing petitions and protests of the African community – including Koinange's lifelong work — regarding land policy, official recognition, engagement of the African community, and African involvement in government. These positive developments were the results of Britain's post-war, Liberal colonial development commitment. To this extent, 1950 appeared to vindicate Koinange, Peter, and Kenyatta's efforts that change would come by working within the British governing system. However, all of these promising and positive developments came too late to halt the growing tide of unrest.

The racial tensions of the 1940s, as discussed in previous chapters, increased significantly by 1950. November 1949 saw a series of police raids in the Kiambu district to deal with an escalation in criminal activity. These raids resulted in more than 550

⁸⁸ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 281.

⁸⁹ H. Swanzy, 'Quarterly Notes', p. 12.

⁹⁰ KNA VQ/16/2, Monthly Report, Mar. 1950, item 15; Ibid., Monthly Report, Apr. 1950, item 16.

⁹¹ Although the newspaper never saw much success, due to the militant developments during this period, the initiative is still noteworthy (KNA VQ/16/2, Monthly Report, May 1950, item 17).

⁹² KNA ARC(MAA)/2/5/229, CNC to Chief and Mrs. P.K. James, 3 Oct. 1950, item 153.

convictions during the month of November alone.⁹³ That year saw a number of assassination attempts against leading African political leaders — including Senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kung'u.⁹⁴ Late in 1949, the Electors' Union published the aforementioned 'Kenya Plan', calling for a firm establishment of white political dominance in the colony.⁹⁵ In July, Dedan Mugo Kimathi, a leader at the KATC, was the first to be convicted in court for the administration of an illegal secret oath.⁹⁶ In August, in response to the growing unrest, the government officially outlawed the 'Mau Mau Association'.⁹⁷ It was, as Spencer has noted, the beginning of the KAU's militant years.⁹⁸ The following year, militant youth, ex-soldiers, and trade union leadership took control of the Nairobi KAU branch. While there were a number of promising developments, the growth of unrest, political action, and racial tensions became the dominant and driving force shaping Kenya's future from 1950 onward. As alluded to earlier, the Koinanges did not escape being impacted by this growing militant unrest.

It was in April of 1950 that David Gathiomi, Koinange wa Mbiyu's eldest son by his third wife, disappeared. Following his disappearance, Koinange wa Mbiyu told the Senior Superintendent in charge of the CID that his son had died, but refrained from offering further details as to the cause.⁹⁹ Later, Koinange acknowledged that his 'son committed suicide'.¹⁰⁰ Seven years after David Gathiomi's death, while Koinange was still detained under the Emergency, Koinange told a Special Branch officer at the Marsabit Detention Camp his account of the events of Gathiomi's death:

⁹³ KNA VQ/16/2, Monthly Report, Nov. 1949, item 11.

⁹⁴ Tom Mbotela (senior member of the KAU), Muchohi Gikonyo (leading Kikuyu city council council member), and Waruhiu wa Kungu (Senior Chief of Kiambu) (Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 281).

⁹⁵ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 280.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Spencer, *Kenya African Union*, p. 202.

⁹⁹ KNA JZ/7/17, 'A note on the disappearance of David Gathiomi Koinane', item 4e, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Some time about April 1950 two men came to my house in a car. They told me that my son David Gathiome [sic] wished to see me. I went with them in the car. When we arrived near Gathiome's [sic] house the half-cast told me that my son had shot himself. I went into the house and found my son dead. He was lying on the ground with a shot wound in the head. It appeared that the bullet entered just under his left eye. He had apparently been sitting in a chair when the incident occurred because the chair had fallen on to the ground with him. I did not see any weapon. I asked where the weapon was and was told by the Kikuyu, who brought me in the car, that he had it. He then showed me a pistol. I told Gathiome's [sic] wife, Wanjiru, to go and find his brothers in order that they could dispose of the body. I did not think that anyone else could have shot him. I believe he shot himself although I cannot think why, he did not appear to be worried by anything prior to this. After a short time my son Frederick Mbiyu arrived and we decided that he, Frederick, and his brothers should dispose of the body secretly otherwise there would be all sorts of lengthy government enquiries. I then left.¹⁰¹

It is unclear where the gun came from. It is known that Koinange wa Mbiyu owned at least one shotgun.¹⁰² The Corfield Report alleged that nine pistols were given to the more militant elements of the Koinange family earlier that year.¹⁰³ As mentioned earlier, David, along with his mother, Joyce, and two of his brothers, Frederick Mbiyu and John Mbiyu, were known to be involved with militant political elements by 1950. It is likely that these family members were in fact involved in the violent uprising that came to be known as Mau Mau. The death of David Gathiome made real the growing cost of militant political action for the Koinange family. Therefore, when, six months later, Koinange warned the audience gathered at Karinga that 'trouble was brewing' from the youth, it was a statement borne of personal loss and heartache. This family tragedy appears to have motivated Koinange and Peter not towards militancy but towards an increased pursuit of actions aimed at de-escalating the tensions within the colony.

¹⁰¹ TNA CO/822/1245, Governor of Kenya to SoS, 2 July 1957, f. 16.

¹⁰² KNA JZ/7/11, F.M. Koinange to Chairman of ACoD, 23 Sep. 1957, item 26, p. 1.

¹⁰³ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 229.

A Response to the Crises of 1950

Fuelled by the militancy within Central Kenya and among family members, both Koinange and Peter issued public warnings in 1950 concerning the escalation of violence and racial division within the colony. Koinange's speech at the October 1950 KAU meeting was his warning, which was, according to the administrative report, a return to 'his old form'.¹⁰⁴ Peter and Kenyatta voiced their own warning earlier that year.

Peter and Kenyatta approached the colonial administration in early 1950 about the growing tensions in the colony. According to George Bennett, they sought 'to warn the Government and unofficial Europeans of the need to take action, to build up inter-racial co-operation before it was too late'.¹⁰⁵ Validating the sincerity of this warning is the criticism leveraged at the Corfield Report in 1960. Mr Cooke, in a 1960 LegCo meeting, critiqued the bias he believed was evident in the report. Cooke pointed specifically to the way in which the Corfield Report did not take seriously the warning given by Peter and Kenyatta in early 1950 of the 'grave danger of unrest' in the colony.¹⁰⁶ For Cooke, this was an example of where the Report dismissed evidence that undermined the broader claims that Kenyatta and Peter were leaders of Mau Mau. Cooke explained that Peter and Kenyatta met with several Europeans, including himself, in the years and months prior to October 1952. While scholarship has largely followed the lead of the Corfield Report in dismissing these warnings as insignificant, they were in fact consistent with Koinange and Peter's firmly held belief that change would come through working within the governing system.

¹⁰⁴ KNA JZ/7/17, Particular Incidents, ii, item 4b, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 127.

¹⁰⁶ *Hanwarð* (Kenya), 'Corfield Report: Sessional Paper No. 5 of 1959/60', 12 Apr. to 22 June 1960, col 1616.

As part of the response to these warnings, the multiracial Kenya Citizens Association was established. The inaugural meeting took place the same month that Koinange warned those at the KAU meeting of the growing threat from militant youth. The initial members of the Kenya Citizens Association included seventeen Europeans, eight Indians, and eleven Africans.¹⁰⁷ Among the European members were a number of prominent government officials: Sir Charles Mortimer (member of the colony's Executive Council), Sir E. A. Vasey (former Minister of Education), T. G. Askwith (later Commissioner for Community Development and Rehabilitation), and S. H. La Fontaine (a long time colonial administrator, who served as the DC in Kiambu and as the PC of Central Province). Their presence is a potent reminder of the diversity of perspectives within the European community in 1950 – and evidence that not all government servants saw Kenyatta, Koinange, and Peter as radical or militant. The members of the Association represented the more liberal and moderate minded of the European, Indian, and African communities.¹⁰⁸ Sir Charles Mortimer took a leading role in establishing the Association with its aspiration of 'fostering [...] better human relationships in Kenya'.¹⁰⁹ La Fontaine, a long time friend and supporter of Koinange wa Mbiyu, served as the Association's Secretary.¹¹⁰ Early initiatives included support for vernacular African newspapers, coordinating meetings between European and African farmers, and sponsoring public talks at the United Kenya Club.¹¹¹ By May 1951, the Association reported improved relations between European and African farmers, a partnership with the Young Kenya Association, and further efforts at fostering cooperation between the races.¹¹² Koinange

¹⁰⁷ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historica Survey', p. 102.

¹⁰⁸ Rosberg and Nottingham, *The Myth of Mau Mau*, p. 268.

¹⁰⁹ KNA ARC(MAA)/2/5/229, Constitution for the Kenya Citizen's Association, 5 July 1951, item 163/1; Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 127; A.M. Macphree, *Kenya* (New York, 1968), p. 108; Rosberg and Nottingham, *The Myth of Mau Mau*, p. 268.

¹¹⁰ KNA ARC(MAA)/2/5/229, S.H. La Fontaine to Members of Kenya Citizen's Association, 2 July 1951, item 163.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Meeting of the General Committee of the Kenya Citizen's Association, 5 July 1951, item 163/2.

¹¹² Ibid.

joined the association by January 1951.¹¹³ Peter, who had helped establish the Kenya Citizen's Association found that his November 1951 departure for London was unexpectedly the end of his engagement with the group, for he was not to return to Kenya until the 1960s.¹¹⁴ In retrospect, the impact of the Kenya Citizen's Association in stemming the tide of racial division and militancy was negligible, but its existence serves as a visible reminder of the attempts at interracial cooperation that pursued a vision of Kenya's future apart from violent uprising or a call for independence or self-rule. Adding to this increase in collaboration with leading members of the European community, the Koinanges also intensified their efforts via London.

The most prominent of these efforts was their collaboration with Labour MP Fenner Brockway. Brockway was a leading figure of the Left, serving as chairman of the British Centre for Colonial Freedom from 1942 to 1947 and helping to establish the Congress of Peoples against Imperialism in 1945.¹¹⁵ Peter had met Brockway in 1948 during Peter's extended stay following the protest of 210 and Peter's ongoing efforts to further the mission of the KATC.¹¹⁶ Following this, Brockway visited Kenya for the first time in September 1950, during which he stayed with Koinange at his home in Kiambu, even as others discouraged him from doing so due to the growing unrest already discussed.¹¹⁷ Koinange held a reception in honour of Brockway's visit, extending invitations to key colonial officials, including the new Chief Native Commissioner Davies, who had taken

¹¹³ M.S. Clough, 'Koinange wa Mbiyu: Mediator and Patriot', in B.E. Kipkorir (ed.), *Biographical Essays on Imperialism and Collaboration in Colonial Kenya* (Nairobi, 1980), p. 84.

¹¹⁴ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', p. 188; TNA KV/2/2540, W.F. Bell, 8 Nov. 1951, item 260b; Ibid., SLO East Africa to London Special Branch, 19 Nov. 1951, item 268a; Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 130.

¹¹⁵ D. Howell, 'Brockway, (Archibald) Fenner, Baron Brockway (1888-1988)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford), accessed on 12 July 2017. <http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/39849>.

¹¹⁶ TNA KV/2/2539, Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism to M. Koinange, 9 Dec. 1948, item 189a.

¹¹⁷ F. Brockway, *African Journeys* (London, 1955), p. 84.

over after Wyn-Harris' departure for the Gambia in 1949.¹¹⁸ Brockway's 1950 visit began a decade of collaboration between he and the Koinange family.

After his visit to Kenya, Brockway began a correspondence with James Griffiths, then the colonial secretary, to voice his support for Koinange's long-standing claim to the *Njunu mbari* lands and requesting that restrictions against commercial coffee farming for African farmers be lifted.¹¹⁹ James Griffiths met Koinange on a state visit to Kenya. Later he joined with another former colonial secretary, Sir Arthur Creech-Jones, in calling for an end to Koinange's ongoing detention in the late 1950s, claiming that Koinange's character and history ran counter to the government's claims that Koinange was a leader of Mau Mau.¹²⁰ Brockway provided office space, administrative support, and professional connections in aid to Peter's work in London during the 1950s. Built upon his 1948 visit to the United Nations Organisation (UNO), Peter convinced the KAU to fund travel in September 1951 for Richard Oneko and himself to travel to Paris in order to submit a KAU petition and to address members of the UNO.¹²¹ With Brockway's support, Peter addressed Labour Party meetings at the UNO in Paris, as well as to a host of small civil and social groups.¹²² Their involvement with the Kenya Citizen's Association, their public warnings regarding the growing unrest, and their active partnership with Fenner Brockway, all begun in earnest in 1950, reflect Koinange and Peter's continued belief that they 'could win a demand if [they] went about it properly'.¹²³

Koinange and Peter still strongly believed that political change for Kenya was still possible without militancy or violence. As they had for decades, they believed that

¹¹⁸ KNA ARC(MAA)/2/5/229, CNC Davies to Koinange Mbiyu, 1 Sep. 1950, item 148.

¹¹⁹ TNA CO/822/1245, Brockway to Lennox-Boyd, 6 Mar. 1957, f. 6; Brockway, *African Journeys*, p. 84.

¹²⁰ TNA CO/822/1245, Creech-Jones and Griffiths to Lennox-Boyd, 1 Aug. 1958, f. 33.

¹²¹ TNA KV/2/2535, Security Liaison Officer to London, 28 Jan. 1952, item 273a.

¹²² TNA KV/2/2540, Security Liaison Officer, 19 Nov. 1951, item 268a.

¹²³ Koinange, *The People of Kenya*, p. 7.

petitions, lawful protest, and political engagement from within the governing political system was the best hope for bringing change to colonial Kenya.

Moderation and Mischief: Understanding the Koinanges' relationship with the KAU

Discussion of Koinange and Peter's ongoing attempts to pursue change through the British political system is conspicuously absent in current scholarship, lost in the midst of the dominant narratives of militancy, loyalism, Mau Mau, and unrest. Perhaps this is because, in the end, patient political action failed to stem the colony's slide toward violent rebellion. Perhaps it is because of the dominant influence of the Corfield Report and its focus on militancy. Perhaps it is because of the fact that there were indeed Koinange family members engaged in militant political action by the early 1950s. However, by overlooking Koinange and Peter's continued efforts, scholarship has minimised the effort made by influential African leaders in Kenya in pursuit of a different future – a middle road between lock-step subservience to official directives and radical calls for violent uprising. This centrist position, at once both critical voice and voice of hope, has been absent in academic discussions.

Concerning Koinange and Peter's engagement with the KAU, this chapter has challenged and revised the current assessment of their involvement with the organisation. John Mbiyu was an active member under Gichuru's leadership, while Koinange and Peter became more involved under Kenyatta's presidency. Koinange and Peter's engagement with the KAU was tied to Kenyatta's return to rise the presidency. As such, it was also tied to the lowest period in the KAU's history. Peter became a prominent leader as a

result of Kenyatta's return and the 191 and 210 controversies but spent his first twenty months in London. Koinange's primary involvement followed his forced retirement from the chieftaincy in early 1949, with Koinange retaining much of his old form by voicing support and dissent, as he believed the situation required. The mediocre and politically weak nature of the KAU from 1947 to 1950 reveals that none of these leading men were the impassioned, strong, dynamic leaders who had once commanded a significant following. By 1950, their melancholy approach to KAU leadership cost them the influence they had once enjoyed.

There is no indication that the rumours of an assassination attempt on the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester with which this chapter opened is to be believed. Like many a rumour and myth, however, it provides information concerning the context in which it arose. There was indeed a rise in militant and subversive action by 1950; in all likelihood, David Gathiomi, his mother, and a number of brothers were involved with this militancy. By 1950, politics had split the Koinange family, with the death of David Gathiomi serving as the clearest picture of the price they might pay for such political loyalties and divisions. All of this serves to highlight that social and political realities had changed significantly for Koinange and Peter. They no longer commanded the power or influence they once had enjoyed. Political leadership passed not only to a younger generation but also to a more radical contingent determined to fight colonialism. This took place at a time when Koinange and Peter continued to hang their hopes on change from within the system through working with a political patient and moderate KAU, the multiracial Kenya Citizens Association, or through work in London with MP Brockway and others to call for change. While the story of a murder on the Magadi Soda road may be apocryphal, the portrait it offers of Kenya by mid-1950 was all too real.

As the previous chapters have demonstrated, the Koinanges had long worked with Kenya's various racial communities, particularly with the colonial administration, to pursue change through constitutional means. They worked closely with the colonial government through the mid-to-late 1940s. Their activities with the Kenya African Teachers' College were focused on educational advancement, not militant activity. Militancy arose in Peter's absence, in the vacuum of Kenyatta's uninspiring leadership. In their involvement with the KAU from 1946 onward, both men demonstrated a desire to work with the European, Indian, and African communities via political norms to bring about change. In spite of the personal tragedy of David Gathiomi's death in 1950 and the growing division within the Koinange family, both Koinange and Peter increasingly worked to find a way forward for Kenya apart from violent rebellion.

Broader Implications of the Koinanges' Work with the KAU

This revision of the Koinanges' story – specifically their relationship with the KAU – presents a number of challenges to broader scholarship. First, family units were not, nor have ever been, homogenous. The great danger of group studies is present in the studies of families – that the individuality and differences are subsumed into the larger body. In the case of the Koinanges, while Joyce Kagendo, John Mbiyu, and others more readily embraced and advocated militant political action, they shared this connection with only a part of the larger family. Indeed, the inherent risk of this thesis, in studying a family and presenting too broad of conclusions that incorporate far more of the family than they should. This is where the individuality of biography tempers this risk. There is similar fruitful work to be done in studying the Kenyattas, the Mbekis, the Kabilas, and others to seek the differences and individuality within their families. What might be learned by

studying Uhuru Kenyatta in contrast to a sibling who did not engage in politics in the same way? What does it say about the opportunities, limits, and challenges of political dynasties? Perhaps, as with the Koinanges, such a study might highlight the diversity of hopes and conceptions held by various family members. The second fruitful application of this period in the Koinanges' history involves leadership.

It has long been assumed that the Koinanges were 'prime movers' and pre-eminent leaders within the KAU.¹²⁴ This chapter challenged this assumption. While Kenyatta, Koinange, and Peter's names were used frequently, this was done, as Bennett notes regarding Kenyatta, without their consent to support things of which they would not have approved.¹²⁵ There is a sense that by 1950, Kenyatta and the Koinanges possessed symbolic influence, at best, but lacked the ability to capitalise on this in order to challenge the more militant leadership.

There is continued work to be done in considering when and how a leader's influence becomes effectual, symbolic, or otherwise something different than power typically equated with prominent leaders. In the midst of end-of-empire crises, radical shifts occurred in politics – often reshaping the landscape of political leadership. As the KAU headed into the 1950s, the growing unrest and crises undermined traditional leadership. As the KAU story has highlighted, those leaders of the 1920s and 1930s generation who pursued change by petition and protest from within the system were supplanted by the 1940s generation of leadership and promised more rapid change. In scholarship concerning Rhodesia, Zaire, Ghana, Algeria, and elsewhere, there is fruitful work to be done in seeking out those leaders who called for a middle approach between European domination and independence or self-rule. In the end, these individuals were

¹²⁴ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp 28-30.

¹²⁵ Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 115.

almost always silenced by the voices that won the day – whether the Afrikaners of South Africa or the leaders of Ghana’s independence. However, hearing these voices that sought and hoped for justice and change from within the governing system serves to highlight the diversity of possible outcomes and the variety of identities colonial subjects assumed.

Lastly, this chapter presents a challenge to the hegemony of historical narratives. Narratives of militancy, independence, and nationalism dominate the historiography of this period. Indeed, these narratives soon came to dominate the years of the 1950s and the 1960s. It became increasingly expedient for the government to link the Koinanges to militancy to justify their detention. As the next chapter will demonstrate, Koinange and Peter were symbolic figures, at best, during the Emergency – made symbols of militancy by a colonial government wary of African leadership critical of colonial policy and by militant groups looking to justify their own actions by anchoring themselves to traditional leadership. Whether propagated by the colonial government, militant rebels, popular history, or scholarship, the myths linking the Koinanges to militancy at the KAU were driven by broader narratives. In this way, themes of militancy or nationalism have obfuscated historic reality to serve the ends of a militant or nationalist narrative. Far too much of Africa’s history has and is still forced into the hegemony of these larger narratives, developments, and agendas. The actions of the Koinanges, as with others, must be allowed to speak for themselves, even if their story undermines the widely accepted and defended narratives of militancy, nationalism, or of heroes and devils.

As 1950 drew to a close, rising militant activity in and around central Kenya took a direct toll on the Koinange family. Family unity was increasingly divided over political action. Koinange and Peter were increasingly marginalised in both African and European political circles. By the early 1950s, their effective power to guide or change the social and

political developments of the day were negligible at best. Yet, the colonial government was convinced they continued to wield tremendous influence and power within African politics. By late 1952, they were both declared leading figures of the Mau Mau uprising. Where the late 1940s hinted at the internal family divisions and the political marginalisation of Koinange and Peter, the early 1950s revealed them in the most public ways possible. It was within the crucible of the Mau Mau rebellion, to borrow a phrase from Robert Edgerton, that the culmination of these late 1940s developments are to be found.

CHAPTER SIX

The Mau Mau Myth: The Koinanges and Mau Mau (1952-1960)

After 1945, Koinange [wa Mbiyu] began to organize an army of resistance. Money and arms were collected. Oaths were administered to those joining. All this was done at his homestead in Kiambaa. Mau Mau's army came into being.¹

This is a prevailing narrative in Kenya today. It is one in which Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu are presented as prominent leaders of Mau Mau. Family members claim that Koinange administered oaths to Mau Mau's leading figures, including Dedan Kimathi and General Mathenge, handing them 'the swords of war'.² One of Koinange's wives told the local press that Koinange 'doubled as a senior chief and a Mau Mau fighter'.³ Duncan Ndegwa, a friend of the Koinange family and former civil servant, claims that Koinange was at 'the forefront of Mau Mau', while family members claim that one of his wives, Joyce Kagendo, was a treasurer for Mau Mau.⁴ According to Ndegwa, 'Chief Koinange [...] ought to have been tried in Kapenguria in place of Kenyatta'.⁵ This narrative has been presented by the Koinange family, friends, and the local press over the last decade. Sixty years ago, the colonial government held a similar assessment of the Koinanges' involvement in Mau Mau.

¹ P. Nowrojee, 'The Paradox That Was Chief Koinange', *The Star* (Nairobi, 13 Jan. 2010).

² J. Ngumba, 'The Life and Times of Senior Chief Koinange...as Narrated by His Wife', *The People's Digest* (Nairobi, 14 Dec. 2007), pp 4-5.

³ Ibid.

⁴ D. Ndegwa, *Walking in Kenyatta Struggles: My Story* (Nairobi, 2006), pp 256, 290; *JL November Field Notes*, 2010.

⁵ Ibid., p. 290.

By 1952, officials in Governor Mitchell's increasingly conservative colonial government were convinced that Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu were important leaders with Mau Mau. In 1953, following Koinange's acquittal from charges that he had collaborated in the assassination of Senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kung'u, the colonial government immediately detained Koinange 'for being a leader in the organisation of Mau Mau'.⁶ He was detained for the following seven years under justification that 'his position enabled him to exercise a considerable amount of authority which he directed towards the management of this proscribed Mau Mau society'.⁷ Concerning Peter Mbiyu, Governor Baring wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in the mid-1950s that Peter was 'very prominent' in Mau Mau, 'deep in the more violent side' of the uprising, and was 'more detested and feared by loyal Kikuyu than any other Mau Mau personality'.⁸ While the colonial government in Kenya was convinced of the Koinanges' leading influence of Mau Mau, they failed on numerous occasions to convince either Kenya's courts or officials in London that this was indeed true. Building on the previous chapter, by 1952 the Koinanges lacked a position of influence within the KAU or in militant political groups. As this chapter will demonstrate, Koinange and Peter were neither the leaders of Mau Mau that the colonial government portrayed them as in the 1950s nor the militant leaders that family, friends, and Kenya's press portray them as to this day.

It is here in this discussion of Mau Mau that the arguments of this thesis find their culmination. With a view to the long perspective of the Koinanges' entire lives, Koinange and Peter remained throughout the Mau Mau period what they had always been: moderate politicians, committed to a constitutional and multiracial approach to bringing about change by working within the governing political system, with a focus on land,

⁶ WKK *Suspension of Detention Order 1958-1960*, R.G. Wilson, 'Special Restriction Order: Mbiyu Koinange', 11 Jan. 1960, p. 2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ TNA CO/822/1238, E. Baring to Colonial Secretary, 10 Jan. 1957, f. 1.

education, and African involvement in the colonial government. This chapter begins as the official Emergency period began – with the murder of Senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kung'u in October 1952.

The assassination of Waruhiu marks a pivotal moment in Kenya's history, tipping the colony into eight-years of martial law and truncated justice. Waruhiu had come to prominence alongside Koinange in the 1919 *kiama* compromise, was a fellow leader in the Kikuyu Association, served as a divisional chief in Githunguri during the 1940s, was a fellow member of the Kiambu local native council, and was a well-known colonial chief, second only to Koinange in prominence and notoriety in central Kenya, during the 1940s. Due to Waruhiu's continued loyalty to the colonial government, he was appointed Senior Chief of Kiambu two years after Koinange's forced retirement.⁹ Koinange was tried as an accomplice in Waruhiu's murder. After a verdict of not guilty, Koinange was immediately detained under Emergency Regulations until 1960.

This chapter examines key aspects of Senior Chief Koinange's life in detention in northern and western Kenya from 1953 to 1960 and Peter's exile in London during the same period. Particular attention is given to a confession Koinange wa Mbiyu made in 1957 concerning his involvement with Mau Mau. This confession is damning evidence of Koinange's engagement with militant activity. I argue that the long-perspective framework of this thesis and recently available archival material necessitates a critical assessment of Koinange's confession. In a political context writ large with narratives of militancy and loyalty, polarised by radicalisation at both political extremes, Koinange's confession reveals more about the context of his detention than it does of pre-Mau Mau reality.

⁹ KNA DC/KBU/11/1, 'Headman - Waruhiu wa Kung'u', f. 32.

The chapter also examines Peter's work in the United Kingdom from 1951-1961. The particular focus of the discussion concerning Peter is the ongoing failure of both MI5 and Kenya's government to provide evidence of Peter's alleged militant activity. This failure is especially compelling given the access the Home Office Warrant (H.O.W.) gave the government in London to intercept Peter's mail, phone calls, and private conversations (e.g. at the Communist party headquarters). Add to this the access the government in Kenya had to local informants, thousands of screened detainees, and intelligence data from the 1940s and the 1950s, the absolute lack of evidence is telling. While this chapter resembles chapters one and two with Koinange and Peter experienced very different daily lives, there is clear evidence that they maintained the commitment, they had long held while working together in Kenya, to pursue change through non-militant efforts.

What this chapter reveals is that the historical record contradicts narratives that present the Koinanges as Mau Mau leaders. While they may have become symbols of the rebellion, co-opted by militant leadership or by a colonial regime guided by suspicion, it was a symbolism in conflict with the Koinange's actions and political commitments. The current understanding of the Koinanges' relationship to the Mau Mau Emergency requires a significant revision.

The Mau Mau Emergency

The Emergency resulted from the continued rise of the social and political tensions discussed over the course of the previous chapters, which had, in turn, led to a rise in violent militant action and corresponding government repression. These responses exacerbated racial, tribal, and inter-tribal divisions across Kenya's Central Highlands.

The polarisation of the late 1940s grew exponentially within this heated context, leaving moderate politicians alienated in both the leading European and the leading African political communities. In spite of the many promising developments of 1950, the political and social situation deteriorated rapidly over the following two years.

The years of 1950 and 1951 were notable for the rise in violence in central Kenya with arson attacks in Nanyuki, threats of violence in Nyeri, the assassination of African colonial servants, and the increased proliferation of the 'killing oath'.¹⁰ The oaths bound those taking them to the use of violence to reclaim land, be it from Europeans or loyalist Africans. Over the course of a six-month period in 1952, some 60 loyalists were murdered in a growing wave of militant violence.¹¹ Kenya's conservative settler community increasingly pressured the colonial government to declare a State of Emergency as early as July 1952.¹² Seeking a middle way, the government passed eight Emergency Bills to clamp down on militant and political activity.¹³ However, within three months, marked by the assassination of Senior Chief Waruhiu, the State of Emergency was declared.

As they had in the post-war period, significant changes in the leadership in both the colonial government and the Colonial Office, who guided the British response to the escalating violence, only exacerbated the situation. Sir Philip Mitchell, who became Kenya's Governor in 1944, retired in July 1952 in the midst of this growing unrest. Following his retirement, Henry S. Potter served as acting governor until Sir Evelyn Baring took up the post in September 1952, appointed in the wake of the Conservative

¹⁰ D. Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: the Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London, 2005), pp 389-390; D. Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization* (2009), pp 35-8.

¹¹ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p. 390.

¹² J. Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (New York, 1979), p. 286.

¹³ E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo, 'The Formative Years 1945-55', in B.A. Ogot and W.R. Ochieng' (eds), *The Decolonization and Independence of Kenya: 1940-1993* (Nairobi, 1995), p. 42.

victory in London that year.¹⁴ Baring had previously served in white-settler-controlled Southern Rhodesia for two years in the early 1940s. Baring's appointment to the governorship meant that liberal and moderate politicians — whether European, African, or Indian — were further marginalised and distanced from the colonial government. It was also at this point that the Kenya Citizen's Association appears to have been dissolved. In London's Colonial Office, the Conservative victory led to the appointment of Oliver Lyttleton to replace James Griffiths (who had been sympathetic to African petitions from Kenya) as Secretary of State for the Colonies. In a letter to Peter Mbiyu, Labour MP Fenner Brockway warned Peter that Lyttleton's appointment meant they would 'find things more difficult' in their petitions to the Colonial Office.¹⁵ These changes of governor and Secretary of State for the Colonies did not offer much hope for a peaceful resolution to Kenya's growing unrest.

Apart from these developments in the British government, Nairobi's African communities were increasingly led by the strident and radical voices of the day. Following the June 1951 takeover of the Nairobi Branch of the KAU, meetings grew increasingly tense between the new, radical leadership and the organisation's late 1940s moderate leaders (Kenyatta, Koinange and Peter being members of the latter group). Bildad Kaggia and Fred Kubai, both radical leaders in the developing militant context, held prominent roles in the young, urban politics of the day. Kaggia claims to have strangled a fellow African in a Nairobi taxi in 1951.¹⁶ Fred Kubai barely escaped a conviction for the attempted murder of government headman, Michohi Gikonyo, around the same time period.¹⁷ By January 1952, Nairobi's militant leaders established a secret committee

¹⁴ Potter served as Chief Secretary in the Colonial Government during Mitchell's Governorship (*The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 24 June 1952), Government Notice no. 647).

¹⁵ TNA KV/2/2540, SLO East Africa to London Special Branch, 19 Nov. 1951, item 268a.

¹⁶ Atieno-Odhiambo, 'The Formative Years', p. 35.

¹⁷ Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, p. 281.

tasked with creating ‘secret cells throughout Kikuyuland’.¹⁸ It is these cells which used the names of Kenyatta and the Koinanges to validate their actions and garner social and political power.¹⁹ Such acts were in direct contradiction to Kenyatta, Koinange, and Peter’s own beliefs. In the early 1950s, these militant political developments — whether amongst the youth, ex-soldiers, or both — dominated and shaped the developments of African politics in Central Kenya.



Image 6.1: Senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kung’u in his brown Hudson on the outskirts of Nairobi.²⁰

This pre-Emergency militancy came to a climax when, two weeks after Baring’s arrival in Kenya, Senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kung’u was murdered in broad daylight just outside of Nairobi (Image 6.1). Two weeks later, and a month to the day of his initial arrival in Kenya, Governor Baring declared a State of Emergency. ‘Operation Jock Scott’ took place in tandem with the government’s declaration at the end of October.²¹ Led by intelligence and security forces, ‘Jock Scott’ involved the arrest of leading political figures

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 292.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ J. Koinange, *Koinange-wa-Mbiyu: Mau Mau’s Misunderstood Leader* (Lewes, 2000), pp 78-81; Ndegwa, *Walking in Kenyatta Struggles*, image plate 6.

²¹ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, Appendix.

such as Kenyatta, Kaggia, Kubai and others. Peter Mbiyu's name was second on the list to be detained, which never occurred given his departure to London the previous November.²² The following eight years in Kenya's colonial history saw widespread martial law and military action characterised by massive detention and truncated judicial processes.

So widespread was the unrest in central Kenya that the colonial government established a series of detention centres and prison camps to screen and then house thousands detained during the Emergency period.²³ Conservative estimates are that no less than 100,000 were detained during the course of the Emergency.²⁴ The series of camps and detention centres through which persons were passed came to be known as the 'pipeline'. Intelligence officials, utilising local informants, locally screened those rounded up in raids. If not released after screening, those detained were sent onward to one of a number of detention centres. Those considered leaders of the uprising were moved to camps specifically designated for 'hardcore' prisoners.²⁵ As David Anderson and Caroline Elkins have demonstrated, the pipeline was rife with corruption and abuse. The worst abuses occurred at the camps for hardcore detainees, where European and African camp officials used castration, brutal sexual assaults, and water-boarding techniques to extract confessions.²⁶ Terence Gavaghan, who was promoted from district officer to serve as supervisor for several of these 'hardcore' camps, oversaw the more brutal interrogation and torture techniques.²⁷ Daniel Branch marks October 1956, when the prominent

²² TNA CO/822/1238, E. Baring to Colonial Secretary, 10 Jan. 1957, f. 1.

²³ Several of these were already existent, yet repurposed, government camps. Marsabit Camp in the Northern Frontier District, where Koinange wa Mbiyu was held, was one such camp.

²⁴ TNA CO/822/1246, Sir Renison to Colonial Secretary, 28 Oct. 1959, f. 121; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p. 5.

²⁵ Further detail concerning the pipeline can be found in Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p. 314 and C. Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: the Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York, 2005), pp 369-70.

²⁶ B. Macintyre, 'Tales of Brutality and Violence That Could Open the Claims Floodgate', *The Times* (London, 4 Apr. 2011). Accessed 12 July 2015. <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/uk/article2973063.ece>.

²⁷ D. Anderson, 'Mau Mau in the High Court and the "Lost" British Empire Archives: Colonial Conspiracy or Bureaucratic Bungle?', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40 (2012), p. 708.

militant leader Dedan Kimathi was captured, as the end of the military portion of the Emergency.²⁸ While military operations related to Kenya's State of Emergency only spanned a four-year period from October 1952 to October 1956, the 'pipeline' and its accompanying detention centres remained active and courts functioned under Emergency regulations until 1960.

This final decade of imperial rule in Kenya was marked by some of the worst abuses in the history of the British empire. Eventually, as the political will to enforce these increasingly public and widely excoriated tactics waned, a new cohort of educated, elite African politicians arose. These were the political leaders who would represent African interests as the colony headed towards independence in the early 1960s.

The Emergency, Mau Mau, and the Koinanges

In spite of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu's moderate actions and lacklustre involvement with the KAU in the late 1940s, the colonial government considered both men 'founders of Mau Mau'.²⁹ Nothing highlights the colonial government's firm belief that the Koinange family, including Koinange wa Mbiyu, was deeply involved in militant and violent action than the murder of Senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kung'u.

On the morning of 7 October 1952, Senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kung'u testified before a native tribunal concerning a land case in *Mbari ya Kibara*, located between Nairobi and Limuru. After giving his testimony, Waruhiu climbed into his brown Hudson motorcar and headed towards Nairobi. A young driver and two friends were with him in

²⁸ Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, p. 117.

²⁹ KNA JZ/7/11, DC to Executive Officer, 'Petition: Frederick Mbiyu Koinange', 6 July 1953, item 13, p. 1.

the car that morning. A couple of kilometres down the road, Waruhiu's car stopped, the road blocked by a tan-coloured taxi. A man approached the brown Hudson from the direction of the taxi. Upon reaching Waruhiu's vehicle, he pulled a revolver from his jacket and shot Waruhiu four times through the open rear window. A fifth shot glanced off the hood of the car and a final shot punctured the front tire, stranding Waruhiu's vehicle as the taxi cab and its occupants raced off in the direction of Nairobi. When the shooting began, Waruhiu's companions ran from the car and into a nearby field. Police from Nairobi arrived on the scene some time thereafter and made their first arrests connected with the shooting that afternoon. Among those arrested for the murder were John Mbiyu Koinange and his father, ex-Senior Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu.³⁰ According to the Koinange family, all of Koinange wa Mbiyu's private papers were confiscated from his home office by security personnel at this time and were never returned nor have they ever been recovered.³¹

John Mbiyu was a disgruntled ex-soldier who quit his government job in 1945 and shortly thereafter, became involved in Nairobi's trade union politics.³² Described as 'one of the most anti-British Kikuyu', Special Branch reports noted that he was 'a protagonist of extreme violence and a direct link between the Koinange family and the terrorist element [...] A founder [sic] member of Mau Mau and an active emissary of that organisation'.³³ During the Second World War, Frederick Mbiyu, John's brother, was posted to the war propaganda unit.

³⁰ 'Murder of Chief Waruhiu: Six Africans in Court', *The Manchester Guardian*, (16 Oct. 1952), p. 1; KNA JZ/7/17, Koinange wa Mbiyu to Governor, 13 Oct. 1953, item 6.

³¹ Interview with W.K. Koinange, 22 Mar. 2012.

³² KNA JZ/7/48, (John Wesley) Mbiyu Koinange, 1953, item 5, p. 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.; *Ibid.*, Petition No. 161: John Wesley Mbiyu Koinange, Notes by Mr. Fazan, 8 Oct. 1953, item 3.

Frederick then worked as a clerk for an army colonel for a short while, before quitting to start several businesses, including a bus company plying the route between Limuru and Nairobi on which Waruhiu was murdered.³⁴ The DC of Kiambu believed that Frederick was ‘one of the pioneer members of Mau Mau’.³⁵ Frederick Mbiyu was detained two weeks after Waruhiu’s murder swept up in ‘Operation Jock Scott’. Following his release from detention in the late 1950s, Frederick invited a former European administrator of the camp to his wedding.³⁶ Frederick’s mother, Joyce Kagendo, appears to also have embraced more militant political action.

While a specific date could not be found, Joyce appears to have been detained early in the Emergency – perhaps even during the Jock Scott operation. She was imprisoned at Kamiti prison and released some time before 1958. By the time of her release, Joyce Kagendo was well thought of by the administrators of the prison. In fact, in 1958, she was part of an experiment that sought to pair women still imprisoned at Kamiti with non-imprisoned women, including Joyce, in an effort to rehabilitate the prisoners. In May and June of that year, 33 of the 118 of the women still imprisoned at Kamiti as hardcore Mau Mau fighters were transferred to the converted Tribal Police Centre at Gitmaiyu where a ‘select few ex-Kamiti women’, including Joyce Kagendo, lived in residence with the prisoners. By the end of the year, twelve of the 33 women were recommended for immediate release to their homes, thereby bypassing the regular pipeline process.³⁷

John and Frederick’s militancy highlights the division within the Koinange family discussed in the previous chapter. In 1949, the younger Charles Karuga was appointed sub-headman in Kiambu, over administrative resistance to the idea of John taking the

³⁴ KNA JZ/7/11, Chairman’s Notes: Frederick Koinange, item 10.

³⁵ Ibid., Kiambu DC to Executive Officer, ‘Petition Frederick Mbiyu Koinange’, 6 July 1953, item 13, pp 1-2.

³⁶ D.L. Smith, *Kenya, the Kikuyu, and Mau Mau* (Herstmonceux, 2005), pp 316-7.

³⁷ KNA VQ/16/2, Monthly Intelligence Report – Kiambu, May and June 1958, item 78.

position.³⁸ This disappointment not only encouraged John's opposition of British colonial rule, but also increased the division within the Koinange family. The following year, a Special Branch report noted that visible 'enmity' had developed between John and Charles.³⁹ By April 1952, divisions within the family had solidified, with Koinange wa Mbiyu, Charles Karuga, and Peter Mbiyu on one side, and John Wesley and Frederick Mbiyu on the other.⁴⁰ As a symbol of his intentional break with his family's embrace of European religion and culture, John renounced his European names (with their overt Christian heritage) in April 1952.⁴¹

Meanwhile, Peter Mbiyu remained in England. As the second on the list to be detained in October's 'Jock Scott' night raid, the government issued subsequent orders to arrest and detain Peter immediately upon his return to Kenya.⁴² It was Peter who secured the London-based barrister Dingle Foot to join Indian barrister V.P. Vohra and West Indies barrister Dudley Thompson, who had worked with Foot several years before, to represent Koinange wa Mbiyu and John Mbiyu.⁴³ In late October 1952, following their arrest and 'Jock Scott', Charles had written to Peter, 'we need your help to look after the legal defence of the father and brothers [...] without you there is great confusion and I do not know what to do [...] our mothers are unhappy and your wife also'.⁴⁴ Peter's wife was arrested in late 1952 and their home destroyed.⁴⁵ Charles' letter reveals the closeness

³⁸ KNA JZ/7/48, (John Wesley) Mbiyu Koinange, 1953, item 5, p. 1.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴¹ To prevent confusion between the various Koinange family members, this thesis will refer to John Wesley Mbiyu Koinange as John Mbiyu, instead of Mbiyu Koinange, as he was officially known after April 1952. (KNA JZ/7/48, (John Wesley) Mbiyu Koinange, item 5, p. 3; 'Notice of Change of Name', *The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 29 Apr. 1952), General Notice no. 1038).

⁴² TNA CO/822/1238, Governor to Secretary of State, 10 Jan. 1957, item 1.

⁴³ 'Kenya Arrests Total 8,500', *The Times of India* (21 Nov. 1952) p. 7; 'Mr. Pritt faces Motion for Contempt: Cable to M.Ps on Kenya Trial', *The Guardian*, (24 Dec. 1952), p. 5.

⁴⁴ TNA KV/2/2540, C.K. Koinange to M. Koinange, 22 Oct. 1952, item 330a.

⁴⁵ A. Kareithi, 'Married and Detained for Kenya's Sake', *The Standard* (Nairobi, 27 Aug. 2011. Accessed 24 Feb. 2012 at <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/article/200041720/married-and-detained-for-kenya-sake.html>).

found within the various factions of the Koinange family, the need for the first born son (to give the family guidance in the absence of the father, and how, in Peter's absence, the Emergency forced Charles into a role that was not meant to be his. Peter attempted to lead, as he could, from England. His most significant work was seeking out an advocate for his father and brothers charged with the Waruhiu murder.

While arrested in October 1952, it was not until January 1953 that Koinange and John were formally charged with Waruhiu's murder. Charges of 'murder' or 'conspiracy to murder' were brought against nineteen individuals during that three-month period from October 1952 to January 1953. Charges against five of these individuals, including two additional Koinange family members, were dropped due to a lack of evidence. The magistrate then commended the case to the colony's highest court, recommending it be split into two separate cases with differing charges: one for the three men charged with the actual murder and the other case for those charged with 'conspiracy to murder'.⁴⁶ John Mbiyu was charged with the former, while Koinange was charged in the latter.

John, the alleged gunman, and the taxi driver, were the three individuals charged with Waruhiu's murder. The Crown argued that John recruited the gunman, provided the gun, and hired the driver for Waruhiu's assassination. Following a brief court hearing, the Crown Prosecutor's closing statement acknowledged the minimal nature of the evidence supporting the charges against John, but hoped it 'might satisfy [the Court] that Accused 3 inspired this murder and provided the weapon'.⁴⁷ In fact, the only evidence presented supporting the claim of John's intimate involvement was a late-night confession given by the gunman while in police custody. The court declared the statement inadmissible, for by law the accused, in this case John, ought to have been present at the

⁴⁶ KNA AC/1/3514, *Criminal Case No. 5089/52*, 1952, pp 85-86.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

time the statement was given to respond to the charges. Given the midnight hours of the statement and the intimidation by detainees by police and other security forces, it is difficult to know what in the statement was true and what was supplied by the officials involved in taking the statement. In his closing statement to the court, Dingle Foot successfully argued that 'the bits and pieces' presented by the Crown Prosecutor 'don't add up to anything at all'.⁴⁸ The High Court agreed and John Mbiyu was acquitted of all charges.⁴⁹ The gunman and driver were found guilty and executed for Waruhiu's murder.⁵⁰

In the second case, heard before the same court, Koinange was tried, alongside five others, with conspiring in the murder of Waruhiu. In this case, the Crown provided only a single witness in support of the charges. The witness was of dubious character, with questionable loyalties, and possible personal grudges against the accused. Changes between this single witness' testimonies cast doubt on the reliability of their claims. The Crown argued that they had three additional witnesses who failed to appear but gave no indication to the court of who they were or what had kept them from appearing. Due to the lack of persuasive evidence linking the alleged conspirators to the murder, the judge acquitted Koinange and the five co-accused of all charges.⁵¹ As of April 1953, the colonial administration had failed to convince both the High Court in Kenya, as well as the intelligence officials in London, of their claims that Koinange and Peter were prominent leaders of Mau Mau.

Despite the findings of the justices, both John Mbiyu and Koinange were immediately detained under Emergency Orders. They were moved to the Marsabit

⁴⁸ *East African Standard* (10 Apr. 1953), p. 9.

⁴⁹ KNA RR/6/23, *Case 32/53*, Feb. 1953.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ 'Ex-Senior Chief and Others Acquitted', *East African Standard* (16 Apr. 1953), p. 5.

Detention Camp in Kenya's remote Northern Frontier District. There they joined Frederick Mbiyu, who had been detained since his arrest in late October 1952.⁵² John Wesley and Frederick Mbiyu were then transferred to a series of 'hardcore' camps (Manda Island, Takwa, and Hola), home to the worst cases of abuse and torture of detainees by government security personnel.⁵³ Both brothers were finally released and allowed to return to Kiambu in 1959. As for their father, Koinange wa Mbiyu remained in detention until June 1960, spending the majority of his time in detention at the camp in Marsabit.

From April 1953 until June 1960, the colonial government publicly maintained their claim that Koinange had masterminded Waruhiu's assassination as part of the justification for his continued detention.⁵⁴ They also maintained their claim that Peter was 'deep in the more violent side of Mau Mau'.⁵⁵ As will be seen, they were never able to provide support for these claims. This was the character and nature of Kenya's colonial administration during the Emergency period. Suspicion, rather than clear evidence of wrongdoing, was the standard of the day. The Koinanges' actions during the Emergency period reveal the glaring discrepancy between the government's assessment of Koinange and Peter and their actual involvement in the violence and militancy that came to be known as Mau Mau.

Koinange wa Mbiyu's Detention During Mau Mau

Koinange wa Mbiyu's seven-year detention can be divided into two separate phases based on the location of his detention and the scaling down of Emergency regulations, first

⁵² KNA JZ/7/11, S.H. Fazan to F. Koinange, 28 May 1953, item 9.

⁵³ TNA CO/822/1245, M. Koinange to F. Brockway, 10 July 1959, f. 76.; TNA FCO/141/6169, Takwa Detainees to Parliamentary Delegation, 19 Jan. 1957, item 211; *Hansard*, 27 July 1959, vol 610, col 181-262. Accessed 12 July 2015. <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/jul/27/hola-camp-kenya-report>; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp 326-31.

⁵⁴ TNA CO/822/1245, Ex-Senior Chief Koinange, f. 7.

⁵⁵ TNA CO/822/1238, Governor to Secretary of State, 10 Jan. 1957.

with the cessation of military activity in 1956 and then from 1958 onward (Table 6.1). From April 1953 until March 1958, he was detained at the remote Marsabit Detention Centre in Kenya's Northern Frontier District. In March 1958, due to deteriorating health, Koinange was moved to a small bungalow in Kabarnet until his release in June 1960. His move to Kabarnet was predicated on a marked deterioration in his health with reports of advanced Parkinson's disease, cataracts, high blood pressure, and a weak heart.⁵⁶ The historical records created by Koinange's detention provide immense detail concerning Koinange's activities in the 1940s and the 1950s, while revealing the strongest evidence the colonial government had to support their detention of Koinange. While the last three chapters have referred to this material on repeated occasion, it is now time to examine these specific records in detail.

DATE	DEVELOPMENT
Apr. 1953	High Court acquittal
	DETENTION AT MARSABIT (1953-1958)
May 1953	Detention in Marsabit begins, appealed to Governor
Oct. 1953	First Advisory Council on Detainees appearance and decision
1953-1956	Questions raised in British Parliament about Koinange's continued detention
1957	Koinange family land consolidated
Apr./May 1957	Koinange admits Mau Mau involvement during meetings with Special Branch
1957-1958	Public pressure increases for Koinange's release
	DETENTION AT KABARNET (1958-1960)
Mar. 1958	Transfer to Kabarnet
July 1959	Family visits Koinange in Kabarnet (including Peter Mbiyu from the UK)
June 1960	Returned to Kiambaa under Restriction Orders
Jul 1960	Koinange dies at Charles Karuga's home

Table 6.1: Timeline of Koinange wa Mbiyu's Detention.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ WKK, *Kabarnet Health Correspondence*, Director of Medical Services to Provincial Medical Officer, 'Movement of Ex Senior Chief Koinange', 10 Mar. 1958.

⁵⁷ TNA CO/822/1245, Ex-Senior Chief Koinange, f. 7.

The intelligence report is a summary created by a colonial official after sifting through the voluminous records present in 1953 concerning Koinange's political activities in the 1930s and 1940s. Providing a chronology of his activities, there are a series of key events from Koinange's seven years in detention that provide insight into Koinange's political actions and commitments. The first took place in October 1953, a year after his initial arrest, when Koinange appeared before the governor's Advisory Council on Detainees (ACoD) for the first time. There is bare mention of Koinange's activity from 1953 to 1956. It was a time period in which the administration's focus and broader public concerns were on the ongoing military actions against Mau Mau. The archival record concerning Koinange then grows again considerably from 1957 onward – with a particular focus on the administration's decision to continue with their detention of Koinange. This second season in the records provides the second focus, for it records the events of Koinange confessing to involvement in Mau Mau to a Special Branch officer. The confession took place in the context of growing pressure from both leadership in London and leadership in Nairobi for the colonial government to release the aged Koinange from detention. The following discussion concerning Koinange's detention furthers the revisionist narrative over the long duration of this thesis, seeing the activities around Koinange during the Emergency as clear continuations of the narrative developed in the preceding chapters.

The Early Years of the Emergency

While Peter pursued seemingly all available avenues in Europe to protest the military response to Mau Mau and his father's detention, pursuing 'contacts ranging from Liberalism to Fabianism, but stopping short of Communism', his father came to learn the

specific reasons the government used to support his detention.⁵⁸ Koinange wrote letters protesting his captivity following his detention in April 1953 and the High Court's acquittal in his trial. It was not until October 1953 that he was informed of the justification for his detention. Taking a closer look at the allegations, Koinange's meeting with the ACoD, and their internal discussion illuminates much about the colonial administration in the first year of the Emergency.

In the weeks prior to his meeting with the ACoD, Koinange received a letter outlining the reasons for his detention. There were six in all:

- (a) administered an oath of secrecy [...] in February 1950.
- (b) made anti-European speeches, calculated to embitter race relations [...in...] which he stated that all Europeans ought to leave the Country
- (c) [...] further anti-European speech [...] at which he shouted 'Where did the Europeans get their land? Did they bring it with them?'
- (d) made a subversive speech against the Government on 17th June 1951 at a reception given in honour of Fred Kubai [...]
- (e) a speech [...] on the 24 June 1951 falsely and maliciously accused the Government of turning Kikuyu and Wakamba out of Maasai country in order that Europeans might settle there; and
- (f) [...] on the twentieth April 1952, warned Africans who were Government servants among his listeners not to report what they heard.⁵⁹

Four of the above charges had to do with the KAU meetings discussed in the previous chapter (items b, c, e, and f). In response to these allegations, Koinange told the Council that (a) was a prayer meeting for rain and that (b) came as no surprise because 'he had never made any secret' that 'the Kikuyu wanted their land back'. He further denied speaking against the government or calling for Europeans to leave. He denied having said (c) but did affirm that he 'urged on this and many other occasions that Africans should be allowed to buy land in the European highlands'. As for Fred Kubai's party in (d), Koinange argued that his only memory of a gathering for Kubai was on the latter's return from the UK. Lastly, regarding (e), Koinange argued that he had not urged government

⁵⁸ KNA KV/2/2542, Peter Mbiyu Koinange, 22 Jan. 1953, item 385a.

⁵⁹ KNA JZ/7/17, Executive Officer to Ex-Senior Chief Koinange, 9 Oct. 1953, item 3.

servants to keep secrets but to report what they heard ‘correctly’, for the misunderstandings that undergirded the growing distrust between the administration and the African community stemmed from inaccurate translations of these meetings.⁶⁰ In discussion with ACoD, Koinange

admitted that he knew that Jomo and his [sons] wanted self-Government and the land back from the Europeans, but maintained that he himself had taken no part in the agitation for self-Government. He argued that he had confined himself solely to the land question, which he had pressed constantly.⁶¹

As this thesis has demonstrated, Koinange’s protest of land policy was unwavering throughout his life. Half of the arguments given for Koinange’s detention were land related. Although the Council did not accept all of Koinange’s rebuttals, the council did acknowledge Koinange’s long-established protest of land policy, calling his rebuttal a ‘credible defence’. Koinange’s consistent protest had led to his forced retirement in February 1949 and the rise of official suspicion of his actions. The members of the ACoD committee recognised and affirmed Koinange’s response — his protests against land policy and for the return of his own land had long been present and resolute.

This first meeting with the ACoD members and the documentary record it produced highlighted a number of key issues at play in Koinange’s detention. First, as discussed in the preceding chapters and noted by the ACoD, Koinange’s protest of colonial land policies was present throughout his life. It was the growing tensions within the colony during the 1940s and early 1950s that resulted in the interpretation of these protests as hostile to the colonial government. What might have been dismissed as the frustrations of a disappointed, elderly, retired civil servant by the late 1940s, were interpreted as acts of subversion towards colonial rule. In their written remarks, the Advisory Council on Detainees recognised that opposition to Koinange was due to his resolute and historic

⁶⁰ Ibid., Petition No. 162: Ex-Senior Chief Koinange Mbiyu, 30 Oct. 1953, item 8, pp 1-3.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 3.

protest, rather than actual militant activity. Koinange 'probably did not seek the subversion of the Government', stated the report, 'but he consistently refused to accept the finality of any Government decision about land which ran counter to Kikuyu claims'.⁶² In this, the ACoD astutely summarised Koinange's political career and the nature of the colonial government's response to Koinange from the mid-1940s onward. Significantly, five of the six reasons given for Koinange's detention are not references to any kind of militant activity, but rather public speeches questioning administrative policy and actions. This contrasts starkly with the reasons given for John Mbiyu and Frederick Mbiyu's detentions, both of which were predicated on their involvement in militant activities.⁶³

The focus on Koinange's speeches as justification for his detention reveals the colonial government's main concern with Koinange: namely, his symbolic importance. Recognising that Koinange may not have taken any Mau Mau oath or been immediately involved with militant activity, the Council reasoned that 'he had appeared so often in public with Jomo and other Mau Mau leaders that he became identified with Mau Mau in the African mind'.⁶⁴ It is worth keeping in mind that evidence of Kenyatta's own connection to Mau Mau was so weak that the government relied on false witnesses for the trial at Kapenguria.⁶⁵ It was because of Koinange's role as a symbol of resistance, rather than militant activity, that the Council recommended that Koinange remain in detention throughout the Emergency.

In addition to considering the reasons given for Koinange's detention, the committee also addressed Koinange's complaints with the conditions of his detention. Following his April 1953 detention at Marsabit, Koinange petitioned Governor Baring for his release.

⁶² Ibid., Appendix I: Petition No. 162: Ex-Senior Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu, 1953, item 9, p. 2.

⁶³ See KNA JZ/7/11, *Frederick Mbiyu Koinange*, 1952-1958 and KNA JZ/7/48, *John Wesley Mbiyu Koinange*, 1953-1958.

⁶⁴ KNA JZ/7/17, Appendix I: Petition No. 162: Ex-Senior Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu, 1953, item 9, p. 1.

⁶⁵ R. Macharia, *The Truth About the Trial of Jomo Kenyatta* (Kenya, 1991).

The petition was denied with the claim that Koinange was ‘in a healthy area where in view of his great age, he had been accorded special treatment’. The Governor also offered for one of Koinange’s wives to join the ex-Senior Chief to help look after him.⁶⁶ Koinange declined the offer out of concern that she would ‘automatically become a detainee.’ He explained that he ‘did not, and would not wish [his] female relations to undergo the hardships’ he was experiencing in Marsabit.⁶⁷ In a letter to Fenner Brockway, Koinange described his conditions at Marsabit in the following way:

Here I am confined in a mud, grass-thatched, windowless 18 feet diameter hut, which I share with three other detainees. As for rations, I am not entitled to anything outside the normal detainees scale [...] my persistent demanding for a special diet is that, in 1931, I had a stomach operation after which I was instructed medically to insist on delicate food.⁶⁸

In support of Koinange’s claims, and contradicting the governor’s objections, the ACoD argued that Koinange’s living conditions were unacceptable. The committee used surprisingly strong language in support of Koinange: ‘in view of his age and past record as Senior Chief and the fact that no conviction stands against him, the conditions of his detention should be, consistent with safety, greatly ameliorated’.⁶⁹ Sir Vincent Glenday, a council member who had participated in Harry Thuku’s 1920s detention, provided an additional note with the report. Glenday considered ‘the present accommodation provided for Ex-Senior Chief Koinange to be *totally* inadequate for one of his age, standing, and past Government service’.⁷⁰ Despite their recommendation that Koinange’s remain in detention because of his symbolic significance (rather than actual militant activity), there is evidence of continued respect for the ex-Senior Chief on the part of the members of the ACoD. Ultimately, neither the 1953 court case nor the 1953 meeting with the ACoD offers any

⁶⁶ KNA JZ/7/17, Koinange wa Mbiyu to Governor, 13 Oct. 1953, item 6, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., Appendix I: Petition No. 162: Ex-Senior Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu, 1953, item 9, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Petition No. 162: Ex-Senior Chief Koinange Mbiyu, 30 Oct. 1953, item 8, p. 3. Emphasis is original.

clear evidence in support of the colonial government's claim that Koinange was a 'leader of Mau Mau'.⁷¹ In the first case, Koinange was acquitted and in the second he was detained on the basis of association, but in neither case is there evidence Koinange embraced militant or oppositional politics.

In London concern over Koinange's detention was the topic of Parliamentary and official debate between 1953 and 1956 (the period of active military operations in Kenya). Two Labour MPs in particular — Fenner Brockway and Charles Leslie Hale — called for Koinange's release from the floor of Parliament on a number of occasions.⁷² The month that the Emergency military efforts officially ended (October 1956), the colonial government responded to questions raised in London's Parliament of whether or not the end to military operations would bring an end to Koinange's detention. The colonial government refused to release Koinange, claiming that he was 'deeply involved in Mau Mau' and his release would 'have a disturbing and unfortunate effect on the Kikuyu'.⁷³ An internal government memo of this time described Koinange as 'one of the architects of Mau Mau'.⁷⁴ Even three years after the court's acquittal of Koinange and the ACoD's report, the colonial government held firmly to their belief in Koinange's militancy. However, facing continued pressure regarding and an inability to provide compelling proof of Koinange's complicity in Mau Mau, it looked like the colonial government might get exactly what they needed in mid-1957, and from none other than Koinange himself.

⁷¹ WKK *Suspension of Detention Order 1958-1960*, R.G. Wilson, 'Special Restriction Order: Mbiyu Koinange', 11 Jan. 1960, p. 2.

⁷² TNA CO/822/1245, 'Ex-Senior Chief Koinange', f. 7; *Hansard*, 29 Apr. 1953, vol 514, col 2122-3. Accessed 12 July 2015. <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1953/apr/29/ex-chief-koinange-detention>; *Hansard*, 13 June 1956, vol 554, col 569. Accessed 12 July 2015. <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1956/jun/13/detainees>.

⁷³ TNA CO/822/1245, W.T. Hull, Internal Memo, 22 Mar. 1957.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, J.L.F. Bust, Internal Memo, 8 July 1957.

The 1957 Confession and Growing Pressure for Koinange's Release

By 1957, Koinange had a clear sense of the government's case against him and the government's narrative concerning his involvement in Mau Mau. The Waruhiu court case, the 1953 ACoD meeting, conversations with camp officials and with his legal representatives, and then meetings with intelligence officials had all provided ample opportunity for him to learn of the government's claims that he was a leader and supporter of the militant violence associated with Mau Mau. Following the end of military action and the rebuff of Parliamentary calls for Koinange's release in 1956, it began to dawn on Koinange that the only avenue through which he might garner his release was to admit to the government's narrative of his involvement in Mau Mau.⁷⁵ In March 1957, Koinange sent a letter to the District Officer at Marsabit indicating a desire to do exactly this. In the letter, Koinange wrote that his house had been used for meetings 'to further the objects of Mau Mau'.⁷⁶ The letter continued:

due to the fact that I am old I now declare a complete retirement from any political organisation and I fully desire to renounce Mau Mau and their activity and would request my sons who are at present detained to do the same. I shall have no more doing in future with Mau Mau and its activity.⁷⁷

The events surrounding this development and the wording of Koinange's 1957 confession and renunciation of Mau Mau involvement are of immense importance. They indicate that by March 1957, Koinange knew for certain what the government expected of his confession.

In April, a Special Branch officer journeyed to Marsabit to hear Koinange's renunciation of Mau Mau. In their first meeting, Koinange told the officer:

I do not know anything at all about Mau Mau. I have never been a member of Mau Mau. [...] The only reason I had stated that I would renounce Mau Mau

⁷⁵ KNA DC/ISO/2/1/15, *Northern Frontier Province - Annual Report, 1957*, p. 17.

⁷⁶ TNA CO/822/1245, 'Ex-Senior Chief Koinange', f. 7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

*was because I thought that was what the Government wished me to say. My letters to my family were written with that intention also. I have never been a member of Mau Mau and have never taken a Mau Mau oath.*⁷⁸

Koinange's awareness of what the government expected of a confession fits with the broader picture of the Emergency context. Throughout Kenya, detainees were pressured, some brutally tortured, until they confessed what was already believed about them.⁷⁹ A January 1957 letter from a number of detainees at the Takwa Special Detention Camp for hardcore detainees indicates as much:

At the moment we are told that the only way to secure our release is by confessing our past activities with Mau Mau and to agree with the allegations made against us. Our record while in Prison, however good it may be, does not appear to help us at all. It puts us in an impossible situation. It seems to us that our release can only be affected by agreeing to crimes which we have never committed.⁸⁰

Detainees knew what confession they were expected to give. The Mau Mau Emergency was not an investigation into social and political troubles, but rather a witch-hunt intended to confirm official suspicions. In this case, Koinange was, over the course of 1957, wrestling with whether or not to confess to the official narrative. Two days after this first April meeting, infuriating as it must have been for the Special Branch Officer, Koinange once again requested a meeting.

It was another month before the second visit with a Special Branch officer occurred. In his confession, Koinange implicated Kenyatta, John Mbiyu, and Frederick Mbiyu in violence, admitted to his funding and membership in a society, and spoke of oaths administered under threat of death:

About two years before my arrest Kenyatta formed a society – I cannot remember its name – which was subsequently called Mau Mau by Europeans. It advocated the use of violence in retrieving African land from the Europeans. I joined this society at this time and used to attend many of their meetings. I also spoke at most of them but did not openly advocate violence like Kenyatta and other

⁷⁸ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁷⁹ B. Kenber and B. Macintyre, 'Brutal Beatings and the "Roasting Alive" of a Suspect: What Secret Mau Mau Files Reveal', *The Times* (London, 13 Apr. 2011), p. 15.

⁸⁰ TNA FCO/141/6169, Takwa Detainees to Parliamentary Delegation, 19 Jan. 1957, item 211, pp 48-9.

members did. I contributed regularly to the funds of this society. Most of the meetings were held at Kaloleni and other locational centres. I was never anything but a mere member of this society. Two of my sons, John Mbiyu and Frederick Mbiyu, were both leading members of the society and both openly advocated violence. I knew that anyone who wished to join the society had to take an oath. I myself was never asked to take the oath. I also know that anyone who did not voluntarily take the oath was forced to take it. Those who refused were murdered. There were quite a number of people murdered for this reason before my arrest. I remained a member in spite of the murder of my friends and others because I felt so strongly about the return of our land from the Europeans which was the main object of our society. My other son, Peter Mbiyu, was also a member of the same society.⁸¹

The transcript of Koinange's confession is part of an archival collection from London's Colonial Office. In this particular case, it is part of a letter from Governor Baring to Colonial Secretary Alan Lennox-Boyd. Following the recounting of Koinange's confession, the Governor adds:

The statements he made recently admit only to a proportion of what he is known to have done. It appears that he is not prepared at the moment to divulge any more information than what he considers the minimum favourably to influence consideration of release.⁸²

In both Koinange's comments in March 1957 and in this note from the Governor, it is clear that Koinange knew what he was expected to confess concerning his involvement with Mau Mau. To what extent was Koinange's confession shaped by what he knew the government wanted to hear, spiced with enough factual detail, in order that he might see a change in his situation? The answer to that question lies in the long-perspective focus of this thesis.

At first glance, the confession seems a clear acknowledgement by Koinange of his militant involvement. Yet, a straightforward acceptance of Koinange's confession raises a series of challenges. First, what is to be made of Koinange's claims about Kenyatta's secret society and their commitment to violence? The linking of Kenyatta with violence, while fitting the colonial government's conclusions, lacked supporting evidence against Kenyatta

⁸¹ TNA CO/822/1245, Governor to Secretary of State or the Colonies, 2 July 1957, f. 16.

⁸² Ibid.

at Kapenguria and continues to be undermined by scholarly research.⁸³ Second, Koinange, the colonial government, and the wider public knew that John Mbiyu and Frederick Mbiyu were engaged in militant politics. Any attempt to deny their associations with militancy would have been foolhardy, unnecessarily casting doubt on the remainder of the confession. Third, Koinange's adamant claim that his focus was on the return of land, not militant activity, is true to the wider historical narrative of Koinange's lifelong quest for the return of the *Mbari ya Njunu* lands. Indeed, it fits the narrative of the militant takeover of the KAU and Mbari oath in the late 1940s, as discussed in chapter five. Land and land policies had always been a central issue for Koinange.

Koinange's confession was a construction of his experience, what was expected, and, very likely, guiding prompts from the official with the purpose of providing what was expected of him, with the hopes of securing his release. In that moment, Koinange embraced the colonial government's myth for a single purpose – release. In isolation, it could easily be argued that Koinange's confession corroborated the government's narrative. However, viewed within the wider context of Koinange's actions in the 1940s and the government's inability to prove their case against Koinange, this confession sits at odds with his prior activities and involvement. The dissonance between the government's narrative of Koinange and that of Koinange's moderate political activity is further exacerbated by calls from officials in Kenya and the United Kingdom to release Koinange from 1957 onward.

⁸³ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp 59-60, 67; R.B. Edgerton, *Mau Mau: an African Crucible* (New York, 1989), pp 49-50; D.W. Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau 1945-1953* (London, 1988), p. 272.

Protesting Koinange's Detention

There had been pressure on the colonial government and the Colonial Office to release Koinange ever since his arrest in October 1952 and subsequent detention following the Waruhiu trial in April 1953. Based in London, Peter Mbiyu was a constant advocate for his father's release. Demands for Koinange's release grew with the end of military action in October 1956. Fenner Brockway pointed to Koinange's consistent character in rebuttal to the changes made by the colonial government in Parliament in 1956:

I am shocked by the statement that ex-Chief Koinange 'was deeply involved in Mau Mau'. I lived with the ex-Chief in Kenya and found him to be a man of deep Christian faith and of a character which had nothing in common with the bestialities of Mau Mau. You will remember that he was charged with being an accessory to a murder and that he was acquitted. Those of us who knew him had no doubt about his innocence. [...] It seems to me very wrong that the Colonial Office should make a statement of this kind when there has been no proof in any Court of Law that it is true. If there is evidence that the ex-Chief was deeply involved in Mau Mau he should have been put on trial.⁸⁴

Brockway points out two key issues: the incongruity of the government's claims when contrasted with Koinange's historical character and, perhaps more significantly, the government's lack of evidence to justify the ongoing detention of an elderly, retired servant for the past five years.

A few months later, Peter Mbiyu reached out to Philip Mitchell, on behalf of his father. This was the same Mitchell who served as the previous Governor of Kenya, who had had a very public breakdown in 1945, was suspicious of African leaders, and supported CNC Wyn-Harris' forced retirement of Koinange. In his request to Mitchell, Peter Mbiyu gave seven reasons for his father's release. The fifth item on Peter Mbiyu's list is perhaps the most important:

Ex-Senior Chief Koinange took a firm stand on the land question. But in doing so he was but expressing the will of Africans and should not for that reason be detained. Apart from this, there does not exist any evidence of any attitude on his

⁸⁴ TNA CO/822/1245, F. Brockway to Lennox-Boyd, 6 Mar. 1957, f. 6.

part hostile either to Africans or non-Africans. To the contrary, there are numerous incidents and evidence of his constant efforts for better relations between the different races in Kenya.⁸⁵

The common links between Brockway's and Peter's letters are the emphasis each letter places on Koinange's consistent behaviour and how they highlight the lack of evidence in support of claims regarding Koinange's militancy. There is no indication in the archival records of whether or not Mitchell did write a letter on behalf of Koinange, but by reaching out to him, Peter's letter gives no indication of a bitterness, instead it hints at a hope that counters what would be expected. Over the course of the following year, a number of influential politicians and former government officials joined with these petitions calling for Koinange's release. Petitions from two former Colonial Secretaries, in particular, serve as prime examples of the noteworthy support voiced on behalf of Koinange.

Arthur Creech-Jones and James Griffiths both served as Colonial Secretary's prior to then Colonial Secretary, Lennox-Boyd. Creech-Jones served as Secretary of State for the Colonies from October 1946 to February 1950. James Griffiths served immediately following Creech-Jones from February 1950 to October 1951 (see Table 6.2). Their joint letter to Lennox-Boyd, as with those that came before, pointed to Koinange's character and the lack of evidence against him:

Our knowledge of [Koinange] is not consistent with the character attributed to him by yourself and the Kenyan Government but we urge reconsideration of his 'detention' on other grounds. He is a very old man of 91 who, for many years, honourably discharged his responsibilities to Government and rendered important services to his people [...] no charge could be sustained against him in the Kenya Courts and he has not been again charged and brought to trial.⁸⁶

Creech-Jones and Griffiths' letter further supports the now common refrain that militant claims regarding Koinange were incongruent within the context of Koinange's historic and

⁸⁵ Ibid., M. Koinange to Sir P. Mitchell, 17 July 1957, f. 17.

⁸⁶ Ibid., Creech-Jones and Griffiths to Lennox-Boyd, 1 Aug. 1958, f. 33.

consistent actions. In this same letter, the authors' highlight the significant role they believed suspicion, rather than evidence, played in Koinange's continued detention: 'it is desirable that in this case *suspicions* should be put on one side and Koinange restored to the normal life of his tribe'.⁸⁷ Koinange's detention was the result of what the government had come to assume about Koinange, rather than any militant action on his part.

Dates in Office	Name	Political Party
Aug. 1945 – Oct. 1946	George Hall	Labour
Oct. 1946 - Feb. 1950	Arthur Creech-Jones	Labour
Feb. 1950 – Oct. 1951	James Griffiths	Labour
Oct. 1951 – July 1954	Oliver Lyttelton	Conservative
July 1954 – Oct. 1959	Alan Lennox-Boyd	Conservative
Oct 1959 - Oct 1961	Iain Macleod	Conservative

Table 6.2. Secretaries of State for the Colonies from 1945 through 1961.

Others joined in the growing protest of Koinange's ongoing detention. Dingle Foot, who had served as Koinange's barrister for the Waruhiu trial, continually called for Koinange's release from 1953 through to 1958.⁸⁸ Dr Julius Kiano, the first Kenyan to attain a PhD and African member of the Legislative Council in the late 1950s, called for Koinange's release from Nairobi, describing Koinange's ongoing detention as 'inhumane'.⁸⁹ In the late 1950s, Joseph Karuga Koinange, one of Koinange's sons who was also living in England like Peter, directly petitioned the new Colonial Secretary, Ian Macleod, and the new Governor of Kenya, Patrick Renison, for his father's release.⁹⁰ Following the controversial deaths of 11 inmates at the Hola detention camp in May 1959, Brockway

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., D. Foot to E. Baring, 3 Apr. 1958, f. 25b.

⁸⁹ TNA CO/822/1908, Government House Meeting, 16 Dec. 1959, f. 1.

⁹⁰ TNA CO/822/1245, Colonial Secretary to Baring, Telegram, 23 June 1959, f. 57; TNA CO/822/1908, I. Macleod to E. Jones, 12 Sep. 1960, f. 19.

once again raised the issue of Koinange's release to the Colonial Secretary.⁹¹ In support of the argument that Koinange's detention ran contrary to his historic character, reports from the local government officials who oversaw Koinange's detention noted his 'exemplary' behaviour.⁹² These comments joined a persistent chorus of protests received by the Colonial Office and the colonial government throughout the late 1950s.

Emerging from these petitions are three important observations. First, the colonial government continued to lack clear evidence of Koinange's involvement in militant violence throughout the 1950s. In the face of repeated calls for evidence, they were unable to provide any corroborative proof of their claims regarding Koinange. Second, those calling for his release, whether from London or Nairobi, argued against his detention based on the perceived disconnect between Koinange's historical character and actions and the government's accusations against him. These rebuttals made in light of the long perspective of Koinange's life undergird the importance of this thesis' study of the Koinanges' over the duration of their lives, and it is this long-perspective approach that makes Koinange's 1957 confession untenable as a record of Koinange's militant involvement. The colonial government lacked evidence of wrongdoing on the part of Koinange; their assessments were based on suspicions that directly contradicted his broader actions and decisions. Thus, thirdly, the colonial government made assessments during the Mau Mau Emergency based on fears and suspicions, rather than evidence of militant activity.

The colonial secretary, in a letter to Fenner Brockway in 1959, admitted the government's dearth of evidential proof against Koinange: 'Koinange was not held for any

⁹¹ *Hansard*, 16 July 1959, vol 609, c 580. Accessed 12 July 2015.
<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/jul/16/ex-senior-chief-koinange>.

⁹² KNA DC/ISO/2/1/15, *Northern Frontier Province - Annual Report, 1957*, p. 17.

specific criminal offence but because his restriction was thought necessary for maintaining public order'.⁹³ Any narrative that places Koinange as an 'architect' or 'leader' of Mau Mau finds itself without sufficient historical grounding. In addition, such action without a foundation of evidence fits within the character of colonial rule during the Emergency. In the end, Koinange was arrested and detained for eight years without evidence of wrongdoing or militant involvement. As seen in the 1959 letter to Brockway (above), by the end of the Mau Mau Emergency the colonial government and Colonial Office were forced to admit as much. With this in mind, it is time to examine more closely the charges brought against Peter Mbiyu.

Peter Mbiyu in England

Governor Baring and Colonial Secretary Lennox-Boyd corresponded throughout the 1950s concerning Peter Mbiyu's exile in London and the possibility of his extradition back to Kenya. The recurrent basis for Baring's request, highlighted most succinctly in a 1957 letter claimed that Peter 'was very prominent indeed in the Mau Mau movement [...] second on the list of names for the original "Jock Scott" operation [...] and] deep in the more violent side of Mau Mau'.⁹⁴ In spite of the boldness of the claim, the Colonial Government, as with Peter's father, failed time and again to provide evidence of this militancy. Peter remained an outspoken political figure, increasingly nationalistic in tone and rhetoric, but one who advocated change through the bureaucratic process, not through violent rebellion.

⁹³ TNA CO/822/1245, Lennox-Boyd to F. Brockway, 7 July 1959, f. 69.

⁹⁴ TNA CO/822/1238, E. Baring to Colonial Secretary, 10 Jan. 1957, f. 1.

Date	Development
Nov. 1951	Travels to UK
Dec. 1951	Gives Radio Address in Paris at UNO Meeting
Aug. 1952	Rumours of return with 'the gift of the White Highlands' ⁹⁵
Oct. 1952	Makes first statements against Emergency
1953-1954	Ongoing Discussions Concerning Extradition
Jan. 1953	Financial troubles begin
Feb. 1953	MI5's Home Order Warrant (HOW) begins
Dec. 1953	Public speeches in Dublin, Ireland
1955	<i>The People of Kenya Speak for Themselves</i> is published in Detroit, Michigan (USA)
1957	Contacts Mitchell, Creech-Jones, and Griffiths
July 1959	Visits Koinange wa Mbiyu in Kabarnet
Late 1959	Appointed the Director of the Bureau of African Affairs for Ghana
Jan. 1960	Lancaster House Conference: Boycott & Libel case
1960	Secretary-General of Pan African Freedom Movement of East, Central and South Africa, based in Tanganyika
June 1961	Returns to Kenya under Restricted Persons Ordinance
Aug. 1961	Restricted Persons Ordinance lifted

Table 6.3: Peter Mbiyu. Timeline of Events from Nov 1951-Aug 1961.

There are three primary events during the 1950s that reveal Peter Mbiyu's relationship to Mau Mau. The first involves his response to the declaration of Kenya's Emergency in October 1952 in public speeches, correspondence, and the publishing of a booklet in 1955 entitled *The People of Kenya Speak for Themselves*. The second is the ongoing discussion between the colonial government and London concerning Peter's extradition back to Kenya. The final revelation involves a five-day boycott of the Lancaster Constitutional Conference in January 1960 and a subsequent libel case.

⁹⁵ TNA CMD/1030, 'Historical Survey', May 1960, p. 138.

Responding to the Declaration of the Mau Mau Emergency

In November 1951, after convincing the KAU leadership to make an appeal to the United Nations Organization (UNO) to pressure Kenya's colonial government for change, Peter Mbiyu travelled to the United Kingdom as a KAU representative in November 1951. Peter immediately reconnected with Labour MP Fenner Brockway. Peter pursued protest and petition through European governing bodies over the course of the next year, finding himself in London when Baring issued the Emergency Declaration in late October 1952.

Peter's response to the Governor's declaration of 20 October 1952 was swift. Within forty-eight hours, the press throughout London printed his written response to the State of Emergency:

The present state of unrest in Kenya is the result of the failure of the Kenya Government to meet the urgent and legitimate demands of the African people.

The declaration of the State of Emergency is totally unnecessary, since there is no violence on the part of the people, who are unarmed. Even the Kenya Government has admitted that *the Mau Mau secret society is not representative of the African people*.

The Kenya African Union and the African members for the Legislative Council have repeatedly declared *their opposition to terrorism* and have invited *the co-operation of the leaders of the other races of Kenya* in the solution of all outstanding problems [...]

It is now clearly evident that the publicity given to the alleged activities of the Mau Mau has served as a camouflage behind which an intensification of *repression against the African national movement could proceed*.

This action can only give comfort to, and serve the interests of, *the reactionary White supremacists* whose main desire is to keep the African people in a state of perpetual helotry.

It makes a mockery of all the declarations of the British Government that its aim is to promote the *rapid advance of the African people to self-government*.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ TNA KV/2/2542, Peter Mbiyu Koinange, 22 Jan. 1953, item 385a, p. 1.

There are two significant elements in Peter Mbiyu's statement. First, there is clear consistency with his prior activity and actions. Mention of multiracial cooperation brings to mind Peter's 1950's warning to the governor and work with the Kenya Citizen's Association, both discussed in the previous chapter. The criticism that racism was prevalent among some quarters of Kenya's settler population reflected the racial tensions of the 1940s, exemplified in the influence of the right-wing Electors' Union. The new development in Peter's written response is the strong sense of nationalism, now made clear in the shadow of the Emergency, Peter's visit to the UNO in Paris, and his year of political advocacy in London. Secondly, Peter Mbiyu did not seek to justify the violence or to identify with the Mau Mau fighters or African militant actions. It would seem that this was the very occasion, were Peter in fact a prominent leader of Mau Mau, to speak to the effect: 'In light of the colonial government's disregard for our longstanding petitions and political protests, we have been left with no other choice but to respond in violent rebellion'. If Peter was in fact 'deep in the more violent side of Mau Mau', surely such a stance would have urged on the fighters and gained Peter prominence among them.⁹⁷ Peter, instead, very intentionally positions himself within the moderate and pro-multiracial political community and outside of the proponents of militant violence in Kenya. This act threatened to undermine the very position of authority the government claimed Peter possessed within Mau Mau.

In these early months and throughout the Emergency, Peter spoke on multiple occasions in public concerning the crisis in Kenya in a way that distanced himself from militancy, while aligning himself with his historic political commitments. Peter Mbiyu pursued every opportunity to speak out against the Emergency. An MI5 report stated that Peter:

⁹⁷ TNA CO/822/1238, Governor to Secretary of State, 10 Jan. 1957, item 1.

Koinange has devoted himself in the United Kingdom to exploiting the situation in Kenya, to the disadvantage of H.M. Government, by means of written and spoken propaganda [...] he has been travelling up and down the country addressing public and private meetings at which arrangements for him to speak have been made.⁹⁸

As to the character of these speeches, Peter spoke with a balanced tone, committed to multi-racial cooperation. He told a March 1953 meeting that 'Not all Africans are good. But good Europeans and good Africans must work together'.⁹⁹ In December 1953, Peter travelled to Dublin to give a series of public addresses. 'The key to the problem in Kenya,' Peter told his audience, 'was the control of land and that of the Constitution'.¹⁰⁰ Quoted by three local newspapers, Peter told those gathered that Africans were being 'killed ruthlessly' by the colonial government and that 'vocal Africans are listed as targets for liquidation for [speaking out]'.¹⁰¹ Such action, Peter argued, 'will only breed more bitterness and racial animosity'.¹⁰² While Peter's rhetoric was heated, the long-held focus on land policy, constitutional change, and racial cooperation are apparent. Even a year into the Emergency, Peter did not embrace militancy as the way forward for Kenya. Instead, he held resolutely to his historic commitments.

In January 1953, just three months after the State of Emergency was declared, MI5 provided an assessment based on their intelligence findings and correspondence with their representative in Nairobi and in light of claims made by the colonial administration concerning Peter's links to Mau Mau:

There is no evidence that [Peter] KOINANGE, or his associates in the U.K., are directly implicated in Mau Mau activities, or that they have any clandestine means of communication with East Africa: nor have they produced any evidence that KOINANGE is essential to Mau Mau as a leader, or that he is in a position to direct its activities.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ TNA KV/2/2542, Peter Mbiyu Koinange, 22 Jan. 1953, item 385a, pp 1-2.

⁹⁹ TNA KV/2/2543, Mbiyu Koinange, 24 Mar. 1953, item 426z.

¹⁰⁰ 'Delegate from Kenya Tells of Conditions', *The Irish Times* (21 Dec. 1953), p. 1.

¹⁰¹ 'African Gives Reasons for Struggle in Kenya', *The Irish Times* (22 Dec. 1953), p. 1.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ TNA KV/2/2542, Peter Mbiyu Koinange, 22 Jan. 1953, item 385a, p. 1.

‘They’ here refers to Kenya’s colonial administration. In the wake of the ‘Jock Scott’ roundup and in the midst of the Waruhiu trial, the government could produce no evidence of Mau Mau involvement. This same report then discussed Peter’s tendency to speak out upon every opportunity afforded him, whether in the press, in political meetings, or in public gatherings. In bringing its assessment of Peter Mbiyu to a close, the MI5 report states:

...nothing is known in the U.K. which reflects any continued interest in KOINANGE as a possible organiser of Mau Mau [...] no evidence is available which can be put forward to support a case for prosecuting KOINANGE on the grounds of his activities in the U.K. He has confined himself to overt political activity and he is not known to be working on behalf of any Communist or subversive organisation, or to have made any public utterance which could be brought within the somewhat indefinite limits of sedition. Neither is any evidence available in the U.K. that he has done anything in Kenya which would constitute an extraditable offence.¹⁰⁴

The only potential point of criticism against Peter had nothing to do with militancy and everything to do with the racial context of the day. An MI5 officer warned that ‘any attempt to advertise his relations with white women with the intention of injuring his reputation might easily discredit H.M. Government rather than KOINANGE’.¹⁰⁵ From the earliest days and months of the Emergency period, Peter persevered in his pursuit of multiracial cooperation, for a solution through the governing bureaucracy (e.g. parliament, the Colonial Office, the UNO, etc.), and to decry the very violence he was accused of instigating, which the colonial government could not substantiate.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Peter's Extradition

Discussions regarding the extradition of Peter began early in the Emergency and continued for nearly seven years. In April 1953, as Peter's brother and father were tried for Waruhiu's murder in Kenya's High Court, the Intelligence Committee in Kenya considered the grounds upon which Peter might be extradited back to Kenya.¹⁰⁶ The Chairman, who also served as the administration's Intelligence Advisor, A. M. MacDonald, opposed the idea and carried the committee's decision. Perhaps unsurprising, it was the CNC, an administrative official, who called for this discussion concerning Peter Mbiyu's extradition and trial. If there had been actionable intelligence linking Peter with Mau Mau, then there is no doubt the direction for the committee's decision would have been in the opposite. Joining with the CNC in calling for Peter's extradition was the long-time friend of the Koinange family, L.S.B. Leakey, who, only half a decade earlier, admitted he had not seen Peter during the war but knew of no reason for concern regarding Peter's conduct.

Internal colonial government documents indicate that Leakey called for Peter to be extradited back to Kenya as early as May 1953, and for Peter to be charged for administering the Mau Mau oath before leaving for the UK.¹⁰⁷ Why did Leakey, who had long known the Koinanges and exhibited no concern regarding Peter in 1948, come to believe Peter was involved in Mau Mau?

As noted in the previous chapter, after staying at Koinange's home as he undertook research in the late 1930s, Leakey had no interaction with Peter during the 1940s.

¹⁰⁶ TNA KV/2/2545, Extract from Minutes of the Eighth Meeting of the Intelligence Committee, 28 May 1953, item 460z.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., A.M. MacDonald, 'Peter Mbiyu Koinange: Minute on a Discussion with the Chief Native Commissioner', 16 May 1953, item 457c.

MacDonald wrote in a report to MI5's Security Liaison Officer in Nairobi that Leakey had, by May 1953, become 'involved in Kikuyu Politics and that the move to bring Peter Mbiu [sic] back to trial [was] being stimulated by Harry Thuku'.¹⁰⁸ What did Thuku have against Peter? Thuku had worked alongside both Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu in the late 1940s with the KAU. However, by 1950 Thuku broke off this relationship with the Koinanges and became a close ally of Senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kung'u.¹⁰⁹ In 1960, Thuku would lead opposition among the Kikuyu home guard and loyalists to Peter's participation in the Lancaster Constitutional Conference.¹¹⁰ This denunciation of Peter may have been guided by bitterness for Waruhiu's murder or Thuku's own need to appear overtly and adamantly loyal in the eyes of the colonial regime. As MacDonald notes, by May 1953 Leakey's loyalties lay with Thuku, not the Koinanges. MacDonald, well placed in his position as chairman of the Intelligence Committee and as Intelligence Advisor to the government, provides further insight into the government's charges of Peter as Mau Mau leader.

MacDonald argued that Peter was not, as the colonial government claimed, the logical successor to Kenyatta among the Kikuyu. Going one step further, MacDonald stated that Peter did not 'occupy any place of primary importance in the Kikuyu scheme of things'.¹¹¹ Remembering that Peter had spent most of 1947 through 1951 outside of Kenya with a focus on the KATC and political action in the United Kingdom and India, it is difficult to see how Peter could have been the prominent figure the colonial government believed him to be. Peter had never been a leader who was widely embraced by the Kikuyu, seeming always apart given his overseas education and moderate political stance

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Throup, *Economic and Social*, p. 283.

¹¹⁰ 'Kikuyu Do Not Want Koinange', *The Irish Times* (25 Jan. 1960), p. 1.

¹¹¹ TNA KV/2/2545, A.M. MacDonald, 'Peter Mbiyu Koinange: Minute on a Discussion with the Chief Native Commissioner', 16 May 1953, item 457c.

in a radically political context. In addition, MacDonald pointed to Peter's financial problems as demonstration of his lack of connection to Mau Mau.¹¹² 'If Mau Mau really regarded him as important,' wrote MacDonald, 'they could provide him with all the finance he requires'.¹¹³ Instead, Peter's finances were provided by his father, his family, and by donations from the Labour Party in the United Kingdom.¹¹⁴ MacDonald's internal note calls into question the very claim that Peter was an important leader of Mau Mau. As early as 1953, there is evidence of doubt within Kenya's intelligence service concerning Peter and a significant disconnect between the administration and the colony's intelligence services. Terrence Gavaghan, prominent District Officer in Central Kenya prior to the Emergency who oversaw some of the worst abuses at the 'hardcore' detainee camps, wrote that he believed Peter Mbiyu had nothing to do with Mau Mau during this period.¹¹⁵ MacDonald and Gavaghan were not the only ones who disbelieved the administration's claims regarding Peter.

Nearly every year from 1952-1960, Kenya's colonial government requested that Peter be extradited back to Kenya. Each time their request was denied, whether by an objection from the Colonial Office or MI5. The January 1953 discussion was discussed earlier.¹¹⁶ In 1954, the Governor of Kenya wrote to the Member for African Affairs that 'there is no doubt that he is doing us considerable harm while at large in the UK'.¹¹⁷ The Governor requested Peter's extradition, which was once again denied on the basis that 'there was no evidence to support an extradition charge'.¹¹⁸ In 1955, some in Kenya's intelligence community argued that Peter was an intermediary between the London based

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ TNA KV/2/2540, Security Liaison Officer, 19 Nov. 1951, item 268a; Ibid., C.K. Koinange to M. Koinange, 22 Oct. 1952, item 330a; TNA KV/2/2442, Peter Mbiyu Koinange, 22 Jan. 1953, item 385a; TNA KV/2/2545, Security Liaison Officer to Director-General, 29 May 1953, item 460a.

¹¹⁵ T. Gavaghan, *Of Lions and Dung Beetles* (Ifracombe, 1999), pp 157-8.

¹¹⁶ TNA KV/2/2542, Peter Mbiyu Koinange, 22 Jan. 1953, item 385a.

¹¹⁷ TNA FCO/141/5892, Acting Governor to MAA, 18 May 1954, item 156.

¹¹⁸ TNA CO/822/1238, Internal Memo to Mathieson, 15 Jan. 1957.

Communist Party of Great Britain's Kenya Committee and Mau Mau. MI5's denunciation of the claim exhibits more than a hint of frustration with the colonial administration in Kenya:

We are very much inclined to doubt that direct contact does exist and a LABEL source (F.4/MK) who is well placed and reliable has stated that nothing has been seen to indicate that such a contact exists [...] We are constantly having to refute allegations by various sources including Government Departments that Koinange is playing a very subversive role in this country. As far as our information goes he appears to be little more than an active propagandist on behalf of the Kenya Africans.¹¹⁹

Each year, for the first three years of the Emergency, London's MI5 office refuted calls by the colonial administration in Kenya specifically on the basis that there was no evidence, in the United Kingdom or from Kenya, that Peter was involved in Mau Mau. The London Special Branch had access to a wealth of Peter's personal information through phone wiretaps, mail interceptions, and intelligence data collection in the African communities in London.

With the cessation of military operations in 1956, Peter Mbiyu began to inquire into whether he might be allowed to return to Kenya. In January 1957, Kenya's War Council indicated that Peter would be detained immediately upon any return to Kenya and so Peter should be discouraged from doing so.¹²⁰ In his letter to the Colonial Secretary, Governor Baring acknowledged that, if Peter should return to Kenya and thus be detained, it as 'extremely unlikely that there [was] sufficient evidence established to prosecute him and, even if it were forthcoming, the case would be very stale'.¹²¹ After four years of screenings and interrogations in the 'pipeline', after more than four years of intelligence gathering from the confiscated private papers of African leaders (including Peter's father), and after a decade of investigations by MI5 into Peter's actions, the

¹¹⁹ TNA KV/2/2552, Captain Derbyshire, 'The Kenya Committee', 16 Nov. 1955, item 704y.

¹²⁰ TNA FCO/141/5553, War Council 197 Meeting, 8 Jan. 1957, pp 6-7.

¹²¹ TNA CO/822/1238, E. Baring to Colonial Secretary, 10 Jan. 1957, f. 1.

colonial government had nothing in support of their claims concerning Peter's militancy. Whatever 'stale' evidence they may have had would have been known to MacDonald when, in 1953, he dismissed the administration's claims regarding Peter. The colonial government had no case against Peter, and in January 1957, the Governor was forced to admit as much under threat that Peter would return, be detained, but could not be tried for lack of evidence. As a result of this letter, a Colonial Office official concluded that if Peter Mbiyu were returned or detained in Kenya, 'We should be open to all sorts of charges, varying from vindictiveness towards a man for his family connections to police state methods of muzzling African leaders and the case could well generate considerable heat in certain quarters of Parliament'.¹²² The relationships Peter Mbiyu had established with members of Parliament posed a very real concern for the Colonial Office. There are two events, one in 1959 and one in 1960, that provide evidence of Peter's longstanding belief in change through the bureaucratic process and the remaining disconnect between Peter's actions and government's claims regarding Mau Mau involvement. The first involves the only time Koinange and Peter were together between November 1951, when Peter flew to London, and Koinange's death in June 1960.

The Family Reunited in 1959

In 1958, as the Emergency was beginning to wind down elsewhere, the administration transferred Koinange from the detention camp at Marsabit where he had spent five years to a hospital at Kabarnet due to rapidly deteriorating health. The government spent £400 on building a small, brick home for Koinange.¹²³ There is a certain

¹²² Ibid., Internal Memo to Mathieson, 15 Jan. 1957.

¹²³ WKK *Kabarnet Health Correspondence*, Baringo D.C. to Rift Valley P.C., 'Ex Senior Chief Koinange', 5 Apr. 1958; TNA CO/822/1245, E. Baring to Colonial Secretary, 14 May 1959, f. 40.

irony that John Mbiyu and Frederick Mbiyu, more overtly militant, were about to be released from Hola, a camp for hardcore detainees, while the government spent new money for the continued detention of Koinange wa Mbiyu, well advanced in years and increasingly showing signs of dementia. From March 1958 to May 1959, family members visited Koinange in Kabarnet on at least eight different occasions and a grandson moved to Kabarnet to help care for him.¹²⁴ Such allowances were certainly not the norm for detainees during a period in which abuses at the 'hardcore' camps were making front-page news (i.e. the Hola camp beatings).¹²⁵ Instead, they were the result of the ongoing public pressure the colonial administration faced concerning Koinange's ongoing detention. The administration sought to eliminate as many opportunities for complaint, or martyrdom, regarding Koinange. It was a dire prognosis from the District Medical Officer in June 1959 that led to an opportunity for Koinange to be reunited with his eldest son, Peter.

In June 1959, the medical staff at Kabarnet reported that Koinange's health was deteriorating rapidly, and he would likely die by the end of the year. The possibility of Koinange's death while still detained and the likelihood that it would make him into a martyr for the opposition worried the colonial government to almost the same extent as releasing him. Koinange's family in Central Kenya was notified of Koinange's deteriorating health. Governor Baring issued a directive for arrangements to be made for a visit by his son, Chief Charles Karuga, by Obadiah Kariuki (Koinange's son-in-law and Bishop in the Anglican Church), and by one of Koinange's wives, Margaret.¹²⁶ In addition, due to the frequent petition regarding Koinange's detention from the floor of Parliament in London, a series of regular updates on Koinange's health were sent to

¹²⁴ NA CO/822/1245, E. Baring to Colonial Secretary, 14 May 1959, f. 40; Ibid., G.J. Ellerton to J.L.F. Buist, 22 May 1959, f. 38.

¹²⁵ 'Kenya camp beatings: causes of Mau Mau deaths', *The Guardian* (7 May 1959), p. 1.

¹²⁶ TNA CO/822/1245, Baring to SoS, 18 June 1959, f. 48.

London's Colonial Office.¹²⁷ The Colonial Secretary raised the possibility of Koinange being moved to the United Kingdom to live with Peter.¹²⁸ With concerns that Koinange's health was such that he would not survive the journey, the colonial government reluctantly (with pressure from the Colonial Office, the Colonial Secretary, and from former colonial Secretaries Creech-Jones and Griffiths) agreed to allow Koinange's two sons then living in London, Peter Mbiyu and Joseph Karuga, to visit their father before his death.¹²⁹ After seven years of calling for Peter's extradition, but recognising the weakness of the government's case against Peter at a time when the Emergency was to be winding down, the administration agreed to Peter's visit but under the most stringent limitations.

According to the government's restrictions, Peter would be required to fly to Kabarnet via Entebbe (to avoid demonstrations or confrontations in Nairobi), all reporters were to be restricted from Kabarnet prior to Peter's arrival, and Peter's visit was not to last longer than 24 hours.¹³⁰ In addition to evicting them from Kabarnet, the press were also to be barred from publishing news of Peter's visit until after he returned to London.¹³¹ Acquiescing to pressure from the Colonial Office and various members of Parliament, Peter's stay was extended to 48 hours under the condition that Peter would be immediately detained by the colonial government should he break any of the restrictions placed on his speech, conduct, and activities during his visit.¹³² In the end, as the result of a fully occupied airplane to Entebbe, Peter had a full 72 hours in Kabarnet.¹³³ For three days, the father and son who had collaborated together throughout the 1940s, championing one another's causes and holding in common a similar perspective on

¹²⁷ WKK *Kabarnet Health Correspondence*, Provincial Medical Officer (Rift Valley) to Medical Officer (Kabarnet), 30 June 1959.

¹²⁸ TNA CO/822/1245, Acting Governor to Colonial Secretary, 17 June 1959, f. 46.

¹²⁹ Ibid., Governor Baring to Webber, 18 July 1958, f. 86; Ibid., Internal Memo, Buist to Barnes, 24 June 1959.

¹³⁰ Ibid., E. Baring to Colonial Secretary, 13 July 1959, f. 73; Ibid., E. Baring to Webber, 16 July 1959, f. 83.

¹³¹ Ibid., Crawford to Colonial Secretary, 20 July 1959, f. 91.

¹³² Ibid., E. Baring to Webber, 18 July 1959, f. 86.

¹³³ TNA CO/822/1246, E. Baring to Colonial Secretary, 24 July 1959, f. 101a.

political action, were reunited. Peter saw his wife, Louis, and his son, John, during the visit and met with his brother, Chief Charles Karuga (Image 6.2).



Image 6.2: Koinange (front, second from left) with two of Koinange's wives (front right), Peter Mbiyu (front, far left), Peter's wife Louis, Peter's son John (back, second from left) and Charles Karuga (back, far right).¹³⁴

Charles served as the head of the Koinange family during his father's exile. It is a role that Peter would have customarily taken as the eldest son, but due to his exile in London, Charles became the representative of the Koinange family. Charles held the position his father once held as the administrative chief of Kiambu, receiving praise from the colonial government for his service throughout the Emergency period.¹³⁵ It was Charles who contacted Peter in late 1952 to ask for help in finding legal counsel for their father and brothers, which resulted in the securing of English barrister Dingle Foot.¹³⁶

Peter's visit to his father in 1959 came and went without any incidences the colonial government had feared. There were no protests or suspicious behaviour or political

¹³⁴ Image from Dr Wilfred Koinange's personal collection. Used with permission.

¹³⁵ KNA DC/KBU/11/1, Chief Charles Karuga Koinange, ff 180-1.

¹³⁶ TNA KV/2/2540, C.K. Koinange to M. Koinange, 22 Oct. 1952, item 330a.

grandstanding. W. J. Marquand, the Assistant Secretary of Uganda, reported to London's Colonial Office that 'during the whole time he was with me [Peter] Koinange behaved perfectly. He did not ask to use the telephone, nor to communicate with anybody'.¹³⁷ Peter's travel was made possible by the financial generosity of the Labour Party, other members of Parliament, and the groups Peter had collaborated with throughout the Emergency.¹³⁸ While the dependence on others' generosity appears to have been a bit of an embarrassment for Peter, it was a reflection of his decade of work cultivating political and social relationships. Following his return, Peter sent a letter of thanks to the Colonial Office's East African department, noting that 'my visit was very much appreciated by my parents and my family'.¹³⁹ The Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu of the colonial government's imagination — the subversive leaders of the violent Mau Mau uprising — were a myth to which the colonial government tenaciously clung in the years following Peter's visit.

Koinange's health rallied in the months following Peter's visit, as if buoyed by the reunion with his eldest son. He progressed from bedridden to walking a few steps with the aid of a cane. His regular medication (two pills and an injection) helped significantly with his other symptoms, leaving him only with the tremors and the fixed expression of Parkinson's disease.¹⁴⁰ Joseph Karuga, Peter's brother who was also living in London during the latter part of the Emergency, visited his father in August of 1959. He highlighted the marked improvement in his father's health.¹⁴¹ With evidence of advanced Parkinson's disease and deteriorated health, the Colonial Office now petitioned colonial administration to establish 'some kind of "security" or bond-system' to allow Koinange to

¹³⁷ TNA CO/822/1246, W.J. Marquand to F.D. Webber, 31 July 1959, f. 111.

¹³⁸ TNA CO/822/1245, Webber to Barrington, 21 July 1959, f. 92a.

¹³⁹ TNA CO/822/1246, M. Koinange to Webber, 6 Aug. 1959, f. 112.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., E.N. Griffith-Jones to F.D. Webber, 31 Aug. 1959, f. 120.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., J.K. Koinange to I. Macleod, 2 Dec. 1959, f. 134.

return to his home in Kiambu.¹⁴² The colonial government denied the request, keeping Koinange detained at Kabarnet until June 1960. As late as January 1960, a government report stated that Koinange

was detained under Emergency Regulations for being a leader in the organisation of Mau Mau. His position enabled him to exercise a considerable amount of authority which he directed towards the management of this proscribed Mau Mau society. His return to his district is not acceptable in the light of the malign influence which he holds over the people. It is considered necessary, therefore, that control should be exercised over him by way of restriction until he can be returned to his place of origin without material prejudice to the public safety or the maintenance of public order.¹⁴³

While the government could not prove it in court nor provide any compelling evidence to the Colonial Office in London, they maintained that Koinange was a leader of Mau Mau who exerted guiding authority of the organisation, and whom, in his nineties, suffering from Parkinson's disease, they believed could still exert a 'malign influence' over his people. The words of Creech-Jones and Griffiths return to mind – that the government's conception of Koinange was one based on suspicion, incongruous with his historic behaviour. While the above report concerning Koinange's perceived action and continued threat to peace was being written in January 1960, Peter's presence at the first constitutional conference considering self-rule in Kenya resulted in a six-day boycott of the proceedings and a libel case brought against the Colonial Office and major London newspapers.

The Lancaster House Conference

In January 1960, the new Conservative Secretary of State for the Colonies, Ian Macleod, convened the first constitutional conference to guide Kenya's move towards self-

¹⁴² Ibid., 'Kenya: Future of Ex-Chief Koinange, Achieng Oneko, etc.', undated, f. 136.

¹⁴³ WKK *Suspension of Detention Order 1958-1960*, R.G. Wilson, 'Special Restriction Order: Mbiyu Koinange', 11 Jan. 1960, p. 2.

government. It was Macleod's first major conference in his position, and he likely hoped for a victory following eight years of Emergency action in Kenya that might give a positive story to combat the stories of abuse, such as the front page story of the deaths of 11 inmates at the hands of Hola Camp officials in 1959. Lennox-Boyd, Macleod's predecessor, had advocated for a multiracial solution for Kenya. African members of the Legislative Council had blocked the proposal when it was clear that it would not meet their demands for 'one man, one vote'.¹⁴⁴ On the other hand, any consideration of 'one man, one vote' was strongly opposed by Kenya's conservative settler population for fear of what it would mean for the European community who were in the minority. In response, the African members of the LegCo boycotted the council's meeting in January 1959. It was this boycott that led to the calling of the Lancaster House Constitutional Conference in London a year later to discuss a way forward.¹⁴⁵ Using longstanding practice of a boycott from European politics, the action on the part of the African Members on the LegCo brought about change in a 'proper way', through political protest, rather than militant violence. It was a validation of Peter's 1944 claim and the political perspective he shared with his father that change would come through the British political system, in time, and if done in the proper way. While they were not a part of the action, the boycott was an embodiment of their own political beliefs.

Tom Mboya, who had been involved in the boycott, was one of several new African leaders who had arisen from the power vacuum of the Emergency years. Mboya was a graduate of Oxford's Ruskin College. Mboya invited Dr Thurgood Marshall, a leading figure of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the United States, and who would later become one of the longest serving Justices on the

¹⁴⁴ B. Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: the Dialectic of Domination* (London, 1990), pp 399-400.

¹⁴⁵ Bennett, *Kenya*, p. 144.

United States Supreme Court, to attend the conference as an advisor on crafting a constitution for the African delegation.¹⁴⁶ Marshall's invitation was widely approved of due to his awareness of legal philosophy. However, there were those among the African delegates who believed there was a need for an additional advisor, someone with personal knowledge of Kenya's particular social and political context. As a result, an invitation from several of the African members was extended to Peter Mbiyu. Peter had recently taken up a post as the Director of the Bureau of African Affairs in the newly independent government of Ghana in October 1959.¹⁴⁷ The administrative myth of Peter as Mau Mau leader was embraced by the European members of the right-wing United Party, by Michael Blundell's multi-racial New Kenya Group, and by Harry Thuku (claiming to speak on behalf of Kikuyu home guard and loyalists); Peter's nomination as a secondary advisor to the African members of the conference was vociferously opposed.¹⁴⁸

In response to these protests, the Colonial Office barred Peter from attending the meetings. So opposed were the various parties to Peter's inclusion in the conference that Macleod addressed the events in his opening speech: 'The name that has been put forward to me [for an African advisor] was one of only two men outside Kenya regarded by the Government of Kenya as responsible for the unhappy events that led to the Emergency in Kenya seven years ago'.¹⁴⁹ Convinced that they needed to show solidarity and strength from the outset, and building on their success through the boycott the previous January, the African members immediately boycotted the constitutional conference proceedings. The conference could not move forward without the African members and maintain any sense of legitimacy. The African members boycotted the conference for five days.¹⁵⁰ The

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁴⁷ B.A. Ogot, *Historical Dictionary of Kenya* (Nairobi, 1981), p. 110.

¹⁴⁸ 'Kikuyu Do Not Want Koinange', *The Irish Times* (25 Jan. 1960) p. 1; W. Waggoner, 'London Deadlock on Kenya Stands', *New York Times* (20 Jan. 1960), p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ TNA TS/58/516, Petrie to Sir H. Kent, 19 Apr. 1960, ff 8-13.

¹⁵⁰ 'Kenya Parley Boycott Lifted, Another Looms', *The Washington Post* (23 Jan. 1960), p. A5.

entire first week of Macleod's moment-making conference was lost due entirely to the boycott by the African members. It was an early win for the African delegates and a clear indication that they could not be ignored and neither would their choices be dictated by Europeans, as had so long been the case in Kenya.

In order to keep the Colonial Office from officially approving of Peter's involvement in the face of such strong opposition, the Colonial Office compromised by issuing each delegation a blank nametag to be used in order to extend an invitation to a person of their choosing. The designee of this secondary advisory role would be allowed to join the delegates in their meeting rooms but barred from the conference hall itself. Captain Gregg's right-wing United Party did boycott the next day of the conference in protest of Koinange's admittance.¹⁵¹ The Conference could continue with the European members represented by Blundell's New Kenya Group. As a result, the United Party only staged a single-day boycott as a protest of Peter's involvement. It was an indication that politics had changed significantly. An African delegation shuttered the conference for a week, while the conservative European settlers could hardly boycott for more than a day without fear that decisions would be made without them. Peter's admittance to the conference, on a limited basis of involvement, was poetically eulogised by the Permanent Secretary for the Colonial Office, Sir Hilton Poynton:

'Mau Mau milkman, have you any pass?'
Yes sir, yes sir, but only second class.
Good for the cloakroom and good for the loo,
But not for the Music Room among the chosen few.'¹⁵²

In spite of the controversy surrounding Peter's involvement with the Lancaster Conference, it does not appear that Peter actually took part in the proceedings. An editorial in *The Guardian* accurately assessed what was at stake: 'Having chosen him [...]

¹⁵¹ 'United Party's Token Walk-out: attack on Kenya Nationalist', *The Guardian* (26 Jan. 1960), p. 1.

¹⁵² N. Fisher, *Ian Macleod* (London, 1973), p. 146.

they were determined to show that the time is past when others could decide who should represent them'.¹⁵³ Looking back on the conference and its impact on developments in Kenya, another editorial from *The Guardian* in March noted that 'Once they had gained admission as an advisor for Koinange to their rooms in Lancaster House, they had no further use for him'.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, Peter was non-consequential to the Constitutional Conference as an advisor following his admittance. Ian Buist, a colonial official, recalled that 'The African Members promptly gave [their badge] to Peter Koinange, but thereafter paid him absolutely no attention'.¹⁵⁵ Instead, Peter was caught up in a legal case.

Without a significant place at the constitutional conference, Peter focused his energy on charging the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr O. H. Morris, an official in the Colonial Office, and a number of local newspapers with libel.¹⁵⁶ Peter claimed that Secretary of State's accusation that Peter was a leader of Mau Mau was not only false, but had also negatively impacted Peter's life and livelihood. Peter's libel charge created considerable consternation within the Colonial Office. The constitutional conference was to be a highpoint of the Conservative Party's colonial progress. Instead, the conference was shutdown for five days due to the boycott by the African representatives, and Peter was suing them in court. Peter's case forced them to reveal the basis for their claims, for within the British legal system they carried the burden to prove that their claims were indeed true. This was the very situation the government had sought to avoid for so long.

This libel case, which is a minor event in contrast to the larger developments towards self-rule, is nonetheless significant for the analysis of Peter's relationship to Mau Mau and the colonial government's claims. Rather than participating in the constitutional

¹⁵³ 'No Diktat', *The Guardian* (24 Jan. 1960), p. 16.

¹⁵⁴ 'Not an Encouraging Prospect', *The Guardian* (26 Mar. 1960), p. 7.

¹⁵⁵ BDOHP DOHP/118, *John Latto Faquabarson (Ian) Buist*, 1990, p. 58.

¹⁵⁶ TNA TS/58/516, Petrie to Sir H. Kent, 19 Apr. 1960, ff 8-13.

conference, Peter spent money and no insignificant effort to rebut the government's claims that he was a leader of Mau Mau. In their correspondence with the Colonial Office, the colonial administration in Kenya, while maintaining their long-held belief that Peter Mbiyu 'was in fact guilty of very great complicity in Mau Mau activities', had not a single admissible shred of evidence to support their claims of Peter's complicity in Mau Mau.¹⁵⁷ By April 1960, the continued lack of evidence against Peter put the Colonial Office in a very difficult position. 'It would be politically embarrassing in the extreme', noted an internal memo, 'if the result of any litigation were a finding by the court that the Secretary of State's remarks were not justified'.¹⁵⁸ Peter had forced the Colonial Office into the uncomfortable position of standing behind the claims of a colonial administration that had long been run by suspicion and myth, particularly in relation to Koinange and Peter. The Colonial Office and colonial administration in Kenya were forced to acknowledge that their claims regarding Peter were – as two former colonial secretaries had noted concerning Koinange – based on suspicion and – as Peter's legal case had forced them to admit – based on little more. While the libel case knocked the knees out from under the colonial administration and Colonial Office's claims against Peter, Peter's actions are also revealing concerning Peter's relationship to Mau Mau.

In the midst of the conference proceedings, the libel case was more important to Peter than his role at Lancaster House. As discussed in previous chapters, Peter was not a particularly strong or dynamic politician, often more concerned with academia or his family than politics. For nine years, Peter had not been able to return to Kenya – with the exception of the short trip to see his father in 1959 – on the basis that the colonial administration claimed he was a leader of Mau Mau. Those were years filled with Peter's

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., ff 9-10.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., ff 11-12.

active rebuttal of these claims. Peter's main concern, by January 1960, was with setting the record straight concerning his presumed connection to Mau Mau. Between the money, time, and effort, Peter went to enormous trouble to rebut these claims – an extraordinary action if there was a possibility the colonial government had gained evidence in the raids, interrogations, and intelligence gathering of the Emergency period.

As late as 1960, the colonial administration held resolutely to their militant Peter and Koinange myth despite their lack of evidential support. At the same time, it was the British court system that Peter chose to use to seek to expose the lie of the colonial government. It seems he still believed there was justice and change to be had if done properly.

Revising the Mau Mau Narrative

The preceding chapters have argued for a revised historical narrative of Koinange and Peter's political lives. This chapter has examined the claims, originally made by the colonial government and echoed in official reports, scholarship, and popular mythology, that Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu were guiding, militant leaders of Mau Mau. As the colonial administration was reminded of time and again – from the outcome of the Waruhiu trial to intelligence reports to answering questions for Parliament to a libel case and the Lancaster House conference – there was no evidence that Koinange or Peter embraced radical, militant politics or served as leaders of Mau Mau.

The colonial government's complete inability to link Koinange or Peter to militancy is striking – especially given the resources dedicated to uncovering such evidence and the

presence of known militant members of the family in Joyce Kagendo, David Gathiomi, John Mbiyu, and Frederick Mbiyu. It is telling that with the thousands of persons detained, screened, and interrogated in the Emergency 'pipeline', and with intelligence officials in both Kenya and the United Kingdom who went to great lengths to find evidence of such a connection, the government could still provide nothing but 'stale' evidence by 1960. Terrence Gavaghan, the administrator who oversaw the interrogations of the 'hardcore' Mau Mau leaders in Kenya's pipeline, was, in his memoir *Of Lions and Dung Beetles*, positive in his assessment of Koinange and Peter and doubted claims that they were involved in the militancy of Mau Mau. Referencing the pre-Emergency period, Gavaghan notes that as of 1949 he was 'on good terms with both Senior Chief Waruhiu and jovial, cultured Peter (first son of old) Koinange' and later believed that they had nothing to do with Mau Mau.¹⁵⁹ The justification for Koinange's detention was frequently challenged on the basis that the government failed repeatedly to present more than official suspicions against Koinange. MI5 officials in London tried repeatedly to bring an end to their monitoring of Peter Mbiyu, with their investigation only continuing at the insistence of Kenya's colonial government. Yet, the 1960 libel case revealed that after years of intelligence work and countless man-hours in translation, source development, and mail intercepts, there was no credible evidence linking Peter to Mau Mau. The colonial government's creation and dogged embrace of the militant Koinange myth reveals the character of colonial rule in the post-war, pre-independence era.

Kenya's post-war colonial officials held tightly to a growing number of suspicions that contradicted the reality of their day. The most pronounced example of this was the trial of Kenyatta at Kapenguria in 1953. As the revelations of Rawson Macharia's perjury and Anderson's *Histories of the Hanged* demonstrate, the colonial administration of the 1950s

¹⁵⁹ T. Gavaghan, *Of Lions and Dung Beetles* (Ilfracombe, 1999).

relied on paid false testimonies, truncated judicial processes, and intimidation in an attempt to regain and maintain control.¹⁶⁰ While the violence and conflict of the military operations from 1952 to 1956 were real enough, the overarching narrative and the beliefs about individuals – whether Kenyatta or Koinange – were largely creations of administrative suspicions. While faulty in their emphasis on nationalism as a driving force behind Mau Mau, Rosberg and Nottingham do helpfully portray a colonial government that functioned, by the 1950s, on the basis of beliefs that simply were not based in truth or fact. Wartime suspicions led to a growth in post-war conspiracy theories, a tightening of political permissibility, and a dark age of political extremes characterised by threats of murder for Africans who refused to take secret oaths and threats of harm to prisoners and detainees who refused to embrace the administrative narrative. The resolute adherence to an indefensible narrative that Koinange and Peter were leaders of Mau Mau joins with the corpus of work – from *The Myth of Mau Mau* to *Histories of the Hanged* – in revealing a colonial administration that functioned on half-truths and suspicions during the 1950s, resulting in the miscarriage of justice and widespread abuse of power. And yet the myths had tremendous resilience, influencing the Corfield Report, the oral testimonies of the 1950s and the 1960s underlying much of the academic understanding of this period, and the reborn myth of Koinange militancy embraced by the Koinange family today.

Throughout the Emergency, Koinange and Peter remained committed to a belief that change would come through the prevailing political structure, through multiracial cooperation, and through a repudiation of militant or violent politics. Koinange, described as an ‘exemplary’ detainee by the District Officer at Marsabit, persisted in protesting his detention through the governing system, even going so far as to renounce Mau Mau violence and embrace the militant Koinange myth. Throughout the Emergency, those who

¹⁶⁰ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Macharia, *The Truth About the Trial*.

knew Koinange, from district officers to prominent British politicians, consistently referenced his character and actions as contrary to the government's 'Mau Mau leader' narrative. Peter's work in Kenya in 1950-1951 and in London from 1952 onward continued to demonstrate his commitment to multiracial cooperation, working for change through Britain's political system, and criticising the colonial government's land policies, lack of education, and lack of African involvement in the colony's governing structure, while denouncing the violence associated with Mau Mau.

By 1952, both Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu were, without question, a frustration to the colonial government. They refused to toe the loyalist line as Senior Chief Waruhiu and others chose to do. Because of their bold outspokenness in a time when such action threatened their political standing, they became the face of 'militancy' for leading officials in the colonial administration. Historically, the narrative has explained the change in Koinange and Peter's standing with the colonial government as the result of their intentional shift into nationalist, militant opposition. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, it was not the Koinanges who had undergone a significant shift in their actions during the 1940s, but, it was a colonial administration, radically transformed by the Second World War period. This shift, most clearly seen in the increased government suspicion, its demands for unquestioned loyalty, and its tendency to cling to narratives without clear evidence, resulted in an administration that created and embraced narratives expedient for control but which blinded it to the realities of the day. The story of the 1940s is not one in which the Koinanges embraced militancy but rather a story about the increasingly radical character of colonial rule, revealed in the developments mentioned above, in the violence of the 'pipeline' (rife with abuses of power, torture, and intimidation), and in the truncated judicial processes of the Emergency era. Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu's late colonial era history is not an example of the growth of

nationalism among Kenya's elite or of a disenchanted elite who embraced militant political action and abandoned British colonial rule. The history of the Koinanges' apparent 'shift' by the late colonial period is, in fact, the story of a colonial administration in crisis, clinging to unsubstantiated myths in order to justify its actions.

CONCLUSION

Myths in Late Colonial Rule: Rethinking the Koinanges' Story

Political dynasties are alive and well in modern Africa. In April 2013, Uhuru Kenyatta, son of Jomo Kenyatta, was elected as Kenya's fourth president since the country's independence from colonial rule in 1963. This thesis began with this observation. Kenya is now days away from the 2017 presidential election that will once again see Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga, sons of Kenya's first President and Vice President, respectively, vie for the highest office in the fifty-four-year-old independent nation. In the interim period between Kenya's 2013 and 2017 elections, over seventy elections were held across the African continent, many of which highlight the prevalence of political dynasties across the region. Elections in Botswana, Malawi, Togo, Gabon, and Ghana resulted in either the election or re-appointment of the direct descendants of former leaders. Elections in Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Djibouti, and Equatorial Guinea, likewise, resulted in the election of leaders connected to elite dynastic families of the recent and more distant past. While this thesis has focused on a dynastic family of Kenya's colonial period, it has affirmed what the elections of the 2013-2017 period intuitively convey, which is that 'political power is [indeed] self-perpetuating'.¹ Peter Mbiyu (not to mention Charles Karuga Koinange and other family members) benefited greatly from the political influence and prominence of his father, Koinange wa Mbiyu, both while abroad

¹ E. Dal Bo, P. Dal Bo, and J. Snyder, 'Political Dynasties', *Review of Economic Studies*, 76 (2009), p. 115.

and following his return in 1938. Africa's modern history is littered with dynastic families influencing the political, economic, and social developments within which they lived.

As an examination of the Koinange dynasty, this study has highlighted the power of biography to illuminate the complexities and tensions of the historical past. Reflecting Alice Kessler-Harris' observation, this study of Koinange and Peter Mbiyu has offered an opportunity to 'see through the life', revealing the changing character of colonial rule in the 1940s, the impact of political extremes created during the Second World War, and the wide range of political players pursuing a multitude of political possibilities into the 1950s.

² The late-colonial and post-independence discourses of nationalism, independence, and self-rule have dominated the historical understanding of the colonial period. The narrative recovered in this thesis serves as a reminder of those in the African, European, and Indian communities who pursued a number of possible futures, many of which were neither an embrace of the white minority rule of Northern Rhodesia or the self-rule of India.

As a work of biography, this thesis has examined the lives of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu 'in dialectical relationship to the multiple social, political, and cultural worlds they' inhabited.³ This thesis has examined social engagement, racial tensions, independent education, political identity, and the political divisions within families, among other issues. The narrative approach and revisionist nature of this thesis has also offered an 'opportunity to approach a multitude of historical issues in a unique way', allowing the narrative to challenge previous conclusions born from the problematic written and oral sources created during and after the Mau Mau Emergency.⁴ Indeed, this thesis risks, as one reader noted, alienating everyone. It has taken a critical approach to source material

² A. Kessler-Harris, 'Why Biography?', *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), p. 626.

³ D. Nasaw, 'Introduction', *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009) p. 574.

⁴ J. Brown, "'Life Histories' and the History of Modern South Asia", *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), p. 587.

and contested a number of widely held scholarly and popular narratives. The intention of this thesis has been to highlight the discontinuity in the present Koinange narrative, to offer an alternative narrative that coheres to the broader story of the Koinanges' lives and the colonial context and, as a result, to provide an additional example to be added to Kapenguria, Mau Mau, and others, of how official mythology shaped administrative actions in the final decades of Kenya's colonial era.

While a significant portion of scholarly work has emphasised the disappointing results of the Kenya Land Commission of the mid-1930s, this thesis has challenged the heavy emphasis placed on this historical development. Through the specifics of Koinange and Peter's stories, this thesis has located the dominant shift not in the mid-1930s, but rather in the war and post-war period of the 1940s. The narrative of Koinange disenchantment and eventual militancy was, as this thesis has demonstrated, a construction of wartime and post-war suspicions. The suspicions of war, the proclivities of particular and prominent officials, and the polarisation of political action in Kenya during the 1940s birthed myths of militancy. Koinange and Peter, while disappointed with a number of developments over the course of their lives, maintained a commitment throughout their lives to pursue political change through the governing political system. Koinange and Peter's names were co-opted by other groups for their own political ends – by a colonial administration intent on identifying political opponents and by militant leadership seeking to legitimise their political *coup d'état* of the Kenya African Union and generational political leadership. The role of unsubstantiated myth in shaping official narratives regarding Koinange and Peter is congruent with the work of David Throup, Jeremy Murray-Brown, and others concerning Kenyatta's own marginalisation within African politics and the scholarly criticism of administrative claims that Kenyatta was a leader of the Mau Mau. Together, this revised narrative of Koinange and Peter, alongside the historical

understanding of Kenyatta, reveals a colonial administration that, by the 1950s, acted within a constructed understanding of their own making, heavily shaped by suspicion, imagination, and myth. This was not simply minor misunderstandings of the vagaries of African politics, but rather broad claims, maintained for the better part of a decade, for which there was no evidence or proof.

The myths of militant Kenyatta, Koinange, and Peter were expeditious for justifying Emergency era actions – whether excessive use of force or truncated judicial processes. They reveal an administration desperately scrambling to gain control of a political construct driven by the post-war extremism of its own making. It raises the question: what other myths may have driven official actions and reactions in the pivotal post-war period – with what lasting ramifications? Both the onset of the Emergency and the length of its duration were the direct results of an administration driven by faulty beliefs – myths – concerning the political players, political reality, and political possibilities of the day. By the late 1940s, it was the colonial administration that failed to provide political space for those like Koinange and Peter Mbiyu who opposed specific colonial policies but remained committed to pursuing change from within the governing structure. Frequently, the outbreak of the Emergency period is discussed in relation to either the assassination of Senior Chief Waruhiu or the role of the squatters, ex-soldiers, or trade unions in stirring African discontent. This thesis posits that the Mau Mau Emergency was a crisis of the colonial administration's own making. It was not simply the result of policy decisions but in fact the result of personalities and suspicions that reshaped the nature of colonial rule over the period of a decade.

As leading members of 'perhaps the most prominent family in colonial Kenya', as Daniel Branch has described the Koinange dynasty, Koinange and Peter provide a

window into the changing nature of administrative rule in colonial Kenya.⁵ While chapters one and two provided a baseline and context for their actions and commitments, chapter three began a four-part discussion of Koinange and Peter's engagement with the colonial government and African political action in the 1940s and the 1950s. Chapter three highlighted their continued and intentional engagement with the colonial government through the mid-to-late 1940s – engagement that has largely gone unacknowledged in scholarship. It was within this context of the war that official opinion – and thus political possibilities – began to shift. Leading officials who were sceptical of African political leadership limited opportunities to voice dissent, simultaneously pushing militancy into the shadows and more moderate political actors towards political advocacy in London, Paris, and elsewhere. Chapter four then questioned the Koinanges' connections to the Kenya African Teachers' College (KATC) at Githunguri. It argued that it was under Kenyatta's tenure, rather than the Koinanges', that militant elements took root at the college. It revealed the first signs of tensions between Kenyatta and the Koinanges due to the former's leadership at the college. These two chapters called into question the nature of the Koinange's political influence and their political activity in the late 1940s. The narratives of nationalism and militancy that dominated the late-colonial and post-colonial assessments of Koinange and Peter's engagement with the KATC and the KAU were challenged. Towards this same end, these chapters highlighted the post-war division within the Koinange family along political lines. Family tensions and divisions were not unique to the Koinange family, threatening the cohesion of the Waruhiu's, Njonjo's, Karanja's, and others. It is unlikely that any family, particularly among the Kikuyu of Central Kenya, survived the extreme polarisation of post-war politics and the radicalism of the Emergency period unscathed. Thus, chapter six highlighted the disconnect between

⁵ D. Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency Civil War, and Decolonization* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 212.

what the colonial administration claimed regarding Koinange and Peter's leadership of Mau Mau and what they were able to demonstrate to the intelligence personnel in Kenya and the United Kingdom, as well as officials in London's Colonial Office and Parliament. The argument of the final chapter revealed the internal discontinuity between reality and myth in colonial rule in the final decade of its existence: a discontinuity that undermined the administration's legitimacy.

Contrasted with the political influence the administration wielded in the 1940s, by January of 1959 and 1960, it was the African political leadership, utilising the Western political act of a boycott, who wielded the greatest power in guiding political developments. It was officials in London, from which Koinange and Peter had hoped change for colonial Kenya would come, who provided the opportunity for Peter's 1959 reunion with his father and who championed the discussions of self-rule and independence for colonial Kenya. Koinange and Peter, not to mention Kenyatta, were not altogether wrong in their belief that change would come through London. However, the myth of Peter as a militant Mau Mau leader, false as it was, had dominated the administration's narrative for the better part of a decade. By 1960, it consumed Peter to such an extent that he was absent from the very talks that promised significant changes for Kenya.

The narrative developed over the course of the previous six chapters, which focused on providing the long perspective history of the lives of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu, has accomplished the two main goals of this thesis: a detailed examination of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu's lives up to 1960 and, through the most detailed narrative of their lives as told by a breadth of archival records, to argue for a revisionist history of the lives of Koinange and Peter in opposition to the current scholarly narrative. The result is that, as a work of biography and narrative history, it has challenged the

prevalent historiographical narratives of this period, from the tendency to emphasise incipient African nationalism far too early, to the impact of colonial administrators on the political possibilities of the day, and the place of myth in late imperial rule. While the Koinanges demonstrated a remarkable devotion, even in the face of disappointment, to their belief that change would come through the governing political system, the colonial government and African politics underwent drastic changes following the Second World War.

As scholars have sought explanations for the changes that took place in Kenya in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the norm has been to determine critical turning points. The trouble at Olengurone, the assassination of Senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kung'u, and other similar moments of crisis have often been used to explain the cause of wider social changes. This thesis has challenged this preoccupation with specific events, shifting the focus from pivotal moments to periods of gradual change within the very character and nature of colonial rule. Changes in colonial leadership shaped colonial policy, colonial reports, and the interpretation of political developments over the period of a decade or more around and during the 1940s. Further research into the nature and character of Kenya's colonial government during the 1940s and early 1950s will help to further establish this change and its wider impact on administrative perceptions and actions. Even as the boxes containing end of empire documents discovered in the basement closet at Hanslope Park helped to reveal the nature of the colonial response to Mau Mau, documents from the various colonies may reveal similar changes in the nature of late colonial rule and the role of myth-like beliefs in guiding late imperial action.⁶ The

⁶ B. Macintyre, 'Mau Mau and so Much More: Inside the Foreign Office House of Secrets', *The Times* (London, 18 Apr. 2011).

administration in Kenya, at least, was reticent to relinquish the myths and beliefs to which they had clung for so long.

A Funeral and a Homecoming

In July 1960, Koinange wa Mbiyu died in Kiambu, where he lived his final weeks of life under detention in his son's home. A year later, Peter Mbiyu returned to Kenya and was immediately arrested by the colonial government. In both situations, the violent protests the colonial government had continually feared for the better part of a decade failed to materialise.

As late as February 1960, an additional special restriction was placed against Koinange, preventing his return to Kiambu due to 'the malign influence which he holds over the people'.⁷ In the face of his senility and ill health, the colonial administration remained as convinced as ever of Koinange's militant leadership in Mau Mau. In late June 1960, the colonial administration allowed Koinange to return to Kiambu. Fearful that a great and unruly crowd would welcome him, Koinange's return to Kiambu happened unannounced and under the darkness of night. The colonial government embargoed their press release until half past seven in the evening. Koinange's return was announced the following morning in newspapers around the world, from *The Manchester Guardian* to the *Times of India*.⁸ Kenya's very own *East African Standard* carried a front-page story highlighting Koinange's return, complete with a picture of the elderly chief sitting between his son, Chief Charles Karuga Koinange, and his grandson, Wilfred Karuga

⁷ WKK *Suspension of Detention Order 1958-1960*, B.C. Brook, 19 Feb. 1960.

⁸ 'Former Kikuyu Chief Released', *The Guardian* (Manchester, 1 July 1960), p. 11; 'Former Chief Released', *The Times of India* (1 July 1960), p. 9.

Koinange, who was home on holiday from his studies at Uganda's Makerere University (Image C.1).

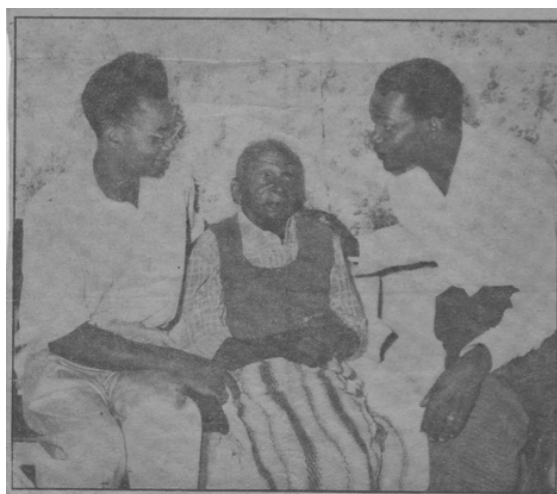


Image C.1: Ex-Senior Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu (middle),
Chief Charles Karuga (right), and Wilfred Karuga Koinange (left).⁹

The colonial government forbade the then senile ex-Senior Chief Koinange from returning to his homestead and to his 1920s stone home, just a mile from where he was restricted at his son's house. Reuters News reported that,

Mbiyu Koinange, 94-year-old Senior Kikuyu Chief, spent his first day of freedom after seven years detention sitting in his son's home at Kiambaa watching his own house a mile away. His son, Chief Charles Koinange, explained to reporters his father was still not permitted to speak to outsiders and his movements were restricted.¹⁰

Records indicate that Koinange's health had deteriorated to such an extent that he was unable to speak. Koinange was released in June 1960 only because the colonial government feared that should he die while still detained, Koinange would be heralded a martyr – not because they gave up the myth of Mau Mau leadership.¹¹ Senile and unintelligible, Koinange's feebleness in contrast to the colonial government's continued

⁹ WKK, *East African Standard*, 2 July 1960.

¹⁰ TNA CO/822/1908, Reuter's Press Release, 1 July 1960, f. 7.

¹¹ TNA CO/822/1245, Detention of Former Senior Chief Koinange Under Emergency Regulations in Kenya, E. Baring to Colonial Secretary, 23 June 1959, f. 56.

claim that he posed a threat to the stability of Central Kenya, serves to highlight the disconnect between the official myth of Koinange militancy and reality. Koinange died at the end of July 1960, less than a month after his return to Kiambu.¹² The weeks following his return and before his death passed without the demonstrations, riots, marches, or political protests the colonial government had so long feared.



Image C.2: Archbishop Beecher (back left) and Bishop Kariuki (front right) officiating Koinange wa Mbiyu's funeral at the graveside.¹³

Koinange's funeral service occurred in the Anglican church the family had built on Koinange's land before the war. He was then buried not too far from the 1920s stone home he had been proud to call home until his arrest in September 1952. The Archbishop of Kenya, Reverend Beecher, and Koinange's son-in-law, Bishop Obadiah Kariuki, officiated the ceremony (Image C.2). Koinange was buried in a wooden casket in the European style and honoured in an Anglican ceremony at the church and graveside. Interestingly, the site of Koinange's burial was, itself, a legacy of his work on the Kiambu Local Native Council (LNC). During his nearly twenty years on the LNC, Koinange supported a proposal to require each family to have a burial plot on their own land.¹⁴

¹² 'Kikuyu Chief Dies After Release: Murder Case Recalled', *The Daily Nation* (Nairobi, 28 July 1960).

¹³ From Dr. Wilfred Koinange's personal collection. Used with permission.

¹⁴ TNA CO 822/1908, Iain Macleod to Elwyn Jones, 12 Sep. 1960, f. 19.

Koinange died and was buried as he had lived – a wealthy African patriarch who had willingly embraced much of the European culture, religion, and politics brought with British colonial rule. There were no signs of militancy or opposition to European presence or imperialism in his death, just as it had been largely absent in his life.



Image C.3: Pallbearers carrying Koinange's casket. Many, but not all, of the pallbearers are Koinange's children.¹⁵

Following the Lancaster House Conference and his libel suit, Peter Mbiyu returned to Ghana. It was there that he received the telegraph from the Governor's Deputy in Kenya notifying him of his father's death.¹⁶ The colonial administration, still convinced of Peter's leadership of Mau Mau, forbid Peter from returning to Kenya for his father's funeral. In conjunction with Peter's absence during the land consolidation of the late 1950s, Peter's absence, as Koinange's eldest son, in the wake of his father's death proved detrimental to Koinange family unity in the decades that followed.¹⁷ For a year following his father's death, Peter's name remained on the colonial government's Special Restriction Order – itself a continuing legacy of the Emergency period officially declared

¹⁵ From Dr. Wilfred Koinange's personal collection. Used with permission.

¹⁶ Ibid., Deputy Governor to Colonial Secretary, 28 July 1960, f. 11.

¹⁷ 'Koinange Family in Land Feud', *The Daily Nation* (Nairobi, 23 Feb. 1982).

over in January 1960.¹⁸ Should Peter attempt to return to Kenya, the order was the legal basis for his immediate arrest and detention.¹⁹ A year after his father's death, en route to take up the post of Secretary General for the Pan-African Freedom Movement for East, Central, and South Africa (PAFMECSA) in Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika, Peter attempted to visit his family. He was immediately arrested as he disembarked the plane at Nairobi's Embakasi Airport.²⁰ Rather than imprisoned, he was taken to his family's home in Kiambu – likely due to the goodwill his younger brother Charles maintained with the colonial regime – where, like his father, Peter was restricted in his movements and actions.²¹ Once again undermining the administration's claims to militancy, there was no public demonstration or riotous gathering. Two months later, the governor finally removed Peter's name from the Special Restriction Order.²² The government could no longer maintain the myth that Koinange wa Mbiyu or Peter Mbiyu were militant leaders of the Mau Mau rebellion.

This dynastic study of the Koinange family has faced a number of limitations – not exclusively, but predominantly its narrow focus on Koinange wa Mbiyu and his eldest son, Peter Koinange. While this is due to the nature of the project and the limitation of source material, there are a number of opportunities for future research. Certainly there is fascinating study waiting to be undertaken concerning Peter Mbiyu, John Mbiyu, and David Gathiomi – three firstborn sons of Koinange wa Mbiyu's first three wives who had very different life experiences and chose very different responses to colonial rule. No doubt it will provide insight into potential individuality within Kikuyu cultural community

¹⁸ *The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 22 Aug. 1961), Government Notice no. 4026; McMahon, D.B., 'Emergency in Kenya Ends: Proclamation by Governor', *The Times of India* (13 Jan. 1960), p. 7.

¹⁹ *Hansard* (Kenya), 11 May - 21 July 1961, 13 June 1961, col 1186. Accessed 13 July 2015. <http://books.google.co.ke/books?id=iUJbXehL9fIC&lpg=RA2-PA1039>.

²⁰ *Hansard* (Kenya), 11 May - 21 July 1961, 6 June 1961, col 821. Accessed 13 July 2015.

<http://books.google.co.ke/books?id=iUJbXehL9fIC&lpg=RA2-PA1039>; Ibid., 13 June 1961, col 1186.

²¹ 'Kept Out of Nairobi', *The Guardian* (5 May 1961), p. 9.

²² *The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 22 Aug. 1961), Government Notice no. 4026.

and family dynamics, as well as a series of case studies on the impact of military service, overseas education, and trade union involvement in late-colonial African political action. There is a further contrast to be made between these three eldest sons and Charles Karuga Koinange who, although a second born, served as the *de facto* patriarch of the family during the pivotal period of the Mau Mau Emergency and the land consolidation efforts of the late 1950s. Here the Koinange family offers an avenue for investigating the way colonial rule reshaped traditional practices of tribal and familial leadership, as well as generational dynamics and internal Kikuyu politics. More broadly, the Koinange dynasty offers opportunities for examining the various complexities and developments regarding gender in Kikuyu family and communities, activity by female members (in education, business, and religion), the inter-relationship of European and African educational actions, the impact of Christianity on African political action, and the crises and opportunities of the wealthy and elite during both the colonial and post-colonial period, among a myriad of other opportunities. Just as the Koinange dynasty offers a number of opportunities as windows into broader colonial and post-colonial developments due to the historical records created by their action (in government, business, education, and religion), so too will further investigation into the various dynastic families across Africa.

Ongoing research into modern Africa's dynastic families offers numerous and valuable opportunities for further understanding the complexities of the social, political, and cultural dynamics in which the dynasties arose. Whether presidents, senators, chiefs, administrative officials, leaders in education, industry, or politics, these families and the Koinanges have quite a lot in common – life stories that reveal the complexities and challenges of the world in which they lived. Theirs' are histories which are accessible via the pre-crises source material just now being made available through releases to official archives. One need only imagine what detailed dynastic biographical studies of the

Kenyatta's and the Odinga's of Kenya, the Khama's of Botswana, the Kabila's of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Bongo's of Gabon, and the myriad of other dynastic political families throughout Africa might reveal, how their stories might challenge current dominant narratives in the historiography, or help to highlight causes or factors previously ignored or minimised.

EPILOGUE

The Koinange Legacy: Controversy, Corruption, & Contemporary Myths

The years since Koinange wa Mbiyu's death have not always been kind to the Koinange family. Without question, much of what was true of their past remains true today. They have held noteworthy positions within Kenya's government over the last fifty years. Education is still of utmost importance to the family. Most of Koinange's children and grandchildren have successfully completed undergraduate education, and many have gone on to complete post-graduate work. The Koinange family's entrepreneurial spirit remains alive and well, with members of the family active in the various sectors of technology, transportation, education, tourism, and entertainment. Jeff Koinange, a grandson of Koinange wa Mbiyu, is perhaps the most well-known of the Koinange's today, recognisable by the 'All Kenyan, all the time' catchphrase from his daily television show that aired in Nairobi for many years. The family remains the main benefactors of St. John's Church and of the Senior Chief Koinange girl's school in Kiambaa, the successors of the church and school built by family members on Koinange's land in the first decades of the twentieth century. They remain one of the most prominent and wealthy families in the wider Kiambu area.

On the surface, the Koinange legacy appears as strong as ever, with social and political power apparently perpetuated in the decades since independence. However, there is a distinct difference in how it has continued. The Koinange dynasty, in the post-

independence era, has not led the social and political changes of the day, but rather has found itself swept up in the changes around them. While the family served as patrons to other clients during the colonial era, the post-colonial period has seen the family dependent on the patronage of others.

Apart from the brief moment when the Lancaster House Conference came to a halt due to a boycott concerning Peter's admission to the conference, there is a noticeable absence of a Koinange family member from the story of Kenyan independence as it developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s. For over forty years, Koinange wa Mbiyu had been a consistent and prominent social and political leader in major events, shaping policies and pioneering African political action. Peter, who spent so much of his life before 1961 living outside of Kenya, was considered one of 'the big three of Kenya's Africans' prior to the Emergency.¹ And yet, with the family detained and pacified during the late Emergency period, the Koinange dynasty is absent in the formational events of the late 1950s that preceded Kenya's independence. This absence has relegated the family to the footnotes of Kenya's post-colonial history. While mentions of the Koinange family abound in the colonial era historiography, they are mentioned in the work on post-colonial Kenya primarily in connection with public scandals and internal family disputes.

From 1963 to 1980, three of Koinange's eldest sons held prominent positions within the newly independent Kenyan government: Charles Karuga, John Mbiyu, and Peter Mbiyu. Charles Karuga Koinange, who served as a colonial chief during the Mau Mau Emergency, continued his administrative work with the government until his retirement in 1980. Charles, more closely than anyone else in the family, outwardly emulated his father's career with the government. Following a post-independence appointment to

¹ TNA KV/2/2540, DG to SLO East Africa, 1 Sep. 1949, item 226a.

District Officer in 1962, Charles then served as Provincial Commissioner by the 1970s.² As his father before him, Charles held distinguished positions on a number of local councils, committees, and courts.³ However, in contrast to his father, Charles was not a bold critic of administrative policies and his prominent positions on committees were the result of his official position rather than a recognized ability to lead. Charles' tendency to withhold criticism and dutifully fulfill his responsibilities was a legacy of the Emergency era in which his work as chief began and a foundational requirement for political self-preservation during Kenya's post-independent *de facto* one-party state. While Charles worked as a government administrator, his two brothers served in Kenya's new legislative assembly.

John Mbiyu, one of the more politically radical among the Koinange family during the 1940s and 1950s, served as a Senator and then member of parliament for Lari (the Kiambu seat was held by his brother, Peter) through the latter years of the 1960s.⁴ John's tenure came to an end likely in the midst of growing opposition to Kenyatta's rule, the return of Mau Mau oath-taking, and public conflict with former Mau Mau fighters. John Mbiyu disappears from formal political developments by 1970. It was Peter Mbiyu who held the longest and most prominent positions in the post-independence era.

Appointed a Minister of State in 1963, Peter held a prominent ministerial position from then until just before his death in 1981. His first portfolio as Minister of State for Pan-African Affairs reflected his work with Kwame Nkrumah's newly independent Ghana

² *The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 16 Jan. 1962), Government Notice no. 240; Ibid. (Nairobi, 24 Apr. 1962), Government Notice no. 1937; Ibid. (Nairobi, 25 May 1965), Government Notice no. 1853.

³ Ibid. (Nairobi, 2 Feb. 1965), Government Notice no. 398; Ibid. (Nairobi, 30 Aug. 1966), Government Notice no. 3230; Ibid. (Nairobi, 1 Feb. 1966), Government Notice no. 366.

⁴ KNA KA/2/21, T.N. Malinda, 29 June 1967, item 9; *The Official Gazette* (Nairobi, 11 June 1963), Government Notice no. 2472. By the 1960s, both John Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu, prominent members of Kenya's government, went by the name 'Mbiyu Koinange' presenting a level of uncertainty in their overlapping careers during the 1960s.

and as General Secretary for the Pan-African Freedom Movement for East, Central, and Southern Africa (PAFMECSA) in Tanganyika.⁵ However, the position was short-lived, lasting less than a year, as Kenya's newly independent government abandoned pan-African ideals and focused on local issues. Over the next decade, Peter held three different portfolios and none for more than three years at a time. He served as Minister of Education from 1964 to 1966, a return to his focus on education in the 1940s, as Minister of State in the Office of the President from 1966 to 1969, and then as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1969 to 1971.⁶ By 1971, following this turbulent first decade in government, it was clear that Peter lacked the personality required of a political leader. Had it not been for President Kenyatta's appointment of Peter to Minister in the Office of the President, Peter's political career would have come to an unceremonious end by 1971. Within a year of Kenyatta's death in 1978, Peter was not only removed from his government post, but also lost his reelection campaign.⁷ Peter's political career ended with a short tenure as Minister of Natural Resources in the months following Kenyatta's death. While Peter served in Kenya's newly independent government for nearly two decades, it was not as a result of his own political strengths. Peter Mbiyu, while academically inclined, was underwhelming as a politician. Indeed, his fifteen-year absence during the Emergency, as Greet Kershaw rightly notes, surely undermined his political legitimacy, as it would have any politician with a similar absence.⁸ Peter's decade and a half in government was entirely the result of the patronage and protection of President Kenyatta.

Peter never developed the dynamic, demanding, or influential political skills of leadership that his father had possessed. Peter's inability to establish political influence revealed itself on a number of occasions throughout the 1960s. In 1965, Kenyatta asked

⁵ B. A. Ogot, *Historical Dictionary of Kenya* (Nairobi, 1981), p 110.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ G. Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below* (Oxford, 1997), p. 216.

Peter to meet with fifty ex-Mau Mau fighters and convince them to lay down their weapons, come out of the forest where they had remained since the late 1950s, and return to their homes. Duncan Ndwega writes of the incident: 'Perhaps sending Koinange was a mistake because he was not the kind of man to face such an issue squarely.'⁹ When the crowd became obstreperous, Peter fled out the back door, fearful for his own safety. By 1966, Peter's political presence was unimpressive enough that his name was left off of the official listing of government resulting in the issuance of an official apology for the mistake.¹⁰ The frequent changes in his government positions during the 1960s owed more to Peter's shortcomings than to his strengths. His short tenure as 'Minister without Portfolio' in 1970, which typically goes unmentioned, reflects the uncertainty of what position he might fulfil – the answer found only when Kenyatta appointed him Minister in the Office of the President.¹¹ This posting allowed Kenyatta to keep Peter within his government, but with few defined duties or responsibilities.

Despite Peter's high position within the government, by the 1980s, no member of the Koinange family held the political or social influence Koinange wa Mbiyu had wielded for so much of Kenya's colonial period. Certainly the Koinange dynasty enjoyed the prestige and the opportunities afforded Kenya's post-independent elite, but it was always as followers, not as leaders.

⁹ D. Ndegwa, *Walking in Kenyatta Struggles: My Story* (Nairobi, 2006), p. 367.

¹⁰ Ogot, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 110.

¹¹ KNA KA/1/71, A. B. Pant to P. M. Koinange, 4 Nov. 1970, item 20.

The Koinange Family Legacy

While the first fifty years of the twentieth century saw the Koinange dynasty esteemed by government and community alike, in the final decades of the century, the Koinange family name is more publically connected to family disputes, corruption, and murder. In the mid-1970s, Peter's name was connected to the abduction and murder of J. M. Kariuki, a popular politician and outspoken critic of Kenyatta's administration. In the early 1980s, fourteen family members, including three of Koinange's wives, sued Charles Karuga in a case reported in the daily newspapers. In this highly public case, family members accused Charles of using his position as chief in late colonial Kenya to steer the consolidation of the family's land to his own advantage. A decade later, Dr. Wilfred Koinange, Charles' eldest son, was dismissed from his government post in connection with the theft of over 400 million dollars. This theft, known as the Goldenberg Scandal, has the distinction of being Kenya's largest fraud case in its history. For many in Kenya today, it is these three developments of the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s that have defined the Koinange family in the mind of the public.

The murder of J.M. Kariuki shook Kenyan politics in the mid-1970s. Kariuki, a Mau Mau supporter known for his autobiography *Mau Mau Detainee*, gained a seat in Kenya's Parliament in 1969 with, according to political historian of modern Kenya Daniel Branch writes, near 'total support' from his district.¹² Kariuki was an outspoken critic of government corruption and the theft of land by Kenya's independent elite.¹³ 'We do not want a Kenya of ten millionaires and ten million beggars,' argued Kariuki.¹⁴ Kariuki was arrested on the evening of 2 March 1970 as he left the Hilton Hotel in downtown

¹² D. Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011* (New Haven, 2011), p. 105.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp 103-105.

¹⁴ As cited in M. wa Githinji, *Ten Millionaires and Ten Million Beggars* (Farnham, 2000), p. 1.

Nairobi.¹⁵ Kariuki went missing for ten days. His body, with clear signs of physical torture, and unnamed, was discovered in the Nairobi mortuary and identified by his widow and a fellow member of parliament.¹⁶ Riots broke out in the city, particularly among university students who supported Kariuki's condemnation of Kenyatta's government.¹⁷ Members of Parliament demanded an immediate inquiry.¹⁸ The subsequent investigation revealed high levels of corruption within the police and CID, and a clear sense that powerful political officials were guiding and shaping the narrative concerning Kariuki's death. The Kariuki murder is a chilling window into the abuse of power, corruption, and terror wielded by Kenyatta's *de facto* one party state during the 1970s.

The police investigation failed to find a suspect for Kariuki's murder. The Parliamentary inquiry identified no fewer than twenty government and police officials involved in the murder and its subsequent cover up.¹⁹ The committee lamented that 'a good deal of the Committee's time was wasted investigating the investigators instead of the actual murder'.²⁰ Their report stated that the police investigation was 'farcical from start to finish'.²¹ Despite an official police investigation and a Parliamentary inquiry, Kariuki's murder remains unsolved to this day. In 2012, the Kariuki family petitioned Kenya's 'Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission' to look into his murder.²²

It is widely held that Peter Mbiyu, in his role as Minister of State within the Office of the President, was the political actor most directly involved in coordinating Kariuki's

¹⁵ KNA BW/13/5, *Press Clippings on J.M. Kariuki*, 1975.

¹⁶ KNA KA/12/8, *Report of the Select Committee on the Disappearance and Murder of the Late Member for Nyandarua North, the Hon. J.M. Kariuki, M.P.*, 1975, p. 30.

¹⁷ KNA BW/13/5, 'Anger and Grief', *The Standard*, 13 Mar. 1975; *Ibid.*, 'Students boycott lectures over J.M.', *Daily Nation* (13 Mar. 1975).

¹⁸ KNA KA/12/8, p. 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²² O. Mathenge, 'J.M.'s Children Move Audience to Tears', *Daily Nation* (Nairobi, 6 Mar. 2012).

abduction, interrogation, and murder. As the Committee prepared to issue its report in June 1975, President Kenyatta summoned twelve committee members to the State House. According to news reports at the time, Vice President Daniel T. Arap Moi and Peter Mbiyu Koinange were present for the closed meeting.²³ When the report was submitted to Parliament later that day, Peter's name, along with that of the Senior Superintendent of Police, had been removed.²⁴ According to new reports, Peter's name was removed at the insistence of President Kenyatta.²⁵ When questions were raised in Parliament concerning the changes, Peter attempted to halt the proceedings.²⁶ The retraction of Peter's name, in spite of the inclusion of the name of his bodyguard in the report, and Peter's subsequent attempts to deter public debate, indicate a level of complicity in the crime.²⁷ Utilising archival records from March and April 1975, Daniel Branch highlights the belief at the time that Peter was behind Kariuki's assassination at the bidding of President Kenyatta.²⁸

In light of Peter's underwhelming political leadership and the challenges he faced when meeting with ex-Mau Mau fighters in the late 1960s, it is highly unlikely Peter acted of his own accord or in a prominent leadership role. The high profile assassination of a prominent politician, the subsequent cover-up, and the nature of a political context controlled by Kenyatta and KANU point to the involvement of President Kenyatta, or, at the very least, his Attorney General Charles Njonjo – rather than any prominent role by the politically marginalized and weak Peter Mbiyu Koinange. According to Duncan Ndegwa, Cabinet Secretary at the time, Njonjo was the 'only person who could make decisions' in the President's stead by 1975.²⁹ Both Kenyatta and Njonjo had been the

²³ KNA BW/13/5, 'President Gets a Copy', *The Standard*, 4 June 1975.

²⁴ Ibid., 'J.M. Probe: Full Report', *The Daily Nation*, 4 June 1975.

²⁵ C. Mohr, 'Kenyan parliamentary committee charges cover-up in murder', *New York Times* (4 June 1975), p. 7.

²⁶ Ibid., *The Daily Nation*, 4 June 1975.

²⁷ Branch, *Kenya*, p. 114.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ndegwa, *Walking in Kenyatta*, p. 438.

direct targets of Kariuki's criticism. As noted above, the death of Kenyatta meant the end of Peter's political career. Any action on the part of Peter was in subservience to his patron.

Within six years, the Koinange family name was again caught up in a public scandal involving the abuse of power. This time, rather than a Parliamentary inquiry, fourteen fellow members accused Peter's younger brother, Charles Karuga Koinange, of abusing his position of power during the latter years of the colonial era.

In February 1982, three of Koinange wa Mbiyu's wives, nine of his sons, and two of his daughter-in-laws sued Charles in court. They claimed that Charles illegally used his government position as district chief and his role as *de facto* head of the Koinange family in the latter years of the Mau Mau rebellion to claim a larger portion of Koinange wa Mbiyu's land than was his right.³⁰ The trial hinged on the challenges created by Koinange's detention and the opportunity afforded Charles to oversee the consolidation of the family's land. Koinange, it seemed, had written a will while detained at Marsabit, but then subsequently rescinded this will in response to the protest of one of his wives. According to Charles, his father had gifted one third of the available 610 acres to himself (50 acres), to Peter (100 acres), and to their brother, Njoroge (20 acres).³¹ Sixty-seven acres were then given to each of Koinange's wives. The remainder of the land was to remain undesignated until either Koinange returned from detention or Peter Mbiyu and Joseph Karuga returned from England. At least this was the story Charles offered in his defence.

³⁰ M. Njau, 'Koinange Family in Land Feud', *The Daily Nation* (Nairobi, 23 Feb. 1982).

³¹ 'Koinange's Will "Rejected"', *The Daily Nation* (Nairobi, 3 Mar. 1982).

Because Koinange wa Mbiyu failed to address the dispersal of his lands in the final month before his death, the duty, by custom, fell to Koinange's eldest son – Peter Mbiyu. However, because the colonial government barred Peter Mbiyu from returning for his father's funeral, this did not occur immediately following Koinange's death. Peter, as had his father, chose to avoid the issue following his return to Kenya in 1961 – quite content to enjoy his large inheritance and yet again an indication of Peter's reluctance to lead. Family members grew increasingly frustrated at Peter's unwillingness to address the land question, but refrained from legal action until after Peter Mbiyu's death. When the case came before the local magistrate and a council of elders, family members withdrew their case citing concerns of bias by the elders who were related to members of the family by marriage. It was not until 2015 that the family's land dispute was finally settled in court.³²

This fifty year old dispute was a direct legacy of the family's internal political divisions of the 1940s and the forced separation of the family during the Mau Mau Emergency. The land dispute reveals that Koinange wa Mbiyu's desire to create a unified family, discussed in chapter one, were undermined by the challenges of the Second World War period and the last decade and a half of colonial rule. By the 1990s, the Koinange name was once again the focus of public discussion, this time in connection with 'the biggest – and most complex – financial scandal in Kenya's history' – the Goldenberg Scandal.³³

In the early 1990s, Kenya's government, in need of financial aid, looked for ways to build its cash reserve. Leveraging government export incentives, a series of dummy

³² K. Muthoni an F. Makana, 'Former Cabinet Minister Mbiyu Koinange Estate Settled by 25 Judges, 35 Years Later', *The Standard* (Nairobi, 26 Sep. 2015). Accessed 4 Oct. 2017. <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000177633/former-cabinet-minister-mbiyu-koinange-estate-suit-settled-by-25-judges-35-years-later>.

³³ 'Kenyan Tycoon Loses Fight to Avoid Trial Over Goldenberg Affair', *Agence France-Presse* (Nairobi, 31 Jan. 2001).

corporations, under the umbrella of Goldenberg International, were established, filing claims for the export of gold and diamonds. While Kenya has little to no diamonds or gold, more than four hundred million dollars in fraudulent payments were made to Goldenberg International over the course of a few short years.³⁴ Following the revelation of the scandal in 1992, official prosecution began in 1994.

Eight individuals were charged with complicity in the affair. Those charged included the company's co-owner, Kamlesh Pattni, the former commissioner for Customs and Excise, A. K. Cheruiyot, the former commissioner of Mines and Geology, Collins Owayo, the Governor of the Central Bank of Kenya, Eric Kotut, his former deputy, Eliphaz Riungu, and the Permanent Secretary of Finance at the time, Dr Wilfred Karuga Koinange.³⁵ As Branch rightly argues, the Goldenberg Scandal was as much about politics – and the acquisition of funds for the 1992 general election – as it was about taking advantage of trade incentives for personal gain.³⁶ In 1995, the leader of the opposition party, Raila Odinga, filed a private suit against those accused of involved, with the addition of then Vice President George Saitoti.³⁷ The Goldenberg Scandal revealed financial and political corruption at the highest levels of President Moi's government.

The political fallout from the Goldenberg Scandal were widely felt. As John Githongo wrote in 1993, Goldenberg shook 'the very foundations of Kenya's economy', bringing with it a fifty percent drop in the value of the shilling over a year and a half.³⁸ In 1998, it was discovered that leadership at the Central Bank of Kenya had destroyed documents pertinent to the case.³⁹ Following an earlier decision by the World Bank to

³⁴ 'Kenyan Official Charged with \$126 Million Theft', *Reuters News* (Nairobi, 14 Dec. 1994).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Branch, *Kenya*, p. 219.

³⁷ 'Opposition MP Files Criminal Charges Against Vice-President Saitoti', *BBC* (Nairobi, 11 Mar. 1995)

³⁸ As cited in Branch, *Kenya*, p. 220.

³⁹ 'Goldenberg – CBK Records Produced', *All Africa* (Nairobi, 9 Oct. 1998). *All Africa* is cited as the source if the original news article that All Africa syndicates could not be consulted.

withhold development funds, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), citing the gold and diamond scandal, suspended a two hundred and five million dollar loan to the Kenyan government in 1998.⁴⁰ Two years later, a Public Accounts Committee report further implicated President Moi and former Finance Minister, Musalia Mudavadi, in the scandal.⁴¹ In 2003, in the midst of an attempt by then Attorney General Amos Wako to get the case dismissed, it was revealed that Parliament knew as early as 1992 that Goldenberg International and its subsidiaries existed in name only.⁴² When the case returned to the High Court in 2012, four justices were dismissed for either their personal connection to persons involved in Goldenberg International, for their failure to investigate '10 prominent personalities', or for using their positions to remove the names of the most notable among the accused, including Vice President Saitoti.⁴³ In 2012, Mudavadi's presidential campaign floundered when Raila Odinga threatened to expose Mudavadi's involvement in the Goldenberg Scandal.⁴⁴ Over the course of two decades, the revelations from the Goldenberg Scandal shook the very foundations of Kenya's economy, judiciary, and politics, leaving in its wake silenced and dismissed politicians. For Wilfred Karuga Koinange, the Goldenberg Scandal also meant the end of his political career.

After a notable career as a doctor, epidemiologist, and nearly a decade as Kenya's Director of Medical Services, Dr Koinange was shuffled between four Permanent Secretary positions over the course of seven years (1987-1994). His initial three postings — to the Ministry of Research and Technology, the Ministry of Industry, and the Ministry

⁴⁰ M. Bigg, 'FOCUS – Kenya's Goldenberg Trial Finally Starts', *Reuters News* (Nairobi, 3 Mar. 1998).

⁴¹ 'Goldenberg – It Goes to the Top', *All Africa* (Nairobi, 5 Oct. 2000).

⁴² 'Goldenberg Inquiry – Parliament Queried Gold Exports', *All Africa* (Nairobi, 27 May 2003).

⁴³ P. Chepkemei, 'Nyamu Fights Back Over Sack', *The Daily Nation* (Nairobi, 3 May 2012); E.M. Gekara, 'How Ego Fight Over Goldenberg Claimed Bosire and Nyamu Careers', *The Daily Nation* (Nairobi, 7 May 2012); W. Thuku and I. Lucheli, 'Scandals and Past Rulings End Careers of Four Senior Judges', *The Standard* (Nairobi, 26 Apr. 2012). Accessed 3 Oct. 2017.

<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000057069/scandals-and-past-rulings-end-careers-of-four-senior-judges>.

⁴⁴ J. Sigei, 'Mudavadi and Raila Fight Dirty Over Poll', *The Daily Nation* (Nairobi, 7 May 2012).

of Agriculture — were held for a single year each. He was then appointed Permanent Secretary of the Treasury in 1991.⁴⁵ His appointment came in the midst of the corruption scandals and allegations of government abuse that had resulted in the withholding of development funds by the World Bank and the IMF in the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁴⁶ The need for these funds was significant, so re-establishing the trust of global donors became a primary focus for the Ministry of Finance. After more than two years, Germany became the first nation in October 1993 to release development funds following promised government reforms in Kenya.⁴⁷ The international press reported on the theft of millions of dollars via Goldenberg International that same year, undermining the claims of progress.⁴⁸

The subsequent investigation revealed that over the course of four months (April-July 1993), Dr Koinange authorized the payment of over five and a half billion shillings from the Central Bank of Kenya to Goldenberg International or one of its subsidiaries. Dr Koinange's actions were outside of his official authority and so he was charged with an unconstitutional abuse of his government position.⁴⁹ The timing could not have been worse. The events occurred at the same time that Koinange was busy assuring global donors during talks in Paris that reforms within the Kenyan government were effectively working to address corruption and fiscal mismanagement.⁵⁰ Dr Koinange was relieved of his government post in August 1994 and arrested the following December.⁵¹

⁴⁵ 'Moi reshuffles aides', *Agence France-Presse* (Nairobi, 16 Dec. 1991).

⁴⁶ 'IMF Delays 63 Million Dollar Kenya Loan Pending Review', *Reuters News*, (Nairobi, 24 Dec. 1991).

⁴⁷ 'German Assistance for Kenyan Development Projects', *Agence France-Presse* (Nairobi, 13 Oct. 1993).

⁴⁸ 'Kenyan Lawyers Sue Former Top Kenyan Officials for Fraud', *Agence France-Presse* (Nairobi, 9 Dec. 1994).

⁴⁹ 'Former Senior Civil Servant Charged with Corruption', *BBC* (Nairobi, 16 Dec. 1994),

⁵⁰ 'Kenya, Donors Begin Talks to Free Halted Aid', *Reuters News* (Nairobi, 12 Oct. 1993).

⁵¹ 'Former Senior Civil Servant', *BBC*; 'Kenyan Official Charged with \$126 Million Theft', *Reuters News* (Nairobi, 14 Dec. 1994).

By May 1995, the Goldenberg Scandal was seized on as 'a crusade for the political opposition in Kenya and a festering issue for overseas aid donors'.⁵² The revelation that top officials, including the President and Vice President, were aware, if not involved in what was 'the biggest ever fraud uncovered in Kenyan history' only added to the accusations of government corruption.⁵³ Dr Koinange, accused of the illegal payment of funds, argued that his actions were taken at the behest of then Vice President George Saitoti, who was the Minister of Finance at the time, with the approval of President Moi and the approval of the Governor of the Central Bank of Kenya.⁵⁴ Koinange's attorney claimed Koinange was following orders and charged the Prosecution in the case with intentionally covering up 'alleged wrongdoing by top ministers not charged in this case'.⁵⁵ In one of the more memorable moments in the trial, Koinange's lawyer told the court, 'Surely it could not be imagined that we shall meekly lay our heads on the chopping block as a sacrifice to the gods'.⁵⁶ It became clear that while the Goldenberg Scandal involved figures at the highest levels of government, those charged in the case were serving as scapegoats for those at the top.

In my 2012 conversations with Dr Koinange, he claimed that Goldenberg was well under way prior to his appointment to the treasury. It was his belief that he had been moved to the Treasury post in 1991 as the person on which blame would fall with the assumption that the scandal would soon be discovered. After nearly a decade and a half of various proceedings, seven of the nine charges against Dr Koinange were dismissed in summer of 2012.⁵⁷ Dr Koinange passed away a few weeks later.

⁵² 'Kenya Businessman on Bail in Goldenberg Trial', *Reuters News* (Nairobi, 23 May 1995).

⁵³ 'Kenyan Tycoon, Former Official on Theft Charges', *Reuters News* (Nairobi, 5 Jan. 1995).

⁵⁴ 'Kenya Goldenberg Witness Says Told to Hide Payment', *Reuters* (Nairobi, 11 Mar. 1998).

⁵⁵ 'Defence Rejects "Sacrifice" in Kenya Graft Trial', *Reuters News* (Nairobi, 18 Mar. 1998).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ S. Njenga, 'Koinange had no hand in Goldenberg', *All Africa* (Nairobi, 4 Sep. 2012). Accessed 27 Sep. 2012. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201209050030.html>.

By the end of the twentieth century, the Koinange name was widely known, but not for the family's philanthropic, social, religious, or political efforts as it had been at the beginning of the century. Now the Koinange name was linked to the political intrigues, post-independence elite family division, and government corruption. While the stories of Koinange wa Mbiyu's courage and boldness during the colonial era abound, there are few, if any, such 'hero' stories told of Peter, Charles, Wilfred, or others from the post-independence era. In recent years, the family has attempted reshape their public legacy. To do so, they have returned to the late colonial myth of Mau Mau militancy.

Rebuilding the Koinange Legacy

Jeff Koinange, grandson of Koinange wa Mbiyu and an award winning international journalist, wrote a book about his grandfather's life entitled *Koinange-wa-Mbiyu: Mau Mau's Misunderstood Leader*, published in 2000. The book reflects the family's efforts to reshape their public identity. The book offers fascinating details into his grandfather and family's life; the kind of details only a family can tell about itself. However, the book borrows heavily, and often word for word or in poorly adapted paraphrased passages, from the work of Marshall Clough and Ralph Bunche. The reader, if familiar with the writings of either of these authors, quickly gets the sense that the story being told is not the Koinange's story at all. It is an embrace of the late colonial era myth of Koinange militancy and opposition to colonial rule. The reasons behind the family's decision to embrace something that Koinange and Peter worked to refute are closely connected to the changing place of Mau Mau within contemporary Kenya's changing historical identity.

For nearly forty years after independence, both Kenyatta's and Moi's governments worked to distance themselves from Mau Mau. Peter's visit with ex-Mau Mau fighters in 1968 and the re-emergence of Mau Mau oathing in the late 1960s were part of the efforts to suppress the place of Mau Mau in Kenyan identity. In the late 1990s, things changed significantly.

Evan Mwangi's 2010 article, 'The Incomplete Rebellion: Mau Mau Movement in Twenty-First-Century Kenyan Popular Culture', compellingly argues that modern references to Mau Mau is more about contemporary politics and discord, rather than the historical past.⁵⁸ Mwangi contends that the Dedan Kimathi statue, unveiled in downtown Nairobi in 2006 with a plaque proclaiming the former Mau Mau general as one of Kenya's liberation heroes, was about solidifying President Kibaki's political legacy.⁵⁹ In modern discourse, identifying with the Mau Mau rebellion is a way to claim social capital and political legitimacy. It is these wider cultural and political developments that have resulted in the Koinange family's efforts to bind themselves to pre-independence militancy and the Mau Mau rebellion.

Over the last twenty years, the Koinange family has worked hard to portray Koinange wa Mbiyu as a militant, Mau Mau leader. Attempts to re-establish the Koinange story on the basis of Koinange wa Mbiyu's legacy began in the aftermath of the Goldberg Scandal with a multi-page article in the local *The People's Digest* tabloid.⁶⁰ This was followed by the publication of Jeff Koinange's book in 2000. The book found a welcome audience in Kenya's local press. *The Sunday Nation's* review of the book described it as 'an honest attempt to put the image of Kenya's most vehement opponent of

⁵⁸ E. Mwangi, 'The Incomplete Rebellion: Mau Mau Movement in Twenty-First-Century Kenyan Popular Culture', *Africa Today*, 57 (Winter 2010), pp 86-113.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 95.

⁶⁰ 'The Legacy of Koinange: He Spoke Fiercly for His People', *The People's Digest* (Nairobi, 24 July 1998), pp 1, 6.

colonialism in right perspective'.⁶¹ *The East African* noted how Koinange had become 'an embittered man [...and] forged an alliance with the young renegades led by Jomo Kenyatta'.⁶² A 2001 article, again in *The People's Digest*, offered readers the story of 'the early days of the legend', Koinange wa Mbiyu.⁶³ In 2007, the legend continued to grow, when an article argued that Koinange wa Mbiyu 'doubled as a senior chief and a Mau Mau fighter'.⁶⁴ A 2010 article in *The Star*, entitled 'The Paradox that was Chief Koinange', provocatively suggested that 'after 1945, Koinange began to organize an army of resistance. Money and arms were collected. Oaths were administered to those joining. All of this was done at his homestead in Kiambaa. Mau Mau's army came into being'.⁶⁵ Within this same context, attempts were made to cast Peter Mbiyu as 'the power behind the throne in the Kenyatta presidency and one of the key decision makers in the formative years of the young nation'.⁶⁶ Historical narratives presenting Koinange wa Mbiyu as a Mau Mau leader and Peter Mbiyu as a powerful politician behind Kenyatta are driven by contemporary narratives, rather than a commitment to the historical past. With the public scandals of the 1970s through the 1990s, it not surprising that the Koinange family is seeking to recast their reputation and their name in public memory.

There is a sadness regarding these efforts to reclaim a prominent position in society and politics. Koinange and Peter spent the last decade of the colonial era refuting the accusation that they were involved in leading Mau Mau. In the decades since, the historiography of Kenya has often embraced this militant narrative. In doing so, historians

⁶¹ N. Wachira, 'Book Sheds Light on the Freedom Struggle', *The Sunday Nation* (Nairobi, 15 Oct. 2000), p. 19.

⁶² N. Karuoya, 'Was Senior Chief Koinange a Colonial Stooge or a Patriot?', *The East African* (Nairobi, 11 Jan. 2001), pp 1-2.

⁶³ 'Story of Senior Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu: Early Days of the Legend', *The People's Digest* (Nairobi, 15 May 2001), p. 11.

⁶⁴ J. Ngumba, 'The Life and Times of Senior Chief Koinange...as Narrated by His Wife', *The People's Digest* (Nairobi, 14 Dec. 2007), pp 4-5.

⁶⁵ P. Nowrojee, 'The Paradox That Was Chief Koinange', *The Star* (Nairobi, 13 Jan. 2010).

⁶⁶ K. Mutungua, 'Mbiyu Koinange, the Powerful Force Behind the Kenyatta Presidency', *The Daily Nation* (Nairobi, 30 Oct. 2011), pp 4-6.

of Kenya have often settled for two-dimensional portraits of the Koinanges in service to the wider agendas of nationalism and militancy. There is a very real danger that the contemporary efforts of the Koinange family will subjugate the complexity of their family's past to the demands of current social and political debate. Recent efforts, if continued, allow the colonial government's militant myth to once again dominate the historical understanding of Koinange and Peter's lives. The result is an exaltation of a history of violence - one that is antithetical to the life of Koinange or Peter – rather than a story of diplomacy that was needed in Kenya in the 1930s and 1940s, and is still needed today.

Despite the reputation the family had garnered by the end of the twentieth century, the story the family could be offering to local news, in the place of the militant Mau Mau myth, is one of a family that has shaped modern Kenya in every area possible: religion, education, business, culture, and politics. The family boasts one of the most influential, loved, and highly decorated chiefs of Kenya's colonial era: a leader who sought to balance loyalty and courage, support and disagreement. The family's legacy in the area of education and Christian faith provided schooling and places of common worship for communities throughout central Kenya that still serves the local community to this day. The family's entrepreneurial efforts not only established some of the first African businesses in the late colonial period, but also have seen family members continue to spearhead new opportunities in economic growth and development. The family boasts two recipients — Dr Wilfred Koinange and Jeff Koinange — of one of the nation's highest civilian honours, the Moran of the Order of the Burning Spear. Dr Koinange, despite his later association with the Goldenberg Scandal, was involved with and is a signatory on the World Health Organization's 1979 global declaration of the eradication of smallpox.⁶⁷ Under his leadership as Director of Medical Services, Kenya became the first nation in

⁶⁷ F. Fenner, et. al., *Smallpox and Its Eradication* (World Health Organization, 1989), p. 1141.

Africa to screen all blood donations for the AIDS virus.⁶⁸ In 2013, a family member, Paul Koinange, won the election for the Kiambaa parliamentary seat. He won his re-election bid for a second term in August 2017. It was the first time in nearly thirty-five years — since Peter Mbiyu lost his bid for re-election in 1978 — that a Koinange family member was elected to Parliament. The legacy of the Koinange dynasty, without any connection to Mau Mau or claims to being the power behind Kenyatta's presidency, is remarkable.⁶⁹

Kenya, in the wake of the 2017 election recall, ongoing public debates concerning the place of Mau Mau in its history, and the ethnic and political divisions that have rocked the country since 1992, is at a pivotal moment in shaping its national identity. In the same way that the Second World War era forced European and African politics into specific narratives of narrowed definitions of what it meant for one to be loyal, the narrative that threatens to undermine Kenyan society and politics is, yet again, a narrative of loyalty with ever narrowing boundaries. The violence that followed the 2007 presidential elections had, at its core, questions of loyalty and the will to political violence as a demonstration of that loyalty. The 2017 election, following the Supreme Courts dismissal of the results, places Kenya in a moment of decision — of loyalty to one's social and political group, no matter the cost, or of a loyalty to the ideals of a republic, of public debate, and democracy. Intentionally fixing a family's identity within these narrowing narratives of loyalty may be advantageous in the moment, but the long-term cost is great. If the Koinange family continues to embrace the militant Mau Mau myth, they will not only help to sustain a grave injustice of the colonial era, but that myth will overshadow the incredible, albeit imperfect, legacy of which the Koinange dynasty has every reason to be proud. The broader tendency within Kenya to embrace advantageous narratives of loyalty to one's

⁶⁸ J. Brooke, 'Kenya is Reacting Bitterly as AIDS is Highlighted', *The New York Times* (24 Feb. 1987).

⁶⁹ I have every reason to believe that the legacy of the Koinange women in the twentieth century is similarly remarkable. Their impact in the sectors of medical care, education, counseling, and business fall outside of the focus of this thesis and available archival material.

party, social group, or ethnic community threatens to undermine foundational pillars for creating trust in the governing political system. A belief that an imperfect system can lead to change and to eventual justice is a legacy of Koinange wa Mbiyu and Peter Mbiyu's lives that modern Kenya needs to hear.

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