A History of Women Anti- state Fighters in Kenya;1945-2019

By

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Bonny Wamukoya Wasike, for his endless support throughout my studies and to Rev. Father Lance Nadeau, the Superior General Maryknoll Fathers, and Brothers, for his support and motivation in my academic journey.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMISOM-   African Union Mission to Somalia

AWAPSA-   Advocacy for Women in Peace and Security Africa

FGDs-   Focus Group Discussions

FGM-   Female Genital Mutilation

KADU-   The Kenya African Democratic Union

KANU-   The Kenya African National Union

KAU-   Kenya African Union

KCP-   The Kenya colony and protectorate

KDF-   The Kenya Defense Forces

KII-   Key Informant Interview

KNA-   Kenya National Archives

KPU-   Kenya People's Union

NACOSTI-   National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation

NARC-   National Rainbow Coalition

UN-   United Nations

UNDP-   The United Nations Development Programme

UNODC-   United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

WIIS-   Women in International Security

ABSTRACT

Women's insurgency has often been laden with passivity, coercion, or victim narratives. An unraveled puzzle around this case is that it has hardly received much scholarly attention. This study is historical documentation of women anti-state fighters in Kenya between 1945 and 2019. Specifically, the study examines how women were involved in fighting and related violent activities. The study also examines how women enlist in violent groups and their experiences in times of fighting. The study participants were drawn from four major counties: Nairobi, Garissa, Nyeri, and Mombasa. A qualitative research approach was employed, and a historical research design was utilized. The study was guided by the signaling theory of crime and the fighter's centrality approach to fighting. The study participants included women fighters and ex-fighters in Mau Mau, Mungiki, Jeshi la Embakasi, Gaza, and Al-Shabaab. Security personnel such as KDF, former flying squad, Kenya Police, and prison officers also constituted the participants in this study. Men fighters, people who know women fighters, county administrators, and academia were also adopted as participants in this study. The sample size consisted of 98 participants selected through purposive and snowballing sampling techniques. In total there are 100 interviews (physical and virtual) and 4 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) used in oral data collection. Archival sources, specifically British colonial administrators' reports on the Mau Mau situation in Kenya, colonial administrators' letters, districts' annual reports, prison records and newspapers during the colonial era in Kenya from the Kenya National archives in Nairobi and Nyeri were also utilized. Records of the Mau Mau veterans in Kenya at the Nyeri Mau Mau veteran association's private archives are also used. The study establishes that the relationship between gender, women, and violence is based on gender stereotypes. The stereotypes are grounded on the public-private dichotomy, which only recognizes male warriors and peaceful or victimized women. It also reveals that women enter these groups through insiders and fight using both combat and non-combat strategies. However, as political, social, and economic developments take shape in the country, these fighters' fighting front and strategies keep changing. Also, their place in these groups is marked by gender conflicts between masculinity and femininity and limited by patriarchy. Finally, the findings reveal several aspects that render women passive victims or coerced actors in violence. These include the grievances of violent groups, their activities such as FGM, the masculinity element accorded to weapons they use, and the few women fighters. The study concludes that women are central and game changers in the success of violent groups. The study recommends re-socialization and rewriting the history of violence that is gender-sensitive, and inclusive. The centrality of the violent actor is recommended in the examination of war and violence. In the fight against violence and terrorism, the study recommends that there is a need to be cognizant of both women victims of violence and conscious fighters.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Fighting

This is defined as any strategy or tactic employed by violent groups to propel their aims. These strategies are both combat and non-combat in nature. In this study, these strategies range from engaging targets in the battlefront or attack scenes to mapping the targets, collecting of intelligence, financing the groups, acquiring, storage and transporting of arms and weapons, food supply to the fighters, and any other invisible tactic that promotes the activities of these groups. This study primarily focuses on Mau Mau, Mungiki, Jeshi La Embakasi, Gaza, and Al-Shabaab. However, it should be noted that these groups operated at different times and that various grievances and issues informed their emergence. For example, Mau Mau, in the Kenyan historical context, was a nationalist and liberation group. Accordingly, it is different from the other groups already classified as illegal and debarred under the Prevention of Organized Crime Act (2010). However, in this study, what connects Mau Mau with these other groups is the use of violence to achieve their individual group goals. Nonetheless, fighting in Mau Mau is used as a reference point upon which women fighters in Kenya are contextualized and studied.

Women anti-state fighters

These are women who take part in fighting and its related activities aimed against the state. They are also called violent actors and are members of groups that have been banned by the government as illegal. They include those who take arms and weapons to the war fronts and attack scenes and those who carry out invisible roles to facilitate these wars. These hidden roles include the collection of intelligence, transportation, storing weapons, financing war, locating, and luring targets for attacks, among others. While **a woman** is typically defined as a mature female human being, in this study a woman includes young girls as low as 15 years old. This is because some violent group members are aged as low as 15 years old. While these are underage in the Kenyan constitution, their intentional participation in unleashing violence and fighting, supersedes, the age and thus cannot be isolated from the rest of the fighters. This is the case, especially where more violent groups dominated by teenagers are being recorded in the country. This is the case in Jeshi La Embakasi, Gaza and Al-Shabaab. Also, in Mau Mau, Waiyaki Wambui, one of the Mau Mau fighters, was 16 years old when she took her Mau Mau membership oath.

Combat fighters

These fighters carry arms and weapons and engage the presupposed enemy or target in the attack scene or battlefront. This category of fighters physically encounters the enemy or the target. It also involves suicide bombers, kidnappers, armed robbers, car hijackers, and guerrilla warfare fighters.

Non-combat fighters

These fighters perform invisible roles in fighting to facilitate the war. Usually, scholars, media, and the state regard these as passive actors. However, this study terms them as non-combat or silent fighters. These are the force behind the organization, planning, and facilitation of war. These fighters collect intelligence, make, acquire, store, and transport weapons to war fronts or attack scenes. They also finance the war, nurse the injured combat fighter, ensure a steady food supply, and give emotional support to the combat fighters.

Violence

Violence remains obscure (Arendt, 1969). While there is evidence in history, that it has played an enormous role in human affairs such as facilitating independence for some African nations, over time it has proved that it is a means to universal suicide. Additionally, what is termed as violence differs from one situation to another depending on who is unleashing it, why, and to whom is the violence directed. What is violence to one group, can be termed as a means of self-defense, power, liberation, and protection by the other. This study defines violence as activities of anti-state groups like Mungiki, AI-Shabaab, Gaza, and Jeshi La Embakasi. These activities are also termed fighting. In this study, these groups are termed violent groups. They have been classified as illegal criminal groups in Kenya under the Prevention of Organized Crime Act (2010). However, this thesis is cognizant of the idea that sometimes the Kenya Armed forces can be a source of violence to non-combatants. Violence also involves political violence, pain, and negative impacts of the activities of liberation groups like Mau Mau in Kenya. It involves the means of combat and non-combat fighting by these groups. There is often bloodshed, property destruction, displacements, and loss of lives.

Gender

This is the social construction of femininity and masculinity. While at face value these translate to male and female, the femininities and masculinities aspects are deeply rooted in the erroneous designation of some traits to the male and female actors in the society. These designations, and traits, form the ideal man and woman (not as per biology but rather society) and end up elevating some set of individuals while subordinating the other. The gender classification of African society is rooted in colonialism that diffused the European gender identities into Africa. There was a sudden shift to an ideology that uses the biology of women to socially construct a picture of naive, passive, and weak actors in society while that of men was painted with bravery, courage, leadership, and physical strength. This construction forms the fundamental principle upon which women fighters and fighting are defined in this study. The traits accorded to fighters are based on this social construction, which informs the societal, media, and government's definition of fighters both in the larger society and in this study. Out of these social constructions emerges **Gender stereotypes.** These are erroneous and untrue assumptions about each gender category that have been held as true over time and passed down from one generation to another. They are accompanied by **Misogyny** which ascribes some weak and negative behavior and traits to one gender category while glorifying the other.

Security agencies

This includes various security and military personnel in Kenya, especially those that deal with curbing violent groups. These include trained personnel in the Anti-Terror Police Unit (ATPU), Kenya Defense forces (KDF), Kenya Police (KP), Administrative Police (AP), former flying squad, and Kenya Prisons. Security personnel in private security firms that control security in malls and public entry points are also involved in this category. Also, head administrators in these security sectors constitute part of the security agency in this study. It is worth noting that this definition is challenged by violent groups. The groups regard the state and its security apparatus as a source of violence in the country. Also, sometimes the masses consider the violent group as their security wings filling the security gaps that the state has failed to fill.

CHAPTER ONE

1   General Introduction

> "Many experts and policymakers are uncomfortable
> with the idea of women as rational actors who choose
> extremism as a way of expressing their agency. These
> experts struggle to imagine women as violent except
> when coerced or in self-defense. As such they turn
> women into one-dimensional actors that are apolitical
> and infantilized overlooking the full range of choices
> that women make." (Haynie, 2016, pg.2)

This thesis provides historical documentation of women anti-state fighters in Kenya between 1945 and 2019. The study cuts across the various epochs in the country and the violent groups dominating each epoch. It explores women's entry into violent groups, how they enlist, the roles they play, their plight, and their experiences within violent groups. The thesis is grounded on the argument that women remain at the periphery of violence talks in Kenya. In this way, the thesis's major objective is to examine how women are involved in fighting and other related activities in Kenya. Historically, women had been fighters as opposed to passive or coerced actors in violence in Kenya. The thesis also contends that women's active participation in violence in Kenya has not been fully recognized due to gender stereotyping and the gendering of war that shapes the plight of women in society in Kenya. As noted by Haynie (2016), there are few efforts by experts and policymakers to recognize women as rational actors in violence and explore how they fight.

This thesis holds that the efforts to uncover the driving factor for women's participation in violence fail due to cultural and patriarchal patterns that depict them as intruders in a male domain. This gives rise to the passivist, coercion, or victim perception of women fighters. Grievances of violent groups, how women enter these groups, how they fight and their experiences in war are also seen as factors informing the peripheral position of women in violence and terrorism in Kenya.

Violence in Kenya has evolved through four major phases (pre-colonial, pre-independence, post-independence, and new millennium). In this study, focusing on the latter three, it is argued that all these phases are interrelated when examining the histories of women fighters in the country. In this way, for an in-depth understanding of women and their involvement in violence, there is a need for a historical study that cuts across these phases and their related violent groups.

The study focused on women who participated in an insurgency through combat or non-combat ways. These include those who took arms and joined men in the forest to fight during the Mau Mau war, commanded fighters, made weapons, supplied food and guns, recruited new members, administered oaths, and did intelligence for the Mau Mau. They also include female members of groups such as Mungiki, *Jeshi la* Embakasi, Gaza, and Al-Shabaab, whose role in the groups extends beyond the commonly held domestic sphere duties.

The fighters whose stories are explored include field Marshal Muthoni Kirima, Miriam Mathenge, Wambui Waiyaki, and Mukami Kimathi. These were fighters in Mau Mau. In Mungiki and *Jeshi la* Embakasi, the fighters include Sheila, Wangui, and Shiko Bomba. These fighters sought anonymity, thus the names used here are pseudonyms. In Gaza, the thesis focused on Tina, Venessa, the late Clare Njoki, and Marsh Minaj. In Al-Shabaab, Maya, Mariam, and Violet Kemunto are discussed as examples of fighters in the group. Apart from the late Clare and Violet, the rest of the fighters sought anonymity thus the names used herein are pseudonyms.

The study connects the relationship in the three epochs on women and violence in Kenya by describing their histories as fighters in relation to the key factors that cut across these groups. The researcher draws conclusions from historically traced and examined chronology of events related to these women and their participation in violence.

1.1   Background to the study

Debates on Women and their active participation in violence are anchored on the dichotomy of public and private spheres. Ridner (2012) notes that women are many a time regarded as the weaker sex that exists to serve men. Harders (2011) contends that, in gender, there is a categorization of society into men and women, constructing the perceived differences between them and treating them differently. Feminists came up with the public and private spheres to express women's marginalization in politics, international relations, and security. However, its indiscriminating use across cultures and contexts have reinforced the view that depicts women as powerless and lacking political agency, and purely dependent on existing social and political structures (Khelghat-Doost 2017). Implicit in this dichotomy is the assumption that power belongs to the public domain, a male monopoly, and women are confined to the domestic and powerless sphere. Khelghat-Doost (2017), further, contends that this view has generated a body of literature in historical and security studies that view women as victims of conflict and

violence. As a result, these studies tend to overlook explicitly and implicitly women's power and agency.

Violence work is mostly associated with men as opposed to women. Ndung' u & Shadung (2017) refer to this as gendered violence, while Grisard (2014) contends that violence is regarded as a gendered object of knowledge created and circulated through historical records, mass media, and state establishments. Malvern & Koureas (2014) explain that wars and violence have confounded formations of femininity and masculinity, with intense implications for gendering violence and terrorism. The popular, scholars, and experts' understanding, and depiction of war and violence present violence standards as male, and the qualities associated with violence and war are generally associated with masculinity (Amanda, 2014). Skemp (2016) asserts this view and writes that aspects of physical strength and bravery are regarded as exclusively masculine virtues. This leads to legitimized gender stereotyping that promotes women's passivity in war and violent talks.

The gender representations of violent actors have received less scholarly attention, even though violence, its contexts, histories, and forms have been the subject of significant academic research in recent years. Most of these studies include but are not limited to those in security, conflict, political science, and sociology disciplines. Even where studies indicate that historically women have been participants in fighting, their low numbers undermine their credibility as fighters (Cunningham, 2003). Some researchers, security agencies, policymakers, state, and society still hold onto the narrative that only recognizes men as warriors and women as victims. With such a skewed narrative, it is hard to assimilate the idea that women are conscious partakers in violence. This leads to biased counter-violence and terrorism strategies. In this context, Satterthwaite and Huckerby (2013) contend that a biased approach to women's violence leads to incomplete anti-terrorism strategies with unacceptable results. Accordingly, Ndung' u and Shadung (2017) contend that while significant attention has been paid to the context of the global peace and security agenda.

Ndung' u and Shadung (2017) assert that while the context of the global peace and security agenda has received a lot of attention, policymakers need to focus on emerging dynamics concerning gender and violence such as the increased victimization of men and boys. The gendered approach to violence can only be changed with an adequate exploration of women's political violence participation. It is only through this, that the realities of their partaking actively in violence can be unmasked.

1.1.1 Global trends of women's plight in fighting

Women actively take part in violence. For instance, the Global Extreme Monitor (2017) reported 100 suicide attacks in 2017. The reports hold that women carried out 11% of these attacks. While this sounds like a small figure, Ashcroft (2021) contends that few violent actors or weapons can wipe the entire world balance. As such these figures should not be assumed. Moss (2018) reports that women constituted 137 of the 623 terrorists in terror attacks reported by the Israeli Think Tank, Institute for National Security Studies. This implies that one in every five terrorists is a woman. This figure should not be ignored, and participants cumulatively classified as victims or coerced actors.

In the USA, fighting has evolved over various epochs. These include the slavery period in the 17th century, the 18th-century American revolution war, the neighborhood vigilantes in post-1776 after its independence, and the violent extremism after 2001, September attack. In all, these female fighters have had their share of participation. Harders (2011) notes that there were two types of women: the beautiful soul and the spartan mother. The beautiful soul is the harmless one, whose operations were limited to the kitchen and abided by society's rules. The spartan mother is the courageous mother, who encouraged men in fighting and wished to join in the war. However, it is essential to note that the latter is less spoken about because their numbers are tiny compared to the former. Explaining the connection between gender women and violence, Goldstein (2004) writes that men often fight, and women do not. However, this does not imply that the latter do not want to fight or have never been involved in any fights in the past. Despite the gender stereotype that curtained them from violence during the American civil war, the patriots recognized women as invaluable allies in the war. Most of them, from the south and North, were volunteer brigades who signed up as nurses in the civil war (Culpepper, 2012). During the Civil War, many participated as cooks and information sources, while more than 400 fought in both the Union and Confederate forces by disguising themselves as men (Blanton & Wike, 2002). In her discussion of women in the American civil war, Linda (1994) asserts that some threw up their gender identities to fight. Sometimes, they concealed themselves and kept their true gender stealthy.

Further, others enlisted with the tacit approval of recruiters, who were desperate for the workforce while some enrolled with their husbands as they did not trust them to go to the war alone. These fighters wore uniforms and passed as men with ease. Even the pregnant ones managed to pass (Wiley, 1975). Others, while drawing from the myth of Delilah, played the

role of covert operatives. These were very active and significant in espionage, smuggling of weapons, and assassinations. Most of these were young thus their age and gender would not raise any suspicion. This is the silent power of women in war. Culpepper (2012) notes that during this time, women turned their attention outside the home to the public sphere. It was the first time in American history that they played a significant role in a war effort. This marked a landmark in women, gender, and public participation in the USA (Culpepper, 2012).

Moreover, Sutten (2009) notes that women are increasingly involved in terror activities in the USA. However, the author is keen to note that counter-violence strategies tend to ignore gender as a relevant factor (Sutten, 2009). Echoing the same views, the US Department of State acknowledges that violent and terror groups like Boko Haram, ISIS, Alshabaab, and Taliban are directly targeting women and girls to achieve ideological and tactical objectives. Vogelstein & Birgio (2019) in the Council on Foreign Relations writes that today extremist groups rely on women to gain strategic advantage as facilitators and perpetrators of violence. However, the USA continues to overlook its role in facilitating and perpetrating violence.

In Middle Eastern countries historically, the countries have been in constant violence whose causes vary from one country to another. Due to gendered violence, the culture and religious doctrines in these countries propagate women's limitations to the domestic sphere. Their travel, dress code, and interaction with other men were limited and determined by the community's men (Afshar, 2016). For instance, in Iran and Saudi Arabia, each woman has a male guardian who decides their travel, marriage, and divorce. While this is the case, Jordan & Denov (2007) note that women have played extensive roles in planning and executing violent activities throughout history.

Gendered identities in these countries are constructed through the discourse of religion and nationalism (Kang, 2017). Holt & Jawed (2013) notes that women participated in the Arab spring, the Lebanon revolution, and Iraq's Islam resistance. However, Kang (2017) contends that even though women have led various insurrections gaits, foreign regimes, and dictatorial governments, these facts have seldom been recorded. Today, women are active participants in fighting in the region. Jordan & Denov (2007) notes that Afghanistan and Nepal Arabic countries have had women and militants. The author writes they constitute 10-30% of the terror combatants in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many have played crucial roles in detonating and attacking their targets, while others stand out as leaders in these organizations.

Today, women are active participants and members of Kurdistan's worker's Party, commonly known as the Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK), one of the most prominent armed organizations in the Middle East (Hanner, Cullen, & Benson, 2019). It is worth noting that fighters in terror and violent groups like ISIS in the middle east come from the region and other parts of the world. For instance, Hurlburt & O'Neill (2017) reports that one out of five foreigners recruited to ISIS is a woman. Additionally, Rahmah (2016) says that ISIS has offered an international call for women to join the war in Syria and Iran and that some have responded positively to the ring. Additionally, the authors note that between 1985 to 2010, women terrorists were involved in over 257 suicide attacks. However, Waddell-Harris (2017) notes that these countries have always viewed these fighters as passive or coerced actors in violence rather than fighters. Whereas the above is the case, this perception hinders counterterrorism and counters violence policies in the country and globally and cultivates a gender-skewed assumption about women's role in the fighting.

Africa has historically recorded cases of violence and wars. Traditionally, some forms of violence in the continent were regarded as social games and hobbies (Wig, 2016). Such include cattle rustling, which was exclusively a men's affair (Mazrui, 1977). Various cultural practices, political choices, and settings such as female genital mutilation (FGM), polygamy, and inheritance policies propagated patriarchy and subjugated women. However, in some communities, women actively participated in everyday political and economic decision-making. For instance, in Egypt, the mother queen had the right to choose the next pharaoh. In some communities, they led migrations and conquered kingdoms. Such was the case with queen Amina of Katsina (Songhai people) (Shandu, 2018). Others include Iyadole, a member of the Alafins' council among the Yoruba and Swati women in South Africa, and the amazons of Dahomey led by queen Tassi Hangbe ruler of the Kingdom of Dahomey (Shandu, 2018; Kass, 2001). Thus, African society cannot be treated as one monolithic group regarding gender, women, and fighting. Some diversities are grounded on the nature of the society involved-centralized and decentralized, patriarchal and matriarchal among others. This study recognizes the diversity of women fighters in these diverse societal arrangements. It examines their backgrounds, ages, and even levels of education to contextualize their entry into violent groups and their roles in these groups. This implies that while the experiences of women fighters in Kenya can be akin to other women elsewhere in the world, the interpretations of these experiences depend on the background and space of operation which tends to be actor specific.

While there were communities with vocal women, their efforts, and roles in the public sphere in Africa have been side-lined from history, and violence, and this cannot be assumed (Farrar, 1997). Many times, they are regarded as mothers and caregivers. In times of war, many scholars have only identified the domestic roles that they played, thus presenting them as passive players in violence in pre-colonial Africa (Ogbomo, 2005). In this way, one can argue that the connection between gender and violence was based on both biological determinism and social constructions, which were wrongly exploited by society to place women in the domestic sphere. Oyěwùmí (1997) contends that when biological understandings are found convincing, social categories gain their acceptability and authority from biology. The social and biological perspectives feed each other in allocating gender categories in society.

With the 19th century inception of the colonial powers which was marked by violence, other forms of violence rooted in the political, social, and economic grievances that the Africans had against the white colonial masters emerged. Since the 19th century, fighting in the continent has evolved from one generation to another, suiting the situation and the people. Since the colonial period, men and women in Africa were devised as social categories and history is portrayed as masculine (Oyěwùmí, 1997). Attributing the gendering of African society to the colonialist, Oyěwùmí (1997) further contends that female actors are reduced to exceptions, or their success is associated with their male counterparts. However, this does not imply that women have never participated in war-related activities. Denzer (2005) points out that some took up arms and went into the battlefield during the decolonization process, while others coordinated attacks. Such an example was Yaa Asantewa, the Commander in Chief in the Yaa Asantewa War in Ghana against the Europeans (Iliffe,1967; Day, 2004). Given the above, Sjoberg & Gentry (2011) contend that in Africa, the involvement of women in terror activities is neither an exclusive phenomenon in the 21st century nor is it limited to only the current violent groups.

Nigerian women organized the Aba Riots commonly referred to as the 'women war' in Igbo history, in 1929 (Van Allen, 1975). These women organized a massive revolt against the policies imposed by British colonial administrators in South-Eastern Nigeria (Van Allen, 1975). The "war took months for the government to suppress and became a historic example of feminist and anti-colonial protest (Ukeje, 2004). Apart from their participation in the independence war, some women in the country were active members of vigilantes. These were

usually called madams since they oversaw these groups and coordinate the unleashing of violence on the presupposed enemies.

However, currently, Nigerian women are seen in significant terror groups like Boko Haram. Agara (2015) asserts that Boko Haram employs female militants. Out of the several suicide bombings that have taken place in the country, only two have been orchestrated by men. Precisely, the rest are choreographed and executed by women. While explaining the motivating factors for women's involvement in Boko Haram, Comolli (2015) postulates that some join to escape their social traditions while others are abducted and enslaved. In addition, others saw a chance in Boko Haram to advance their freedom and reduce their hardships. In this way, the author regards these fighters in Boko haram as victims whose participation is coercive.

The scholarships raise the question of how many women are coerced and how many join voluntarily. Zenn & Pearson (2014) observe that due to the significant role that they play in violence, Boko Haram, in Nigeria, has focused on recruiting female suicide bombers and training women fighters since mid-2014. Considering the above observations, Agara (2015) contents that the media and policymakers have obfuscated the participation of women in violent activities in Nigeria. The author postulates that the uniqueness of their involvement in violent activities reveals a clear relationship between gender, women, and violence that can no longer be ignored hence the need for an intensive and historical study. While Boko haram has women fighters, many discussions about the group paint their picture as victims of Boko haram's violence. Indeed, cases of Boko haram kidnapping girls cannot be assumed (see Maiangwa & Agbiboa, 2014; Ifemeje, Ewulum & Ibekwe, 2015). However, volunteer women fighters in the group cannot be assumed too (see Maiangwa & Amao, 2015; Lamptey & Allotey-Pappoe, 2019). These are the fighters that this study sought to explore in the Kenyan context and how their fighting and experiences have changed over time.

In East Africa, women's participation in violent groups cannot be assumed. Traditionally, women were not largely linked to direct combat. They played the role of spies for their husbands because their gender would not raise any suspicion alarm. However, with the coming of the colonialists in East Africa, many of them directly participated in guerrilla warfare. Despite this, they have been sidelined from the history of violence in East Africa. Women are presented as victims of violent groups or as innocent individuals who fall in love with the 'wrong people'. The picture painted of violent actors is primarily masculine. In the early 1980s,

with the emergence of neighborhood groups in East Africa, the role of women in fighting cannot be assumed. Both men and women need to be examined about violence.

In Uganda, for instance, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has been identified as a significant threat for a long time. Gustavsson, Oruut & Rubenson (2017) reveal that the group has not only been recruiting boys (minors) but also girls (minors) soldiers. Eck (2014) confirms that their entry into the movement is majorly through abduction and kidnapping (Pham, Vinck & Stover, 2008). While the principal founder of this group is Alice Lakwena, Joseph Rao Kony has always been at the center of LRA discussions. In this way, the role of a woman (the founder of the group) has been left out, and the focus shifted to the man, who came into play after its foundation.

1.1.2   Historical incidents of Women in violence and fighting in Kenya

In Kenya, before the emergence of violent groups in post-independent Kenya, the Mau Mau war of independence and earlier colonial resistance groups had attracted women's participation in violence. Scholars such as Cooper (1988), Presley (1988), Elkins (2005), Presley (1999), Santoru (1996), Branch (2007), and Kanogo (1987) have revealed that in the 1950s, women had come to the limelight due to their active or passive participation in Mau-Mau freedom war. Maina (2017) contents that during the Mau-Mau war in Kenya, some of these fighters took up arms and joined the guerilla warfare. During this war, they demonstrated to be even strong and more effective fighters alongside their men counterparts. For example, Gathogo (2017) writes that general Kabuki was ensnared and killed in September 1956, alongside a fellow female fighter. Other women active in Mau Mau include Wanjiru Nyamatura, Bandi wa Kamau, field Marshal Muthoni, Wambui wa Kanyari, Kahanoki, and Jerena wa Mahoni (Gathogo (2017).

Women's participation in fighting was not limited to the Mau Mau and the decolonization process. In post-independence Kenya, they have been involved in violent neighborhood groups and modern terror groups. Throughout the 1990s, many violent neighborhood groups such as *Mungiki, Taliban, Baghdad*, *Chinkororo*, *Gaza,* and *Jeshi la Embakasi* emerged. A lot has been discussed about these groups concerning their grievances and factors for the emergence and participation in violence. Bosibori (2017) notes that women played a significant role in the *Chinkororo* movement's success. In Mungiki, the Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal (2012) reports that women make up 20-25% of the total members in Mungiki while Achuka (2015) notes that they were among the 39 Gaza members who surrendered in 2015

following the government amnesty announcement. In 2017, the late Marsh and Njoki, commonly referred to as the Gaza queens, were identified as among the fighters in Gaza (The National Reporter, 2017).

Cases of women jihadists in Kenya cannot be ignored. In the 1980s bombing of the Norfolk Hotel in Nairobi, the Moroccan assailant was with a female accomplice (Mugo, 2013). The man has been well-scripted, but the lady is only described by Mugo (2013) to have had a German accent. No more information is given about her. In 2013, Samantha Lewthwaite, - "White Widow," was reported to have coordinated and executed the Westgate mall attack. The attack led to the death of about 67 people (Sunguta, 2019). In 2015 April, the Garissa University attack, the "White Widow," was believed to have directed the attack that killed 147 students (Sunguta, 2019). Additionally, Mwaura (2015) reported cases of girls at the coast of Kenya fleeing their homes to Syria to join the Islamic State (ISIS). In 2015 July, a woman was arrested in Mombasa for recruiting five youths into Al-Shabaab (Ndung' u &Salif, 2017).

In 2016, Rukia Farij was identified as a female recruiter in Al-Shabaab in Mombasa. She was also reported to be behind several grenade attacks in the county (Mukoto & Duggan, 2016). In 2016, three women bombed Mombasa central police station (Mukoto & Duggan, 2016; Mwangi, 2017). This was the first time women attacked a police station in broad daylight, indicating that violence in Kenya was gradually indulging them as Fighters (Mwaura, 2015). Ochami & Ombati (2016) contends that the three were linked to Al-Shabaab, a major violent group in Kenya and the East African region. The group is reportedly constituted of 25% Kenyans, largely, young people motivated by diverse factors (Akwiri, 2016). However, the author asserts that while women's participation in violence and, more specifically in Al-Shabaab is rising at an alarming rate in Kenya, violence issues are still considered men's affairs (Akwiri, 2016) strictly. In May 2016, two Kenyan female, medical students in Kampala, were arrested for forming a terror cell linked to Al-Shabaab (Ndung' u & Salif, 2017).

In the 2019 attack on DusitD2 Hotel in Nairobi, several women were mentioned to have primarily participated in the attack. Their participation ranged from planning to smuggling weapons and hiding the perpetrators. Others included mothers and sisters who knew that their kin were members of the Al-Shabaab group but never reported to the security agencies (Sunguta, 2019). However, their talk and roles in the attack faded within a short period as the talk of men in terror groups and equipping security firms with arms intensified. In the same year, the USA backlisted Kenyan miss Halima Adan as among the seven most dangerous

people in the world who finance terror and violent groups (US state Department of Treasury, 2019). Also, the International Crisis Group (2019) reported that Women constitute a strong social base for the Al-Shabaab insurgency in Somalia, while Badurdeen (2018) designated them as significant recruiters of other fighters into Al-Shabaab in the Mombasa region.

Despite all these cases pointing to women's involvement in violence, Kenya's approach to violence and terrorism largely remains gender biased. More focus is given to men than women. In her speech in Nairobi, Kenya, Ambassador Amina Mohammed noted that;

> "Despite the acknowledgment of the role women can play in preventing violent extremism, several current national approaches to violent extremism are not adequately gendered. More specifically, they are not systematically inclusive of women, nor are they substantively and sufficiently gender-specific or gender-sensitive." (Ambassador Amina Mohamed, Monday, July 15, 2019)

From her speech, there seems to be gender blindness to violence in Kenya. This makes the war against violence and terrorism incomplete and less productive.

The government treats women as passive actors- couriers and intelligence who are not expected to do confrontations. Moreover, the number of female officers in Kenya's Police Service is lower than that of men (Kushner, 2013). The UN Women (2016) notes that in 2012, women consisted of 11% of Kenya's Police Service. This is a small percentage because women constitute about 18 % of Kenya's total prison population (Kenya Police Crime Statistics, 2017). The constitution of Kenya, chapter 84, stipulated that women should constitute 30 % of the country's entire police service (Constitution, 2010). Nevertheless, this percentage has not been attained. It is only in August 2019 that Kenya produced its first all-female Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team (Ombati, 2019).

The media play a role in promoting the male gaze of violence and terrorism in Kenya (see Bosibori, 2022). There is a strong relationship between the media and society. This is because the media is the 'eye and ear' of the people in areas they cannot physically access. As such the information the media disseminate to the public is important as it defines how people think and perceive various issues in society. The media reports, news, and documentaries focus more on violent male actors than women. The media portrays ladies as joining violent groups through romantic adventurism such as jihad brides, or a sense of their personal lives lived in their

communities and countries (Bosibori, 2022). Such was the case with the three female students found crossing the Kenyan border to Somalia in March 2015. The media labeled them "Alshababes' and merely interpreted them as the girlfriends of Al-Shabaab (Some, 2019). In the 2019 January DusitD2 attack, Violet Kemunto, one of the planners, was always identified with his suicide-bomber male accomplice (Sunguta, 2019). Additionally, the media regard women as being "used" by men as violent actors. For instance, such headings as "Al-Shabaab has used women to carry an attack" as reported by Mukoto and Duggan (2016) imply that they are not voluntary but coerced actors.

Much focus is given to the individual's status instead of the violent act itself when releasing reports on women's violent actors (Bosibori, 2022). For instance, identifying Samantha Louise Lewthwaite as "the white widow" in news and reports promotes sympathy towards the lady, especially in Africa, where widows are regarded as helpless and vulnerable. Such a title like "My unborn baby is not kicking- says a woman held over Al-Shabaab links" takes away the real story as much sympathy is channeled to the pregnancy statuses of the lady and the unborn baby (see Onchari, 2019).

Researchers in the field of security and violence side-line women in violence and security talks. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019) contends that the male researchers' over-presentation in the field of violence in Kenya has shaped this agenda. For instance, most studies on violence focus on men's experiences and tend to paint their roles as leaders and bosses. Women are primarily depicted in their relationship with men (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019). Few women researchers exist in the field and most of these regard women as victims of violence. Also, the perception of criminal places as dangerous areas limits female researchers' access to study violence on the ground of their integrity and security are at risk.

It is against this backdrop that there is a need for a systematic and historical scholarly exploration of how women's participation in violence has evolved. Some questions require attention; how do women enter violent groups? how do they fight and what are their experiences in fighting? Why, despite their participation in violence, society regards some as victims, coerced, or passive actors? In answering these questions, the histories of some women fighters in Kenya are studied to unmask the issues raised in these questions. Special focus is given to women on violent groups that emerged in Kenya in the period 1945-2019.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In Kenya, various historical and current war, and terror incidents link women to participate in violence and terrorism. As earlier demonstrated, there are rising cases of women actively participating in violence. However, they are often side-lined from discussions on violence, and when they are discussed, they are presented from the stereotyped perspective of victims and coerced actors.

Violence in Kenya has been gendered as a male affair. Even where there is evidence of women as partakers in the public sphere, the state, media, researchers, and society have assumed this. The narrative of the intrinsic vulnerability of these fighters thrives. This raises a delicate security situation in Kenya since the available counter-violent strategies are skewed in a way that only men are prime suspects or potential suspects in violence. Kenya's security personnel are largely men, an indicator of the male gaze in security grounded on the gender stereotypes that put women at the periphery of the war. Also talks about women in violence fading off quickly, thus limiting counterterrorism measures. Again, most discussions, especially in the media houses on these fighters and violence, only focus on violent transnational groups, hence overlooking the in-country violent groups.

Additionally, there are few historical studies on the subject in the period 1945 to 2019, although the issue of the connection between gender, women, and violence is a historical one. Most available studies on women and violence are done in the form of security reports or sociological studies focusing on one violent group. These are the case with studies focusing on Al-Shabaab and Mungiki. Most historical studies either focus on Mau Mau alone or do little to link the colonial era to post-colonial developments. While there is a historical study on Jeshi la Embakasi, the focus is on its origin growth, and development, and very little attention is given to the women actors in the group. In this way, these studies assume the historical links and connections that shape women's fighting in the country.

Finally, answering the question of women in violence has been, for a long time, a complicated aspect. This is because of the widely held gender beliefs that place these fighters in the domestic sphere, while violence belongs to the public domain. This has been the case in exploring the motivations of women's active participation in violence. These beliefs trace their origin to the colonial era and have been shaped and supported by the media, security agencies, and scholarship.

This study, in an attempt to solve these issues, explores the history of women fighters in Kenya between 1945 to 2019. Specifically, it examines the connection between gender, women, and violence, how female fighters join violent groups, fight, their plight, and experiences in violent groups, and why the passivity narrative of women is endured in Kenya. These are explored in three major epochs as explained in section 1.3.1 of this thesis below.

1.3   Research's Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine how women are involved in violent activities and their experiences in fighting between 1945 and 2019. This is done by exploring the stories of women anti-state fighters to unmask how they entered violent groups and how they fought their plight and their experiences in the groups.

1.3.1   The Study Objectives

In this thesis, I distinguish between three broad periods of violence in Kenya, exploring how women in each period are involved in violent activities and their experiences. The first period spans between 1945 and 1963 and is marked by the Mau Mau war of independence in Kenya. The war is used as a reference point for women's participation in fighting in this study. Using the Mau Mau war, I establish how gender identities are used to place and define women involved in violent activities in Kenya. The second period spans between 1964 and 1989. I explore how women were involved in post-independent violent groups such as Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi. This period is marked by a single-party state and the KANU regime's authoritarianism. The researcher examined whether the changing political contexts of the country influenced these fighters' involvement in violence against the state. The final period is between 1990 and 2019. The epoch features the political pluralism in Kenya and the entry of transnational violent groups' cells in the country. New groups that draw inspiration from individuals outside the country like Gaza also emerged within this period. Here, the researcher examined the changes and continuities in the perception and experiences of women in violent activities. An exploration of how these experiences is interpreted by the state, the media, and the masses to define fighters is modeled. To this end, three specific objectives guide this exploration;

a.   To interrogate the link in gender, women, and violence in Kenya 1945-1963.
b.   To examine the place of women in the evolving violence in Kenya in the period 1964-1989

c. To analyze the continuity and change of women's involvement in violence in Kenya in the period 1990-2019.

1.4 Research Question

The study's major question was; How are women involved in violent activities in Kenya and what are their experiences in these activities? To answer these the following specific questions guided the study;

a. How are gender, women, and violence related in Kenya from 1945-1964?
b. What is the place of women in the evolving violence in Kenya from 1964-1989?
c. What factors are informing continuity or change in women's involvement in violence in Kenya from 1990-2019?

1.5 Study Premise

The study assumed that;

a. In the history of violence in Kenya, gender, women, and violence are inseparable.
b. Violence in Kenya has evolved through three major phases (pre-independence, post-independence, and new Millennium) and those women have evolved from passive to active actors in these phases.
c. Women's fighting strategies have evolved from one study period to another due to the changes in the groups that emerge in each period and the diverse goals that inform these diverse groups.

1.6 Relevance of the Study

This study undertakes a historical analysis of women's participation in violence in Kenya, from 1945-2019. The study is justified in its endeavor to address two related issues. The first one is the need to understand why, even though historical and recent events reveal women as active participants in violence, they are always depicted as victims, passive or coerced actors. The second is the hope that the new insights gained from the study will lead to a significant benefit in the fight against violence and terrorism. This is particularly in policy formulation and execution of holistic anti-terrorism strategies that also consider and include women. The latter is significant because constant voiced expressions call for the development and adoption of relevant and comprehensive gender-sensitive policies pivotal for mitigating violence and

terrorism. Findings and recommendations from this study may help pertinent stakeholders of various sectors and departments. These sectors include the security department, counter-violence policymakers, human right activist, and academicians, as discussed herein.

Haynie (2016) notes that most de-radicalization and security programs are men-centered, and very few of them have been developed explicitly for women. Some policymakers have emphasized the significance of including all actors in security programs. However, many people still believe that women are powerless in hostile circumstances and restricted to stereotyped roles. This places them in prey positions even when they are the main focus of integration plans. In the security sector (Anti-terror Police Unit, flying squad, Kenya Défense Forces, and other related agencies and committees in the ministry of interior), the findings could be a driver and force for policy change, formulation, and execution in counter-violence strategies by policymakers and executors.

Moreover, the findings may help address gender concerns in violence and counter-terrorism initiatives. These may help in shedding new light on the relationship between long-standing violence and terrorism in contemporary Kenya and human rights and women activists. Kenya has a long-standing history of conflict among these parties, with the Kenyan security agencies being portrayed as violators of human rights and abusers of women during security operations. Such was the case in the *Usalama* watch operation in 2014. Such insights will help address the conflicting aspects between women activists, human rights activists, and security forces involved in counter-violence operations.

To the academicians, historians, and researchers, the study findings may add knowledge to the field of gender and violence in Kenya and globally. The study brings a new theoretical approach to gender constructs in violence that regards women as equal and partakers in violence. It establishes the link between the various violent epochs and different categories of violent groups (Mau Mau, in-country neighborhood groups, and modern-day transnational terror groups) in Kenya. The study also explores fighting as not limited to combat alone and recognizes the centrality of non-combatant strategies in fighting.

Generally, the study offers new insights and theoretical approaches to gender in counterterrorism in Kenya. It challenges the narrative of political protection in the country's politics and defies the inherent susceptibility or passivity of women. All these aim at ensuring gender-inclusive counter-violence strategies and initiatives in Kenya.

1.7   Scope   and Limitation of the Study

This study focused on violent groups that emerged in Kenya in the period 1945-2019. In particular, it focused on violence perpetrated by the independence movements, neighborhood groups, and violent transitional groups. These include Mau Mau, Mungiki, Jeshi la Embakasi, Gaza and Al-Shabaab. The groups were chosen because despite operating at different times and contexts, they all employed violence as a means to solve their grievances. Therefore, they offer a historical chronology of the evolution of violence and a unique historical path through which the participation of women in fighting can be explored. In this way, the study may focus on Mau Mau in the colonial period as a reference point to, Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi, in the 1990s and Gaza and Al-Shabaab in the new millennium.

The study starts its analysis in 1945 and ends it in 2019. This period of slightly over half a century of investigation is adequate for a historical analysis of fighters in Kenya. The study period accords the research analysis of a broader and deeper cast on the colonial and post-colonial dynamics on the issues of women's fighting. The year 1945 was chosen as the starting point of the study. It was during this year the decolonization wave hit Kenya with the return of the second world war soldiers. Some of these soldiers became part of the Mau Mau movement, a military wing of the Kenya African Union. By 1945, this radical wing of KAU had started oathing its members. In 1952 that the Mau Mau movement's flag was raised at Ruring' o in Nyeri county. The flag was an indication that the war against the colonial master had officially begun. In October of the same year, after the murder of chief Waruhiu, by these radical groups, the British colonial masters declared a state of emergency in Kenya leading to the immediate outbreak of the war. The Mau Mau independence war is significant to this study since it marks a historical point at which Kenyan women engaged in a nation politically and economically driven war. Gathogo, (2017) Cooper (1988), Elkins (2005), and Kanogo (1987) in their writing contend that although war is primarily a men's affair, Mau Mau ended up drawing the participation of Kenyan women into guerrilla warfare against colonialism.

On the other hand, the year 2019 was chosen to end this study because this year Kenya suffered a terror attack (DusitD2 Hotel Attack), where several women were linked to its planning and execution (See Sunguta, 2019; US State Department of Treasury, 2019). This attack opened up space for an in-depth investigation of the women involved and their plight in the group. It should, however, be noted that the years 1945 and 2019 were not rigidly given. Where

necessary, the study stretched beyond the years to collect data to enrich the principal argument of the thesis.

As regards the territorial extent, the study focused on Nyeri, Mombasa, Garissa, and Nairobi counties. Garissa county is chosen due to its high record (32%) of terror attacks in the country (Wafula, 2014; Wakube, et al., 2017). Furthermore, its proximity to Somalia places it in a better position for violent discussions. Also, the county has registered the second-deadliest violent attack in Kenya's history after the 1998 US embassy bombing.

Nairobi County was chosen since it hosts Kenya's capital city. The City hosts several organizations dealing with women, gender, and violence issues. The county also offered a cosmopolitan plural space upon which people of diverse races, ethnicities, genders, and classes were interviewed on the theme under study. Nairobi County had received 22% of terror attacks in the country at the time of this research, with the 1998 USA embassy bombing being the deadliest claiming over 200 people (Wafula, 2014).

Mombasa county had registered 13% of Kenya's terror attacks at the time of this study (Wafula, 2014). However, it was the only county that had recorded women attacking a police station in broad daylight. Additionally, many fighters reported being involved in Al-Shabaab either hail from the region or residing in the area.

Nyeri County was chosen due to its extensive Mau Mau activities in the independence war. Mau Mau was launched in Nyeri. Maina (2017) contends that people from Nyeri county were very vocal in the Mau Mau activities and war. Additionally, Mungiki, a violent neighborhood group of the 1980s and 1990s, draws huge membership from the region. Therefore, the county offered an ideal space upon which women fighters (both in independence movements and neighborhood groups) can be discussed up to the 2000s when militia groups were banned in Kenya.

In cases where the key informants were found outside these counties, the researcher went past these territories to collect information to enhance this study.

1.8   Methodology

Knowing people's history and background is key to understanding the circumstances that inform their contemporary trends. This informs the choice of the historical approach in this study. I used the approach to examine how Kenyan women's participation in violent activities has evolved from 1945 to 2019. The approach helped unmask the trends on how these fighters enter violent groups, their roles in these groups, and their experiences. I explored three distinct epochs of violent groups primarily defined by the diversity in Kenya's political regimes and economic situations.

The first period, 1945 to 1963, is marked by the colonial political economy with Mau Mau as the violent group fighting for Kenya's independence. The second period is between 1964 and 1989. This is the period immediately after Kenya's independence. It was marked by political authoritarianism and the oppression of the opposition parties by the KANU regime. This period saw the emergence of ethnic-centered violent groups such as Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi to fight against the state-sponsored KANU Youth wingers. Economic hardship and marginalization were also witnessed during this period. The final period is between 1990 to 2019. The period coincided with the re-introduction of political pluralism in 1992 and the end of the KANU regime in 2002. New violent groups also emerged that drew inspiration from outside the country, while transnational terror groups started having their cells in Kenya. In this period, I focus on Gaza and Al-Shabaab violent groups.

The groups that emerged in all these three periods had different grievances, modes of operation, battlefronts, and weapons. With these, the historical approach was significant in explaining how these changing states, political and economic contexts, and the backgrounds of the women fighters studied influenced their fighting strategies and experiences in violent groups. The women's fighting strategies and experiences in these epochs and groups change from one period to another. Nonetheless, some techniques and experiences cut across these epochs, as demonstrated in the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

1.8.1   Archival Sources

I used archival sources to examine how women participate in violent activities effectively. The archival sources used in this thesis constitute the British colonial government records and the archival collections of the Mau Mau Veterans Association in Nyeri county. I reviewed the colonial administrators' security books, provincial and district security reports, personal letters,

diaries, prison records, and reports on the Mau Mau situation in Kenya at the Kenya national archival in Nairobi and Nyeri counties. The newspapers in Kenya reporting on the Mau Mau activities, attacks, and situations are also reviewed. From the Mau Mau veteran association's private archives in Nyeri county, I review the veterans' list and how they are categorized in relation to their roles in the group. The categorization is broadly defined as the fighters and those who supported Mau Mau.

While the former was entirely men, the latter was women-dominated. The list was also full of erased names, many of which the operator termed as late, and others as mistakenly included. With this, I became conscious of possible errors in the archival sources. I realized that sometimes the information was recorded depending on who was recording it and for what purposes. Although women have been mentioned in all these records, the voices captured and accessible are those of the British administrators and masculine reflections of Kenyan women at war. Additionally, some information was missing, especially the stories of Mau Mau fighters as individuals. While some were said to be at the UK national archives, which I never had a chance to access, some were said to be constantly borrowed by some government departments, thus making them not accessible to public members at the time of this study.

1.8.2 Oral Interviews

Due to the limitation of the archival sources and the need to holistically explore stories and ways in which Kenyan women fight and the experiences they go through, both in colonial and post-colonial Kenya, oral interviews are essential. The interviews helped to fill the tension between the official written documents, perceptions, and the lived realities of those women involved in fighting in Kenya. I carried out the interviews with the help of two research assistants who helped translate Kikuyu and other local dialects to English, where Kiswahili or English would not be used for interviews.

The primary data collection took ten months. The participants included women fighters and ex-fighters in Mau Mau, Mungiki, Gaza, Jeshi la Embakasi, and Al-Shabaab. I explore their stories, how they grew up and joined these groups, their roles in the groups, and their experiences. I also interacted with security officers, specifically the Kenya Police (KP), the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF), Former Flying squad officers, the current Sting Squad Headquarters (SSH), and the Kenya Prison Officers (KPO). These participants provided information on their perception of women's participation in in-country violent groups and Al-

Shabaab. Specifically, they explained how they see them engaging in violent activities and how these fighters are perceived in society vs. reality on the ground.

Men fighters and ex-fighters in Mau Mau, Mungiki, Jeshi la Embakasi, and Gaza were also interviewed. These participants gave me information on the organization and modes of operation in these groups, power hierarchies, and the plight of women within this hierarchy and structure. I had a chance to interview some clan and religious elders in Mombasa and Garissa counties. County administrators were interviewed on the state of violent groups and the gender dynamics in the reports of these groups. I also interviewed investigative journalists on crime in Kenya. Specifically, I explored their documentaries and raised questions on the plight of women in the violent activities they document, the stories of the women they have interacted with during their criminal investigations, and how they define these fighters as far as violent activities in Kenya are concerned. These significantly linked me to some fighters and ex-fighters, especially in Mungiki, Gaza, and Jeshi la Embakasi.

In the oral interviews, some participants would turn down the interview at the last minute, citing trust issues regarding the kind of information they were to offer. While accepting to actively partake in violent groups, some fighters sounded bitter toward the state in Kenya and presented themselves as victims of a state which has failed to provide for its citizenry. Biasness was also observed between men and women fighters, especially in Mau Mau. Most of the former participants regarded the latter as just supporters of Mau Mau, whose efforts did not count in the war's success. Nonetheless, the latter defined themselves as equal Mau Mau fighters with their men counterparts and accused the men of using masculinity and patriarchal ideas to sideline them at the time when they were seeking compensation from the government of Kenya. One of the revelations that arose from the analyses of the fighting strategies employed by women was that some in Mau Mau, Al-Shabaab, Gaza, and Jeshi la Embakasi women used their bodies for sex and as bait for intelligence collection. However, while explaining their experiences, most of these fighters clung to the narrative of being raped by security officers when arrested rather than being willing to give out their bodies to secure their freedom. Some also did not want to talk more about this because prostitution is laden with a negative connotation in Kenya, citing that their dignity as women and their safety would be at stake if they publicly accepted that they sleep with men to collect information.

 In some cases, I interacted with participants as a group to examine their collective views on the theme under study. However, sometimes I observed that some participants were

uncomfortable giving information before the group, thus having to do individualized follow-up interviews to seek clarity on the subject matter. Some cases gave rise to diversity in the information provided before the group and when the participant was alone. Many cited fears of being victimized for taking a particular stand that did not conform with the group's collective mindset.

In total, I interacted with 72 participants in oral interviews, including ten women fighters and ex-fighters, five men fighters and ex-fighters, 14 men and women who knew women fighters, 11 individuals from academia, seven county administrators, eight clan elders, and three investigative journalists. There were 13 security officers drawn from the KDF, SSH, Kenya police, Kenyan prison, former flying squad unit, and private security firms in Kenya. In other instances, I had more than one interview with one participant for clarity purposes and to seek more information. Accordingly, from the 72 participants, I had 100 oral interviews. Four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with six clan elders, seven security officers, eight women, and six youths were also undertaken. There were 26 participants in the FGDs carried out in this study. As such, both the interviews and FGDs sum to 98 participants.

1.8.3   COVID-19 and the Digital Interviews

The fieldwork for this study was carried out in the third phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. With restricted movements and lockdowns, digital interviews became an option because physical interviews were impossible. These were carried out through cell phones, Zoom meetings, and Skype. While these were an option, power, and internet limitations disrupted some interviews leading to constant rescheduling. At the same time, with cell phone interviews, it was difficult for me to read the participant's emotions, facial expressions, and gestures when explaining their views and stories on the subject matter. As a result, where possible, some digital interviews in the first phase of data collection were followed by physical interviews in the second phase when the government reduced the country's COVID restrictions.

1.8.4 Situating the study in Mombasa, Nairobi, Garissa, and Nyeri Counties
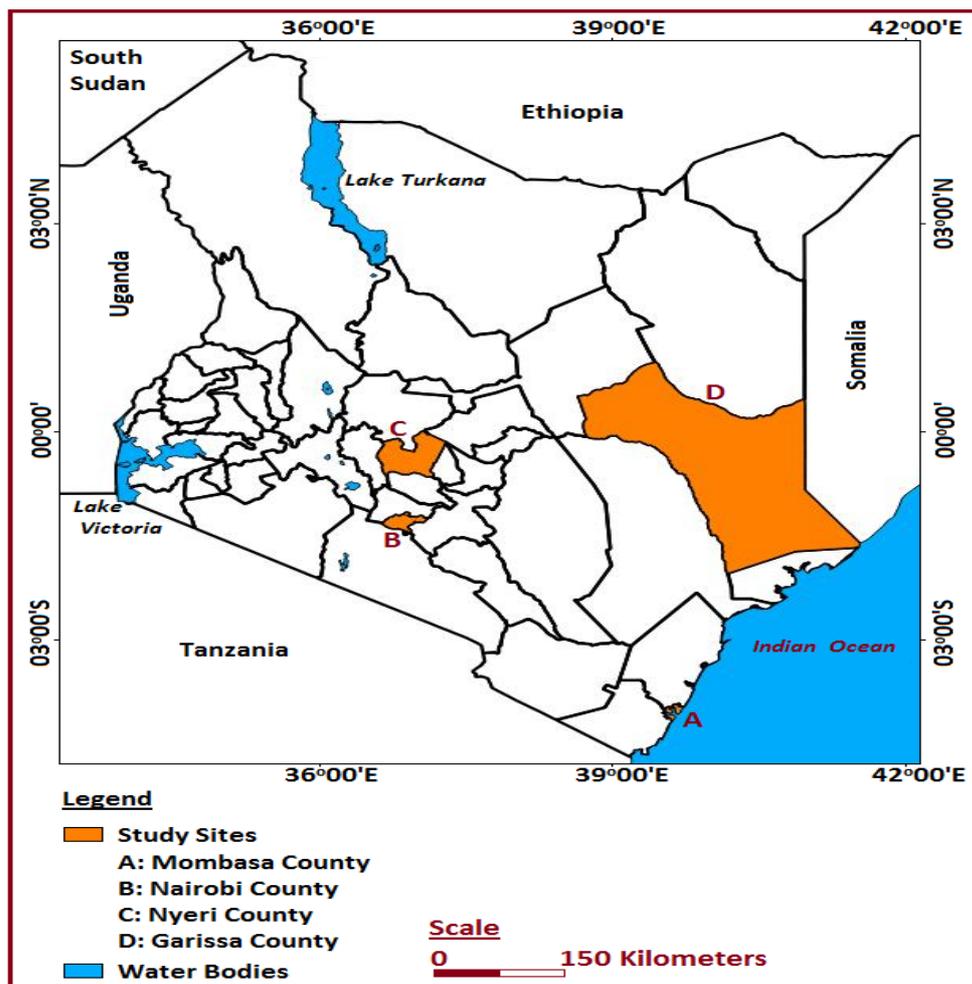
Figure 1 **Map of study locale**

Source: Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission, 2013

The map above shows the four counties where the researcher interacted with the research participants. This study was carried out in four counties in Kenya: Nairobi, Nyeri, Garissa, and Mombasa. Various reasons informed the choice of these counties. Garissa County had the highest number of terror attacks in Kenya and the second-deadliest violent attack in Kenya since independence after the 1998 US embassy bombing (see Wafula, 2014; France 24, 2019; DW Akademie,2019). Also, its proximity to Somalia placed it in a better position for violent discussions.

Nairobi County hosts the country's capital city. In Nairobi, the researcher had access to slums like Dandora, Kibra, and Kayole, where she interacted with members and ex-members in groups like Mungiki, Jeshi la Embakasi, and Gaza. The county also offered a cosmopolitan

plural space in which people from diverse ethnicities, gender, and classes on how women participate in violence has been exhibited over time and the factors that shape these trends. Great insights were drawn from the county's major violent attacks, which include the 1975 attack on Starlight nightclub, the 1980 attack at the Norfolk Hotel, the 1998 USA embassy bombing, the 2013 Westgate mall attack, and the 2019 DusitD2 Hotel attack. Activities of Gaza, Mungiki, and Jeshi la Embakasi in the county also informed its choice.

Mombasa County stood as the only county that had recorded a case of women attacking a police station in 2016 (see AWAPSA, 2018; UNDP, 2019). Additionally, most of the women who are reported to participate in Al-Shabaab activities either hail from the county or are residents of this county. I had access to ex-fighters in Gaza and Al-Shabaab, some of whom hail from the region while others have run from Nairobi to seek refuge in the county.

Nyeri County was selected due to the extensive nature of Mau Mau activities during the independence war. Nyeri people were the epitome of the Mau Mau war. In Nyeri, Mau Mau was launched with its flag raised at Rureng'o in 1952 (Maina, 2017). Additionally, Mungiki, which began in the 1980s, draws huge membership from the region. Therefore, it offered an ideal space where women's entry and participation in war-related activities and violence in Kenya could be discussed up to the 2000s before the state banned violent groups in Kenya.

These four counties presented as a vast study region. The counties are very far apart, thus posing time constraints. However, the COVID-19 shutdowns worked in favor of the researcher. Phone calls and Skype interviews helped in reducing long travel and costs across the counties. Also, research assistants helped cover other regions, especially during the second phase of data collection, where physical interviews were possible with reduced COVID cases in the country.

1.8.5   Limitations and Challenges

My positionality about the theme under study and that of my interview participants was a challenge. The study appeared to be deviating from the norm to challenge the status quo. Accordingly, some participants, especially women, felt the researcher was betraying women by terming them violent actors because she the researcher is genetically one of them. With the history of women being subordinated by men and many being victims of gender-based violence, some participants felt that it is not yet the time to examine women from the angle the researcher did, especially in violence. To them, much focus ought to be given to celebrating the achievements of women than examining them as equal violent actors as men in society.

Violence and terrorism are very sensitive and emotive topics in Kenya. Accordingly, some respondents were reluctant to give information for fear of being spied on. This made it hard for me to trace some respondents, especially women ex-fighters in Alshabaab, Gaza, and Mungiki. The researcher used insiders to trace respondents through the snowballing sampling technique to solve this. Additionally, I had to assure the study participants that the research was only for educational purposes and policy advice and that I would not disclose their identities without consent. Accordingly, in the preceding chapters, some names used for the participants for reference and citation purposes are pseudonyms, and the names participants chose to be identified with. These are indicated to distinguish actual names from pseudonyms because none of the Mau Mau participants, for example, sought anonymity; thus, their actual names are used.

1.8.6 Data Analysis and Presentation

The oral and archival data collected were analyzed using the thematic approach. First, I began by transcribing the tape-recorded data and coding the field notes into themes. The data was then edited to identify errors and omissions to correct them. The data were then classified according to content and the historical timeframe for events and developments. The themes were organized as per the research objectives. However, additional themes related to women's involvement in violent groups emerged while evaluating the fieldwork notes. Data collection was grounded on the research questions such as how women fight, how they enter violent groups, and their experiences in fighting. Accordingly, the thematic approach to analyzing the data assisted in directly relate the participants' responses to the questions.

The researcher also interconnected archival, oral, and secondary sources using triangulation (see Heale & Forbes, 2013). This helped in a better comprehension of the women's involvement in violent activities in Kenya. Secondary data is examined against evidence from archival and oral sources to ensure content validity. Analyzed data is presented as narrations, followed by first-hand quotations from primary sources and consolidations from secondary sources.

Generally, the researcher aimed to examine how the women fight and what they experience in clashes or wars. However, the researcher's interactions with the participants revealed diversity in how the groups the researcher focused on defined themselves and how the state defined them. Also, there were diversities in how women wanted to be perceived depending on the audience and reason. To the state and security agents, these groups under study were classified as illegal, criminal, and therefore, banned except Mau Mau, whose ban was lifted in 2003. I also realized that sometimes the state security officers and state-sponsored groups like the

KANU Youth wingers are sources of violence to the citizenry, especially when carrying out security and anti-terror operations. The violent group members depicted themselves as the security wing of their regions who are filling the gap left by the government or rebelling against violence perpetrated by the state. With all these diverse definitions, it was deducible that the concept of a 'woman fighter' was broad. This is because even state security agencies have women officers. As such, the study's focus was narrowed to 'women anti-state fighters' to focus on women who are only in the groups that the government has banned. However, the Mau Mau war stood as a reference point for the preceding epoch and groups studied.

Ethically, the researcher only embarked on data collection after receiving a research permit from National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) in Kenya. Participation in this study was only voluntary after the participants were informed of the study's purpose. No respondent was given money or offered any incentive to drive them to participate in this study. The researcher invoked participants' informed consent when she needed to tape-record and photograph the interview sessions. Moreover, all the secondary sources referred to were fully acknowledged using APA citation and referencing style.

CHAPTER TWO

2   Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents a review of the existing literature related to women's fighting and their participation in the public sphere in Kenya. The review is done in four subsections: women and war, women in the public sphere, women in independence movements, and women in modern-day violent neighborhood groups and terror groups. In the review, the researcher identified the knowledge gaps that this study fills in Kenya and borrows some of the aspects articulated in the existing works to support the study's arguments and enrich the analysis.

2.1   Women, Gender, and war

The connection between gender and war is arguably the most contested issue across cultures (Ahmed, 2004). This is because masculine traits are constantly portrayed as aggressive, and these are more appealing to the war space. In this system, the domination of masculinities fortifies the idea of femininities as passive (see Goldstein, 2001). Accordingly, in the gendering of the war system, studies on logical women in politics, war, and international relations have been until recently missing. The principal emphasis of these studies has been the discrimination against the heterosexual feminine in war rather than how they fight and their experiences at war.

Gender is ontologically embroiled in war (see Pfuhl, 2003). This implies that it is hard to do war without doing gender. The culturally defined gender identities that enable wars and masculinities are associated with qualities that make a good warrior. In this thesis, my arguments are, therefore, grounded on the idea that nobody is innately born into war. Specifically, in the doing of gender, men are socialized into war to attain manhood. This socialization includes cultural rites that involve ordeals that test or show bravery (see Mbithi, 1990). Such include initiation and wrestling in many African communities. Grounded on these cultural ordeals of bravery, it is worth noting that in pre-colonial African communities, women also went through these initiation rites as proof of womanhood and maturity for marriage (see Mbithi, 1990). As such placing them at the periphery of war using masculinities constructed through cultural rites is narrating a single-sided story of a people's history. I also argue that creating a man warrior also takes the efforts of women in society. In their various roles, commonly termed passive, women facilitate war and physical conflicts. In the following chapters, these will be discussed as the non-combat fighting strategies which include a

collection of intelligence, food, and arms supply motivators and financiers, and nurses to the wounded soldiers.

Schraut and Weinhauer (2014) contend that there is a strong gender bias in representing violent fighters from historical and security studies. There is an assumption that men and women have varied historical, and anthropological interactions, and motivations for political violence. Women's fight has been attributed to social factors, revenge, ideology, money, and outside forces and not personal feelings, obligations, or empowerment (Comolli, 2015; Doughert, 2016; Bloom & Matfess, 2016; Gelehan, 2019). Other scholars give poverty, religious ideologies, lack of education, and political oppression as reasons for women suicide bombers (see Gilbert, 2016; Maoveni, 2019; Galehan, 2019). Examination of motivation for these fighters alone as an approach to studying women in war is not holistic to bring out their experiences in war and fighting strategies. The approach validates the youth bulge theory of violence which in turn limits violent actors to the poor and frustrated in society. Pearson (2015) notes that the female jihad wing's presence suggests that women are deeply ideologically committed to destruction. The authors' views reveal them as agents of war and activists in their own right. However, Ness (2004) notes that such fighters are seen as deviants and that their motivating factors are taken as feelings of abandonment by institutions supposed to fight for them. Women's motivation for fighting is typically misunderstood (see Srobon, 2019). The contextual pressure creates a convergency between individual women, violent group leaders, and society that increase their participation in violence. These studies informed this study on the motivating factors for women fighters in Kenya. With this diversity in motivating factors for fighting, it is essential to explore how they fight to establish whether it is different from men and how it impacts the entire violent sphere.

Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) write about the various images painted of women involved in violence in the global political arena. The authors contend that violent women upset the picture of enlightened women as capable and equal but not attracted to violence as men. These women fall into the historical category of bad women. The author describes three types of women fighters. These include mothers whose violence is defined as fulfilling biological destinies, whores who use sex for violence, and monsters who are mentally dented and thus attracted to violence (Sjoberg &Gentry (2007). In this thesis, the whores were revealed as women who use sex to lure security officers and gather intelligence, a technique in all the violent groups studied. The monsters were well noted in Mau Mau.

These were termed 'hardcore' women by the British colonial administrator and had two separate prisons built explicitly for their encampment. Nonetheless, the authors allude to various ways through which women fight. They note that;

> Women are capturing hostages, committing suicide bombings, hijacking airplanes, and abusing prisoners (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007. Pg.1).

These fighting strategies were revealed in Al-Shabaab after the 2000s in Kenya.

War and violence are placed in the public sphere and are closely linked to politics. The motivations and goals of violent groups dominantly have a political inclination. In this way, war and violence are political aspects. In the following section, I explore the plight of women in Kenya's public sphere. The changes in this sphere specifically the political setting inform the changes in the battles ground, the fighting strategies the experiences of the fighters studied.

2.2   The place of Women in the Public Sphere in Kenya

There exists a plethora of works on women, gender, and public space in post-colonial Kenya. As rooted in traditional African beliefs, Kenya's definition and place of men and women reveal a society divided into the public and private spheres. Mazrui (1977) contends that the public sphere was strictly a sphere dominated by men, while women belonged to the private sphere. This disagrees with Oduol (1993), who contends that women have tremendously contributed to Kenya's public and political sphere. The diverse views of these two authors would be attributed to the differences in perspectives of their writing. Mazrui takes the colonial gender construction that inferiolized the female and enthroned male hegemony (see Oyĕwùmí, 1997). At the same time, Mazrui writes back in history before the women's decade in 1980. On the other hand, Oduol takes a neutral stand that recognizes women as participants in Kenya's public sphere even in their invisible form. Specifically, after 1980, Kenya witnessed tremendous efforts of women partaking in the politics of the day with heightened campaigns for their empowerment socially, politically, and economically. Nonetheless, whether this participation in politics was reflected in violent activities is the concern of this thesis, specifically how they participated in the groups that emerged during this time like Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi.

Midamba (1996) and Nzomo (1993) note that in the 1990s, women played a significant role in Kenya's democratization process. They helped to undermine the anti-democratic forces of the

KANU regime and suffered under the state security apparatus, leading them to strip naked in demand to release their sons (Kassilly & Onkware, 2010). The venue of their demonstration is today referred to as Freedom Corner. Tibbetts (1994) asserts that these protests indicate women's capacity in their positions, tasks, and societal image linked with mothers and their access to a specific position in Kenya.

However, Oduol (1993) and Waiyego (2004) contend that while women contribute to the public sphere, their contributions have not been adequately acknowledged. The situation is attributed to the patriarchal structure that characterizes Kenya's system. In Kenya's society, patriarchy is an organized social structure where men hold more power and are given more power and authority than their women counterparts (Kassilly & Onkware, 2010). The latter has been downgraded to domesticity, and when in the public discourse, their national roles consist of reproducing their private sphere roles of family and motherhood. Kassilly and Onkware (2010) note that women have endured decades of violence from the fierce patriarchal system. Does this patriarchy reflect itself in violent groups? How does this scenario define women fighters, their position, and their roles in violent groups in Kenya? These are questions that this study sought answers to.

Despite the improved electoral performance of women, affirmative action policies, and other human rights, the gender question remains unfinished. Perhaps this unfished gender question is the same case manifested in the violence sphere, where women are primarily seen as invisible despite their participation in these groups. Kassilly and Onkware (2010) reveal a Kenyan woman empowered beyond the domestic sphere. However, society has not acknowledged her existence as a rational violent actor, thus keeps on forcing the narrative of domesticity.

Writing on Kenyan women, Opuku, Anyango, and Olupu (2018) note that there are hindrances to women's active participation in Kenya's public sphere. Their proportion in Kenya's national assembly by 2018 was 21.8 % (Nyabola & Pommerolle, 2018). This makes Kenya the country with the lowest percentage of women in the national assembly in East Africa. Even with such numbers, 90% of them felt unsafe during the party primaries with many citing intimidation, harassment, and character assassination (Carter Centre, 2018). Janet Chepkwony, one of the aspirants from Kapsabet, a town in the former Rift Valley province, reported:

> I received threats to my life, while my supporters were
> physically abused or intimidated. This made it difficult to access

some of the areas and compete with my rivals on an equal footing (Nyabola & Pommerolle, 2018, pg.16).

Her sentiments agree with Kassilly & Onkware (2010) who contends that between 1992 and 2007, violence locked women out of the electoral process. Many were physically and sexually assaulted and displaced by the political violence in the country in the four general elections.

Picking on gender, Opuku, Anyango and Olupu (2018) note that institutionalized male dominance in Kenya uses gender ideology to place women in the public sphere within the home arena as mothers and wives, thus locking them out. The aspect of gender raises the gender dimension's concern in this study since violence is in the public domain. Additionally, the experiences of women in the public sector inform this study on their experiences in violent groups and how they shape the definition and presentation of these fighters in general.

Cubbins (1991), studying the division of labor in Kenya, notes that gender affects the inter-generational transmission of resources, with men favored over their women counterparts. The Kenyan state is more patriarchal and oppressive to femininities, as demonstrated in the case of Wambui Waiyaki Otieno and the burial of her husband. Wambui lost the case because the ruling was based on traditional gender beliefs (Cubbins, 1991). In these beliefs, women are characterized as harmful and destructive forces (see Cubbins, 1991). This raises a controversy; if women are regarded as destructive forces, why are they seen as victims of violence? This study sought to answer this question in its exploration of fighters in Kenya from 1945 to 2019. Revisiting the case of Wambui Otieno Gordon (1995) notes that when the system works in favor of patriarchy, women even fear to come out to support their own. Such a state, in the long run, breeds mistrust between women and the state. Does this inform why women choose to join violent groups? This study sought to answer this.

Several efforts are being made constitutionally to improve women's public participation in Kenya. These include but are not limited to the constitutional provisions of the 2/3 gender rule. However, Kibwana (1992) asserts that although the constitution and other laws, including human rights, grant women rights in the public sphere, they do not adequately enjoy them. This is due to the culture of male domination. The same remarks are echoed by Nyabola and Pommerolle (2018), who writes that although women constitute 51% of the Kenyan population, they only make up 47% of the electorate. Also, they are not involved in high-level negotiations of the public discourse in Kenya. They are mostly absent in the newspapers' front pages and in board rooms where decisions about the state's future are formulated and executed. Does this

male domination manifest itself in violent groups in Kenya? This study sought to answer this by examining the plight of women fighters within these violent groups, their positions, whether they take up leadership roles, and how they relate with the male fighters.

Kiruthu (2014) notes that interconnectedness exists across the world. With globalization, changing gender identities, and constructions are being witnessed. Maina (2017) confirms this narrative of changing masculinities in Kenya. She notes that women in Kenya are becoming more empowered and vocal to the extent that masculinities are threatened. They perform the roles that men traditionally did leading to new ways of constructing masculinities and femininities based on economic power and level of education. Gustatssun (2017) regards the idea of women's confinement to the private sphere as an outdated element in the current digitalized world. The author contends that Kenya's social media space has opened the domesticity of women and turned the private space from a segregated space to a connected space. Here women receive ideas and network with the world beyond their surroundings. In this study, the researcher, while focusing on Gustatssun (2017), raises questions on whether social media may inform change and continuity in women's participation in violence in Kenya. This is because there is freedom of social media in Kenya. Many violent groups and terror groups are using the dark web to communicate their ideas, recruit, plan, finance, and execute their violent attacks and related activities (Bosibori & Athuaire, 2020). The study examines how evolving gender identities impact women fighters in Kenya.

From the above, it is evident that women's participation in Kenya's public sphere is mainly examined from political and economic perspectives. Their proportion, in this sphere, is relatively low compared to their men counterparts. For instance, in the national assembly, they constitute only 21.8 % (Nyabola & Pommerolle, 2018). This is the case even though they constitute 50.31 % of the total population (see World Bank, 2020). Despite the tremendous efforts that have been made to promote women's participation in the public sphere, they are still regarded as passive beneficiaries of laws that they do not participate in making. Society still holds to the narrative of weaker women who should be in the domestic sphere despite the changing political contexts in the country. As such, there is hardly any substantial attention given to emerging empowered women, who are carving their niche beyond the domestic domain especially in the period after the 1980 women's decade. In a way, there is the negligence of changing gender identities and individual abilities and values (see Bem, 1982).

Situating the Kenyan woman in the public sphere is significant to examining how the diverse political context and changes in Kenya because the state informs the diversity and changes in their fighting strategies and experiences. I argue that the changing political contexts in Kenya influence and shape women's involvement in violence. Evolution from one political epoch to another comes with a new political background that not only dedicates the nature and goals of violent groups that emerge but also the targeted enemy to be fought, the battle fronts, fighting weapons, and experiences of fighters in general. Accordingly, in the following chapters, I argue that interplay in the public-private dichotomy (mainly grounded on gender stereotypes) and grievances of violent groups, plays a role in putting women at the periphery of violence.

2.3 The role of women in War in pre-colonial Context

Before examining the place of women in colonial and post-colonial violent groups, significantly, I review the literature on the role of women in war pre-colonial context. This will set the context against which the women fighters in colonial and post-colonial Kenya emerged. It is important to note that most of the fights in precolonial Africa generally and Kenya to be specific, were ethnic or kingdom based. They mainly consisted of cattle raiding or the desire by one kingdom to expand its territories by conquering another kingdom.

Olowaniyi (2021) explored the role of women in African warfare. The author contends that a lot of literature on women and their involvement in war focuses on women's support to the men fighters and not so much on their combat roles. With this lack of scholarly engagement, the author notes that mainstream discourses continue to be gender-blind thus concealing women's agency and political labor. Aware of this scholarly inadequacy this thesis sought to examine how women in Africa partake in war and their experience with specific reference to women fighters in Kenya. The author's recommendation that women's agency in war should form the core of knowledge informs the drive to carry out this study in Kenya.

Okonkwo (2021) documents the involvement of women in pre-colonial Igbo warfare. The author notes that pre-colonially the Igbo military training was gender inclusive. Both men and women were trained on the use of weapons and marched out boldly to war fronts. The author's findings imply that among the Igbo pre-colonially, gender was immaterial on war fronts. This would be attributed to the idea that in some pre-colonial African communities, the society was not gendered and that the gender constructions in Africa were a creation of the colonial state (see Oyěwùmí, 1997). Okonkwo's work informs this study on women combat fighters in

Kenya. Field interviews revealed that in violent groups studied herein, gender was immaterial in times of fighting. However, this thesis goes further to explore how gender stereotypes are exploited by colonial and post-colonial violent groups to achieve their individual group goals.

Some communities in pre-colonial Africa had an all-female fighting squad or warriors. Law (993) documents the Amazons of Dahomey Kingdom, present-day Benin in west Africa. These Amazons consisted of all-women warriors who led the Dahomey Kingdom into war against its neighboring kingdoms and won wars. However, it is important to note that these women fighters never married or bore children. They lived in the palace with the king, where They trained and organized for war. Law's work informs this study on how women fight and the plight of women in fighting. The current study sought to examine this in relation to selected violent groups in Kenya It is also worth noting that Law's study focused on the Amazon of Dahomey, while the current study focused on violent groups in Kenya.

Apart from participating in direct combat, some women played invisible, but significant roles in pre-colonial African wars. These roles included spying, storage of weapons, nursing the wounded male warriors, and cooking for their warriors (Olusola & Abayomi, 2020; Faboyede, 2013; Weir, 2006)). These roles have been largely termed passive roles (see Ogbomo, 2005; Bokhari,2007; Davis 2006). This thesis is cognizant of the significance of these roles and refers to them as non-combat fighting strategies in the next chapters. The thesis also argues that the designation of these roles as passive roles takes away their significance and renders women who carried them out invisible when the history of war is documented in Africa.

2.4 Women in the independence and decolonization war

A holistic understanding of women and war in Kenya requires a historical approach. I, therefore, trace the history of their fighting in Kenya from the pre-independence period. While there were cases both in colonial and pre-colonial Kenya, from where I would draw my reference, many of the violent groups and wars fought were community specific with a community-based agenda for fighting such as cattle rustling. Mau Mau War of independence, therefore, offers a good reference point as the movement had a national picture in terms of grievances and targets. The Mau Mau War was a landmark in Kenya's history, paving the way for the decolonization process. However, Elkins (2005) contends that the action was grounded in violent warfare and brutality against Kenya's settlers. This is the same violence and brutality that the colonial police and security agents unleashed on Kenyans and, more specifically, the Mau Mau fighters. The violence involved castration, detention, deportation from Nairobi,

screening, and operation Anvil (see Elkins, 2005). Mau Mau had about 20,000 men and women primarily armed with homemade guns (Elkins, 2005). The war offers a good reference point to examine the link between gender women and violence in Kenya. This is because examining women's participation in this war will shed light on exploring what the society ascribed to women in terms of fighting before the emergency of post-independence violent groups in Kenya. It is, therefore, significant to review the works on Mau Mau to contextualize this link.

Writing of the masculine history in almost all academic spheres including security and violence is traced from the colonial regime in Africa (see Zeleza, 2005). Given this, Oyěwùmí, (1997) notes that

> The histories of the colonized and the colonizer have been written from a male point of view, where women are peripheral if at all they appear (Oyěwùmí, 1997, pg. 121)

Both the colonizer and the colonized are presumed male. Accordingly, national resistance and decolonization movements in Africa, especially Mau Mau in Kenya, are important in historically situating Kenyan women in war and violence activities both nationally and internationally.

Both men and women participated in the Mau Mau war. However, the latter's role in the war is generally limited to the passive wing of the war. Elkins (2005) notes that women helped to organize the activities of the movement at grassroots levels. These include individuals like Shifra Wametumi and Hellen Macharia, who were detained for being the Mau Mau operations' backbone. Others took part in oathing, collected funds, and prepared for the war. However, Presley (1988) notes that while men and women equally participated in the war, their equality is not recognized by academic journals. We still have a history of Mau Mau and women's history as if they are two different entities. The author contended that Mau Mau was a gendered war and that what motivated men to fight was the same grievances that drove women to join men in the forest to fight. However, the author has not given much about these fighters who joined the men in the forest, for example, the author has not elucidated how they joined and what their experiences were in fighting.

Presley (1988) notes that denoting women as passive wings in the Mau Mau war is isolating their importance in the war's activities. This is the same problem exhibited in today's violence sector, where women's roles are only regarded as passive, and thus not given much attention.

In this study, I am cognizant of both the combat and non-combat fighters in Mau Mau. I argue that in war, both combatants and non-combatant fighters interact toward the same goal- victory. Failure by the non-combat fighters automatically leads to an unsuccessful combat wing. The centrality of non-combat fighters (the majority who are women) is explored.

Mau Mau war shaped the later life of the women fighters. Examining the daughters of Mau Mau, Presley (1998) writes about Wambui Otieno. Wambui joined Mau Mau at the age of 16 years, spied, organized arms, and liaised between Mau Mau and the union movement. Cloete (2006) echoes the same narrative and notes that Wambui took all the 15 warrior oaths of Mau Mau but remained an urban guerrilla. Why she did not join the fighters in the forest after taking all those oaths has not been documented. Presley (1999), further, notes that Wambui, later, became a very powerful activist in Kenya's political sphere. This is an indicator of how the fighting experience would impact and shape these fighters' behavior and ability later in life. I note that Wambui's history is told more from a masculine and victimized perspective than a rational strong Mau Mau fighter. Her story majorly centers on the period after colonialism when she is battling a court case as a widow, who desperately wanted to bury her husband (see Anderson, 2002; Lonsdale, 2001). Wambui's case is not an isolated one as many of the fighters of this study's focus was revealed to be presented in relation to their husbands, brothers, and male friends. Such is the case with Mukami Kimathi, Miriam Mathenge, Clare Njoki, and Violet Kemunto in the following chapters. I, therefore, argue that the presentation of these fighters with a male inclination and link conceals their contributions to war and leaves no room for their experiences to be realistically documented.

Explaining women's entry into Mau Mau, Kanogo (1987) writes that their participation was a reaction against the European gender construction and the colonial political economy. These gender constructions and political economy disrupted the traditional identity criterion, and cultural and social organization of Kikuyu society and put women at the periphery of community life. Would women's involvement in violence in post-independent Kenya be informed by Kenya's political economy, such as the oppressive government regimes? This study sought to examine what factors shape women's entry into violent groups in post-independence Kenya and how they join these groups and how they fight.

Women were essential participants in the Mau Mau war. Santoru (1996) contends that in the Mau Mau war, the colonial officials saw them as autonomous enemies who had to be fought on a large scale because a weakened women's wing would weaken Mau Mau. The British

colonial officers regarded women's role in Mau Mau as fundamental (see Santoru, 1996). Therefore, they had to provide a specific program to curtail them (Santoru, 1996; Elkins, 2005). Although they were initially regarded as coerced actors, the British colonial officers imagined that they, although corruptible and weak, were dangerous. The author's work informs this study on who are the women fighters in Kenya and how they are perceived by different actors in society. Santoru (1996) further notes that women were the major problem that the colonial police had to deal with because they kept the Mau Mau spirit alive. This raises the controversy; why are men only mostly recognized in the Mau Mau war? The study also interrogates the plight of women in violent groups in post-independent Kenya.

Also, Santoru (1996) explores the contradictions surrounding women's rehabilitation in Mau Mau. Rebisz (2021) terming this villagization, argues that this was a brutal counter-insurgency by the British colonialists to the African women in Kenya. The two authors' narration brings out the brutality both physical and psychological that the Kenyan women had to undergo in the colonial camps. While this thesis is cognizant of this kind of brutality, it draws from the point that villagization was a colonial counter-insurgency tactic. This implies that there was insurgency from the natives too. As such, my focus shifts to these women natives who were involved in the fight, how they fought, and their experiences.

Some women were found in the forest fighting (Gathogo, 2017). However, very little is mentioned about them, who they were, and how they fought. Women Mau Mau fighters were regarded as deviants in society. However, this deviance and mental insanity were exploited to propagate violence. For example, Bruce-Lockhart (2014) shows evidence of detention camps that dealt with "hardcore women," such as the camp at Gitamayu, created in 1958. This implies that the Kamiti Women's prison was not the only detention camp for women in Mau Mau. However, the author contends that the British colonial officers believed that hardcore women had to be handled to weaken Mau-Mau. Nevertheless, the same colonial state classified these women as insane to cover up for the abuse unleashed on them in detention. All the women Mau Mau fighters I interacted with in this study confessed to having been detained in Kamiti women's prisons. Bruce-Lockhart (2014)'s work on the British approach to detainees sheds light on how gender, deviancy, and psychological well-being fashioned colonial practices of penalty.

The idea informs this study on the connection among gender, women, and violence and how diverse actors in society, especially the state regards women fighters. Their detention and life

in prison contribute to the narrative of their experiences in war and how diverse actors interpreted these experiences. Also, it shows how the same relationship would be exploited today in Kenya's violent space to cover up women's participation in violence. Some fighters and ex-fighters in post-colonial violent groups like Mungiki, Gaza, and Al-Shabaab also raised concerns about the state in Kenya and detention. Today, Kamiti maximum women prison is among the prisons that house women who have been arrested for gross violations such as murder. The prison conditions as narrated by the prison officers I interacted with in Nairobi paint a picture not far from that of the colonial state. As a result, some ex-fighters choose to hide and live a secretive life than surrender to the state for detention. For those still in the violent groups, avoiding police arrest is one of their cautions. In this thesis, I explore how these fighters navigate through all these dynamics as part of their experiences in war.

Discussing the construction of masculinity in the Mau Mau revolt, Luise (1990) asserts that in the writing of African history and the Mau Mau revolt, no focus has been given to masculinity and femininity. The author, further, notes that in the Mau Mau war, although women would be married to their fellow fighters, in the forest, they regarded each other as co-fighters and not as husband and wife. This directly translates to the remarks by some fighters who noted that in war there is nothing like a men leader or a woman leader. In a way, in the forest, gender was immaterial. Nonetheless, this does not take away the fact that gender conflicts emerged in terms of leadership, especially in the Mau Mau war of independence. Luise (1990) sheds light on the first objective of this study, the connection between gender women and violence and the plight of women in these groups. In the forest, women infused their domestic roles with the public sphere and emerged out more potent than initially thought. Such infusion would be reflected in the current women who actively participate in violence, both as wives to the fighters and fighters in their light. Fighters such as the late Clare Njoki in Gaza and Violet Kemunto in Al-Shabaab are best explored from these perspectives. The author also sheds light on how social relations are differently interpreted to suit women fighters in their world of war. Here, I argue that this interpretation changes from one actor to another and from one period to another depending on the situation, audience, and interests at stake.

Documenting the role of women in advocating for the release of Harry Thuku, Wipper (1989) notes that although men and women never had the same or equal power, certain traditional conditions, and institutions pushed the latter to achieve such a strong political voice. Such are the beliefs and the institutions that this study sought to examine and establish how they shape

women's participation in the public sphere and, more specifically, in violence in Kenya. Wipper (1989), further, contends that women's oathing during the Mau Mau war was a gesture to treat women as equal to men. They would be trusted with community secrets. The author's idea of oathing depicts the normal oathing and agreement established by most violent groups, as documented by Bosibori (2017). I analyze some of these oaths to examine their influence on the roles individuals play in violent groups from a gendered angle and how it shapes how the fighters are perceived within and outside these groups.

From the decolonization review above, it is evident that many women were involved in the wars of independence. Many of the existing works document violence unleashed on women while their husbands were away fighting, while others have passivized their fighting strategies. Such a documentation angle looks down upon the fighters who took arms and joined men in the forest to fight. These women are missing in many of the narratives of the liberation wars. The passive wing approach also downplays the centrality of non-combat forms of fighting such as arms and food supply, collection of intelligence, recruitment of new members, and nursing of the wounded combat fighters. Additionally, from the stories, it emerged that women's activities were responsible for the sustenance of the Mau Mau war, thus the colonial masters had to seek ways to intervene and curb them. This raises several questions: Why are women regarded as victims or coerced actors of violence today while in Mau Mau, they were considered dangerous? Is it that their participation in violence is insignificant or deliberately ignored? This study answers these questions.

2.5   Continuity and Change in Women and Violence in Kenya

KANU's authoritarian regime filled almost Kenya's first three decades of independence1963-1993. Up to 1990, Kenya was a single-state party marked with state-sponsored violence from the KANU youth wingers to the political opponents of the time (see Mwangola, 2007; Okoth & Jagero, 2021; Branch & Cheeseman, 2009; Widner, 1993). From 1992 to 2010 when the country promulgated its current constitution, the political landscape shifted to multipartyism but with each electioneering period marked with ethnic-based violence (see Yego, 2015; Ajulu, 2002; Oyugi, 1997; Oucho, 2010). Much of the literature within this time frame focuses on the violent groups that emerged in response to the state and KANU youth wingers (see Kagwanja, 2003; Wamue, 2001; Anderson, 2002; Truth & Reconciliation Commission, 1999).

Discussions on women focus on their role in political space as subordinated individuals who were victims of state and opposition violence. The women's decade also features when debates on their empowerment in this period are presented. Very little scholarly attention is given to violent activities and women's participation in this violence. Mungiki remains the highly studied violent group within this period with the other 18 groups by 2022 and 33 groups by 2010 being mentioned alongside political and power discussions. In addition, women are presented as victims of Mungiki, being forced to undergo circumcision (see Wamue, 2001; Anderson, 2002). Also apart from 1975, 1980, and 1998 bomb attacks, most violent activities in Kenya were recorded during the electioneering period or in form of tribal fights over cattle rustling where men warriors dominated the war and women presented as victims. The 2000s were somewhat silent in Kenya in terms of violent groups until 2007 when the country recorded the worst post-election violence (see Kegoro, 2009; Kagwanja, 2013; Mutahi, & Ruteere, 2019). Since 2010, there has been an increase in violent activities, terror attacks, and violent neighborhood groups in Kenya. The number of violent groups in Kenya increased from 33 in 2010 to 326 in 2017 in addition to increased attacks by Al-Shabaab on Kenyan soils (The national research Crime Centre, 2019).

Badurdeen (2018) writes on Al-Shabaab enlistment in the coastal part of Kenya. The author explores how and why women are involved in the Al-Shabaab recruitment process using biographical narratives. The findings reveal that women are central in the recruitment of fighters into Al-Shabaab. However, she notes there is a fragile line between their intentional and unintentional enrollment in the group. Nonetheless, she does not offer a clear explanation of this fragile line. Badurdeen's work focuses on Al-Shabaab, which is among the focus group of this study. However, this study historicizes the participation of women in violence and involves other violent groups within Kenya. With a historical approach, it will be easier to unmask some of the aspects that have been overlooked, over time, regarding women's participation in violent activities. Additionally, some willingly join Al-Shabaab, but the author has given very little attention to them. Further, there is a lack of a clear profile of women who have been involuntarily recruited. Finally, the author focuses on women recruiters. However, there is no historical background explaining how these recruiters entered the group. This study will similarly use a historical approach to explore this aspect.

In her discussion of violent extremism in Mombasa Kenya, Badurdeen (2019) explores women's tasks in radical units and their effects. The findings indicate that women are recruiters

in Al-Shabaab, thus agreeing with her prior research. She, however, adds that there are cases where these fighters have been cited as suicide bombers. The author contends that women's violence is not a recent phenomenon. It is only that their involvement has been overlooked for a long time. The idea enriches this study because women have been partakers in violence, only that society holds a lot to gender stereotypes of war. However, the author does not indicate other violent groups in which women have been actors in Kenya. This study fills this gap by studying other groups like Mungiki, Gaza, and Jeshi la Al-Shabaab.

Moreover, in her argument, the author notes that low-income families, religion, and individual behaviors are among the factors that motivate women's recruitment into violent groups. Those from low-income and middle-income families are the most targeted. This raises the question of rich women financing militants. For instance, in 2019, a Kenyan lady was blacklisted by the US for financing ISIS (Hellen, 2019). It also raises questions about whether income motivated women to Mau Mau war. The findings also indicate that those in the coastal region are easily recruited. The results justify the selection of Mombasa County as one of the sampling points for this study. Nevertheless, it also raises a fundamental question of whether these individuals hail from Mombasa or whether Mombasa is just used as a gateway for recruitment. To fill gaps, this study examined the backgrounds, ages, and social statuses of women fighters in Kenya.

Banks (2019) writes that there is always a broad assumption that violence and terror group members are always male. This has been primarily associated with a smaller number of women in violent groups and gender stereotypes that define war. The author, further, contends that it is until recently that women have been written in violence and terrorism studies. His ideas agree with the Crisis Group Report (2019), which asserts that research on violent groups tends to be male-dominated, focusing on men actors, participation, and passage in and out of the war space. The report contends that such a focus muddles an imperative yet hidden fragment of the image. The study is relevant to this study as it shed light on how a singular focus fails to capture the role women play in violent groups in Kenya.

Furthermore, Banks' (2019) 's ideas inform this study on why women's active participation in violence goes unnoticed and unrecognized. However, this study deviates from his works because he only focuses on women in Al-Shabaab. In contrast, this study sought to trace and document their participation in violence from colonial Kenya to post-independent Kenya. With such a more comprehensive historical approach, it would be easier to offer insights that would contextualize their current involvement in the war. The Crisis Group Report (2019) forms part

of the motivating factors that informed this study. This study goes back to history to trace and lay the foundation of women fighters to solve the dilemmas raised by the current security reports and studies.

Stern (2019) explores the invisible women in Al-Shabaab. The author notes that fighters in the group are painted as less picture and not highly given attention. The author recommends the need to interact with women members in Al-Shabaab to see if their accounts correlate with societal perspectives. This study fills this recommendation and chooses women Al-Shabaab returnees as part of its study participants to get and analyze their account of their real roles and experiences in the violent group.

Ndung'u & Salif (2019) studies violent extremism in Kenya. The authors note that reports have drawn attention to women's participation in extremism in Kenya. They give an account of various violence and terror incidents that involved women. The accounts given are an accurate indicator that women's presence and participation in violence in Kenya are increasing. This account serves as a driving force for this study to examine why this is the case. More importantly, these authors provide an impression of a growing women's violence. However, this study traces the genesis of their entry into violence and connects this participation through the various historical epochs of violence in Kenya.

Petrich and Donnelly (2019) write about the shifting relationship between Al-Shabaab and Kenyan women. The authors note that there is a particular relationship between Al-Shabaab and various categories of women and women groups in the horn of Africa that involves sex work. This implies that women are actively partaking in terror groups in Kenya and their sexuality is at the center of this insurgency. With this conviction, there is a need to carry out an in-depth study to examine the factors informing these relations between Al-Shabaab and these categories of women. The study sought to establish if the sexual relationship highlighted by these authors is a coerced or a voluntary relationship and how it shapes the definition of women fighters, and their perception by government security agencies, men fighters, and society in Kenya. Just like the previously reviewed scholars, the authors have only focused on Al-Shabaab. They have not given a historical context within which women's participation in violence emerged and how it has changed over time. This is the gap that this study sought to fill with reference to women anti-state fighters in Kenya between 1945 and 2019.

From the works reviewed above, it is evident that several studies have been written on women and violence in Kenya. However, these works focused only on the Al-Shabaab violent group, which became more pronounced in the country after 2010. Additionally, there are several controversies raised. Such include the thin line between voluntary and involuntary recruitment of women into the group. Much of these works are either in the form of security reports or sociological studies. Aspects far away from political grievances have been revealed in women and violence in the review. These include but are not limited to women fighting due to religious reasons. Thus, there is no proper historical documentation of women's participation in the group provided. This study sought to provide historical documentation of women fighters in Kenya from 1945 up to 2019. In this way, the study links the various violent groups that have been witnessed in Kenya to give a clear and definite plight of women fighters in Kenya. This is because the mere focus on Al-Shabaab in the discussion of women fighters is just concealing a fundamental picture of the situation (the historical context) in counter-terrorism strategies.

2.5.1 Women's Fighting Strategies

Terror and violent groups use various fighting techniques, including shooting, hijackings, kidnappings, pumping, and barricading hostages (James, 1994). These fighting techniques are very relevant to the topic under study. Accordingly, in this section, the review explores how women fight. Euro News (2016) and Leila (2016) give examples of women who hijack vehicles and planes of the targets. For example, Khaled Leila was the first woman to hijack an airplane in 1969 (Leila, 2016). In 1970, she made the same attempt, but the mission was not successful. The Times Israel (2017) affirms that Leila was a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP) outlawed as an extremist group by the European Union. At the time of her arrest, she had two grenades to use in hijacking the plane. The report contends that in 1969 she attacked an American passenger plane landing it in Damascus. They held three Israeli passengers for three months before trading them for Syrian Prisoners of war in Israeli jails.

Women also employ petrol and grenade bombing as fighting strategies. Cragin and Daly (2009) provide an example of the price sisters (Delours and Marian Price). These two were members of the Provisional Irish Republican Army, a terror group in western society. The two sisters did bombings in London in the 1970s and were specifically tried and jailed for the two attacks outside the Scotland Yard Whitehall Army recruitment center on March 8, 1973. Whether this technique is used by Kenyan women fighters is what this study seeks to establish and how it

impacts their overall picture in the country. The jailing of the two sisters also motivated this study to examine how the Kenya state treats women fighters once arrested or known.

Also, women carry out assaults and hostages. For instance, Fusako Shingenobu was a member of the Japanese Red Army, a terror group that carried out joint attacks with PLFP against the USA and Israel in the 1970s. Together with her four allies, Fusako Shingenobu assaulted the French embassy in Hague and took the French ambassador hostage in September 1974. Other techniques employed by women in fighting include direct attacks. Such was the case at Mombasa Central police station in Kenya, where a woman pulled a knife and stabbed a police officer in broad daylight before exploding a petrol bomb that partially burnt down the station (Mwaura, 2015; Ochami & Ombati, 2016).

UNODC (2020) contends that kidnapping is one of the fighting techniques used by terror groups. The report shows that between 2008 and 2014, al Qaeda, a terror group, made at least $25,000,000 from kidnapping. Out of this, 66 million were collected in 2013. However, the report does not show whether women are part of the kidnappers. This was the same case in Nigeria in 2014 when Boko Haram kidnapped 276 schoolgirls from a school in Borno state (see Zenn, 2014). Much of the focus was on the girls who had been kidnapped and a generalized description of attackers as Boko Haram which is normally depicted as male. Avoiding the gender lens of attackers and kidnappers promotes gender blindness in fighting. This study sought to unmask this problem with special reference to fighters in Kenya.

Suicide bombing is one of the growing trends of fighting techniques employed by violent and terror groups. Bloom (2007) and (Noor 2011) posit that there is an increasing trend of women suicide bombers. Fighting through suicide bombing is not a new strategy in the violence sphere. The strategy began in 1985 when a 16-year-old girl, Khyladan San, drove a lorry into an Israeli security force caravan killing two soldiers (Zedalis, 2004). Darten (2019) also notes that women suicide bombers during the Chechen War in the 2000s were very rampant. The author postulates that more than two-thirds of suicide bombers were women. Recently, in groups such as Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, Women combatants as young as seven years constitute many of these suicide bombers (Darten, 2019). Campell (2020) asserts that between 2014 and 2018, Boko Haram deployed 468 women suicide bombers. Bryson & Co-Existence (2018) note that since these bombers die during attacks, it is hard to tell whether they were coerced into active fighting. Informed by this precision, this study chooses to use the histories of women fighters

and ex-fighter in Kenya to examine what exactly motivated them to participate in the fighting and how they fought in these groups.

From the review above, it is evident that why and how women fight have some gender biases that shape their passivity narrative. The review has shown that women employ fighting techniques including those used by men and handle sophisticated weapons associated with physical energy and masculinity. This then raises the question of why, even though the women are using the same fighting techniques employed by men, are differently treated, and perceived in the violence and terror spheres. The review also informs the current study on the fighting strategies used by women fighters in Kenya. How do women fighters in Kenya fight and what are their experiences in fighting? Additionally, the review revealed that some security reports do not give the gender dimensions of the attacks or attackers. This leaves out finer details on women's participation in such attacks. This is the gap that this study sought to fill.

2.6   Theoretical Framework
2.6.1   Recruitment of Women into Violent Groups

In the study of women fighters in Kenya, I challenge these stereotypes and examine how women are recruited, fight, and their experiences in fighting. As regards how they join the groups, I borrow from the tenets of Densely's (2022) signaling theory of recruitment in crime. The fighter's centrality approach to war and violence explained the plight and experiences of women fighters.

I begin my discussion with the fighters in this study are recruited into violent groups. The study borrows from the idea of Gartner and McCarthy (2004) on women's access to violent groups and trusts elements of violent groups. The researcher also employed the ideas of Densely (2012) on the signaling theory of crime in the recruitment into gangs and violent groups. Gärtner and McCarthy (2004) contend that female access to violent groups is predominantly through family or friends in the neighborhood. The author, further, contends that people's perception of the individual characteristics crucial for the selection of fellow fighters is based on gender stereotypes held in the underworld. However, the evidence that challenges these stereotypes does very little to challenge them. This is because the stereotypes have been held for a long until the masses see them as the absolute truth.

The author also notes that trust is very significant in recruitment into violent groups. While sharing the same idea with Densley (2012), Gärtner and McCarthy (2004) deviate to raising

gender diversity in trust issues in the groups. He says mafias and professional thieves, for example, claim to trust the loyalty and resilience of women less than men. This is the case even though they have witnessed weakling and disloyal men and trustworthy and steadfast women. This trust issue was revealed in my interaction with some of the study participants, especially the men. They cited the aspect of women being malleable and weak and thus would not be trusted as fighters. Nonetheless, evidence from the field revealed great women fighters. For instance, field marshal Muthoni Kirima, stayed in the forest for 11 years, rose to the rank of a field marshal, and was the last one to leave the forest in 1963.

Gärtner and McCarthy (2004), further, contend that even women do not find their gender trustworthy when it comes to handling physical risks. According to the author, they are unlikely to target men and rely on men when violent reinforcement is necessary. An examination of this idea shows that Gärtner and McCarthy (2004) are only focusing on combat fighting. My fieldwork findings reveal that women non-combat fighters target men's security officers to get information and steal guns. I argue that fighters regardless of their gender are reluctant to place unwarranted trust in people whose odds to win the war are lower. Nonetheless, Gärtner and McCarthy (2004) only speak of this based on gender and contend that fighters are unlikely to place their trust in gender whose potential to win the physical confrontation is lower. The author also notes that women, who seek to join violent groups must display violence or aggressive behavior to be acknowledged. Low-quality violence is likely to be a burden to the group for which high-quality type needs to compensate. As a result, there is the assumption that most violent groups have little incentive to implement gender-blind recruitment if their main assets are a reproduction of violence. This explains the relatively low numbers of women fighters compared to men in violent groups. Generally, Gärtner and McCarthy's (2004)'s focus is limited to two aspects gender (where only men are seen as rightfully placed to be in war) and combat fighting. This thesis goes beyond these to focus on non-combat fighting and women as rational and able fighters in the war.

Densley (2012) postulates that violent groups face a problem with the ambiguity of the attributes of new entrants. None of the appropriate trust-affirming qualities for violent groups can be easily revealed from mere observation. Consequently, they seek visible marks linked with these traits. The ensuing problem is the ambiguity over the dependability of the noticeable signs because some agents like police officers' spies may emulate them. These trust issues were revealed in my fieldwork. Some participants would not turn up for interviews because they

would not trust me thinking that I was a state informer. However, the same mistrust was accorded to me by some state security officers who mistook me for maybe spying on them. This then helped me understand the centrality of trust in these groups when it comes to not only sharing information but also recruitment of members. The violent groups must look for signals that are too hard and costly to fake. As such, recruitment into these groups emerges not as a single action but as a trust-seeking process.

Densely (2012) contends that regardless of gender, violent group members extend their confidence mainly to family friends, and others like themselves but rarely beyond. Entry into these groups is restricted to individuals who have prior links with active group members. In this thesis, I call these the insiders. These are the people who negotiate for potential members to be recruited into the group. All the fighters and ex-fighters I interacted with in the field noted that they were introduced to these groups by an insider. These insiders ranged from family members to friends. This is because violent groups reduce the risks of invasion by rooting the group in a continuing structure of individual ties (see Densely, 2012). Kinship or friendship links overlap and raise data about an individual thus decreasing doubt. Focusing on the insider, this thesis reveals that most of the insiders for the fighters I interacted with were men, especially in Mau Mau, Mungiki, and Jeshi la Embakasi. This would be attributed to the dominance of men in violent groups in terms of numbers. Nonetheless, from the 2000s in Gaza and Al-Shabaab, most of the fighters I interacted with were revealed to have had women insiders.

Densley (2012), further, notes that the recruiter and the potential member must find themselves in a situation where they exchange signals. These can be in the neighborhood and villages. In the current era with technological advancement, social media, and digital space add to this environment. For example, one of the ex-fighters I interacted with in Mombasa County, narrated that she met her insider to Al-Shabaab through Facebook. The same was echoed in the case of the late Clare Njoki in Gaza. From these environments, they get to build trust in natural interactions. The insider examines if the potential fighter can fight, and this can be combat or non-combat.

Recruitment is completed by the gang elders or leaders. The idea of the leaders in these groups informs the idea of the group leadership and the plight of the women in these violent groups' leadership structures. After the screening, the new member is put into a test of group values. One can be sent to rob, kill, spy etcetera. After this, one must burn bridges (Densley, 2012). This involves getting the group tattoo as in the case of Gaza, taking the oath (applicable in all

groups studied here), and undergoing circumcision in Mungiki among others depending on the group.

2.6.2   The fighter's centrality approach to war and violence

This study employs the fighter's centrality approach to the war in explaining women's involvement in violent activities. The approach is grounded on the gaps identified both in the background of the study and the literature review of this thesis. Most of the available scholarly works on women and war focus on the victim's picture of women. Some raise questions on gender which then gives this study the ground for pursuing its research question. Additionally, in the recruitment of women to violent groups, gender, and women's biology are used to portray them as weaklings, malleable, and therefore, a burden to these groups. Most of these assumptions are based on gender stereotypes passed either in written or oral forms from one generation to another until they have been taken as sacredly true.

On how women fight, I not only focus on combat fighters but also non-combat fighters. The latter is largely ignored or designated as passive, thus concealing these fighters when history is written or told. The thesis is cognizant of the centrality of non-combat fighters in the success of violent groups. It also examines the experiences both from the rational and victim angles. To bring in-depth evidence, the thesis also gives stories of the women fighters studied here.

All these aspects give rise to a new approach to women and war not only in Kenya but also globally. I refer to this as the fighter's centrality approach to war. The approach is grounded on the centrality of each form of fighting in the success of the war. This implies that within the violent groups, each member regardless of gender, age, class, education, and background is very significant in the accomplishment of the group's mission. However, while this is the case, each member is assigned duties depending on their abilities, skills, and experiences to deliver a given task. This is akin to the popular notion of equity in society that gender activists, women activists, and human rights organizations advocate for daily.

The approach also posits that in war, and violence, active and passive roles categorization are inapplicable as every role contributes to the success of the fight. It is worth noting that the passive-active dichotomy of war roles is one of the reasons that women are put at the periphery of war and violence. Erasing this categorization not only recognizes the importance of each role in the group but also the importance of the individual performing these roles. Ideally, violent groups have hierarchical structures that define who does which role, how they do it,

and when to do it (see Shaikh & Jiaxin, 2006; Bosibori, 2017). These structures and roles have to be followed for the success of the group's goal. This then implies that fighting is not only about physical combat but also involves all those invisible activities, before, during, and after the combat fighting which works towards the success of the group activities. Recognition of these activities that have been conventionally termed as passive as normal fighting strategies is significant in not only defining fighting holistically and in detail but also the documentation of information about wars, fighters, and formulation and execution of counterterrorism strategies.

Also, the approach holds that while sex may at times determine how individuals fight, gender is not, thus war and violence are gender neutral. And when the groups decide to employ gender in its popular notion, they do so to conceal their activities or safeguard their women fighters from the hands of the security officers. Anybody regardless of their gender can choose to fight either as a combatant or non-combatant. Finally, the approach holds that the passivity of women in war is due to gender stereotypes and has nothing to do with their biological features. Just like in other public domains, such as politics, the sidelining of women is purely on assumptions as opposed to reality. Liberal feminism calls for equal opportunities for women like their male counterparts in leadership, and politics (see Marilley, 2013; Kensinger, 1997). Etc. in the same spirit the fighter centrality approach contends that men and women should be equally perceived in areas of violence and fighting.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter sought to review available works on women's gender and violence. The review revealed many results on women and violence nationally and internationally. The review was thematically done according to the study's objectives. However, the chapter revealed a male gaze on violence and fighting where women are placed at the periphery of war and violent talks. War and violence were revealed as gendered to depict men as warriors and women as coerced, irrational, and victim actors. Even where there was evidence of their involvement in the fighting, the women were portrayed as either mothers fulfilling their biological roles and whose violence should not be seriously taken as it is already domesticated, monsters who are pathologically damaged, thus acting out of irrationality, or whores whose violence was depended on sex.

Most studies of women and violence were from the sociological security or international relations point of view. The chapter revealed that very little attention had been given to the

scholarship on women anti-state fighters in Kenya from a historical perspective. Additionally, most studies focus only on one violent group with no attempt to link these violent groups over time. Women entering violent groups were seen from a gender angle as they were presented as people being lured by their male counterparts. Their experiences in the war were more of victims than violent actors.

The chapter also revealed some studies which have attempted to position women in the public domain. Cases of women's involvement in the independence war and the post-independent political sphere were revealed. However, the role of these women in these spheres was primarily described as 'passive," giving way for the male version(active) of history to take precedence over what women did.

Nonetheless, some studies reviewed formed the foundation upon which this study's primary arguments and theoretical approach were grounded. The researcher termed this new theoretical approach the fighter centrality approach. The approach was coined by consolidating the gaps and emerging issues from this review.

CHAPTER THREE

3   The Link between Women, Gender, and Violence in Kenya;1945-1963

As indicated in chapter one, debates on women fighters in Kenya are anchored on the dichotomy of the public and private spheres. In these spheres, gender identities and roles come out either as masculine (public domain) or feminine (personal domain). Gender identities are accompanied by gender roles reflected in these diverse spheres. However, it is worth noting that cisgender is evident in Kenya. In this case, gender identity ascribed to someone matches their sex assigned at birth (Aultman, 2014). Such explains the variations in roles and attires accorded to men and women. The public-private dichotomy also informs the numbers of women fighters, perceptions of how they fight, and the emergence and grievances of violent groups in Kenya. The question of how women fight, and their experiences cannot be comprehensively answered without mapping the link between gender, women, and violence. This raises two essential questions, first, how does the public-private sphere dichotomy come into play in violent groups? Second, how does this dichotomy inform this link?

This chapter explores how gender, women, and violence are linked in Kenya using the Mau Mau war as a reference point. In so doing, how the public-private sphere and gender identities (masculinity and femininity) manifest in the grievances of the Mau Mau war of independence are explored. The chapter also explores how this public-private dichotomy shapes entry, plight, and the position of women in the Mau Mau war. The Mau Mau membership oaths and their influence on the gender stereotypes witnessed in fighting are discussed too. Central to this discussion is the examination of how women navigated these stereotypes and their experiences in the war of independence.

3.1   Emergence and Growth of Mau Mau war up to 1945 to 1952
3.1.1   The colonial political economy and the drive for self-rule in Kenya up to 1945

The Mau Mau war was an outburst of violence on the part of Africans who would not succeed in life in European conditions. The genesis of Mau Mau can be traced back to the British colonial political economy in Kenya. Several studies exist on colonialism and colonial political economy in Kenya (see Kanogo,1987; Barnett & Njama, 1966; Branch, 2007; Durrani, 2018; Ndege, 2009; Good, 1976; Elkins, 2005). The colonial political economy impacted Kenyan communities' social, political, military, and economic organization. It was characterized by land alienation, forced labor, taxation, and African culture erosion (Kanogo,1987; Durrani,

2018; Ndege, 2009; Karari,2018; Anderson,2000). These conditions made the Kenyan natives oppressed and stagnant in life.

Infusion of the British colonial political economy into Kenya before the second world war created a situation in which Kenyans began demanding their independence, land, and freedom. Native and crown land ordinances rendered Africans landless and forced workers into the settlers' farms (see Gachihi, 1986). Additionally, Kenyan natives were monitored using the passes (Kipande) to catch deserters of European labor (Clayton,1976).

Photo 1 Colonial Pass in Kenya

Source: **Author's fieldwork photos**

The photo above shows an example of a colonial pass (*Kipande*) in Kenya. The pass showed the holder's name, district, area chief, sub-location, occupation, and age. It also contained the signature sections showing the authorizing person for the holder's movement, their destination, and the date of authorization and travel. Such details helped restrict the Kenyan natives' mobility, thus confining them to offer free labor on European plantations.

Likimani (1985) contends that the increased land alienation, economic frustrations, and dismantled African institutions set in motion several activities that culminated in nationalist movements in the country. Against this background, the Kenya African Union (KAU) was formed in October 1944 as the first national African party agitating for Kenya's independence (Lonsdale,2000). Later, Mau Mau began as a splinter group of KAUS (Gachihi, 1986). While reporting on Mau Mau, the colonial report on the situation in Kenya in 1950 noted that the Mau Mau grievances included land, housing, and wages (see Pro 822/444/1950). The same views are echoed in the Kenya Land Commission Memorandum of 1958, which notes that land alienation and issuance of land title deeds to the European settlers began the new era of African discontent (KNA/Kenya land commission: Evidence and Memorandum vol 2). Asserting these records, Gitu wa Kahingiri, a Mau Mau war veteran in an interview with Aljazeera, noted that two crucial things inspired Mau Mau. These were political independence and their alienated land (Gitu wa Kahingiri, interview with Aljazeera, 2016).

3.1.2 The end of the Second World War (WW2), the rise of Nationalism, and formation of Mau Mau in Kenya, 1945-1951

It should be noted that before Mau Mau was formed, the end of the second world war, brought about a wave of nationalism that agitated the need for independence not only in Kenya but also in many African countries. It is documented that most of the second world war African veterans returned to their home countries and began radically pushing for independence than before (see Patsis, 2016; Jackson,1999). The majority became the leaders and fighters in the independence movements that emerged after 1945. In Kenya, the events and treatment of the African soldier in the Second World War helped actualized the Mau Mau group and the independence war associated with it.

When the second world war began, the British administrators forcefully recruited young Kenyan men as fighters. Such include people like Marshall Dedan Kimathi and Stanley Mathenge (Parsons, 2017). Their experiences in these wars revealed that even white people could die. The war ignited the spirit of nationalism among the Kenyan soldiers because in the war, they were fighting for British political supremacy and independence, yet they lacked the same superiority and political independence back in Kenya (see Onstad, 1989; Losh, 2019). Also, the war accorded them skills in fighting and the usage of European guns and weapons (see Headrick, 1978). Furthermore, unlike their white counterparts, these African soldiers were not compensated and rewarded after the war (see TNA, CO822/118/6, Onstad, 1989; Losh,

2019; Headrick, 1978). As a result, when the 1945 wave of decolonization reached Kenya, some of these soldiers and other Kenyans with the same goals started preparing for a revolt against the British colonizers. The war's central theme was to paralyze European activities in Kenya and force the colonial administrators out of the country.

It should be noted that by the end of 1945, it became increasingly evident that the political associations and negotiations had failed to bring any visible improvement in the situation of native Kenyans (Gachihi, 1986). As such a new way of fighting for independence had to be devised. Violence became a viable alternative to achieve this and Mau Mau was a manifestation of this violence. Mau Mau was led by radical activists, the majority of whom constituted WW2 veterans who organized a militant kind of nationalism. By 1945, The KAU leaders began oathing their members (Gachihi, 1986). This revealed the emergence of organized acts of violence within KAU. As a result, there was fear that the party may face a ban from the colonial administrators if its militant activities were known or exposed. An internal group within KAU called *Muhumu* (sic. Important) was formed in 1951. Its main role was to control oathing of members (Gachihi, 1986). Those in this committee were ready to use violence against the colonialists. In this way, Mau Mau grew under the umbrella of KAU. However, the two were not synonymous (see Cornfield 1960). This is because there were members of Mau Mau who were not necessarily members of KAU.

3.2 The Outbreak of the Mau Mau War 1952-1957

In 1952, the murder of chief Waruhiu wa Kung'u by the Mau Mau adherents marked the immediate cause of the outbreak of the Mau Mau War and its associated violence. Interviews with Mau Mau veterans revealed that chief Warihiu was a British loyalist who supported the British at the expense of his tribesmen. Their accounts agree with Wamagatha (1968) who contends that chief Waruhiu was a vocal opponent of Mau Mau and always held *barazas* (public gatherings) to mobilize people against Mau Mau oaths. However, some colonial records on local administration in Kenya indicated that Africans in Kenya had developed negative blood toward chiefs because some chiefs and headmen received pieces of land as a gift from the administration as an appreciation for their status in society (KNA.DC/NN/1/4). Such created tension between the chiefs and the local people, especially the young chiefs appointed after WW2 (see the KNA/DC/FH/1/26/ report, 1947). It was against this tension and feeling of betrayal that the Mau Mau adherents killed chief Waruhiu. The East African Standard October 1952 reporting on his murder, stated that.

"Senior Chief of Kiambu district, Waruhiu wa Kung'u was murdered in an ambush at the mouth of a small Murray track leading to Limuru D route yesterday afternoon." (The East African standard October 7, 1952, p. 1)

After this murder, the British administration in Kenya declared a state of emergency and detained some leaders believed to support the Mau Mau. This is the war that drew Kenyan women, especially the Agikuyu into fighting for their land and political independence in diverse ways and forms as discussed later in this chapter

3.3   Gender in the emergence and grievances of Mau Mau in Kenya 1945-1961

An examination of the grievances raised by Mau Mau reveals that most of these grievances fell in the public domain. Land and political independence are mainly classified as belonging to the public domain. It is, therefore, not astonishing that Mau Mau is principally linked with men, with women coming in as mere supporters or passive actors. Taking these grievances at face value as entirely belonging to the public sphere, and therefore, pegging to masculinity is erroneous. A complete society needs interaction between all the society members. For example, traditionally, among the Agikuyu, while the land was mainly inherited and controlled by men, women had their niche in land production. There was a division of labor where women did the weeding, planting, harvesting, and preparing the harvest for storage (see Santoru, 1994). Men, on their part, did land preparation and tilling (Kenyatta, 1978). Accordingly, land loss as a grievance of Mau Mau was not limited to the men alone. It impacted women as their duties and land benefits were crushed. As a result, using land as a grievance to put women at the periphery of violent groups is erroneous. This is the same erroneous view that the British colonial administrators in Kenya used to classify women as being forced into Mau Mau activities (see KNA.AR.1954.CP. 2801; PRO.CO 822/437).   For instance, in the archival file number KNA.AR.1954.CP. 2801, the colonial district officer reported that Mau Mau men were taking advantage of women's naivety and were forcing them to take the Mau Mau oath and support the Mau Mau course in central Kenya.

Politics is largely associated with men, and so are the leadership and benefits that come with it. Mau Mau had political liberation as a grievance (Gachihi, 1986). Some scholars, policymakers, and society find it hard to believe that women can participate in groups whose agenda is political (Haynie, 2016). This is because their participation in politics and leadership in Kenyan society is limited by cultural barriers (Kivoi, 2014). Those who enter politics are seen as deviants and hard cores with thick skins to endure the challenges in the political sphere.

These challenges include intimidation, harassment, character assassination, and sexual and physical assaults (see Carter Centre, 2018; Nyabola & Pommerolle, 2018; Kassilly & Onkware,2010). Nonetheless, the fieldwork findings revealed that, just like in land, political grievances had been erroneously used to put women at the periphery of Mau Mau fighting. Interviews with some Mau Mau Men Veterans revealed that men regard politics as a masculine affair. Therefore, they do not see any reason why women would consciously engage in a war, whose grievances involved politics. Such gender bias from men to women would explain why women Mau Mau veterans are recorded as "supporters of Mau Mau" in the Mau Mau Veteran Association's records in Nyeri county.

An interview with Professor Fathma in Mombasa, Kenya, revealed that women are not bystanders in society (Prof-Fathma, KII,30/10/2020). They are affected by all other things concerning men. Therefore, they rationally react to political oppression not because the men are reacting but because they feel the pain of such oppression and want to liberate themselves. Professor Fathma's remarks were echoed by Mau Mau veterans interviewed. For example, Field Marshal Muthoni noted that Kikuyu women witnessed oppression by the British colonial masters and thus chose to join in the fight for Kenya's freedom. Supporting the idea of women as rational and part of political institutions, scholars have shown that even in pre-colonial and colonial society, women in Kenya had their positions within the political organizations of their communities (see Gachihi, 1986; Maina, 2017).

3.4   Breaking the Gender Norms through Oathing in Mau Mau War 1952-1957

One central element of recruitment into Mau Mau was oathing of its members. Oathing spread among traditional Kenyan communities to organize people and gain the support of all community members (Gathogo, 2017; Gachihi, 1986). Disobedience to the oath was punishable by death (Barnett & Njama, 1966). Some Men Mau Mau veterans interviewed refuted women as full fighters in Mau Mau because of oathing. For example, Wachira, a Mau Mau veteran explained that women would not be classified as fighters because it was taboo for them to share the same warrior oaths with men even in the pre-colonial Kikuyu society (Wachira, KII, 29/10/2020). His views have been echoed by some scholars. For example, Gachihi (1986) writes that in traditional Kenyan society, especially among the Bantus and Nilotic groups, women would never take an oath, and if they did so, they would never share the same oath with men. However, some veterans accepted that some women even administered oaths, especially after 1953. For example, in an interview with field Marshal

Muthoni, she noted that she used to administer oaths and that she administered the Mau Mau oath to her husband (Muthoni, KII, 30/08/2020). This section discusses oathing in Mau Mau in Kenya and the place of women in these oathing ceremonies. The section shows how these fighters broke the gender norms of war and partook in the rituals traditionally reserved for men.

In Mau Mau, there were different types of oaths administered depending on the severity and intensity of the swearing. An interview with field Marshall Muthoni, a woman Mau Mau veteran, revealed that the kind of oath also depended on the brutality of the person administering the oath (Muthoni, KII, 30/08/2020). Both oral and archival sources revealed that oathing committed people to the Mau Mau course (see PCEA II/G/3; KNA-DC/KBU/1/45; PCEA II/C/22). It is worth noting that oathing was part and parcel of the Kikuyu traditional religious and sacrificial events. However, men only did oaths while women had different oaths to be sworn (Muthoni, KII, 30/08/2020). However, when the Mau Mau war began, oathing was somewhat different as all fighters swore the same oath depending on their roles in Mau Mau.

Gathogo (2017) gives a list of all Mau Mau oaths. These include *munguririo,* which was administered to all people to psychologically prepare them for the war. *Mbatuni* oath was the second oath given to those going to war. *Mtogo wa mtogo* or *Ngero* oath was the third one administered only to combat Mau Mau fighters in the forest (Gathogo, 2017). *Mtogo* means a gun (Muthoni, KII, 20/07/2021). The oath guaranteed that the combat fighters comprehended specific war-coded language and expression. This oath was also called *Kahenri kahenri,* which means razor blade (Gathogo, 2017). The fourth oath was called *muma wa gikundi* (oath of the council). This was administered only to war council members to ensure that some secrets were not disclosed even to the junior fighters (Gathogo, 2017). The oath was also called the *atongoria* oath (Muthoni, KII, 20/07/2021). Generally, the Mau Mau oath read.

> "I swear before God and before the people who are here that I have today become a soldier of Agikuyu and Mumbi, and I will from now onwards fight the real fight for the land and freedom of our country till we get it or till my last drop of blood. Today, I have set my first step (stepping over a line of a goat's small intestine) as a warrior, and I will never retreat. And if I ever retreat may, this soil and all its products be a curse upon me! If ever I am called to accompany a raid or bring in the head of an enemy, I shall obey and never give lame excuses. ... I will never spy or inform on my people, and if ever sent to spy on our enemies, I will always report the truth. ... I will never reveal a raid or crime committed to any person who has not taken the Ngero Oath (Oath of Violence or crime) and will steal firearms wherever possible. ... I will never leave a member in difficulty without

trying to help him. ... I will always obey the orders of my leaders without any argument or complaint and will never fail to give them any money or goods taken in a raid and will never hide any pillages or take them for myself. ... I will never sell land to any white man. And if I sell: May this soil and all its products be a curse upon me!" (Barnett & Njama, 1966. 131-2.)

An examination of these oaths reveals that they advocated for violence against the enemy. The phrase "If ever I am called to accompany a raid or bring in the head of an enemy, I shall obey and never give lame excuses" (Barnett & Njama, 1966. 131-2), shows the readiness of the fighters even to kill. Women Mau Mau veterans interviewed confessed that they took at least two Mau Mau oaths thus an indicator that they were fully involved in this war as fighters. For instance, Field Marshal Muthoni took all the Mau Mau oaths (Muthoni, KII, 30/08/2020). Miriam Mathenge took her first oath of loyalty to Mau Mau in her marital compound. In an interview with her in Mweiga, in Nyeri County, Miriam explained that she took another oath in the forest (Miriam, KII, 27/12/2020). She became highly involved in Mau Mau Mau as a village fighter with these two oaths. Wambui Waiyaki took her first oath while in school, and she would later take all the Mau Mau oaths as an urban fighter (Chege, KII, 14/10/2020; Cloete, 2000; Otieno, 1998). Also, Mukami Kimathi took her oath as a Mau Mau fighter after marrying Dedan Kimathi.

The accounts of these fighters agree with Kinyua, Matheka, and Onyancha (2016), who contend that once a woman had taken the *Ngero* (third oath), she was legible as a combat fighter. An interview with Field Marshal Muthoni, a Mau Mau veteran, revealed that as a sign of the oath, women were tattooed on the arm while men mainly were tattooed on the penis (Muthoni, KII, 30/08/2021). Her remarks agree with a colonial report on Mau Mau ceremonies in 1954, revealing that oath takers were tattooed on their arms or cut on their penis (PCEA II/G/3). The option of where a tattoo was to be put took care of both men and women fighters.

Also, the oath called for the Mau Mau fighters to spy against the enemy. This goes in line with one of the ways in which women fight–the collection of intelligence, as discussed later in this thesis. Most of the non-combat Mau Mau fighters fell under this category of fighting (Gachihi,1986; Kanogo,1978). The fact that spying was captured in Mau Mau's oath reveals how important this role was in Mau Mau, thus, terming it as passive is concealing its significance.

The oath also talks about never selling land to an enemy or betraying fellow fighters. Women sharing in this citation reveal that; one land was part of them, and two, it challenged the long-held malleability of women. The British colonial administrators considered women as actors in the domestic sphere because they were malleable and thus easily swayed (Urovitz, 2017). However, sharing the same oath with men calling for non-betrayal reveals that any fighter would be malleable. This again proved that designating women as malleable is a gender stereotype without unfounded truth.

3.4.1 Women's body and sexuality as an oath component in Mau Mau 1952-1957

Mau Mau's oathing incorporated features of women's bodies and sexuality. Kanogo, (1987) contends that

> "All of the oaths incorporated features relating to female sexuality, and women were required for the performance of the rites. Menstrual blood was an ingredient in some oath concoctions (Kanogo, 1987, p.86).

It is hard to reconcile Kanogo's account that women 's menstrual blood was used in the Mau Mau oathing. Interviews with Mau-Mau veterans did not reveal anything of such sort. This is because the fighters interviewed were not ready to speak about the details of the oath claiming that this is a secret, they swore, and thus cannot talk about it. For example, Njenga a male veteran remarked that;

> "What we swore in Mau Mau was our secret. I cannot disclose to you how we did it and all the material we used in the oath. I can only tell you that we used blood, soils, and some plants." (Njenga, KII,1/11/2020).

The same secrecy views were echoed by Miriam Mathenge a female veteran. She noted that

> "The Mau Mau oath is supposed to be kept a secret. Not even the brutality we experienced from the colonial soldiers and home guards would let us tell this secret. I cannot offer you details about this oath and the things we used in administering this oath." (Miriam, KII,27/12/2020).

Their fears to disclose such an act openly on the use of menstrual blood can be linked to the changes in society over time and how such an act can be perceived by the modern generation. Mbunga (2013) has refuted the use of menstrual blood in Mau Mau oathing contending that among the Agikuyu menstrual blood was sacred, and thus would not be used in oathing.

However, the fact that oathing which was traditionally a male's reserve was extended to women, any changes were expected, and use of the menstrual blood cannot be assumed on grounds of sacredness. Women were even oath administrators (Gathogo, 2017; Gachihi, 2014; Gachihi, 1986; Kanogo, 1987). This is a role they would not traditionally do. Supporting the view of women's sexuality and menstrual blood in oathing Koster (2016) gives an account of a Mau Mau fighter who explains her oathing process and the involvement of menstrual blood as a component of the oathing concoction. She narrates that "

> "I was told not to reveal the oath. Seven pieces of meat were put on a stick and inserted into my vagina. The meat was given to me to swallow. At the same time, I made vows that if a fellow Mau Mau is in need and I fail to assist, the oath should kill me. If I knew of the colonial government's plans and failed to reveal them, the oath should kill me. After eating the seven pieces of meat, I was given blood in a bowl to drink (mixed with women's menstrual blood and animals' blood). Some were applied on my forehead, chest, naval, and vagina. I was then escorted to the exit door where I washed the blood in a black basin and put on my clothes. Going outside I passed through the banana leaves arch and went back home." (Koster, 2016,118).

The Mau Mau oaths with extended female participation broke the gender and war code established in the pre-colonial Kenyan society. The sexual actions and signs in oathing altered the nature of oathing into a much more enigmatic and cohesive ritual. Women brought their female bodies and female energy to oathing ceremonies thus revolutionizing the oath (Koster, 2016). In addition to their bodies, they brought their conviction and willingness to do everything possible to get Kenyan independence. The erotic gestures, menses, and female body were all resources the oath administrator utilized reliant on the kind of oath and situation to perform outrageous, honored, and authoritative rituals (Koster, 2016). The existence of women in these rituals feminized what was sacredly regarded as sternly a masculine space.

3.5   Mau Mau Weapons as Tools for Sidelining Women Fighters 1952-1963

The weapons used in Mau Mau and their attacks are normally associated with masculinity. Mau Mau used weapons that required physical energy or courage to carry and use. A focus group discussion with some Mau Mau veterans revealed that they used a lot of energy in utilizing the catapult, which was their main weapon (Mau Mau Veterans FGD, 15/10/2020). Additionally, they had to put up with carrying heavy homemade guns and some stolen sophisticated guns from the colonial *Askaris*. These are discussed in detail in women combat fighters later in this chapter. In an interview, Field Marshall Muthoni revealed that all combatant fighters in Mau Mau made use of these weapons (Field Marshal Muthoni, KII,

20/07/2021). Oral interviews with Mau Mau veterans revealed that some women not only transported these weapons to the forest for combat fighters but also knew how to make them. Such include fighters like Hannah Kung'u and Field Marshall Muthoni who made guns from pipes (Kui, 2019; Gathogo, 2017).

3.6 Perception of Mau Mau Women Fighters in Kenya by Different Actors

As already demonstrated in the introductory chapter of this thesis, war, and violence are mainly associated with masculinity. The description of an ideal fighter reflects masculine traits such as bravery, physical strength, and courage (see Goldstein, 2001). On the other hand, a woman is defined as weak, vulnerable, and a peacemaker. These gender perceptions raise the concern to examine the gender dimension of violent groups. This is because, despite the already mentioned gender perceptions, violent groups have had women members. This section explores how different sets of individuals in Kenya perceive Mau Mau women fighters. The chapter, further, examines the typologies of these fighters. This is done to establish how these gendered dimensions agree or disagree with the reality of fighters in Kenya

Violent groups in Kenya are largely male-dominated. This dominance is anchored on how various actors in Kenyan society infuse gender with war. For example, the Mau Mau men fighters initially never saw women as important in the group. In an interview with Muthoni Kirima a Mau Mau veteran in Pembe Tatu estate in Nyeri County, she noted that, in the beginning, men were not ready to allow women into the group (Muthoni Kirima, KII,30/08/2020). The same views were echoed by Njenga a male veteran who admitted that

> "We believed that women could neither nor lead in war (Njenga, KII, 1/11/2020).

The oral views of these fighters are echoed by Kiragu, Matheka, and Onyancha (2016) who note that though the war offered women an infrequent chance to prove themselves, they shortly discovered that several men were uncomfortable with their presence. Such remarks show a strong male-controlled structure and gender bias in Mau Mau, particularly at the beginning of the war.

Men were reluctant to allocate women roles that gave them honor and power in the customary setup. Remarks by some male Mau Mau veterans indicated that some squads never allowed women to have guns until every man had one (Kariuki, KII, 06/11/2020). Some also noted that

a woman only carried a gun but would not use it. However, female veterans interviewed refuted these claims and stated that any fighters who had taken the *ngero* oath (third Mau Mau oath) and undergone military training regardless of their gender had nothing to bar them from using guns. These veterans argued that in the forest there were no men or women since everybody was just a fighter. They also noted that there were women who led platoons and attacks. However, it is worth noting that this biased view of men fighters about their female counterparts in the war changed as the war intensified.

Mau Mau men veterans were not alone in this refutation of women as fighters in the war. The British colonial administrators in Kenya had regarded Kenya women as malleable, individuals, who would easily be manipulated and coerced into the Mau Mau insurgency. Different colonial district reports between 1952 and 1957 affirm the idea of the colonial British officers placing women at the periphery of the Mau Mau war. The reports describe these fighters as being forced to partake in Mau Mau activities and oaths (Urovitz, 2017). For example, the district officer in Kiambu in 1954 noted that it was undoubtedly that men were forcing women into Mau Mau in large numbers (PRO.CO.822/437). A report by the colonial district officer in 1994 echoed the same views. The officers reported that.

> I believe that Mau Mau men are using women's naivety to coerce them into Mau Mau oathing and membership (KNA/AR.1954.CP,2801.11).

Kiragu, Matheka, and Onyancha (2016) contend that the women's malleability character was attributed to their low levels of education and thus inability to decide on their own. This view reflects the Central Kenya Annual Report of 1961. In this report, the colonial officer in central Kenya noted that illiterate women constitute the majority of voters in Central Kenya in 1961(KNA.AR.1961.CP. 2801/5). According to the annual report, these same unschooled people were also dreaded and deceived to think that Mau Mau was the redeemer of Kenya (KNA.AR.1961.CP. 2801/5.2). This report is reflected in Presley's account of how the British regarded women. The author notes that the British officials in Kenya observed that women had a little revelation to British organizations such as missionary schools, and formal jobs and were more uncivilized than their male colleagues who had been westernized (Presley, 1988). This situation has been blamed on the same British administrators. Amadiume (2015) notes that the western education that came along with colonialism neglected African women and cut them off from local colonial administrative institutions.

These reports are an indicator that the British colonial administrators never believed that women would join the Mau Mau war independently without coercion. Even as late as 1956, four years after the outbreak of the Mau Mau war, the colonial British administrators maintained that women were participating in the Mau Mau war due to coercion by their husbands (KNA/DC/26/1956). This Perception was founded on the active-passive dichotomy that dominated the British gender system. An interview with Ochieng, a university lecturer and a researcher in Nairobi revealed that the idea of passive and active actors in violence came with colonialism (Ochieng, KII, 18/11/2020).

His ideas agree with Oyěwùmí (1997) who contends that pre-colonial African society was not gendered. Using the Yoruba society as a point of reference, the author contends that it is the colonialists who brought the gender divisions in Africa. She notes that

> "The colonial custom and practices stemmed from a worldview which believed in the absolute superiority of the masculine over the feminine." (Oyěwùmí, 1997.121)

Santoru (1996) notes that the British administrators in Kenya had a problem in defining a female enemy because of their notion of women as weak and passive. The assumption of women as weak and passive paralleled the British ideal gender roles as they negated the possibility that women like men would participate in and promote Mau Mau's agenda with intention (Urovitz, 2017). Even Corfield's report on Mau Mau failed to capture women as a powerful force behind the Mau Mau war and a great game-changer that led to the success of the war (see Corfield, 1960). The report does not mention any of the women Mau Mau fighters by their names. His omission of these fighters was a good example of future historical accounts that would keep women at the periphery of war and revolutions. On this account, Oyěwùmí, (1997) notes that with colonialism, there was an invention of an African woman without an account.

 Ideally, when the Mau Mau war was in progress, there was a popular tendency by the British colonial administrators in Kenya to portray women as victims than rational fighters. This projected the passiveness and fitting of British gender stereotypes (Presley, 1988). Urovitz (2017) notes that the British notion of women as mothers were transferred from the metropole to its colonies. The author further contends that these British gender stereotypes suggested that women were nonviolent by nature. In this way, they regarded any woman who joined the war as deviant and the 'hardcore' ones as insane (Urovitz, 2017). Their overgeneralizations of

Kenya women as whole as passive in the war overlooked their desires for political activity in Kenya.

What emerges from the findings above is the idea of the British view on women that were not completely informed of the significance of Mau Mau and that they were coerced actors who needed protection. However, the British colonial administrators ultimately acknowledged that women were not spectators in the war as reports of women Mau Mau fighters and attackers began to be written by the district officers. Nonetheless, the initial perception thrived even after independence because the stereotype had been internalized among the masses. In this way, the British colonial systems, and ideas, threw the Kenyan women to the periphery of history which was not theirs. Memmi (2013) terms this as a serious blow suffered as such ideologies removed the colonized from their history.

The British perception of Kenyan women dates to the First and Second World Wars and was reflected in other countries. Ochieng, a university lecturer and a researcher in Nairobi in an interview explained that the first and second world wars enhanced women's passivity in war (Ochieng, KII, 22/09/2020). For instance, Korean, Chinese, and Taiwanese women in the war were referred to as 'comfort women.' Tongsuthi (1993) notes that the Japanese soldiers conscripted them for their sexual pleasure. The use of sexual slavery as noted by Argibay (2003) not only threw women at the periphery of the war but also portrayed them as victims of war. With this notion, the colonial administrators in Kenya sent women to the periphery, and those who took part in the war were regarded as deviants, hardcore, or spoiled brats. Over time, studies on women's involvement in the war began reinforcing this passive actor and victim narrative. Such include works by Majdalany (1963) who described women 's attraction to the Mau Mau war as misdirected hero-worship nationalism. Later this perception could be exemplified in other violent groups that emerged in post-colonial Kenya.

The foregoing discussions reveal that different actors regarded women Mau Mau fighters differently. This perception was dictated by the gender constructions in their cultures. For instance, the British viewed the Kenyan women from the British way of doing gender while the African men pended their perception of the traditional Agikuyu society. This agrees with Bem's gender schema theory which holds that gender identities are held differently by different people at different times and that this diversity is manifested in the level of individuals in terms of stereotypes (see Bem, 1981; Canevello, 2017).

3.7 Typologies of Women Fighters in Mau Mau

3.7.1 Numbers

Despite the passivity account of women held by British administrators and some Mau Mau veterans in Kenya, the Mau Mau war registered a good number of female fighters. Their few numbers when compared to men have been used to overlook their participation in the war (see Wood & Thomas, 2017). Getting the exact number of Mau Mau women fighters is not practical. This is due to the time-lapse, death of some fighters, and intentional erasing of some fighters out of the war due to compensation interests of the record keepers. Also, the roles of some soldiers were underground and thus not recorded. Also, some veterans are too old to accurately recall all the events of the war. Nevertheless, a look at some colonial prison records in Kenya gives some light on the proportion of women in the war.

It is noted that Kamiti prison was mainly built for 'hardcore' Mau Mau women (KCP.CDD.AR,1954). These same views are echoed by Presley (1988) and Gathogo (2017) who note that Kamiti prison was expanded to house the large numbers of women Mau Mau detainees. Presley (1988), further, contends that by the end of 1954, the prison hosted 1335 male prisoners and 1010 female (Presley, 1988). By 1955, over 10000 women had been arrested due to Mau Mau-related offenses. According to the report by Kenya colony and protectorate (KCP)Treatment of offenders 1957, during the Mau Mau period, 13,265 women were admitted to prison in 1955. Out of these, 1,714 were discharged and 11,467 were sent to prison (KCP Treatment of offenders, 1957). Out of these, 9,961 were first-time offenders, while 1506 were repeat offenders. Additionally, the Report of the General Administration of Police and detention camps in Kenya in 1957 shows that in 1,956, 1,194 inmates were released from Kamiti leaving 1,384 in the camp. In 1957, 4220 individuals were released, and 174 remained in detention (General Administration of Police and detention camps, 1957). By 1,956, the Daily chronicle 7 September 1956 shows that of the 27841 Kikuyus who were still in detention camps, 3,103 were women. In her account of Mau Mau women, Presley (1988) asserts that virtually all these individuals were detained due to their involvement or suspected involvement in Mau Mau activities.

 The records in the Mau Mau veterans' association in Nyeri County show over 30 women who were killed, arrested, or detained due to their involvement in Mau Mau activities (MVA. MFR, 2021). Nevertheless, they are largely classified as supporters of Mau Mau fighters through food and ammunition provision (also see Gathogo, 2017; Presley, 1988; Santoru, 1996; Gachihi,

2014). Such a classification shows the passive image that is given to these veterans by their male counterparts. At the time of this research, some male Mau Mau fighters seemed to intentionally suppress the role of their female counterparts in Mau Mau as fighters. This was largely revealed not only in the all-male leadership in the Mau Mau veteran association but also in their accounts of women in the war. Most of the male veterans interviewed gave a masculine version of the Mau Mau war which presents the women fighters as just supporters as opposed to fighters in the war. The notion of "mere supporters' is attributed to the idea that most women in the war carried out invisible roles while men were mainly at the combat battlefield. A focus on war as only combat was, therefore, revealed. This picture of war conceals the significant part of fighting which involve non-combat roles whose centrality cannot be ignored in the success of any war.

3.7.2 Age

Mau Mau drew members from diverse ethnicities, backgrounds, ages, and social statuses. For example, the early members of the Mau Mau war of independence were the educated elite men who had attained western education and returned to the country. Most of the leaders were relatively educated. Some were WWII veterans who had returned from the war in 1945 (Amanda, 2007). However, as the war intensified, most members joined some of whom were not educated at all. This is because the leaders would not work alone since they needed support and soldiers to execute their radical activities. Eventually, the Mau Mau members included Kenyans who had lost their lands and were against colonial brutality. Some of these members had served as laborers in the plantations and had tangible experiences of colonial violence and brutality (Gachihi, 1986). Accordingly, by the end of the 1940s, the group had attracted a large following, mainly from poor Kikuyu families who had suffered land loss and experienced colonial brutality (Kanogo, 1987)

The war attracted women fighters from various backgrounds, ages, marital statuses, and social classes. Gathogo (2018) notes that the Mau Mau council did not encourage people below the age of 25 and above 35 to join the fighters in the forest. This is because traditionally among the Agikuyu (who constituted most of the Mau Mau fighters) warriorhood was only a preserve of young men immediately after circumcision (Gachihi, 1986). Women were never part of the warriorhood because the culture dictated that they got married and took over wifely roles after initiation (Urovitz,2017). Explaining all only men warriors, Kariuki Njenga a clan elder in Mathira West noted that these young men were considered to be physically fit and with enough

energy to confront the enemies compared to their female counterparts (Kariuki Njenga, KII, 26/10/2020). Also, only the old men sanctioned the war and advised the young warriors (Robert, 1987).

Despite the above age restriction, available evidence and narratives from the fighters interviewed revealed that the age of women fighters in Mau Mau ranged between 16 years to 26 years old. For example, Muthoni Kirima joined the war at the age of 20 years (Gachihi, 1986; Susan 2001; Gitunga, 2021). The oral interviews revealed that Miriam Mathenge another fighter joined the group at the age of 24, while Mukami Kimathi joined the group at the age of 23. Wambui Waiyaki, another renowned fighter joined the war at 16 years old (Anderson, 2002; Gitunga, 2021). It is worth noting that there were women younger than 16 years old who joined the war. While it was hard to get their names to ascertain this age, colonial administrators' report on Mau Mau pointed out this reality. For example, the Kiambu district officers in 1953 reported that they feared that even children were being given the Mau Mau oath (PRO. CO. 822/437). Oathing was a way of identifying Mau Mau members and getting their commitment to the war as previously shown in this chapter. Interviews from Mau Mau veterans revealed that even the older women were part of Mau Mau. While these women never joined the forest as guerrilla fighters, they played a significant role as a village and urban fighters.

3.7.3 Family and Social Class

The fighters in the Mau Mau war came from diverse social classes and families. For example, they came from both rich and poor families. Nevertheless, the majority came from poor or low-class backgrounds marked with poverty and struggles. Wambui Waiyaki was from a wealthy family. An interview with Chege, a childhood neighbor with Wambui in Nairobi revealed that Virginia Wambui Waiyaki was from a well-off family. The father was a police inspector for the British, and his three brothers studied in Britain (Chege, KII, 14/10/2020). These oral accounts echo those of Presley (1988) who contends that Waiyaki Wambui came from a good family, a family of leaders. Her family by any standard was materially endowed and had several acres of land (Walaula, 2014). The Guardian October 18, 2011, reports that Wambui Waiyaki Otieno came from a prominent family in central Kenya. The reports also echo the oral sources' view that Wambui's father worked for the British. He was the first African inspector of police in Kenya (Guardian, 2011; Waliula, 2014). This position gave the father a steady and reasonable income. In her autobiography, Wambui noted that her brothers studied in Britain

and that it was the war that prevented her from going to Britain to study (Otieno, 1998; Walaula, 2014).

Wambui's family story is different from Field Marshall Muthoni's and Mukami Kimathi's. Field Marshal Muthoni Kirima was born in 1930 in Nairutia, Laikipia County. She was the third born in a family of five girls and one boy. At the age of 4 years, they moved from their home in Nairutia to Karing'u. Explaining the move's cause, Muthoni points out that life in Nairutia was not all that good. Accordingly, their father thought it wise that they move to Karing'u in search of better opportunities that would improve their living standards (Muthoni, KII, 20/07/2021). The journey of about 15 kilometers was done using a donkey. It is important to note that the country's transport system then was not as improved as it is today. Only traditional means of transport were easily accessible. Such include animals, walking, and cart, among others. Muthoni Karima, in an interview, explained that:

> "I rode on a donkey, I had no sandals and yet had to walk half of the journey by myself." (Muthoni, KII, 20/07/2021).

Her statement painted a picture of a girl from a low-income family when they were moving out. They would not even afford a pair of sandals. She had to endure walking barefoot for half of the journey-about 7.5 kilometers. Perhaps, this shows her first measure of endurance and perseverance in pain and struggles as a fighter later in life. At Karing'u, Muthoni was doing child labor on a white settlers' farm (Muthoni, KII, 20/07/2021). Her father also worked in a European firm (Kanake, 2017; Bicharne et al, 2017). Even after her marriage, they never had much. Ekene (2020) notes that Muthoni and her husband lived in reserves.

Mukami Kimathi, another veteran, was born in 1930 in a middle-class polygamous family. She was the second born in a family of 4 siblings (Mukami, KII, 08/12/2020). Her father had inherited wealth from Ngumo, their grandfather who was a popular wealthy man in Central Kenya (Nderitu, 2019). It was because of this aspect of a better social class that her father was reluctant when Kimathi proposed to marry her. Writing about Mukami Kimathi, Nderitu notes that:

> "My father laughed in Kimathi's face and told him that he would not allow his daughter to marry a poor man' (Nderitu, 2019. 39).

She also notes that:

"Kimathi (his late husband) unlike me came from a poor family and paid his way through school by working on wealth people's farms for payment (Nderitu, 2019. 39)"

Her description of how the father rejected Kimathi on grounds of poverty and her description of the Kimathi family, reveals that Mukami Kimathi came from a well-off family. However, as the colonial land policies took root in Kenya, the family slowly sunk into poverty. The father began working as a menial laborer in the settler coffee plantations (Kui, 2019). An interview with Mukami revealed that she even dropped out of school after four years due to a lack of school fees (Mukami, KII, 8/12/2020). They lived in servitude, a way they were not supposed to live (Nderitu, 2019). However, Kui (2019) links this dropping out of school to the idea that Mukami 's father never wanted any of his children to get British education. In this way, he did not bother to pay the school fee.

Other women fighters were drawn from diverse religious backgrounds and beliefs. For example, those who had not undergone circumcision were allowed into Mau Mau. Such an example was Wambui Waiyaki. Her mother was a devoted Christian. As a result, Wambui was never circumcised since Christianity regarded circumcision as a barbaric and sinful act. This was not normal among the Kikuyu at the time (Otieno, 1998). Nevertheless, when the war broke out, Wambui was part of the Mau Mau fighters.

3.7.4 Education Levels

Women fighters in Mau Mau had different education levels ranging from primary, and secondary to university level. For instance, Muthoni Kirima never had any formal education (Kanake, 2017). On her part, Mukami Kimathi dropped out of school after four years (Kui, 2019). Miriam Mathenge was schooled only for two years. However, other fighters like Wambui Waiyaki had a secondary level of education. An interview with Kanyata, a family friend of Waiyakis, revealed that Wambui was among the girls who took their Mau Mau oaths in school even before the emergency began (Kanyata, KII, 29/12/2020). This account agrees with Kui (2019) who contends that while she was in school, Wambui took an oath administered by their teacher together with other girls. Wambui herself in her autobiography explains that it was the Mau Mau war that stopped her from proceeding to Britain for her university education (Otieno, 1998; Adenekan, 2011). The fact that other schoolgirls took the oath shows that other women fighters were educated, not just the illiterate as widely held by the British colonial administrators.

3.8   Kenyan Women in the Fight against Colonialism 1952-1963

The diversity in age, family background, and social class of Mau Mau women fighters and how they joined Mau Mau raises concerns worth scholarly scrutiny. Understanding the motivation of these fighters is important in showcasing the gender differences in violence and terrorism (Banks, 2019). Women's entry into violent groups is informed by diverse factors and the entry is diverse depending on the group and time. For example, during the Mau Mau war, women joined the war as fighters because they wanted to fight for their land, revenge against British brutality, or run away from British brutality.

Mau Mau's principal objective was to drive the British colonial administrators and settlers out of Kenya (Kanogo, 1987; Branch, 2007). The fighters wanted two things: their land and political independence (Ngunjiri, 1985; Leakey, 2013). The colonial British administrators regarded land and politics as primarily associated with men in traditional Kenyan communities. Amadiume (2015) echoes the same views contending that traditionally in African society land was under the control of men and women's productive and reproductive labor was controlled by men. It is therefore not by surprise that the Mau Mau was crafted and organized by men.

However, according to the clan elders interviewed women played a very significant role and had a great association with land (Kiragu, clan elder, KII, 1/11/2020; Kariuki, KII, 1/11/2020). Echoing the same view Gachihi (1986) refutes the colonial and Amadiume perspective and notes that customarily Agikuyu women had all the ways to organize themselves and were integrated into the normal of social, economic, and political societal matters. Oyěwùmí (1997) also cites that in traditional African civilizations, women had access to land through marriage and that this was assured since it was guaranteed by the community. The association of land and politics with men has mainly been used to put women at the periphery of the Mau Mau war (Gachihi 1986; Gathogo, 2018). Accordingly, examining their stories is significant to unmask the diverse reasons why and how they joined the war

Women joined the Mau Mau war as fighters because they wanted to fight for their land, revenge against British brutality, or run away from British brutality. Field marshal Muthoni in an interview explained that she had witnessed and experienced the brutality of land alienation and colonial political economy, especially forced labor and taxation. Kinyua, Matheka, and Onyancha (2016) agree that in the Mau Mau war, women went into the forest to fight for the akin goals as men- land, and independence, and avoid the constant harassment from the

colonial home guards. According to Gachihi (1986), these fighters were in a world where natives regardless of gender were forced into waged labor to supplement the family income. This explains why Muthoni was a child laborer on a settler farm where she witnessed the racial violence between the whites and her Kikuyu tribesmen (Kanake, 2017). In an interview, Muthoni explained that she saw physical, verbal, and emotional abuse of the Kikuyus by the colonial administrators (Muthoni, KII, 20/07/2021). There was rampant sexual violence towards Kikuyu women too. Her observations are echoed by Nyagosia, Moywaywa, & Nyamwaka (2017) and Presley (1998) who give accounts of physical and sexual abuse of women by the British colonial administrators in Kenya. In one account a native narrates how a home guard and British administrator sexually abused her.

> "Suddenly Edward produced a glass soda bottle. Waikanja told him to push the bottle into my genitalia which he did. I felt an agonizing pain and then realized that the glass bottle contained very hot water. Edward literally forced the bottle into me with the sole of his foot while Waikanja was looking on and directing him." (Nyagosia, Moywaywa, & Nyamwaka, 2017. pg.14)

Such violence and brutality made Muthoni begin hating the British colonialists and this would later be a motivating factor for her involvement in the Mau Mau war of independence. Her account of the brutality of the colonial administrators and how slavery pushed her to enter the Mau Mau war is reflected in Gachihi (1986)' discussion on why women joined Mau Mau. The author notes that rampant crime communal punishment and violence, murder, and slavery coupled with a lack of a place for refuge attracted Kikuyu women into the Mau Mau war (Gachihi, 1986). This aspect of violence was noted to be the immediate cause for Muthoni's entry into Guerrilla warfare. In an interview she explained that:

> *Her (Muthoni) troubles began when her husband joined the forest fighters. One day after general Mutungi (her husband) left for the forest, the local colonial chief searched for him. Her husband was a candidate for membership in a loyalist group led by one colonial chief called, Muhoya. When the soldiers arrived at Muthoni's home, they found him already gone. They made several visits to this home in vain and eventually suspected that he had joined the Mau Mau fighters in the forest. On her part, Muthoni maintained that she never knew the whereabouts of her husband. Maybe he was on a business trip. To get information from her, the soldiers, under the instruction of chief Muhoya, resorted to violence. They beat her ruthlessly until she would not move. They left her unconscious in a pool of blood. Nevertheless, she never told them any information about her husband joining Mau Mau. "I would rather die than tell them where my husband was," she remarked.*

According to Kinyua, Matheka & Onyancha (2016), Muthoni's ordeal at the hands of the home guards motivated her to join the forest fighters. Muthoni wanted to take up arms and fight the colonialists and was more determined and committed to Mau Mau spirit than ever before (Kanake, 2017). After one week of loneliness, she met other fighters together with Marshall Dedan Kimathi and persuaded Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi to enlist her as a fighter in the forest (Muthoni, KII, 07/11/2020). Given the excellent working relationship they had before, her courage right from childhood, and her ability to weave strategies, Dedan Kimathi allowed her without questioning (Kanake, 2017). With that, her journey as a forest fighter began.

On her part, Miriam Mathenge another fighter in Mau Mau joined the group due to the inspiration she received from her husband about the importance of freedom. It is because of such motivation that Santilli (1977) contends that women joined Mau Mau due to their relationship with men fighters. However, it should be noted that women in colonial Kenya were not operating in a vacuum and thus were aware of what was happening in their society. For instance, Miriam had witnessed the brutality of the colonial administrators on their land and landlessness and thus wanted to be part of the liberation movement (Miriam, KII, 27/12/2020). Her story agrees with Brownhill and Turner (2003) who reports that the British administrators in Kenya fortified industrialist relationships in the reserves and created a large population of landless women. Additionally, Miriam's husband, general Mathenge, had served in the second world war (Lewis, 2007; Parsons, 2017). Miriam explained that the husband narrated how people were fighting for political independence and supremacy in other countries (Miriam, KII, 27/12/2020). She described that she realized that the white people were weak through her husband and would also die (Miriam, KII, 27/12/2020). With this assurance and desire to have their political freedom, Miriam joined Mau Mau

Sharing a similar story was Mukami Kimathi. Mukami began witnessing and learning about the brutality of the British colonialists at a very young age (Kui, 2019). She saw the neighbor's land grabbed and given to the home guards and loyalists from other tribes (Mukami, KII, 8/12/2020). Additionally, her father always informed them of the white man's brutality and told them they had been born in servitude (Nderithu, 2019). She first saw the colonial pass- *Kipande* with her father (Kui, 2019). Her father never liked the white men in the country and never wanted any of his children to be associated with them. However, Mukami defied this and joined the school against her father's wishes (Nderithu, 2019). In school, she met her teacher Dedan Kimathi, who would later be a Mau Mau leader, and her husband (Mukami, KII, 8/12/2020).

In this way, Mukami joined the group for two things- the husband's inspiration and the desire for political freedom.

Other individuals joined to avenge the loss of their loved ones at the British administrators' hands. For example, Wambui Waiyaki's hatred for white people began when the British assassinated the grandfather. In an interview with Wanjiku Kanyata, a childhood neighbor to Wambui Otieno, it was revealed that the grandfather was against the British and was betrayed and killed by the loyalists (Kanyata, KII, 26/12/2020). Kanyata explained that it is said Wambui began her hunger for the British from this point (Kanyata, KII, 26/12/2020). Her account about Wambui's grandfather is echoed by other scholars who note that while the immediate family of Wambui worked for the colonialist, her grandfather, Waiyaki wa Higa was against the British and was betrayed and killed by the loyalists (see Adenekan, 2011; Waliaula, 2009; Pugliese, 2003; Presley, 2011). Wambui's hatred for British colonialists beginning with the assassination of her grandfather is also narrated by Kui (2019) in her book, Those who went before us. The author contends that the killing of her grandfather pushed her to join Mau Mau when it started (Kui, 2019). Wambui 's quest to join Mau Mau out of bitterness and desire for revenge is reflected in Adenekanm (2011)'s writing that apart from the grandfather, her cousin was also murdered by the British. Further, Wambui had seen the attacks on her community members by colonial officials and some home guards (Otieno, 1998; Adenekanm, 2011). This then implies that Wambui was only waiting for the right moment to revenge on the British's acts in Kenya. Waliaula (2014) asserts that Wambui was compelled to join Mau Mau to take vengeance upon those who buried her grandfather alive in Kibwezi. In this way, the Mau Mau war provided an excellent opportunity for her to accomplish her revenge.

The accounts of the four fighters above reveal diversity in the reasons why they joined Mau Mau. Nevertheless, colonial brutality in their families or neighborhood is common for all the Mau Mau veterans studied. Colonial political and economic oppression was a significant factor. Gachihi (1986) notes that the colonial political economy negatively impacted women. Hence, they were attracted to the Mau Mau war. It is worth noting that even before 1952 when the war broke, women in Kenya had begun protesting colonial land policies, elimination of circumcision, the Kipande system, forced labor, and brutality (see Ngugi 2009, Presley, 1992; Wipper, 1989; Alam,2007). Therefore, it is not a surprise that they joined the war when it broke out. Women's resistance against the British was not limited to Kenya alone. Some

countries in Africa witnessed such resistance. For example, in Nigeria, the 1929 aba riots were organized by women protesting colonial administrators' policies in South-Eastern Nigeria (Van Allen, 1975).

Each of the four fighters above had the immediate cause to enter Mau mau. These ranged from abuse and rape by the home guards to a lack of a place for refuge from this brutality, especially when their husbands had left. On these grounds, women's entry into Mau Mau is mainly associated with finding a haven from the colonial administrators as opposed to fighting. This is an erroneous view because of two reasons. First, it assumes women's place in colonial protest before the Mau Mau war began. Secondly, it only depicts Mau Mau fighters as those who were in the forest alone. Ideally, some women never joined the forest but were fighters in the war as discussed later in this chapter.

3.9   How Kenyan Women Joined Mau Mau

The diversity in the reasons why women joined Mau Mau informed the varied ways through which they entered the war. Some joined through husbands, brothers, and close friends who were already members of the group while others join independently. It should be noted that joining the war through the husbands does not imply that they joined because of their husbands. In this case, the husbands only acted as the insiders described by Densley (2012) in signaling the theory of crime.

Mukami Kimathi joined the war after getting married to her husband, Dedan Kimathi, a Mau Mau leader. She explained that after their marriage, both would enroll people into Mau Mau openly (Mukami, KII, 8/12/2020). However, their stay in the village was short-lived (Mukami, KII, 8/12/2020). They both ran into the forest when the husband became most wanted by the colonialists. Her story agrees with Kui (2019) who contends that after their traditional Kikuyu marriage, Mukami and her husband Dedan Kimathi administered oaths by the banks of river Gura. In Mukami Kimathi's biography by Nderitu (2019) it is evident that before her marriage to Kimathi, Mukami was just a normal village girl going about with her roles as a girl in her father's house. She was not involved in Mau Mau at this time despite witnessing the brutality of the British colonialists.

Sharing the same story is Miriam Mathenge, who joined Mau Mau after her marriage. In an interview with her in Mweiga, Nyeri county, Miriam explained that she took her first Mau Mau oath in her matrimonial compound (Miriam, KII, 11/12/2020). Her account of when she first

got involved in Mau Mau activities agrees with Durrani (2018) who asserts that Miriam's involvement in the Mau Mau struggle began during an oath that she took first in her matrimonial compound.

Other women joined Mau Mau through their fathers. For example, a Mau Mau veteran called Hannah Kung 'u joined through the father. It is noted that Hannah was greatly influenced by her father, who was a fighter. The father made guns at home from water pipes (Kui, 2019). Accordingly, by the time Hannah was joining Mau Mau, she already knew how to make guns. Hannah had already been exposed to violence and its activities by her father (see Durrani, 2018). She took the Mau Mau oath in her father's presence, although she knew the impact of being a Mau Mau fighter.

The idea of women joining Mau Mau through their fathers and husbands explains why the fighters are normally identified in relation to their husbands. Mau Mau veterans like Mukami Kimathi and Miriam Mathenge in an interview with the researcher pointed out that the state, researchers, and society always only associate them with their husbands (General Mathenge, and Marshall Dedan Kimathi respectively) as opposed to their role in the war. This is not the case with field marshal Muthoni who joined the war independently. Muthoni is more popular compared to her husband general Mutungi even though they both left the forest at the same time in 1963.

Some fighters joined through the close allies who were members of Mau Mau. Such was the case with Wambui Waiyaki. Wambui joined the Mau Mau through another female worker who worked in their firm (Kui, KII, 03/09/2020). In, 1945 Wambui ran away from home because none of her immediate family supported her involvement in the fight (Kui, 2019). Her father worked for the British, her mother was a Christian, and his brothers studied abroad (Otieno, 1998). It was a family that had embraced the British way of life. Further examination revealed that socialization in school by her teacher had introduced Wambui to Mau Mau before 1952 (Njenga, KII, 10/11/2020). Wambui had already taken an oath of loyalty to Mau Mau as a schoolgirl. A male teacher administered this oath (Kui, 2019). Adenekani (2014) writing Wambui's obituary also asserts that Wambui took her first oath while studying at Kikuyu girls. Although Wambui was not very much aware of membership in Mau Mau at the time of this oath, the fact that she took it introduced her to Mau Mau ideologies. In her autobiography, she declares that when she took her first Mau Mau oath, she presumed the oath to be linked with the girls' guide club in which she was a member (Otieno, 1998). This assumption and ignorance

on her part would be associated with the sheltered life she lived before the war began (Cloete, 2011).

Some women make the independent move to join Mau Mau. For example, Field Marshall Muthoni independently joined the group through the inspiration she got from attending field Dedan Kimathi's meetings. Muthoni joined the Mau Mau movement at the age of 20 years after being agitated by colonial brutality. For two years, she joined other women as spies and took all the Mau Mau oaths (Muthoni, KII, 07/11/2020). Muthoni explained that she spied for two years undetected. Not even the husband knew that she was always taking information to Dedan Kimathi. She always met Dedan Kimathi under a huge fig tree near Nyandarua forest (Muthoni, KII, 07/11/2020). Her explanations indicate that although she joined independently, Muthoni had someone, maybe a woman spy of Mau Mau or Dedan Kimathi, who motivated and welcomed her to the group. Nevertheless, her work as a Mau Mau spy for two years is echoed by Susan (2020) who contends that before even she ran into the forest Muthoni was a spy of Mau Mau for two years. Kassam, (2018) also asserts that for these two years, not even the husband knew that Muthoni was a Mau Mau spy.

Muthoni's bold steps to join Mau Mau even without the knowledge of the husband can be traced back to her childhood. Matheka, Kinyua, and Onyancha (2014) document that Muthoni was brave since childhood. Her first sign of bravery was reflected when she killed a rhino alone that had attacked her father's goats in the forest while grazing (Kui, 2019). An interview with Muthoni about this incident revealed that Muthoni was not only brave but also intelligent. She explained that she knew that once a rhino bleeds it dies (Muthoni, KII, 20/07/2021). This then implies that Muthoni weaved bravery with wisdom to save her father's goats. It is not therefore surprising when she decided to join Mau Mau as a guerrilla fighter.

Having discussed how women entered Mau Mau, the next section discusses the place of women in Mau Mau. Did they lead? How did they fight and what were their experiences in the war?

3.10 The Gender Conflict in Mau Mau Leadership ranks up to 1961

Mau Mau was an organized and structured group. The group had departments, leaders, and warriors in different capacities (Mugo,2004). The Mau Mau council was the most authoritative and central government of the war. Gathogo (2018) contends that this war council was led by *Ndambiri wa Karuga.* A Mau Mau council was mainly made up of the older men in the Kikuyu community. This council's work was to make significant decisions about the group and

coordinate the group's activities (Gachihi, 1996). The council was also responsible for administering some oaths to the combat guerilla fighters (Gathogo, 2018).

An interview with Miriam Mathenge, field marshal Muthoni, and Mukami Kimathi revealed that while the Mau Mau council was male-dominated, there were women in the council. Miriam Mathenge explained that while she never sat there, women like field Marshal Muthoni and Cindi Reri were part of this council (Miriam Mathenge, KII, 26/7/2021). The same views are echoed by Mugo (2004) who contends that women served in the Mau Mau council which was initially a reserve of men. The author explains that their inclusion into the war council was because, the men fighters recognized that they would not achieve independence without women's input (Mugo,2004).

However, not every woman fighter was allowed to sit in the Mau Mau council. It was established that those admitted into the council had leadership positions, and the ability to quickly craft ideas. For example, Cindi Reri commanded a platoon of over 200 women fighters in Mau Mau (Kinyua, Matheka, and Onyancha, 2016). Gachihi (1986) echoes these views and notes that with women emerging as *Itugati* (forest fighters), female platoons were created, and these were commanded by outstanding women fighters. Posting in platoons was done by the Mau Mau council but the allocation of duties was done by the platoon leader (Gachihi, 1986). On her part, Muthoni was both a combat fighter and a field Marshal (see Mugo, 2004; Ojakorotu & Segun, 2017; Kabira & Maloiy, 2017; Kiragu, 2016; Later, 2016; Nyagosia, et al, 2017).

In the forest, the highest rank of the Mau Mau fighters was that of a Field Marshall. This was the second authoritative position after the Mau Mau council. A lot of recognition is given to field marshal Dedan Kimathi who stands as a major historical figure in Kenya's liberation struggle (see Mugo, 1976; Anderson et al, 2017; Ochieng, 1992; Sitamei, 1999; Kamau, 2000; Alam, 2007; Murimi, 2015; Gathogo, 2014). Nevertheless, Njagi (1993), Ndubai (2016), and Peterson (2004) point out the existence of other field marshals such as Musa Mwariama from the Ameru. It is worth noting that very few fighters were appointed to this rank. This would perhaps explain why very few are known to have existed.

The presence of a woman field marshal in Mau Mau has generated a lot of conflicting ideas and feedback from the Mau Mau veterans. While some male veterans interviewed accepted that Muthoni Karimi rose to the position of a field marshal, many of them refuted this saying

that Muthoni is a self-declared field marshal. On the other hand, the women counterparts noted the idea that Muthoni Kirima was a field marshal appointed by the Dedan Kimathi. For example, Mukami Kimathi remarked that

> "The other day I heard someone say that marshal Muthoni was never a field marshal, yet I know she was a Marshall." (Mukami, KII, 24/07/ 2021)

According to her the people propagating such demeaning comments about Mau Mau women are male veterans shocked at how women challenged the status quo. She further pointed out the fact that the current Mau Mau Veteran association is a men's thing', and this shows how society thinks of women in terms of war and decision-making. Her pointing to the Mau Mau veteran association as a 'male thing' pointed to gender conflicts within the Mau Mau veterans. Ideally, those who refute Muthoni as a field marshal are men, and those who largely support her as a field marshal are women (Kinyua, Matheka & Onyanch, 2016). On her part, Muthoni insists that she was appointed as a field marshal by Dedan Kimathi. However, she does not remember the date or year, and place of such appointment. While this would be associated with her old age and probably memory loss, a look at the colonial records of Mau Mau leaders did not reveal her name or the presence of a woman marshal at the time either.

Kinyua, Matheka, and Onyancha (2016) in documenting this conflicting account of Muthoni as field marshal explain that there is the possibility that Muthoni was given this position by Dedan Kimathi when issues of loyalty grew between Kimathi and general Mathenge. The authors contend that Kimathi gave ranks to reward his loyalists after 1954 failed British talks (Kinyua, Matheka, and Onyancha, 2016). Their views are echoed by the Fort Hall annual report of 1955 stating that Kimathi gave outranks to all and sundry (KNA/XA. L/11/34.8). It was also revealed that Muthoni was very close to Kimathi and that they came from the same place. This was cited by several veterans who refuted Muthoni legitimately being given the rank of a field marshal.

In other accounts, it is noted that Muthoni gave herself the title of a field marshal because she was the last one to leave the forest with her husband (see Kinyua, Matheka &Onyancha, 2016). However, this account may not be true. This is because if the title was given due to coming out of the forest last, then all the other four fighters that were with Muthoni when she came out of the forest would be as well termed as field marshals. Not even her husband, general Mutungi is designated as a field marshal, yet they left the forest at the same time.

Study participants who agreed that Muthoni rose to the rank of field marshal contend that even women could be field Marshalls if they performed to meet the requirements for the same. A field Marshall had to be very informed, a good strategist, a strong fighter, and command authority and influence over fellow fighters, village, and urban fighters (Gachoka Mwangi, KII, 6/11/2020). Through the lens of these traits, then Muthoni must have reached this rank. Gachoka Mwangi a Mau Mau veteran, in an interview, revealed that Muthoni's promotion to field Marshal rank was holistic (Gachoka Mwangi, KII, 6/11/2020). It was not confined to her combat skills alone. He explained that.

> "Muthoni was a fighter, a nurse, a strategist, and a food provider- all in one person" (Gachoka Mwangi, KII, 2020).

Such attributes would not be left unnoticed and unappreciated. His description of Muthoni matches the account by Kui (2019) and Kinyua, Matheka, and Onyancha (2016) who contend that Muthoni was nicknamed a weaver bird by Kimathi because of her abilities to weave ideas and held many positions and duties (also see Mugo, 2004; Later,2016). Muthoni was decisive in formulating ideas, and a fast thinker and her prowess in the forest saw her lead platoons (Kiragu, 2016).

It is worth noting that a female Marshall had never been experienced in the Mau Mau movement until Muthoni became one. In this way, Muthoni and Cindi Reri broke the Mau Mau gender norms, where it was men only who led platoons. A field marshal and a platoon leader were positions highly respected. The fact that a woman would outdo men and rise to the rank of a field marshal, would be a reason why most men fighters feel that their masculinity was demeaned. In this way, they tend to give a different story about this rank to protect their masculinity and demonstrate that men were the force behind Mau Mau's success and that women were just followers.

Kenyan society is generally regarded as a patriarchal one. This patriarchy has been in the public sphere (Maseno & Kilonzo, 2011; Ademiluka, 2018). Closely connected to patriarchy are toxic masculinities and weak femininities. The fieldwork findings indicated that patriarchy works for women fighters differently depending on the objective and benefits involved. Patriarchy is beneficial to women fighters while fighting. This is because society will always see a weak woman and a strong man who makes decisions on her behalf. In this way, women fighters emerge as victims or irrational actors in violence.

Nonetheless, at some point, patriarchy works against these fighters. For example, during the Mau Mau war, patriarchy helped conceal combat fighters such as field Marshall Muthoni. This is evident in the way the British colonial administrators regarded women as passive actors who would not be involved in the public sphere dominated by men (PRO.CO 822/437; KNA.AR.1954.CP. 2801; KNA/DC/26). In this way, the fighters took advantage of this British patriarchal thought to fight without being easily detected. However, after independence, when compensation is to take place for the Mau Mau fighters, patriarchy is playing a key role in side-lining the women Mau Mau veterans (Owaahh, 2018; Gachihi,1986; Gathogo, 2017). The men veterans are at the forefront and only regard women fighters as just supporters. This is evident in the all-male, member Mau Mau veteran association in Nyeri. Additionally, most male veterans are hesitant to acknowledge the women combat fighters and women leaders in Mau Mau. Interviews with Mau Mau of the veterans revealed that they are mostly today recognized in association with their late husbands- who were also fighters. Such association with the men fighters only takes away their significant roles during the Mau Mau war, thus putting them at the Periphery of both the war and any compensation associated with it.

Below the field Marshall were generals. Field marshals and the war council appointed generals after demonstrating royalty and full commitment to the Mau Mau course. They were strong and strategist fighters who helped the field Marshal plan and organized white settlers' attacks. The generals commanded platoons (Tamarkin,1976; Gachihi,1986). The field interviews revealed that while there were women who commanded platoons such as Cindi Reri and field Marshall Muthoni, none of them was given the title 'General'. Furthermore, existing studies on Mau Mau fighters only identify men generals (see Gathogo, 2020; Itote & Osborne, 2015; Parsons, 2017; Lewis, 2007; Maina, 1977).

The platoons were a group of fighters under a specific general. These fighters were mainly fighters in the forest. Most of the women fighters in the forest fell under the category of platoons. Another group in the Mau Mau organization consisted of the village and urban fighters. These were always in communication with the field Marshal and the generals. Their primary role was to ensure a steady supply of food, weapons, and information to the forest fighters as shown in the next section of this chapter. Examples of such fighters included Wambui Otieno, Miriam Mathenge, and others who acted as spies and linked the forest fighters to the community.

3.11 Strategies and Categories of Women Fighters in Mau Mau

As mentioned in chapter one of this thesis, war is depicted as a combat affair. However, the fieldwork interviews revealed diverse strategies both combat and non-combat employed in fighting. These strategies are either combat or non-combat as discussed herein.

3.11.1 Women Combat fighters

There is a polarity of men and women in analogies with war, violence, and peace. The image painted is that of men trooping to the battlegrounds and women seated at home awaiting for their homecoming. In this regard, going against acceptable female and masculine behavior in a battle can be challenging (Coulter, 2008). Armed female fighters are regarded as deviants or unnatural. These are the ones that Starr and Zurbriggen, (2017) call the cross-type in the gender schema theory. They are considered to process information through the lens of the opposite gender (Starr & Zurbriggen, 2017). Practically, in most traditional Kenyan communities, women were never expected to participate in direct combat (Gachihi, 1986). War and defending the community was a masculine affair (Kinyua, Matheka & Onyancha, 2016). However, events during the Mau Mau war saw the emergence of women fighters who joined men on the battle fronts, took up arms, and engaged directly in the fight. Kinyua, Matheka, and Onyancha, (2016) contend that the 1952 outbreak of the Mau Mau war provided Kenyan women a chance to the unchartered world of warfare. For the first time in history, Agikuyu women battled alongside their male folks in the forest of Nyandarua and Kirinyaga now known as Aberdare and Mount Kenya respectively. The combat fighters in this case are seen from the lens of women who are on war fronts, involved in attacking the targets, using weapons, and those who used weapons in an organized and coordinated manner.

The women fighters who were combat fighters began from non-combat roles. For example, Muthoni Kirima began as a non-combatant fighter whose role was to gather ammunition and grenades from the market (Muthoni, KII, 7/11/2020). Nevertheless, she quickly embraced the fighting tactics and skills. Her shooting skills and aiming were very accurate thus joining other fighters in attacking the British colonial administrators and the white settlers. The presence of women armed fighters in Mau Mau is evident in the story by East Africa standard Wednesday, 7th October 1953. The newspaper Headline read that.

> Women gangsters in a raid killed the wife of a royalist (East Africa standard October 7, 1953.1).

The story read that women were part of the Mau Mau that attacked the fort hall reserve. In this attack, three men, five children, and a woman were raided near Muriaini. Referring to the women involved in that raid as gangsters reveal a picture of fighters very brutal and armed and whose major motive was to kill. The colonial administrators in Kenya used all sorts of violent names to refer to Mau Mau. Many a time the name gangster and terrorists were used interchangeably to refer to these fighters.

Also, reports on the Mau Mau situation in Kenya in 1954 revealed that colonial soldiers found some women in the forest engaging in violence (PRO.CO 822/454. Passim pro). Other district reports on the state of Mau Mau in central Kenya revealed that some women were found in the forest dressed as *askaris* (sic. Solders) (KNA/ARC/MAA-2/3/36). Women dressed up as soldiers reveal armed fighters disguised as soldiers to confuse the British soldiers as home guards. Field interviews with the veterans revealed that the Mau Mau fighters would at times dress like the home guards to avoid being detected by the British soldiers and home guards.

Fighting and training for the fight in the forest were not for the faint-hearted. It included being hit with the side of a panga on the stomach to test one's resilience (Muthoni, KII, 30/08/2020). No fighter was spared of this training and the Batuni oath. The Batuni oath was given to armed fighters and permitted them to use violence (see Gachihi, 1986; Gathogo, 2017). Explaining her role in the forest, Muthoni noted that she took part in attacking the white settlers and stealing arms and weapons (Muthoni, KII, 30/08/2020). She underwent all the phases of training and fought alongside men, even in hazardous zones (see Karani, 2005; Kassam, 2018; Kinyua, Matheka & Onyancha, 2016). Many a time, Muthoni managed to escape death, although with several injuries (Kui, 2019). Kassam (2018) asserts that Muthoni was the only fighter who survived an ambush in 1954 where her 6 fellow fighters were killed.

Other women combat fighters in Mau Mau included Cindi Reri, Grace Nyaguthii, Wanjugu Githuku, and Njoki Waiceri (see Kassam, 2018; Gachihi, 1986). The Mau Mau veterans interviewed recognized Cindi Reri as a very tough fighter with expertise in using guns. Their accounts agree with Kassam (2018) who notes that at some point the colonial masters thought that Cindi was the head of Mau Mau due to her skillful shots. Her greatest military legacy in the Mau Mau war is linked to the battle at Rui Ruiru where Mau Mau killed so many British soldiers (Gachihi, 1986). Cindi was the one raising the Mau Mau flag to direct the fighters (Alam, 2007).

Women armed fighters also took part in training others in military skills and weapon making. For example, Muthoni trained other fighters on some escape and shooting skills. Also, she took part in making weapons and poisoning the arrow tips. The weapons they made included guns, slings, simis, spears, and arrows. However, Muthoni insisted that their secret weapon was the catapult (Muthoni, KII,7/11/ 2020). The fighters used forest herbs and poisonous animals like snakes to poison the spears and arrows. The principal aim of poisoning the weapons was to ensure that the enemy did not survive to retaliate back once shot. The idea of poisoning their weapons was common in Kenya's violent groups. For example, in her study of the *Chinkororo* movement, Bosibori (2017) shows that the group members normally poisoned their arrows using forest herbs and snake poison. Nonetheless in Mau Mau, some weapons were stolen or acquired by attacking the British colonial soldiers and home guards. Some of these weapons are shown below.

Photo 2 Mau Mau weapons

Source: The researcher's photography in the field

The first photo shows homemade guns which were used by Mau Mau fighters during the war. The second photo shows the bows and arrows which were part of Mau Mau weapons.

Photo 3: The catapult

Source: Etsy (2021)

The catapult is normally used together with the stone. Its major role is to propel the stone to the target.

Initially, the colonialist spread the idea of women as malleable individuals and victims of the Mau Mau war. Generally, the colonial masters assumed that Kenyan women would not be involved in the war whose grievances were in the public sphere. Nevertheless, as time elapsed by 1953, the presence of women-armed fighters challenged this narrative. It became apparent that they were involved in the war as fighters. Presley (1988) asserts that with the 1953 massacre at Fort Hall, key government officials realized that women were more violent

supporters of Mau Mau as compared to their male counterparts. It is on this grounds that their prisons were expanded. Specifically, Gitimayu prison was established for the 'Hardcore' women (see Elkins, 2005; Bruce-Lockhart, 2014, Urovitz, 2017; Gathogo, 2017). Many of the armed fighters were detained here as they were classified among the "Hardcore" who had refused to surrender and give Mau Mau's secrets to the British colonialists.

To defend their narrative, the British administrators termed these fighters as mad or insane (Bruce-Lockhart, 2014). Such classification was used to justify that these fighters were not conscious actors but insane people who found themselves involved in a war whose agenda they had no idea. Sjoberg, and Gentry (2007) describe these women as monsters. These are depicted as pathologically damaged and thus drawn to violence. The monster narrative brings out an image that the woman fighter is not liable for her activities since there is something incorrect with their womanhood (Sjoberg &Gentry, 2007). This woman is more deadly and violent than even the men fighters. The persistence of this erroneous view of women fighters perhaps explains their peripheral position in Mau Mau history. Most district records do not mention women-armed fighters by their names. For example, the Corfield report was the formal history of the British colonialists to conquer and eradicate Mau Mau. The report's exclusion of these fighters is a worthy illustration of future historical narratives that would rely on stereotypes to categorize them as feeble, malleable, and victims of war.

3.12 Non-combat Fighters: Women fighters as Game Changers and the Backbone of Mau Mau war

The non-combat category of women fighters consisted of a majority of women fighters in Mau Mau. These were fighters who did not necessarily take up arms to the war front or attack sites but whose roles and actions were key to the success of the armed fighters. Many times, these fighters are termed as performing passive roles (see KNA.AR(MAA) 2/3/36VII; Alam, 2007; Santoru,1996; Levine,2010; Koster, 2016; Bokhari,2007; Davis 2006). This classification lays the foundation of the concept of the passivity of women in this war and violence. However, the classification of war roles as active and passive fails to adequately capture the entire array of responsibilities the fighters carry in violent groups (Sutten, 2009). The fact that these fighters are seen as passive takes away their significance and conceals the vital contribution of these roles to the success of violent groups in the country. The term passive also renders the fighters as inactive individuals in war or individuals whose actions are not driven by individual rationality but by group coercion. Nonetheless, this section while examining these roles shows

that these fighters were the game changers, the energy, and the backbone of the success of the Mau Mau war. These roles are not just duties but forms or strategies of fighting.

3.12.1 Collection of Intelligence: sexual relationships as a pathway

Information is key to the success of attack missions of violent groups. The findings revealed that women fighters are key to the collection of information needed for these purposes. These fighters are commonly referred to as spies. For example, Wambui Waiyaki was a strong urban Mau Mau fighter responsible for intelligence collection and relaying information to combat fighters (Cloete, 2000; Adenekan, 2011). Wambui took all the oaths of Mau Mau (see Cloete, 2006; Otieno & Presley, 1998). However, she never joined the forest as a combat fighter (Heather, 1999; Kui, 2019). Gachoka Mwangi, a Mau Mau veteran, remembers her as a fighter from the town who majorly provided secret government documents to the Mau Mau generals (Gachoka, KII, 06/11/2020). The fact that her father was a police officer, she knew the way to access the offices and documents (Kui,2019). Wambui led a group of Mau Mau spies together with Shiru, their worker (Kanyata, KII, 29/12/2020). In 1959 she was arrested by colonial officers and detained in Lamu (Otieno & Presley, 1998).

Another veteran who played a significant role in the collection of intelligence was Hanan Kungu. Hannah acted as a spy, informing the father and other fighters of what was happening outside the forest (Kui, 2019; Gathogo, 2017)). She was a smart spy who even hid fighters in her house. Scholars on Mau Mau echo the role of women as intelligence collectors. For example, Kinyua, Matheka, and Onyancha (2016) contend that women outside the forest played treacherous roles such as the collection of intelligence. The authors, further, note that fighters like field Marshall Muthoni Kirima spied for two years before joining the forest as a guerrilla fighter. This is echoed by Kui (2019) who notes that Muthoni used to take information to Kimathi under a huge fig tree before she joined the forest as a combat fighter. While terming these fighters as a passive wing of Mau Mau, scholars like Gathogo (2017), Kanogo, (1987), Gachihi, (1986), and Presley (1986) assert their roles in Mau Mau as spies. The value of these spies in the Mau Mau war is well revealed in Kiambu district annual report in 1953. The report terms these fighters as the 'eyes and ears' of Mau Mau (KNA. DC.KMB1/44, pg. 3). Such a definition then implies that without these wing of women spies, Mau Mau fighters would never know what is happening outside the forest and the whereabouts of the colonial *askaris* and home guards. This was key in planning attacks.

Sexual relationships were revealed to be manipulated as a strategy by women fighters to collect information from security officers. These relationships had diverse perceptions from different participants in the field. While the fighters regarded this as a love relationship, other participants termed it prostitution. In this case, fighters disguised as prostitutes to nab security officers, and collect vital information they needed. A colonial report by a special branch in 1955 revealed that women were encouraged to befriend home guards and security forces to collect information and ammunition (PRO.WO276/279). Also, in a letter to the Nairobi Commissioner of police, an informer recognized as Jamey wrote that:

> "I wish to inform you that near the post office in Limuru lives common prostitutes with their male friends...these two prostitutes (Joyce and Valeri) are members of Mau Mau movement and supply Mau Mau gangsters with information and food" (KNA/AM/1/13. Pg 2)

However, while at this time this practice was not castigated by society as it was seen as beneficial for the Mau Mau fighters, at the time of this research, the women fighters are not comfortable speaking about it. This is due to the changing values and labeling accorded to sexual relations over time and in society. Many of the Mau Mau stories on women and sexual relations are based on sexual violence on them in camps, reserves, and prisons by colonial administrators and home guards (see Kanogo, 1987; Bruce-Lockhart, 2014; Branch, 2007).

3.12.2 Transportation of Guns: My Body, my Dress code my armory

Another way that women fought in Mau Mau was through the storage, transportation, and delivery of weapons to where they were needed by the combat fighters. These weapon couriers were very significant to the forest fighters. The Kenya colony and protectorate (KCP) Community development annual report of 1952 showed that a vital part of Mau Mau support comprised of women who trafficked arms to fighters in the forest area of the three Kikuyu districts. This colonial account was validated by Miriam Mathenge a Mau Mau veteran in an interview she revealed that she knew how to hide weapons and trained other fighters on tactics and methods of acquiring guns and ammunition from the colonial soldiers. She also taught them how to pass these stolen weapons to the fighters (Miriam, KII, 8/12/2020). Miriam explained that weapons were essential requirements that the fighters needed to win the war. Her views agree with Alam (2017) who asserts that women were significant in the transportation of guns and ammunition without which the forest fighters would have not made it. They had to put all efforts into ensuring enough guns for the Mau Mau fighters in the forest.

Miriam explained this had to be met, even if it meant killing the white people or home guards who were loyalists to the colonial administrators (Miriam, KII,11/12/ 2020).

Hannah Kung'u was another village fighter. She was a courier who delivered guns and other weapons to the Mau Mau fighters in the forest. Hannah fought even when she was pregnant exploiting her pregnancy to deliver firearms, ammunition, and food to the fighters (Njoroge, KII, 2020). Kui (2019) writing on the story of Hannah documents that she was a courier ferrying weapons for the forest fighters. The same views are echoed by Gathogo (2017) who gives an account of women fighters in Mau Mau and their roles in the transportation of guns and ammunition to the fighters in the forest. The accounts of these fighters agree with the colonial annual reports which showed that women not only fed Mau Mau but also carried weapons for them into the forest (KNA.AR(MAA) 2/3/36VII). These colonial accounts agree with other scholars who contend that women liaised with the forest fighters and concealed firearms and transported weapons (see Gachihi,1996; Cloughs,1998).

Women also befriend colonial officers to get and transport these guns. A report by a special branch in 1954 indicated that women were encouraged to befriend home guards and security forces to collect ammunition (PRO.WO276/279. While this sexual relationship worked for Mau Mau, the negative connotation attached to it generates different debates, especially after the war and as time passes. These debates center around these fighters as victims of sexual abuse in times of violence and war. The voluntary fighters who use sex as a strategy in their fighting are overshadowed by the victim narrative of women in war. Additionally, the stand of violent group members on sexuality contradicts what exactly is happening with their women fighters. For example, in Mau Mau archival and oral sources revealed that women used sex to get information from the bodyguards (KNA/AM/1/13; TT Cociya Tumu Tumu minute 21 April 1948). This was the case even though in traditional Kikuyu society, prostitution was regarded as immoral (Gachihi, 1986). However, using their bodies during the war was essential in helping the group win against the British colonialists.

The question on sex relations in Mau Mau also reveals banned sexual relations among Mau Mau fighters. For example, Kinyua, Matheka & and Onyancha, (2016) explains that Mau Mau had a very strict code about sexual relation. An inquiry into this with the veterans interviewed revealed that sexual relations were not allowed among fighters. This is because it was believed that it would weaken the group. However, the oral interviews also revealed cases of fighters who were pregnant during the war. For example, Mukami Kimathi left the forest because she

became pregnant (Kui, 2019). Field Marshall Muthoni is reported to have miscarried twice while in the forest (Kiragu, 2016). Also, Hannah Kung'u exploited her pregnancy to ensure supplies to the forest fighters (Kui, 2019). Such evidence shows that sexual relations were allowed among the fighters thus dismissing the idea that women never offered sex to the male Mau Mau fighters.

These double standards on sex relations in Mau Mau make it hard to establish when women were involved in sexual violence and when they were using sex as a tool for fighting. Many a time, the narratives from the fieldwork revealed that the victim narrative takes precedence over that of sex as fighting.

3.12.3 Recruitment and Oathing: Ensuring Stable Group Membership

Some studies have shown that women are forcefully recruited into fighting by men (see Gärtner & McCarthy, 2004; Fleisher & Krienert, 2004). This is a perception that has always been used to regard women as coerced actors in violence. Nonetheless, findings in this study revealed that women play a significant role in recruiting members of violent groups. For example, in Mau Mau Mukami Kimathi explained that she and her husband used to mobilize people and administer oaths to the recruits (Mukami, KII, 8/12/2020). Both would enroll people into Mau Mau openly until they ran into the forest. Also, as a village fighter, Miriam Mathenge mobilized people and even children to join the Mau Mau war. The colonial records about Mau Mau also pointed out women recruiting their husbands into Mau Mau. For example, the memorandum by the commissioner for community development and rehabilitation on 6, January 1954 showed that wives had, on several occasions, convinced their spouses to take the oath and were militant. The same views are documented in the Corfield report of 1960 which reports that by 1950 women had begun administering royalty oaths in Mau Mau. For example, field Marshall Muthoni administered the Mau Mau oath to her husband. After convincing the husband to join the Mau Mau war, Muthoni explained that.:

> "We woke up early and took a goat to Kainani Forest. This forest was located near my father-in-law's place. Once there, I took him through the oathing process, where he swore his allegiance and commitment to the Mau Mau fighters and the war of independence. After this, he entered the forest to join the other fighters. With him were a gun, a spear, and a small food bag that I had prepared for him. This was the last time I saw him until 1956." (Muthoni, KII, 7/11/2020).

Her explanation reveals that Muthoni not only administered the oath to the husband but also played a part in convincing him and recruiting him to the Mau Mau war. This defies the initial colonial narratives that men were forcefully recruiting women to Mau Mau. Women were also reported to recruiting their children into Mau Mau (PRO.CO 822/974). Accordingly, the district officer saw it vital to rehabilitate them more than men to save the next generation (PRO.CO 822/974). The idea of women Mau Mau recruiters was echoed by scholars like Barnett & Njama (1966), Itote (1979), Wairimu (2019), and Gathogo (2014). Presley (1988), although terming these roles as passive, shows that women did recruitment in Mau Mau.

3.12.4 Food and Medical Supply

Other forms of fighting included the supply of food and medicine to the combat fighters. Most of the fighters in this category never joined the forest, but their supplies were significant in sustaining the Mau Mau war. Interviews with Mau Mau veterans revealed that the problem was not how many people were sent to the forest during the war. The deal lay in securing regular supplies for conducting a sustained resistance. According to the Fort Hall annual report of 1953, the district commissioner explained that.

> "Women operate with some of the gangs, harbor and encourage the gangster in the forest. While the fighting continues, there is no doubt that the Kikuyu female will continue to be an extremely tough nut to crack" (KNA/XA.1/11/32, pg. 3).

Another colonial record indicated that women's role in aiding Mau Mau was considerable. They conveyed food to fighters in the forest and sometimes were caught dressed as *askaris* (KNA/ARC/MAA-2/3/36). Gachihi (1986) contends that the passive wing of Mau Mau comprised women who, in addition to other supplies, ensured that there was enough food for the forest fighters. Alam (2007) echoed the same views and noted that fighters such as Bandi wa Kamau took food to the combat fighters in the forest.

As an extra strategy, these fighters also composed songs for mobilizing people to join the Mau Mau war. For example, Miriam Mathenge composed songs that mobilized the people to join the war against the white man and supply food to the Mau Mau guerrilla fighters. Gathogo (2017) echoes these views and notes that women gave their contributions to Mau Mau through war songs and dances. These songs and dances resonated with the grievances and concerns of the fighters against the British colonial administrators. These songs were *wakariara* and

wakaruri. *Wakariara* dance and *wakariara* song enticed the youth to take the oath of loyalty in preparation for the big war ahead (Gathogo, 2017).

Some fighters employed multiple fighting strategies (Kinyua, Matheka & Onyancha, 2016). They collected intelligence, transported guns, and supplied food. For example, Hannah Kungu exploited her pregnancy to deliver firearms, ammunition, and food to the fighters (Njoroge, KII, 12/10/2020). The ability of these individuals to fight in diverse ways reveals them as an asset in this war because one fighter would carry out various roles to the group's success. Additionally, some combat fighters provided medicine to the injured fighters. For example, Marshal Muthoni nursed sick fighters in addition to doing armed fighting (Kinyua, Matheka & Onyancha, 2016). While studies classified the non-combat roles as passive, during the war these roles were normally regarded as going to war and a high-risk operation (Kinyua, Matheka & Onyancha, 2016).

3.13 Experiences of Women Fighters in Mau Mau 1952-1963

Having examined how women navigated the Mau Mau war, this section discusses their experiences as fighters. In Mau Mau, life for the fighters, regardless of the category, was not easy. Interviews with the Mau Mau veterans revealed that the fighters had to deal with fear, violence, physical assault from the colonialists, separation from families, and even death. Some had to be arrested and detained under callous conditions. In an interview, field marshal Muthoni once a combat fighter, noted that the Mau Mau Forest fighters risked attacks from wild animals, harsh weather conditions, and killings from colonialists (Muthoni, KII, 8/12/2020). The Mau Mau men detainees risked capital punishment (Hynd, 2012). For example, Marshall Dedan Kimathi was arrested in 1956, executed in 1957, and buried in a secret grave by the colonialist (Shimanyula, 2021; Ochieng, 1992). Her wife, Mukami Kimathi, also a fighter in Mau Mau, has never gotten a chance to see the grave more than 50 years later.

The women were not spared in these experiences. For example, field Marshall Muthoni fought in the forest for 11 years (Kui, 2019). She explained that for 11 years, day and night in Nyandarua and Kirinyaga forests, she never had a comfortable sleep, a nice bath, or a lovely shave as would be generally expected of a woman (Muthoni, KII, 7/11/2020). She slept under trees and endured the rain. The fighters would not even hide in the caves because that would be dangerous. This is because colonialists would easily find them or even bomb the entire cave. Sleeping was in turn, and many a time, they stayed awake the whole night since this was the

time the colonialists hunted for them mostly (Muthoni, KII, 7/11/2020). She wore torn clothes and, at times, used skins from the wild animals they hunted for food. It was a life of changing tactics every day because they feared betrayal from even those around them (Muthoni, KII, 7/11/2020). Muthoni explained that she learned the art of walking on toes in the forest, going back and forth to prevent colonialists from tracing their footprints.

Non-combat fighters in the village and towns also had their share of colonial brutality and assault. These experiences are diverse from one fighter to another. For example, in 1955, August Miriam Mathenge was attacked by British soldiers and home guards (Muchiri, 2021). Her husband, General Mathenge, was among the highly wanted Mau Mau fighters by the colonial administration. When her house was raided, they did not find Mathenge. Accordingly, they began interrogating Miriam about her husband's whereabouts. Miriam was adamant about giving them any information. The soldiers were very impatient and disappointed with her, thus torturing her to retrieve her husband (The county, 2021). She explained that about 20 police officers beat her and inserted a glowing cigarette into her ears in their bid to get information from her (Miriam, KII, 11/12/2020).

Miriam was arrested and detained for one year in Othaya and seven years in Kamiti women's prison (The county, 2021). She explained that she was taken to Kamiti because the colonial administrators classified her as a hardcore woman (Miriam, KII, 11/12/2020). Her remarks on being hardcore are echoed by Gathogo (2014) who contends that hardcore fighters were detained in Gitimayu and Kamiti women's prisons. Also, Presley (1988) contends that hardcore women in Mau Mau were detained in Kamiti and were often treated as insane by British colonial prison officers. As a Mau Mau detainee, Miriam washed the huge tracks and lorries that carried corpses (Miriam, KII, 11/12/2020). She was often promised freedom from prison if she would be a "good lady" and tell the officers about the other fighters. However, these promises never moved her stand and commitment to Mau Mau. This she did despite knowing that her children were suffering without their father and mother (Miriam, KII, 27/12/2020). Miriam has also never seen her husband since he left for the forest in 1955.

Wambui Waiyaki was arrested in 1959 and detained in Lamu (Ogamba, 2017). An interview with Mzee Chege in Nairobi revealed that her detention was possible because of betrayal by her fiancé (Chege, KII, 14/10/2020). While in prison, Wambui was severely raped by the colonial prison officers and thus came out of the prison pregnant in 1961 (Otieno & Presley,

1998; Presley,1998). She never received justice for this assault despite registering this issue before the authorities at the time.

Mukami Kimathi was arrested on her way to Nairobi from the forest. Her mistake was the lack of a pass (Kui, 2019). She was detained in Langata and kirigiti (Nderithu 2019). At one point, she conspired with a prison officer and escaped. The prison officer called Gatiba always pitied her because she was a breastfeeding mother. He always sneaked food for the young child, who cried a lot out of hunger bangs (Mukami, KII, 8/12/2020). It is this officer who helped them escape prison. However, their freedom was short-lived because they were rearrested and given eight months imprisonment in Kamiti. She was only released after her husband, Dedan Kimathi, had been killed.

The experiences of these women fighters are not different from that of men fighters. The detention conditions for both women and men detainees were brutal. Santilli (1977) notes that women were spared capital punishment. However, this does not imply that these fighters were not killed during their duty or in detention camps. For example, Gathogo (2017) contends that when general Kabugu was shot dead in Embu, he was with a woman in combat, and both died the same day from bullet wounds. Also, supplying food, information, and weapons to Mau Mau fighters was a criminal offense whose penalty was death (Gachihi, 1986). Yet, these are the roles that Mau Mau women fighters diligently performed despite knowing the legal implications on their lives. These experiences are many times used to place these fighters as victims of the Mau Mau war. However, a more in-depth examination of their lives reveals that they were more than willing to undergo all these for Mau Mau's success. None of these fighters was forced to join the Mau Mau war. Moreover, their arrest, detention, and assault were not because of their gender but because of their roles in the war.

<div style="text-align:center">Field marshal Muthoni   Miriam Mathenge</div>
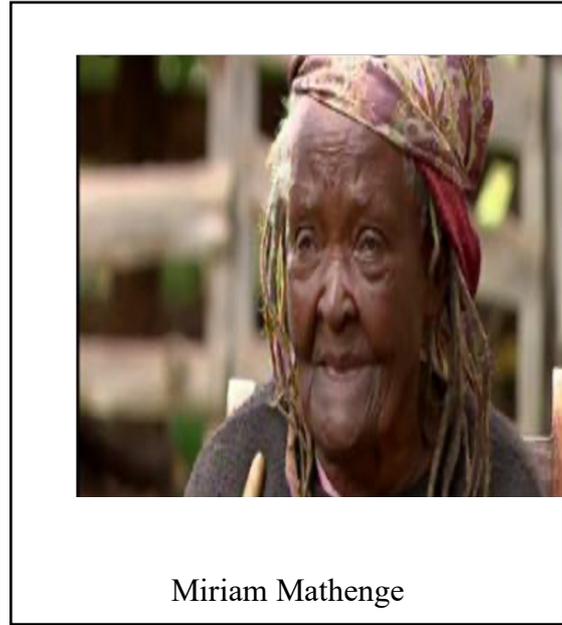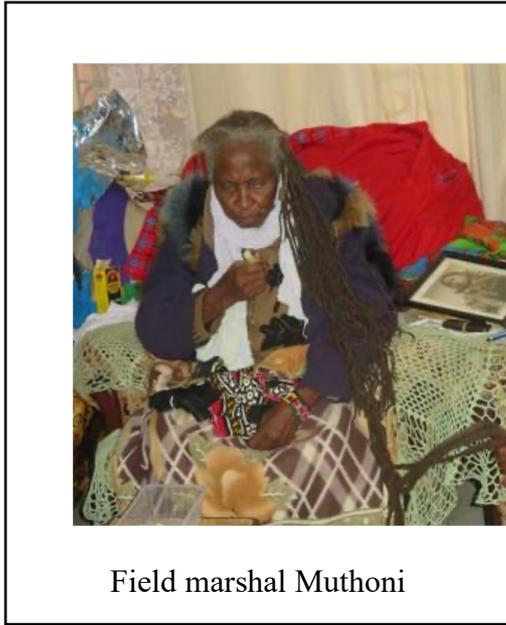
Photo 4: Women Mau Mau veterans with their long dreadlocks

Source: Researcher's fieldwork photographs

The photos above show Mau Mau veterans with their long dreadlocks. As a sign of their life experiences and memory as Mau Mau fighters, some Mau Mau fighters, both men and women, have kept long dreadlocks. For example, Miriam has very long dreadlocks, which she has kept for over five decades. She explains that not cutting her hair and keeping long dreads was their Mau Mau symbol of Africanism and resistance to colonial rule. As such, she has kept these dreadlocks in memory of the fight they staged against the British colonialists until Kenya gained independence (Miriam, KII, 27/12/2020). This account concurs with Muthoni wa Kirima, who noted that she has kept her long hair as a memory of the life and pain they endured in the forest (Muthoni, KII, 30/8/2020). Other Mau Mau veterans with the same long dreadlocks include Mwangi Waichigo Njuguna, Njoroge, and Gachoka. Perhaps this aligns with Miriam's explanation that Mau Mau fighters kept long hair in the forest. Secondly is the idea that the Mau Mau veterans have not enjoyed the fruits of the independence they fought for. Muthoni explained that she would never cut her dreadlocks until she fully enjoyed the fruits of freedom (Miriam, KII, 26/7/2021). At the time of this research, she had long dreadlocks.

3.14 Conclusion

This chapter sought to examine the link in gender, women, and violence in Kenya between 1945 and 1963. In so doing Mau Mau war was used reference point for this discussion. To interrogate this relationship, the grievances of Mau Mau were examined against the gendered private-public spheres dichotomy. Additionally, the place of women in Mau Mau, why and how they joined the war, and their experiences were examined. The chapter revealed that Mau Mau erupted because of the harsh and brutal colonial political economy in Kenya. This was marked by land alienation, lack of political independence, and forced labor in settler plantations. Mau Mau rose with the major objective to fight for the lost land, and political independence. These grievances were found to belong in the public sphere defined as a masculine space or space for men. With such grievances, therefore, women in Mau Mau were seen as either acting due to coercion by their husbands or just passively partaking without rationally thinking about why they are fighting.

Furthermore, this chapter has demonstrated that there is an interaction between what is termed a public sphere and the private sphere. Women in Kenya, throughout history, have had their space and position on land, political institutions, and the economic system of their communities. Accordingly, when these aspects are suppressed, the suppression and oppression impact both men and women in equal measure. Accordingly, it was not surprising or abnormal to have rational and conscious women Mau Mau fighters. This is because they were not bystanders in colonial Kenya. They experienced and witnessed the brutality of the colonial administrators and choose to fight knowing why they were fighting.

Oathing as a feature in Mau Mau was also examined through the lens of gender and women fighters. It was established that the citations made, focused on masculine elements like land, fighting, use of violence against the enemy among others. However, a close examination of some oaths revealed some strategies used by non-combatant fighters such as spying. Additionally, it was revealed that women fighters took the same oaths as men fighters, and some were oath administrators. The chapter also established that among the oathing resources in Mau Mau was menstrual blood. This finding indicates that women were at the center of Mau Mau. The fact that traditionally they never shared oaths with men has changed during the war. Mau Mau fighters broke all these gender norms in the general society to liberate the situation as the need presented itself. Accordingly using oathing to define women as victims, Passive or coerced actors in violence is an erroneous view.

This chapter has established that diverse actors regard Mau Mau women fighters differently. Nonetheless, many of these actors see women as passive or coerced actors in violent groups. For example, at the beginning of the war, the British colonial administrators classified them as passive and coerced actors. This was based on colonialists' gender stereotypes. The overgeneralizations of women as passive in war overlooked their political activity and desires in Kenya. What constituted women through the lens of the British colonialists' culture was diverse from femininity in traditional African cultures and norms about war. For example, how the Kikuyu people processed information on women and their abilities was diverse from the British colonial administrators' perspective. The British assumed cultural and time diversity and examined an African woman from the lens of European culture only. This led to an erroneous view of women and violence in Kenya. However, as time evolved, the same British administrators termed the women in the war as the ears and eyes of Mau Mau. They also classified some fighters as hardcore in the war and set up two prisons specifically for these women. This implies that for the British colonial administrators, the identity of women in Mau Mau kept changing from time to time.

During the war, women were highly valued and regarded as important individuals in the success of the war. However, as time elapsed, perceptions about the women veterans reflect a denial of women's ability in fighting. In this way, it can be deduced that the value of women fighters in violent groups shifts in the eyes of men fighters depending on the benefits to be accrued. At the time of this study, when these fighters needed compensation, the women had been put at the periphery by their men counterparts. This was not the case in 1952-1960 when these women were the eyes and ears of the Mau Mau fighters.

The typologies of women fighters in Mau Mau were examined. The discussion revealed that women were not one single group. Like their male counterparts, women fighters were diverse in age, social class, and level of education. This diversity was also reflected in the diverse factors for their fight, how they fought, and how they joined the war. Their major goal was land and political independence. These grievances largely form the core point for assuming that women were coerced actors in fighting. Land, politics, and economics are largely associated with masculinity in Kenya. Women joined the war whose grievances were land and political independence. In the eyes of the British administrators, African women had no access or control over land, and therefore the alienation could not bother them.

However, it is essential to note that women attached value to these two crucial aspects- land and politics in their community. Land alienation and destruction of the colonial administrators' political institutions took away women's roles in their lands and dismantled their councils. Accordingly, the land alienation policies impacted what they did daily. It is not like Kikuyu women were never interested in the land because it was controlled and inherited by men. The loss of independence sent women to the periphery of political activities in their communities. Aware of these losses, they fought consciously and rationally, knowing why they were fighting.

This chapter has shown that women fighters join violent groups through insiders. These insiders would be their partners or family member. fighters in Mau Mau joined the war through their fathers or, husbands, with a few joining through their women friends. The presence of many men insiders was seen to enforce the stereotype that men force women into fighting. However, the chapter demonstrated that the fact that most fighters joined through men insiders does not necessarily imply that these fighters were forced. Knowledge of the insider helped the Mau Mau and the new fighters develop trust with each other and had nothing to do with coercion.

A gender conflict was revealed in the space of women in Mau Mau, especially in leadership. There was a gender conflict about accepting that women took up leadership roles such as field marshals. It was established that the conflict around this leadership position emanates from the conflict between femininity and masculinity. Masculinity is struggling to remain dominant over femininity while femininity is struggling to prove that women were key to the success of this war.

The chapter also revealed that the fighters fought in diverse ways. However, these fighting strategies can be broadly categorized as combat and non-combat fighting. Combat fighters took up arms and were present on the war fronts. However, the number of combat fighters was seen as less when compared to their male counterparts. These few numbers are used to conceal the fact that women are combat fighters in general society. The presence of women combat fighters is contrary to the pre-colonial Kikuyu gender norms of war that only recognized male warriors and vulnerable women. In this case, the masculine gender stereotypes of war were used to conceal the combat women fighters.

Women non-combat fighters employed fighting strategies that are largely referred to as passive roles. It emerged that some scholars refer to these categories of women fighters as a passive

wing of the Mau Mau war. These strategies include the collection of intelligence, acquisition, and transportation of weapons to required destinations, and supply of food and medicine to the combat fighters. This chapter established that the classification of these strategies as passive degrades their significance in the war thus putting non-combat fighters at the periphery of the war. The chapter revealed that these roles were key to sustaining the war. It also emerged that non-combat fighters took a lot of risky ventures to carry out these roles. Accordingly, these fighters were as essential as the combat fighters. In this regard, this chapter concludes that the classification of fighting strategies as passive and active contributes to the classification of women as passive, coerced, or victims of war. This is an erroneous classification and perception of women fighters.

Women fighters' experiences during the war involved sexual abuse, arrest, detention, and death. These experiences are not diverse from the experiences of the male fighters. However, when these experiences are narrated and documented, they portray women fighters as victims of violence, especially sexual abuse and killing. Much documented and narrated about these paints a picture of women victims of violence. Nonetheless, the chapter also established cases of fighters who used their bodies for sex and befriend the home guard to acquire weapons and source information. These are less spoken about due to the negative connotation attached to prostitution in the current society.

Ideally, this chapter concludes that when the Mau Mau war began, some women defied while others continued some of the traditional gender norms. Such was necessary for the success of the Mau Mau war. Women gained new identities and roles, to suit the prevailing war times. Accordingly, the relationship between gender, women, and violence emerged as a dynamic one. It changes depending on the prevailing culture, actors, time, and conditions. Nevertheless, gender stereotypes were exploited by fighters to propel the Mau Mau war's mission.

The next chapter discusses the plight of women in evolving violence in Kenya between 1964 to 1989.

CHAPTER FOUR

4 The Plight of Women in the Evolving Violence in Independent Kenya; 1964-1989

With independence, it was anticipated that the brutality experienced during the Mau Mau war was never to be witnessed again. In December 1964, Kenya became a full republic with President Jomo Kenyatta as its first president under the Kenya African National Union (KANU). In this chapter, we explore the violent groups in independent Kenya and the place and experiences of women in these groups. The chapter contends that the newly independent state contributed to the emergence of violent groups. The chapter also shows that women in this period were game changers in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi which are the major focus groups in this period.

4.1 Colonial Legacies in the Newly Independent State 1964-1982

One of the features of the colonial administration in Kenya was the "Big man syndrome" where those in power suppressed and silenced their subjects. As Kenya transited to independence, the new African leaders took over power but carried with them the colonial legacy of big Man syndrome. President Jomo Kenyatta took over the president and Jaramogi Odinga as the vice president under the KANU political party. The Big man syndrome soon reflected itself as a repressive KANU regime emerged. Although the new leaders had promised liberation and equality, these dreams and promises died by the end of the first decade of independence. This was due to the ethnic chauvinism and perpetuated that was perpetuated by the brutal leaders under the KANU regime. Internal party wrangles and ideology differences led to the split in the ruling party. As a result, the vice president, Jaramogi Odinga, quit KANU to form Kenya People's Union (KPU) in 1966(Throup, 2020). However, President Kenyatta banned KPU in 1969, undermining the multiparty system as he centralized power. Kenya remained with only one party, the ruling party, KANU (see Anyang'Nyong'o, 1989; Ajulu. 1992). President Kenyatta capitalized on the use of a youth group called KANU youth wingers to oppress the KPU supporters (Anderson, 2002).

Apart from political repression, the decade also witnessed the collapse of the million-acre scheme that was meant to return the vacated colonial lands to the original native owners. Those in power together with their allies allocated themselves large tracks of this land leaving the real owners landless and squatters (see Alliance, 2006; Shilaro, 2023). Mau Mau continued to be

a banned group in Kenya and its veterans remained landless. In an interview, field Marshall Muthoni a Mau Mau veteran noted that:

> "When I left the forest, I came back poorer than I left, I had no land, and the government did nothing much to help us settle. It is only a city mayor who saw mercy on me after spending several nights outside the municipality offices and gave me the place, where I live today. I have not received any compensation for the land we lost, the land we were fighting for in the forest." (Muthoni, KII, 30/08/2020).

Muthoni's remarks were not different from those of other veterans. Most of them are living in squatters to date.

Ideally, the first decade of Kenya's independence was marked with *kikuyunization*, where the president rewarded and gave positions to his Kikuyu allies and tribesmen at the expense of other tribes in the country (Ajulu, 1992). Kenyatta's death in 1978, and replacement by President Moi created hope for a new start. However, this too was short-lived. The country witnessed the reintroduction of the torture chambers, detentions without trials, and a reign of terror unleashed on the political opponent of the regime (see Adar, & Munyae, 2001; Kariuki, 1996; Gimode, 2007)). *Kalenjinization* replaced *kikuyunization.* President Moi rewarded and gave top-significance positions to his Kalenjin tribesmen. Mau Mau continued to be a banned group and the veterans were sidelined. The KANU youth wingers continued to enjoy, state support and in 1982, Kenya was declared officially a single-party state under the KANU regime (Ojwang & Okowa, 1989). The land question coupled with nepotism and hard economic times continued to be an issue facing the masses. Most of the violent groups in Kenya in this period would trace their genesis from this oppression, feelings of marginalization, and hard economic times.

4.2 The independent State and Emergence of Violent Groups 1964-1982

As shown above, the newly independent state had its challenges. With the British colonialist out of the country, the black Kenyan leaders took over the leadership of the country. However, it did not take long before political rivalry among them began leading to various factions in the country seeking security from the youth in form of violent groups.

In post-independence Kenya, the history of violent groups can be traced back to KANU youth wingers. This was a state-sponsored group of youths whose role was to harass the ruling party's political opponents, mainly the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) members

(Bosibori, 2017; Ngunyi, Katumanga, 2014). The KANU regime was marked by dictatorship, oppression of the opposition, limited freedom of expression and speech, and the media (Nasong'o & Murunga, 2008; Kariuki, 1996). Those who opposed the government of the day risked arrest and detention and assassinations (Chege, 2017).

The intensity of the KANU youth wingers grew when KANU split, and the Kenya People's Union (KPU) was formed in 1966 (see Ogula, 1977; Mueller, 1984; Ajulu, 2002)). The ruling party used the youth to unleash KPU supporters, and the actions of the youth wingers proceeded even after the party was banned in 1969 (Anderson, 2002). In 1982, after the attempted military coup against President Moi, he declared Kenya officially, a single-party state (Widner, 1993). All elections during the one-party era were not free and fair and they witnessed violence unleashed by KANU youth wingers. Prominent politicians in the government hired the youth wingers to harass and disrupt political rallies of opponents (see Anderson, 2002; Bosibori, 2017).

An interview with Mr. Simiyu a security analyst in Nairobi revealed that most of Kenya's violent groups, such as *Mungiki* and *Jeshi la* Embakasi, began as a response to KANU youth wingers (Simiyu, KII, 03/12/2020). The analyst contends that government repression triggered the emergence of many of them. Also, Kenya's economic and political situation offered an excellent breeding ground for these groups (Simiyu, KII, 13/12/2020). His remarks agree with some scholars who contend that KANU youth wingers were a breeding ground for violent groups in post-independent Kenya (see Anderson, 2002; Bosibori, 2017; Ngunyi, Katumanga & Programme des Nations Unies pour le développement, 2014). The opposition leaders had to react to the violence that was perpetrated by the government using these groups (Ngunyi &Katumanga, 2014). Most of these groups were ethnic based. The opposition group was highly vulnerable to state-sponsored violent groups, and the formation of their militias to protect their parties and rallies was the only alternative at hand. Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi emerged in this context.

4.3 Gender, Women and Politics in Kenya During the Women's Decade 1975-1985

In Kenya, the conference dedicated to the women's decade was held in 1985 in Nairobi. The decade marked the genesis of enlightenment of the Kenyan society on the centrality of women's empowerment in equality, peace, and development. Nzomo, (1989) contends that while the Kenyan government adopted the women in Development Policy (WID) during this decade, the

question of women remained at a level of vaguely worded statements of government commitment to this empowerment.

There was rampant government interference in women's activities. The was co-optation of top leaders and welfare orientation of the women's organizations which left the groups toothless dogs (Nzomo, 1989). As such, gender discrimination against Kenyan women remained rampant throughout this decade (Mathangani,1995). There was discrimination in inheritance, marriage, divorce, child custody, and maintenance. Pregnant girls in government educational Programs faced punitive actions (Nzomo, 1989). There was also the manipulation of the customary law to deny women their basic rights such as the burial rights of their Partners. Such was the case with Mau Mau veteran Wambui Waiyaki Otieno (see Otieno& Presley, 1998; Stamp, 1991). The Nation Group Newspaper reporting on this case noted that;

> Wambui's defeat is a defeat for Women (The Nation, June 1987, p. 36).

Wambui was among the powerful individuals not only in independent Kenya but also during the Mau Mau war. The fact that gender played a role in her losing a case against the state on the burial of the husband, also demonstrates how women fighters in Mau Mau were left vulnerable even after fighting for the independence of the country.

Against this backdrop in 1985, after the women's decade conference, there emerged a new awareness and assertiveness among Kenyan women, both at the group and individual levels. They up against gender-based discrimination against them through Seminars, workshops, campaigns, and educational tours. Despite this awareness, they remained Politically subordinated in Kenya (see Kassilly Onkware, 2010). The undemocratic environment under the KANU regime was hostile to anybody that challenged the status quo. As the KANU youth wingers triggered the emergence of opposition militias, the Kenyan women found themselves in this political mud, all with the aim of liberation. These groups are discussed below and the women's plight in them.

4.4   Mungiki 1983-1989

Mungiki draws its name from the Kikuyu word *Muingi* which Means masses (Land Info, 2010). The group began in central Kenya in the late 1980s. There are several versions concerning the true origin of Mungiki. However, oral interviews with fighters in Mungiki revealed that the

group's first founders were six students led by a grandson of a Mau Mau fighter. Land Info (2010) identifies this grandson as Ndura Waruinge, the grandson of Mau Mau general Waruinge. The group attracted members from the Kikuyu ethnic group who had lost their land in 1982 and 1987 and ethnically instigated violence in the Rift Valley (Mwangi, 2011).

The grievances of Mungiki included landlessness, and political oppression by the ruling regime and called for the return to the customary Kikuyu way of life (Wamue, 2001; Andersen, 2003). Land Info (2010) notes that Mungiki was anti-imperialist, anti-western, and rejected Christianity. Their grievances at the time of formation resembled those of Mau Mau. An interview with Kamanda a male fighter in Mungiki revealed that the group associated itself with Mau Mau fighters (Kamanda, KII,16/11/2020). Such association is possible because the Mau Mau veterans were never compensated for their land despite Kenya gaining Independence. Interviews with Mau Mau veterans revealed that the Kenyan government forgot them and has never, given them land, yet this is the same land they fought for in the forest. Sharing land grievances with Mau Mau and political oppression, gave Mungiki popularity and legitimacy among the landless and poor peasant Kikuyus in central Kenya. Moreover, they had a dreadlocks hairstyle like the Mau Mau fighters.

In terms of religion, Mungiki advocated for a return to the traditional Kikuyu way of life (Mwangi, 2015; Wamue, 2001). The group prayed facing Mount Kenya as the Kikuyus did traditionally (Wamue, 2001; Mwangi, 2010). The aspect of Mungiki practicing the traditional Kikuyu way of worship was also reflected in Mau Mau in Colonial Kenya (see Kui, 2019). Perhaps this is because the two groups were majorly constituted by the Kikuyu ethnic group and shared the same grievances.

Wangui an ex-fighter in Mungiki explained that Mungiki used violence, criminality, and intimidation to achieve its goals and grievances (Wangui, KII, 12/01/2021). Her remarks agree with Mwangi (2015), Land Info (2010), and Andersen (2003) who identify violence and criminality as approaches used by Mungiki to achieve their goals. As a return to the traditional Kikuyu way of life, Mungiki incorporated aspects of traditional Kikuyu rites in their way of operation. For example, the group advocated for compulsory female circumcision. This rule in Mungiki has been used to classify women as victims of Mungiki because Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is illegal in Kenya (see Ossome, 2018). With the women's decade's enlightenment, since the 1980s, FGM is illegal in Kenya and is regarded as gender-based violence against women (Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2011). Nonetheless,

this has not stopped women fighters in Mungiki. Interviews with these revealed that they were not forced to undergo the cut. They did it voluntarily. Also, even though Mungiki offered an ultimatum for women in central Kenya to undergo the cut, there is no evidence that they fulfilled this ultimatum.

As time elapsed, Mungiki evolved into a political militia that incorporated even the elite in society. Sheila a woman fighter in the group explained Mungiki politicians hired the group to unleash violence on political opponents (Sheila, KII, 16/11/2020). Her remarks are echoed by Kegoro (2009) and Waki report (2008). These studies reveal that Mungiki unleashed violence in Kenya's 2007/2008 post-election violence. Mungiki is among the 18 groups banned in Kenya in 2002 and in 2010 under the Prevention of Organized Crime Act 2010 as will be captured in chapter four.

4.5   Jeshi La Embakasi 1987-1989

Another group that grew out of political repression in the country is *Jeshi la* Embakasi. The group began as a political Militia by former Embakasi member of Parliament (MP) Mr. David Mwenje (Nganu, 2019). The group did not have a structured organization but attracted followers from varied areas of Embakasi, Nairobi (Mwangangi, 2018) The major role of the group was to offer political protection to their godfather-David Mwenje, who was also part of the opposition politicians at the time in Kenya. The members disrupted the political rallies of his opponents and mobilized Masses to cheer the MP in his political rallies in the constituency (Simiyu, KII 15/11/2020). They also offered him protection against the state-sponsored KANU youth wingers, which always disrupted the opposition's political rallies. The groups' members were always paid around 250 Kenyan shillings for the services they provided (Katumanga, 2005). In this way, they were a group for political hire. However, an Interview with Shiko Bomba a woman fighter in the group revealed that the group also operated on economic hire (Shiko, KII,11/09/2020). This explains why in the following sections of this chapter most of the fighters in the group cited economic reasons as their motive for joining the group.

Nganu (2019) explaining the evolution in the group explains that as time elapsed, Jeshi, la Embakasi changed into an illicit unit for lease by the highest dealer. The founder of Jeshi la Embakasi had political motives, and the group members had economic motives. This reveals the interaction between political and economic aspects of violence. Politics focuses on leadership while economics involves breadwinning. These two belong to the public sphere

which is largely associated with men. Most of the group members at its foundation were poor male youths in Embakasi. Lahey, et.al (1999) contend that boys are best suited in violent groups due to masculinity traits that portray them as brave and courageous compared to their girls' colleagues who are regarded as emotive and fearful to carry out some tasks unless under the influence of drugs. Agreeing with this in line with the recruitment of women to violent groups Gärtner and McCarthy (2004) contend that women have fewer chances of recruitment into violent groups due to the gender stereotypes that depict them as weaklings, untrustworthy, and weaklings. However, the notion of masculinity in the group was challenged as the group evolved. The group attracted even women members as time elapsed and its scope of activities expanded. Nganu (2009) writing on the history of Jeshi la Embakasi asserts that its membership expanded to include young men and women from other locations in Nairobi, both the rich and the poor.

4.6   Women in oathing in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi

The section discusses the oathing processes and rites in Mungiki and *Jeshi la Embakasi* the place of women in these oaths. The roles of these fighters in oathing are examined and how these roles present women in these groups as fighters. The section reveals oathing gender breakers and equalizers in these groups. This revelation aligns with the primary approach to this study that focuses on the centrality of the fighter in war regardless of their gender.

4.6.1   Women oath takers challenging Mungiki's ideology of returning to traditional religion 1983-1989

The practice of oathing fighters was not limited to Mau Mau in the colonial period but was also reflected in violent groups in post-colonial Kenya. In *Mungiki,* the membership oath was sealed with baptism at a group leader's place of choice. For example, Wangui, an ex-member of the group, contends that she was initiated and baptized in Laikipia, where she took an oath (Wangui, KII, 16/11/2020). Sheila, a member, also confirms that her initiation to the group took place in Nanyuki, where she was baptized and took an oath (Sheila, KII, 16/06/2021). In this baptism, all recruits are immersed in the same water by the same leader. They were then brought out to believe that they have been washed of westernization and that they would be praying to *Ngai,* the traditional Kikuyu god, and belong to the Mungiki society. The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2007) reports that once initiated into the group, Mungiki members swore an oath of secrecy (also see Africa Research Bulletin 1-31 May 2007 and Reuters, 2007).

A close examination of the Mungiki oath citation reveals that it is closely linked with the Mau Mau *Mbatun*i oath. The oath reads.

> "From today I have joined the Mungiki movement. And if I come out of Mungiki, I have agreed to die…If I am given any property [like a gun, or money] by a member, I will keep it and I will not tell anybody; and if I tell anybody, I will accept to die" (Land Info, 2010, 8-9).

Kamanda, a fighter in the group noted that this similarity is because Mungiki is children of Mau Mau (Kamanda, KII, 16/11/2020). Children in this sense imply that they are fighting for land and economic liberation just as Mau Mau did. Land Info (2010) asserts that even during their oathing the recruits are told.

> "This is a holy place, and you are the children of Mau Mau, *matigari ma njirungi"* (Land Info, 2010. 8).

 An interview with Sheila a member of *Mungiki r*evealed that raw goat blood, meat, and banana leaves are part of the oathing materials used in Mungiki (Sheila, KII, 16/11/2020). Her account agrees with Land Info (2010) which contends that the *Mungiki* covers their oathing room with fresh goat skin with dripping blood and fresh banana leaves. The report further shows that the new members eat a bit of uncooked meat called *mutura* and drink some raw goat blood as they chant the creed (Land Info, 2010). Reporting on Mungiki oathing, the Safer Access (2007) notes that Mungiki's oathing comprises cleansing with a concoction of goat blood, urine, and tripe. Also, Wangui an ex-fighter in the group, explained that *Mungik*i fighters take an oath called *Mbitika* when preparing for combat (Wangui, KII, 26/06/2020). Other oaths include Horioho(repentance) and exodus-the continuous oath signifying the group is nearing victory (Kamanda, KII, 16/11/2020).

Unlike in Mau Mau where even women would administer oaths, in Mungiki oathing is a reserve for specific men leaders. This is because the group claim to be based on the traditional Kikuyu way of life (see All Africa News, May 2007; land Info, 2010). Traditionally, among the Kikuyu, the women never swore an oath unless under very extreme conditions leave alone administering the oath. However, the fact that women and men in Mungiki take the same oaths contradicts their ideology on returning to the Kikuyu traditional culture and lifestyle. If in the traditional Kikuyu society, women and men never shared an oath this implies that the oathing in the violent groups had nothing to do with the gender in traditional Kikuyu society but binding their members together and ensuring that their secrets are safe. Also, the subordination of

women in oath-taking in Mungiki would be because the initial founders of the group were all male.

4.6.2 Oathing taking and administration as an equalizer for men and women fighters in Jeshi la Embakasi 1987-1989

In Jeshi la Embakasi oathing was compulsory for all new and old group members regardless of gender, age, and social class. All fighters took the same oath and drank from the same cup. Shiko a woman fighter in Jeshi la Embakasi explained that this signified unity, bond, and promise to never betray the group even at the point of death (Shiko, KII, 16/11/2020). There were no different oaths for men and women in Jeshi La Embakasi and all fighters could administer oaths. In an interview with Shiko Bomba, she explained that she and the other group members took an oath that involved bloodshed (Shiko, KII, 16/11/2020). In this oath, they swore never to betray each other, even if it meant dying. All group members drank the blood of a sheep from the same container as a sign of brotherhood and sisterhood (Shiko, KII, 16/11/2020). Shiko was taken through an oathing process by a woman. However, due to the secrecy she swore, she was not ready to explain the finer details about the oath because she is still a member of the group.

Apart from initiation oaths, some oaths were randomly taken by members as the situation presents itself. For example, Shiko explained that all fighters going for an attack must take an oath before leaving. In this oath, they spike their hand with a needle and lick the blood from each other (Shiko, KII, 16/11/2020). They promise to protect each other just in case of an ambush and not betray each other, even if it means death.

It is worth noting that breaking the oath in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi groups is met with severe punishment which includes death. In Mungiki, Kamanda, a fighter explained that all betrayers must be met by death (Kamanda, KII, 16/11/2020). He explained that most people branded as forcefully recruited and killed because they refused membership are members who want to leave the group after taking oaths and learning the secrets of the group (Kamanda, KII, 16/11/2020). In Jeshi la Embakasi, Shiko Bomba, a woman fighter, explained that they would look for and kill a member who left. This is because they cannot trust an outsider with their information and ways of operation (Shiko Bomba, KII, 11/9/2020). Densley (2012) in his signaling theory of crime contends that trust is a central aspect of violent groups. Recruitment to these groups is a trust-seeking process that identifies and tests the hard and costly to fake

signals (Densley, 2012). Accordingly, any member who shows disloyalty to the group after recruitment must be eliminated to avoid spreading the group's secrets to state security agencies.

Nobody is spared in this punishment regardless of age or gender. For example, since she left Mungiki in 2012, Wangui had never had peace. She lives a very secret life because she is sure that the day the Mungiki members in her platoon would find her, she will die a brutal death (Wangui, KII, 26/06/2021). Wangui explained that she went to her rural area and stayed for five years before returning to the city. In the city, she is in constant fear. She is unsure if the group's old members have forgotten about her as they can trace her and kill her for betrayal.

4.7   Weapons in the New Era of Violence 1982-1989

As shown in the last chapter Mau Mau's weapon was mainly the catapult and some homemade guns. These were largely associated with masculinity as they required a lot of energy and courage to use. In independent Kenya, Mungiki, and Jeshi la Embakasi used small arms and light weapons such as handguns, Machetes, and knives (Mwangi, 2011; Land Info, 2010). The use of the catapult was no longer in place despite the idea that even in a group like Mungiki, there were elements of Mau Mau values and grievances. The absence of the catapult is due to the developments in the country, trends in global technology and the availability of guns from other countries, and state corrupt police officers. Additionally, the war fronts had changed from the forest to open spaces, and strategies such as car hijacking, disruption of political rallies, and theft with violence emerged.

Wangui, an ex-member, noted that in Mungiki, she had to learn how to use a gun. Her brother trained her; hence she did not pay as the other fighters did (Wangui, KII, 16/11/2020). She also had to look for a knife and a machete by herself (Wangui, KII, 16/11/2020). The older and experienced members of the group taught new recruits how to use and store the gun. For example, Sheila, a member of Mungiki, notes that she was trained using a gun by an old lady (*cucu*) in the group (Sheila, KII, 12/01/2021). Sheila claims that this training only took two days in Ngong forest. Shiko Bomba, a fighter in Jeshi la Embakasi, explained that:

> "Nobody gave you a gun. You had to look for one by yourself".
> (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020).

These guns were either bought from well-known dealers or stolen from police officers (see Nairobi News, 2018; Bwana & Kipkemoi, 2020). Lonely police officers fall victim to these robberies to get guns (see Nairobi News, 2018; Muraya, 2017). For example, Shiko had to

befriend a police officer, drug him, and steal a gun from him to possess one (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020). Her account agrees with Muraya, (2017) who contends that violet groups in Nairobi target police officers to restock their weapons. Some fighters buy guns from Eastleigh's black market. Shiko explained that it is a risky step to get a gun, but one has no option because they need handguns as a group in their attacks and missions (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020).

The aspect of attacking police officers to get guns remained from the 1950s. However, unlike in colonial Kenya where the victims of these attacks were colonial *askaris* and bodyguards, in post-independent Kenya African police officers were targets. Again, the role of women in these deals was evident- befriending police officers to lure them for guns.

4.8   Perceptions of Women fighters in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi

Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi were generally male-dominated groups and were started by men. For instance, Jeshi la Embakasi was started by former Embakasi member of parliament Hon. Mwenje (Nganu, 2019). His major aim was to use the young men to intimidate his political opponents (Nganu, 2019). Mungiki was started by six male students led by a 15-year-old boy called Ndura Waruinge, the grandson of general Waruinge, a Mau Mau veteran (Land info, 2010). Though both Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi were founded by men, they were very receptive to women as fighters. For example, in an interview with the researcher in Kibra in Nairobi, Atieno (pseudonym) confessed to being a member of Jeshi la Embakasi (Atieno, KII, 11/09/2020). In Mungiki, Wangui and Sheila Mathira (not their real names) confirmed their membership in the group.

Despite being open to women membership, Mungiki had requirements and their definition of a true woman fighter as per their beliefs. According to the group, an ideal woman follower and supporter of Mungiki had to undergo circumcision. In an interview with Wangui, she explained that circumcision was one of the requirements for Mungiki women and her entry into the group was easier because she was already circumcised (Wangui, KII, 21/01/2021). Sheila, another fighter in Mungiki also confessed to having undergone the cut because of her husband who is a Mungiki member. She explained;

> "He (the husband) asked me if I would get circumcised to be a real woman and marry him. I never wanted to lose this one again. I accepted (Sheila, KII, 6/11/ 2020).

This was Sheila's second time meeting a Mungiki man who wanted her. The circumcision accounts of these two fighters agree with Wamue, (2001) and Auchter (2017) who contend that Mungiki carries out forceful circumcision on their women members. However, the fighters interviewed presented the circumcision act with positivity and a sense of pride and identity. Within Mungiki, circumcision is seen as a noble way of defining women (Andersen, 2003). This is attached to the traditional Kikuyu culture where women circumcision marked a transition from childhood to womanhood and readiness for marriage (Kenyatta, 1978).

Kamau (2009) contends that the acts of circumcision of women in Mungiki were not limited to women fighters within Mungiki but also to non-members. The same views are echoed by diverse sources in Kenya which point out to Mungiki giving ultimatums to women within its localities to undergo circumcision. For instance, the East African Standard, May 2002 reported that the sect members gave women between 13 and 65 years in parts of Kikuyu and Kiambaa divisions until July 7, 2002, to undergo FGM according to Kikuyu customs. The newspaper reported that if they failed, Mungiki would perform it by force. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that this ultimatum was enforced. Also, the International Crisis Group established in February 2008, that coercing, or motivating, women into circumcision is Mungiki's priority agenda (International Crisis Group, 2008). However, Wamue (1999) in her report about Mungiki seven years earlier noted that initially, the group denied all allegations that its members participate in involuntary female circumcision.

Whether women in Mungiki were forcefully or voluntarily circumcised, the very act of circumcision reveals how Mungiki regards them. It points out the men's authority over women and controls over their reproductive power. Additionally, it reveals that these fighters are considered wholly in the group if only they have been mutilated.

4.9   Typologies of Women Fighters in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi

4.9.1   Numbers

In post-independent Kenya, male dominance was revealed in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi. The fighters interviewed noted that women constituted a smaller percentage of fighters in these groups when compared to their men counterparts. Nevertheless, the findings revealed that no single unit within these groups constitutes men alone. In Mungiki, women constitute 4-5 members in a group of ten members. This agrees with the Australian Government Refugee

Review Tribunal (2012) which reports that women make up 20-25% of the total members in Mungiki. In Jeshi la Embakasi, the findings showed that women constitute 3-4 out of 10-12 members in a unit.

The figures above from the oral interviews agree with other sources on women's proportionality in violent groups. For instance, according to Land Info (2010), Mungiki members are about 4 million in Kenya, and out of this 400, 000 are women with men constituting 80 % of the population. These views are echoed by Wamue (2001) who contends that 400,000 members of Mungiki are women. The IRB (2007) also points out that 20% of Mungiki members are women. While the oral sources indicated the proportion of women fighters in these groups, other sources have not been able to come up with the most recent exact figures of not only women fighters in these groups but also all members. For instance, it is worth noting that there is a period difference between when Wamue (2001) did her research and when Land Info (2010) compiled their report. Nevertheless, the two agreed on these figures showing no change in the numbers after one decade. Also, in his research Aguka (2018) using a sample of 100 Mungiki members, the researcher established that Mungiki women constituted 26% of the total population. This stagnancy in the number of figures would be attributed to the secretive nature of the group thus most scholars tend to rely on already available figures.

As in Mau Mau in the colonial period, there are challenges in getting the exact number of women fighters in Jeshi la Embakasi and Mungiki. This was attributed to the unique fighting styles. It was revealed that women largely do their fighting secretly. Interviews by Ebru TV reporter in her series of *widowed by crime* also show that women fighters in these groups present themselves as lovers of male fighters as opposed to fighters in the group. The challenge is, further, alleviated by the conflict on what it means to be a fighter or what fighting entails within and outside the group. Inside the groups, the male fighters regard these women fighters as colleagues and sometimes supporters while outside the group these women are regarded as lovers, daughters, and associates of male fighters if not forced actors in the groups.

4.9.2 Age

Fighters in Mungiki range from the youths to the old. For example, Sheila and Wangui joined Mungiki at 25 and 22 years old respectively (Wangui, KII, 12/10/2021; Sheila KII, 16/11/2020). Evidence of old women in the group is revealed by Sheila who noted that;

> "Women, especially older members, advise those who sit in leadership positions…. I learned a lot from one *cucu* (grandmother) about my role in the group." (Sheila KII, 16/11/2020).

The fact that she describes this old lady as a grandmother reveals that she might have been above 45 years old. This age diversity in Mungiki women fighters is reflected in research on Mungiki welfare. The report shows that the age of the Mungiki population lies between 15-29 years old (KEN 34.510, 2009). Land Info (2010) and Aguka (2018) expound that most Mungiki members are aged between 18 to 40 years with a few ranging between 40-60 years. These sources are not gender specific in the age bracket. However, the bracket they provide reflects the ages of the women fighters interviewed.

4.9.3 Social Class, Education and Background: The Woman Decade' Influence

The women's decade in Kenya was marked by an awareness of the significance of women's education. Education was seen as among the keyways to empowering them and promoting equality, thus ending gender-based discrimination against them (Nzomo, 1989). Unlike during the Mau Mu war, this period was marked by an increase in the number of women with education in Kenya.

Fighters in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi came from diverse social classes and education levels. Many of these had at least completed primary school. The following are narratives about some of these women.

> *Wangui, a Mungiki ex-member, studied up to form two and dropped out of school due to poverty. She explained that she was born in 1972 in Kangema, Murang'a County, and due to the poverty in the family, in 1986, she left for Nairobi after class 8 to live with her uncle and joined Pangani girls. However, she dropped out of form two due to a lack of school fees and support from home (Wangui, KII, 16/11/2020). She would later join Mungiki with that level of education.*

Wangui's story is not different from Shiko Bomba's (not her real name), a member of Jeshi la Embakasi. Her story;

Shiko was born in 1992 in Siaya County. Her father worked as a postman in Nairobi, and her mother was a housewife. They were four girls and three boys. Her father had two more women, and her mother was the first one. It was a polygamous family. Their father was irresponsible and absent many of their time. He beat her mother for no good reason. They attended school amid poverty and trouble because their father never minded them something she never understood why. She completed her secondary school education but would not make it to university or college. Shiko explained that she completed her primary school studies scored 267 marks and joined secondary school. She scored a C (plain) but would not join campus due to financial constraints.

These fighters' family backgrounds indicate that while violent groups have members from diverse social classes, in this epoch, most women were from the lower class mostly, the unemployed, the urban poor, and slum dwellers. For example, Sheila, a Mungiki fighter, was born in Karatina, Nyeri County, in a middle-class family. Her father was an ex-police, and her mother *mitumba* (second-hand cloth) trader in Nairobi (Sheila, KII, 16/11/2020). Her discussion of family background revealed a family that was struggling to meet their needs. For example, after completing her secondary school examination, she began selling vegetables in the Karatina market because she had no means of meeting her daily needs (Sheila, KII, 16/11/2020).

On her part, Wangui, an ex-fighter in Mungiki, explained that;

They (her family) lived in a reserve in Murang'a. Her father and mother were peasant farmers. Her father always told them that their land was alienated during the colonial period in Kinangop, and their grandfather was forced into a reserve in Murang'a (Wangui, KII, 16/11/2020).

For Shiko Bomba, a fighter in Jeshi La Embakasi, her father worked as a postman, and her mother was a housewife. However, the family was polygamous, and the father was violent and never provided for them (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020). Shiko's father would be retrenched later, throwing the entire family into abject poverty.

When they moved to the city, all these would only afford to stay in slum areas due to the inability to afford house rents in the city's better ends. It is worth noting that many of the slum

dwellers in Kenya are those who live below one dollar a day, people struggling to meet their daily bread. An interview with Shiko Bomba revealed that life at home was not easy without her parents. Her city account is as follows;

> *Her aunt offered to bring her to Nairobi, promising to take her to school and find a job. However, once in the city, the aunt never took her to school and never found her job Shiko became the housemaid of the aunt, and life was not easy; mistreatment, abused, and denied. Life in her aunt's house forced her out to the streets. She joined her friend at the Dandora dumpsite, where she collected valuables from the garbage. The pay per day depended on the kilograms one had collected. It is while working in the Dandora dumpsite that she was linked to Jeshi la Embakasi in Nairobi.*

Shiko's poverty and slum story is also reflected in other fighters. For example, Wangui lived in Kayole and kibra while Sheila lived in kibra. Also, her suffering in her aunt's place reflects class-based discrimination which Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi groups had as part of their grievances at their genesis.

There is a visible trend in the education levels of women fighters in the country over time. In Mau Mau, during the colonial period, the women fighter had between none to secondary level of formal education. This would be attributed to the idea that many Africans had resisted their children attending European missionary schools. Also, the girl-child education was less valued, especially in families that had resisted Christianity and stood firm to the Agikuyu traditional culture. In this culture, girls got married after initiation and their education was informal centering on their wifely and motherly roles in the family (Kenyatta,1978). However, Amadiume (2015) contends that in the colonial period, low levels of women 's formal education were due to the discriminative western education. The author contends that this education system neglected women. His ideas are supported by Oyěwùmí (1997) who notes that not like those parents never wanted their daughters to go to school. In colonial state, the employment system was masculine, thus parents were subsequently not very eager to educate their daughters. In this way, gender, religion, and colonial jobs intertwined to determine the level of education one acquired.

Examining fighters in post-independence Kenya, between 1964 and 1989, with those in colonial Kenya reveals that the fighters in this epoch were more educated although the majority came from the lower and middle class. In Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi, and Gaza fighters acquired at least a primary level of education. Those who left school were either due to lack of school fees or just because they joined the groups and got carried by its activities. The diversity in the education levels was due to the idea that in the middle of the 1980s, with the women's decade affirmative education took root in Kenya and the education of girls was highly emphasized (Sifuna, 2006). This attracted more ladies to schools than in the previous epoch. Additionally, the new state focused on education as a way of developing the nation, thus many parents took their children to school (Eshiwani, 1990).

Besides, the idea that many of the fighters came from the middle and lower classes was due to the strong capitalism that the independent government inherited from the colonial masters. With this capitalism, social classes emerged with the middle class and lower class being oppressed by the elite (majorly, the top political leaders of the time). In this way, the two lower classes had one common enemy that is the elite, who was the government of the day. This was not the same situation in colonial Kenya, where both the rich and poor ganged against the colonial master for political independence.

4.10 Women in the Fight against KANU's Political and Economic Oppression

The diversity in fighters' ages, level of education, and social class raise a concern about what brought them together into fighting. Fighters in Jeshi la Embakasi and Mungiki had liberation and economic agenda. Mungiki began because of government oppression. By the late 1980s, most members were people whose land had been alienated during the colonial period and never compensated after independence (Anderson, 2002; Kagwanja, 2003; Wamue, 2001). Also, they had lost their property in the Rift valley due to violence unleashed by the KANU Youth wingers (Aguka, 2012; Anderson, 2002; Kagwanja, 2003). In this way, most of the people who joined the group at first had liberation goals. They were against government oppression and westernization (Land Info, 2010).

For example, Wangui joined the group in the 1990s. She explained, that at this time, the KANU repression had grown, and Mungiki had already begun. Her account of KANU repression agrees with Orvis (2001), Kamungi (2009), and Adar and Munyae (2001) who contend that the KANU regime under President Moi was brutal to the common citizenry and politicians in the

opposition. The regime was marked by the use of force, a single-party system, rigging of elections, and the use of KANU youth wingers to unleash violence against its opponents (Bosibori, 2017; Kamungi, 2009; Anderson, 2002).

Wangui's elder brother had joined the group unknown to her. In one of their conversations, the brother explained that he rejected government oppression and chose to return to their traditional life, fight for their lands, and have their peace and religion (Wangui, KII,16/11/ 2020). The call for a return to traditional life and way of living has been echoed by several scholars who have documented Mungiki in Kenya (see Oloo, 2010; Okoth and Olang, 2010; Wamue, 2001; Land Info, 2010; Kagwanja, 2003; Andersen, 2003). Wangui saw sense in what the brother explained. After all, their father had already told them they were poor because their land had been taken away and never returned after independence. The zeal with which the brother spoke inspired her, and she decided to join the group. Wangui's story reveals a fighter who joined the group with a liberation motif inspired by the brother and her living conditions in rural and urban areas.

Some join violent groups because of economic motivations. An interview with Kamanda, a Mungiki member, revealed that most of the group members, especially the youth, are in Mungiki because of money. He explained that:

> "We are doing this for money. See how the economy is taking us. Nobody cares about the lives of the common citizen. Those who have continued to have while the poor remain poor. You must do that which you think gives you money and the good life you want" (Kamanda, KII, 16/11/2020).

His remarks agree with Shiko Bomba and Sheila in Jeshi la Embakasi and Mungiki, respectively. Shiko Bomba explained that joining Jeshi la Embakasi was the best deal because it implied more money and a larger family (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020). Nganu (2019) echoes Shiko's remark on the role of money and belonging for the individuals joining Jeshi la Embakasi. Nevertheless, Sheila combined economic reasons with love and Mungiki ideology. She explained that:

> "He (husband) told me about Mungiki and its beliefs and mission. Yes, I was afraid at first, but again his zeal in explanation made me like the idea of turning to our cultural way of living and fighting political and economic oppression. Also, he was my husband, and I was not ready to lose him." (Sheila, KII, 16/11/2020).

From her remarks, it is apparent that Sheila joined Mungiki for two reasons. The husband convinced her about the Mungiki ideology which was to return to the traditional way of living. Secondly, this explanation was timely because Sheila was jobless, with no good education to accord her something better. The cost of living was also a burden, yet she could see corruption in the country, with the wealthy getting richer and the deprived getting poorer (Sheila, KII, 16/11/2020). Sheila believed that the government was primarily responsible for the desperate situations of ordinary citizens like her. The fact that Mungiki paused as fighting political and economic oppression made her tap into the ideology. Also, her husband was a member of Mungiki and was doing well in life which convinced her to join the group. She did not want to lose him.

An interview with Simiyu, a security analyst, revealed no single vigilante that emerged during this period was focused on political revolution alone in Kenya (Simiyu, KII, 13/12/2020). The political involvement and goals of these groups were tied to economic situations and gains. Most of these groups are military groups for politicians and are paid to do dirty jobs to meet the interest and political goals of their Godfathers. Such was the case with Jeshi la Embakasi whose godfather was Mwenje a former Member of Parliament for the Embakasi (Nganu, 2019, Opala & Haysom, 2020; Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2012). As they deliver to meet the political interest of the godfathers or hirers, the group members, in turn, get economic gains (Kenya National Assembly Official Record, 2002). Mwango, a police officer interviewed in Nairobi, explained that fighters in organized violent groups act purely on money ideology (Mwango, Kenya police, KII,16/09/2020). Her remarks agree with Atieno a fighter in Jeshi la Embakasi who contends that her entry into the group meant more money and a larger family (Atieno, KII, 1/09/2020). She also mentioned family in her reasons for joining the group. This then implies that she wanted a sense of belonging, especially after crushing with and running away from her aunt.

4.11   The Man Picture in Women's Entry to Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi

While most studies focus on why women join violent groups, how they join has not received much scholarly attention. As such, examining how women join these groups is key in understanding their plight in these groups right from recruitment to experiences. Like in Mau Mau in colonial Kenya, in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi, it was revealed that Men are the major gateways through which women enter these groups. Sheila, a Mungiki fighter, revealed that she was introduced to Mungiki by her husband. The zeal and passion with which the man

spoke about the group made her see sense in the group's ideology and decided to join (Sheila KII, 16/11/2020). For her joining was not hard because her husband was already a member. Sheila's story of being introduced into Mungiki by her husband is echoed in other studies about Mungiki. For example, Masinjila (2018) contends that Mungiki women are regarded as outsiders who need insiders (men) to introduce them to the group and guide them on what to do.

The inside-outside dichotomy of women in the group perhaps is borrowed from the traditional African gender aspects where women are never regarded to belong in their homes and when they marry, they became under the control of their husbands. Again, it points out the male dominance of the group. Mungiki was crafted by men, and this gave them an upper hand in terms of deciding membership and coordinating both the activities and the members of the group. Very little is documented about women in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi. When these women come into the limelight, they are attached to the male fighters or leaders. This is attributed to women entering into these groups through their male counterparts and their general regard as outsiders.

Some fighters joined these groups through friends. For example, Shiko Bomba's journey as a fighter began with an introduction to a small gang by a female friend. In an interview with her, she explained that the lady was in a group of six other members; four men and two women, who engaged in a street mugging and robbery for survival (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020). However, before long, they got introduced to Jeshi la Embakasi by another male friend who worked in the dumpsite. Shiko explained that she and the other six entered Jeshi la Embakasi as a group (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020).

The accounts of fighters in Kenya in this epoch and their entry into the violent groups as fighters reveal that each individual's entry into the groups depended on how the situation presented itself. There is no single formula or trigger that can be attributed to these fighters and how they entered the groups. The factors for participation in these groups and modes of entry as fighters are multifaceted and intertwined. It is also apparent that all these fighters had insiders who helped them join the groups. This implies that anticipating members must have a connection with an already existing member. Such connections are essential in ensuring aspects of trust and avoiding betrayal of the group (see Densley, 2012). The introduction by such close insiders also works to the group's advantage because the anticipating members will always tend

to trust the information conveyed by the insider about the group. This is the trust explained by Densley (2012) in his signaling theory of recruitment into violent groups

In violent and terror groups, recruitment is regarded as a trust affair between the recruiter and the recruited (Bosibori, 2017). Densely (2012) contends that the recruiter must seek a signal of trustworthiness in anticipating new members. Such explains why knowledge and introduction by the insider are essential. Violent groups in Kenya overcome these trust issues by relying on the already existing members to bring in new members to the groups. The groups also do screening of the new members relying on hard-to-fake signals (Densely, 2012; Bosibori, 2017). Such include tattoos for Jeshi la Embakasi, Dreadlocks, and FGM in Mungiki. The search for trustworthiness is also linked to the oathing of new and old members as discussed in the previous sections. Like their men counterparts, women fighters in these violent groups were introduced to their groups by insiders. These insiders include their husbands, friends, and close family members such as a brother, among others. In a way, the insider exploits the links with the anticipating members to convince them about the group's ideologies and way of operation.

These accounts indicate that these fighters entered violent groups voluntarily. However, other studies indicate that some groups like Mungiki use other means to recruit their members (see UN report June 7, 2007; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2007; Mutogi, 2017). Such include getting people who move into their religious meetings out of curiosity and getting inspired by the teaching. Also, the group has been reported to be forcefully recruiting people and forcing them to take the group's oath of loyalty (Land Info, 2010). However, an interview with Kamanda, a member of Mungiki, revealed that Mungiki does not work with a forcefully recruited member. He explained that not even women are forcefully recruited by their husbands. He remarked that:

> "Forcefully recruited people can betray the group. "Hawa *ni swara tu"*-meaning these are just betrayers (Kamanda, KII, 16/11/2020).

The insiders in this period are outstandingly men. Perhaps this explains why some reports and scholars contend that women are forced into violent groups by men. However, the gender composition of these groups (numbers and founders) can explain this. As already indicated above, men constituted a majority of the members in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi. Also, these groups were founded by men as patrons or Godfathers. It is easier for the founding members to trust each other as opposed to new entrants. Accordingly, senior men members in these groups stand out as the insiders through which the women enter the groups.

4.12 Women in Mungiki, and Jeshi la Embakasi's Leadership Structures

Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi are highly structured with organized leadership and their way of operation. An interview with Mwango, a female police officer, revealed that violent groups plan and restructure their violent activities and have a specific organization (Mwango, KII, 18/12/2020). An interview with Kamanda a Mungiki member revealed that Mungiki, while not highly centralized, has leaders in various units. Such units include the national coordination committee, the operational unit, the defense unit, the public relations unit, an administrative wing, and a coordination wing (Kamanda, KII, 16/11/ 2020). The operational unit includes the spiritual executors who create and enforce the cultural and spiritual mysticism that binds the group members to each other. They also carry out oaths, collect money and execute spiritual leader projects. His description of the group structure is echoed by Land Info (2010) which gives an account of Mungiki's hierarchical structure. The defense unit consists of combat fighters who organize violence in the country (Land Info, 2010). The field interviews revealed that due to the large membership in the group, the members are divided into units depending on their residential places. Each unit constitutes about 10-20 members, men, and women, with a leader within the area.

Gender disparity was revealed in the Mungiki leadership structures. An interview with Sheila, a woman fighter revealed that in the hierarchy, men lead, women follow then children. A leader is highly respected, authoritative, and above the rest of the members (Sheila, KII, 26/6/2021). Being a leader implies that one is highly courageous, meets all membership requirements, understands the group operations deeply, is quick and accurate in crafting ideas, very swift and ready to do anything for the group's success (Sheila, KII, 26/6/2021). Her description of the group's structure reflected the traditional Agikuyu authoritative chain in a family where men led the mothers and the children (see Kenyatta, 2015; Wamue, 2011; Abbott, 1997; Rasmussen, 2010). The similarity would be attributed to the fact that Mungiki calls for a return to the traditional Agikuyu way of living (see Wamue, 2001, Andersen, 2003; Mwangi, 2011; Land Info, 2010).

Sheila, further, noted that women leaders were primarily responsible for female members in the group (Sheila, KII, 26/6/2021). However, they sat in decision-making meetings and acted as a link between the women members and men leaders to convey information and decisions made. The field interviews revealed that women leaders received assignments from male leaders. However, at times, women could bring assignments on board, share them with men,

and then allocate them to chosen members. Kamanda, a male fighter in Mungiki, accepted the presence of women leaders in the group and noted that their ideas are also important in organizing the group operations (Kamanda, KII, 16/11/ 2020). Nevertheless, women leaders were few. The acceptance of women as leaders in Mungiki is also echoed by Rasmussen, (2010) who offers an illustration of the one-woman head and educator of new female recruits in Mungiki. Kenya–KEN39764 report (2020) asserts the presence of women in leadership roles and responsibilities in Mungiki. Nonetheless, an ex-fighter in Mungiki noted that most of the leaders had positions due to their power in mobilizing or associating with the men leaders (Wangui, KII, 16/11/2020).

In Jeshi la Embakasi, an interview with Shiko revealed that the group had about 60 members within Dohlhom, Nairobi. Nevertheless, she explained that there were leaders who coordinate the group activities within these units per locality (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020). These are key decision-makers in the group, and they constitute both men and women. Women leaders were the strictest and tough (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020). She explained that whenever they assigned one a task, he or she had to do it accordingly, or else they would face punishment. Shiko, further, explained that at least one or two women had to be present whenever they met with somebody who needs their services, especially men. Nevertheless, she explained that men dominated group leadership (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020). The dominance of men in leadership positions in Jeshi la Embakasi is documented by Nganu (2019) in her work, <u>Evolution, and Activities of Jeshi La Embakasi Movement in Kenya.</u> Nevertheless, the author points out to women fighters in the group are not easily cowed or silenced. Such are traits associated with leadership.

As regards, explaining the dominance of men in leadership positions in these groups, Wangui an ex-fighter noted that leadership, even Kenya's political sphere, was primarily associated with men. Her views are echoed by several existing studies on gender, politics, and leadership in Kenya. These studies reveal men's dominance in major leadership positions and the existence of barriers that impede women's entry into these positions in large numbers (see Opoku, Anyango, and Alupo, 2018; Ochwada,1997; Stamp, 1991; Abuya, 2020; Nzomo, 1989).

It is worth noting that violent groups are an extension of the larger society and often carry those beliefs that work to their advantage and discard those they disagree with. Nonetheless, the fact that men dominate these violent groups' leadership does not imply that women are not

significant in the groups. An interview with Kamanda, a Mungiki member, indicates that women were central to these groups' operations (Kamanda, KII, 16/11/2020i). They are both women combat and non-combat fighters, and all their roles contributed to the group's operations and success. This is elaborately discussed in the next section.

4.13 Women in the Changing War Fronts and Fighting Strategies

In this section, the study discusses the changing war fronts that marked the period between 1964 and 1989. The new war fronts are revealed to inform the fighting strategies that the fighters in this period employ. This is specifically with combat fighters.

4.13.1 Combat fighters: From freedom fighters to armed Robbers, killers, and kidnappers

Women combat fighters were not limited to the Mau Mau war of independence. Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi in postcolonial Kenya saw women fighters who participated in direct combat. However, their combat fighting strategies were somewhat diverse from Mau Mau. In this epoch, the combat fighters involved those who participated in the robbery, killing, car hijacking, and kidnappings targeting both pro-government individuals and sometimes innocent Kenyan citizens going about their normal business. This diversity in the two epochs is informed by diversity in the motivations of these groups. The combination of economic gains with political oppression saw Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi engage in criminality against even the innocent non-combat citizens to get money.

For example, Wangui, an ex-fighter in Mungiki explained that she participated in armed robbery (Wangui, KII, 12/01/2021). Also, Sheila, a fighter in Mungiki remarked that combat fighting is something she does passionately and without regret. Their main weapons were machetes and short guns. She remarked that.

> "Yes, we threaten and kill targets. It is good and beneficial to us. (Sheila, KII, 16/11/2020).

Her statement revealed that Sheila has participated in killing targets something which contradicts the idea of women as intrinsically peaceful and harmless. There are a lot of secondary sources giving evidence of Mungiki's involvement in the killing, armed robbery, kidnap, and political attacks (see Safer Access, July 2007; Andersen 2003; Waki Report, 2008; Okoth & Olang; 2010; British Broadcasting Corporation, 22 May 2007; Africa Research Bulletin, 30 June 2007). However, none of this literature mentions women-armed fighters in

the group. The only available evidence of women as armed fighters in Mungiki in this thesis is the personal accounts of the fighters and security officers whom the researcher interacted with in the field. Such gaps in literature would be linked to the fact that Mungiki was widely reported as oppressing women by forcing them to undergo circumcision (see Mwangi, 2011; Wamue, 2001: Land Info, 2010). In this way, it was presumed that the ladies cannot partake in Mungiki's armed activities as they were regarded as victims of its violence. Also perhaps, this erroneous view would be attributed to the enigmatic operation of Mungiki and its brutality towards non-members, especially when it began hence difficulties in accessing all its information.

Sometimes when they were not hired for attacks, the groups would resort to robbery to get money for self-sustenance. Shiko, a fighter in Jeshi la Embakasi, explained that they have often killed the people who became adamant in times of robbery or those who noticed them. These are several people she cannot remember (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020). However, in her statement, she seems not to take individual responsibility for these armed robberies and killings. She brings a narrative of "we", an indicator that they acted as a group. This is the same narrative reflected in Mungiki by Sheila. The "we" reference shows women armed fighters who are not ready to paint a picture of killers to the public. Their actions remain concealed in the group action, and thus a feeling of less guilty. Nonetheless, while documenting Jeshi la Embakasi, Nganu (2019) asserts that women engaged directly in armed robberies to an extent of killing. A close look at the author's sources of information on this matter shows police officers giving these accounts (see Nganu, 2019). This agrees with the study findings that women direct combatants in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi are intentionally concealed by the groups for their secrecy advantage. Revealing widely that these fighters kill is detrimental in two ways. First, it challenges the masculinity with which the groups were built, and second, exposes their strategies, to the security agencies.

Vulnerability stereotypes about women were exploited by combat fighters. The gender stereotypes portray them as vulnerable and weak. Even Kenya society classifies women, especially pregnant ones among the vulnerable categories. For example, in Mungiki, Wangui explained that fighters could parade as pregnant at night to trap lonely motorists for hijacking and kidnapping (Wangui, KII, 16/11/2020). The same view was shared by Mwango, a police officer who contends that the fighters parade as vulnerable individuals to kidnap, hijack cars,

transport weapons, and even organize attacks and robbery of guns and uniforms from police officers (Mwango, KII, 28/12/2020). She gave an example where she explained that.

> *Some years back, women fighters in a violent group called the strikers could parade as business ladies going to the market very early in the morning along the Nairobi-Nakuru superhighway. These women would stop matatus heading to Nakuru or Nairobi. Unsuspecting motorists could stop only for the entire vehicle, and its occupants to be attacked and robbed of their valuables. It took a long before these attackers could be known. (Mwango, KII, 28/12/2020).*

4.14 Non-combat Fighters: Spies, Recruiters, and Funders

Among the most assumed fighters are the non-combat actors. These are mostly involved in invisible but very significant roles in the war. This section discusses how women put together their bodies, statuses, and gender stereotypes to effectively perform these roles.

4.14.1 Spying as a Fighting Strategy and the Sexuality Attached unto it

Apart from the combat fighters discussed above, Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi had non-combat fighters. These were mainly spies. Wangui, an ex-member fighter in Mungiki explained that in Mungiki young women were good at soliciting information used in attacks by the group (Wangui, 12/01/2021). The spies mostly paraded as *mama fua* (sic. mobile laundry service providers), housemaids, and vulnerable street families (Wangui, 12/01/2021). Once they studied the targeted area, they would convey the information to the group leaders. These leaders then hatched the plan for an attack. Kihato (2015) echoes the idea of women spies in Mungiki. The author notes that during election violence in Kenya, they identified the enemy's house which would then be looted and burned in the ethnic conflicts, especially in Kibra

Masinjila (2015) contends that Mungiki women utilized sexual relations to establish if the "enemy" men have gone through the circumcision rite of passage. The author, more so, asserts that sex workers linked to Mungiki were key at spying on unsuspecting targets and notifying the group's leaders of the strategies of the identified rivals and seducing the men particularly targeted for assassinations to murder areas or attack areas (Masinjila, 2015). Shiko Bomba, a fighter in Jeshi la Embakasi also asserted Wangui's views and noted that to carry out their spy

work well, women paraded as lovers to security men, bar attendants, and vulnerable individuals who needed help (Shiko, KII, 1/09/2021).

4.14.2 Recruitment and Transportation of weapons: Role of Motherhood and Women's Privacy Rights

Recruitment as a form of fighting was also reported in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi. In Mungiki, Sheila admitted that she had recruited several of her friends to the group (Sheila, KII, 16/11/2020). These fighters were also revealed as key in carrying group weapons. For example, an interview with Shiko, a fighter in Jeshi la Embakasi revealed how she uses her panties and her puffy hair to transport guns to the required points (Shiko, KII,11/09/ 2020).

She also noted that together with her fellow fighters, exploit the privacy tool to avoid being detected (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020). This explains why female fighters the best at transporting weapons is to targeted destinations. With few female state security officers in Kenya, men officers mainly carry out frisking at security checkpoints. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) stipulates that women should constitute 30 percent of the security personnel. However, they still constitute a small percentage of this population, hence leaving much of the security work in the hands of the male officers (see Bosibori, 2022). In a country where men are reported to abuse women sexually, any serious frisking of women by male officers attracts attention and privacy calls from human rights and women activists. In this way, their protection by activists conceals their real roles in these groups. This is because it is hard for security officers to classify them as fighters and non-fighters with limited security checks.

The fieldwork interviews also revealed that breastfeeding mothers carry weapons easily between the clothes holding and covering their babies (Sheila, KII, 16/11/2020). This is possible because it is not easy to suspect that a child can conceal the weapons carried. Shiko, a fighter in Jeshi la Embakasi, noted that just like pregnant women, mothers with small babies are also respected and given special treatment almost at every point in the country (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020). Whenever they approach even the police, the focus is on motherhood and the child instead of checking them to see if they have any illegal weapons (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020). In this way, they easily avoid thorough checks in an effort also to avoid exposing the child to the public. Kamanda, a fighter in Mungiki, noted that some breastfeeding mothers used their children as bait for their targeted victims (Kamanda, KII, 16/11/2020). He explained that such mothers paraded at night on roads as if their children were sick and needed transport means to the hospital. The desperate state attracts the attention and sympathy of motorists who end up

being hijacked (Kamanda, KII, 216/11/020). According to him, breastfeeding mothers were the best in attracting victims of car highjack and kidnap in Mungiki.

4.14.3 Generation of Group Funds

Violent groups needed finances to buy weapons, transport weapons, collect information, "buy" their access to targeted areas through bribing, and rent houses from where they plan attacks among other needs. All these require a steady and stable financial flow. Sources of these finances include payment from hirers, robbery, and income from their business ventures.

Findings from this study revealed that women played a key role in the generation of the funds used in servicing the group's needs. For example, in Mungiki, they oversaw the collection of funds in matatu termini and were caretakers in the Mungiki rental houses (Wangui, KII, 16/11/2020). Some operated *boda boda* businesses. Also, Shiko, noted that with the *boda boda* business, it became easy for them to operate and run away. Some of the members owned motorbikes used both for business and for robbery as the situation presents itself (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020). Nganu (2019) when documenting Jeshi la Embakasi concurs with these views and notes that women in Jeshi la Embakasi operate *boda boda* as a way of generating funds for the group and as an easy way of escaping attack sites. It also revealed that these fighters partook in the disruption of political rallies as hired by politicians. Sheila a fighter in Mungiki explained that even politicians funded the groups and hired them during the electioneering period to unleash violence against opponents (Sheila, KII, 16/11/2020).

Additionally, food supply as a form of fighting was not witnessed in this epoch as it was previously witnessed in Mau Mau. This is because, in this period, the war front had changed. Fighters in this era focused on political rallies disruption, kidnappings, robbery with violence, and car hijacking. The guerrilla warfare was no longer there as it was during the Mau Mau war. Each fighter lived in their own built or rented houses and returned home after fighting. As such, the combat fighters were not confined to one same camp where clothing, food, and medicine would be an issue. They used proceeds from their operations to sustain themselves.

4.15 Women in Work Versus Sexual and Marriage Relationships in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi

As indicated in the preceding section, sometimes women fighters befriended men security officers or targets to get information. This involved having sexual affairs with them to conceal their motives in the relationship. Additionally, it was established that sometimes fighters marry

each other. These two aspects promote the victim and coerced membership narrative of women in violence and put these fighters at the periphery. Which relationship took precedence over the other? Though the Mungiki group operated on strict observance of conservative traditional Agikuyu culture, fieldwork interviews revealed women members partaking in what (on the surface) seemed immoral. Such involved cases where these fighters enticed the adversary erotically and even had intercourse with them as a weapon for disarming them or winning their trust so that they may spy on them. Masinjila (2015) notes that such accounts reveal irony when Mungiki punished women members for voluntarily associating with outsider males but compensated them for doing the same sexual act as a service to the group.

4.16 Experiences of Women Fighters in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi

Fighters in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi had their share of experiences, due to their membership in these groups. These experiences involved life-threatening situations and gender-based violence. Some were killed, while others received rape and sexual brutality at the hands of the police officers. These experiences are not different from what their male counterparts underwent. However, when the rape and killing experiences come to the limelight, aspects of their human rights violation overshadow the reality that they were fighters. Ideally, their experiences (rape, brutal arrest, and killings) consist of the things fought against by the human rights organization in the country and other activism groups. These are some of the grievances that activists for women's empowerment had in their rallies, campaigns, and educational tours in the 1980s (see Nzomo, 1989). A deputy county commissioner interviewed noted that when operations and arrests are made, the public is quick to side with the fighters and point fighters to the government for brutality, extrajudicial killings, and profiling some categories of youth and religious groups (Deputy County Commissioner, KII,18/10/ 2020). This is because these experiences come out as violations of human rights by the government.

For example, Virginia Nyakio, a Mungiki fighter, and wife to the Mungiki leader was executed by police officers in an operation against Mungiki in the Nairobi area (Masinjila, 2015). In an interview with the researcher Kamanda a fighter in Mungiki agreed that Nyakio was not only a wife to Maina the Mungiki leader by then but also a fighter in the group who controlled most of the group's finances (Kamanda, KII, 16/11/2020). Wangui, an ex-member of the group also asserted that Virginia was a fighter in Mungiki (Wangui, KII, 12/01/2021). However, in public, her murder came out portraying that she was innocently killed. For example, Odongo, (2017) reports that the lady was killed to conceal evidence of the killers of her driver. This portrayed

her not as a fighter but as a victim of violence- being in the wrong place with the wrong person (her driver). Reporting on the same case, Okoth (2013) gives an account that shows an innocent mother who was killed leaving helpless children behind. The reporter further mentions police brutality in her killing. Moreover, the husband had gone to court to seek for justice for her wife but cited blocks from government authorities (Okoth, 2013).

Those who have not been killed live in fear and secrecy. Wangui, an ex-fighter in Mungiki had to go back to her village for several years before finding her way back to the city again. She feared that her fellow fighters would trace her and kill her (Wangui, KII, 16/11/2020). Her story is echoed by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2013) which reports that in Mungiki if a member decides to cut ties with the group, this is taken as betrayal and leads to assassination. Aguka (2018) also asserts that Mungiki kills its deserters with the fear that they may leak their secrets to government security agents.

4.17 Conclusion

This chapter sought to examine the Plight of women in violent groups in Kenya between 1964 and 1989. The fieldwork findings revealed that this period was marked by political authoritarianism in Kenya where the state used sponsored youth to unleash violence against political opponents. Mungiki and Jeshi La Embakasi emerged in response to this political and economic oppression. Again, it was established that the period coincided with the Women's decade. This was marked by massive enlightenment on the centrality of women's empowerment in equality, development, and peace. While this was the case, the chapters also revealed that these remained in theory as there was rampant subordination of women in all spheres of life. The women in this era found themselves within this trichotomy of political, economic, and gender-based oppression. Informed of this, many of the fighters joined Mungiki and Jeshi La Embakasi to fight government oppression and advocate for their economic liberation. While other factors may have contributed to their fighting, political and economic liberation emerged as the primary reason.

The chapter also revealed that these fighters came from the middle and lower classes in Kenya. This was unlike in Mau Mau where almost all Africans in Kenya were involved in the war. This diversity is due to the changes in targeted enemies. In the Mau Mau war, the major enemy was the British colonialists in Kenya. However, in post-colonial Kenya, the enemy was the elite, upper class who constituted the top government leaders of the time. The fighters had

attained basic primary school education too because the government emphasized education for all as a way of developing the new nation. The wave of women's empowerment also promoted girls' education. Additionally, in independent Kenya, Africans could easily access educational institutions unlike in the colonial era where access to schools was race-based.

Further, the chapter revealed that these fighters joined the groups through their brothers, husbands, or male friends. Male dominance in these groups was attributed to these male insiders. However, none of the fighters studied spoke of forced entry into any of the groups. To be full members, they had to meet some requirements. This involved oathing and circumcision in Mungiki and oathing and tattooing in Jeshi La Embakasi. While FGM was fought as illegal in this era, women in Mungiki embraced the cut with positivity and as a way of fighting Westernization in the oppressive Government.

Also, it was established that women leaders were allowed in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi. However, their numbers were few compared to their male counterparts. This would be attributed to their less number generally in the group. However, Patriarchy emerged in these leadership roles. The women leaders had to display some features such as bravery, courage, etc. to be given such positions. Ideally, these traits are associated with masculinity as opposed to femininity. In this way, the fighters had to behave like men to get these positions. The findings also revealed that in Mungiki women would not administer oaths. However, they shared the same oaths with men. These oaths were akin to those taken by Mau Mau fighters. This is because Mungiki Identified itself with Mau Mau fighters who were never compensated for their land after independence. In Jeshi la Embakasi it was revealed that there was gender equality in oath administration. All fighters in the group could administer the oaths. How this was done differed from oathing in Mungiki and Mau Mau. The diversity showed that oathing in violent groups changes from one group to another. However, the purpose of oathing remained the same; uniting the group members and ensuring the secrecy of the group operations.

The chapter also revealed that like in the Mau Mau war, female members proved to be central to the success of Jeshi La Embakasi and Mungiki. Their fighting strategies were both combat and non-combat. Combat fighting strategies shifted from guerrilla warfare for during the Mau Mau war to kidnappers, armed robbers, car hijackers, and street mugs in post-colonial Kenya. This was due to the change of war front from the forest to the streets and political rallies. The change was also associated with the change of targets and enemies for the attack. Non-combat

fighting strategies involved spying, storage, and transportation of guns. However, generating funds for the groups also emerged as a fighting strategy in this period. This was attributed to capitalism and economic oppression in independent Kenya. The fighters needed money to buy weapons, sustain their lives and bribe some rogue police officers to access some attack areas.

Sexual relationships were seen to be exploited in the fighting strategies. Additionally, women's privacy was exploited by these fighters to avoid frisking. Breastfeeding mothers also exploited their motherhood and children to transport weapons. The chapter also examined the experiences of women fighters in these groups. Like in Mau Mau, in the previous epoch, the fighters in this era faced arrest, killing, and sexual and physical abuse. This was largely exploited to paint their picture as victims of violence. The findings revealed that such was the case because these experiences breached human rights and women's dignity with the evolving campaigns against abuse and discrimination against women. Accordingly, the attention went to the arrest, killing, and physical assault faced as opposed to the violent act committed.

The next chapter explores changes and continuities in how women navigated their world of war since 1990 when the wave of democracy reached Kenya.

CHAPTER FIVE

5 Continuity and Change of Women's Involvement in Violence in Kenya; 1990-2019

In the previous two chapters, a shift was seen between the two epochs in terms of typologies of women fighters, why and how they fought, and their experiences in war. Some similarities were also witnessed between the two epochs. In the period after 1989, major landmarks happened in the country. The wave of democratization reached Kenya and the country moved from a single party to a multiparty state. This chapter seeks to examine how women navigated through the violent groups that emerged after 1990 in Kenya. It also examines what these fighters carried from the previous epochs, how they applied it, and the impact on their fighting. The chapter also discusses new developments in terms of women fighting in this era and the factors informing these developments. All these are done with reference to women fighters in Gaza and Al-Shabaab. However, an understanding of these continuities and changes of political developments in Kenya between 1990 and 2000 is first appropriate.

5.1 Multiparty Politics, Violence, and the Ban of illegal Groups in Kenya 1990-2002

As shown in chapter four, the period between 1964 and 1989, in Kenya was marked by political dictatorship and oppression from the KANU government. The county was a single state with KANU as the only recognized political party. However, in the early 1990s, Kenya went through a major political shift.

In the earlier 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the USA remaining the only world superpower, many developing countries were under pressure to open up the political space for more political parties (National Youth Council, 2022). It is worth noting that by the end of the 1980s, many African nations were witnessing dictatorial political regimes and hard economic times evident in the establishment of the structural adjustment programs in the region by the World Bank (Rono, J.2002). There was pressure from external and internal actors on the African presidents to allow multipartyism and promote economic development. This wave of democratization is largely referred to as the Third wave.

In Kenya, the Moi administration had faced criticism since 1986 from the Kenyan church. Additionally, there were a series of riots in the country in July 1990 aimed at pushing the government to open up the political space. Church leaders such as Alexander Muge and Reverend Timothy Njoya called upon the government to create a political environment that would allow Kenyans to participate in the government (see Kasfir,1998; National Youth

Council, 2022). There was also pressure from the opposition leaders like Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. Having been expelled from KANU, and without any political alternative, Odinga formed the Forum for Restoration and Democracy (FORD) party in May 1991(Khadiagala, 2010). However, President Moi declared the party illegal and had several of its members arrested ahead of the pro-democracy rally that was to be held in November of the same year (National Youth Council, 2022; Khadiagala, 2010). This arrest caused the international community to react strongly with outrage. Western donors acting through the World Bank stopped foreign aid to Kenya, and on 26th November 1991, the West discontinued bilateral aid to Kenya and demanded reforms within the government (Marquette, 2001).

With the wave of democracy in the country, section 2A of the then constitution was amended to allow political pluralism in the country (Makinda, 1996; Odinga, 2013). Multiparty politics implied more political parties and opponents to the KANU regime. It also intensified ethnic politics evident in the political parties that were formed along ethnic lines (Ajulu, 2002). Intensified negative ethnicity paved the way for 1992 post-election violence (Ajulu, 2002). In this violence, KANU Youth Wingers and *Jeshi La Mzee* (sic. the old man's army) were used by the ruling party to do a dirty job (see Bosibori, 2017; Posner, 2007)). Studies also indicate that provincial administrators and state security agencies were employed by the KANU regime to frustrate the opposition parties (Kagwanja, 2003). The *Jeshi* culture intensified in the country as the opposition politicians responded to this brutality by forming gangs and militias from their ethnic groups.

In the 1992 post-election violence, land remained an issue of confrontation. Some communities such as the Agikuyu were displaced from the Rift valley (Kamungi, 2009; Oucho, 2002). There were also rampant political arrests and assassinations. Such include Robert Ouko in 1990, Bishop Alexander Muge, in 1990, and Catholic priest John Caesar in 2000. (See Okoth, 2013). In a way, the multiparty politics widened the grievances of violent groups and promoted the emergence of more violent groups as was evident in the emergence *of Jeshi la Mzee, Jeshi la Kingore, Jeshi la Darajani,* and others like Taliban, and Saboat Land Defense Forces (SLDF) (Olang & Okoth, 2010). The violence perpetuated by these groups intensified as the country drew near to President Moi's retirement in the new millennium. As a result, in 2002, 18 of these groups were banned. Among the groups banned were the previously discussed Mungiki and Jeshi 1a Embakasi. It is worth noting that although Kenya had gained independence by this

time, Mau Mau was also a banned entity in Kenya until 2003 When the KANU regime collapsed.

While Kenya was facing threats from politically and economically driven neighborhood groups, during this era, in 1998, Al Qaeda an international terror group bombed the USA embassy in Kenya (Mogire & Mkutu Agade, 2011). This was the first large attack that killed over 200 people on Kenyan soil after the 1980 bomb attack on the Norfolk Hotel in Nairobi (see Kamau, 2019; Mogire & Mkutu, 2011). The country was at a crossroads with four tasks; combating internal violent groups, sustenance of political pluralism, consolidating power for KANU, and handling transnational terrorism. Amid this confusion, the new millennium swam in, and politics of transition also began as President Moi was set to retire.

5.2 Political   Developments and Power Shifts in Kenya 2003-2005

The period after 2000 witnessed new developments and changes in Kenya's public space. In 2002, there was a ban on several militias in Kenya. This was due to intensified militia activities between 1997 and 2002. Accordingly, 18 violent groups were declared illegal (see the National Cohesion and Integration Commission of Kenya, 2018; The New Humanitarian, 2002; Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2002). Additionally, in 2002, Kenya made a significant change in its political sphere. President Moi retired, and KANU lost political supremacy to the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) coalition marking the end of the KANU regime's four decades in Kenya (Masime & Kibara, 2003; Kinas, Karega, & Chacha, 2018).

Between 2002 and 2005, two critical things happened. First, NARC collapsed, and second, Kenya went into a constitutional referendum that failed (Andreassen & Tostensen, 2006; Kimenyi & Shughart, 2010; Ngige, 2020). One of the major issues raised against the previous KANU regime was too much power in the executive branch of the government. The constitution that Kenya was using since independence was accused of conferring too much power to the presidency. Additionally, there was an undefined separation of power among the three arms of the government (Kimenyi & Shughart, 2010). President Kenyatta and Moi used this executive power to marginalize some ethnic groups and reward their political allies.

Against this background, to show his commitment to enhancing democracy in Kenya, president Kibaki during his inaugural speech promised a new constitution within his first 100 days in office (Kimenyi & Shughart, 2010). However, this promise was not fulfilled. The constitution review took longer than it was anticipated, and a draft was only completed three years later in

2005(Cottrell & Ghai,2007). The delay was attributed to the disagreement among the reviewers on power distribution between the executive and legislative branches of the government (Kimenyi & Shughart, 2010). Like the independence constitution, the new draft was accused of conferring a lot of power to the executive.

When the referendum campaigns began, Hon. Raila Odinga led the NO campaign while the government led the YES campaign. However, the NO team won. After the failed constitutional referendum, president Kibaki fired all the ministers associated with the NO campaign (The Guardian, 2005; Relief web, 2005). What followed was a re-ethnization of Kenya's politics. The findings of this study revealed that these ethnic-based politics informed the emergence and realignment of violent groups in Kenya in this epoch. Between 2005 and 2007, militia formation grew to protect the ethnic groups. An interview with Simiyu, a security analyst, revealed that new militias were formed at the behest of the emerging opposition in Kenya (Simiyu, KII, 15/11/2020). It is in this context that groups such as Gaza emerged.

5.3   Emergence and Evolution of Gaza; 2005-2019

After the ban on Mungiki, Gaza emerged after the 2005 referendum. Most of the Gaza members were former Mungiki members who went hiding after the ban on Mungiki in 2002 (Haysom & Opala, 2020; Achuka, 2020; Atta, 2018). Achuka (2020) notes that, unlike Mungiki, the Gaza group never had an ethnic dimension. Also, Haysom and Opala (2020) contend that some of the Gaza members were former *Jeshi la Embakasi* members who defected after losing their patron. This implies that the Gaza group is diverse in its membership and attracts even members from violent groups that had emerged between 1964 and 1989. Evidence drawn from the 2007 post-election violence report revealed that Gaza and Mungiki are two distinct groups. Both are mentioned as distinctly partaking in 2007/2008 post-election violence (see Waki report, 2008). This implies that while some Gaza members were former Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi members, the group is an independent offshoot with diverse ideologies and operation methods.

The Gaza group traces its name to a Jamaican gang called *Gaza* in Portmore- a slum in Jamaica whose members kill at will (Atta, 2018). The Gaza Kenyan group members draw inspiration and pledge allegiance to Jamaican dancehall artist Adjija Palmer commonly known as Vybz Kartel (Achuka, 2020). The artist was sentenced to life imprisonment for several crimes related to murder and robbery with violence (Achuka, 2020). An interview with Otis, a Gaza male fighter, revealed that the group members regard Kartel as their true living god, and they drive

pressure in spilling blood for money (Otis, KII, 05/12/2020). Given their belief in Kartel as their true god, the group is described as a mystical militia connected across the nation (The standard, 2018). However, Gaza is dominant in all slum areas, and low-income, and middle-income estates in Nairobi.

The primary aim of the group's members is economic, as they focus on armed robberies for financial gain. Interviews with Gaza members revealed money as their primary reason for fighting. For example, Venessa, a fighter, explained money, rich boyfriends, and nice outfits as a feature in Gaza (Venessa, KII, 19/09/2021). This is the same account shared by Otis, and Tina, fighters in Gaza. The group is also available for political and economic hire so long as they make money.

5.4 Transnational Terror Groups in Kenya: Entry and Growth of Al-Shabaab 2006-2019

As neighborhood groups in Kenya were positioning and strategizing themselves, new developments were taking place in international terrorism in Kenya. Sleeper cells of Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaida emerged in the coastal region and lower parts of the northeastern. Al-Shabaab began in 2006 as a splinter group of the Islamic State Union (Dörrie, 20014). The group is against the Sufi traditions and aims at creating an Islamic state in Somalia (Anderson & McKnight, 2015). The group claims to wage jihad war on enemies of Islam and pledges allegiance to al-Qaida (Mwangi, 2012). As a result, countries that fight Al-Qaida or Al-Shabaab activities are met with war (Dörrie, 20014). Al-Shabaab fights against the central government of Somalia and the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM).

Kenya became Al-Shabaab's enemy because of two reasons. One, the country collaborates with the USA in the war against terrorism (Cannon & Ruto, 2019). This war directly impacts Al-Shabaab activities in the Eastern African region. Secondly, Kenya entered AMISOM under operation Linda Nchi, and KDF forces have been severely fighting al-Shabaab in Somalia (Cannon & Ruto, 2019). Oral interviews with ex-fighters of Al-Shabaab and KDF soldiers revealed that the group's agenda is religio-political. Nevertheless, some participants noted that some purely fight for money, while others are not even aware of why they are fighting.

In Al-Shabaab, the promotion of jihad and protection of Islam religion emerged as the group's significant grievances. According to Islam, only men participate in jihad (Cook, 2005). The religion also does not allow women to partake in the public sphere-politics, trade, etc., leave

alone fighting. However, the presence of Jihad brides and women fighters termed as daughters of Alshabaab, Alshabaabes, and jihad brides (see East Africa, 2014) reveals that women are taking part in Jihad and fighting in Kenya. An interview with Mariam, an ex-fighter in Al-Shabaab, revealed that she joined the group to protect her religion and avenge the murder of her father. He was a Muslim cleric killed by Kenyan security officers (Mariam, KII,12/12/2020). As a result, using jihad as a reason to deny women's rational participation in Al-Shabaab is erroneous. This is because the evidence in Kenya and other countries has revealed women Jihad fighters (see De Leede, 2018; Lahoud, 2014; Khelghat-Doost, 2016; Badurdeen, 2020).

Also, the aspect of religious revenge cannot be assumed. In Kenya, the Muslim community feels marginalized and victimized as terrorists. The way the government does the security operations against terrorism impact even the innocent men and women in Kenya's Eastleigh and coastal areas (see Cummings, 2014; Aling'o, 2014; Torbjörnsson & Jonsson, 2016). Women are never spared in this operation. Some women have lost their husbands, brothers, sisters, fathers, and friends in such operations. Such losses indicate that religious profiling and victimization impact women and men equally. Accordingly, any group like Al-Shabaab that claims to protect their religion attracts them as fighters and supporters.

5.5 Perception of Women Fighters in Gaza and Alshabaab

Gaza and Al-Shabaab groups are open to women membership. Women fighters are essential both strategically and tactically in the group. However, this is not the same way the security bodies, society, and media view these fighters. For example, the media reports women fighters in Al-Shabaab in association with their men counterparts. These fighters in the Al-Shabaab are termed Al-Shabaab brides, Alshababes, wives of Al-Shabaab, and daughters of Al-Shabaab (Bosibori, 2022). For example, Violet Kemunto, a fighter in Alshabaab was always referred to as the wife of Ali Gichunge, an Al-Shabaab terrorist (The standard, 20 January 2019; Kiss FM, 25 January 2019). The story is not different for fighters in Gaza. For example, the latest Mashi Minaj and Clare Njoki, former fighters in Gaza were always termed Gaza queens and prettiest thugs (see African Exponent, 30 May 2017; Nairobi News, 18 May 2017; All Africa, 18 May 2017). Much focus was given to their beauty and relationship with their boyfriends, who were also fighters, then their plight as fighters in the group.

Stern (2010), in his report on women members in Al-Shabaab, gives an account of how men Al-Shabaab members perceive women in the group. The author contends that diverse male fighters have various views concerning women fighters. Some regard them as fighters because they share their problems with their men and care (Stern, 2010). For this reason, they are considered members. Other male members define these fighters as their 'fellow supporters'. A different view is that.

> "Those women who are 'members' of Al-Shabaab are those who work in the medical area. Other women who cook and other things are just seen as assisting (Stern, 2010)."

However, the author narrates that evidence from women defectors of the group reveals that Al-Shabaab men consider them assistants, not permanent members (Stern, 2010).

From the accounts above, it is evident that actors outside Gaza and Alshabaab find it hard to believe women as fighters. Women perceived intrinsic peacefulness, malleability, and weaknesses reinforce this notion of forced individuals in these groups. Nevertheless, to some men fighters, the story is not the same as they are open to women's membership in their group. These diverse views about women fighters in these groups render them important to the violent groups both strategically and tactically. This is because their true identity is confusing especially to the world outside the groups.

5.6 Women's Plight in Gaza and Al-Shabaab's Oathing 2006-2019

The field interviews revealed that oathing was an essential element in Gaza and Al-Shabaab. The fact that these aspect features across all the groups studied in all the epochs implies its continuity and centrality in violent groups. An interview with Otis, a fighter in Gaza revealed that oathing is done for all members regardless of gender (Otis, KII, 5/12/2020). Gumbihi (2015) reports that Gaza members take an oath. Achuka (2020), reporting for the Daily Nation, affirms that Dandora is the oathing site of Gaza fighters. Speaking of Clare, a slain woman fighter, and how she took her oath, Otis remarked that:

> "She (Clare) took the blood of the bond without a second thought. Somebody could think that she had done it before. I cannot compare any member in that group with her" (Otis, KII, 5/12/2020).

His remarks revealed boldness in the late Clare Njoki when she took the oath of initiation into the group. Additionally, it is essential to note that oathing in Gaza is done by the group leader

with the help of a medicine man (Otis, KII, 5/12/2020). Apart from drinking blood, the oath involved shaving one's hair with a razor blade and taking traditional medicine that the leader sourced from some medicine men in the villages (Standard, 2019). The participants interviewed never disclosed the source of blood they use for oathing in Gaza, and none was ready to give details of this oath. Examining two women ex-fighters concerning this revealed fear of disclosing what they swore and the concoction they had drunk as oathing blood. Even Otis, the male fighter interviewed, was not comfortable disclosing much about this oath. This implies that oathing plays a crucial role in ensuring secrecy in the group even after a person has left it.

In Al-Shabaab, Mariam explained that she underwent interrogation, scrutiny, and questions to ensure she had not been sent to betray them (Mariam, KII, 22/12/2020). Her friend Riziki, another fighter, had to prove beyond doubt that Mariam was not a *kafir* (sic. Betrayer). Also, Mariam swore allegiance to Al-Shabaab and the oath of loyalty to the group. However, she was not ready to explain in detail this oath.

Breaking the oath in all these groups is met with severe punishment involving death. For example, Mariam, an ex-fighter in Al-Shabaab, was informed that betrayal of the group and its teachings would cause her death (Mariam, KII, 22/12/2020). She was also told that she could not leave the group because they would follow and kill her. Mariam and Maya, ex-fighters in Al-Shabaab fear being tracked by Alshabaab and contacting Kenyan security agents. Leaving Alshabaab is regarded as a betrayal of the group and against the oath of allegiance. On the Other hand, they do not trust that the government security agents will grant them amnesty. In this way, they prefer living a secret life. Juma & Githigaro (2021) echoed the fear of these fighters. The authors note that defectors of violent group members face a dilemma of stigma and negative labeling, making it hard to reintegrate into the community.

In Gaza, ex-fighters interviewed had all relocated from Nairobi to avoid the Gaza members and the security agencies at the same time. They fear that the Gaza members may trace them and kill them for leaving the group. Some reports indicate that those who defect from Gaza are met with death threats from the group (see Gumbihi, 2015; The African Crime & Conflict Journal, 2017; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2002; Mwangi, 2011; Rasmussen, 2010)

While oathing is used to bind fighters together, its administration revealed oaths were mainly made for masculine actors. Such are among the reasons used to term women as passive actors

in violence. However, this study established women in Al-Shabaab, and Gaza partakes in the same oaths as men. However, they do not administer these oaths. This is a shift from the previous epoch where both men and women would administer oaths in, for example, Jeshi la Embakasi. This shift is perhaps due to the toxic masculinities that seem to suppress the protected and empowered woman.

5.7 Typologies of Women Fighters in Gaza and Al- Shabaab

Apart from the political freedom developments and power shifts in Kenya within this era, there were also unified campaigns for women's empowerment in education, economic and political spheres. The era saw more women emerging in the political arena. Following the execution of Free primary education in 2003 (Somerset, 2009) and subsided secondary education in 2008 (Orodho, 2014) more women had access to education (see Sifuna, 2004;). Besides, affirmative action also saw women easily access tertiary and higher education (see Onsongo, 2009). These developments influenced the numbers, age, level of education, and backgrounds of women fighters in Gaza and Al-Shabaab as discussed below.

5.7.1 Numbers

In Al-Shabaab, Mariam, an ex-fighter, noted that there were 18 women in her camp from different countries. She also stated that there were about 2-3 women involved in every of Al-Shabaab's attacks (Mariam, KII, 13/09/2021). Mariam's account agrees with the remarks of Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) officers who, in a focus group discussion in Garissa, noted that women in Al-Shabaab are in a ratio of 2:3 (KDF, FGD, 8/8/2021). Maya, an ex-fighter in the group, echoes the same views and narrates that each camp unit in Kismayu comprises 12 to 15 women (Maya, KII, 19/09/2021).

Membership of women fighters in Al-Shabaab emerged to have lots of discrepancies from oral sources. Something important to note is that the available evidence from both oral and other sources shows a group dominated by men. Nevertheless, differences in the number of women differ from one account to another. For example, Stern (2010), in his study of women members in Al-Shabaab, noted that some of his respondents said that of every 6 Al-Shabaab members, 2 are women. Others informed him that women are about 25 in a group of 100 members. Further Stern (2010) notes that defectors of Al-Shabaab informed him that women constitute 60% of the group. Some refuted women's memberships in Al-Shabaab, saying that Jihad does not involve women. These include accounts of religious leaders and imams interviewed. Their

stand on women fighters agrees with Stern (2010), who notes that some of his respondents noted that Al-Shabaab is 100% men.

However, such views refuting women's membership in Al-Shabaab disagree with several sources and historical accounts of the group's attacks in Kenya. For example, in 2015 July, a woman was arrested in Mombasa for recruiting five youths into Al-Shabaab (Ndung' u & Salif, 2017). In 2016, Rukia Farij was identified as a female recruiter in Al-Shabaab in Mombasa. She also was reported to be facilitating several grenade attacks in the county. In 2016 three women attacked Mombasa central police station, and Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility (Mukoto & Duggan, 2016; Mwangi, 2017). Ochami and Ombati (2016) contend that these three women were linked to Al-Shabaab, a primary violent group in Kenya and the East African region. Also, studies by Badurdeen (2018), Badurdeen (2019), International Crisis Group (2019), Ndung'u, Salifu and Sigsworth (2017), and Ndung'u and Shadung (2017) show that women from Kenya are fighters in Al-Shabaab.

Denying women's membership in Al-Shabaab reveals individuals protecting their religion and masculinity. In his account of the respondents refuting this membership, stern (2010) shows that the male respondents denied this while the female defectors accepted that there were women members. This shows a gender conflict with each category of gender trying to prove its abilities in war. Women fighters want to be involved and be associated with the group. The male Al-Shabaab members, on the other hand, are not ready to accept publicly that the group recruits women. This is basically due to the idea that women are regarded as weak (see Adam & Katman, 2021). Thus, men recruiting women into fighting sounds shameful and demeaning to their masculinity.

 Al-Shabaab greatly associates itself with the Islam religion (Anderson & McKnight, 2015). They often regard their victims as *kafir* and use jihad as their notion of fighting against the kafir (Anderson & McKnight, 2015). While this may be entirely religious fundamentalism, men fighters and supporters of the group say that jihad does not involve women. Thus, the women in Al-Shabaab are only wives to the men fighters. On this account, some Muslim clerics interviewed noted that the attacks by Al-Shabaab are not jihad. This is because the attacks are totally against the jihad principles and course. From their accounts, it was revealed that Al-Shabaab men fighters deny women membership to continue enjoying religious sympathy and support worldwide.

Nevertheless, studies by De Leede (2018), Cook (2005), Von Knop (2007), and Khelghat-Doost (2016) around the globe and over time on jihad point out women's involvement in jihad. These studies show that different violent groups struggle in their relationship with women and jihad. However, Margolin (2019) notes that under the facade of protective jihad and tactical inevitability, these groups reveal a readiness to include women in jihad in extraordinary conditions.

The challenge faced in ascertaining the number of women numbers in Gaza and Al-Shabaab is gendered due to the diverse ways of fighting between men and women. For example, in Al-Shabaab, unlike men who serve in the bases, most women offer their support from their communities, keeping the support silent and thus making it difficult to know that they are involved (Stern, 2010).

5.7.2 Age

In Gaza, the age bracket of the women fighters ranged between 15 and 30 years old. Venessa and Tina, ex-fighters in Gaza joined the group at the age of 16, barely before completing secondary school (Venessa, KII, 19/09/2021; Tina, KII, 26/6/2021). The age bracket agrees with Mukutu (2017), who contends that the membership age in Gaza ranges from 13 to 32 years old. The same views are echoed by Nairobi News (2018) and All Africa News (2017), which report that young people as low as the age of 14 are being recruited into Gaza. Mwangi (2019), writing about the late Clare Njoki and Mash Minaj, fighters in Gaza, notes that the two were in their early 20s.

Fighters in Al-Shabaab are in their early 20s. However, those above the age of 30 cannot be assumed. An interview with Mariam and Maya revealed that they joined Al-Shabaab at 25 and 21 years, respectively. Their age bracket agrees with Bardeen (2018)'s findings that most women recruited into Al-Shabaab are at their youthful age. Other sources in Kenya indicate that Al-Shabaab has attracted young people below 20 years or in their 20s. Sunguta (2019) reports that Khadija Bakir was a 29-year-old student arrested on her way to Somalia to join Al-Shabaab. In 2016, two Kenyan ladies, aged 23 and 22, respectively, medical students in Kampala, were linked to forming a terror cell linked to Al-Shabaab (Ndung'u & Sharif, 2017).

5.7.3 Family, Religion, and Social Class

Fighters in Al-Shabaab and Gaza came from diverse social classes. Mariam, an ex-fighter in Al-Shabaab, comes from a middle-income family. Her father was a trader and a devoted Islam preacher, and her mother was a housewife who sold *vitumbua* -desserts (Mariam, KII, 22/12/2020). However, after the father's death, life was never the same again in the family. The father was the only stable source of income in the family (Mariam, KII, 11/12/2020). Accordingly, her family sunk into poverty, and her college life was full of financial struggles.

The same story of poverty is reflected in the late Marsh Minaj, a former fighter in Gaza in the kayole slums in Nairobi. She was killed in May 2017 in a police operation in Kayole slums in Nairobi. Very little is known about her family and childhood. However, the researcher was able to gather some information from neighbors and fellow fighters in Gaza. An interview with Kendi, a former schoolmate in Kayole secondary school, revealed that Marsh Minaj lived with her sister in Kayole (Kendi, KII, 06/11/2020). Kayole is one of the slums in Nairobi inhabited by low-income earners in the city. The fact that Marsh lived with her sister in this slum reveals that they had financial struggles and would not afford to live in better estates in the city

Also, the late Clare Njoki's story depicts somebody from a low-income family. An interview with her aunt revealed that Clare was the firstborn and was raised by a single mother who mainly did farming until she went to Nairobi to seek for means of survival (Njeri, KII,16/10/ 2020). In Nairobi, they lived in Kayole slums, an indicator that they would not afford life on the other side of the town where the living conditions were better.

Al-Shabaab drew most of its membership from the Salafi section of Islam adherents in terms of religion. Members from other religions must convert to Islam and denounce their previous faith. An interview with Mariam, an ex-fighter in the group, revealed that she was a firm Islam adherent and attended Al-Madrasa S.B primary and Allidina Visram High School (Mariam, KII, 11/12/2020). She explained that her family had a firm and strict adherence to the Islam faith (Mariam, KII, 11/12/2020). Such explains why her father ensured that they attended Muslim schools and lived according to the faith's religious teaching.

Moreover, she explained that all the Al-Shabaab members had to convert to Islam if they were from other religions. Her remarks concur with the story of Violent Kemunto, an Al-Shabaab fighter. When she married and joined Al-Shabaab, Violet converted from Christianity to Islam (Bizna reporter, 2020). Also, Stern (2010) and Ndung'u and Sharif (2017) show that Al-

Shabaab forces its members to attend compulsory Islam lectures. This indicates that once individuals want to join the group, they must denounce their religion and embrace Islam.

5.7.4 Education Levels

Compared with the previous two epochs in chapters two and three, the fighters in this epoch seemed more educated. This is due to affirmative action and campaigns that advocated for women's education in the era. As stated earlier, free primary and subsidized secondary education in this era were a contributor to these better-educated women.

Fighters in Gaza interviewed had dropped out of school in form two or three. This was the case with Venessa and Tina, whom the researcher interviewed. Achuka (2014) reports that Marsh Minaj had attained primary school education. On her part, the late Clare Njoki dropped out of school in form one (Gitau, 2017).

In Al-Shabaab, there was evidence of fighters with college and university levels of education. For example, Mariam and her friend Riziki had a college education in hospitality when they joined Al-Shabaab (Mariam, KII, 22/12/2020). Also, other sources and studies show that Al-Shabaab is attracting university women as members (see Sunguta, 2019; Ali, 2018; Ndung'u & Salif, 2017). Violet Kemunto attained her first degree from Masinde Muliro University of science and technology in Kenya (Mburu, 2019).

The age, religious, social background, and level of education of women fighters reveal diversity among fighters in this epoch. This diversity challenges the passivity narrative regarding women fighters as one monolithic group. It also challenges the idea that only uneducated people from low-income families and backgrounds join violent groups because of economic hardships. More recent reports in Kenya on fighters point to individuals from wealthy families joining violent groups. For example, in March 2015, the police arrested four young women (Ummulkheir Sadri Abdalla, Khadija Abubakar Abdulkarim, Halima Aden, and Maryam Said Aboud) all from wealthy homes in Nairobi, in Elwak on claims of eloping to Somalia to join the Al-Shabaab (The Monitor, 2019). Such examples contradict the widely held notion that only low-income families join violent groups.

Alshabaab attracts some fighters with university education. This changing and upward trend of education levels among these fighters, over time, could be associated with the intensified campaigns for girls' child education in Kenya. Nevertheless, why these educated individuals

get attracted to the violent group as fighters is a multifaceted aspect that combines social, gender, and economic factors, as discussed in the next section of this chapter.

5.8   Women in Religio-economic and Identity Construction in Gaza and Alshabaab 2003-2019

Money, power, and prestige emerged as one of the drivers for engaging in violence. For example, Violet Kemunto's accounts indicate that money is the lead motivator for her involvement in Al-Shabaab. Mburu (2019) reports that she never minded even devil worship to get money. Her coursemates in the university narrated that Violet, who was behind the planning of the DustiD2 hotel attack in 2019 in Nairobi, always admitted that her mission was to accumulate money and would do anything to get it (Mburu, 2019). Wambu (2019) echoes the same views and notes that Violet's family admitted that she loved money, expensive things, and glamour. This economic orientation is echoed by the Monitor (2019) which contends that women regard joining violent groups as a form of employment. Also, Sahgal and Zeuthen (2018) note that the promise of money and employment informs women's entry into violent groups. Perhaps this explains why Violet did not waste time competing in the elusive jobs in the country (see Mbala et al, 2019). Instead, she chose to join Al-Shabaab after her studies.

Also, evidence from women fighters in Gaza revealed economic reasons as the primary driver for joining the group. However, others were motivated by multiple factors. For example, an interview with Kendi, a neighbor of the late Marsh Minaj, revealed that economic reasons, bitterness, and a desire for revenge drove Minaj to join Gaza. Kendi explained that Minaj wanted to recruit her but was not open to telling her direct (Kendi, KII, 06/11/2020). Minaj always asked her if she could date somebody from Gaza, want to make money, become rich, or if she loved the way the police were killing people. She also questioned if she loved how the rich were mistreating the poor and wanted to do something to avenge the oppression in society (Kendi, KII, 06/11/2020).

The questions that the late Minaj raised to Kendi are a clear indication of an individual passionate about getting rich and committed to revenging oppression by the police and the rich in society. The observation about money being a driver for fighting is supported by the remarks of Otis, a Gaza male fighter. Otis remarked the following about Minaj:

> "The problem with Minaj was pride and she was somehow reserved. But ganja ilikuwa inamtuma mbaya-*the motivation*

for money kept her moving forward in the group" (Otis, KII, 05/12/2020).

The aspect of police brutality raised in Minaj's case, in Kenya's slum areas is not new. Several studies and reports have been done documenting how poor youth in slums are arrested and killed even when they are not guilty of any offense (see Kamari, 2018; LeBas, 2013; Wako, 2019; Kyaa & Kasina, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2020; Wood, 2020). Nevertheless, Austin 2019) reports that the police deny such brutality noting that those killed are criminals who if not killed will kill the police officers. This then creates a conflict between the populace and the police officers. This conflict ignites the spirit of revenge among the slum youth.

Minaj's story is not different from that of Mariam an ex-fighter in Al-Shabaab. Mariam's story reveals that financial struggles, rejection, and victimization in the community and revenge for her father's death motivated her recruitment into Al-Shabaab. Her story:

> *Mariam explained that all was good in her family until 2011 when Al-Shabaab issues became tense in the country, and the coastal region was marked as one of the highest radicalization points. Muslim preachers and adherents, she explained, were the significant victims of labeling as terrorists. She explained that the mosque where her father was preaching was identified as one of the radicalizing places. Her father's preaching was regarded as a promotion and support of the* Al-Shabaab's *agenda in the country. Her father faced several court cases concerning the association with* Al-Shabaab. *In 2013 the father was brutally killed by unknown people whom she believes were government agents. After the death of the father, life was never the same again in the family. The father was the only stable source of income in the family. Also, she explained that people around them, including neighbors, always looked at them with negativity and suspicion. It is during this time that she begun discovering herself and questioning her purpose in life. She became close to an old friend who was ready to help her navigate life and redefine herself. The friend, Maria explained introduced her to in-depth Islam teaching. Her talks and teachings about Islam were inspiring, real, and touching.*
>
> *The friend, whom she only called Riziki, had a network of friends in Kenya and Somalia. Riziki's life was good; she had a lot of money and was not struggling like Mariam. By this time, Mariam had joined a college in Mombasa, where she was studying hospitality. It is through Riziki that she was introduced to* Al-Shabaab *and the group's teachings. Mariam explained that the way Riziki used to describe the group, its agenda, and teachings, and how she used to present herself on social media, revealed that the group was not evil as the government labeled them. For once, Mariam saw that what her father used to teach about Islam was true. The taught that the government killed her father gave her more motivation to join the group since the teaching was in line with what his father*

considered true Islam. Accordingly, Mariam wanted to make her late father proud, and happy and continue with his wishes and teachings.

Mariam and Minaj's story is an indicator that joining violent groups is not necessarily triggered by one factor. Several factors combine to push one into joining these groups.

With these accounts, it is evident that money, victimization, and oppression in society are the primary motivator of fighters in Gaza and Al-Shabaab. However, extreme religious teachings emerged too. These teachings act as a catalyst as they offer hope to those who feel oppressed. Also, peer pressure motivated others to join violent groups. This gives them a sense of belonging and respect among mates.

An interview with Ochieng, a researcher, and lecturer in Nairobi, revealed that the government's response to security inspires women fighters. For example, there is the generalization that almost every Muslim is a terrorist (Ochieng, KII, 22/10/2020). The researcher explained that this might not be in a written document, but security operations carried around the country paint that picture (Ochieng, KII, 02/09/2020). Accordingly, sometimes women become fighters to protect their own because they know what has been generalized about their men and society is not true (Ochieng, KII, 02/09/2020).

Ochieng's views on revenge, religion, and police brutality are echoed by other sources. The East African (2018) reports that revenge for the loss of a beloved one, and ill-treatment at the hands of the police are among the driving factors for women's entry into Alshabaab. The report also cites the feeling that Islam is under threat, a motivates women to join Al-Shabaab in solidarity with their Muslim brothers and husbands (East Africa, 2018). Kenyan youths join Alshabaab due to the government's collective punishment of Muslim and Somali groups in Kenya (Torbjörnsson, & Jonsson, 2016; Annel, 2014). Nevertheless, Phelan (2020) contends that women fighters are driven by religious ideologies that adopt a gendered frame. According to Bloom (2010), this gendered frame interacts with other factors such as the education, age, and economy of these fighters.

Nevertheless, an interview with Professor Fathma revealed that women joining violent groups are also reacting to a patriarchal structure. Women need space, and therefore, they enter violent groups and become stronger (Professor Fathma, KII, 30/11/2020). Her views are echoed by Elizabeth, a researcher at the Dadaab refugee complex in Kenya. Elizabeth contends that women fight to challenge the existing gender stereotypes about their abilities (Elizabeth, KII,

20/09/2020). According to her, the ideology of women fighters is more inclined to feminism and women empowerment than the mission of violent groups. Phelan (2020) echoes these views and asserts that some women see participation in violent groups as a form of empowerment and redemption. This is because, in times of war, gender becomes diluted. Afshar (2003) asserts that women's participation in violent groups creates a sense of equality and erases gender stereotypes. This is because they contradict several gender stereotypes, especially the idea of women as weak and individuals who need protection (Herschinger, 2014). This implies that the centrality of each fighter in a violent group is key in discussing these groups. Gender is immaterial and when applied it conceals the role of other actors, especially women.

5.9   How Women Join Al-Shabaab and Gaza: From Men to Women Insiders.

As in other groups studied in this thesis, women fighters in Gaza and Al-Shabaab joined the groups through insiders. For example, Venessa a woman fighter in Gaza joined the group through her husband who was already a leader (Venessa, KII, 19/09/2021). The same story is shared by Maya an ex-fighter in Al-Shabaab. Maya joined Al-Shabaab through her boyfriend whom she met on Facebook (Maya, KII,19/09/2021. Violet Kemunto another women fighter in Al-Shabaab joined the group after getting married to her husband who was already a member (see Mburu,2019).

Mariam, an ex-fighter in Al-Shabaab, was introduced to Al-Shabaab by her friend, who was already a fighter. Her recruitment process was as follows:

> *Mariam joined Riziki, her friend, on a trip to Somalia, and that is how her journey to Al-Shabaab began. In 2016, they traveled through Lamu with Riziki to Somalia. She did this without telling her mother until she reached Kismayu. She explained that it took them five days of hiding sometimes to avoid contact with people. However, in many of the security checks, it was easy for them because of their dress codes (wearing hijab) and the fact that they were women. Nobody suspected them, especially the fact that the region is dominantly Islam. Once in Somalia, Mariam was introduced to the leaders and some fighters too. She had to undergo interrogation, scrutiny, and questions to be sure that she had not been sent to betray them. Her friend Riziki also had to prove beyond doubt that Mariam was not a kafir.*

Accordingly, Mariam's admission into the group was somewhat easier because Riziki, her friend, was an insider. Friendship network is seen as very powerful in building trust in violent

groups (see Densley, 2012). Darden (2019) contends that young people join violent groups in many ways including friendship networks. While the author is not specific about the gender of these young people, Badurdeen (2018) makes it clear that young women are lured by other women's friends to join Al-Shabaab. These same friends help them cross over to Somalia, clearly echoing the narrative of how Riziki helped Mariam to cross over to Kismayu, Somalia.

It is not clear how the late Clare and Marsh Minaj joined Gaza since the police had killed most Gaza members present when they joined. However, an interview with their neighbors and one male fighter in Gaza reveals that the two women fighters had boyfriends in Gaza. In Clare's case, Grace her neighbor explained that she became somewhat rich with expensive clothing, jewelry, and makeup (Grace, KII, 05/12/2020). However, while she was doing well, her mother's life was not that great. Clare's life suddenly changed the moment she reached Nairobi. This implies that she already knew the boyfriend before she reached the city, maybe through the internet. This is because Gaza is a dangerous and secretive group in Kayole (see Mutuku, 2017; Gumbihi, 2015; Tumsime, 2020; The African Crime & Conflict, 2020; Vidja, 2019). Accordingly, it was not easy for a village girl to bounce in as quickly as she did. In an era of technological advancement and social media, online recruitment into violent groups cannot be assumed. The fighters in these groups show off their fancy lifestyles on social media platforms, thus attracting other young women who cherish such high-end life. Many studies on violent groups and social media recruitment agree with these views (see Olaysa, 2018; Kimtai, 2014, Wambua, 2020, Hubi, 2019; Bosibori & Atuhaire, 2020).

In Gaza forceful recruitment is not allowed. This is because they fear it may lead the group into betrayal and trouble. However, in Alshabaab Miriam's account shows that those women forcefully recruited are not considered fighters (Mariam, KII, 22/12/2020). Salma, a counselor in Mombasa explained that some of her clients who are Al-Shabaab returnees have confessed that there is involuntary recruitment of fighters in Al-Shabaab, who end up being used for sex in the camps (Salma, KII, 14/09/2021). She explained that her clients have confessed to having slept with multiple men in one night. Some say they would have sex with 3-4 men per night. The only secret to surviving sexual roles and avoiding gang raping is to be cooperative and support the group mission (Salma, 14/09/2021). In this way, one is likely to get a connected lover who can then accord them protection.

The account of Salma and Miriam of women being taken forcefully as sex slaves in Al-Shabaab is echoed by another researcher. Attwood (2017) reporting for BBC news asserts that there are

women from the coastal part of Kenya who were promised jobs in Somalia but ended up being Al-Shabaab slave sex workers. Some of these managed to escape while others died there. The same views are shared by Wanyonyi (2018) who gives an account of a 27-year-old woman from the coast who was a sex slave in Al-Shabaab. According to this account, the woman was promised a job that would give her 60,000 KES per month. However, once she arrived in Somalia, she found out that the job was to be used as a sex tool for Al-Shabaab men (Wanyonyi, 2018). Voluntary fighters are respected and accorded their roles in the promotion of the group's ideologies. In this case, forced to join the fight as sex slaves cannot be termed as fighters, and thus in this thesis they are not recognized as such. This is because their presence in the group is not asset related but used as objects without the freedom to make rational decisions.

It is also worth noting the shift in the gender of the insiders connecting new members to these groups. While in Mau Mau, Mungiki, and Jeshi la Embakasi, insiders were primarily men, in Gaza and Al-Shabaab most of the insiders happened to be women. Such a shift is associated with these groups' change of tactics and strategies to avoid suspicions by security agencies. Also, it would be due to more women finding their way into these groups. Furthermore, the protected and empowered woman would be taken as one who wants to empower fellow women thus luring them to join these groups cannot be suspected as misleading the recruits but giving them an empowerment platform.

5.10 Women Cannot be Leaders over Men in Al-Shabaab and Gaza: 2003-2019

The leadership in Gaza and Al-Shabaab emerged to be exclusively male. In Al-Shabaab, an ex-fighter Mariam explained that just like the Muslim community men make significant decisions, and leadership is majorly male-dominated (Mariam, KII, 22/12/2020). However, unlike in the outside society, in Al-Shabaab, women are given chances to lead fellow women fighters (Mariam, KII, 22/12/2020). However, they are not part of the primary leadership of the group. Nonetheless, their work in the group is highly valued and rewarded. Maya another ex-fighter in Al-Shabaab remarked that while Al-Shabaab was male-dominated, there were women leaders whose role was to command fellow women (Maya, 19/09/2021).

These accounts reveal that women who lead in Al-Shabaab only command their fellow women and are not recognized as part of the group's leadership. The accounts of these women fighters agree with the International Crisis Group (2019) which contends that Al-Shabaab's governance excludes women in its leadership structures or major decision-making. Christina (2020) also

asserts that women are not involved in Al-Shabaab's decision-making. Marsai (2020), further, adds that Al-Shabaab has made it clear that women do not take up leadership roles. However, the group acknowledges that these individuals are important to the Al-Shabaab community. Echoing the same remark is Donnelly (2018), who notes that women in Al-Shabaab are not necessarily in leadership roles, yet Al-Shabaab heavily relies on them for its operations.

The absence of women leaders in Al-Shabaab was attributed to the local Islam and Somali cultures. A KDF soldier interviewed notes that the Somali and Islam culture is patriarchal in nature and men are the key decision-makers (KDF, KII, 23/06/2021). Al-Shabaab claims to be defendants of the Islam religion and culture and the group emanated from Somalia (Dörrie, 2014; Stern, 2010). This origin and association explain why the KDF soldier gave reference to Somali and Muslim cultures. His observation agrees with several scholars who have documented patriarchy in Muslim and Somali communities. Many of these scholars assert that Muslim and Somali traditional cultures put women at the periphery of leadership and public domain (see Alexander & Welzel, 2011; Munoz,1993; Bangura, 2021). In such communities' men are the primary decision-makers.

The same all-male leadership was reflected in Gaza. Whereas the finding revealed women who oversaw departments like information and data storage and management in the group, it was apparent that the central leadership of the group is in the hands of men. Nonetheless, an interview with Tina a fighter in the group revealed that there are troops under the coordinators, who are assigned roles and duties. Most women fighters fall under troops. However, some take up coordination roles (Tina, KII, 22/ 06/2021). For example, she spoke about Joy, a woman fighter who was a coordinator at the Jacaranda Embakasi East area.

> "She was tough. We feared her. She also had physical strength until we nicknamed her HM (Heavy Machine). She was ruthless, merciless, and would decide your fate within one minute". Nobody dated her in the group because even men feared her." (Tina, KII, 22/ 06/2021)

Joy's description reveals that her physical strength was the reason she was accorded the position of coordinator. The traits accorded to Joy, are normally those associated with warriors, physical strength, courage, and ruthlessness (see Skemp, 2016). This implies that one must demonstrate masculinity and shed off femininity to be a leader Gaza. This agrees with the male privilege concept in the Gender Schema Theory which states that male traits are regarded as superior and highly skilled (see Bem, 1981; Davis & Wilson, 2016). Women who take up

leadership roles in violent groups are regarded as deviants or unnatural. They are seen as intruding into the world of men. This is because according to Mainah (2015), muscular and physical prowess are functional for protection, contract enforcement, recruitment, and reliable associate's management. All these are assumed not to be found in femininity-an erroneous view.

5.11 Categories of Fighters in Al-Shabaab and Gaza

The fighters in Al-Shabaab and Gaza can be broadly categorized as combat and non-combat. The specific roles under each category are discussed in the following subsections.

5.11.1 Combat Fighters: Armed Robbers and Suicide Bombers.

Fighters in Gaza and Al-Shabaab can be categorized into two categories: combat and non-combat fighters. Interviews with fighters in these groups revealed the presence of women fighters who are involved in direct combat in the attack areas. For example, Mariam, an ex-fighter in Al-Shabaab, explained how she was involved in killing, making, and setting bombs, grenades, and other weapons that the group used. Her story:

> *In Somalia, she had seen and participated in killing fellow fighters for minor mistakes that were always regarded as betrayal. Accordingly, she was not ready to go through the same torture and death when she failed to deliver on a duty that was assigned to her. Mariam decided to run away. This was not easy since she had to kill two people along the way. She explained that one of the victims was an Al-Shabaab male member she met in the bush and suspected her moves. To avoid further interrogation, she pulled the trigger and killed him silently. The next victim, she never came closer to him. After the first episode, she became more cautious, and the moment she spotted him, she killed him before he would spot her (Mariam, KII, 22/12/2020).*

Her story reveals a fearless woman who brutally shed the blood of others. The fact that she even knew how to assemble bombs and grenades shows an individual who would even act as a suicide bomber.

Mariam is not alone. Maya another woman ex-fighter in Al-Shabaab noted that she had killed many innocent souls and had nothing to be proud of (Maya, KII, 19/09/2021). The accounts of these two fighters agree with available evidence of women in Al-Shabaab involved in direct combat. For example, in 2016 three women associated with Al-Shabaab attacked Mombasa central police station (see Mukoto & Duggan, 2016; Mwangi, 2017; Mwaura, 2015). These

three were not only armed with knives but also a petrol suicide bomb (Mukoto & Duggan, 2016; Mwangi, 2017). Also, terror attacks both in Kenya and Somalia reveal women suicide bombers detonating in various targeted areas (see Shire, 2019; Sheikh, 2019; Warner & Chapin, 2018).

The combat fighters in Al-Shabaab challenge the local Somali culture and Islam jihad concerning women's roles in the war. The International Crisis Group (2018) reports that the local Islam culture dictates that only men should be involved in direct combat. Based on this Shire (2019) documents that the presence of women suicide bombers and direct attackers in Al-Shabaab is a sign of desperation in Al-Shabaab in terms of manpower and strategy. This implies that the group has been forced to have women combat fighters to enhance its manpower and change its fighting strategy and tactic for survival.

In Gaza, Clare Njoki, and Marsh Minaj were known combat fighters. At the time of her killing, Minaj had engaged the police officers in a shootout for hours (Kenyan 2017; Lepapa, 2017). In the process, a police officer was shot dead. The shooting trend to kill exhibited by these fighters shows that women fighters in this era do not surrender easily or bow down to defeat. Njeri another ex-fighter in an interview at Kaloleni regretted the people she hurt and killed while serving in Gaza (Njeri, KII, 19/09/2019). An account was also given by Tina another fighter in Gaza. She spoke about Joy a fearless fighter in Gaza who always walked around armed.

The stories of the Gaza fighters indicate that women in the group are involved in armed fighting to an extent of killing. Similar stories of fearless Gaza women armed fighters have been reported. For example, the African Crime and Conflict Journal (2017) gives an account of women in Gaza who stab and kill their victims fearlessly. In one incident, a lady knifed a man in the *Saba Saba* area, Nairobi, killing him immediately after demanding money and a phone from him (African Crime and Conflict Journal, 2017). Also on November 16, 2020, an undercover police officer by the name of Blackest widow exposed another Gaza-armed female fighter called Njeri. In his Facebook account, the officer warned Njeri to run away or else face the same fate as Clare Njoki who was killed in 2017.

Photo 5: An undercover police officer in Kenya sends a warning message to one of the Gaza women fighters on Facebook

Source: *The Kenyan post (2018)*

The post shows, a woman wearing police attire kissing a gun. Her posture reveals a fearless individual, ready to make use of the gun any time any place as the situation presents itself.

A vulnerability strategy was reported in Al-Shabaab where women use "weakness" to access police areas. pregnancy attires and "mom Bombs" were revealed as best for suicide bombs and widowhood statuses as good bait to attract sympathy from the public. For example, the three attackers at Mombasa Central Police Station, in 2016, paraded as vulnerable citizens who had gone to report a case of a stolen phone (see Akwiri, 2016; Wasike, 2016). These women were reported to be under the coach of Aboud Rogo's widow, Haniya Said Saggar (see Ochmai, 2016; BBC, 2018; The Voice of Africa, 2016; African News, 2018). Aboud Rogo was a Muslim cleric who was killed due to his association with Al-Shabaab. His wife has been linked to not only the recruitment of young women into the group but also to Al-Shabaab attacks in Mombasa County. Also, Samantha Lewthwaite an Alshabaab member and an individual

behind the Westgate mall attack in 2013 in Kenya is normally regarded as a white widow (The Guardian, 2013).

The use of pregnancy, widowhood, and physical weakness by women fighters to get hold of their targets was revealed to work for the advantage of violent groups while leaving security agencies and society confused. This is because this vulnerability is granted in a humanitarian manner that conceals the violence that these individuals perpetrate. A deputy county commissioner who sought anonymity explained that.

> "Imagine a pregnant woman seeking asylum. You need, first, to establish if she is truly pregnant. Sometimes, human rights activists and women activists take advantage of such security protocols to create headlines. They will accuse the security forces of leaving a pregnant woman stranded." (Deputy county commissioner, KII, 18/10/2020).

Such humanitarian aspects accorded to pregnant women gives them easy access to their targeted areas of attack. Explaining this situation, Simiyu, a security analyst in Kenya, explained that violent groups are an extension of the larger society, and members are not blind or operating in a vacuum (Simiyu, KII, 03/12/2020). They know what society thinks of women and how to exploit these perceptions (Simiyu, KII, 03/12/2020). The perception of women in Kenyan society concerning war and fighting is humanitarian, and this is exploited and taken advantage of by violent groups.

In Alshabaab, oral interviews with Mariam and Maya revealed that the group uses weapons ranging from simple handguns and grenades to sophisticated weapons like AK 47s, bombs, and other machine guns. Suicide bombs are also used in the group. These weapons have been echoed by other studies such as Maruf and Joseph (2018), Cengiz (2018), and AMISOM (2021). The findings also revealed that women use these weapons whenever the situation arises (see Sheikh, 2019; Petrich & Donnelly, 2019; Khelghat-Doost, 2016). In Gaza, women used weapons such as shorthand guns and Knives (Njeri, KII, 19/09/2020). In the next section, the use of drugs and zombification will be examined as a weapon by non-combat fighters.

5.12 Non-combat women fighters in Gaza and Al-Shabaab

The fighting strategies under non-combat fighting in Gaza and Al-Shabaab are as discussed herein.

5.12.1 Spies

Interviews with ex-fighters in the group revealed that the collection of intelligence is largely a duty of women in the group. Their views were echoed by Stern (2009) who contends that 85% of intelligence in Al-Shabaab is done by women. Onyango (2018) notes that Gaza recruits young and beautiful ladies as detectives to collect information on possible male targets and bait them into their attack areas. Some women spies paraded as businesswomen selling fast and street foods near police stations to collect information about police posts and from police officers (Njeri, KII, 19/09/2019). The disguise helps them gather information needed by the group. For example, Joy a woman fighter in Gaza always paraded as a bar attendant to map and trail the movements of her targeted victims (Atieno, KII, 22/6/2021).

The role of women as spies in Nairobi's violent groups is explained by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation blog. It is noted that, in these groups, women do not necessarily participate in combat fighting but act as liaison persons, spies, and/or intelligence wing to their groups and hirers (The Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2015). However, sex was revealed as bait for targeted individuals in this duty. To explain why sex is a strategy for most fighters, an investigative journalist explained;

> "There is something called the silent power of a woman. It is not visible, loud, or shouting, but it is highly exploited by violent groups. Beautiful Women's winks, eye rolls, smiles, sweet words, tears, dress code, hairstyle, and many more can easily trap a man." (Investigative journalist, KII, 28/09/2020)

His remarks agree with, Petrich & Donnelly (2019) who contend that Al-Shabaab tactically positions beautiful women in areas near main Kenyan military stations, with the primary goal of creating ties with the soldiers for spying purposes.

Several security officers interviewed acknowledged the role of women sex workers in collecting information in the country. For example, in Al-Shabaab, a KDF solders who have worked in AMISOM explained that women are very friendly to the security officers in Kismayu. At first, they thought that it is their nature until they learned that friendliness was a

source of soliciting information and monitoring the whereabouts of the police officers and other persons who were on a peacekeeping mission in Somalia against the Al-Shabaab (KDF, FGD, 8/08/2021). The narratives by these KDF soldiers agree with Petrich (2018) who notes that there is a well-coordinated and structured system of sex workers who sell info obtained from their clients particularly police officers to Al-Shabaab. The author explains that this is possible because sex workers see everything and go everywhere yet they are hardly noticed (Petrich, 2018). Frykberg (2017) also asserts that Al-Shabaab has hired local sex workers as detectives, paying them for info revealed by their clients. The author gives an example of a police officer who remarked that.

> They *(Al-Shabaab women fighters working as prostitutes)* always target villages that closely border our camps. They have tried establishing a close relationship with us while others are even willing to become lovers of some officers." (Frykberg, 2017, pg. 1)

These prostitutes are termed as whores whose violence involves sexual lures (see Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007)

The findings revealed that the information collected by the women spies relates to the routine operations of the targeted individuals or area, the entry and exit point of the targeted areas, when and when the police will be carrying out an operation in the targeted area, and how many police officers are in a station as a given point. These oral findings agree with Stern (2019) who notes that in Al-Shabaab, for example, these fighters provide information on real-time military movement and checkpoints. Other information targeted and collected involves the locations of armories in police stations, the location of security cameras within the targeted area, the power switch points, and how long it takes for security officers to respond to a distress call within the area (see Petrich& Donnelly, 2019; Petrich, 2018).

A close examination of the kind of information that these spies collect, reveals very vital details that are key in the planning and execution of attacks. This then implies that attacks by Gaz and Al-Shabaab cannot be successful without the information provided by the spy's wing of these groups. Accordingly, spies' roles cannot be assumed as less important or as normally labeled "passive. This is because, without their efforts, violent groups are as good as "deaf and blind".

5.12.2 Weapon Carriers: Women's Bodies as Mobile Armories

Women ferrying guns and ammunition for combat fighters were not limited to the Mau Mau war, Mungiki, and Jeshi la Embakasi. Findings revealed that women are key in the acquisition, hiding, and transportation of guns in Gaza and Al-Shabaab. Other sources in Kenya's print and mainstream media echoed these views (see Kenyan news report 5th April 2017; Muranya, 2017; African Crime and Conflicts Journal, 2017; Kenya DIASPORA NEWS, 2020; Stern, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2019; Christina, 2021).

Perhaps, the most significant facet of this fighting strategy is how they managed to transport these guns and ammunition. The fieldwork interviews revealed a very powerful way in which women utilized their bodies and dress code to ferry these guns and ammunition.

Photo 6: A Gaza woman hides a gun under her bras

***Source:* The standard 2018**

The photo above shows a woman hiding a pistol in her bra. With such a strategy, it is hard for security officers to detect that one is carrying a weapon. A Gaza male fighter interviewed contended that the late Clare always carried her gun and used her puffy hairstyle and panties to hide it (Otis, KII, 05/12/2020). This is an indicator that even women's hairstyles are used as storage places for guns for transportation. Perhaps this explains the trendy adoption of puffy hairstyles among most fighters in the country.

Security officers interviewed accepted that women's dress codes and hairstyles are used in hiding weapons. For example, Bob, Kenya police explained that these hairstyles are a living armory where they hide small weapons (Bob, Kenya police, KII, 28/12/2020). Also, a former

flying squad officer noted that he fears women's wigs and dresses. This is because according to him they hide small handguns under wigs and puffy hairstyles (Ouma, FS, KII, 07/10/2020).

The idea of physical outlook and beauty emerged in explaining why women are never easily suspected as they transport guns. A flying squad officer interviewed remarked that.

"Pretty can be dangerous" (Ouma, FS, KII, 07/10/2020).

His remarks directly linked with Bob, a Kenya police officer, who explained that women fighters are among the prettiest. According to the officer, their looks, and dress code are sexually attractive, which is an excellent weapon to confuse male victims and officers (Bob, Kenya police, KII, 28/12/2020). Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) term these pretty women as beautiful souls. The authors contend that beautiful souls are the thing that warriors should defend. These are expected to be ant-the war, and violence while at the same time cooperating with the war fought to safeguard their blamelessness and virginity (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Additionally, the aspect of religious attires such as *Buibui* was seen to play a great role in this. For example, the three Al-Shabaab fighters who attacked Mombasa Central Police Station in 2016 had hidden a petrol bomb and a knife under their traditional *Buibui* attires (Wasike, 2016; Akwiri, 2016).

Also, fighters exploit gender stereotypes and religious beliefs to fight and exercise their duties. For example, Mariam exploited her Islam dress code to navigate to and from Somalia. She explained that, in many of the security checks, it was easy for them because of their dress code (wearing hijab) and the fact that they were women. Nobody suspected them because the region is mostly Islam (Mariam, KII, 22/12/2020). Her explanation was echoed by Home Office Report (2020) which reports that Alshabaab understands the gender plays in Muslim and Somali cultures. In this way, they can use these traditional ideas about women and what they see as their unique strengths to fulfill the group's needs (Home Office Report, 2020). Mariam transported guns, weapons, and materials for the bombing to Nairobi and Mombasa and explained that this is entirely the work of women (Mariam, KII, 22/12/2020). She also explained that how society places a woman in Muslim society works to the advantage of al-Shabaab fighters (Mariam, KII, 22/12/2020). However, she explained that some men dress as women to achieve their missions. Such is an indicator of how gender is exploited in violence and terrorism.

Sexual ties were key to the acquisition of guns and ammunition from security officers. For example, an interview with Otis revealed Marsh Minaj, a fighter in Gaza, was central in acquiring guns from police officers (Otis, KII, 5/12/2020). Otis explained that Marsh used to date police officers to get weapons and clothes used in their robberies. He explained that Minaj had a boyfriend within the group. However, the police boyfriend was used as a tool (Otis, KII,05/12/ 2020). Additionally, she would drug her 'lovers' and get away with the gun, boots, and clothes (Otis, KII, 05/12/2020). These remarks agreed with Issa (pseudonym), a KDF soldier who confessed that in 2013, he was tricked and lost his gun and jacket to a girlfriend (Issa, KDF, KII, 14/12/2020). Also, Mogaka, a former flying squad officer, confessed to being a victim of a woman fighter. The officer noted that a woman she dated ended up stealing his handgun. According to the officer, this was the most challenging moment for him because he had taken the girl as a wife (Mogaka, FS, KII,7/10/ 2020). Efforts to trace her never bore fruits; thus, he had to face the conditions and terms of the service for losing his gun (Mogaka, FS, KII, 14/10/2020).

The accounts of women dating officers for guns were echoed by Bwana & Kipkemoi (2020) who document a lady who stole a pistol from a security officer in Nairobi. The authors report that the officer had picked this lady for sex from Nairobi's Moi Avenue. The lady would later drug the officer and escape with the pistol.

5.12.3 Privacy and Human Rights as a Seal for Women Weapon Couriers

Fighters use their bodies as bait for targeted victims and as an armory. However, human rights and privacy issues are associated with women and their bodies. This privacy explains why they are not thoroughly frisked at the security checkpoints such as the malls where human officers replace technology devices. An investigative journalist interviewed revealed that women never undergo serious security check-ups in shopping malls (Investigative Journalist, KII, 20/06/2021). Her remarks were well observed in her documentary *Bweta La Uhalifu: Usalama Shelabela* produced by K24 television in Kenya in 2011 (see K24 TV, December 2014). In this documentary, she managed to go through several security checkpoints in malls in Kenya without being detected with her gun tied around her back.

5.12.4 Recruitment of New Members

Cases of women recruiting new members to Gaza and Al-Shabaab were revealed. In Gaza, Njeri an ex-fighter explained that she was introduced to the Gaza boyfriend by her female

friend in school. The oral interviews revealed that women are the best at identifying and luring people to join these groups. This is because they are not easily suspected. The same strategy was seen in Al-Shabaab. Mariam and Maya, two ex-fighters in Al-Shabaab revealed that they were recruited into Al-Shabaab by their female friends. They also explained that it was largely the work of women Al-Shabaab members to recruit new members both online and offline. Their views are echoed by the International Crisis Group (2019) which reported that Al-Shabaab relies on these fighters for recruits. Bardeen (2018) asserts these views as she recognizes the presence of voluntary women recruiters in Al-Shabaab. East Africa (2018) documenting the ranks of women fighters in Al-Shabaab, reports that they are important in ensuring stable membership in Al-Shabaab and that is possible through their recruitment roles (also see Christina, 2021).

5.12.5 Generation of Funds

Like in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi, Gaza and Alshabaab groups in this era needed funds for sustaining the group operation and reward members for their jobs. In Al-Shabaab, women were reported as the major funders of the group. It was established that some ladies in Eastleigh, Garissa, and Mombasa operate businesses that are funded by Al-Shabaab. Profits from these businesses are used to fund the activities of the group. This role of generating funds in Al-Shabaab is a complex one. This is because officially Al-Shabaab bans women's engagement in any form of trade as it is considered un-Islamic (Stern, 2019; The Immigration and Refugee Broad of Canada, 2011; Donnelly, 2019). However, the fighters and county administrators interviewed explained that some women run shoes, khat, clothes, and general shops to generate money for Al-Shabaab. These oral accounts were echoed by the International Crisis Group (2019) which reports that Al-Shabaab relies on women for fundraising. Also, Gardener (2018) asserts that Al-Shabaab allows its women to operate its business and that these fighters enjoy the freedom of movement more than other Muslim women. Also, in 2019, The USA backlisted a Kenyan woman as among the seven most dangerous people in the world who finance terror and violent groups (US state Department of Treasury, 2019).

There is inconsistency in the application of the ban against women's engagement in business by Al-Shabaab. This inconsistency works to the advantage of Al-Shabaab. This is because it is not easy to suspect women fighters fundraising for the group. Such least suspicion is due to the idea that while officially Al-Shabaab bans women as breadwinners, privately, it relies on them for its fund generation.

5.12.6 Food Supply

The supply of food and medicine as a way of fighting was also revealed in Alshabaab. Women fighters in camps cook and nurse the injured combatants. An interview with Mariam an ex-fighter in Al-Shabaab revealed that recruits begin from such roles before they graduate to combat roles like making weapons and staging attacks (Mariam, KII, 22/12/2020). However, seeking medical supplies is entirely the work of male combatants who raid community chemists and health centers to collect the medical supplies needed. However, once the medicine is in the camp, women take up the role of ensuring that the sick fighters are well taken care of. The role of women as cooks and caregivers in the Al-Shabaab camps is echoed by Ashfar (2018) and Leed (2018), who contend that these fighters use their traditional roles and attires of protection as a way of supporting their Al-Shabaab mission.

5.13 Constitution 2010, Operation *Linda Nchi* and Usalama *Watch* and Women's Fighting in Kenya 2010-2019

In 2010, Kenya inaugurated a new constitution. The 2010 constitution gave more clear provisions on gender rule something that strengthened the women's position in Kenya's public sphere and called for the elimination of gender-based discrimination (see the constitution of Kenya, 2010). While this was happening, a rising trend was witnessed in the number of violent groups in Kenya. As of 2010, the number had risen from 18 groups in 2002 to 33 groups (Bosibori, 2017, National Crime Research Centre, 2012). These were banned under the Prevention of Organized Crime Act 2010 (Prevention of Organized Crime Act, 2010 which was revised in 2012. Gaza and Al-Shabaab were among the banned groups and thus some operational and tactic changes were expected within these groups to avoid the hands of the police. Nonetheless, in 2017, the number of these groups rose to 326 and their operations intensified in the country (National Crime Research Centre, 2018).

Additionally, Kenya's enmity with Al-Shabaab intensified over time. This was attributed to two major operations: Operation *Linda Nchi* where Kenya sent its KDF troops to fight Alshabaab in Somalia and *Usalama w*atch, an operation that was done in Eastleigh to flush out Al-Shabaab fighters (see Olsen, 2018; Anderson, 2014; Bosibori, 2017). The picture painted of the *Usalama* watch were those of discrimination against the Muslim community in Kenya and abuse of women during the operation (see Bosibori, 2022). Ombati and Mosoku (2019), further, reported that the women's number in violent groups also increased in the country during this period. Onyango (2013) asserts this increasing trend and notes that the number of

crimes done by women in the county increased in this period. All these developments in the country influenced the identity and kind of women fighters within this era and the strategies they used to navigate their world of war as discussed below.

5.14 The Bold and Open Fighters in Gaza and Al-Shabaab 2012-2019

While women are part and parcel of the violent groups studied, their visibility is seen to evolve as time elapses. For example, in Mau Mau, Mungiki, and Jeshi la Embakasi (1945-the 1990s) women fighters are not so much in the limelight. These are women who fought but concealed themselves from the public and the security agencies. However, in the new millennium, there emerged more visible and bold fighters publicly declared their membership in Gaza and Al-Shabaab.

In Gaza, the late Marsh Minaj and Clare Njoki openly threatened people and made it known that they were in Gaza. An interview with Kendi, once a neighbor to Marsha, revealed that Marsh and her friends always dressed in unique clothing: timberland shoes, oversized hoods, jean trousers, and a lot of jewelry and makeup. They also had many piercings- nose, tongue, ears, and tattooed bodies with a dragon and the name Gaza (Kendi, KII, 06/11/2020). This dress code is the reported dress code of all Gaza members in Nairobi (see Wanyama, 2018; the standard April 19th, 2019). When slightly triggered, Marsha was an open fighter, and together with her girls, they threatened people even in broad daylight (Kendi, KII, 6/11/2020). This agreed with Grace, a resident in Kayole who noted that Clare and Minaj could openly threaten young men and women and the elderly in Kayole (Grace KII, 05/12/2020). At some point in a saloon, Grace noted that Clare had threatened to stab one lady after a small disagreement (Grace, KII, 05/12/ 2020). Mwangi (2018) notes that the late Clare and Minaj were among the most dangerous fighters in Nairobi's Gaza gang. Marsh was even reported as the manager of *Warembo Sacco*, an offshoot of Gaza that consisted of only female fighters (The Kenya forum, 2017).

The accounts of fearless fighters agree with photos in social media and other online media platforms which show women fighters in Gaza posing with guns and threatening officers. Such include the examples below.

Photo 7: Gaza fighters pose with an AK 47 and Pistol respectively

Source: Tuko News (2018), Ghafla Kenya, 2018

The bold and open threats issued to police officers by female fighters in Gaza can be best captured in one warning sent to an officer who killed Marsh Minaj and Clare Njoki. The warning read.

> "You are stupid, and I will be happy when you die a shameful death. I am not scared of you and even if you search for me, you will never find me. I won't waste time. I have enough money and a black belt," (Achuka, 2017. pg.1)

In this warning, the fighter whose name was not disclosed declares that she is not even afraid of the officer who killed her fellow fighters. These fighters are presented as thick-skinned and assertive by their fellow fighters. For example, an interview with Otis, a Gaza male fighter, revealed that Clare knew strategies and ways to handle the police and any threats around. She knew everything about shooting, and locating places and people to attack (Otis KII, 05/12/2020). The fighter further explained that Clare always carried her gun. Additionally, Clare is presented as a thick-skinned one who would command all of them, and none could oppose her decisions and commands. The fact that she dated the leader of Gaza gave her even more courage and confidence to confront even the police officers.

In Al-Shabaab, it emerged that women were not afraid or worried about identification with the group (Mariam, KII, 22/12/2020). Some even called themselves Al-Shabaab brides on social media to show their loyalty to the group. For example, Violet Kemunto the fighter behind the attack on the DusitD2 hotel in 2019 in Nairobi called herself Al-Shabaab bride in her Facebook accounts (Kingsley, 2019; Bizna reporter, 2020).

5.15 Marriage versus Work Relations in Gaza and Al-Shabaab

One of the social relations that emerged in this study is marriage. The marriage relationship between fighters emerged as a factor that defines fighters in two different ways. Ideally, when fighters are married to each other, the focus is more on this relationship than on the working relationship. For example, the late Clare Njoki and Marsh Minaj had their boyfriends in Gaza (Kamau, 2017; Mwanza, 2020). In Al-Shabaab, Mariam and Maya affirmed that women married men within the group.

Al-Shabaab bans sexual immorality and sexual conduct attract the death penalty through stoning (Petrich & Donnelly, 2019). However, the fieldwork accounts by ex-fighters in the group revealed that women fighters use sex to trap their targeted enemies. Petrich and Donnelly (2019) also note that Al-Shabaab at times relies on women sex workers, who are not necessarily permanent members of the group to collect information from security officers in Kenya.

In Al-Shabaab, the stories of women being recruited as sexual objects also dominate the discussion of women fighters (see Parker, 2017; Rise for Peace, 2020; Human Rights, 2021). Nonetheless, in an interview with Mariam and Maya, ex-fighters explained that the sex slaves in Al-Shabaab camps are not regarded as fighters but as tools to threaten the enemy. These cannot be defined as women fighters, yet their experiences and stories generalize women as victims of violence.

While explaining why the victim narrative of sexual abuse endures, Elizabeth Ndirangu, a woman researcher, noted that in the contemporary world, much focus is on a woman victim who needs liberation and protection (Ndirangu, KII, 20/09/2020). Accordingly, very little attention is given to them as sex traders who exchange sex for what they want. Ochieng, a university instructor, attributed this to the large cases of sexual abuse of women in times of war and violence (Ochieng, KII, 18/11/2020). Accordingly, the many victims overshadow the smaller numbers of women fighters using sex to fight.

Also, increased campaigns on women's rights and gender-based violence inform this victim narrative. This is because how these campaigns are done in Kenya paints a picture of oppressed women and male oppressors (Ndirangu, KII, 20/09/2020). For example, despite a huge amount of evidence of women unleashing violence on men in Kenya, campaigns against gender-based violence in Kenya focus on femicides, rape against women, wife battering, and women discrimination in the workplace (Wanyama, KII, 19/12/2020). In a way, gender in Kenya is anonymous with women as opposed to both men and women principally in violence.

5.16 The Humanitarian Respect Accorded to Pregnancy and Motherhood

Pregnancy is one of the most valued stages of a woman's life. A pregnant woman is normally regarded as susceptible, weak, and in need of protection and help (Okafor, 2000). This is because Pregnancy is a sign of new life and continuation of the lineages, families, etc., and pregnant women are seen to swing between life and death (Hlatshwayo, 2017). While this is the case, fighters have exploited pregnancy to propel the missions of their groups. An interview with a security officer who sought anonymity revealed that most pregnant ladies do not pass through the security metal detectors. She explained that most claim that these technology-based detectors are a health issue for their unborn babies (Security Officer, KII, 21/06/2021). In this way, they are left to pass through the vehicles' gates which generally do not have any security checks. Mercy (not her real name), a Kenya police officer, remarked that,

> "It is hard and embarrassing to argue with a pregnant woman at security checkpoints. The people, media, and society will judge and blame you for being inhumane and inconsiderate of the lady's condition. Nobody will dig deep to know the mistakes of the lady because pregnancy is associated with mood swings. Society expects us to understand. So, we give them a thorough way to avoid hitting the headlines as pregnant women abusers (Mercy, KII, 16/09/2020).

Maya and Mariam, ex-fighters in Al-Shabaab, remarked that fighters aware of the humanitarian element accorded to pregnancy are now using mom bombs or fake pregnancy bumps to avoid security check-ups. A security officer interviewed also remarked that even when arrested for the violent acts, if pregnant, the focus turns to Pregnancy instead of the act perpetrated (Security Officer, KII, 21/06/2021). Her remarks agree with a report by the Nation media in Kenya whose headline read

"My unborn baby is not kicking- says a woman held over Al-Shabaab links" (Nation, 7/10/2019, 1).

In such a headline, the focus goes first to the unborn baby before even the violent act under discussion. To the larger public, the pregnant woman is seen as a vulnerable individual in need of protection. However, within themselves is the rational goal to use this vulnerability and pregnancy as either a fighting tool or a means to deliver weapons to required destinations.

5.17 Riding Behind the Curtains of Fashion

The following section discusses how women use their hairstyles and attires to carry out their duties in violent groups. special focus is given to puffy hairstyles, bras, hijabs, and infant bags in the transportation of guns and arms.

5.17.1 Hairstyles and Wigs

Another element that stood out in the war world of fighters in Gaza and Al-Shabaab is their dress codes and hairstyles. Puffy hairstyles and wigs were ideal for transporting pistols and ammunition. A security officer in Mombasa who sought anonymity explained that they do not check women's hair as part of their security protocol because it can easily be termed as erotic or sexual abuse (Security officer, KII, 12/09/2021). Atieno, a fighter in Gaza, noted that nobody easily suspects these wigs and fluffy hairstyles as they form part of their hair fashions (Atieno, KII, 22/06/2021). The fighter explained that these hairstyles are expensive, but their benefits are worth the investment (Atieno, KII, 22/06/2021). Otis, a male fighter in Gaza, explained that one head of a woman with a wig could comfortably carry one pistol and around 30 rounds of ammunition without raising any suspicion (Otis, KII, 5/12/2020).

The study established that while wigs are a hair fashion for women, they are a tool for their fighters. In this way, fighters were found to navigate between fashions and a fighting tool to conceal their acts. It is hard to detect such fighters because the government has not banned these hairstyles as it will be regarded as a violation of women's freedom and choice of dress code and intruding on their hairdressing. Elizabeth Ndirangu, a gender researcher, noted that this could easily be termed as gender-based discrimination and profiling of women (Ndirangu, KII, 20/09/2021). Also, it may be that while the violent groups have mastered the exploitation of fashion, counter-violence strategies in Kenya as elsewhere in the globe are yet to adopt this tactic and thus fail to notice this.

5.17.2 Traditional Religious Attires: The Trichotomy of Religion, Privacy, and Security

Garments are a fighting tool for women. Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) contend that a women terrorist's garments conceal explosives trapped around their wombs. In this study, attires such as *Buibui are* another element that emerged in Gaza and Al-Shabaab. This attire helps fighters to navigate easily in the trichotomy of religion, privacy, and security. *A buibui* is essentially the typical Islam attire for women, which covers the entire body and is buggy so that one cannot see what is inside this attire (Gilligan, 2009; Mwakikagile, 2010). Usually, the women fully dress and then put this attire on top. The dress aims to conceal the body of Islam women from exposure to the public. Some wear headgear covering the entire face and head, leaving the eyes only exposed.

The study findings revealed that fighters, especially in Al-Shabaab, exploit these attires for their fighting benefits. An interview with Mariam, an ex-fighter in Al-Shabaab, revealed that she and her friend Riziki easily crossed the border to Somalia because they wore their Islam *buibui* (Mariam, KII, 13/09/2021). Accordingly, they were taken as local villagers in their normal errands in border villages. A KDF officer in Garissa explained that:

> "If you start to question and frisk a woman dressed in a *buibui* thoroughly, you will not only be accused of sexual assault but also religious violations and profiling of the Muslim community." (KDF officer, KII,8/08/ 2021).

His remarks are grounded on the idea that there have been reports of Islam profiling in Kenya. Anderson (2014) writing on Al-Shabaab in Kenya notes that since 2012, there have been brutal ambuscade with frequent raids on mosques, along with baffling assassinations and several disappearances of vocal Muslim activists. The same views are echoed by Cleophus (2014) who notes that anti-terror and violence campaigns in Kenya target the Somalia and Muslim communities in the country. Most anti-terrorism Operations like *Usalama Watch* are done in Eastleigh, highly populated by the Muslim community (Anderson, 2014). Such operations have raised human rights violation issues with the Kenya Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Watch (see Human Right Watch, 2015; Lind, Mutahi, & Oosterom, 2015). Accordingly, intensely frisking a woman wearing a *Buibui* raises various issues ranging from gender, sex, privacy, and religious abuse and profiling. This discourages the security officers from doing thorough checks on such women leaving them free to navigate their world of fighting.

The oral interviews with Mariam and Maya revealed that the *Buibui* grants women a good chance to attract sympathy from the Muslim community. If "harassed" by the police, the Muslim community will stand up and call for justice for her as they regard such as religious discrimination. Secondly, the attire offers a good chance to hide behind privacy. Telling a woman to remove her *Buibui*, for example, in public, even when fully dressed inside, will be termed as intruding on their body and privacy. Finally, the *Buibui* offers a good space to carry weapons tied to their bodies without detection because it is bulky, long, and covers the entire body. For example, the three ladies who attacked Mombasa central police in 2016 had hidden their weapons under their *buibui* (Deutsche Welle, 2016).

Buibui is not only exploited by Al-Shabaab women fighters. Atieno, an ex-fighter in Gaza, noted that sometimes non-Muslim *women* in the group wore Buibui to accomplish their missions due to the aspects already discussed. This implies that while *Buibui* has a religious attachment to Islam, some fighters consciously use this attire to fulfill their duties and roles. Before the public, these fighters pose as submissive Muslim women. However, in violent groups, the garment stands as a tool that helps them navigate the world of war without much detection and suspicion.

5.17.3 Women's Handbags and Infant Bags in Insurgency

Closely linked to the dress code and attires are women's handbags. One major thing that characterizes most women is carrying large handbags. Oral interviews with the security officers in Nairobi and Mombasa revealed that women's handbags are never thoroughly checked at security checkpoints, unlike their male counterparts. Additionally, the findings indicated that these handbags are rarely left in the luggage bay of malls and supermarkets. Explaining this special treatment of these bags, Simiyu, a security analyst, noted that:

> "Women will always argue that there are very personal items related to their sexuality in those bags that do not warrant public exposure. This requires only female security officers to check their bags, yet their numbers are few. Thus, not available at all checkpoints (Simiyu, KII, 3/12/2020).

The normal infant bags were also revealed as being used to transport weapons. Shiko, a fighter in Gaza, explained that infant bags work best with fighters with small babies. This is because not only will the baby be a source of special treatment, but also nobody will bother checking a

typical infant bag loaded with a child's clothes, feeding bottles, and diapers (Shiko, KII, 11/09/2020).

5.18 Language: Vulnerable, Weak, and Immature Individuals

The study also established that women in Gaza use different language interpretations to carry out their duties without suspicion. The language ranges from body language to verbal or spoken words. Body language included but was not limited to tears and emotions. An interview with Atieno, an ex-fighter in Gaza, revealed that once caught by security officers, women fighters sometimes resort to crying to attract the sympathy of the officers (Atieno, KII, 222/06/021). Her remarks agree with Otis, a fighter in Gaza who noted that at times when women fighters shed tears claiming that they are not aware of the violence associated with them, they attract the sympathy of the police officers and end up being released (Otis, KII, 05/12/20201. Moraa (Pseudonym), a former flying squad officer, noted that.

> "Women know how to play innocent to avoid the hands of the security officers. Women cry and can appeal to emotions." (Moraa, KII,23/10/ 2020).

Additionally, Moraa also narrated her experience when they tracked fighters in Kayole. The man ran away, and the woman was left behind. She was breastfeeding and crying that she was innocent. Moraa explained that she would not withstand arresting the lady crying with a 2-3-month-old baby. So, she left her. Later, the lady was killed in another police operation where she exchanged shooting with the police before she was killed. Mogaka another flying squad officer shared the same view. The officer noted that.

> "You want to arrest a woman; she resists the arrest, starts taking videos and shouting in the whole neighborhood that you are assaulting her. The shouting power of women can even land you in trouble. A woman is one person who can cry even when she has not been touched a bit just to appeal to emotions and masses and get off the hook." (Mogaka, KII, 7/10/2020).

The sentiments from these officers and the accounts of the fighter agree with Luvvie (2018)'s account on About the Weary Weaponizing of White Women's Tears. The author notes that instead of using their words, women cry and that no matter what the initial catalyst of the situation is, they end up being appeased, pacified, and pampered (Luvvie, 2018). The author further notes that he has seen women's tears shut down a conversation, even if they were the

instigators of conflict (Luvvie, 2018). This show that fighters have perfected the use of tears to avoid police arrest and to play innocent.

Tears by fighters were also revealed to be a good tool in trapping police officers for attacks by violent groups. A KDF soldier narrated how a woman associated with the *Wakali Kwanza* gang in Mombasa used tears to trap him in an attack by the gang. His story:

> *The woman came to him crying that a group of men had snatched her bag. As the officer tried to question the young men, the lady started screaming that the officer was demanding a bribe because she did not have a mask. They took away his phone and left him being beaten by the members of the public who took the cry of the lady accusing the police as the right one.*

Explaining why society always sides with women once they cry, professor Fathima noted that the narrative of women as victims of violence have taken root in Kenyan society and seems static in implementing gender issues (Fathma, KII, 30/10/2020). Her remarks agree with Masinjila (2015) who contends that the struggle at explaining women's assumed roles in violent groups is rooted in the conventional understanding of their tendency to utilize their femininity to promote life using convincing ways as opposed to violent means. Ndirangu, a gender researcher, contended that the situation is not likely to change with the current wave of affirmative action and feminist campaigns whose relevance is grounded on portraying women as the oppressed and men as the oppressor (Ndirangu, KII, 20/09/2020).

Apart from tears and emotions, the study findings also established that women in Gaza and Al-Shabaab utilize "vulnerability" language to their advantage in fighting. Vulnerability language, in this case, include statuses and aspects like widowhood, women being weak, and women being referred to as daughter, among others. The study established that the gender stereotype that women are weak makes it hard even for security officers to handle women fighters. Mogaka, a flying quad officer, remarked that.

> "It has reached a point where you cannot shoot a woman because society asks; which man shoots a woman? You are not a man enough; you are weak and overreacting. But when they shoot at security officers, it is said that they are acting in defense. What amazes me is the idea that this society is not ready to look at the women fighters as also people who have military training and even mastered the game more than we have done because, for them, they strive for what society regards as violent or not violent." (Mogaka, KII, 07/10/2020).

Other police officers interviewed also alluded that women are never handcuffed in Kenya during arrests. The accounts and remarks by these officers reveal that, generally, these fighters, as per society, are not supposed to be shot even when they attack officers because they are weak. Again, the aspect of masculinity and femininity is seen at play here. A man who shoots a woman is seen as weak, while a woman who shoots at a police officer is seen acting in defense. This is the dichotomy within which the fighters operate to conceal themselves as violent actors.

Fighters whose husbands have died also use widowhood statuses to clear their names and pose as innocent. In Kenyan society, widows are seen as vulnerable individuals who need comfort and help. Under the Act of Parliament of August, (2011), the National Gender, and Equality Commission states that widows are legally recognized as vulnerable people in Kenya. An investigative journalist interviewed noted that when widow fighters realize they are being traced, they pose as unaware that their husbands were fighters. Often, they come to the public with their babies crying that they have lost their husbands and are left helpless (Investigative journalist, KII, 5/10/ 2020). In this way, they attract public sympathy because the attention goes to their widowhood statuses and orphaned children instead of the violent act under investigation warranting their arrest.

The journalist's remarks are well captured and observed in the K24 TV program "*widowed by crime*" in Kenya. In this program, young widows narrate how officers killed their husbands and fighters in Kenya. Others explain how they escaped death narrowly while fighting. While these women agree that they were fighters with their late husbands, one thing characterizes their narrations: tears, children without fathers, and hard life as widows. In this way, they end up attracting public sympathy for help, and their violent acts go unnoticed or are just assumed. To some extent, the blame is shifted to their late husbands and mostly the government for extrajudicial killings and not providing job opportunities to young people, thus sending them to crime and associated violence. Also, some fighters are referred to as "daughters" of their violent groups. For example, some media reports have designated fighters in Al-Shabaab as daughters of Al-Shabaab, and daughters of Jihad, among others (see Aljazeera, 2019).

The ascription of the name "daughter" paints a child's picture instead of an adult and conscious fighter (See Bosibori,2022). In the end, these fighters are assumed or seen as irrational or victims because they are just daughters-children. This perception is grounded on the general gender structure in Africa and Kenya in particular. In many Kenyan communities, children are

the least in command of authority in this structure. In this way, they cannot make decisions without consulting the elders and their parents, who hold the highest positions in the gender hierarchy.

In an interview with a KDF officer who sought anonymity, the officer noted that he has never heard men fighters being labeled sons of Al-Shabaab, Gaza, among others (KDF, KII, 8/08/2021). His remarks were echoed by Kemunto, a Kenya police. She noted that.

> "We call women fighters daughters of Al-Shabaab, Gaza, queens, children of single mothers, among other names. However, we don't extend the same to men fighters (Kemunto, KII, 28/12/2020).

These remarks by the officers imply that the language used when dealing with and reporting about fighters is key in their recognition and evaluation. Women fighters are assumed or not recognized because they are always labeled with a language of vulnerability and irrationality compared to their male counterparts, who are always regarded as oppressors.

5.19 Experiences of Women Fighters in Gaza and Al-Shabaab

Like their male counterparts, some women fighters end up being killed in attacks or traced on social media. For example, the Gaza fighters bragging on Kenya's social media attracted the undercover police's attention, who learned about the group and started warning the group members. An interview with Kendi, a neighbor with the Marsh, revealed that she never saw Minaj since 2016 when she left until early 2017 when *Hessy wa Kayole* listed her as warned and wanted on Facebook (Kendi, KII, 6/11/2020). Also, the late Clare's aunty explained that at some point, Clare's name was put as most wanted by an undercover officer, *Hessy wa Kayole.* The officer warned her and her friends to stop violence and thuggery in Kayole (Clare's Aunty, KII, 16/10/2020). These oral accounts agree with a post by undercover police with a nickname *Hessy wa Dandora* also called *Hessy wa Kayole*. Under a Facebook account (see photo 8 below), *Hessy wa Dandora*, the undercover police listed the names of Marsha Minaj and Clare Njoki together with others warning them that they would be killed if they did not surrender (also see Kejitan, 2018; Olewe, 2019; The Nairobi news reporter, 2017).

Photo 8: Hessy wa Kayole's post warning two women fighters (the late Clare Njoki and Marsh Minaj) in Gaza.

Source: Ghafla Kenya May 30, 2017

The post is translated as.

> "*We have not said you (the two women fighters) are thieves. But if you are staying with gangster boyfriends, men who openly acknowledge that they are gangsters your crime is knowing and living with gangsters without reporting to the police. Criminal sympathizers write your comments below*".

The two fighters were killed a few weeks later after the warning. Claire was killed along the Kang'undo road by flying squad officers together with other Gaza members (Mwangi, 2018). Grace, their neighbor in an interview said they had gone on a mission that backfired (Grace, KII, 05/12/2020). Her remarks agree with Mwangi (2018) who contends that Clare was felled alongside others as they were robbing residents along Kang'undo road.

In an interview case with Otis, a male fighter in the group, it was revealed that very few people attended Clare's burial since the police denied people access (Otis, KII, 5/12/ 2020). Otis's remarks are echoed by the Newsday Reporter (2018) which reports that Clare was buried in an

unusual ceremony attended only by a few immediate family members and plain cloth police officers. The photos taken by the media are the only record of the burial. This is because not even the family was given a chance to prepare for the burial (Newsday Reporter, 2018). In an interview with the aunty, it was revealed they had to request photos from media people who had come to cover the event, but very few responded positively (Clare's aunty, KII, 16/10/2020). Nonetheless, an interview with Venessa, an ex-fighter in Gaza, revealed that few women fighters have been killed in Gaza (Venessa, KII, 19/09/2021). Her remarks agree with Achuka (2017) who gives an account of a Gaza fighter. The women remarked that;

> "If a man is caught by the police in an operation, most likely they will be shot, but the police are unlikely to shoot a girl, so we fill in," she said." (Achuka, 2017, 1)

When Clare Njoki one of the women fighters was killed, the male members of the group including the boyfriend came to the public to declare that she was innocent. In a Facebook post, the boyfriend, the late Gaza leader stated that the police only killed her because they would not catch him (the boyfriend). Ndung'u (2018) reporting for Tuko news captured the post as follows;

> "Vini, Ngare, and Blackie you killed Claire because she refused to rat me out and then made it look like she was a criminal too, how do you take pride in knowing that you killed an innocent person and lied to Kenyans that you recovered weapons…. Hessy, stop taking the credit for killing Clare saying that you had warned her, and just settle your grudge with me like a man instead of dragging innocent people into battle they know nothing of." (Ndung'u, 2018, 1).

Also, interviews with people who knew Clare including Otis a male fighter in Gaza gave a different picture from what is portrayed in the post above. The interviews revealed that Clare was among the most dangerous fighters in the group. As shown earlier in this chapter, she oversaw data management, weapons storage, and transportation and was killed in a robbery. However, in public, the boyfriend portrayed her as an innocent individual killed because the police missed getting the husband.

The fear of tracing and getting killed by the Al-Shabaab fighters or arrested by the Kenyan government explains why Mariam and Maya, ex-fighters in Al-Shabaab live a quiet and secret life. Interviews with these two ladies revealed that their life with social media ended the day they decided to leave Al-Shabaab. In an interview, Jacinta, a prison officer, revealed the

government's mistrust of violent fighters who surrender (Jacinta, PO, KII, 15/11/2020). She noted that it is tough to reintegrate back people returning from violent groups that they have surrendered (Jacinta, PO, KII, 15/11/2020). This is because amnesty may be granted to somebody on a mission to study the security operations and modalities within an institution and later sell the country to terrorists.

5.20 Conclusion

This chapter sought to interrogate changes and continuities in women in violence in Kenya between 1990 and 2019. The chapter revealed that within this period there were major political and social developments in the country that influenced how women navigated their world of war with close reference to Gaza and Al-Shabaab violent groups. These developments included the opening of Kenya's political space to allow multipartyism, and a power shift from the KANU regime to the NARC Coalition. The period also was marked by intense campaigns for women's empowerment education-wise, politically, and economically. There was also a ban on all the violent groups that had emerged between 1964-1989 and the emergence of new ones after the failed referendum in 2005. The rise of violent groups in the county also increased from 18 in 2002 to 324 in 2017 with transitional terror groups coming to the limelight, recruiting Kenyans, and even carrying constant bombings on Kenyan soil. Security operations in the country were seen as victimizing the Muslim community, and youths from the slums as well as unleashing violence on women.

The chapter revealed women's leadership in these groups is not welcome. The leadership is dominantly men. The only time women get near to leadership is when commanding their fellow ladies. These were associated with the culture, operational space, and individuals that these groups consider their role models. Also, while most men fighters acknowledged the value of women in the success of the group's mission, some see these fighters as not equal to them in the groups thus no full fighters. Such denial is associated with the desire to protect masculinity, defend religious ideas like jihad and keep their war tactics secret. In this way, the patriarchal public picture of violent groups conceals the actual roles and duties of these fighters and portrays, them as just passive or coerced actors in violence.

While the age bracket of the fighters was continuous from the previous epochs, new developments were seen in the educational levels of women in Gaza and Alshabaab. All the fighters in this era had attained at least primary and secondary education. Some had even

attained tertiary and university-level education. This development was associated with the educational developments in the country that saw the introduction of free primary education and subsidized secondary education. These two developments made education access easier. Additionally, affirmative action in this era saw more women being admitted into university education with lower grades compared to their male counterparts.

The chapter also examined why women fought in this era. It was established that from the 1990s, these drivers have evolved to include religion, revenge, and economic issues. Also, the chapter has shown that no one factor can singly inform fighting. Drivers for fighters are intertwined and all these factors pile up waiting for a trigger. Compared to other violent groups in the previous epoch and during the Mau Mau war, these drivers were seen to range from collective benefits to individual benefits. Fighters in this were seen to have more individualistic reasons for fighting and personal goals for fighting. The aspect of proving their power in the male-dominated space also emerged. Women in this era fought not necessarily because of the group ideology but due to feminism and women's power drive. In this way, it emerged that violent groups in the country have become an avenue for women to project their power, rising femininities and voices. This is because, in these groups, they get a chance to be heard, recognized, and belong as opposed to the outside society where they are limited to the domestic sphere and have to fight the 'insider-outsider' dichotomy to belong.

Like in preceding groups, women in Gaza and Al-Shabaab joined the groups through insiders. However, there was a gender shift in these insiders in this era. All the women studied were introduced to these groups by their female counterparts. This was a major shift because in the previous epochs where men were the major insiders. This development was attributed to women empowerment in the country, more women joining violent groups for revenge and money, and tactic and strategy changes in these violent groups to avoid the hands of the security officers in the country.

The broad categorization of fighters as either combat or non-combat was revealed here. Combat roles included armed robbery, mugging, kidnaps, suicide bombing, and murder. In this category, more visible and bold fighters who openly associated themselves with their violent groups and threatened security officers on social media were revealed. The weapons used by these combat fighters involved locally available knives and sophisticated modern-day guns. These guns are either purchased from illegal dealers or attacked by lonely police officers. In Al-Shabaab, some women were revealed to be skilled in making grenades and bombs. The

complexity of weapons used evolved in this period due to technological advancement and the difference in the fighting strategies used in these groups. For example, Al-Shabaab targets a larger group to attack to create a huge impact thus the use of bombs and grenades.

 The non-combat fighters were seen to focus more on intelligence collection, recruitment of new members, and generating funds for the groups through operating businesses. Social media was a new development as a space for recruitment and influencing other women to join violent groups.

The study established that the husband-wife relationship takes precedence over the fighter or working relationship in the public. In the groups, the working relationship takes precedence over the marriage relationship. The differences in the dominance of this relationship were seen to inform the tales of women as innocent victims of violence and circumstances. The chapter established that because the marriage relationship dominates in public, the fighters are mostly spoken of with reference to their husbands. Accordingly, they are portrayed as good women who innocently fell in love with the wrong men (fighters).

Also, the chapter established that fighters employ sex work or prostitution to get information and weapons from security officers. They also use the same to lure their targets and bring them closer for an attack. While this is acknowledged and valued within violent groups, these sexual relationships are laden with negative connotations outside these groups. Additionally, some violent groups like Al-Shabaab were revealed to have a strict stand against prostitution. However, this is only in public. This double-sided stand on sex work favors the fighters in their duties. However, they do not openly speak about it once they are done for fear of being labeled prostitutes. To conceal their sex work, these fighters give an account of sexual abuse and rape by security agents and male fighters in public. This then presents them as victims of violence as opposed to willing sex workers trading sex as a strategy for fighting. The dominance of this victim narrative is also enhanced by the high cases of gender-based violence against women and girls in Kenya.

It was also revealed that fighters capitalize on privacy and human rights to navigate their world of war. The findings revealed that the number of women security officers in Kenya is still low compared to the women population in the county. It also emerged that many security checks are done by human security officers (mostly men). Accordingly, women end up not being thoroughly frisked at checkpoints as it may raise privacy and sexual assault issues from the

public. Also, fighters exploit real and fake pregnancies to avoid security checks as they transport weapons. In public, pregnant women are regarded as vulnerable and are supposed to be helped. However, in violent groups, pregnancy is an excellent tool for fighters to navigate around without much suspicion. In this way, the fighters exploiting pregnancies appear as innocent individuals who need help and even attract public sympathy when arrested. The focus goes on the pregnancy as opposed to the violent act.

Fighters with young babies also exploit motherhood to transport weapons or attract public sympathy when arrested. They wrap small weapons together with the baby and pass police checks without suspicion. In this case, the focus goes on the baby as babies are generally seen as delicate. Also, fighters pose along highways with babies as if the babies are sick and thus need help to hospitals. Lonely unsuspecting motorists end up being hijacked. Further, these fighters exploit fashion to navigate their war world. They use religious attires, puffy hairstyles, and wigs to transport pistols and ammunition. Police checks do not frisk such attires, hair, and wigs, as this can be termed as profiling of a certain category of women. Banning such dress codes and hairstyles can also be termed as intruding on their religion and fashion choice of hairstyles.

This chapter also established that the language of vulnerability such as "daughters of Al-Shabaab, and widowhood portrays some fighters as irrational actors or weak individuals who need help. In the case of widowhood, the focus goes to a helpless single mother and her orphaned children instead of the violent act they committed. Violent actors also use tears to attract public sympathy and lure victims to the trap for an attack.

The experiences of women fighters were examined. Like their counterparts in the previous epochs, they face sexual assault from security officers, arrest and detention, and killings in their duties. They face fears of being killed by their group members if they defected or betrayed the group to outsiders. Such cases saw some fighters in Gaza and Al-Shabaab who defected the groups relocating to far places and leading private lives to avoid being tracked by their friends or group members. Also, when these experiences occur, they trigger human rights and gender issues that portray these fighters as victims of violence as opposed to people paying for their choices or acting rationally. The exploitation of human rights and gender issues was revealed to be greater in this era compared to the previous epochs. This is because of the presence of more vocal women and gender activists, more freedom of peace and media in the country, and

the evolving conflicts between declining masculinities and increasing femininities in the country (see Maina, 2017).

The next chapter discusses this study's summary, conclusions, and recommendations

CHAPTER SIX

6   Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This chapter summarizes the study, presents the conclusions drawn from the findings, and recommendations based on the research findings.

6.1   Summary and Conclusions

The study sought to examine the history of women anti-state fighters in Kenya from 1945 to 2019. The primary aim was to establish how women enter violent groups, fight, and their experiences in fighting. The question rose because available evidence across the globe and Kenya, in particular, shows that historically, women have been actors in fighting. However, some scholars, policymakers, and media present them with a passivity narrative. The first chapter presented the background against which the study problem was contextualized. The chapter demonstrated that war and violence are gendered spheres that put women at the periphery and men at the center. The chapter also provided evidence of women's involvement in violence and terrorism globally and nationally. It also demonstrated that despite this evidence, there is a male gaze of violence in Kenya where the society only sees a male fighter and a victim woman. This formed the basis of the study's primary question: How do women fight, what are their experiences and why is the passivity narrative of women fighters in Kenya?

The need to answer this question was regarded as significant in placing women in their rightful position in the writing of African history. Also, addressing this question was significant in implementing holistic and effective counterterrorism and counter-violence strategies and policies in Kenya. It was also seen as a gateway to solving the conflict among security agents, women, and human rights activists in times of security operations in Kenya.

In answering this question, the study focused on the histories of fighters and ex-fighters in five groups in Kenya. These groups included Mau Mau, Mungiki, Jeshi La Embakasi, Gaza, and Alshabaab. Although operating in different epochs and informed by different grievances, these groups share one characteristic; the use of violence to achieve their desired goals. The fact that they operated and emerged in different epochs of Kenyan history was key in documenting the historical participation of women in violence in Kenya. It helped document the chronology of events unfolding from one epoch to another and factors informing such flow of events in the world of war and women. The following specific objectives that guided the study were explained in the chapter;

a. To interrogate the link in gender, women, and violence in Kenya 1945-1963.

b. To examine the place of women in the evolving violence in Kenya in the period 1964-1989

c. To analyze the continuity and change of women's involvement in violence in Kenya in the period 1990-2019.

The chapter also provided the geographical and time scopes of the study. These were Mombasa, Nairobi, Nyeri, and Garissa between 1945 and 2019. The methodology that guided this study, its limitation, and how the researcher overcame them was also discussed here. In general, the chapter was very significant in laying the foundation for other chapters in this study.

The second chapter interrogated the literature review and provided the study gaps that this study sought to fill. The review was done thematically in relation to the research objectives. The review revealed that very little scholarly attention has been given to how women fight, their experiences in war, and why the passive narrative of women strives in Kenya. There was also a lack of historical documentation of this question. There were also controversies around women and the definition of a fighter that the study sought to address. While there are works on women and war, the chapter revealed that when mentioned in such studies, women are presented with passivity narratives. The passive-active dichotomy in the war was revealed as one of the major issues in scholarly works that put women at the periphery of violence and war talks and documentation. The gaps identified in this chapter were based on conceptual dynamics, methodological approaches, time, and space.

The chapter discussed the theory that underpinned this study. Specifically, the signaling theory of crime was examined. Its tenets were key in underpinning the entry of women into violent groups. Recruitment into violent groups was seen as a trust-building process that takes time to avoid any cases of betrayal of the group to the security agents. Both men and women go through this same process. It is worth noting that from the literature review and the theoretical review, the centrality of all fighters in the violent group regardless of their gender was established. As a result, the chapter gave rise to the fighter's centrality approach to war, an approach that underpinned this study.

In the third chapter, the link in women, gender, and violence, the study focuses on women fighters in the Mau Mau war of independence from 1945 to 1963. The chapter explored how women in Mau Mau broke the gender barriers to partake in the war that began as entirely a

male affair. The stories of Mau Mau female veterans were explored to bring out the three major focus areas of the study, how women enter violent group, fight, and their experiences. The study revealed that the relationship in this trichotomy (women, gender, and violence) is based on gender stereotypes and these stereotypes are based on the private-public dichotomy. In this dichotomy, the men belong to the public, masculine sphere while women belong to the feminine private sphere.

In Mau Mau, although women were at the center of the success of the war, the British administrators regarded them as forced actors in war. However, this perception changed after 1953 when more evidence of women partaking in oathing, recruitment, and combat fighting came into the limelight. At the beginning of the war, the male fighters did not want women to join them. However, after some time, they realized that they would not win the war alone. They needed women in the team. Although this was the case during the war, in post-colonial Kenya, most of these men veterans are reluctant to accept that women were actual fighters. Instead, they regarded them as supporters of Mau Mau. Women were also essential in Mau Mau oathing. They not only shared in the same oaths as men but also provided their menses for the oathing concoction and administered oaths. In this way, these fighters challenged and broke the traditional gender norms in Agikuyu society where men and women never shared the same oaths. Additionally, menses were seen as highly sacred and a sign of fertility and life. Using it in oathing signified the connection between women and the freedom of life that the Mau Mau fought for.

The chapter also established that women were combat and non-combat fighters in the war. It emerged that the non-combat fighters are openly regarded as the passive wing of the war. This was revealed as among the reasons why women are seen as passivists in the war. The non-combat fighting was essential for the success of the war and fighters who carried out these roles risked capital punishments from the colonial government. Accordingly, the categorization of fighting into active and passive based on stereotypes is erroneous.

Sexual relationships in Mau Mau revealed that some fighters were traditionally married to the Mau Mau fighters. Because of this relationship, their credit for fighting goes to their husbands. Some fighters used sex and befriended bodyguards to collect information and weapons for Mau Mau. While there are those, who faced sexual abuse from the colonialist, narratives of those who voluntarily used prostitution for the advantage of the Mau Mau war are not openly spoken. This is due to the negative conation that is laden with prostitution in the current society.

There was gender conflict in Mau Mau leadership. The conflict between masculinity and femininity was revealed in the rank of a field marshal. Some men veterans refuted the position of a woman field marshal while all women veterans interviewed accepted its existence. The findings revealed that this refusal is based on the public and private spheres stereotypes where men believe that women cannot effectively hold leadership positions and control men, especially in war and violence which belongs to the public sphere.

In the fourth chapter, the place of women in violent groups in Kenya in the period 1964-1989, the study examined women in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi between 1964 when Kenya became a republic, and 1989, two years to Kenya's multiparty politics. This chapter revealed that the emergence of violent groups in post-colonial Kenya was informed by the authoritarianism of the KANU regime. The period also coincided with the women's decade characterized by awakening the centrality of women's empowerment in development, equality, and peace. Women in Kenya, at this time, were in between rampant gender discrimination and political and economic oppression from the ruling party. The findings revealed that the plight of women in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi was informed by how their male counterparts perceived them, how they joined these groups, why they fought, how they fought, and the leadership positions they hold in these groups. It was established that these fighters were game-changers in these groups. Their fighting strategies and roles provide the required information and tools to stage attacks. The combat fighters in these groups did kidnaps, car hijacking, armed robbery, and disruption of political rallies. This is because the war front had changed from the forest during the Mau Mau era to the streets in independence Kenya. The weapons used also changed to include guns and machetes. The catapult was no longer a fighting weapon due to technology and war front changes.

However, it was established that women's non-combat fighting strategies (collection of intelligence, transportation weapons, recruitment, financing, among others) like in the previous epoch were laden with passivity, thus given less attention. Much focus was given to combat male fighters and the actors behind the making of combat fighters assumed as passive. This again left women at the periphery of war and violence.

It was also established that most fighters entered violent groups through men insiders. These groupings portrayed women as victims of male violence and coerced actors in these groups. However, stories by the fighters and ex-fighters interviewed revealed that these male insides do not force them into fighting. The insiders only help the women build trust with other fighters

in the group to avoid betrayal. This is because recruitment in these violent groups is a trust game, and one requires a link with somebody who is already a member to be recruited. The fact that most women entered through male insiders was linked to the idea that men constitute most fighters in the violent groups in Kenya. Regarding leadership positions, the study revealed accepted women leaders. However, very few of these leaders existed. The few available still had to demonstrate some masculine features to get these positions.

Unlike in Mau Mau fighters in this era came from the middle and lower class of Kenyan society. A majority had attained primary school education. This was due to the campaigns that insisted on women's education in the country. Additionally, unlike during the colonial era, education was accessible to Africans in this era. The study showed that women constituted 20-25% of the membership in violent groups. These numbers play a role in rendering them invisible in war and violent talks. Also, these fighters were differently perceived by diverse actors in terms of fighting. Actors in the larger society (media, police, and policymakers) had not accepted the presence of women fighters. However, male fighters were revealed to acknowledge women fighters.

In this era the place of women in oathing was dynamic. In some groups, women administered oaths while in others they did not. For example, patriarchy and masculinity were revealed in Mungiki where despite sharing the same oath as men, women never administered oaths. However, this was different with Jeshi al Embakasi where women could administer oaths. The diversity in this was attributed to Mungiki's call for a return to traditional Agikuyu life where women never administered oaths and had to be circumcised. This female circumcision in Mungiki is seen as violone against women in Kenya. However, fighters in the group embrace it with positivity.

Generally, the chapter concluded that women were game changers in Mungiki and Jeshi la Embakasi in this era. Their ability to fight as combats and non-combats without much suspicion made the operations of their groups easier and smoother. However, on the side of the government, it made the crackdown on these groups difficult due to the invisibility of some of the fighters.

The Fifth chapter, changes, and continuity in women's participation in violence and terrorism in Kenya focused on women in Gaza and Alshabaab in the period 1990-2019. This was studied with close reference to women in Gaza and Alshabaab. The study established several

developments in Kenya during this time that influenced continuities and changes in women's involvement in violent activities in the country. The period was marked by multipartyism, a change of regime from KANU to NARC, women empowerment campaigns, and the banning of illegal militias in Kenya by the government. Kenya also joined the global war against terrorism after the 1998 bombing of the US embassy. With all these developments, transitional terror groups cells emerged in Kenya and new violent groups within the country emerged after the ban on 18 groups in 2002. The period also experienced a skyrocketing number of violent groups in the country from 18 in 2022 to 326 in 2017.

The study revealed that in this epoch women fought for more personal reasons than group reasons. This included revenge, religion, money, and curving their niche. This period had fighters who had attained at least a secondary school education with others having university and college education levels. This was attributed to free primary education, subsidized secondary education, and more campaigns for girl child education in the country. Also, it was established that the number of women fighters in this epoch was increasing with more vocal and open fighters emerging in the 2000s. This was attributed to the ban on violent groups in the country thus the change of tactic on their side by recruiting more women who would carry out their activities without arousing much attention from the government. Cases of fighters threatening police officers and parading with guns on social media and even identifying with violent groups were revealed in this epoch. This was attributed to technological advancement and the expansion of the virtual space in the country.

In terms of leadership, the study established that women fighters in Gaza and Alshabaab could not hold top leadership positions nor administer oaths. However, the study showed that, unlike the previous two eras, this period saw women insiders helping others to join the groups. This challenged the norm in the previous two epochs where only men insiders were reported However, the nature of these fights expanded from kidnaps, mugging and armed robbery to suicide bombing and bomb attacks. This was attributed to the missions of the violent groups of this era and their major targets.

In executing their roles, the fighters' women capitalized on human rights, privacy issues, religion, fashion, language, and social relations. There emerged a strong link between sex work and violence. Here women fighters paraded as prostitutes to attract the security officers for info and attack them for weapons. Women's dress code, hairstyles, and pregnancies were seen to be exploited for fighting purposes too. In this way, their ways of fighting were revealed as

unique and complex to unmask. Non-combat fighters were revealed to use sexual relations to gather intelligence and acquire weapons for the group. Women's panties, fluffy hairstyles, and dresses were revealed to be significant in the transportation of these weapons. Also, traditional religious attires such as *Buibui* were found to be exploited for this advantage. Women's beauty was seen to be closely linked to sexual relations and their exploitation to the advantage of violent actors. Also, the humanitarian treatment accorded to pregnant women and the vulnerability associated with pregnancy was found to be used in the transportation of weapons, and food supplies, and concealing suicide bombers.

Sexual relations and language codes were revealed to have diverse interpretations in violent groups, security actors, and society in general. The aspects exploited by fighters are those that society uses to classify women as weak, vulnerable, and passive actors in war. Accordingly, the chapter concludes that the gender stereotype in society is contrary applied in violent groups to achieve their missions. Women are doing exactly the opposite of what society thinks of them to propel the violent groups' agendas and ideologies. While the violent groups are fully exploiting these stereotypes, the larger society is reluctant to shed them. This contributes to the continued narrative of women as weak and victims of violence even where they are found committing these violent acts. The diversity in sexual relations and language code interpretations was revealed to enhance women's roles as fighters without suspicion in society. In a way, fighters take advantage of these interpretations to rationally perform their duties and avoid security checks and arrests.

The experiences of fighters were also examined. It was established that the experiences involve sexual and physical assault, arrest and detention, and killings. These experiences play a huge role in portraying women as victims of violence. This is because once they happen, they take precedence over the violent act done since they constitute elements of human rights and gender violence. The factors that inform these trends in women's fighting include skewed affirmative action and women empowerment campaigns, privacy and human rights issues, and religious profiling of some communities in Kenya. Humanitarian aspects accorded to particular groups of people in Kenya and patriarchy in Kenya's social, economic, and Political structures also informed these trends.

As to why the passivity narrative of women fighters strives in Kenya, the study established that the grievances of violent groups in Kenya fall within the public, male domain. Thus, assumptions that women cannot participate in groups whose grievances involve political and

economic liberation, and other elements considered masculine. Also, the fewer numbers of women in violent groups than their male counterparts make them invisible in war and violence talks. They appear as the marginalized and the helpless within these groups, which in actual sense is not the reality. Further, the non-combatant strategies used by women fighters are largely classified as passive and accorded less significance than combatant duties. Most of these strategies involve the use of their bodies, thus ending up being paraded as victims of violence than rational actors using their bodies as fighting weapons. Women fighters use sex as a tool to fight parade as victims of violence once caught or when reporting their stories to conceal the negative connotation that is laden with prostitution. Their victim narrative takes precedence over any narrative due to the rampant sexual and gender-based abuse of women in Kenya.

The threat of rising femininities informs men's denial of women who excels in the world of war. In this way, even violent groups parade as purely patriarchal in public to guard their image while in the true sense, women constitute the central element in their operations. Such a patriarchal pose conceals the true position of women as rational fighters in Kenya. Some groups like Mungiki advocate for FGM, which is considered violence against women. In some, like Mau Mau, women's menstrual blood was seen as one of the resources in oathing. Therefore, it is largely assumed that women cannot support groups that advocate for violence against them and use their sexuality for oathing purposes.

Violent groups' weapons and the gender stereotypes associated with them paint a picture of only women fighters. Many of the weapons require energy and some sharp skills to use. Such traits are the physical characteristics associated with masculinity and a warrior in general. Therefore, it is assumed that women who exhibit feminine features cannot use these weapons. Thus, their presence in violent groups is seen as only to support their husbands or offer sexual gratification to men fighters.

The identity of fighter's changes from one actor to another, and from one period to another. The fighters have evolved from fighting for political freedom and independence to fighting for economic and personal gains. Their battlegrounds have also changed and so are the fighting weapons. While their fighting strategies have remained the same, the nature of activities under combat and non-combat roles have also changed due to changes in technology, fighting reasons, battlegrounds, and weapons. Over time, more vocal and visible women fighters are coming into the limelight. Nonetheless, their positions in the group's leadership are dynamic

as they seem to be accepted in one group and denied the same in the other. Gender conflicts around this leadership were established, and masculinity and femininity tussles were seen to inform these. The study also concludes that women are central to the success of violent groups in Kenya and that they are not always victims of violence.

6.2   Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following is recommended.

There is a need for the re-socialization of violence and terrorism and associated actors. Society ought to be made aware that while warriors' traits depict masculinity, both men and women can be rational fighters. Specifically, researchers in this field need to rewrite and retell a history of violence that is gender-sensitive, cognizant, and inclusive.

To the ministry of interior and coordination of national government, and the ministry of defense which deals with internal security and counterterrorism in the country, the study recommends that in counter-terrorism and giving reports on violence and terror attacks in the country, there is a need to present the centrality of each actor involved in the act. Efforts ought to be made by the concerned security apparatus in the country to move away from gendering war and violence as only masculine. This too applies to the media which reports about terror attacks in the country, there is a need for the journalist to report each actor involved individually as opposed to reporting women fighters in relation to their men counterparts.

 In the fight against patriarchy and associated toxic masculinities, the Kenyan gender activists and the ministry of public service, gender, and affirmative action should be cognizant of rising femininities and the potential of humanitarian treatment accorded to women being exploited in violent groups. There is a need for recognition that while women are victims of violence, they can also be violent actors.

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Gachoka Mwangi, 86 years, Mau Mau veteran, Interviewed at Mathira, Nyeri on 6/11/ 2020.

Kanyata, Wanjiku, 85 years, Resident Nyeri, Interviewed at Kiambu, 29/12/2020.

Kariuki, Njenga, about 65 years old, Clan elder, Interviewed at Mathira, Nyeri on 26/10/2020 and 1/11/2020.

Kiragu, George, about 65 years, Clan elder, interviewed at Ruring'o, on 1/11/2020.

Miriam Mathenge, 93 years, Mau Mau veteran, interviewed at Nyeri, on 11/12/2020 and 26/07/2021.

Mukami, Kimathi, 90 years, Mau Mau veteran, Interviewed at Kinangop, Nyandarua. 8/12/2020; 9/01/202 and 4/07/2021.

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Prof. Fathma, Badurdeen, about 50 years, University instructor, interviewed virtually on 30/10/2020.

Werunga Simiyu, 51 years, security analyst, interviewed virtually on 15/11/2020 and **3**/12/2020.

With Pseudonyms

Bob, 30 years, corporal, Kenya police sergeant, interviewed virtually on 28/12/2020.

Deputy County Commissioner, about 51 years, interviewed at Mombasa on 18/10/ 2020.

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Grace, about 27 years, a neighbor to a fighter, interviewed at Kayole Nairobi, on 5/11/2020.

Investigative journalist, 37 years, Royal media services interviewed at Nairobi, on 12/09/2020 and 28/09/2020,

Investigative Journalist, about 40 years, Kenya Television Network, interviewed at Nairobi, 18/06/ 2020

Issa, 33 years, Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) Lieutenant, interviewed virtually on 14/11/2020.

Jacinta, about 35 years, Prison, Officer interviewed at Kamiti on 5/11/2020 and 19/11/2020.

Kamanda, 27 years, Mungiki fighter interviewed at kibra on 16/11/ 2020.

KDF officer, 40 years, captain interviewed at Garissa on 8/08/ 2021.

KDF, about 37 years, Lieutenant, interviewed at Garissa on 23/06/2021.

Kemunto, 38 years, Kenya police sergeant, interviewed at Garissa on 24/08/2021

Kendi, 28 years, friend to a fighter, interviewed at kibra, on 6/11/ 2020.

Kui, 35 years, women researcher, interviewed virtually and physically in Nairobi on 3/09/2020
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Mariam, about 30 years, Al-Shabaab ex-fighter, interviewed at Malindi on 22/11/2020 and
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Maya, 28 years, Al-Shabaab ex-fighter, interviewed Kambi ya waya, on 19/09/2021.

Mogaka, about 40 years, a Former flying squad officer, interviewed at Juja, on 7/10/ 2020;
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Moraa, 30 years, Kenya police sergeant, interviewed in Nairobi on 7/10/2020 and 23/10/
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Mwango, 30 years, Kenya police, senior sergeant interviewed virtually and physically on
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Ndirangu, 27 years, Feminist Researcher, interviewed virtually on 19/09/2020 and
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Njeri, 24 years, Gaza ex-fighter, interviewed in Nairobi on 16/10/2020 and 18/11/2020.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Research Permit, First Phase of Data Collection

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