

## SCREENING



Hooded loyalist screeners

*Undu umwe itakariganirwo on ni screening. Ngeretha acio matiaiganagira, mendaga o ndimahe uhoro ona itari naguo. Makiihura, makiihurira, kuu borithi station kuu detention ona villagi. Screening yahanaga to kwa ngoma.*

*(One thing I will never forget is screening. Those British were never satisfied; they just wanted more information from me but I didn't have any. They just beat me and beat me in the police station, in detention, and in the village. Screening was hell.)*

—GACHECHE GATHAMBO, *February 22, 1999, Mathira, Nyeri District*

SCREENING IS THE ONE WORD IN KIKUYULAND TODAY THAT IS SYNONYMOUS with British colonial rule during Mau Mau. In recounting their days in the detention camps and barbed-wire villages, Kikuyu men and women never translate *screening* into their own language. Instead, they pause in their Kikuyu or Kiswahili and enunciate the English word *screening* in a slow, deliberate, colonial British accent. This is because there is no word in Kikuyu or Kiswahili that captures the same meaning.

In British colonial Kenya, *screening* was the preferred term for interro-

gation. *To screen* meant to get information from a Mau Mau suspect and, as the Emergency wore on, to persuade him or her to confess Mau Mau affiliations. When interrogations of Mau Mau suspects by colonial officials turned bloody, *screening* took on a more sinister connotation. For former Mau Mau adherents and even for those Kikuyu who never took the oath, screening was indiscriminate, and no one escaped it. It was an experience they would prefer to forget, although their memories often prove uncooperative. The practice began not long after the start of the Emergency when British security forces, European settlers, and the Kenya police force together spearheaded a campaign to interrogate anyone suspected of Mau Mau involvement. No Kikuyu—man, woman, or child—was safe from the screening teams. Every Kikuyu was a suspect.

When the mass deportations of Kikuyu to the reserves was started in early 1953, the colonial government began setting up screening centers throughout the Rift Valley and Central provinces. Local settlers and colonial officers funneled thousands of repatriates through these centers, where they were interrogated for hours and sometimes even days. Baring and General Erskine had ordered their men to screen all Mau Mau suspects in search of intelligence, especially information about future Mau Mau operations, guerrilla support in the reserves and on the settler farms, and names of other Mau Mau, particularly passive-wing organizers and oath administrators. Suspects branded as dangerous were shipped off to a detention camp, while others were slated for final deportation to the reserves, often via a transit camp.

In the field the teams of interrogators, known as screening teams, were ruthless in their pursuit of information. Even in government-approved screening centers like Subukia and Bahati, where presumably there was closer scrutiny of interrogation tactics, the third degree (as the local settlers called it) was the method of choice for extracting information and confessions from Mau Mau suspects. D. H. Rawcliffe, himself a settler, wrote in 1954 that the third degree was so widespread that "every European in the security forces knew about these beatings, talked about them, and very often had ordered them or participated in them:" Even the Christian missionaries were aware of the brutality, calling the government's screening center at Thomson's Falls a "cruelty camp."<sup>2</sup> Such abuses could hardly have been surprising, considering those who were typically in charge. The screening centers were often staffed by local European settlers whom Baring had appointed as temporary district officers in charge of screening.

Christopher Todd, the first settler appointed as a screening officer, had a major role in devising the screening system on the settler estates and

elsewhere in the colony. Todd was a longtime resident of Naivasha and a leader among the local settlers there. Fresh from his service in the First World War, Todd arrived in Kenya in 1920 to take up a government land grant in the Rift Valley, or Happy Valley, as the local settlers called it. His view of the natives, as he referred to the Africans, was not unlike that of his fellow European colonists. Stereotypical in his British paternalism, Todd displayed a common colonial attitude of the time.

There was no depth of thought [with the native]. As for culture, compared with European and Asian standards, there was none. These men were pagan barbarians but none the less likeable for that. . . . They were naturally lazy and had continually to be kept up to the mark. Perhaps their greatest curse was, and is, the way in which their whole lives are governed by superstition—that, coupled with their colossal vanity, makes them such an easy prey for the unscrupulous agitator.<sup>3</sup>

During the Second World War Todd fought again for the Allied forces, this time narrowly escaping death. Returning to Kenya in 1950 after two years of convalescence in Wales, he remained paralyzed for the remainder of his life. His physical condition did not prevent him from joining the Kenya Police Reserve at the outbreak of Mau Mau. Along with his close friends in the Kenya Legislative Council, settlers like Cavendish-Bentinck, Todd was resoundingly critical of what he described as Baring's too soft Emergency policies. Together with his neighbors, he formed the Vigilance Committee for Naivasha. As he later recalled in his memoirs:

A number of farmers in the district became so exasperated by the lack of action taken by Government to suppress the menace that they formed a Vigilance Committee, to take the law into their own hands for the purpose of protecting the lives of their families should the occasion arise. The Police soon got word of this "subversive society." After discussion with the members, they persuaded them to join the KPR where they would have legal protection.<sup>4</sup>

Baring did not seek to disband the Vigilance Committee, but rather wanted to be certain it was incorporated into his government and protected by the same laws that would also shield his police force from outside scrutiny and possibly later prosecution for Emergency abuses. By appointing settlers like Todd as temporary officers, he bestowed on them the protection of the Crown in return for their manpower and local knowledge.

By his own account, Todd and his fellow screening officers felt they

needed shielding by the colonial government to do their interrogation work effectively. He candidly remembers, "I did not believe in obtaining information under threat of violence, although there are cases where such methods are necessary, such as in a case of emergency."<sup>5</sup> Typically, screening would begin with a long question-and-answer session, but Mau Mau suspects generally sat silently or were "sullen and arrogant," as one settler described them.<sup>6</sup> Occasionally, the interrogators would give up, frustrated and exhausted, and either release the suspect for final deportation to the reserves or hold him for another round of screening. The more likely scenario, though, was similar to the experiences of Njama Ileri, Ndiritu Kibira, and Kirigumi Kagunda—three detainees who years later described what had happened to them. Bound to a chair in the screening center at Subukia, Njama Ileri was tortured by a white settler and several Kikuyu loyalists. Although he recognized the Africans as some of the workers with whom he had labored on the Subukia Estate, Njama did not know the *Mzungu*, or European, who extinguished cigarettes on his back during the interrogation. Today he still bears the scars of the cigarette burns and walks with a limp from the beatings given him by his loyalist interrogators.' Njama's experience in the screening center was hardly unique. At the Kiringiti Estate in Molo, Ndiritu Kibira was working as a gardener when he was rounded up with nearly one hundred other Kikuyu workers and shipped by lorry to the Bahati screening center in Nakuru. There, according to Ndiritu,

we were taken to a camp in a farm [Bahati] owned by a settler whom we had nicknamed Nyangweso. That was where we were screened. We would be asked whether we had taken the oath, and those who denied having taken it were beaten badly until they were forced to confess or at least gave them some information. Many died from the beatings. . . . The black *askaris* [guards] were the ones who were doing most of the beating, but the white settlers and policemen were there as well, directing it and also beating us.

Kirigumi, a Kikuyu squatter who was forcibly removed from the Rift Valley, recalled his screening experience.

We would be sent to the camp where we would be interrogated. To be interrogated meant to be beaten. It wasn't just to be asked questions. It was to be beaten—holding yourself like this. You would be hit there. . . . You would be beaten here [on the stomach and back] very hard. You would also place your legs thus, and be hit on this ankle and the other which would go this way and was hit again to go back. Then you would be asked to stand up and someone else would take your place.'

Scores of former Mau Mau adherents whom I interviewed offered similar recollections. Teams made up of settlers, British district officers, members of the Kenya police force, African loyalists, and even soldiers from the British military forces demanded confessions and intelligence, and used torture to get them. If the screening team was dissatisfied with a suspect's answers, it was accepted that torture was a legitimate next resort. According to a number of the former detainees I interviewed, electric shock was widely used, as well as cigarettes and fire. Bottles (often broken), gun barrels, knives, snakes, vermin, and hot eggs were thrust up men's rectums and women's vaginas. The screening teams whipped, shot, burned, and muffled Mau Mau suspects, ostensibly to gather intelligence for military operations, and as court evidence.

Identifying who exactly perpetrated screening crimes is difficult largely because the Kikuyu oath takers knew their interrogators often only by nicknames. Though they rarely knew a European's name, they could generally identify a screener's colonial affiliation based on his uniform: a German-style SS cap meant he was part of the Kenya Police; the Kenya Regiment uniform was also distinctive, as was that of the members of the Administration, many of whom the locals knew well before Mau Mau. The Kikuyu nicknamed nearly every colonial agent who had an impact on their lives, whether bad or good, a practice that had been ongoing throughout Britain's occupation of the colony. For the Kikuyu victims of screening, nicknames not only identified someone but were also a form of empowerment. How better to insult a much-hated young settler than to call him *Muru wa Itina*, or the Son of the Buttocks? Not surprisingly, his father was simply *Itina*, or the Ass. But when the Emergency started, less humorous and more sinister names appeared, like *Kiboroboro*, or the Killer. There was also *More More*, the Whip, the Man with No Shirt, and the One with the Crooked Nose. This list goes on and on and would become more impressive when Mau Mau suspects began filling the detention camps, where even fewer Kikuyu knew the Christian names of the British camp commandants or the African warders.

Self-described screening experts like Christopher Todd claimed to know merely by the look of a suspect whether or not he or she was Mau Mau. When a suspect refused to talk, the screeners used this extraordinary intuition to justify their use of the third degree. Todd would later boast of his screening prowess: "When I became more practiced, I could get a very good idea as to how many oaths a man had taken just by looking at him.

There was something about the ideas and whole demeanour, an aura of evil which emanated from the man or woman which showed the state of utter degradation to which a once normal human being had been reduced by the foul oath-taking ceremonies."<sup>9</sup> Most British settlers and colonial administrators agreed there was a sense of evil that manifested itself in devil-like eyes and sinister and sullen expressions—they called it the Mau Mau look. Margery Perham, on visiting some of the Mau Mau detainees, noted "the dark look upon their faces, which seemed to add an extra darkness to the colour of their skin, and their look of settled hatred as they sat motionless on the ground."<sup>10</sup>

Bahati and Subukia, where Todd was stationed, were not the only screening centers using abusive tactics. There existed dozens of technically illegal, or unregistered, screening centers throughout the Rift Valley and Central provinces. In fact, of the scores of interrogation facilities in both the settled areas and the reserves, only fifteen were ever officially sanctioned by the colonial government. Governor Baring knew that illegal screening centers were operating and tacitly approved of them, partly because he had neither the manpower nor the funds to establish additional government-sponsored interrogation units." Some of these centers were actually mobile, like the one operated by the local settler R. E. Fellowes. Together with a team of other settlers and Kikuyu loyalists, Fellowes would travel from farm to farm in the White Highlands and conduct massive, on-the-spot screening.<sup>12</sup> Most of the screening operations took place in permanent sites, generally in the offices of the Administration or in outposts on settler farms. In the Rift Valley, for example, one settler who operated his own screening camp was known as Dr. Bunny by the locals. It was his experimental prowess when it came to interrogating Mau Mau suspects that earned the doctor his notorious nickname: the Joseph Mengele of Kenya. One settler remembers her brother, a member of the Kenya Regiment and a pseudogangster, boasting of Dr. Bunny's exploits, which included burning the skin off live Mau Mau suspects and forcing them to eat their own testicles. Another former settler and member of the local Moral Rearmament Movement also recalled Dr. Bunny's handiwork. He, too, remembered skin searing along with castration and other methods of screening he would "prefer not to speak of"<sup>14</sup>

Margaret Nyaruai, a young woman at the time of Mau Mau, was taken to the screening hut on the estate of her settler employer near Kabaru not long after the start of the Emergency. There she was beaten by a white man whom the Kikuyu had nicknamed Karoki, or He Who Comes at Dawn, and by the young settler turned British colonial officer nicknamed YY. While being screened, Margaret was asked:

Questions like the number of oaths I had taken, where my husband went, where two of my stepbrothers had gone (they had gone into the forest). I was badly whipped, while naked. They didn't care that I had just given birth. In fact, I think my baby was lucky it was not killed like the rest. . . . - Apart from the beatings, women used to have banana leaves and flowers inserted into their vaginas and rectums, as well as have their breasts squeezed with a pair of pliers; after which, a woman would say everything because of the pain . . . even the men had their testicles squeezed with pliers to make them confess! After such things were done to me, I told them everything. I survived after the torture, but I still have a lot of pain in my body even today from it.<sup>5</sup>

Margaret's confession did not earn her release. Instead, Karoki forced her to labor without pay on his estate throughout most of the Emergency. From time to time the screening teams, hungry for any information, continued to interrogate her, often thrusting hot eggs into her vagina to force her to talk.'

Ratcheting up the violence in the screening centers were the Kikuyu loyalists who worked side by side with the British colonial officers to interrogate Mau Mau suspects. Many loyalists were known by the local settlers, members of the Administration, and the Mau Mau adherents for their ruthlessness. Nonetheless, the British colonial government was utterly dependent upon them for their knowledge of Mau Mau activities; interrogations would have been impossible without them. On one level, they became the henchmen for the European officers in charge of screening operations. With few exceptions, the loyalists beat and murdered Mau Mau suspects on command; other times they tortured the oath takers without any prompting or supervision. But some loyalists had been conscripted into colonial service and for this reason were less reliable deputies. There were also those who dangerously played both sides, loyalist during the day and Mau Mau by night, either in an attempt to save their own skins or opportunistically to hedge their bets before knowing who would be the eventual victor. And then there were the true double agents, as Mau Mau called them, oath takers who had infiltrated the colonial government by joining the Home Guard. The ruse did not always work; in some cases when Home Guards refused to follow orders, they suffered detention and torture just as the Mau Mau suspects they had helped detain. In Kiamariga, for example, Kamau Githiriji remembered that he and five other men had been arrested and brought behind the district commissioner's office. There the "white man in charge," as Kamau remembered him, "ordered [the loyalists] to shoot us, but [they] refused to comply. For that, they were relieved of their

duties." The same white man then loaded the loyalists on the back of the lorry with Kamau and the other Mau Mau suspects and sent them all to Nyeri Prison, where they were held for several weeks before being transferred to Athi River Detention Camp.<sup>17</sup>

Loyalist behavior was motivated by much more than simply desiring to follow the orders of their white superiors. Many of them hated the Mau Mau and everything they represented; the oath takers had launched a direct attack on the loyalists' privilege, and greed, and targeted most of their aggression on those individuals who had collaborated with the British and allegedly profited at the expense of their Kikuyu neighbors. Loyalists were determined to eliminate Mau Mau, or as one former Home Guard from Kiambu district stated bluntly, "I wanted to kill them all; they wanted to ruin everything."<sup>18</sup>

By empowering the loyalists to participate as equals in the screening operations, the British colonial government was fueling a smoldering civil war in Kikuyuland and providing loyalists with the opportunity to settle old scores. They could identify adversaries as belonging to Mau Mau, torture them during interrogation, and confiscate their property. In some cases the loyalist interrogators stood barefaced in front of Mau Mau suspects, identified them as oath takers, and beat them senseless, sometimes killing them.<sup>19</sup> In other cases, loyalists' identities were protected, and they became the notorious hooded informants of Nairobi and the White Highlands. Their heads covered with a *gakunia*, or sack, the loyalists would peer out at the accused Mau Mau through two small eyeholes. Colonial officers directed countless screening parades in which lines of Mau Mau suspects filed past the hooded loyalists. His identity protected, the loyalist could send a man or woman off to a screening center or a detention camp with a nod of the head. One former Mau Mau suspect recalled such a screening parade that took place outside Nairobi during the early years of the Emergency.

We went through a kind of identification parade, whereby one was ordered to pass in front of a parked vehicle inside which there was a person in a hooded, flowing robe. The informer's face was completely covered, except for the eyeholes. "When a suspect passed in front of the vehicle the informer would say "yes" and the suspect would be sent aside, or "no" and the suspect would be allowed to go past. . . . In my case, the informer said "no" and I was allowed to go past, but for only a few steps because seconds later I heard someone call, "Hey, you man with a long coat; arrest that man in the long coat." I then felt someone grab me by the collar of my coat and I was out into the enclosure where those arrested were being held.<sup>20</sup>



Colonial authorities were keenly aware of the civil dimension of Mau Mau and knowingly exploited it in the reserves. Many of the chiefs had begun organizing their own private police forces for protection of themselves and their families, and these private armies merged with some several hundred Tribal Policemen, an organization formed in the late 1920s and composed mostly of the sons and close relatives of the chiefs and headmen. By 1953 the colonial government had recognized these groups as so-called islands of resistance to Mau Mau and therefore ready recruits in the war against it. Baring gave Major General Hinde authorization to convert these private militias into the officially sanctioned Home Guard, or Kikuyu Guard, but first the chiefs and the local British district officer had to vet each potential recruit. Refusal to serve actively in the anti-Mau Mau campaign rendered a Kikuyu, a priori, a Mau Mau. To become a colonial-appointed Home Guard meant you were, in theory, willing to fight and kill your oath-taking neighbor. Local senior chiefs—like Njiiri and Ignatio in Fort Hall, Muhoya in Nyeri, and Makimei of Kiambu—would vouch for their mercenaries and then force each one to *kuhungwo mahuri*, have their "lungs cleaned." In other words, they had to proclaim openly that they had never taken a Mau Mau oath.

Still, in the early days of the Emergency, Mau Mau retained the upper hand in the reserves, often savagely attacking many of the loyalist leaders. In late October of 1952 Mau Mau murdered Chief Nderi. The district commissioner struck back, levying a collective fine of nearly ten thousand head of livestock on all suspected Mau Mau adherents in the area; he later redistributed the livestock to the local loyalists. Undeterred, Mau Mau also targeted loyalist informants for elimination. In Fort Hall a district officer reported:

There was one murder of an old man at Ruathia; he was chopped in two halves because he had given evidence against Mau Mau in Court at Fort Hall. Further down the road the whole family of a Chief's retainer had been murdered because the retainer had given evidence, and down in the river below Gituge we found the corpse of an African Court Process Server who had likewise been strangled for informing against Mau Mau.<sup>21</sup>

Other attacks were against loyalist witnesses slated to testify against Mau Mau in local courts. Several such potential witnesses were hacked to death, burned inside their huts, or they simply disappeared.<sup>22</sup> Then came the infamous Lari Massacre of March 1953, during which ninety-seven loyalists, most of whom were members of Chief Luka's family, were slaughtered. Within a month, the colonial government armed some 20 percent of the

Home Guard with shotguns and provided them with uniforms and rations. Major General Hinde recruited Colonel Philip Morcombe and appointed him commander of the Home Guard. Eventually, nearly the entire corps of Kikuyu Home Guard, numbering some fifteen thousand in early 1953, would be armed with precision weapons or spears and outfitted with uniforms and easily recognizable silver armbands. Hinde also insisted that the Home Guard should come under the day-to-day command of European officers, or district officers, Kikuyu Guard. Many of these officers were recruited directly from the ranks of the British settlers; others were career colonial servants. Thus those in day-to-day charge of the Home Guard were not trained military personnel but local settlers out of the Kenya Regiment or career colonial officers, most of whom were quite junior.

One such junior officer was J. A. Rutherford, who in 1954 took it upon himself to compile a history of the Kikuyu Guard and the Europeans responsible for its activities. Utterly disdainful of the oath takers, Rutherford and his fellow district officers were dedicated to maintaining the morale of the Home Guard, despite the fact that they knew the loyalists were routinely "pay[ing] off many old scores against Mau Mau."<sup>23</sup> The colonial government knew that loyalist fitna, or intrigue, was rampant in the reserves. Most colonial officers believed the loyalists were as justified as the British colonizers in brutalizing the Mau Mau. Rather than trying to stop loyalist predation, they worried more about keeping their Kikuyu supporters firmly on the side of the colonial government. Rutherford was hardly circumspect in pointing out how he and his fellow colonial officers supported the loyalists.

The District Officers in the field were quick to sense this feeling [ of low morale] and made it clear that the Government would have to take definite action to maintain the loyalty and aggressive spirit of the Guard. Action was soon taken. The Guard was told that its members would, when conditions improved, receive preference in every possible way and be considered before the masses who, by their oathing and obedience to Mau Mau ways would have to work their passage back to recognition. Words were not enough. The Guard was given material assistance in a number of ways. . . . The Guard was never paid because it was felt that would make them mercenaries whereas they were in fact engaged in eradicating a disease which afflicted the majority of their tribe. They were assisted in a number of ways; they were let off the Special Tax the tribe had to pay as its contribution to the costs of the Emergency. They were helped with the school fees of their children; they were given free issues of clothes from time to time. Where the battle did not allow any form of trade to be carried on, such as the export of wattle bark or charcoal, they only were given permits.<sup>24</sup>

In return for their active help in suppressing Mau Mau, the colonial government guaranteed the loyalists the best of everything—the biggest and most fertile plots of land, trading licenses, tax exemptions—not to mention *carte blanche* to settle old scores with their Mau Mau neighbors, even if that meant torturing and murdering them. Mau Mau were getting what they deserved, as O. H. Knight, a district officer in charge of the Kikuyu Guard in Kitale, made perfectly clear: "I have just been reading the unmentionable foulnesses of the Mau Mau oaths, and I can only say, in the words the Jews used against St. Paul, 'Away with such fellows from the earth, for it is not fit that they should live.'"25

By the spring of 1953 the Kikuyu loyalists were working side by side with British forces to cleanse the Kikuyu countryside of the Mau Mau scourge. The Home Guard had become an officially recognized armed unit, fighting on behalf of the colonial government, which needed these loyalists to defeat Mau Mau in the reserves. Together with members of the Kenya Police Reserve, the Kenya Regiment, the King's African Rifles, British military forces, and officers from the Administration, the Home Guard joined in launching the screening campaign that so terrorized the suspected Mau Mau population in the Kikuyu reserves and the White Highlands. Ostensibly, the British forces were in Central Province to hunt down the armed guerrillas operating in and near the forests. But in practice little distinction was made between the Mau Mau forest fighters and the civilian population. They were all Mau Mau savages, and treated as such. In southern Kiambu the Kenya Regiment launched a murderous campaign from its post in Thigio, near the Rift Valley escarpment. Farther north, in what was then called Fort Hall (today Murang'a District), there were numerous massacres like the one at Kiruara in November 1952. In 1953 a series of yet more assaults was launched against the civilian population at the hands of the British-led forces. Thousands of young men, both white and black, cut their battle teeth in the Kikuyu reserves—men like Idi Amin, whose King's African Rifles company had been dispatched from nearby Uganda to fight in the war. Then in 1954 came the massacre after the Mau Mau attack at Kandara, in the heart of Fort Hall District. Once the battle was over, the "British security forces just went crazy," recalled one woman who survived. "They had stripped the local people naked and started beating them. Some were led off and shot; others were executed right there. Later, the whites ordered them buried beneath the road and tarmaced it over again. But for a long time you could see the dried blood that had oozed to the surface and out of the sides."26

Similar episodes unfolded in Nyeri District. In March 1954 the King's African Rifles massacred a reported twenty-two civilians—an event that apparently led to a court-martial, though the relevant files still remain sealed in Britain's Public Record Office.<sup>27</sup> In many locations, the wives and mothers of the Mau Mau guerrillas were often targeted by the British security forces. When Molly Wairimu was awakened in the early morning hours to the sound of rifle butts breaking open her door, she knew she had been singled out. "There were many young British soldiers and some African soldiers as well," she later recalled. She then went on, describing the events that followed.

They informed me that they had just killed my husband at a place called Muumbuchi, and then they started beating me. They were using their gun butts to hit me. One would hit me, and the blow would throw me to the other, who would hit me and throw me to the next. Nobody cared about where they were hitting me. I was beaten until I was confused and I didn't care anymore if they killed me. My two-year-old son, who had been woken up by the noise and my screams, ran to me, passing between the legs of the soldiers. As I was being thrown by the blows, from one soldier to the next, my son was trying to hide himself between my legs. They were then shouting at me, telling me that they were giving me the independence that my husband had gone to get for me. They did not seem to care that there was a small child, scared to death and screaming his head off. As I was being thrown from one soldier to the next, my son fell down and was trampled by the frenzied soldiers. . . . I was beaten so much that my body had grown numb, until I could no longer feel the pain. They then took me outside, and the last thing I saw was my son's [dead] body lying on the floor of my house.<sup>28</sup>

The collective devotion that these troops displayed in terrorizing the locals is striking. Many of the members of these forces had been officially instructed to hate. Throughout Central Province, men and women recalled drills that impressed a dehumanized image of Mau Mau into the minds of the British forces and encouraged them to take violent action. "They would parade up and down the main road here in their rows with their backpacks on," recalled a man from southern Kiambu. "The white man in charge would shout, 'Who are the bloody savages?' and the other white soldiers and their black *askaris* would respond, 'Mau Mau.' He would then say, 'What are your orders?' and they would reply, 'Kill them.'<sup>29</sup>

But this state-sanctioned terror hardly eliminated Mau Mau from the reserves. The local populations had established, and through all the terror continued to operate, an intricate supply line to the Mau Mau guerrillas in the surrounding Mount Kenya and Aberdares forests. Food, ammunition,

intelligence, medical supplies, and clothing were all collected and disbursed to the forest fighters. Prearranged sites, or *postas*, as many former Mau Mau adherents called them, were the distribution method of choice, though there were other far riskier handoffs. In some instances, women would wrap bullets around the thighs of their infants, tie the young children onto their backs with a cloth, and make a delivery to the forest edge. Older children, too, were used as conduits. Many were scouts, collecting information and passing it to the forest fighters through a relay system. As one man who was ten at the start of the war recalled, "We would run around chasing our hoops, looking like we were playing. But in fact we were listening all of the time and knew how to convey information to the fighters in the forest. Sometimes we were given guns and ammunition to take to them because the British officers didn't usually suspect that children like ourselves would be carrying these things."<sup>30</sup> On other occasions, the guerrillas might come in the middle of the night demanding supplies. The owner of the targeted homestead had no choice but to comply, despite the fact that such an encounter put everyone in jeopardy.

Oathing also continued. Despite tightened surveillance, Mau Mau adherents in the reserves organized nighttime oathing ceremonies, often indoctrinating the recently arrived repatriates whom the colonial government had forcibly removed from the White Highlands, and elsewhere, at the start of the war. Even if those coming to the reserves had already joined the movement, their new neighbors took no chances. A homestead would be chosen for the oathing, and young children would be left outside to scout the perimeter for Home Guards or British patrols. Inside, with the requisite banana leaves and sacrificial goat, the oath administrator would begin. Though there were variations in the ritual process, it was invariably punctuated by political instructions, the meaning of which were clear—at least according to those who took the oath. Muringo Njooro was among those who were indoctrinated during these upheavals, and, according to her recollection, the oath administrator led them through the ceremony where they ingested the meat and blood of the slaughtered goat. After the ceremony, she said,

[we were] told that we were fighting for our land, the land of the Kikuyu, which had been taken by the white people who had taken it for themselves. They could do whatever they wished with the land. A white man could come and declare land for miles as his, without having to ask for anybody's permission or buying it from us. If you as a Kikuyu happened to graze on that land the white man declared as his, you could be beaten or killed. That was where the anger started. . . . We could see that we were being op-

pressed, because when something belonging to you had been taken by someone else and then you are treated like slaves on the land that once was yours, you're bound to feel angry about it, aren't you?<sup>31</sup>

The step-up in oath-taking reflected the hardening ideological battle lines of the war. There continued to be a sizable minority of Kikuyu Christians who refused to take the oath. "It was not because we disagreed with the principles of Mau Mau," one such devout Christian later recalled. "It's just that we had taken the blood of Christ, so taking the blood of the goat would have been blasphemous."<sup>32</sup> Mau Mau adherents often dealt swiftly with these Christians, though not without cause—at least according to the oath takers. "We generally left the Christians alone," recalled one forest fighter. "But if they informed on us, we would kill them and sometimes cut out their tongues. We had no choice. If they had just kept quiet, *we* would not have bothered them. But you know, it was impossible for them to be neutral. The British would not allow it."<sup>33</sup>

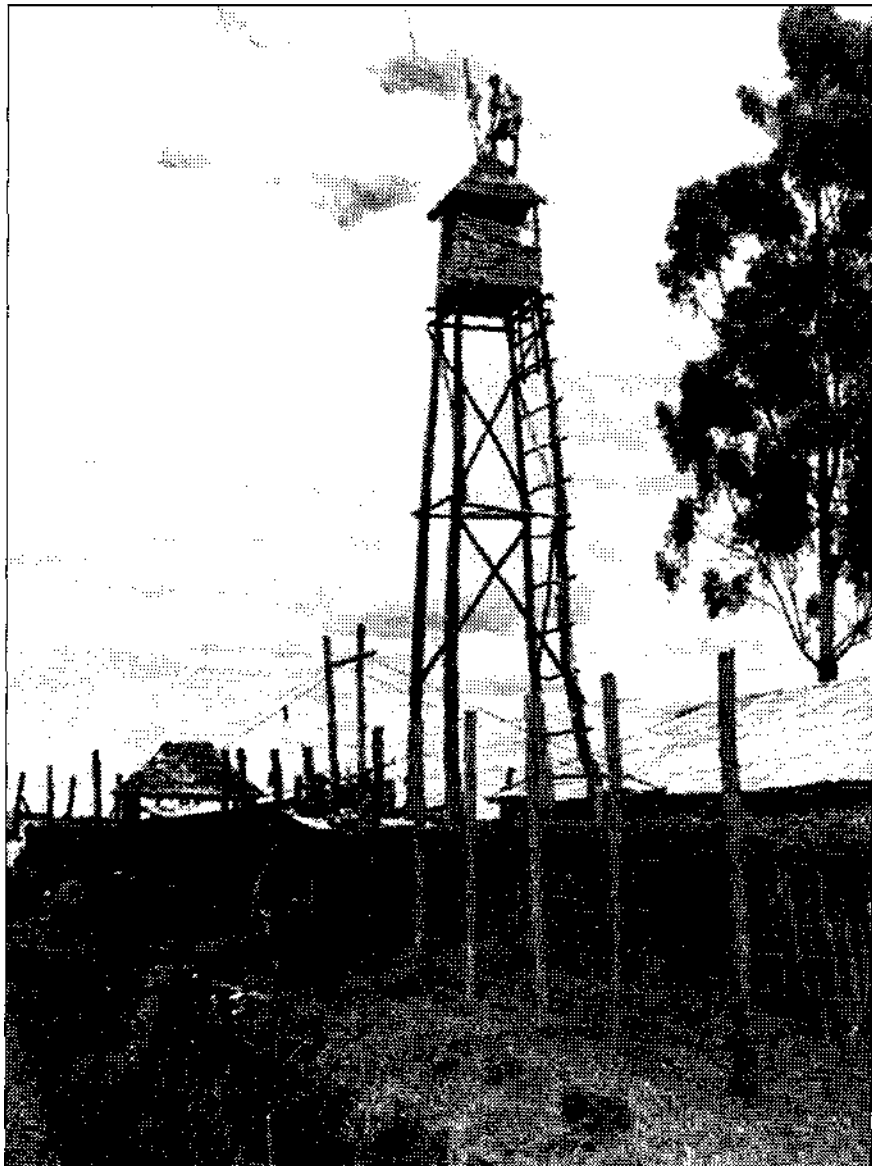
Then there were those oath takers who became, in the language of the time, *migaru*, or turncoats. The fear of the colonial government or the temptation of material gain, or both, compelled some of these Mau Mau adherents to defect and join the ranks of the Home Guard. As the war progressed, scores of poor Kikuyu fought actively against their former Mau Mau comrades as loyalists enforcing British law and order. There were men like Frederick Kinyanjui who, with no land of his own, decided to give up and join Chief Mathea's Home Guard unit in Kiambu. "It was because of the beating I received, and the pain of seeing my wife being beaten until she miscarried what would have been our firstborn baby," he said. "I decided to confess in order to save my life, to have a chance of getting other children. I would have died without leaving any children."<sup>34</sup>

But few gave in during the early years of the war. To break Mau Mau support in the reserves, the colonial government continually turned up the heat. First came forced communal labor. When this was not enough, Baring ordered collective punishments and the further confiscation of property and land. According to Emergency Regulations, the governor could issue Native Land Rights Confiscation Orders, whereby "each of the persons named in the Schedule . . . participated or aided in armed or violent resistance against the forces of law and order" and therefore had his land confiscated. Additionally, colonial officers in the Kikuyu districts could seize livestock and other items, like bicycles, from suspected Mau Mau sympathizers. By early 1954 tens of thousands of cattle, goats, and sheep were taken and, according to many former Mau Mau adherents, never returned.<sup>35</sup> In the North Tetu Division of Nyeri District, for example, Wachehu

Magayu later recalled: "The British officer would come with the Home Guards and take our animals, calling us the bloody Mau Mau. They said that our cows were getting their *wiyathi* [independence], and that we would get ours if we weren't careful. But there was nothing that was going to get me to give up. The British took our land, and we wanted our freedom back, and I had taken the oath and was prepared to die for it."<sup>36</sup>

Magayu Kiama never expected to survive screening. Facedown in a pool of his own blood, Magayu raised his head, only to be kicked in the face again and finally knocked unconscious by one of the Home Guards in Aguthi Location, in Nyeri District. When he came to, he was naked and slumped over in a ditch of cold, insect-infested water.<sup>37</sup> Here he was left to await more screening in a *ndaki*, or pit, inside one of the Home Guard posts that had sprung up all over the Kikuyu reserves. Initially, these posts were an easy target for Mau Mau attacks, because they were poorly designed and sited by the chiefs. After 1953 Baring's government overhauled the posts, and they became the physical symbols of loyalist power in the reserves. Magayu likened the one in his location to a fortress. The post was surrounded by a huge trench filled with wooden spikes, the high walls were laced with barbed wire, and a watchtower soared above the rest of the structure (a trademark for all of the posts throughout the Kikuyu reserves). Magayu also recalled several buildings within the post: a large courtyard, the same place where he had first been beaten, and a long row of individual cells where the *ndaki* was located. He remained in his cell for nearly ten days and was screened daily by the Home Guards and a European officer before finally being sent to detention.

Magayu, like thousands of other Mau Mau suspects, was picked up and brought to the post for screening, with the specific objective of extracting a confession and intelligence. There was, however, a callousness in the behavior of the white and black interrogators that exceeded the mere objectives of war. Few escaped the Home Guard posts, whatever the age or gender. Undoubtedly, the screening task was massive, and to some degree the loyalists and the handful of overseeing colonial officers had to have been overwhelmed by the sheer numbers they were required to screen. Yet the use of sadistic screening techniques reported by numerous survivors and other eyewitnesses suggests that the loyalist Home Guards and their white superiors took perverse pleasure in their various physical assaults on Mau Mau suspects. Word quickly spread among the locals about what awaited them in the Home Guard posts, and many struggled fiercely to stay out. Living in Mathira at the start of the Emergency, Ndiritu Goro remem-



Home Guard post and watchtower in Kianjogu village, Nyeri District

bers the scene in late 1953 at the gate of the post in his location: "I held on to a fence post with both my hands, and refused to go. The Home Guards pried my fingers from the post and overpowered me. We were headed to where Ngotho's dead body was; they had just shot him dead. When we neared the place, Allan, the headman, loaded his gun, ready to shoot me."<sup>38</sup> Unlike Ngotho, Ndiritu lived. Another headman named Kiana intervened,



though his reasons were not entirely sympathetic. He wanted additional information and realized Ndiritu was more valuable alive than dead.

The loyalists' violent anger was not solely reserved for screening sessions in the Home Guard posts but was also expressed all over the markets and homesteads of Kikuyuland. There were instances where all pretense of intelligence gathering was dropped and retribution took on a naked and brutal face. When Mau Mau forces murdered one of Senior Chief Njiiri's sons in Fort Hall in early 1953, the consequences for the local Mau Mau population were devastating. For most members of the Administration, the senior chief epitomized colonial loyalty; he was their darling who ruled over the most substantial island of Mau Mau resistance in Fort Hall's biggest location, Location 2. J. A. Rutherford praised him endlessly, and Frank Loyd, Fort Hall's district commissioner at the time, later recalled, "Senior Chief Njiiri was a bedrock for colonial values. We needed more people like him; he was a true example and leader of loyalist forces."<sup>39</sup>

Among the local population, however, the senior chief was known largely for two things: his wives—he had over sixty of them—and his cruelty. When his son was killed by General Kago, one of the legendary Mau Mau guerrillas fighting in the Aberdares, he unleashed his rage. Kago and his forest gang had made their attack not far from the village of Mununga, near the forest edge. Within a few days the senior chief and the district officer in charge of the local Home Guard entered Mununga with several hundred Home Guards from Njiiri's stronghold of Kinyona. They were not, however, seeking to screen the locals for knowledge about Kago or the assassination. Instead they told the men, all of whom had already been forced for several months to dig a trench between their village and the forest, to put down their tools and make their way to the market. Before many of them could reach the market square, they saw smoke coming from the surrounding huts. The Home Guards were burning everything in sight: homes, crops, bicycles. Then the gunshots began. Everyone scattered, but the Home Guards had formed a cordon around the village, and no one could escape. One eyewitness, Njuguna Robinson Mwangi, who was a teenager at the time, recalled the massacre (as he termed it).

When the first round of shooting was over, the European Home Guard leader called each Home Guard one by one and asked him how many bullets he had used. He then replaced the used bullets with new ones. He then instructed [the Home Guards] to start beating without using their guns, so they started using their *pangas* [machetes] and clubs. My father was beaten mercilessly and could not walk. . . . So many people were killed. The Home

Guard did not want to pass over the dead, so they tried to walk around them, but they couldn't, there were just too many. They then called all of the survivors to the market square, where they were being paraded one by one in front of the shops. When a person reached a certain point, he was just shot dead. I was in that very line. I saw a small passageway between the shops and took a chance. I ran and they shot at me, but they missed. I hid in the forest, and when I came out there was nothing left, just ash and smoke where our village used to be.<sup>40</sup>

Other survivors of Mununga recall similar stories of Njiiri's revenge. Along with Njuguna, Karuma Karumi and Paul Kimanja vividly remember the day, and the corpses that remained.<sup>41</sup> The Home Guard dumped several hundred of them in the communal latrine, where "no one could dare to bury them."<sup>42</sup> In fact, some of the bodies remain there today, under a row of small shops. The rest of the dead were left exposed, to be consumed by hyenas and other local wildlife. Many survivors believed the massacre was meant as an example for other Mau Mau supporters in the district. News of it spread, and even some fifty years later Kikuyu men and women from throughout the region remembered what happened at Mununga and insisted that other forms of British colonial revenge were widespread. "Mununga was not an isolated incident," recalled Muthoni Waciuma. "There was Kiruara, the massacre after the battle of Kandara, and many other such attacks by the colonialists and the Home Guards happening all over the Kikuyu reserves"<sup>43</sup>

In the early years of the Emergency two men working for the British government in Fort Hall were renowned for enforcing colonial control. The first was Sam Githu, better known as Sam Speaker because of his rapid speech. Later it was said that his nickname took on another meaning: Speaker could make anyone talk. Also called the "horror of horrors," the "face of the devil," and more commonly "pure evil," he was a loyalist from Chomo in Fort Hall who had risen through the ranks of the local colonial government. At the start of the Emergency, Speaker was an assistant district officer who appeared to occupy a multitude of roles other than his official one of clerical staff. Working alongside him was a young British settler nicknamed YY by the local Kikuyu. Around twenty years of age at the start of the Emergency, YY and his reign of terror were legendary from Fort Hall all the way through to northern Nyeri District, a distance stretching some fifty miles. Like the sons of many settlers, YY joined the Kenya Police Reserve when the war began and from the start advocated harsh justice for any civilians suspected of Mau Mau sympathies. He was a

Napoleonic figure who more than made up for his diminutive stature with his imperial bravado. Dressed in a police uniform complete with a black leather sash and hat pulled down closely over his eyes, YY walked carrying a riding whip, which he snapped in time with his pace.

In 1953 Speaker and YY moved throughout Fort Hall, helping direct massive screening parades and individual interrogation sessions. In some instances they personally disposed of suspects, often making an example of them for the rest of the Kikuyu population. On one occasion in early 1953 they brought two suspects to the Kandara police station. Prior to the Emergency, the building had been the dispensary and home of the local clinician and his family; when Mau Mau started, the police took over the dispensary space but allowed the man and his family to remain in their attached living quarters. From their window, the two daughters had a perfect view from which to witness what went on at the police station when YY arrived with two Mau Mau suspects. Muthoni Waciuma, the younger of the two sisters, recalled:

We were standing right next to our fireplace, resting our chins on the bricks and looking directly at the police station; it was just a few feet away. We then saw Kamiraru [YY] pull up with two men. They took the first man and hooked him up to the engine of the Land Rover while it was still running and his body just shook all over. But they weren't finished with him. . . . Kamiraru and some other Kikuyu Home Guard took him over to the generator that was in the back of the police station's garage. They then hooked him up to this generator and electrocuted him. After that, Kamiraru and Speaker turned to the other man, who was still standing there. They tied him to the back of the Land Rover and made him run behind them as they drove off. He was running, and of course he falls. They drove him until he died in pieces. That was being done to really show people that if they didn't confess and give up Mau Mau that that would be their fate. I have never seen anything so cruel. And we were scared stiff, so we did everything we could not to have something like that done to ourselves. You just kept quiet. It was really a traumatic time. . . . There was so much suffering. People will not believe that we have survived such things. A lot of atrocities like this one were done."

This example typifies the priority given by white and black alike to inflicting punishment and suffering upon the population of Mau Mau suspects, and the extent to which the brutality was intentionally committed in plain view. 'While some screening was conducted behind closed doors, it was also a public spectacle, empowering the perpetrators and terrorizing the civilian population.



Local police preparing to screen Mau Mau suspects, November 1952

Baring generally refused to do anything to rein in the Home Guards' sadistic tactics, arguing along with his officers in the field that wrist slapping or prosecutions would undermine loyalists' morale. However, in one rare instance six Home Guards were tried in late 1954 for brutally forcing confessions and for summarily executing a Mau Mau suspect in the Ruthagati Home Guard post in Nyeri District. Presiding over the case, Judge A. L. Cram convicted headman Eliud Muriu and the five other Home Guards of murder. In explaining his verdict, Cram deplored the system that permitted the Home Guards to arrest anyone at will, torture the individual until extracting a confession, and then either try the victim solely on the basis of the forced confession or use the same confession as a pretext for sending the suspect to a detention camp. The men on trial were guilty of not just murder; they were committing atrocities on what Cram believed to be a daily basis. He focused particularly on the Home Guard post at Ruthagati, which he said resembled the "stronghold of a robber baron," and elaborated that

it was a barbed wire enclosure surrounded by a staked moat and provided with a drawbridge—a primitive keep, in fact. The sort of place from which prisoners could not readily escape, and it was presided over by [Headman Muriu] and a team of men who had one function in life and that was to

extort statements or confessions by fear and if necessary by violence from every hapless person sent or brought there, innocent or guilty. . . . The reign of terror is well advanced [in this area].<sup>45</sup>

Predictably, Cram absolved the district commissioner from any wrongdoing, remarking that "the DC states he made it amply clear that his instructions were that no violence of any sort was to be used in extracting confessions."<sup>46</sup> But just days before Cram handed down his verdict, G. Hill, the district officer in charge of Eliud Muriu and the rest of the Home Guard at Ruthagati, wrote a memorandum denouncing the prosecution of the six loyalists, arguing, "The conclusion is that the K.G. [Kikuyu Guard] may consider it better to join the Mau Mau and reactivate the fighting war than stay in a post and be liable to serious charge."<sup>47</sup> Far more damning, though, was his argument that the colony's attorney general, John Whyatt, had "no personal knowledge or experience of the physical side of the war"—implying that physical violence was justified given the nature of Mau Mau.<sup>48</sup> Hill well knew what was going on in the Home Guard posts, and it would have been likely that he informed his superior officer, the district commissioner. Throughout the Emergency, variations on Hill's argument, that only those in the field truly understood the mitigating circumstances of colonial violence, would be used time and again to justify brutality and avoid prosecution.

Screening abuses were also being perpetrated in nearby Tanganyika, where a British judge adamantly supported the view that colonial violence was justified during Mau Mau. In October 1953, Governor Baring dispatched Brian Hayward and twenty-one African loyalists to the Northern Province of Tanganyika, to which thousands of Kikuyu had earlier migrated after the British colonial incursion. Tanganyika's governor Edward Twining greatly feared that Mau Mau would spread to his colony. Hayward and his men came to screen local Kikuyu and repatriate any of the so-called bad hats back to Kenya, where they would be detained. All of nineteen years old, Hayward was the son of a British settler in Kenya who had been steeped in local white beliefs about Mau Mau. Baring picked Hayward for his firsthand experience in screening. He was already a temporary district officer in charge of screening in the Kikuyu reserves and had been sent on a brief tour of the screening centers in the Rift Valley (like Subukia and Bahati) before leaving. In less than a week, Governor Twining reported to the Colonial Office that "rumours were heard that the screening teams were being very rough with the Kikuyu, and a European farmer—Colonel Minnerv—confirmed these rumours." Unlike Baring, who refused

to follow up on such allegations, Twining ordered an immediate, official investigation that revealed

violence, in the form of whipping on the soles of the feet, burning with lighted cigarettes and tying leather thongs round the neck and dragging the victims along the ground, had been used on the interrogated. Between 170 and 200 were interrogated, of whom at least 32 were badly injured, and others received some injury. Hayward himself took an active part in the chastisement of the Africans and is said to have threatened to shoot one man after pointing his revolver at him."

Hayward and ten African members of the screening team pleaded guilty on all twenty counts of assault occasioning "actual bodily harm." Most revealing, though, were the judge's summary remarks. In passing sentence, he told the courtroom, "It is easy to work oneself up into a state of pious horror over these offenses, but they must be considered against their background. All the accused were engaged in seeking out inhuman monsters and savages of the lowest order."<sup>50</sup> He fined Hayward one hundred pounds, which was paid by a local group of settlers, and sentenced him to three months' hard labor, which Hayward performed by doing clerical work in a hotel. The loyalist screeners were fined one hundred shillings and sentenced to a day of imprisonment.<sup>51</sup>

By and large, any limits placed on screening techniques were introduced independently by a handful of white colonial officers or, occasionally, a Kikuyu Home Guard. Early in 1953, Magayu Kiama was accused by the local Kamatimu, or Home Guards, of harboring Mau Mau fighters in his home. He recalled "two white men and several African soldiers" burning down his house. Magayu continued: "My wife was shot. A lady visitor was shot, and several suspected Mau Mau fighters were shot. Their bodies were burned in the inferno. I do not know who came to take my children away, or my wife. I was in shock, and I spent the night outside my burned-out homestead. In the morning, the police came for me, and I was taken to the chief's camp, where I stayed several days." Like other suspects held there, Magayu was slated for summary execution. A white officer intervened just in time. He reprimanded the chief, according to Magayu, saying, "I had not been at fault, because it just happened that Mau Mau came to my house to demand sheep for slaughter. . . . That was what I had told [the chief]. I could have been killed, were it not for [this white officer]. . . [But still] I had been badly beaten and could hardly walk. The Home Guard in charge lied to the white officer that I was sick. to hide the fact that I had been beaten."<sup>52</sup>

In Pascasio Macharia's case, he was picked up by the Kenya Police and Home Guard in Nyeri and shipped to his home location in Fort Hall District, where he befriended a Kamba guard who then saved his life. At the Kahuro camp, he remembers,

I was removed from the truck. The order was given by the headman from my place, who said that I was to be beaten because I was the worst person. The *askaris* set on me and beat me until I fell unconscious, and they left me for dead. When they locked up the others, I was left outside, but some guards were there, just in case I regained consciousness. I came to . . . and looked around, and I noticed someone smoking. I asked him for a cigarette. It was a Kamba *askari*. I then asked him for a drink of water, and he gave me one. . . . Just before dawn, the guards who had been guarding me wanted to put me into a pit that was close by. They dragged me toward it, but fortunately, the same Kamba who had given me the cigarette appeared and told them to leave me alone.<sup>53</sup>

But Pascasio's troubles were not over. He was then sent to the office of the Criminal Investigation Department, or CID, where local Home Guards and a white officer interrogated him some more. "Things were bad there; they were exterminating a lot of people," Pascasio said. Luckily, his uncle was a friend of the headman, who agreed, for two crates of beer, to spare Pascasio's life. Instead of a single bullet to the head, the local execution style of choice, according to Pascasio, he was transferred to a detention camp.<sup>54</sup>

Had Baring wanted to control the abuses, he would have had a difficult time imposing his authority on the diverse multitude who had a hand in screening. Interrogators included the European settlers, the district commissioners and their officers in the White Highlands and reserves, the Home Guard, a separate phalanx of security forces under Erskine's command, as well as the Special Branch and the Criminal Investigation Department, who were effectively the colony's gestapo, according to one member of the force.<sup>55</sup> The local colonial press, generally sympathetic to the forces fighting Mau Mau, particularly in the early days of the Emergency, published an article titled "Law and the People," in which it raised the matter: "That any member of the public held in custody as a suspect can be handed over to a body which has no standing or statutory duty in the investigation of crime, for the purpose of extracting confessions or evidence that the police have failed to obtain by normal method of examination, is something which should cause very real concern." 56

The Kenya Police, of which the Kenya Police Reserve and the Special

Branch were parts, were a special category. Many whites in the police force were a lowbrow corps of recruits who, in keeping with their racist upbringing, routinely roughed up the local Africans. With the Emergency, the ranks of the police swelled more than twofold, with white officers like YY coming either from within the settler population, or from a pool of British recruits with few career alternatives other than a post in remote Kenya, or from Rhodesia and South Africa, where similar law-and-order policies were applied to the so-called native populations. Side by side with the whites were African recruits, most of whom came from remote parts of Kenya and who were untrained in policing policies. These new white and black policemen were wholly unprepared for the Emergency situation in Kenya. Even Baring remarked that "the members of the Kenya Police Reserve were tough, that the Police Force was rotten."<sup>57</sup>

Many Europeans in the police force felt entitled to any means at their disposal to fight the war against Mau Mau. Interrogating men and women as they pleased, they created among the Kikuyu a terror of capricious violence. In his autobiographical account of the Emergency, William Baldwin candidly recalls the callousness of the Kenya Police. Himself a member of the Kenya Police Reserve, Baldwin was a nomadic young American seeking adventure in Africa. He seems to have found it in Kenya, where he proudly worked to rid the colony of the Mau Mau baboons, as he called them, freely admitting to murdering Mau Mau suspects in cold blood during eight different interrogations. Some he slowly killed with a knife while forcing other suspects to watch.<sup>58</sup> Former Mau Mau suspects living as far south as Thigio in Kiambu District and as far north as the northern edge of Nyeri District, a hundred miles away, confirmed scenarios similar to the young American's account, leaving little doubt that his behavior was typical. John Nottingham, the young British district officer who was outspoken both during and after the Emergency about his colleagues' behavior, underscores this point. In a 1987 interview for Grenada television's *End of Empire* documentary, Nottingham emphasized:

I think there was nothing that the local Europeans in these various organizations didn't do. . . . I've seen old men kicked into my office in Nyeri by settler sons who are very surprised that I should feel this was the wrong thing to do. The only crime the gentleman had committed was to take an oath. I've seen KPR [Kenya Police Reserve] in charge of, for example, Kiriaini police station in Murang'a District, just put eight people against a wall and had them shot. . . . There were really no limits that they wouldn't go to.<sup>59</sup>



Police brutality during screening and throughout everyday life was hardly a secret in Kenya or in Britain. In March 1953 Tony Cross, a temporary British officer posted at Gekondi Police Station in Nyeri, sent a letter to his former colleagues at Streatham Police Station in South London bragging about what he termed the "Gestapo stuff" that was going on in the ranks of the police force and Home Guard. Soon picked up by the press in London, the letter made the headlines in the *South London Press* and the *Daily Worker*.

We have formed 3 home guards on this manor, each about 50 strong—and they get out and bring in the information—some are pretty good—then we go out and raid, and knock a few off—don't ask me why—just because the home guard say they are bad men—of course some are wanted—anyways after persuasion they usually confess something. It's not uncommon for people to die in the cells—these home guards are unmerciful bast—s. Since I've been here I inspect all prisoners brought in—and if they are a bit dubious I refuse to have 'em—get called to a dead body the next day—and proceed normally. The rule here is if you are on patrol and you find some men hiding in the bush—you call upon them to stop and if they don't—they are shot—or rather shot at—these boys I've got are such rotten shots they can't hit anything—so I grab the first bloke's rifle and have a go—anyway I've been giving them some intensive training and they are getting better now.<sup>60</sup>

Like Cross, other police officers offered accounts of brutality. In one case, Peter Bostock wrote that it was "quite common to shoot prisoners 'while [they were] trying to escape' " and that one officer had told him proudly that he "got nine of the swines [*sic*] in that way." After recalling various acts of terror, Bostock then went on to report, "I can truthfully say that only one act of cruelty towards a Kikuyu ever revolted me during my service in the Police. With two other Europeans I was questioning an old man. His answers were unsatisfactory. One of the white men set his dog at the old fellow. The animal got him to the ground, ripped open his throat, and started mauling his chest and arms. In spite of his screams, my companions [i.e., fellow police officers] just grinned. It was five minutes before the dog was called off. I can still hear that old man's screams. 61

Then there were the South African imports Heine and Van Zyl, two Special Branch officers who were known as particularly sadistic torturers, no small distinction given the situation in Kenya.<sup>62</sup> In fact, some British settlers nicknamed the Special Branch "Kenya's SS" because of its notoriety for torturing Mau Mau suspects behind closed doors. Nottingham highlights this police unit in his description of the screening camps.

When you come to what happened in the various camps, the screening camps, whether they were the local areas, the police stations or whether they were the bigger camps and so forth again there were very few limits that people seemed to observe. The Mau Mau Investigation Center at Embakasi outside Nairobi was nothing less than a torture area which used everything. And it was run by the Special Branch and I would say people were killed there without any news of this being allowed to escape or anything happening at all.<sup>63</sup>

There is little in the colonial record documenting what happened at the famous Mau Mau Investigation Center, the brainchild of the Special Branch. If there were records, they have been destroyed or are still to be declassified. "This [Mau Mau Investigation Center] is where we liked to send the worst gang members when we captured them sent to the forests," recalled one settler who had joined the ranks of the Kenya Regiment sent to the Aberdares. "We knew the slow method of torture [at the Mau Mau Investigation Center] was worse than anything we could do. Special Branch there had a way of slowly electrocuting a Kuke—they'd rough up one for days. Once I went personally to drop off one gang member who needed special treatment. I stayed for a few hours to help the boys out, softening him up. Things got a little out of hand. By the time I cut his balls off he had no ears, and his eyeball, the right one, I think, was hanging out of its socket. Too bad, he died before we got much out of him."<sup>64</sup>

Rhoderick Macleod, a British settler, member of the Kenya Police Reserve, and brother of Iain Macleod, the future colonial secretary, summed up the attitude of many members of Kenya's police force and the Administration in the reserves when he commented: "[The Emergency] was a state of anarchy, in which the book did not work. It was as simple as that."<sup>65</sup> Worse, everyone seemed to know about colonial violence and to condone it, at least tacitly if not explicitly. Fitz de Souza, a respected attorney in Nairobi and defender of Jomo Kenyatta, remembers that a consensus of British political leaders in the colony endorsed a shoot-to-kill policy: "[The idea of shooting people on the spot] was quite, quite, quite widely spread. I was surprised to find that many reasonable educated people, some of them in fact later became members of Parliament and to a very responsible position in independent Kenya, supported this idea of arresting a hundred people from nowhere, just shooting thirty, and sending the seventy to tell the tale of who was the boss."<sup>66</sup>

Screening was not only a way to terrorize the Mau Mau population. Though hardly a streamlined system even by the end of the Emergency,

screening made it possible for the colonial government to amass huge files of information about Mau Mau activities. Torture, or fear of it, compelled oath takers to give details about their oath-taking ceremonies, including names or revealing the locations of the caches of arms or food supplies for Mau Mau fighting the forest war. Some of this intelligence was accurate and some pure fiction, fabricated on the spot by Mau Mau suspects trying to save themselves. The colonial government nevertheless used the information to convict some thirty thousand Kikuyu men and women of Mau Mau crimes and sentence them to prison, many for life. "Far from being concerned about possible disregard of human rights," Cyril Dunn, a correspondent for the *Observer*, would later comment, "Europeans here [in Kenya] are apt to argue that British notions of justice are inapplicable. A letter this week in a local newspaper is typical. 'It is stark nonsense: the writer says, 'to treat these rebels as legitimate belligerents, and to apply to them all the subtleties and intricacies of British law.' "67

The vast majority of Mau Mau cases were heard in Emergency assize courts, where due process was suspended, the defense had little if any access to the evidence in the case, and the defendants themselves were often tried en masse and identified for the court not by name but by large numbers hanging around their necks. Along with those convicted and imprisoned, the makeshift court operations in place throughout the Emergency found over one thousand Mau Mau suspects guilty of capital offenses and sent them to the gallows. This is a startling number of executions, given the often slim evidence offered by the prosecution. However, the suspects tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death by the Kenyan system of justice comprised only a very small percentage of those who ultimately would die at the hands of the British colonial government during the Emergency.

The forces unleashed by the screening campaign revealed a darker side of British colonialism than had earlier been seen in Kenya. Virulent racism was certainly endemic to the colony, as was a profound righteousness—a sense that the British were morally superior not only to black Africans but to all other races as well. Kenya's so-called native laws were already notoriously harsh, and would become even more so in the years to come. There were even massacres during the early years of colonization, like the one Richard Meinertzhagen boasts about, in which some one hundred Kikuyu were murdered as the interior was opened up for British settlement." But what happened during the early years of Mau Mau was different. The dedication to torture and killing during screening operations stands apart. The ubiquity of screening from the rural areas to the urban center of Nairobi

meant that even those in the colonial government and the local European community of settlers and missionaries who were not directly involved with suppressing Mau Mau had to have been aware of the brutality of the screening process.

The British colonizers continuously defined themselves and their Mau Mau antagonists as polar opposites. How better to save Britain's civilization in Kenya than to eradicate the elements who threatened the colony's very foundation? Like the Jews in Nazi Germany, the Mau Mau had few defenders, except for the small minority of Asian lawyers like Fitz de Souza and Sheikh Amin. Today, when reflecting on the number of Mau Mau suspects killed from the start of screening in late 1952 to the end of detention in 1961, de Souza says: "By the end I would say there were several hundred thousand killed. One hundred easily, though more like two to three hundred thousand. All these people just never came back when it was over. This was a form of ethnic cleansing on the part of the British government, and there is no doubt about that in my mind."<sup>69</sup>

From the start the colonial government fought fiercely to deny any wrongdoing in Kenya, and when caught red-handed, Governor Baring and Colonial Secretary Lyttelton cited mitigating circumstances. At the time, men and women did not talk in terms of guilt or responsibility, because their crimes in the screening centers, police stations, and Home Guard posts were not crimes as far as they were concerned. Mau Mau forced them to fight violence with violence. In effect, they were compelled to do the unthinkable when confronted by the barbaric behavior of the Kikuyu oath takers. Casting themselves as hapless victims, rather than perpetrators of crimes, the British colonial agents sought to evoke sympathy, not condemnation. British reaction was hardly different from that of any other regime trying to face down accusations of wartime crimes. In his reflections on Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and Americans in Vietnam, Jan Philipp Reemtsma suggests: "The problem is that societies confronted with their own armies' war crimes often try to get rid of the problem, first by denying the existence of the crimes (it's unjust and insulting to be accused of having committed such crimes), or, if the crimes cannot be denied any longer, by lowering the standards. In both ways people try not to give up the correspondence between reality and self-image in order to be a 'civilized' society, even in war time."<sup>70</sup>

In the case of Mau Mau, the British colonial government was doubly determined, in accordance with colonial rhetoric, to maintain civilization's upper hand over the African savages. Civilization was, after all, the whole point of Britain being in Kenya in the first place. But if British settlers and those who acted on their behalf were as barbaric as Mau Mau, how could

Britain justify its continued presence in and exploitation of the colony? Even the newly arrived temporary officers and young brash settlers, or the Kenyan Cowboys, as the foreign journalists called them, believed to some degree in Britain's paternalistic ethos, or its civilizing mission. In the face of incontrovertible evidence to the contrary—for instance, the castration of a Mau Mau suspect—the British and their loyalist supporters maintained the illusion that their actions were the epitome of civilized behavior. It was as if by insisting loudly enough, and long enough, they could somehow revise the reality of their campaign of terror, dehumanizing torture, and genocide.

At the end of 1953, the Emergency was still in its early stages. Though screening was widespread, there were still but a few thousand detainees in the camps, and the barbed-wire villages had yet to be conceived. But violence against Mau Mau suspects during screening was so extreme, and so widely applied, that there could have been little doubt that it would spill over into the evolving Pipeline of detention camps that was now starting to take shape. The symbiosis between the bloodthirsty views of the British colonizers and the Kikuyu loyalists had already produced the conditions and the drive to destroy, quite literally, the Mau Mau. Although the detention camps in Kenya would never systematically aim to eliminate a whole population as did the Nazi death camps, the conditions were in place by 1953 to transform a fledgling camp system into a far broader locus of torture, hard labor, and killing. Protagonists in this setting were the tens of thousands of Mau Mau suspects who were dehumanized by the British even before they set foot in the camps. While enduring screening, men and women were often reduced to looking and smelling like the animals they were claimed to be. By relentlessly subjecting the minds and bodies of Mau Mau suspects to violence during screening, the British colonizers and their loyalist sympathizers were able to confirm in their own minds that the oath takers were subhuman and themselves paragons of civility.

## THE BIRTH OF BRITAIN'S GULAG



The purging of Mau Mau suspects in Nairobi during Operation Anvil

THE EVENTS OF APRIL 24, 1954, WOULD IRREVOCABLY CHANGE THE

detention camp system in Kenya and the lives of tens of thousands of Mau Mau suspects. On this day Britain's military forces, under the command of General Sir George Erskine, launched an ambitious operation to reclaim full colonial control over Nairobi by purging the city of nearly all Kikuyu living within its limits. Quite befittingly, the assault was called Operation Anvil.

In the early morning of Nairobi's "D-day"—as Anvil's launch was called—Erskine began deploying nearly twenty-five thousand security force members whose mission was to cordon off the city for a sector-by-sector purging of every African area.<sup>1</sup> The general took his cue from a similar "clean-up" conducted by the British military before the Second World War in the then Palestinian city of Tel Aviv, where the element of surprise was the key to its success. Likewise in Nairobi, the entire population—African, Asian, and European—was caught off-guard, and what happened next has been described as nothing short of "Gestapolike."<sup>2</sup> Loudspeakers affixed to military vehicles blared directives: pack one bag, leave the rest of

your belongings in your home, and exit into the streets peacefully. In some cases, the targets of the sweep had no time to pack. People were picked up on the street or at their places of work, or the security forces knocked their front doors down with swift kicks and rifle butts. All Africans were then taken to temporary barbed-wire enclosures, where employment identity cards were used to determine tribal affiliations. The Kikuyu, as well as the closely related Embu and Meru, were separated from the rest of the city's African population in preparation for on-the-spot, ad hoc screening,<sup>3</sup> while members of other ethnic groups were most likely released and returned to their homes or places of work.

Nelson Macharia was one of the thousands of Africans caught up in the purge. He had been working as a mechanic at an Asian car-repair shop in order to support his wife and children, who were living on a small plot of land in the reserve in Fort Hall. "I was arrested on April 24, 1954, at the garage where I worked," Nelson later recalled. "I had no time to collect any of my things, but I was lucky. When we arrived in the large place surrounded by coiled barbed wire in the middle of Nairobi, there were many people who had obviously been beaten and harassed. They were shaking from fear. When I saw them, I knew we were in trouble, though I had no idea the kind of trouble that lay ahead of us."<sup>4</sup> From there, he and the others were marshaled through a screening parade, where a Kikuyu loyalist—his identity protected by a hood, or *gakunia*—sealed a person's fate within a matter of seconds. As Nelson later explained:

There were many white police officers about, and I was made to pass in front of the *gakunia* behind the others, in a long file. The person inside the sack, which had holes made in it, would look at you, and if he nodded his head, that meant that he had recognized you [as a Mau Mau], and you would be whisked away by the white officers and put into the screened-in lorry with the rest of the *magaidi* [dangerous people]. But if he shook his head, it meant that he had not recognized you, and you would be set free for repatriation to the reserves. In my case, he nodded his head, and I was taken to Langata Screening Camp, where I was interrogated some more before I was sent to detention .5

Langata Screening Camp was the temporary destination for many of the Mau Mau suspects rounded up during Anvil. Like Nelson, Karue Kibicho was also taken there after he was removed from his home on River Road. Karue was typical of thousands of young Kikuyu men who had migrated to the city in the years prior to the Emergency. Born on the farm of *Bwana* Baker in the Rift Valley Province, he never knew life in the Kikuyu

reserves, living instead as a squatter on land that neither he nor his father ever had any chance of owning. "I felt like the world was closing in on me," Karue later recollected. "After the [ Second World] War things were getting worse for us on *Bwana* Baker's farm, and I knew I had to leave to find better work, so I went to Nairobi. It was the only place for me to go." But on April 24, he too was picked up. According to Karue and others, "the operation was carried out by only white police officers [security force members], whom we had nicknamed 'Johnnies'. . . They did everything like forcing us into the barbed-wire enclosures, they took our valuables, all the time calling us 'bloody Mau Mau: "<sup>6</sup> Eventually, he too walked through a screening parade, which, though carried out by a European officer rather than a Kikuyu loyalist shrouded in a *gakunia*, was just as capricious and deterministic as the one experienced by Nelson. Along with the eight other men with whom he had shared a room on River Road, Karue was taken to the bus station.

The former bus station . . . [was] near where the Hilton Hotel stands today. Coiled barbed wire had been used to surround the place. That was where we were divided according to our tribes. Everyone who was not Kikuyu, Embu, or Meru was taken away, whereas those who were Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru remained. Each of us then passed in front of a white officer, who scrutinized us without asking anything. He would then hand a person a card that was either red or white in color. There was nothing written on the cards; they were just blank. After getting the card, we would go to another white officer, who after noting the card's color would point us to different directions. Those who had white cards would be shown one way, while those holding red cards would be shown another. In my case, I was handed a red card, which I soon realized meant that I was to be detained. We were later loaded onto buses which took us to Langata Camp, where we were put into tented compounds. We knew we had been arrested because of our involvement with Mau Mau, because we were demanding our land and freedom. We did not have to be told.?

Dozens of people whom I interviewed had been picked up during Operation Anvil, and each one recalled similar moments of confusion, fear, and verbal and physical abuse. If they moved too slowly, or too quickly, they were beaten with clubs and rifle butts. If they spoke in the screening parades, they were often shipped directly to detention. If a Mau Mau suspect protested his rough handling, he would be hauled off and put in one of the "special police vehicles"; several of these suspects were never again seen.' Others remember the difficult separation of families—men being taken off in lorries for more screening at Langata, women and children



sent to different lines for repatriation back to the reserves. "It was an unimaginable time," recalled one Kikuyu man. "I was standing inside the lorry holding on to the screen that surrounded the whole vehicle, designed to keep us from escaping. I could see my people being abused by the 'Johnnies.' Then a team of hooded screeners passed by the vehicle and hissed at us. When the lorry pulled away, I could see the (Johnnies' looting the houses of those they had just picked up, taking the valuables left behind for themselves. The whole thing was just . . . God help me."<sup>9</sup>

Nairobi was the linchpin in Britain's military campaign against Mau Mau, and Erskine was determined to capture it once and for all. He firmly believed that "it had become the main Mau Mau supply base from which the terrorists obtained recruits, money, supplies and ammunition," and he was hardly alone in his sentiments.<sup>10</sup> There was an unusual consensus in the ranks of both the military and Baring's civilian government that the colony's capital was the nerve center for Mau Mau operations. Nearly three-quarters of the city's African male population of sixty thousand were Kikuyu, and most of these men, along with some twenty thousand Kikuyu women and children accompanying them, were allegedly either "active or passive supporters of Mau Mau."<sup>11</sup> According to British colonial officials, Nairobi was gripped by a "breakdown in respect for law and order," and Mau Mau adherents were murdering "loyal Kikuyu, Kikuyu-government-servants, suspected informers, and leading African personalities who were unsympathetic to the movement."<sup>12</sup> They were purported also to be perpetrating a host of other crimes, including armed robberies, the intimidation of potential witnesses, the levying of "protection money," and the organization of boycotts of government-run buses and European products. Worse, one of the British colonial government's greatest nightmares was becoming a reality: the Kikuyu were taking advantage of the tight living quarters of Africans in Nairobi to recruit members of other ethnic groups, particularly the Kamba, into the Mau Mau movement.<sup>13</sup>

Nearly two weeks later Erskine considered Operation Anvil largely finished. From the military's point of view, it was a complete success. A fortnight of relentless roundups, screenings, and deportations had cleansed Nairobi of all Kikuyu, except for those few who were considered "clean," had long-term contracts with European employers, and adequate housing within the city's limits. By the end of the operation and its mop-ups, Britain's security forces had sent over twenty thousand Mau Mau suspects for further screening at Langata Camp and deported nearly thirty thousand more back to the Kikuyu reserves, where the Administration would have to find some way of accommodating them.<sup>14</sup> Once the general's men had cleansed Nairobi and the surrounding areas of suspected Mau Mau

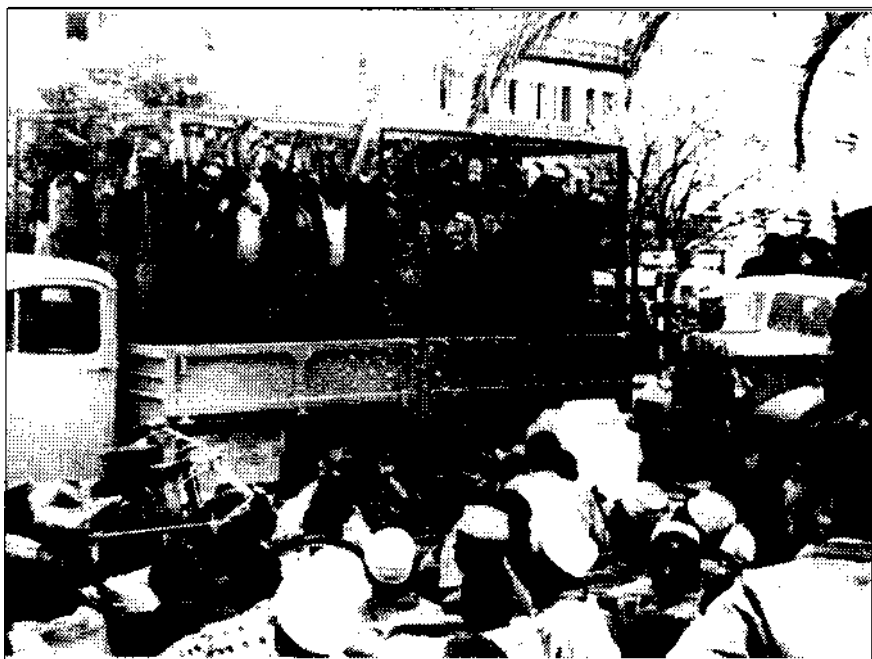
supporters, their job was finished. The responsibility of detaining the Mau Mau suspects and somehow getting them to acquiesce to British colonial authority rested with Governor Baring and ultimately with the colonial secretary.

It would be difficult to argue that the colonial government envisioned its own version of a gulag when the Emergency first started. Colonial officials in Kenya and Britain all believed that Mau Mau would be over in less than three months. They were prepared to handle a few thousand of the political detainees who were being held under Governor's Detention Orders, but as yet had no plans to incarcerate the countless other "lesser Mau Maus." Yet when the movement did not collapse with the arrest of its presumed leadership, or shrink at Britain's initial show of force, the colonial government had to rethink its plan. As the situation worsened, the harsh Emergency directives already in place began to seem inadequate.

Long before Anvil, Governor Baring knew a major crisis was brewing in the Kikuyu reserves. Before 1953 they were already overcrowded and on the verge of ecological collapse, had been so for years, and were hardly capable of absorbing what would become a total influx of some 150,000 repatriates with no prospect of employment and no land on which to grow food. The repatriates alone constituted an administrative and fiscal nightmare for Baring, a nightmare only made worse by the steadily increasing number of Mau Mau suspects recommended for detention by the screening teams.

At no point did the British colonial government consider expanding the boundaries of the Kikuyu reserves. Time and again Baring strictly adhered to his edict that Mau Mau must not be rewarded with a concession to demands for more land.<sup>15</sup> There was, then, only one way around the population problems caused by repatriation. The governor had to find a way to make the reserves more agriculturally productive.

Adding to this seemingly unsolvable problem was the governor's inherent indecisiveness, which rendered him, at times, absolutely paralyzed by the complexities facing him. He needed an expert, and he turned to R. J. M. Swynnerton, Kenya's assistant director of agriculture, who in late 1953 drew up a five-year African land development plan. The Swynnerton Plan was intended not only for the agricultural reconstruction of Kikuyuland, the central Kikuyu homestead, but also for the improvement of all African farming and grazing areas throughout the colony. With Baring's leadership, Swynnerton secured a £5 million concession from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund, and with it planned "intensified agricultural



Deportations of Mau Mau suspects from Nairobi

development in all African Areas of Kenya with due emphasis to the loyal tribes."

The Swynnerton Plan began from the premise that Africans were destructive and ineffective custodians of their own land. Colonial officials assumed that Africans needed agricultural experts to show them how to cultivate and herd efficiently, despite the fact that they had successfully managed their land and livestock for centuries before the British arrived. The plan dovetailed neatly with the colonial government's intransigence on Mau Mau demands, and especially its refusal to expand the boundaries of the reserves. If the Kikuyu could only be shown how to make better use of their land, so the logic went, then its carrying capacity could be expanded and more people could subsist off of the small holdings. Swynnerton's plan described a variety of projects—like bench terracing, soil conservation, bracken clearing, and paddocking—that ostensibly would increase productivity in the Kikuyu reserves. Along with these measures were numerous agricultural projects designed to develop previously uninhabitable areas in Kikuyuland for future resettlement. Locales where no one could or wanted to live, some malaria-infested and others drought-plagued, would somehow be rendered fit for human

habitation and would contribute further to easing overpopulation in the reserves.

The Swynnerton Plan did not stop there. The colony's leading agricultural expert also believed that the small landholdings that marked the Kikuyu landscape were inefficient, and that only through a process of landholding consolidation and legal deeding could agricultural productivity be maximized. The poorer Kikuyu—many of whom already formed the backbone of Mau Mau—had been fighting the colonial government on this issue for years, for they knew full well that such a policy would largely benefit their wealthier, loyalist neighbors and lead inevitably to their own further impoverishment. The dictatorial powers of the Emergency permitted Swynnerton to decide that "former Government policy will be reversed and able, energetic or rich Africans will be able to acquire more land and bad or poor farmers less, creating a landed and landless class. This is a normal step in the evolution of a country."<sup>17</sup> The colonial government was preparing to create permanent socioeconomic divisions within Kikuyu society based on access to land. In the future landed and landless (or land poor) Kikuyu would divide largely along the fault line between loyalist and Mau Mau. Most British colonial officials, Baring included, thought Swynnerton offered the panacea for all that ailed the colony. His unique brand of intense agricultural development, a veritable agrarian revolution, appeared to offer hope for solving the Kikuyu land crisis. It was also, however, a shameless reward scheme aimed at affirming the loyalists as effective, future instruments of colonial collaboration."

How was Baring going to fund all of Swynnerton's proposals? As a result of the earlier forced removals from the White Highlands, there were already over eighty thousand repatriated Kikuyu in the reserves who were unemployed, had little if any land, and needed income from relief work. The provincial commissioner, Carruthers "Monkey" Johnston, made staggering cost estimates for funding even the barest measures needed to prevent starvation and ecological collapse.<sup>19</sup> Even the governor and his newly formed Reconstruction Committee—created specifically to address the crisis in the Kikuyu reserves—had arrived at their own, equally enormous cost projections. Over £2 million were needed simply to cover projected relief expenses for the coming two years. This amount exceeded Swynnerton's total budget for all Kikuyu agricultural reconstruction. Lack of money would continue to be a decisive issue, having devastating consequences for the Kikuyu.<sup>20</sup>

Repatriation was punctuated by daily tragedy: children separated from their parents, death from starvation and disease, suffering from exposure and dysentery, and the sheer chaos and uncertainty of the whole ordeal. Unable to ignore this growing catastrophe, Baring scrambled in the fall of 1953 and came up with another solution: the Four-Point Plan.'

First, the remainder of unwanted Kikuyu in the European settled areas would be parked in the transit camps until spaces could be made available in the reserves. Second, the basis for the flow of repatriates would henceforth be regulated by the results of screening. Priority for places in the reserves was given to those considered more cooperative, with no more than twenty families per month to be repatriated from any given transit camp. Third, a scheme for poor relief in the Kikuyu districts was outlined: Kikuyu labor would be directed only toward projects that were included in the Swynnerton Plan, and the repatriates would be paid on a sliding scale, based on age and gender.

But reality frustrated Baring's plans before they could even be put in place. The transit camps were already overflowing with repatriates and were completely ill equipped to handle thousands more of them for months on end. Moreover, whatever the labor schemes the Kikuyu were enrolled in, the governor still did not have the funds to pay for relief programs on any regular basis. Over the years, I've interviewed numerous Kikuyu who were forcibly removed from the Rift Valley and sent back to the reserves during the early years of the Emergency. To a person they worked on relief gangs, though few recollect ever receiving wages or rations for their labor. For nearly all of them their most enduring memory was scraping together enough money to pay the special or punitive tax that was levied by the colonial government against all Mau Mau suspects living in and returning to the reserves. Revenues from this tax were to be used to help fund the relief programs.<sup>22</sup> Baring's plan to reestablish colonial control—which included expanding the carrying capacity of Kikuyuland—was at this point cut loose from the purported objectives of the Four-Point Plan. Had the welfare of the repatriates been a consideration, if not a goal, then the governor would have stopped or at least slowed forced removals. Instead, the so-called relief programs were in fact designed to make use of cheap or free repatriate labor for Swynnerton's agricultural programs in the Kikuyu reserves.

The last item of the Four-Point Plan was the blueprint for the impending expansion of detention camps. It is in this regard that Baring made the decision to create works camps throughout the colony that would use detainees as a cheap labor source. As with the repatriates, he saw no problem in using the massive, captive workforce at his disposal. In fact, the governor

was about to put thousands of beaten and half-starved Mau Mau suspects to work, not only on the agricultural redevelopment programs proposed by Swynnerton but also on numerous others suggested by the Public Works Department.

At first, there were ostensibly two types of works camps, though distinguishing between them would have been difficult. The first type were located within the Kikuyu districts and were intended for poor relief rather than punishment. They held dozens of homeless, repatriated families who were considered to have "soft" Mau Mau sympathies. The first three of these camps—Githunguri, Aguthi, and Fort Hall—were, within a matter of weeks, pushed beyond their combined capacity of two thousand people. Living conditions were makeshift, and the colonial government's complete disregard for sanitation or hygiene standards inevitably created much suffering for those forced into them.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, thousands of Kikuyu who languished in the squalor of the transit camps anxiously awaited vacancies in the new works camps in Central Province in a desperate hope for improved conditions.

Then there were the works camps located outside of the Kikuyu districts. These were designed for the thirty thousand Mau Mau suspects whom screening teams had already deemed unfit for return to the reserves. These camps were explicitly punitive. The camps housed alleged oath takers who fell somewhere between the extremes of the repatriate suspected of having "soft" Mau Mau sympathies and an internee who might qualify for transfer to the political or hard-core detention camps. This middling category of Mau Mau adherent was produced by the saturation crisis in the reserves. Because of limited space available in the Kikuyu areas, screening teams and the Administration were making more disciplined decisions about the numbers and nature of those who were to be repatriated.<sup>24</sup> Many Mau Mau suspects destined for works camps were no more committed to the movement, and some even less so, than those who had been repatriated to the Kikuyu reserves during the early months of the Emergency.

Forced labor was a constant in both types of camps. Although the colonial government had no difficulty forcing detainees to work, it risked the scrutiny of the international community. Whereas the European Convention on Human Rights could be derogated, in part, by citing the wartime and emergency clauses, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Forced Labour Convention caused the Colonial Office much greater concern. The ILO's position was crystal clear: when a person is incarcerated without trial, he or she cannot be made to work. The colonial secretary himself explicitly recognized that the "proposal [of detainee labor] was contrary to the letter of the International Convention on Forced Labour," and

knew that his office would have to "refute any allegation that [the detainees] are being used as 'slave' or 'cheap labour' for the profit of Government."<sup>25</sup> The colonial government could easily have been accused of using forced labor for political and economic gain, an accusation which would of course have been true, but which Colonial Secretary Lyttelton needed to avoid.

To get around this problem, Governor Baring and the colonial secretary once again looked for help within Britain's own empire. It seemed that General Templer was already violating the ILO Convention in Malaya, though he managed to do it on a reduced scale by creating a two-tiered system of works camps. Templer sent his cooperative detainees to so-called ordinary works camps, where they volunteered to work on labor projects and were supposedly paid an appropriate wage. Those detainees who were uncooperative were sent instead to special detention camps, where they could be forced to work but were also paid. The logic behind this charade was that there were far more detainees working voluntarily—at least in theory—in the ordinary works camps than were being forcibly made to work in the special detention camps. In effect, the colonial government in Malaya was violating the ILO Convention only some of the time.<sup>26</sup> Lyttelton urged Baring to adopt a similar system, emphasizing that "the number subject to compulsory labour [would be] reduced accordingly."<sup>27</sup>

After Templer's system was exported to and implemented in Kenya, neither the ILO nor the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on Forced Labour ever once charged the British colonial government with violating the Convention. Nonetheless, Lyttelton knew his government was "in technical breach of the forced labour conventions." Even Kenya's minister for defense, Jake Cusack, plainly stated in reference to detainee labor, "We are *slave traders* and the employment of our slaves are, in this instance, by the Public Works Department" (emphasis in original).<sup>29</sup>

With Swynnerton's Four-Point Plan in place and with a green light for forced labor, a grand design was beginning to emerge. The works camps, though still in their formative stage, were going to fit into Governor Baring's broader strategy of overhauling the colony's African political economy and transforming it into the basis for continued British colonial rule. It almost sounds like a lofty colonial goal—except that there was a State of Emergency going on. The forced removal, repatriation, and detention of Mau Mau suspects would over time be integrated into the colonial government's broader plan of agricultural reconstruction, land reform, and overall modernization of Kenya. Emergency or not, the development of the colony was going to be carried out on the collective back of the suspected Mau Mau nonulation.

It was at this juncture in the spring of 1954 that the fledgling Pipeline was impacted by Anvil's mass arrests. Forced by the momentum of the roundups to redirect temporarily his attention and resources away from the works camps, Baring and the Public Works Department began preparing vast "reception" facilities for the thousands of new Mau Mau suspects. Langata's capacity was expanded to over ten thousand, while two new reception centers, one at Manyani and the other at Mackinnon Road, were also established. Both of these camps were located in one of Kenya's most arid and desolate regions. Manyani was an enormous site, nearly three miles long by half a mile wide. It was, like most of the camps in the Pipeline, surrounded by barbed wire and watchtowers and patrolled by armed guards with police dogs. Farther toward the Indian Ocean coast stood Mackinnon Road, constructed from an old military airplane hangar remodeled for the new arrivals with dozens of separate compounds divided by thick barbed wire. With the addition of the two new reception centers, technically there was space for another fifteen thousand detainees.

But General Erskine grossly underestimated the number of Mau Mau suspects who would be slated for these camps. Initially projecting no more than a total of twenty thousand new detainees, by May of 1954 there were over twenty-four thousand Mau Mau suspects in the Langata, Manyani, and Mackinnon Road camps alone—a thirteenfold increase in the number of detainees held at the beginning of the year.<sup>30</sup> New intakes were coming in daily, by the lorryload, busload, and via railroad freight cars. Although these arriving hordes were largely a result of Erskine's military operations, the general and his forces were not to blame for all of them. Thousands were also being shipped in from the European settled areas and the Kikuyu reserves by Baring's men in the Administration.

At first, only the governor had the power to issue detention orders, but in time it became impossible for him to keep up with the numbers of pickups, while also managing the escalating crisis in the reserves. Thus he delegated the powers of detention, previously reserved solely for him, to members of the Administration. This meant that the provincial and district commissioners could issue the lesser detention orders, or Delegated Detention Orders (DDOs), to any African suspected of Mau Mau sympathies or any African they simply wanted out of their areas.<sup>31</sup> By the end of 1954 the British colonial government reported that the detainee population had risen to over fifty-two thousand—an increase of 2,500 percent from the beginning of the year.<sup>32</sup>

The growing population in the Pipeline included not only detainees



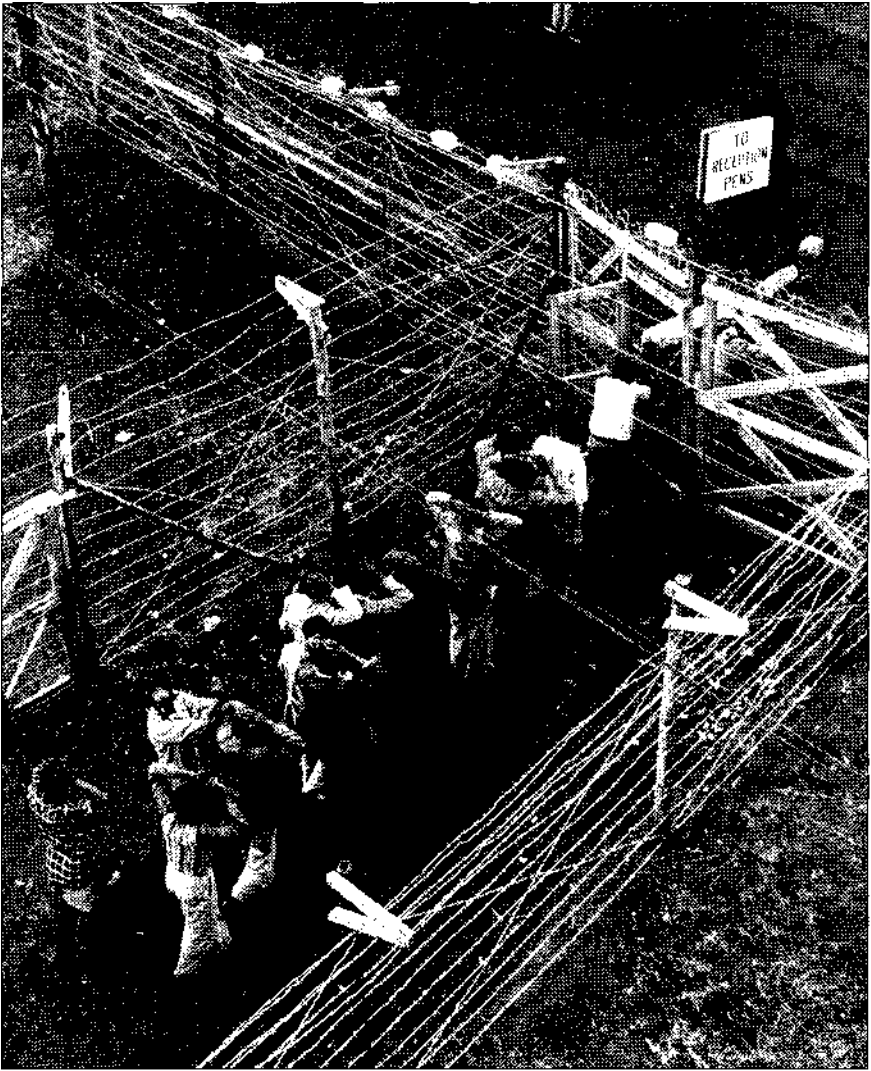
held without trial in the camps but also those convicted of Mau Mau-related crimes and sent to prisons. In fact, the Pipeline would eventually process thousands who were tried and convicted of Mau Mau offenses in the colonial courts. The vast majority of these cases were brought in front of Emergency assizes, where the colonial prosecutors almost wholly abandoned evidentiary procedure. The suspects and their lawyers—if one were even present—were prohibited from mounting any reasonable defense, as the courts were created to enforce swift rather than impartial justice. Most of the attorneys representing Mau Mau defendants came from a small cadre of sympathetic Asians based in Nairobi. These were men like Fitz de Souza, who today recalls:

[I had] no time to prepare a defense. These suspects were generally being brought up on trumped-up charges. Evidence was often planted, prosecution witnesses were brought in at the last minute, and we were not even allowed to cross-examine them when they did testify. There was no discovery at all. We just showed up to represent our clients, who were not even identified by name, but rather by a number. There was little we could do to help them, other than argue for lesser sentencing. These men were sentenced to prison—sometimes for a lifetime of hard labor—through a mockery of the legal system.<sup>33</sup>

With sentences ranging from a few months to life the convicts would be sent to one of the Mau Mau prisons within the Pipeline. The prisons were virtually indistinguishable from the system's detention camps, except that labor routines were reputedly harsher. The most notorious of these prisons was already in operation at the time of Anvil. Located at Embakasi, it held nearly two-thirds of the Mau Mau prisoners, all of whom were being forced to build the colony's new airport, still in use today and since renamed Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. Most people flying into Kenya today will land on its runway.

At the end of their sentences virtually none of these Mau Mau prisoners, whether at Embakasi or elsewhere, would be released. They were instead sent to the camps, or—in the language of the time—they were "Form C'ed." With the stroke of a pen, this administrative procedure transformed prisoners into detainees. Along with most of the Mau Mau suspects held without trial, they were destined for either Manyani or Mackinnon Road.<sup>34</sup>

The reception center set the tone for the rest of a detainee's Pipeline experience. In the case of Nelson Macharia it was filled with uncertainty and



Mau Mau suspects arriving at Langata Camp

personal degradation. After being picked up at the Asian garage, he spent three weeks at Langata. There detainees were strip-searched upon arrival. "The *askaris* and white officers took away all of our money and valuables, which they were searching for and removing from our clothes and bodies," Nelson later recalled. "We were being ordered to hand over our money and valuables voluntarily, but if you said that you did not have any, the white officer would order the *askaris* to search you and your things, even inside our boots and also in our mouths and anuses." From Langata, Macharia, along with several hundred other detainees, was loaded into an enclosed

railcar for the overnight trip to Manyani. When they arrived they were greeted by "the *askaris*, who were arranged in two rows as far as the eye could see," Nelson remembered. "We then passed between them in a file. By then we had nothing but the clothes which we were wearing. The *askaris* on either side were beating us with batons as we passed between them, making us run faster." From there he was forced through a cattle dip full of disinfectant while the *askaris* pushed heads under the solution—sometimes for too long. "You know, many people couldn't swim," Nelson reminded me, "and the dip was very deep so they just didn't make it. Others were held under by the *askaris* and drowned."<sup>35</sup> After the detainees were thoroughly sanitized, the dehumanizing process continued as they were paraded into a large open area and ordered to strip and place their clothing in a collective pile. Each detainee was issued a single pair of yellow shorts and two blankets, which would be their only clothing, or covering, for the duration of their stay in Manyani, a location known for its hot days and very cool nights. In addition, each detainee was given a metal band, on which was etched a number, to be worn around the wrist. For the remainder of their time in the camps, this would be their official identification.

Nelson's experience was hardly unique. Dozens of other former detainees whom I interviewed recalled similar intake processes, as they were called, at Manyani. Karue Kibicho, who had been picked up earlier on River Road, was one of them. Like Nelson, he was transferred from Langata in an enclosed railcar that was "stifling from lack of fresh air and the fact that so many of us were crammed in the car." He remembered "Johnnies" on the train who would pass through the detainees, "stepping on [their] heads, hands, testicles—just anywhere they felt like."<sup>36</sup> They were ostensibly there for security but also managed to help themselves to whatever valuables the detainees still carried. In Karue's case:

I had saved for several years for a very expensive watch that I had so admired and longed for in Nairobi, which was taken from me by one of the "Johnnies" who escorted us on the train. First he had wanted to buy it from me, but when I declined to sell it to him he took it by force, twisting my arm and yanking it off my wrist, then stuffing it in his pocket with the rest of the things he had stolen. But it was just as well he took it because even if I had sold it to him the money would have been taken from me during the searches at Manyani.<sup>37</sup>

Karue too arrived at the reception center to find two rows of *askaris*, the cattle dip, and a pervasive atmosphere of strict control and violence. The process was humiliating, but that was the point. "Before we were handed

our yellow shorts we all stood there, young and old men alike, dripping wet from the dip and naked," he recollected. "They decided to search us again, for what reason I couldn't fathom because we had been searched so many times already. The white officers instructed the *askaris* to search every part of our naked bodies, to check every one of our orifices. It was sin enough to be standing there with our elders without our clothes, but then to have those kinds of things done to us."<sup>38</sup>

The reception center at Mackinnon Road was hardly better. Karega Njoroge was transferred there after he had been picked up in the Anvil sweep. He had been living in the Bahati area of Nairobi when the loudspeakers announced that everyone was to exit their homes and file into the nearby barbed-wire enclosure. After three days the screeners came, took one look at him, and pointed in the direction of a screened-in lorry. He was sent to the railway station, where he was handed a stale loaf of bread, herded into the car by several "Johnnies," and shipped off for the overnight journey to Mackinnon Road. The next morning, when the door rolled open, "I couldn't believe what was happening before us," Karega later told me. "There were hundreds and hundreds of *askaris*, and dozens of white officers shouting to them, '*Piga, piga sana*' [Beat them, keep beating them]. It was a very rough time. We were ordered to take off our clothes; we were searched thoroughly and then given a pair of yellow shorts and a blanket, but no shirts. The white officers then ordered all of our clothes and belongings to be put into an enormous pile. They then burned them all right in front of us."<sup>39</sup>

Karega stayed at Mackinnon Road for over a year, which was typical for most detainees held at the reception centers. This was not the British colonial government's intention. The initial plan had been to quickly screen and classify the detainees, issue them individual detention orders—as most had been arrested under communal detention orders, a violation of the Geneva Conventions—and transfer them either up or down the Pipeline.<sup>40</sup> But the screening teams were overwhelmed by the numbers detained during Anvil, and subsequent military and civilian operations, and could not keep up.

Screening teams—made up of Europeans and Africans from the Prisons Department, Special Branch, CID, the Community Development and Rehabilitation Department, as well as dozens of Kikuyu loyalists from the reserves—all converged on Langata, Manyani, and Mackinnon Road to classify the Mau Mau suspects using the white-grey-black system. The initial screening at the time of arrest was only an introductory interview. Now the screening teams conducted more thorough interrogations to determine how committed a suspect was to the Mau Mau cause. "Whites" were clean

and repatriated back to the Kikuyu reserves, "greys" were considered more compliant oath takers and sent down the Pipeline to ordinary works camps in their home district, and "blacks" were the so-called hard core who went up the Pipeline for softening up in the special detention camps.

Even at this early stage, there was a definite logic to the planned organization of the Pipeline, which was predicated on the idea of detainee cooperation, and by cooperation the colonial government meant confession. Teams were constantly screening and rescreening detainees, hoping both to soften them up and to squeeze more intelligence from them. Detainees would be moved up or down the Pipeline, depending on their levels of cooperation, which would correspond with their classifications. When "blacks" began softening up, screening teams would reclassify them as "greys" and send them down the Pipeline, whereas any "greys" starting to express increased Mau Mau sympathy would be relabeled as "blacks" and transferred to harsher up-Pipeline camps. Theoretically, the colonial government's ultimate goal was to transform as many Mau Mau suspects into "whites" as possible and to exile the remainder to remote camps in the colony.

Detainees came to dread the constant screening to determine whether their Mau Mau sympathies had changed. The screening teams sought confessions and intelligence, and were willing to employ corrupt and brutal interrogation methods to get the answers they wanted. Baring knew of their objectives and described their techniques to the colonial secretary as being "a rough and ready method of interrogation."<sup>41</sup> Suspects were whipped, beaten, sodomized, burned, forced to eat feces and drink urine—all at the hands of the screening teams. "I was bent over the screening table at Manyani with my hands on my head," recalled one man who today lives in the Kariokor section of Nairobi. "I had lost sensation in my legs because of the beating with the rubber hose, and I was very weak. They were demanding that I tell them about Mau Mau activities in my home area in Kandara. I still refused, and the Ngombe [i.e., nickname for European settlers enlisted in the Kenya Regiment] ordered an African *askari* to take scorpions which were everywhere in the camp and force them into my back private part. I was soon writhing from the pain. I began telling them everything; I made up stories naming people. If I didn't, I was going to die."<sup>42</sup>

The screening teams at Manyani and Mackinnon Road could devote hours or days to a single suspect before finally issuing him an individual detention order and assigning him to a color category. One month after Anvil, only 10 percent of Mau Mau suspects at these two reception camps had as yet been screened and classified. It would take well over a year be-

fore the screening teams finished with those picked up during the sweep of Nairobi.<sup>43</sup> With very little movement out of the reception centers, there was no space for new intakes, a problem that could be solved only by further overpopulating the camps.

Extremely close quarters invariably created unhealthy conditions, and within a few months a major typhoid epidemic swept through Manyani Camp. The spread of infectious disease there and elsewhere in the Pipeline came as no surprise to the colony's chief medical officer, Colonel W. G. S. Foster. He had written a lengthy memorandum to Baring and the colonial secretary detailing the abhorrent sanitary conditions in the Manyani and Mackinnon Road camps, arguing that security and expediency had been given priority over health standards. Camp officials refused to allow detainees to dispose properly of human and other waste outside of the detention wires, and the quality and quantity of the camps' water supplies were not even close to acceptable standards." Baring's chief secretary, Richard Turnbull, agreed with Foster's assessment of the "night soil problem," noting:

The essence of this problem was that the buckets were brimming with urine as well as faeces—not even Blondin [French tightrope walker] himself could be expected to carry them without making an abominable mess. Once a proper system of keeping solid and liquid excrement apart has been instituted, the matter will be fairly easy to handle through . . . Night Soil trenches. The first trench we inspected was too near the camp, the second seemed sufficiently far away. In view of the very difficult nature of the soil and the lack of supervision available, it is unlikely that a manual working party could keep pace with the requirements.<sup>45</sup>

Health officials were also needed in the Pipeline, despite Baring's concern that such postings would be viewed by some as a reward to Mau Mau. The War Council concurred, calling the camps a "sanitary menace," though again offered very little in the way of financial or administrative resources to address the problem. Taxi Lewis knew his Prisons Department was not heeding Foster's warnings, conceding "the Medical Department cannot be answerable for the health of the inmates at either [Manyani or Mackinnon Road] Camp."<sup>46</sup>

When the first cases of typhoid appeared in May 1954, Governor Baring denied publicly the incidence of the disease and instead lauded the rise of Manvani Camp as "a million Sterling aluminium and steel 'town' . . . that

stretch [ed] like some futuristic factory for three miles and is over half a mile wide."<sup>47</sup> But by September it was clear that the spread of typhoid in Manyani had reached epidemic proportions and that the entire camp would have to be quarantined. Publicly, official press releases from the colonial government maintained that the camp had state-of-the-art sanitation facilities, fresh water, and proper medical care. Nearly every internal assessment of the outbreak emphasized the opposite, with one memorandum clearly stating, "The camp was not completely finished when the detainees went in and some of the sanitary arrangements were incomplete." <sup>48</sup> Compounding this problem was the increase in Manyani's population, from a reported 6,600 immediately following Anvil, to over 16,000 at the time of the quarantine, well beyond its theoretical capacity of 10,000.<sup>49</sup>

The colonial government was inundated with hostile inquiries. Several members of the Labour Party blasted the Colonial Office, decrying the outbreak as "appalling" and demanding a thorough investigation.<sup>50</sup> Organizations on the left petitioned the colonial secretary, "In view of what happened in the Camps of this nature in Germany during the war . . . [we insist] that emergency action be taken to end this system of detention, before the outbreak spreads and becomes completely out of control."<sup>51</sup> Mainstream and even relatively conservative newspapers like the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Scotsman* also carried news of the outbreak and suggested strongly that remedial action was necessary.

Leading the charge to defend Britain's colonial image was Alan Lennox-Boyd. In July 1954 Lennox-Boyd took over from Oliver Lyttelton as head of the Colonial Office. He brought with him a High Tory imperialist attitude that impressed even the most conservative members of his party. An imposing man in every respect—standing nearly six and a half feet tall and with a penchant for fastidious self-grooming—Lennox-Boyd was a master of disinformation, as the Manyani outbreak would subsequently prove.

He and Governor Baring would quickly prove well-suited colleagues. They shared an aristocratic pedigree and ruling-class sense of duty, albeit one perverted by a high-minded sense of authoritarian righteousness. Lennox-Boyd was a descendant of the Napier family, was educated at the elite Sherborne School, and went on to read modern history at Christ Church, Oxford, where he forged friendships with numerous future politicians and high-level colonial officials, Baring among them. Intensely ambitious, after Oxford he moved into mainstream politics with the help of another friend he met during his university days, Winston Churchill. Churchill helped to position Lennox-Boyd within the Conservative Party and paved his way to an eventual seat in the House of Commons and later the Colonial Office. The future colonial secretary walked in lockstep with



Colonial Secretary Alan Lennox-Boyd inspecting the Home Guard

his mentor, embracing nearly every Churchillian view on empire, from the dislike of India's independence in 1947 to the prime minister's famous position that "he had not become the King's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire."<sup>52</sup>

The new colonial secretary had no intention of facilitating self-government in any of Britain's colonial territories and instead considered himself a "brake" on the process of decolonization.<sup>53</sup> His open and unabashed ruling-class approach to empire led him to dismiss the ordinary Africans as backward and wholly unprepared in the 1950s for independent rule. From the perspective of this imperious man at the helm of the Colonial Office, the end of empire in Kenya was a least a generation away. His sentiments were shared by most in the Conservative government and of course by local colonial officials and settlers.<sup>54</sup> Critics considered him the epitome of the right wing, with Labour MPs like Barbara Castle commenting that Lennox-Boyd was "imbued with the conviction that the British ruling class, both at home and overseas, could do no wrong."<sup>55</sup> Politics aside, the new colonial secretary clearly held two standards in the empire: one for the civilized British and another for their imperial subjects. On this point his biographer, in an exhaustive review of Lennox-Boyd's political career, suggested that the seamy side of empire bothered the colonial secretary little: "If the maintenance of British control over people not yet ready to govern themselves occasionally necessitated use of force, this did not in



itself disturb him. The methods of law-enforcement employed in the colonies sometimes appeared unacceptably harsh to the British public; but they were, he maintained, generally in accordance with the standards and expectations of the colonial peoples themselves." 56

This ethos infused Lennox-Boyd's decision making and provides some context for his later political maneuverings. Time and again he would be forced to respond to allegations of brutality and cover-up in Kenya, and each time he would deftly navigate through the press and the House of Commons with responses that ranged from minor spins on the truth to outright lies. The colonial secretary was joined by Baring in their collective goal of maintaining British colonial rule in Kenya. Lennox-Boyd would routinely and unquestioningly back his governor and their men on the spot in the Pipeline, in the European settled areas, and in the Kikuyu districts. Until Lennox-Boyd left the Colonial Office in late 1959, he and Baring unhesitatingly shared a kind of "ends justifies the means" philosophy toward the some 1.5 million Kikuyu allegedly infected with Mau Mau.

Lennox-Boyd's version of the typhoid outbreak set the precedent for all of his future responses to allegations of negligence and brutality in Kenya. After a well-choreographed and highly publicized visit to East Africa—complete with a staged tour of Manyani—the colonial secretary stood on the floor of the House of Commons and announced that the outbreak "was not due to the camp water supplies or sanitation, or to any failure to take proper health measures." The spread of the disease, he countered, was due to personal contact with detainees who were already infected prior to their transfer to the camp. In an outright misrepresentation of the medical and administrative reports he had received from Kenya, Lennox-Boyd implied that the camp was a model facility for maintaining the detainees' physical and mental well-being.

As Lennox-Boyd was appearing before Parliament, medical personnel were putting their limited resources to work to improve the camp's sanitation and drainage systems, such as existed, and its water supplies. The most important person in this whole operation, at least according to the detainees, was a European officer nicknamed Kihuga, or the Busy and Watchful One. "He was the most remarkable, humane man I met in the camps—he tried to save us from the typhoid and even the beatings," David Githigaita later remarked.<sup>58</sup> In the end, though, Kihuga's valiant efforts could not avert the pending disaster. Lennox-Boyd reported that 63 people had died of typhoid in Manyani and another 760 were infected with the disease.<sup>59</sup> These numbers seem low based on the observations of detainees who were in the camp at the time of the outbreak. Harun Kibe, in particular, had a unique vantage point as he was one of dozens of Mau Mau suspects who had medical experience

prior to detention, and who as a result was conscripted by Kihuga in his effort to sanitize the camp and treat those infected. Harun recollected hundreds of detainees perishing from the disease: "Every few days there were a dozen, sometimes as much as two [dozen] taken to be buried or incinerated. We worked day and night to control the outbreak. I had never seen anything like it, and I haven't since."<sup>60</sup> Another former detainee, Philip Macharia, was part of the burial working party and later recalled: "Our group alone buried over six hundred bodies. I lost count when we were around five hundred or so; I had just grown too tired. I'd say about two-thirds of these corpses were a result of the typhoid because they had no marks."<sup>61</sup>

The typhoid problems hardly ended with the epidemic in Manyani. Soon cases were being diagnosed in Mackinnon Road and Langata, though Baring, the final arbiter in Kenya, personally made the decision not to quarantine either of these facilities. He was anxious instead to move detainees, once they were classified, out of the reception centers to works camps in order to free up space for the continuous flow of new pickups. But the works camps were expanding only slowly prior to Anvil, and the rapid influx of new detainees meant Baring had to create dozens of new camps in order to accommodate the many "greys" and "blacks" coming out of Manyani, Mackinnon Road, and Langata.

To manage the crushing flow of human traffic, Baring established the Working Party, which included representatives from various departments with an interest in the camps—with the notable exception of Askwith and his Department of Community Development and Rehabilitation.<sup>62</sup> Chaired by Taxi Lewis, the prisons commissioner, the Working Party sought to maximize detainee labor by siting camps as near to agricultural or public works projects as possible but dismissed any camp plans requiring lengthy start-up times, regardless of their potential labor benefits. With some one thousand new pickups per week, there was simply no time to lose.<sup>63</sup> But there was little consensus in the Working Party, only compounding the human traffic problem; members of the Administration from Central Province were the most notably strident in some of their objections, largely because all the "grey" detainees were slated to filter through works camps in their districts before their final release. This meant, for example, that if a "grey" detainee originally came from Fort Hall, he would be sent to a works camp in Fort Hall District where he would labor and continue to confess before his final release. Initially, however, the district commissioners from Kiambu and Nyeri flatly refused to have any expanded system of works camps in their areas. The so-called

poor relief camps that Baring had established earlier had proven an administrative disaster, and the DCs complained bitterly during the months before Anvil of the financial and staffing burdens that these camps were generating. The Nyeri DC hardly minced words when he wrote, "The establishment of Works Camps covering 'Operation Anvil' . . . has gone off at half cock and once again the Administration holds the baby. . . . Now it appears that all accounting, payment of salaries, acquisition of equipment, etc., etc. as well as the construction of the Camps falls to the lot of the Administration."<sup>64</sup>

Funding and administrative support were clearly the issue. Without additional financial assistance, the DCs from Kiambu and Nyeri refused to cooperate and rejected the creation of additional works camps in their districts—something that was well within their right given the administrative structure of the colony. Consequently, the Working Party was forced to create an elaborate system of works camps in nearby Embu District on the Mwea Plain for all the "grey" detainees originating from Kiambu and Nyeri districts. There these detainees would labor on the massive Mwea/Teberere irrigation scheme, a project that had been outlined by Swynnerton and that was aimed at developing rice cultivation in the previously uninhabitable and malarial region. In time, however, all the DCs in Central Province would agree to the works camps in their districts largely because it meant that they—along with local Kikuyu loyalists—would have the final say over whether a detainee would be released or sent into exile.<sup>65</sup>

The colony's Treasury, in charge of approving or more often declining requests for funds for the camps, wielded the greatest influence over the pace and scope of Pipeline expansion. The Ministry of Defence and its Prisons Department, which continued to bear the greatest administrative responsibility for the camps, and the Finance ministry had radically different opinions on the need to create additional works camps. On the one hand, Finance Minister Ernest Vasey, who was desperately trying to keep the colony solvent during the Emergency, asserted that the government was "planning too many 'Works' Camps in the Central Province."<sup>66</sup> Jake Cusack and Taxi Lewis, on the other hand, were watching the detainee population steadily grow and responded to Vasey, "It is clear that we are not planning too many 'Works' Camps in the Central Province and, in fact, . . . we should proceed with our examination of the extra . . . extensions."<sup>67</sup> But the Treasury had already granted over Li million for Pipeline expansion, and nearly all of it had been exhausted within a matter of months. Additional camps had to be built, though the necessary funding simply was not there.<sup>68</sup>

In its attempts to solve the problem of inadequate financing, the Work-

ing Party cut nearly every corner possible. Cusack ordered labor gangs to be transferred from reception centers at Manyani and Mackinnon Road to locations around Kenya so that they could build most of the works camps from the ground up. These labor gangs worked under grueling conditions to complete more than twenty camps in less than three months. "When I was selected I thought I was going home," remembers one former detainee. "I had only taken one oath and knew I didn't belong with some of the others [i.e., hard-core Mau Mau]. Instead they took us to Embu, where they worked and beat us like dogs, from sunrise until dark. We built our own prison. Can you imagine?"<sup>69</sup> Only the bare necessities like barbed wire and perimeter trenches—proper sanitation and sleeping barracks were of secondary concern—were in place before the Prisons Department began moving large numbers of detainees out of the reception centers and into the works camps in Embu and elsewhere. Detainees sometimes arrived at a camp to find nothing. This seems to have been more the norm for the remote camps, like the one on Mageta Island in Lake Victoria. There, the first batch of detainees arrived in shackles in the cargo hold of a boat. When they were taken ashore, they spent days building perimeter trenches and watchtowers, uncoiling barbed wire, and digging isolation pits before their shackles were removed and they were allowed to walk freely within the confines of the new facility.<sup>70</sup>

Camps also became incubators for a variety of infectious diseases, despite warnings from local medical officials. Kenya's director of medical services, T. F. Anderson, issued recommendations ranging from proper sanitation facilities, water supplies, and construction materials to medical staffing, inoculations, and nutritional requirements.<sup>71</sup> Nearly all were ignored. In June 1954, Kenya's minister of local government, health, and housing, Wilfred Havelock, alerted the governor to public health risks resulting from the Pipeline's hasty expansion: "As can be imagined a number of matters to do with Health have been neglected . . . as the speed at which the camps have been erected and occupied have prevented any particular attention to this aspect. . . . In the Central Province, however, there seems to be little co-ordination, and there is no single person who is prepared to help to get the requisite work done on the health requirements in camps."<sup>72</sup>

Eventually, H. Stott, the medical adviser to Kenya's Labor Department, was appointed to coordinate the health and sanitation requirements in the Pipeline—hardly a one-man job. He found a myriad of problems and attributed them not just to a lack of resources but also to the refusal of many officers in the Administration to address the health issues. In his November 1954 "Report on Health and Hygiene in Emergency Camps," Stott wrote that members of the Administration held lower health and sanitation

standards for Africans than they did for themselves.<sup>73</sup> Combined with their overall distaste for Mau Mau and the constraints of the Emergency, it is not surprising that the provincial and district commissioners, and their subordinates, ignored the medical recommendations. In place of the suggested corrugated iron, mud and wattle and recycled canvas became the building materials of choice for many of the camps. The camp compounds were routinely filled above capacity. Detainees slept on the ground, often one on top of the other. Stott was fully aware of the detainees' close quarters, constantly reminding Taxi Lewis "that a minimum of 20 square feet *floor area* be provided for each inmate" (emphasis in original)<sup>74</sup> Water supplies were also abysmal. Detainees remember drawing drinking water from drainage ditches, swamps, and muddy boreholes. On numerous occasions Stott himself noted that water "purity [was] not all that could be desired,"<sup>75</sup> and European camp commandants often concurred. At Waithaka Camp, for example, the officer in charge reported "the water [in this camp] is unfiltered and comes directly from a highly contaminated river."<sup>76</sup>

Despite Scott's efforts, infectious diseases continued to be ubiquitous in the Pipeline. Pulmonary tuberculosis was widely reported, with Kenya's director of medical services remarking, "The number of cases of pulmonary tuberculosis, which is being disclosed in Prison and Detention Camps is causing some embarrassment."<sup>77</sup> The overcrowded conditions, together with the detainees' weakened immune systems, exhaustion from forced labor, and poor access to proper clothing or blankets, facilitated its spread. To reduce the incidence of tuberculosis, camp officials needed to reduce the number of detainees in each compound. The Medical Department decided to adopt a policy of repatriating all infectious detainees back to the reserves. In effect, they were trading one public health crisis for another. Detainees suffering from not only tuberculosis but also typhoid, pneumonia, leprosy, and measles were repatriated to the overcrowded Kikuyu districts, where accommodations were arguably tighter than those in the camps.<sup>78</sup>

Waterborne infections—particularly dysentery, diarrhea, and other "epidemic intestinal diseases"—also ran through the camps." So too did vitamin deficiency, with cases of scurvy, pellagra, kwashiorkor, and night blindness afflicting some detainees.<sup>80</sup> Adjustments to their rations and vitamin supplements would generally cure such ailments, though detainees typically suffered for weeks or months before camp authorities took action. Others were not so lucky, dying from the painful effects of these nutritional diseases, which could have been remedied with expedient and proper medical care."

Detainees thus lived in infernal conditions. They often slept and ate in

the same room where toilet buckets overflowed with urine and feces. With poor sanitation and worse ventilation, the air quality was wretched. Bedbugs infested the detainees' blankets, and lice their hair. Their rations generally consisted of maize meal, with an occasional piece of meat or vegetable thrown in—a diet that was often reduced or completely taken away as a form of punishment. In short, living conditions in many of these camps were unbearable, which was of course the point.

Already stretched thin, the colonial government recruited the vast majority of camp commandants from within the ranks of the European population in Kenya. Local settlers were more than eager to enlist in the fight against Mau Mau, alleviating Baring from the costly process of overseas recruitment. Many of these settlers were often officers in the Kenya Regiment and the Kenya Police Reserve, and brought with them an already hardened stereotype of Mau Mau savagery and varying degrees of the now typical eliminationist attitude that dominated settler opinion. Scores had also served their apprenticeship in the Kikuyu reserves, screening Mau Mau suspects and generally terrorizing the local population. For their part, British colonial officers, many of whom appeared to share the sentiments of their settler counterparts, took charge of those camps not under the control of the settler recruits.

Virtually all camp commandants carried guns, *viboko* (rhino whips), or clubs, or all three. Today former detainees still carry vivid memories of the commandants' weapons and their use during roll calls. Regardless of where they were in the Pipeline, roll call meant squatting in groups of five with their hands clasped over their heads. The European commandants would then walk through the lines, counting and beating the detainees with clubs or *viboko*. "The whole thing was just so ridiculous," recalled one former detainee from Lodwar. "Whitehouse [the European in charge] would just count us over and over again. We would be there in the hot sun, and our feet were burning from the sand and the heat. You couldn't move your hands to wipe your face, because that would just invite him to beat you. Every time [there was roll call] he liked to pick one or two of us, and just go crazy beating the person. But we never knew who it would be; you'd just pray it was someone else."<sup>82</sup>

Then there were the guards. Some were recruited from the European population in Kenya, others from Britain, and by all accounts they represented the "bottom of the barrel." Those drawn from the Kikuyu loyalists, or from other African ethnic groups within the colony and neighboring Tanganyika, were hardly paragons of efficiency or virtue. Most of these



Loyalist guard keeping watch over Mau Mau suspects  
at Langata Camp from an observation tower

guards considered the camps the best of all possible bad employment options, even if they were underpaid, worked in dreadful circumstances, and were, they thought, surrounded by human waste in the form of the detainees. Many of the guards considered the camps revolting, even more so because they were isolated from the rest of the colony in some of Kenya's most remote and inhospitable places—locations that were "Conradesque," as one camp official called them.<sup>83</sup>

"The horror" of Kenya's heart of darkness was then hyperbolized by the specter of evil cast over the camps by the detainees themselves. Many guards seemed to fear the detainees greatly. Camp commandants repeatedly told them that the Mau Mau were cannibals and that unless they beat the detainees into submission, they would be eaten.<sup>84</sup> At once empowered and maddened by the confining atmosphere of the camps, many of the guards, not surprisingly, beat, tortured, and murdered the detainees without, it seemed, any remorse.

It would be wrong to view these men, along with the handful of female guards, merely as victims of an ugly system. Although they often complied with orders to beat or torture the detainees, guards also had options. They could choose to be brutal, or they could opt to be compassionate, or even kind. Some former detainees were adamant that guards from certain

African ethnic groups were notoriously harsh, but others said there was no consistent pattern. There is, however, one point of consensus: without exception, ex-detainees pointed to the Kikuyu loyalists as the most brutal. The vast majority of these loyalist guards were assigned to the works camps in the Kikuyu districts where they had immense power not just in the day-to-day operation of the camps but also in the final release decisions.

Like the guards, the moral fiber of the camp commandants also varied greatly. In contrast to those who were cruel or sadistic, there were other camp commandants who were singled out by former detainees for their kindness. Major James Breckenridge from Athi River Camp is legendary among the ex-detainees today, who still praise his humanity and concern for the well-being of the detainees in his camp. Echoing the sentiment of many other former detainees from Athi River, Eric Kamau recalls, "We all respected him very much. He and his wife, who was also at the camp, tried very hard to treat us like human beings—to them we weren't animals but humans like them."<sup>85</sup> Still others were cruel one minute and normal, as some of the detainees termed it, the next. Regardless, the fate of the detainees was in the camp commandants' hands. They could beat them, provide them with proper clothing, force them to work harder, give them five minutes' rest, torture them, or offer them rewards in return for their cooperation. In the end, the choices were left to the individual in charge.

For the Pipeline to function efficiently, it also needed the cooperation of some of the detainees themselves. The noted German sociologist Wolfgang Sofsky wrote about the establishment of absolute power in the Nazi concentration camps, emphasizing that it was not a simple matter of a minority of people establishing dominance over the lives of the majority. Instead, the Nazis needed help from within. In his work, Sofsky stressed that "by making a small number of victims into its accomplices, the regime blurred the boundary between personnel and inmates. . . . Had it not been for the self-administration and the collaboration of the prison-functionaries [i.e., detainees], discipline and social control would soon have buckled and collapsed."<sup>86</sup> This characteristic of camp life was notable not just in the Nazi system but also in that of the Soviets, and it later would be employed in Kenya's Pipeline as well.<sup>87</sup>

Some detainees were tempted to collaborate with colonial oppression and were offered in return rewards and privileges that elevated them above the other detainees. These detainees helped to keep the Pipeline going and enabled authorities to exert more efficient control over the camps. In some cases those who had not confessed were nevertheless relieved from their hard labor and given jobs cleaning commandants' offices, cooking for



them, or, if literate, performing clerical duties such as organizing files and typing. Then there were those detainees who had admitted their Mau Mau sympathies to the screening teams and were now willing to cooperate. These men, and less frequently women, often underwent a complete metamorphosis. As they changed from detainee to collaborator, their carriage, habits, and manner of communication also changed. Most refused to recognize their former compound mates, perhaps from shame or self-loathing. They were often as cruel as their former captors, brutalizing detainees, demanding their confessions, and often informing on their Mau Mau activities both before and during detention. The most famous example of this was Peter Muigai Kenyatta—Jomo Kenyatta's own son—who after his confession joined the ranks of the screening team in Athi River Camp and eventually traveled throughout the Pipeline interrogating other detainees.

One question about the Pipeline remains unanswered: where were Askwith's men in all of this? If the colonial government was implementing rehabilitation on a scale even close to its public proclamations, we should see its evidence in budgetary allocations and manpower on the ground. In reality, there was very little of either. In Kenya's Development Plan for 1954-57, Ernest Vasey allocated the Community Development and Rehabilitation Department £103,000, or 0.5 percent of the colony's total budget. This amount was to be spent not only on Mau Mau rehabilitation but also on other community development projects throughout Kenya. This is in contrast to the allocation for the "maintenance of law and order," which totaled over £2 million, or 20 percent of Kenya's budget." The hypocrisy did not escape the notice of newspapers in Britain. The *Liverpool Post*, for example, commented, "For nearly one-fifth of a development programme to comprise expenditure on capital installations necessary for the preservation of law and order is nothing less than tragic, but such are the realities of the contemporary situation."<sup>89</sup>

During his euphoric days drafting the rehabilitation plan, Askwith was looking for the "right type of man" for his staff—someone who was "Christian, idealistic, practical, with a keen desire to help Kikuyu to adjust themselves to the new conditions."<sup>90</sup> In time, he was happy to take whomever he could get on his limited budget. Askwith's so-called rehabilitation team would number over five hundred, but more than half of these individuals were designated for the screening teams.<sup>91</sup> People like Peter Muigai Kenyatta and the notorious Isaiah Mwai Mathenge, David Waruhiu, and Jeremiah Kiereini would all technically be employees of the Community Development and Rehabilitation Department but hardly fit Askwith's profile of the "right type of man." To add to their burden,

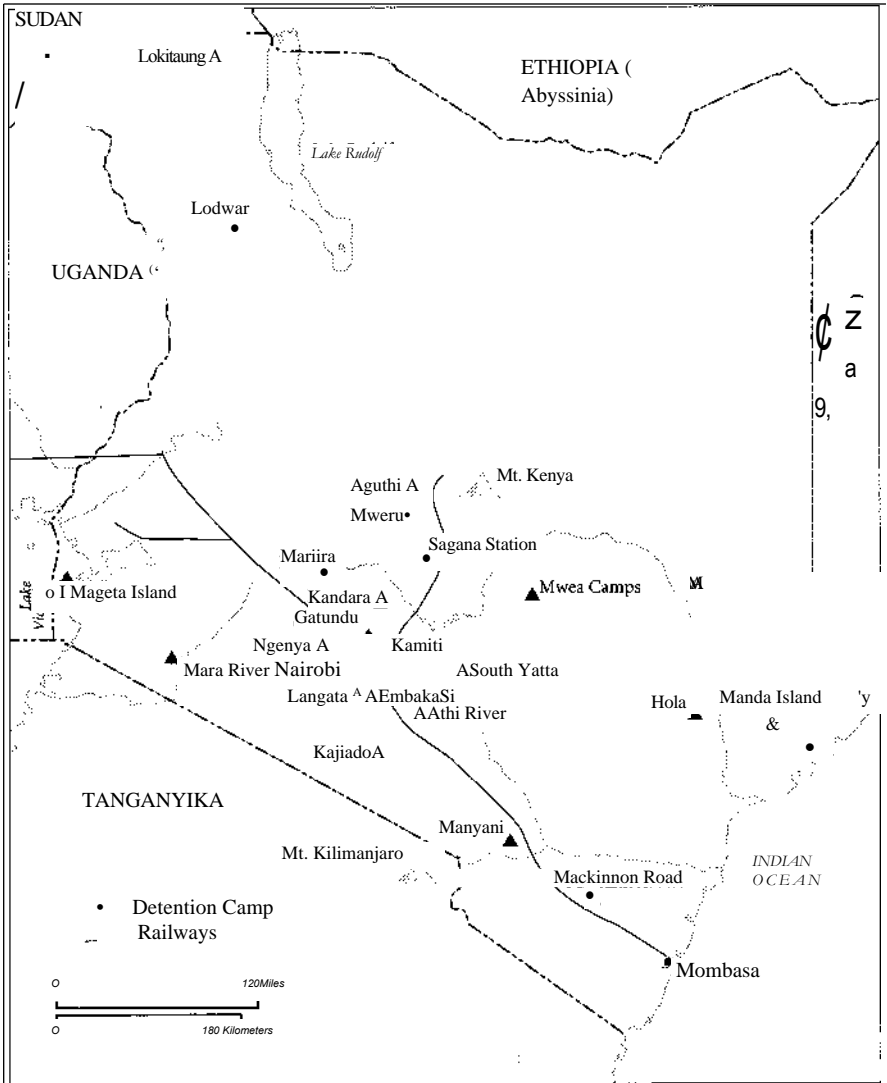
Askwith's staff was theoretically responsible for the reform of not only the detainees in the Pipeline but the rest of the colony's suspected Mau Mau population as well.

There were few rehabilitation officers to carry out Askwith's program. Manyani, for example, had one rehabilitation officer for ten thousand detainees, and many camps had none at all.<sup>92</sup> In total, Askwith had some 250 men and women working on the rehabilitation of nearly 1.5 million Kikuyu, a ratio of 1 to 6,000. Without adequate funding for waste disposal and clean water supplies, allocations for even the most meager rehabilitation staffing, recreational materials, and educational supplies would have been unthinkable. But at the heart of the issue was the attitude that pervaded the Pipeline's conceptualization and implementation. Most of those people overseeing and executing the expansion of the camps and prisons simply did not believe in rewarding Mau Mau, and certainly not in offering them any kind of hearts-and-minds campaign. Many of them wanted the detainees to be absolutely miserable, and in extreme cases they wanted them to die.

Administratively, within the Pipeline Askwith and his rehabilitation officers were always subordinate to the Prisons Department and were relatively powerless when trying to alter the system.<sup>93</sup> On several occasions Askwith appealed to Jake Cusack, Kenya's defense minister, about the violence, stating in one instance: "The other worry is about the thug attitude of a number of Prison Officers. We have constantly had to make representations about the beating up of convicts and detainees in the past and our staff have made themselves pretty unpopular in the process. We claim that you cannot successfully rehabilitate a man in the evening if he is to be knocked about the next day."<sup>94</sup> Despite the colonial government's sunny depiction of detention camp life, the Pipeline was not oriented around any kind of hearts-and-minds campaign. Privately, Kenya's Defence Ministry emphasized this point when its secretary wrote, "There may be a [rehabilitation] programme, but I have never seen it."<sup>95</sup>

By the end of 1955 the Pipeline was fully in place. With its completion came a consolidation of the camps and prisons, characterized by standardization within the system. The centralized bureaucracy, located within the Prisons Department, was finally established and with it the stabilization of a formal camp structure. The Pipeline could now stand completely on its own.

We will never know exactly how many Mau Mau camps and prisons the colonial government constructed in Kenya. There is no single extant document that lists them all. Moreover, camps and prisons were constantly



Main Detention Camps

opened and closed—new ones often arising and old ones shutting down as works projects were finished, and as other projects in new locations were started. By carefully studying the remaining colonial files, and cross-referencing them with interview data and documents from private and missionary archives, I was able to compile what I believe to be a near-complete listing of the camps and prisons in the Pipeline.<sup>96</sup> There were over one hundred in all, not including the scores of camps run by loyalist chiefs, and others run by private settlers—technically illegal under international law—scattered throughout the Rift Valley and Central provinces.

Defining accurately each camp's particular function within the integrated Pipeline system presents a challenge. Some camps were up-Pipeline, or special detention camps only for "blacks," and others were down-Pipeline camps, or ordinary works camps, for "greys." There were also the reception centers, which Governor Baring later renamed holding camps to reflect the fact that detainees housed there often ended up staying for months or even years. There were also camps set aside for non-Kikuyu Mau Mau suspects—particularly Kamba and Maasai. Many of these oath takers either had married Kikuyu or had lived in close proximity to them in Nairobi. Finally, all the way up the Pipeline were the exile camps; at the other end were the chiefs' camps, or open camps, to which "grey" detainees were transferred from the ordinary works camps as a final step before their release.

Because each camp had a specific function within the Pipeline, detainees would not be moved about haphazardly, but rather according to their profiles, that is, according to their degree of demonstrated cooperation, their ethnicity, and their district of origin. For example, most "blacks" were sent to camps like Lodwar, Manda Island, Takwa, and Saiyusi, though Kamba and Maasai "blacks" were sent to Mara River, Kajiado, or South Yatta. By the end of 1955 a "grey" detainee from Fort Hall would never be sent to, for example, Aguthi or Mukurweini in Nyeri District, save by accident, because all "grey" detainees heralding from Fort Hall were sent to works camps in Fort Hall, those from Kiambu District to works camps in Kiambu, those from Nyeri District to works camps in Nyeri, and so forth. This is because the British colonial officers and local loyalists wanted to have the final say over whether a particular detainee from their district was ultimately released. Camp sequencing therefore had a very explicit rationale.

In general the Pipeline was a system for adult male suspects only. Exceptions were those women considered too "black" or hard core to be repatriated to the reserves. Instead, they were sent to the colony's only all-female detention camp at Kamiti, which, once built in late 1953, would be the place where the vast majority of women, totaling a few thousand in all,

were detained in the Pipeline. Included in this number were countless girls under the age of puberty; not included were the dozens of babies born to the female detainees, many of whom had been in Kamiti for years.

In comparison to the number of girls, there were far more unaccompanied male children in the Pipeline, though there was only one camp set aside for them at Wamumu. The total number of boys detained went, not surprisingly, unrecorded, or at least the records are no longer available. Certainly, hundreds if not thousands of these children never saw Wamumu Camp. There simply was not enough room for them, and they instead lived and moved through the other camps with the adult population. (See appendix for diagram of the operating Pipeline circa January 1956.)

When fully assembled, the Pipeline came to embody British colonialism in Kenya, for it was the final step in a longue duree of increasing authoritarianism in the colony. For decades before the Emergency, British colonizers sought to control the African population through a complex, apartheidlike set of laws dictating among other things where Africans could live, where and when they could move, what crops they could grow, and what social places they could frequent. Virulent racism and European self-interest prejudiced the colonial justice system, and punishments typically included public floggings, stiff fines, and long prison terms. Indeed, Kenya had one of the most notoriously harsh penal systems in all of Britain's African colonies. When these repressive measures were not enough to thwart the growth of Mau Mau, the colonial government declared a State of Emergency, enacted dozens of draconian regulations, and began employing terror as a means to subdue the suspected Mau Mau population. In many ways, it was this exploitative and repressive system itself that had helped to fuel the growth of Mau Mau, and it would take the final consolidation and bureaucratization of absolute colonial power in the form of the Pipeline to break it.

Confession was the sine qua non for a detainee's release. The purpose of detention in Kenya was not necessarily to keep the Mau Mau suspects alive but to force them to confess through a punishing routine of forced labor and brutality. In terms of productivity this pattern ultimately revealed an inherent contradiction. A tension emerged between the need for ever greater supplies of labor, without which it would be impossible to continue the colony's infrastructure development, and the competing impulse to punish, debilitate, and even exterminate the Kikuyu population. Exhausting labor routines, beatings, torture, food deprivation, all used to force confession, could and often did render detainees incapable of working.

The British colonial government's works camps in Kenya were not wholly different from those in Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia; they functioned on what Wolfgang Sofsky called "the economy of waste."<sup>97</sup>

The Pipeline was a microcosm where the contradictions and antagonisms between Kikuyu and European societies in Kenya were brought to a boiling intensity, and the world behind the barbed wire rendered utterly transparent, for the first time, the dark side of Britain's colonial project. The hypocrisies, the exploitations, the violence, and the suffering were all laid bare in the Pipeline. It was there that Britain finally revealed the true nature of its civilizing mission.