

MISSIONARIES AND GUERRILLAS¹

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ABSTRACT

To extinguish the Mau Mau, a movement driven by land issues that marked Kenya, the colonial government declared a state of emergency in 1952, creating villages to which the Kikuyu population was displaced, as well as detention camps for the guerrillas. Therefore, it is worth analyzing the relationships amongst Consolata missionaries and the Mau Mau guerrillas, which led to an approximation between these missionaries and the Kikuyu.

KEYWORDS: *Mau Mau; Kenya; Consolata Missionaries; Colonialism; Political Anthropology*

Missionários e guerrilheiros

RESUMO

Na tentativa de extinguir o Mau Mau, movimento impulsionado por questões fundiárias no Quênia, o governo colonial decretou estado de emergência em 1952, criando aldeias para as quais foi deslocada a população kikuyu, além de campos de detenção para os guerrilheiros. Nesse contexto, interessa analisar as dinâmicas das relações entre missionários da Consolata e guerrilheiros Mau Mau, que culminaram numa aproximação entre esses e os kikuyus.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Mau Mau; Quênia; missionários da Consolata; colonialismo; antropologia política*

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[2] The land issue in Kenya began at the end of the 19th century with a severe drought that led to the death of a large part of the herds and the expulsion of clusters by the “big men” who owned the Kikuyu lands

THE FEAR OF THE OATH: CONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE MAU MAU

The Mau Mau movement, uprising, organization or guerrilla (1952-60) can be described, in general terms, as an organization of native Africans — mainly the Kikuyu people — aimed at regaining, through armed struggle, the control of lands that were taken from them during the British colonial rule² and, thereby, at regaining control over their own lives. In addition to the land issue, there are other factors that may have spurred its formation and the delimitation of its targets, including the rejection of Christianity and Western values.

The rejection of Christianity was constantly presented by Christian missionaries and European settlers as one of the principles of the Mau Mau oath, which had to be taken by new members of the movement. The Oath or Muma is a constant theme in accounts about the Mau Mau that has fueled long discussions among Christian missionaries and, above all, among those who declared the state of emergency³ and the theorists of rehabilitation, which was the method adopted by British authorities to try to destroy the Mau Mau guerrillas.

Among Christian missionaries, the prevailing view was that the Mau Mau was an anti-religious and anti-European cult, and the oath — which was taken during the initiation ritual from those who wanted to join the cult — was based on the denial of religious principles. Considered an affront to Christian principles, the oath could not be tolerated by religious leaders. Pastoral letters written by Catholic Bishops Carlo Cavallera and John McCarthy, as well as statements by the Anglican Archbishop Leonard Beecher of the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM), advised Christians to keep away from the Mau Mau oath (Mwaniki, 2018).

Bishop Carlo Cavallera excommunicated all Catholics under his jurisdiction who had taken the Mau Mau oath. The bishop might have acted this way because he related the Mau Mau to the Freemasons, since both were conceived as organizations aimed at destroying the church, and Canon 2335 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law determined the excommunication of those who would join such cults (Njoroge, 1999).

The oath was mentioned in all articles published in the *Missioni Consolata* magazine about the Mau Mau in 1952 and 1953, but I would like to highlight the narrative written by Father Edmondo Cavicchi and published in September 1952, in which he provides a detailed description of the oath-taking rite. This description is very similar to those provided by Leakey (1954) and Kariuki (1975), the latter a former Mau Mau prisoner, about his second oath-taking rite. In fact, the only noteworthy difference between these descriptions is that Kariuki describes the entire oath in addition to the rite. Kariuki (*id.*, pp. 29-30) shares that, after the ceremony, the oath administrator asked him to take seven sticks and stick them one by one into the breast of a sacrificed ram as part of the sacrificial rite, as he vowed to fight for their land and for the African people and, if necessary, to kill the invaders on their land and those who support them, as well as never taking another man's wife, never being with prostitutes, never stealing, never selling their land, and never reveal the secrets of the movement.

Although there was nothing in the oath that referred to the church or to Christianity, the missionaries condemned it on the assumption that it was anti-Christian and, as an antidote to that oath, the Conso-

(Lonsdale, 1990). This situation worsened with the arrival of European settlers in the central region of Kenya, mostly inhabited by Kikuyus, which got worse even further after World War II (Anderson, 2005).

[3] The state of emergency, declared in 1952 by the colonial government in Kenya, aimed to destroy the Mau Mau guerrillas, implementing rules to control the natives.

[4] The Consolata Institute for Foreign Missions was created in Turin in 1901.

[5] Kitson, a captain in government forces, found the Mau Mau oath understandable from a soldier's point of view and believed that the obsession of conservatives with looking for evidence of savagery lacked tactical intelligence (Lonsdale, 1990).

[6] Harry Thuku was one of the trainers at the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), one of the first organizations to resist colonialism in Kenya, of which Kenyatta was a secretary.

[7] The story surrounding Kenyatta's indictment and conviction as a Mau Mau leader has connections with white settlers' views of the Mau Mau and their efforts to ensure their supremacy in the Kenyan highlands.

[8] For example, in the enthronement ritual, warriors took an oath — *Muma wa Aanake* — to respect each other and distance themselves from feelings that could spark disputes among them. They also promised to unite and protect each other.

lata missionaries⁴ created another one: “If I ever associate again with the Mau Mau members, may God kill me”, for those who spontaneously took the Mau Mau oath; and “If I take again the oath, may God kill me”, for those who were forced to do so (Mwaniki, 2018, p. 179).

Like religious people, settlers and colonial agents also condemned the Mau Mau oath. According to Edgerton (1989), they considered the oath to be the focal point of the Mau Mau guerrilla and believed that it included some witchcraft capable of transforming decent people into monsters. A psychiatrist who worked at Mathari Mental Hospital, Collin Carothers, argued that the Mau Mau were prone to violence as a result of a “forest psychology” that made them individualistic and morally unprincipled when not under peer pressure.⁵ Also, this psychiatrist, Leakey, along with Thuku,⁶ believed that the Mau Mau oath was created by someone who was knowledgeable about European witchcraft, which raised suspicions about Jomo Kenyatta being the oath-maker.⁷

Louis Leakey (1954), who was considered the foremost expert on the Kikuyu during that period, argued that the evil power of the oath laid in the combination of a traditional rite and its violation. Thus, the Mau Mau oath subverted Kikuyu values by transforming a public ritual,⁸ performed by responsible adults with the consent of their kin, into a secret and individual rite. Consolata missionaries also viewed with horror the subversion of the traditional Kikuyu ritual. Father Scarcella, from the Kaheti mission, wrote the following:

[...] *Terror reigns in the country.*

The change seen in this population over the course of a few months is absolutely unbelievable. The Kikuyu have lost their serenity and gracefulness; the villages look deserted; even the children became pensive and taciturn.

Since the followers of the cult were declared outlaws, a great number of them, both men and women, began to steal like bandits.

Particularly impressive is the evolution taking place among women. The Kikuyu women, as it is well-known, were not allowed in pagan sacrifices. All kinds of official oath (Muma) were strictly reserved to men. The Mau Mau have broken this tradition and, to the great disgrace and disapproval of the elders, have forced women and even children to take the oath. Men and women came to be considered equal under the “Muma” and in their families, breaking the sense of respect and subordination, and creating a dangerous state of anarchy.

The “Gotahekió”, which is a ceremony whereby the native people free themselves from the obligations imposed by the Mau Mau's oath or “Muma”, and can be defined as the “counter-Muma”, is not much sought after by women because they do not want to give up a privilege that was granted to them by the Mau Mau. (Missioni Consolata, 1953b, p. 160)

The Europeans believed that the violence of the murders committed by the Mau Mau could only be possible if they were controlled or guided by a destructive force. This kind of conception seems to have been created by a colonial government effort to make the Mau Mau uprising look like the cause of violence and social disintegration (Anderson, 2005). Thus, colonial propaganda aimed to make the colonial population, both white and African, go against the Mau Mau. One of the elements chosen as the theme of the propaganda was the brutality of the Mau Mau's acts, which was addressed in a film that featured the Lari massacre.⁹ This film was projected in the reserves of the central province using a mobile cinema installed in a van. After it was shown in the village of Rongai, a British official claimed that many Africans approached the colonial authorities to avow that they had taken the Mau Mau oath (Osborne, 2015).

Another point explored by the propaganda against the Mau Mau involved demonstrating that they were unable to fulfill the promises made at the beginning of the movement to regain the control of their lands and their freedom. These campaigns also used arguments such as “the Mau Mau is against education”, as they had burned down some schools,¹⁰ while the British had built schools and brought “progress” to Africans. Thus, the strategy adopted by the colonial government was to benefit Africans who were loyal to the British by granting them parcels of land, encouraging the development of commercial activities, building schools, creating a model farm and an agricultural training center for their children, and expanding the right to freedom of movement (Branch, 2007).

One may notice that the themes used both for and against the Mau Mau uprising were based on the same principles — the value of work, self-control, respectability, and modernity (Branch, 2007; Osborne, 2015; Lonsdale, 1990). These principles were included in leaflets published in the period prior to the State of Emergency in vernacular newspapers, whose circulation was then banned by the colonial authorities (Branch, 2007). Some of these leaflets were prepared by Henry Muoria and published in his 1994 book *I, the Gikuyu and the White Fury*. In the first leaflet, entitled “What Should We Do for Our Sake?”, the author talks about “how knowledge can help them”, “the need for work”, “the care for children and the need for them to be educated/go to school”, “the white legacy in learning”, “development and progress”, “the need for working together”, and the “creation of cooperatives”, among other topics.

Some of these themes, especially those related to education, appear in the first report on the Mau Mau movement published in *Missioni Consolata*, in September 1952, in which a native teacher talks about the invasion, by Mau Mau leaders, of a parents' meeting at the beginning of the school year, at the chapel school of Kyando:

[9] On May 26, 1953, 120 people died as a result of Mau Mau's actions, and 200 Mau Mau were killed by Home Guard soldiers during this massacre (Osborne, 2015).

[10] These schools might have been burned down because there were teachers who were loyal to the British or due to personal disputes, not because they were against education (Kariuki, 1975).

[...] Some individuals appeared at the window carrying spears, maces, and knives. The assembly grew restless. A voice in the background said, “Nobody move! The door is locked. Don’t be scared. Remain in your seats”.

In this tense scenario, a man stepped forward and announced that he was going to speak: “[...] We all want the good of our people. We want our children to have what we couldn’t have. They won’t get it from others, only from us. The teacher said well. He reminded us of what interests us and our children. We have nothing to add to what he said. He has our full approval. He likes our boys — with him, we will rule and be as numerous as locusts. You should want the work of our hands: none of us will fail. We will repair the buildings. Tell us your wish, and we will make it bigger and more beautiful. The plants in our woods and the hay on our hills are yours. Your school is ours. We must move forward and progress. We can’t go back. (Cavicchi, 1952, pp. 202-3)

In this account, there is no reference to disapproval because the school and its members were Catholic. Mwaniki (2018) — who is a historian, a Kikuyu, and a Consolata missionary — questions his predecessors’ claim that the Mau Mau were an anti-Christian cult. According to him, the movement was not against Christianity, but against colonization, the occupation of their lands by European settlers, and the curtailment of their freedom. This could be demonstrated, according to the author, by the consequences of the so-called “circumcision controversy” (Guerra, 2016), which peaked in 1929, involving Protestant missionaries who demanded that natives linked to their missions abandoned the practice of “circumcising” their daughters, under penalty of expulsion from the church, which led to the exodus of these natives and the foundation of independent Christian churches (Lonsdale, 1990).

Just like Mwaniki, Kariuki, in his memoir entitled *“Mau Mau” Detainee: The Account by a Kenya African of His Experiences in Detention Camps 1953-1960*, states that there was no reference to Christianity in the oaths taken when he joined the movement and that he was a Christian when he took his first oath. Lonsdale (1990) makes a similar observation, noting that the conflicts between the Mau Mau guerrillas and Christians were not caused by issues relating to religious principles, but to their link to the colonial government.

Njoroge (1999) reports that in a letter sent to Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi, in 1953, Bishop McCarthy stated that despite the Mau Mau guerrilla, thousands of Kikuyus — among which were many Protestants — were going to the Catholic Church, as they had begun to distinguish Catholic priests from ordinary Europeans and the colonial government. The Consolata missionaries also recorded an increase in the number of people who were interested in joining the catechumenate in the dioceses of Nyeri and Meru, where their missions

were located, from less than 5,000 in 1951 to more than 50,000 and 10,000, respectively, in 1957 (Mwaniki, 2018, p. 253). In 1956, at the beginning of the campaign to attract the faithful to the church, there were 5,652 catechumens; three months later there were 30,740; and a year later there were 52,606. In 1955, the number of baptized Catholics was 53,148; in 1956 it was 61,857; and in 1957 it was 84,204. By the end of 1958, the number of Catholics had reached 107,786. From July 1956 to June 1957, 3,140 Protestants converted to Catholicism (Trevisiol, 1989, p. 261). Observing these data, it is yet to be understood what motivated such growth during the guerrilla period.

WHITES AND “WHITES”

Although they shared the same fear over the Mau Mau oath, although they believed that it was an anti-Christian movement and disapproved of the use of armed violence as a method of struggle, based on the content of the letter sent by Bishop Carlo Cavallera to Dudley Hawkings in 1953 (*apud* Mwanik, 2018, pp. 88-9), Catholic missionaries considered the demands of the Mau Mau movement to be fair. Njoroge (1999) points out that Bishop John McCarthy, in his pastoral letter issued in 1953, despite condemning the Mau Mau movement as his counterpart Carlo Cavallera had done a year earlier, addressed the injustices suffered by native populations in Kenya for years. “We wish to make it clear that there is no intention to condemn love of country, laudable nationalism and the just attempt to their legitimate grievances” (McCarthy *apud* Njoroge, 1999, p. 168).¹¹ Like Bishop McCarthy and the Spiritans working in Kenya, Consolata missionaries recognized the legitimacy of the Mau Mau movement’s demands, although they disagreed on their actions. These missionaries also set up a team to work with Mau Mau prisoners,¹² as requested by the colonial government, which was based on the idea that the Mau Mau problem was essentially psychological and spiritual, and required an action by the churches to restore their souls and establish hope and harmony instead of the then existing hatred, suspicion, and conflict (Shannon, 1955).

Carothers, the aforementioned psychiatrist, contributed to the conception of concentration camps based on the theory that the Mau Mau were possessed by evil forces that had to be extirpated in public confessions, as traditionally carried out by the Kikuyu (Lonsdale, 1990; Edgerton, 1989). After a more detailed study of the Mau Mau case, Carothers went on to argue that the Mau Mau problem was also related to a psychic insecurity linked to the incompatibility between traditional and modern ways of life (Lonsdale, 1990). Shannon (1955) pointed out the existence of a disorder factor that might have been

[11] The congregation of the Holy Spirit Fathers, that was — and still is — active in Kenya is Irish, and the Irish press made analogies between the Mau Mau movement and the Irish War of Independence. There are some reports of Spiritan missionaries that try to dissociate the Mau Mau from the Sinn Féin — the Irish nationalist movement — because they consider it an offense to compare Christian and civilized Irish nationalist leaders to “wild gangs” such as the Mau Mau (Njoroge, 1999).

[12] With regard to Consolata missionaries, Bishop Cavallera appointed Father Rabaioli to coordinate the creation of this team. Catholics quickly organized themselves, but it took Bishop Beecher of the CMS over four months to find suitable people to do this work (Mwaniki, 2018).

created by the dissemination of odd and false ideas that young people brought from the cities and with which they “infected” their relatives.

Considering those who had taken the Mau Mau oath as “sick” or “infected”, a committee made up of white Kenyans (born in Kenya to British parents) decided that this population had to be “quarantined” in concentration camps where they would be prevented from infecting other people and they could be rehabilitated¹³ (Edgerton, 1989). This committee, based on psychoanalytic theory and Christian theology, believed that if the Mau Mau confessed, they would repent of their sins, have an emotional catharsis, and free themselves from the disease of the oath, being reintroduced to Christianity and to its moral principles. Thus, they proposed a rehabilitation program based on “cleansing” through confession, which was accepted by the colonial government and the settlers.

Christian missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, accepted the role that the then colonial governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, proposed to them in the rehabilitation program, which initially provided for scrutinizing suspects, then after interrogation classifying them into “whites” (innocents), “grays” (who had been involved in the Mau Mau activities), and “blacks” (essentially the Mau Mau). The first step towards the official implementation of this program was the creation of the Moral Re-Armament Movement (MRA), based in the Athi River concentration camp, where a CMS minister, a Catholic priest, an African administrative assistant, and a carpentry instructor worked and were assisted by a group of elders trained in the missions. The MRA intended to establish a program to convince the Mau Mau guerrilla members that they could become Kikuyu leaders based on the ideals of purity, honesty, altruism, and love (Mwaniki, 2018).

The methods used by the MRA did not have satisfactory results and the program was abandoned (Lonsdale, 1990;¹⁴ Mwaniki, 2018; Shannon, 1955). However, Edgerton (1989) highlights that the MRA members had some success with prisoners classified as “gray”, but the administrators of the Athi River concentration camp felt that detainees got closer to the MRA to get out of prison, and that the Mau Mau was their true devotion. Caroline Elkins (2014) seems to have the same conception as the administrators of the Athi River concentration camp when she states that, to get stronger and resist, the detainees organized clandestine sessions of worship to their creator God *Ngai* and to their mythical ancestors, *Gikuyu* and *Mumbi*, seeking answers to the conditions in which they found themselves. The detainees thus maintained a cynical attitude towards Christianity,¹⁵ seeing the missionaries as collaborators of the colonial government, who conveyed to the colonial agents what they had learned about the Mau Mau, in addition to colluding with the treatment given to prisoners.

[13] This rehabilitation program, launched in 1954, aimed to destroy the armed uprising by controlling its supporters and creating new forms of social cohesion, such as Home Guard, Young Farmer’s Clubs and Maendeleo wa Wanawaki, a women’s association in which Europeans were in charge of training African leaders to encourage loyalty and cooperation with settlers, and to teach them manual and domestic work (Shannon, 1955). In order to control the Mau Mau supporters, the colonial government accepted the idea of displacing the Kikuyu population to villages created for this purpose, which was proposed by Carothers (Mwaniki, 2018).

[14] The author also states that this program was not approved by the Christian Council of Kenya (CCK), which represented the Protestant missions; therefore, it was not carried out.

[15] Mbembe (2013) draws attention to what he considers to be mistakes regarding the adherence to Christianity by native Africans, stating that if on the one hand this type of adherence cannot be treated as a submission to Western values, on the other hand it is necessary to observe that there are indeed adhesions and that they occur in specific historical and social situations that impel agents to adopt strategies that enable them to better situate themselves in these contexts.

Mwaniki (2018) agrees that the missionaries were part of the rehabilitation program and shared the belief that the Mau Mau problem could be solved through confession and repentance. However, Father Scarcella, a Consolata missionary who worked in the Department of Rehabilitation at the Ministry of Community Development, although convinced that there could be no rehabilitation without confession and repentance, argued that confession had to be voluntary. Thus, the priest was against the use of methods that would constrain people to confession, as this would eliminate any possibility of honesty in what would be said.

Despite the recommendations of Father Scarcella, who left Kenya in early 1957 due to health problems, just over a year after accepting the position at the Department of Rehabilitation, the methods used by colonial agents to extract confessions did not seem to be free from constraint. In order to obtain confessions, prisoners had their daily lives marked by hunger, forced labor, and torture, says Caroline Elkins (2014). Peterson (2008) points out that many detainees, even when faced with the inhumane conditions of the concentration camps, refused to speak, as the Mau Mau oath required control of the language — or the word. They had to be careful about what they said and who they talked with so as not to let any secrets about the movement slip to their enemies. Knowing how to remain silent thus represented an act of citizenship and differentiated patriots from their enemies, those who sold their land.¹⁶

The Consolata missionaries also claim that initially the prisoners refused to talk to them, but most of the time this refusal gave way when they noticed the existence of some differences between these missionaries and the other whites. One of the main reasons for this to occur, according to reports published in the *Missioni Consolata* magazine and to most of my respondents, was the fact that they spoke — and still do — native African languages. This kind of reaction can be illustrated by the account, given by Father Colombo in 1958, of his attempt to talk with a Mau Mau prisoner in the Catholic hospital in Nyeri, when the prisoner, who refused to respond to his greeting in English, replied rudely when he spoke to him in Swahili, but when he spoke in Kikuyu, the prisoner said that he knew him and wanted to talk to him. After they talked for a while, the priest had to leave and the prisoner asked him to come and see him again. The priest visited him other times and, during one of those visits, the prisoner said that he and the other Mau Mau used to see him often on the road, but they never hurt him because they knew he was different from non-Catholic missionaries¹⁷ and that he was working for their children, who needed to go to school.

In addition to this, there are many other accounts of Mau Mau prisoners about the protection or non-aggression of Consolata

[16] The refusal of the prisoners to confess the oath or talk to colonial agents and missionaries is constantly addressed in the literature.

[17] From the collected documentation, it is possible to suppose that there was an intense dispute between Catholics and Protestants in the colonial context.

[18] It must be remembered, however, that in the early days of the guerrilla warfare a Consolata missionary sister and one of the Kikuyu catechists linked to the mission were murdered by the Mau Mau. Some missionaries I spoke with claim that they were killed because they could endanger the movement and/or the families of those who attacked them, as they knew them and could report them to the colonial authorities.

missionaries,¹⁸ but the best known is that of Dedan Kimathi, one of the main Mau Mau leaders who was sentenced to death in November 1956 and executed on February 18, 1957. In an article entitled “La condanna e la morte del ‘generalissimo’ Mau Mau: sulle ormi di buon ladroni” [The condemnation and death of a great Mau Mau leader: on the path of good thieves], Father Merlo-Pich talks about an occasion when one of the Consolata missionaries saw Dedan Kimathi in prison shortly after his capture. According to the priest, Kimathi said that when he was a child he attended the chapel school in Wamagana, which was linked to the Tetu mission, and, despite having been later baptized by the Protestants, he still remembered the Hail Mary and would like to receive the Catholic sacraments. He also said that he always prohibited those he led from carrying out any acts against missionaries, and that he always knelt down and prayed before any important action.

Dedan Kimathi’s relationship with Consolata missionaries was mentioned by some of my contacts. One of them, Father Bianchi, said that Kimathi’s statements about the Consolata missionaries played a fundamental role in their acceptance by the Kikuyu population. Father Bianchi, as well as others who talk about this relationship, emphasizes the role of the letter left by Kimathi to Father Marino on the day before his execution, in which he thanks the attention paid by the missionaries and asks the priest to take care of his son, mother, and wife:

Dear Father,

It is about one o’clock night that I have picked up my pencil and paper so that I may remember you and your beloveds’ friends before the time is over.

I am so busy and so happy preparing for Heaven tomorrow 18th of Feb. 1957.

Only to let you know that Father Whellan came in to see me here in my prison room as soon as he received the information regarding my arrival. He is such a dear kind person as I did not firstly expect. He visits me oftenly and gives me sufficiently encouragement in every way possible.

He provides me with important books which more than all have set a burning light throughout my way to paradise, such as:

- 1. Students Catholic Doctrine;*
- 2. In the likeness of Christ;*
- 3. The New Testament;*
- 4. How to understand the Mass;*
- 5. The appearance of the Virgin Mary at the Grotto of Lourdes;*
- 6. Prayer book in kikuyu;*
- 7. The Virgin Mary of Fatima;*
- 8. The Cross and the Rosary etc.*

I want to make it ever memorial to you and all that only Father Whellan

that came to see me on Christmas day while I had many coming on the others weeks and days. Sorry that they did not remember me during the birth our Lord and Saviour. Pity also that they forget of me during a merry day.

I Have already discussed the matter with him and I am sure that he will inform you all.

Only a question of setting my son at school. He is far from any your schools, but I trust that something must be done to see that he starts early under your care etc.

Do not fail from seeing my mother who is very old and to comfort her even though that she is so much sorrowful.

My wife is here. She is detained at Kamiti prison and I suggest that she will be released after some time. I would like her to be consalted by sisters, e.g., Sister Modester, etc. for she too feels very lonely.

And if by any possibility she can be near the mission as near Mathari so that she may be close to the sisters and Church.

I conclude by telling you only to do me favour by getting education to my son.

Farwell to the world and all its belongings, I say and best wishes I say to my friends with whom we shall not meet in this busy world.

Please pass my compliments and best wishes to all who read the *Wathiomo Mukinyu*.

Remember me too the Fathers, Brothers and Sisters.

With good hope and best wishes,

I remain, dear Father,

Yours loving and departing convert

D. Kimathi

(Kimathi *apud* Mwaniki, 2018, p. 348)

Kimathi was an avid writer and, like other Mau Mau leaders, he earned the respect of his followers with his wit. Even though he was in the middle of the forest that covers central Kenya, where the Mau Mau guerrillas stayed, which made it difficult for the colonial police to capture him, he always wanted to obtain information about what was happening in Kenya, so he organized an information network which included warriors that would listen to radio programs and others that would obtain news from native reserves — created by the British colonial government in order to separate the space where natives could live — whenever possible. Also, Kimathi used to pay special attention to propaganda against the Mau Mau to counteract what whites said about them. Kimathi was also concerned about preserving the memory of the forest guerrillas so that future generations would not forget their ancestors who sacrificed themselves for them (Osborne, 2015).

Kimathi became a symbol for both the Mau Mau and their opponents and, as such, he inspired a number of novels, including one written by Father Ottavio Sestero, *L'inafferrabile Mau Mau* [The Elusive

[19] In addition to the book *L'Inafferrabile Mau Mau*, Father Sestero wrote a series of chronicles aimed at young people, as well as articles in which he describes the situation in Kenya and that were published in *Missioni Consolata*. In one of these articles, published in the September 1956 issue, he talks about the slow formation of the Mau Mau and the reasons for their existence. He highlights the conditions in which they live in the villages, stressing the control of epidemics that decimated the population with the introduction of hygiene rules and medical treatment provided by European missionaries, which resulted in an exponential population growth. So, when fighting for more land, says the priest, the Kikuyu are worried about the future of their children, as there is not enough land for everyone.

[20] Kenyatta was imprisoned in his own home in Maralal, which became part of Kenya's national museum.

[21] One of the aspects that helped to build a friendly relationship between missionaries and prisoners was, according to some of my informers, their role in delivering messages exchanged between prisoners held in different prisons or concentration camps or between them and their families. In this regard, it is interesting to note that, after giving a conference at the University of Urbino, in which I mentioned the role of Consolata missionaries in the circulation of messages in the Mau Mau period, some people mentioned that what Bernardo (an anthropologist who was a Consolata missionary and worked in Kenya during this period) used to say about the letters he carried to and/or from prisons now made sense. As it was an illegal activity, it is not mentioned in the articles published in *Missioni Consolata*.

[22] In 1956, Eileen Fletcher, a Quaker who worked with the women in Kamiti, shocked the British public opinion by talking about the conditions in concentration camps, especially with regard to children. She reportedly denounced the existence of young children left alone while their mothers went to work, 11-year-old detainees sentenced to remain in solitary confinement for 16 days for singing a Kikuyu song, sexual abuse, forced labor, among other abuses (Edgerton, 1989).

Mau Mau]. According to Cristiana Pugliese (2002), this one presents the Mau Mau movement from an internal and external perspective at the same time. This might have been possible because he lived with the Kikuyu for thirty years; also, he was an Italian and a Consolata missionary, therefore, a foreigner. Another point highlighted by the author concerns the absence of any negative words to refer to the Mau Mau in general, in addition to the character of Dan Kima (Dedan Kimathi) which is presented as a brave and intelligent man, a leader who killed only when he was forced to do so, who believed in order and discipline, condemned infighting and unnecessary bloodshed, and was a caring husband and father.¹⁹

Another notorious prisoner with whom the Consolata missionaries maintained close relations was Jomo Kenyatta. According to some of my respondents, Kenyatta was constantly visited by the missionaries in charge of pastoral work in prisons and talked a lot with Bishop Cavallera.²⁰ An important detail they highlighted in relation to the closeness between Kenyatta and Consolata missionaries is the fact that his wife, who is the mother of the current Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta, is Catholic, was baptized by a Consolata missionary, and continues to attend church and help in social work.

The relationships maintained with Consolata missionaries by Kimathi, Kenyatta and other Mau Mau leaders, as well as other Kikuyus, in the context of the Mau Mau guerrilla, draw attention to how those missionaries have changed over time and the positions adopted by several of the agents involved in the context of the state of emergency.

Thus, although these missionaries were against the Mau Mau at the beginning of the guerrilla and Bishop Cavallera wrote a pastoral letter condemning the movement and threatening excommunication to Catholics who participated in it, they built good relationships with many of the Mau Mau prisoners.²¹ Furthermore, despite condemning the guerrilla, Consolata missionaries did not agree with the colonial government as to the displacement of the Kikuyu population to villages created during the state of emergency, which prevented them from helping the guerrillas by providing them with food, clothing, medicine and, above all, new members.

In this context, according to reports from missionaries published in *Missioni Consolata* and statements from some of my respondents, the missionaries constantly complained to colonial agents about the poor conditions in which the Kikuyu population lived, being confined to villages, concentration camps, and prisons. One of these complaints refers to the fact that children and young people were imprisoned together with adults.²² Father Ghilardi, from the Egogi/Meru mission, stated that, since the agents of the colonial government declared that they could do nothing about this situation, he

offered to shelter the so-called “*piccolli Mau Mau*”, adopting an educational methodology learned from the Salesians, that is, without the use of violence or a security system. According to the priest, there was no escape and these young people were integrated with the others who attended the mission schools.

In addition to the complaints made to the colonial authorities, the missionaries organized a scheme to care for this population imprisoned in the villages, which was described as follows by Father Giannelli:

In each village, efforts are being made to build a school to take care of children and a sewing school for the girls. The Sisters devote themselves primarily to religious instruction and to the healing of the sick, who are always numerous. As for missionaries, they are interested in working in the field, trying to meet the various needs and seeking the Government for the most serious cases. Particularly noteworthy is the precious work of our doctors — Dr. Pagliarani, Dr. Lantra, and Father Dagnino —, who regularly visit the villages to act as doctors and surgeons, receiving great recognition in the same environment that, in the past, people were against our actions. (Giannelli, 1954, pp. 255-6)

Another factor that seems to have influenced the constitution of a Consolata missionaries position that differentiated them from other whites in the context of the Mau Mau guerrilla was their imprisonment by the British during World War II. Considered to be enemies when Mussolini declared support for the Axis powers, these missionaries were taken to the Koffiefontein concentration camp in South Africa, where they remained until 1943 and were then relocated to the Kabete concentration camp in Kenya. In addition to being imprisoned, according to Father Camoglio’s diary it was said that the British no longer wanted Italian missionaries in Kenya.²³

These facts, on the one hand, led to the reinforcement of the perception by the natives that the Italian missionaries were different from the British²⁴ and that they were not the natives’ allies. At the same time, the prison experience gave the Consolata missionaries a more accurate perception of what it meant to be a prisoner — there are several reports of imprisoned missionaries during World War II who realized that they were not afraid to visit prisons and villages, as they knew how they worked and how both the Mau Mau prisoners and the villagers felt, because they had also been prisoners of the British.

The elements exposed above demonstrate how some of the actors involved in the anticolonial disputes resorted to strategies for the production of meaning and organization of actions based on the specific situations in which they found themselves. Thus, it can be observed how the Mau Mau guerrillas — who at first rejected dialogue with

[23] The British asked the Holy See to remove the Italian missionaries from Kenya and the latter sent the Irish bishop McCarthy to negotiate with the British, who, after negotiations conducted by the bishop, authorized the permanence of these missionaries in Kenyan territory (Mwaniki, 2018).

[24] Kariuki (1975) talks about two Italian prisoners of war who worked on the same farm as him, when he was still a boy, noting that, although they were white, they were friendly and treated Africans as equals. Perhaps living with Italian prisoners of war contributed to creating a friendlier image of them.

Christians, claiming that they should catechize the British, since they, by adopting the death penalty, were not respecting the principles of Christianity — became allies of the Consolata missionaries. The alliances between these missionaries, the Mau Mau guerrillas, and part of the Kikuyu population can only be understood if their context is taken into account; that is, a context marked by the native population insertion in social structures different from the traditional ones, whose management they dominated, and in which both the Consolata missionaries and the Kikuyus found themselves in more or less subordinate positions in relation to the British.

The internalization of mechanisms that enabled African populations to act within the colonial order made them capable of using the most diverse strategies in order to achieve their goals, whether the production of meaning or concerning material needs, as observed by Mbembe (2013). Thus, the bonds established between the Mau Mau guerrillas, the Kikuyus, and Consolata missionaries reveal the consequences of a series of positions taken by these actors; that is, when Consolata missionaries considered the demands of the guerrillas to be fair and strove to help the village population, they showed that they could be good allies. Furthermore, these missionaries were receptive in the context of the Mau Mau guerrilla²⁵ to the demands that the Kikuyus had been making since the 1930s in relation to the curriculum of schools aimed at natives, which, according to them, should include English and other subjects previously reserved for the teaching of foreign children.²⁶ This shows changes in the way they understood the training necessary for the Kikuyus and allows us to understand why they became allies with Consolata missionaries and asked them to take over the foundation and/or direction of schools in the villages.²⁷

[25] What had not happened before.

[26] A discussion that marked the opening of independent schools in the 1930s and 1940s, which were closed by the colonial government in 1952, whose principles were resumed by Consolata missionaries in the management of the schools they took over.

[27] Translated into English by Carmen Reis [E.N.]

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