



# Factors that Influenced the Akamba People of Machakos Town Sub County to Participate in the MAU MAU Rebellion between 1895 and 1963

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**Abstract:** *The study sought to investigate factors that influenced the Akamba people to join the rebellion against their colonial establishment. The study was guided by the following objectives: To investigate the factors that influenced the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County to participate in the MAU MAU rebellion, to examine the role played by the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County in the organization of the MAU MAU rebellion and to assess the socio-economic impact of MAU MAU rebellion on the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County. The study adopted qualitative research design. Secondary and primary information was obtained from books, journals, articles, theses, dissertations, newspapers as well as several internet sources. Oral data was obtained from respondents. The collected data was grouped into various sub themes and corroborated to eliminate inconsistencies and exaggerations. Thereafter, the data was presented descriptively following the various thematic issues. The findings indicate that MAU MAU rebellion among the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County was occasioned by land alienation, forced labour, social discrimination and the punitive colonial policies. The paper recommends that further study be carried out on the wider Akamba people and their involvement in the MAU MAU rebellion. It is also important to delve into the MAU MAU legacies among the Akamba people and how it continues to shape the history of the region.*

**Keywords:** MAU MAU Rebellion, Ramifications, Land Alienation, Racial Discrimination, Socio-economic effects, Machakos town Sub County

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## 1. Introduction

The Akamba were among the earliest people in the interior to meet the Europeans through their Chief Kivoi of Kitui. The first Europeans to meet them were the German Missionaries, Johann Ladwing Krapf and Johannes Rebmann of the Church Missionaries Society (CMS) in 1849. During this time, the Akamba served as guides, potters, soldiers, and at later date employees (Myles, 2014). Conflict between the Akamba and Europeans occurred during the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the British started construction of the railway, which was meant to link the East African coast with Uganda. The

construction of the railway had adverse effects on the Akamba because it led to land alienation, forced labor, collapse of the long-distance trade, exploitation of the territory and relegating the Akamba to infertile native reserves. This reduced their movement to migrate to better lands (Munro, 1975; Spencer, 1983; Wisner, 1977).

According to Matheka (1992), the Akamba people of Machakos town sub-county resisted against the British when they started to construct a Fort – Fort Ainsworth, imposition of annual tribute to officials of IBEA Company and put the entire Machakos under effective company rule. In 1938, the Akamba defied a colonial effort to compel them to give up their livestock as part of obnoxious

livestock control legislation (DC/MKS/10B/15/1 - Machakos Destocking Conditions and General Correspondence, 1938).

They fought the British in a friendly way before the law was repealed. Syokimau, Syotune wa Kathukye, Muindi Mbingu, and later Paul Ngei, JD Kali, and Malu, of Kilungu, were among the most well-known Akamba resistance leaders (Bilow, 2009). It is in light of the above state of affairs that this study sought to bring into light, the factors that influenced the Akamba people of Machakos Town Sub County to participate in the MAU MAU rebellion, the role they played in MAU MAU rebellion and how their socio-economic activities were affected.

## 2. Literature Review

The inhabitants of the Machakos town sub county started to conflict with the white man in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first Europeans who came into contact with the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County were German missionaries, Johann Ludwing Krapf and Johannes Rebman of the church missionary society in 1849. Although the Akamba people of Machakos town sub county had been living peacefully doing their day to day socio-economic activities, this came to an end towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when they started to conflict with the white man who had already penetrated into the interior and started to project imperialist designs led by Fredrick Jackson of IBEA Co. This was unlike earlier visitors e.g. the Arabs, who had traded with the Akamba in the long distance trade without any conflicts (DC/MKS/1/1/33 - Machakos District Annual Report, 1955).

The initial conflicts of the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century prepared the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County to rise up in arms to fight the white man during the MAU MAU rebellion of 1952-1960. According to Matheka (1992: Mazrui, 1987), the people of Machakos started to resist against the British when they started constructing Fort Ainsworth. Long term factors which influenced the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County to resist the White man and hence saw MAU MAU as an opportune moment to fend their anger against the British were:- land alienation, building of an administrative centre, disruption of the long distance trade, disrespect of the Akamba traditional religion, disrespect of the Akamba culture, imposition of chiefs by the British, Economic exploitation, confiscation of their livestock by the white man, payment of taxes and plight of the ex-soldiers (DC/MKS/1/1/34 - Machakos District Annual Report, 1958)

Land alienation, which was originally meant to facilitate construction of the railway later on was extended to start white settlement. White settlers established white settler

farms which forced the Akamba to move to infertile native reserves which angered them.

The building of an administrative centre by Frederick Jackson in 1889 and the subsequent expansion through local chiefs angered the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County. The administrative centre was used by Fredrick Jackson and his white settlers as a spring board from where they would operate to new lands.

The disruption of the Akamba trade by the white man further infuriated the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub-County to prepare for resistance. The disruption of this trading pattern which embraced the long distance trade dealt a blow to the Akamba commercial activities and prepared them for resistance against the British.

The British disrespect of the Akamba traditional religion, particularly when Leith cut down a tree that formed part of the shrine in 1891 at Mumbuni where Scott Theological College stands, served as a desecration and a disgrace to the Akamba. This made them to remain bitter until the emergence of the MAU MAU rebellion (DC/MKS/1/1/34 - Machakos District Annual Report. 1958)

According to Jons Finke (2003), MAU MAU and Akamba participation in the anti-colonial uprising was widespread but largely peaceful, though a movement of complete European rejection had arisen as early as 1911. It was led by a widow named Siotune Wa Kathuke, who channeled anti-colonial sentiment into frenetic dancing, in which teenage girls were "possessed" by an anti-European spirit and preached radical anti-government messages.

By the 1930s, resistance had become more focused, and the Ukambani Members Association (UMA) was established, with Muindi Mbingu as one of its founders, who went on to become a hero in the struggle for independence. The organization was formed by a group of wealthy Akamba cattle owners to thwart attempts to settle Europeans in Ukambani and reduce Akamba herds through compulsory purchase ("destocking"), a suggestion that the Maasai also rejected (DC/MKS/4/9 - Machakos District Political Record Book, 1930).

In Machakos, things came to a head when wealthy Akamba refused to accept payment for 2,500 confiscated cattle, saying it was just a quarter of the animals' true market value. When the government forced the cattle sales, between 1,500 and 5,000 men, women, and children marched to Nairobi's Kariokor ("Carrier Corps") Market to petition Governor Sir Robert Brooke-Popham to put an end to them. They camped near the racecourse grounds for six weeks, saluting the governor whenever he moved, before the governor called a public meeting in Machakos town to resolve their grievances. Senior askaris, as relatively affluent members of Akamba society, had huge herds, so it's not shocking that Akamba

police and army members sympathized with the demonstrators. The outcry, which came from people who had 'loyally' fought for the British King and country in WWI and were now being treated unfairly, made front-page news in Europe, and the colonial authorities finally relented, returning the stock. Much has been known about the creation and course of the rebellion in relation to Jon Finke's work, but little has been said about what happened after the revolt, especially in the Akamba region of Machakos town sub-county, which was thought to be the main center and core of the Akamba involvement in the rebellion, hence the need for this study.

Myles (2014) noted that the movement found willing supporters in Nairobi. This is because thousands of Africans had come to Nairobi in search of work since the end of the Second World War. The surge was especially notable among the Akamba men, who wanted to escape the dry conditions of the overcrowded reserves and had done so frequently against the wishes of their elders and chiefs. In Nairobi, members of every ethnic group mixed freely and thousands of Akamba people took the oath, some at their own wish and others forced by the leaders from both kikuyu and Akambani. Those few in Nairobi that refused the oath faced uncertain future, with violence, a daily occurrence in the streets.

MAU MAU, on the other hand, did not have the same success in Ukambani's rural areas. The importance of gaining Akamba support there was recognized by the KAU as early as 1951, particularly because the majority of the former servicemen lived in the reserves (Kisaingani, 1993). That year Paul Ngei had toured Machakos, giving speeches under the guise of KAU just like Kenyatta and Fred Kubai had spoken in Machakos and Kitui. But on the eve of emergency, the government acted to prevent the movement of people between the Akamba reserves, Kikuyu land and Nairobi. On September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1952, it passed a traffic amendment restricting the passage of vehicles at night along three major routes in Ukambani: Between Machakos and Nairobi, Thika and Machakos, Thika and Kitui. The Kenya police began night patrols at Machakos and the government increased the number of tribal police there. It also created a new west Akamba division of the Kenya Police Reserve.

In Mitamboni location according to Myles (2014), an ABC member by the name Martha Ngandi was noted saying that some Akamba had been forced to take a MAU MAU Oath. Those in Mitamboni were scared of the MAU MAU. On one of the European farms belonging to Mr. Davis Evans, 20 oathed Akamba were discovered. The government then found out that several oathing groups comprising of young Akamba men were circulating throughout the reserves. When Kawa Musili, one of the people that officiated the oath was arrested, his confession was indicative of this new trend: "I wish

to tell the screening team about "kwasya na kwika" a MAU MAU war council (sic). The following were the aims and the objectives of the council: to fight to the end, to subscribe money for furthering MAU MAU oaths in Ukambani and to administer MAU MAU oaths to all Akamba Chiefs on whom the government was so reliant for maintaining stability, began receiving threats. There were strong connections between MAU MAU activity and the railway line. The government expected trouble in areas such as Kagundo- home of Paul Ngei and Iveti, therefore neglected places like Mbitini and Kilungu in south west, where MAU MAU took root.

### 3. Methodology

The research used qualitative research design and was carried out in Machakos town sub-county which was chosen because it has a long history, having served as the site of the country's first administrative headquarters in British East Africa (Kenya). The sub-county is bordered on the west by Nairobi and Kiambu counties, on the north by Embu, on the east by Kitui, on the south by Makueni, on the south west by Kajiado, and on the north by Murang'a and Kirinyaga. The headquarters of the British colony was established in 1899. A good number of MAU MAU adherents hailed from this area. Therefore, there are a lot of facts that have not been tested and documented from Machakos Town Sub County concerning MAU MAU. Machakos town sub-county became the suitable area as it captures the scope of the study and fits the methodology within which researchers of such a topic should dwell.

The target population of the study involved the elderly aged 50 years and above and are residents of Machakos Town Sub-county. The preferred 50-year-old population sample was likely to have relevant information. The target population included ex-service men, political/civil leaders, administrators and farmers. Both genders were involved.

Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources involved data collected from Kenya National Archives, and oral interviews conducted by the researcher. Secondary data was obtained from books, journals, newspapers, thesis and dissertations as well as the internet.

Data was analyzed thematically, which involved identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meanings that the researcher got from the informants. The researcher generally analyzed the patterns in observations through the entire data collection phase.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The background study, demonstrated that, the African resistance dates back to the period of the European penetration into the interior of the continent. The

penetration was followed by imposition of European system of administration. Despite the fact that the initial African resistance was suppressed, it emerged later on the various parts of Africa in different forms. Other than MAU MAU in Kenya, other resistance battles in the African continent included, Chimurenga Uprising among the Ndembele and Shona in southern Rhodesia, MajiMaji rebellion and the Hehe rebellion in Tanganyika, just to mention but a few.

Despite the fact that Machakos was thought to be a loyalist area during the colonial era, the research clearly showed that opposition to the white man began in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Following land alienation to construct the railway, resist taxation and establishment of Fort Ainsworth. The Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County resisted out rightly when they realized the imperialist designs of the British foreigners who they had compared with the Arab traders. It is this background, which set in motion resistance between the British and the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County. The original Europeans who came as missionaries were followed by imperial groups led by Fredrick Jackson. It is this group which sparked off resistance to the whiteman.

This research has shown that MAU MAU did not begin in Machakos. It spilled from Nairobi through the Agikuyu and the Urban Akamba, who had gone to look for white color jobs. This information is contained in (DC/MKS/1/1/31 - Machakos District Annual Report, 1953). This archival report, shows how MAU MAU grew steadily and how criminals died violent deaths in Machakos district in 1955. This report also shows MAU MAU oathing ceremonies in areas of Mbitini, Mukaa and lower Kilungu.

Further archival evidence confirms that MAU MAU operations in Machakos built a prison camp for MAU MAU prisoners at Lukenya to quarry stones for the main Nairobi-Mombasa road. More Archival reports show how in 1953 young Akamba members were converted to MAU MAU. Most of these were employees of the East-African Railway and harbors and stone quarries.

As part of the background study, members of the MAU MAU war veteran association in Machakos, narrated how hideouts for MAU MAU adherents were wide-spread in Ivetti forest, Oldonyo sabuk and Kitale forest. They further, detailed the presence of 13 mass graves in Kyumbi area of Machakos and another Mass grave near Machakos teacher's college at the outskirts of Machakos town. The MAU MAU adherents who were killed were buried en-mass in these graves. Notable MAU MAU leaders included, Joseph Muasa, Nthula, Kavula, Muia Makola and Ndawa Wa Mbili all of whom would transport war materials to MAU MAU war veterans (Musembi Mutia, O.I; 11.02.2020).

The MAU MAU war veterans attacked the white man because of land alienation in Mua Hills, Mukaa grass lands, and Kapiti plains. The Akamba people of Machakos town sub-county were moved to infertile stony reserves on the slopes of Ivetti hills, Ngelani, Kangundo, and Kiima Kimwe, where they were restricted to only have three heads of cattle and not allowed to go beyond class four. This background therefore, leaves no doubt that the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County participated in MAU MAU to address the grievances already alluded to. Detention camps were established at Kathonzweni, Thavu, Kaasia, Mbooni, Ithemboni and Kilome (Francis M Mutiso; O.I; 13.2.2020).

The first objective of the study was to analyse the factors that influenced the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County to participate in the MAU MAU rebellion. In fact, most of these factors, which served as catalysts to the Akamba participation in MAU MAU rebellion, were long term factors emanating from the last two decades of the 19th Century with expropriation of large tracts of land from the Akamba to construct the railway.

As can be shown, the establishment of the Ukamba Members Association, which provided a platform for formal resistance to colonial supremacy, gave impetus to Akamba resistance to colonial rule. To add insult to injury, the seizure of Akamba cattle ignited their wrath led by Muindi Mbingu. The anti-stocking policy further infuriated their anger and propelled their resistance. To further demonstrate their anger, the Akamba in places like Ngelani, Matungulu, Mitaboni and Kangundo attacked colonial chiefs. Indeed, the various leaders discussed, such as Chief Yosiah Nzioka, who were used by the colonial state to further their imperialists' policies and designs, pricked the Akamba so much that when the MAU MAU erupted in 1952, the Akamba quickly plunged into it. It is also worthy to note that the factors that motivated the Akamba to join MAU MAU could not be condoned. Each of the factors disadvantaged the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County and promoted the well-being of the colonial state. It is evidently clear that, the Akamba joined MAU MAU rebellion to contest misrule and socio-economic exploitation by the whites.

The factors which manifested socio-economic exploitation really impoverished the Akamba so much that they became squatters, paupers, destitute and vagrants in their own territories. Colonial state on the other hand flourished, occupying prime lands, subjecting the Akamba to cruel policies of taxation to raise revenue, denying Akamba children higher education, demonizing Akamba culture and subjecting the Akamba to forced labor in European owned farms. All these ills and maladies left the Akamba with no alternative but to join MAU MAU rebellion in order to correct and reverse the above state of affairs.

From the data collection, it is evidently clear that MAU MAU occurrence in Machakos town sub-county was real.

The inhabitants of the Sub County took part in MAU MAU after being motivated to participate in it. Eye witness accounts vividly show the valid repercussions that affected the inhabitants.

The major bond of contention between the white settlers and the inhabitants of Machakos town Sub County was land alienation which had reduced the inhabitants of Machakos town Sub County to abject poverty. Indeed, family life in Machakos town Sub County was not only disrupted but almost became nonexistent due to the harassment by the white settlers.

Eye witness account also reveals various concentration camps spread all over the Sub County which were used as punitive centers for MAU MAU adherents. They included Kathonzweni, Kaasya, Thavu and Kwa Luvai near Embakasi. The existence of these camps is a clear indication of the atrocity of MAU MAU to the people of Machakos town Sub County.

Some of the MAU MAU survivors who were members of MAU MAU war veteran association show scars and physical impairment meted on them by the colonialists in an effort to make them (Africans) denounce MAU MAU activities (Musembi Mutia, O.I; 11.02.2020)

From pictorial evidences, children were not even spared by the violence. Most of them were left lonely in deserted homesteads with nobody to cling on. Those children who succumbed were buried in the mass graves with their parents.

During the data collection, the researcher was able to get information that MAU MAU war veterans in Machakos town Sub County are still pursuing compensation from the British government. Indeed, some of the members have been compensated e.g the chairman of the association, Mutia Musembi who has been in the forefront to ensure compensation is done to everybody. In order to ensure that is done, the association meets every Thursday at Mavivye near the chiefs' camp to look at not only compensation but also welfare matters concerning members of the association. Other than the commonly known freedom fighters, e.g., Paul Ngei and JD Kali, the study has shown other freedom fighters, e.g Paul Kisoi, Musembi Mutia, Nthengi Kithyaka, Nzili Muoka and Ndiku Mutwiwa. The study further demonstrated the gallant role played by women in support of MAU MAU, a good example is Syotune Wa Kathukye (Rose Kasuki, O.I; 11.02.2020).

Economic exploitation: The Akamba people of Machakos town Sub County were exploited by the White settlers as they provided labour in European-owned farms and colonial government projects. Those Africans who refused to offer labour were heavily fined or underwent a one month's imprisonment term. Indeed the African people of Machakos town Sub County were supposed to offer compulsory labour. In view of Nguli Wa Ngima (O.I. 13.02.2020) he recounted to the researcher how the

African labourers were paid meager wages and at times paid in kind.

Confiscation of their livestock by the white man influenced the Akamba people to resist. DC/MKS/1/1/10. The Europeans took away oxen from the Akamba native reserve. The colonialists regime had forcibly seized 2500 cattle, 1220 small calves and bulls and sold them to Messrs Leibergs meat factory at a throw away price of about 10-11 shillings each. The Akamba treated this as high way robbery. Mobilised by Muindi Mbingu the Akamba people of machakos town Sub County peacefully marched from Machakos town to seek audience from colonial pundits. This really angered the Akamba who rose up in arms to fight the white man when MAU MAU rebellion occurred.

Payment of taxes: According to the Secretary General of the MAU MAU war veteran association Francis Musyoka Mutiso (O.I.13.02.2020) he detailed to the researcher how the inhabitants of Machakos town Sub County were subjected to well-defined methods of taxation such as hut tax, head tax and poll tax all of which were collected with a lot of brutality and without representation. The painful and punitive forms of taxation prepared the Akamba people of Machakos Town Sub County to participate in the MAU MAU war of liberation.

Plight of the ex-soldiers: The colonial government disappointed and mistreated the ex-soldiers after World War 2. The colonial government never fulfilled its promises to the ex-servicemen and hence the ex-servicemen mobilized the Akamba people of Machakos Town Sub County to resist the colonial government in retaliation.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The social consequences included, disruption of family life and interaction, physical violence, changing gender roles, children added responsibilities, disruption of formal education, psychological effect, separation of children from their parents, death of many people and rural – urban migration.

Economic consequences included, disruption of trade, collapse of local industries, undermining of man-power development, forced labor in European owned farms, impoverishment of Africans, review of taxation policies, and creation of white color jobs.

According to Machakos District annual report of 1955-1956 DC/MKS/1/1/33, her royal highness visited Machakos and noted how MAU MAU was declining. MAU MAU threat in Machakos started to decline because the Akamba felt there was far more to be gained and far more to be achieved from cooperation than disloyalty and resistance which had led to the above adverse effects.

Therefore, it can be concluded that just as in many African communities, the Akamba people of Machakos town Sub

County fully participated in fighting for the independence of Kenya and for their rights from white man's oppression.

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