

A BIOGRAPHY OF THE LATE SENIOR CHIEF KATHURU NYAGAH OF  
THAGICU-KITUI COUNTY, KENYA, 1918-1998

PETER MUGENDI NDUKU

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## DECLARATION AND APPROVAL

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university or for any other award.

Signature *peterson*

Date 09/05/2023

Peter Mugendi Nduku

MAHS/2018/26828

### Approval by Supervisor

We confirm the work reported in this thesis proposal was carried out by the candidate under our supervision.

Signature



Date...09/05/2023

Name: Dr. Peter Wafula

Department of history, Archeology and Political Studies,

Kenyatta University.

Signature:



Date...09/05/2023

Name: Dr. Ruth Nyambura

Department of history,

## DEDICATION

To my mother, siblings and in memory of my grandfather whose efforts to educate my mum has had a



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Mount Kenya

University

## ABSTRACT

The study of biographies of those personalities who have contributed in one way or the other in influencing history can be quite fascinating because it furthers our understanding of broader issues and processes in any given society. Such colonial chiefs included senior chief Waruhiu wa Kung'u, chief Musa Nyandusi, Odera Akong'o, Njiri wa Karanja and paramount chief Kinyanjui Gathirimu just to name a few. As I read through the literature on colonial chiefs, it occurred to me that there is no one who has written a biography on colonial chiefs in Thagicu District even though there were a few chiefs among them the likes of senior chief Kathuru Nyagah and chief Mwendwa wa Kitavi who played very important roles in shaping the destinies of their people. The mention of the name of senior chief Kathuru among the Thagicu rekindles memories of a leader who through collaboration with colonial officials played a significant role in improving the lives of Thagicu people. This thesis was an attempt to write the biography of the Late Senior Chief Kathuru Nyagah of Thagicu community. The Late was born around 1918 and passed away in 1998 having lived for a record of eighty years. He was first appointed a Headman in 1943 before being made a chief in 1947. He was an extremely rare type that was hard to come by during the colonial period. His loyalty in serving the colonial government was unquestionable. It is therefore no wonder that chief Kathuru was made the most powerful chief in Thagicu-Kitui District by being given the title of a Senior Chief. His popularity as well as his reputation suffered a great deal when he was carrying out his duties as a colonial chief. In other words, chief Kathuru acted as the cutting edge of the colonial sword and the result was that he quite often collided with his people. The brutal attempt to assassinate chief Kathuru showed and awakened the colonial officers in Kitui to the gravity of the Mau Mau activities in Thagicu-Kitui District. This thesis will add to the existing literature on colonial history by among other things examining the working of the colonial government in Thagicu-Kitui district during the colonial period. Likewise it is expected that this thesis fills important gaps which list on the available information on chief Kathuru which apart from being scanty is scattered in various documents. The result of this study will also raise the curiosity for further studies in the same field by future scholars who will use this work as a reference in their works.

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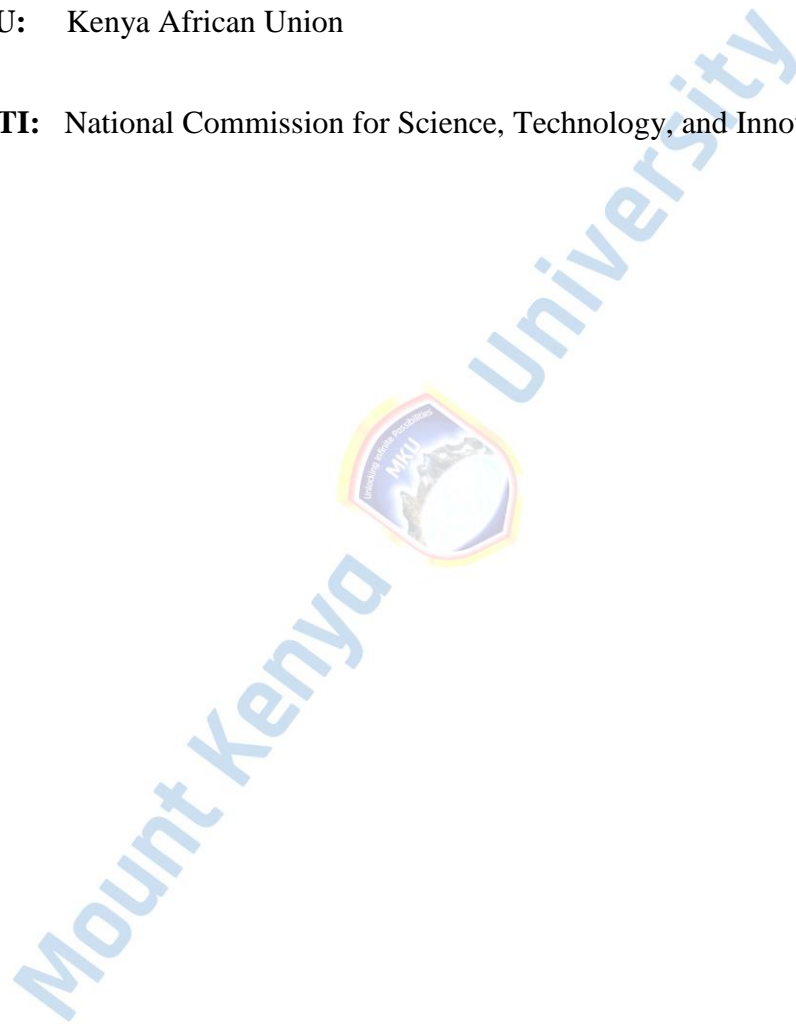
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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

**KNA:** Kenya National Archives

**The KAU:** Kenya African Union

**NACOSTI:** National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

It was concluded that history of people unveils a lot concerning the society as a whole. The broader aspects of the society were clearly seen in the acts of the individuals as people represent active participants of their respective societies. It was indeed revealed that individuals who are regarded by their communities as heroes form significant subjects of historical study (Tignor 2015). Moreover, as Carlyle (1993) contends, history is comprised of biographies of great men and women since these great people shaped history through divine inspiration and personal attributes. Carlyle alleges that the lives of great men and women are fundamental in understanding the society and its institutions. He claims that universal history is at the bottom of the history of the Great people. Therefore, from this perspective, history can be said to be the aggregate of the lives of individuals who constitute the society.

Hargreaves (1964) postulates that historians may perhaps continue their debate, but the layman can turn to biographical studies in anticipation of forming at least a provincial understanding of imperialism. It is through the study of biographies that people are bound to develop an in-depth understand and have a comprehensive view of an entire era in the society. He affirms that a biography is not only documented to bring out 'times and life' of an individual but also scrutinizes a broader spectrum of the community where the said individual lived.

Ochieng (2005) contends that human beings tend towards being inquisitive concerning fellow individuals who appear to have achieved what most of the people have failed to accomplish in life. Historians have indulged the inquisitiveness as biographies provided

history has been narrated or documented coherently. It poses some questions such as; what is greatness and how can we recognize it? What constitutes great people? Is the sense of greatness a mere immediate intuition?

A biographer should not look or overlook effects of the individual he is attempting to write about since by doing this he can be dishonest to himself. The greatness of an individual in the society can only be measured by quality and quantity of the effects since they help in the molding of the characters (Simiyu, Kireti, and Atinga, 1963). Crafford (1945) alleges that the primary duty of a biographer is to objectively seek out for truth and document it down without any form of bias. Therefore, effort was put in the research process in order to furnish a comprehensive and balanced account that came up with a picture of a powerful and great man rather than a plastered saint.

Rowse (2016) asserts that it is only through the reading of biographies that great deal in history can be learned in a congenial approach. He claims that a biography is entitled to lead an individual who reads it in a historical atmosphere. For example, Sigmund Freud works about the life of Carlyle depicts the best picture of the Victorian age. However, Rowse looked down those individuals who were not educated claiming that they had no sense of history because they do not have some sense of standard and means for making a judgment.

This biographical approach relied on studying a single person and placing him within historical context. It was evident that the genesis of a great man is profoundly influenced by the society in which he resides. Guy Arnold and David Goldsworthy stated that study of biographies of individuals as brought episodes and events that enables better understanding of early societies.

Goldsworthy (1984) in his study about Tom Mboya brought to the light the labor movement in Kenya in the pre-colonial period and exposed the labor condition that existed in Kenya during colonial Kenya. Documenting the life of Senior Chief Kathuru Nyagah has helped to bring a very significant contribution towards understanding Kenyan colonial history in depth.

## **1.2 statement of problem**

Colonial Chiefs were exceptionally instrumental in the success of the colonial policy and chief Kathuru Nyagah was not an exception. Senior Chief Kathuru Nyagah was one of the most respected colonial chiefs in Thagicu, Mwingi District by both the colonial administration and the local people. This placed him at a central position in the colonial administration, a position he capitalized to become an effective change agent for the colonial government.

There were economic and political developments that took place in Thagicu during Kathuru's tenure as a chief. Development projects such as construction of schools, dispensaries, bore-holes, earth dams, water-reservoirs, soil conservation methods and roads construction were implemented in Thagicu location during his reign. It is not known what role colonial chief Kathuru played towards the implementation of the said development projects. The research seeks to establish whether chief Kathuru was responsible for these developments through pressurizing the colonial government or they were initiated as an overall development strategy adopted by the colonial government for the well-being of the local people, thorough research is required.

This research also sorts to establish, if, by performing his duties as a colonial chief, he implicitly and explicitly compromised the economic and political rights of the people of Thagicu for personal political power and material gain.

### **1.3 The purpose of the study**

The main purpose of the study was to document a biography of late senior chief Kathuru Nyagah who was a colonial chief of Thagicu during colonial time and who was very little known about him scholarly. It also sot to document Kathuru's social life, political life and his assassination in 1998.

### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

- i. Was to examine the early life of senior chief Kathuru Nyagah and how it influenced him to raise to chieftdom position.
- ii. Was to analyze the career of Senior Chief Kathuru Nyagah and determine whether by collaborating with the colonial government, Kathuru compromised the economic and political rights of the people of Thagicu in exchange for the power and material gain which he accrued from the collaboration.
- iii. Was to determine how chief Kathuru was responsible for the various development projects implemented in his location and how he maintained his popularity among the people despite of the duties he performed as a colonial chief.
- iv. Was to investigate the cause of his death.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The underlying questions which will guide the study will be:

- i) How the childhood life of senior chief Kathuru Nyagah did influenced his rise to senior chief?
- ii) What role did Chief Kathuru Nyagah played in his career as a senior chief and colonial office bearer to impact his community?
- iii) What was the nature of senior Chief Kathuru Nyagah's private and family life?
- iv) What led to Senior Chief Kathuru Nyagah's assassination?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

African personalities occupied central positions whether as collaborators, rebels or trade unionists during the colonial period and these positions influenced the masses in one way or another, thus it is impossible to ignore the studies of such important personalities in our colonial history. It is important to find out how they influenced the masses and the reaction of the colonial government towards such personalities. In other words it is important to give biographies of such personalities wider sketches. As John liffe puts it, a biographical approach to history can yield useful results because it furthers our understanding of broader issues and processes in any given society.

Accordingly, it is a full conviction that if historians have to understand the colonial history of Mwingi District and its effects, it is necessary to study the biography of Senior Chief Kathuru Nyagah, who occupied a central position in the colonial administrative machinery, a position which favored colonial domination and made him one of the outstanding personalities in the district for historical study.

It is justifiable to study the biography of chief Kathuru who provides a framework in the study of economic, political and social developments in Mwingi District during the

colonial period. This research sorted to find out what role chief Kathuru played in shaping the economic, social and political life of his people during this period.

The study was also aimed at helping to unveil the policies of the colonial government in respect to uplifting the welfare of the local people. This study also worked to establish whether chief Kathuru together with the other chiefs in the district campaigned for those development projects or they were initiated as an overall development strategies adopted by the colonial administration to develop the area.

### **1.7 Justification of the Study**

It was evident that, there is no single historical work in existence which primarily devotes itself to the study of the life history of Senior Chief Kathuru Nyagah despite the fact that both Ndambiri and Ochieng portray him as a chief who occupied a central position in the colonial administration in Mwingi. The available information about Kathuru apart from being scanty and scattered in various documents has also left many important gaps which require to be filled up. This required a systematic, coherent and objective account of chief Kathuru. Kathuru's association with colonial administration earned him a reputation which has long persisted even after his retirement as a chief and also after his death. For the people of Mwingi District, the name Kathuru has for a long time been a household name. However, despite this, many people did not seem to know who he was beyond the fact that he was a colonial chief. Due to this, a proper research on late chief Kathuru was needful.

### **1.8 Scope of the Study**

The study was confined to Chief Kathuru Nyagah and covered the period between 1918 and 1998. The year 1918 and 1998 represented a timeframe when chief Kathuru was born to when he died respectively. The study confined itself to Mwingi District, Thagicu location in Kitui County since that is where Chief Kathuru was born, brought-up and ruled. The study limited itself to Kitui county archives and Kenya National Archives since those were areas where most of Chief Kathuru's material could be found. The study focused on senior Chief Kathuru to comprehend his role in the development of his community and his contribution to the advancement of his people well-being.

### **1.9 Limitation of the Study**

Limitation of the study was characterized by, time constraints, financial constraints. A lot of time was spent in Kenya national archive and Kitui archive doing archival research since most of the chief Kathuru's information was scattered and scanty in various documents. To overcome this, the researcher spared most of his free time and dedicates it to archival research.

### **1.10 Delimitation of the study**

The researcher created good rapport with the respondents and leaders in order to create conducive environment for them to give true information. In situations where the absenteeism of information through interview experienced, the researcher used secondary sources to extract the data.

### **1.11 Assumptions of the study**

The availability of respondents and accessibility of target population was attained. The respondents were truthful and genuine, in expressing their true opinion on the subject. There were no non-probability errors as a result of ignorance in respondents reporting, overstatement and coverage error.

### **1.12 literature review**

#### **1.12.1 Empirical Literature review**

The study of colonial chiefs has been carried out by many historians and as such there is a lot of existing literature on colonial chiefs. Ogembo M.A (“The Role of Colonial Chiefs in Kenya. A case study of Ezra Ododi, 1978) argues that colonial chiefs have been grossly misrepresented and given all sorts of labels such as self-seeking rogues, collaborating nonentities, corrupt lot and so on simply because they served as agents of a colonizing power. Ogembo in this particular work presents the view that it should not be out rightly accepted that all or the majority of colonial African chiefs were collaborating nonentities who formerly had no standing in their societies nor were they merely self-seeking rogues who had no interest in the conditions and progress of their people. According to him, there were those chiefs who took advantage of the new ideas promulgated by their colonial masters to improve the well-being of their people. Ogembo’s work is relevant to this study in that he gives an insight into the performance of colonial chiefs by refuting any kind of generalization while assessing the contributions which colonial chiefs made towards improving the welfare of their people. While acknowledging the fact that there were those chiefs who did much to improve the well-being of their people, he nonetheless points out that there were those who failed to grasp

the nature and demands of their offices and who proved to be failures and were swiftly removed from their offices.

Munro F.J. (Colonial Rule and the Akamba, social change in the Kenyan highlands 1889-1939, 1975) claims that the British colonial officials sought to appoint chiefs in the first place due to lack of funds, shortage of trained European officials and the consequent need for local manpower rather than preconceptions and theories about appropriate forms of colonial government. He further notes that in the establishment of local systems of government, it was these factors which dictated British attitudes and opened the way for bargaining with African authorities and for African initiatives. As such the British established an administrative superstructure with a hierarchical civil service, staffed by Europeans at the top administering areas divided into provinces and districts. The Africans were at the bottom in charge of locations.

This policy of Indirect Rule according to Ochieng W.R. (“Colonial African chiefs- were they primarily self-seeking scoundrels?” in Hadith 4, 1972) required traditional authorities to play their roles within the colonial setting. It required that they take accurate account of new rules promulgated by the imperial power and that each chiefs’ actions were to be geared towards that set of rules rather than any other set (tribal set) to which traditional leaders had hitherto paid full heed. He further argues that this policy did not in any way mean to protect or preserve traditional political structures. The colonial powers evolved a pragmatic policy which involved working with or without chiefs in one way or the other but always within the framework of overall colonial rules and values. It meant that whenever and to whatever degree chiefs retained power, they did so at the grace of the colonial power.

Both Munro and Ochieng provide the framework within which to assess the contributions which colonial African chiefs could possibly render to their societies. It is within the framework of the colonial rules, values and conditions that we should assess such contributions. On the one hand, the chiefs had their own people whose values and concepts of leadership were clear and unmistakably defined. On the other hand, their colonial positions, which they could maintain only by satisfying certain European values and demands completely, estranged them from their people.

O'Leary F.M. Variation and change amongst the Kitui Thagicu. A comparative study of two vicinages, 1979) gives the view that in appointing the colonial chiefs, the District Commissioner considered those individuals and lineages which had sought access to British power from the beginning and that those who were friendly to the D.C. were automatically appointed chiefs. He is, however, quick to note that in choosing chiefs, the British were not simply fascinated by empty loyalty or collaboration but also considered the background connections and the estimation which their choices had in the eyes of their people. It is therefore completely untrue and a blatant camouflage of facts to suggest that any nonentity who presented himself to the D.C. and smiled sweetly was made the chief. In most cases the persons chosen had been notable personalities whose pre-colonial activities had won them respect and admiration in the society.

There is some general agreement among some historians that the roles and duties which colonial chiefs performed tempted them to become corrupt. According to Tignor L.R. (Colonial chiefs in chief less societies" in Journal of Modern African Studies, 1971), the role of chiefs as mobilisers of local resources gave them and the headmen ample occasion to enlarge their incomes. Tax collecting methods of payment by result encouraged them

to extract the largest possible revenue for the largest possible commission, while the confusion and uncertainty of the ordinary people about the nature and extent of colonial tax demands enabled them to charge extra for a hut and poll tax receipt seize more livestock from defaulters than was necessary for taxes owing or imply demand livestock 'for the colonial' and add them to their own herds.

Tignor offers the argument that corruption among the colonial chiefs could best be attributed to the low salaries they were paid. Their salaries were totally unrealistic and inadequate compensation for the important duties demanded from them. In addition to enriching themselves, chiefs had to appropriate wealth to finance the tribal retainers since for a long time no government salaries were allocated to them. Some of the colonial chiefs were very corrupt and adopted a very ruthless policy of exploitation of their positions to amass wealth.

Tignor's work is relevant to this study in that it shows the attitude of the colonial chiefs towards material gains and the ways and means which they used to acquire wealth. It is, however, important to point out that it would be unjust to generalize from examples of some few chiefs that all colonial chiefs were corrupt self-seekers concerned with their own material gain and who did very little for their people.

Those historians who have attempted to write about colonial chiefs in Ukambani have tended to focus their attention on Machakos, Makueni Districts while at the same time overlooking the neighboring Mwingi District. Munro F.J has written on colonial chiefs in Ukambani. However, his study concentrated mainly on Machakos, Makueni Districts. His discussion centres around the colonial chiefs in those districts and mentions nothing about colonial chiefs in the neighbouring Mwingi District. Other historians who have

attempted to write about colonial chiefs in Kamba community have, like Munro, concerned themselves with Machakos District. Robert Tignor (1971) in his article picks up three tribes in Kenya as his case studies- Kikuyu, Kamba and Maasai including the Ibo of Nigeria. Like Munro he talks of colonial chiefs in Machakos District with reference to the Kamba tribe. However, both Munro's and Tignor's works are quite useful and relevant to this study.

Margaret Ndambiri, in her dissertation, "A Biographical essay on ex-Senior Chiefs as ones who lived up to the requirements of their offices and one who was loved and respected not only by his own people but also by the often haughty and ungrateful colonial officials. Ndabiri goes ahead to equal Kathuru with such other colonial chiefs as Musa Nyandusi of Gusii, Odera Akongo of the Luo and Karuri wa Gakure of Kikuyu. Her work only deals briefly with the career of chief Kathuru firstly due to the fact that she was primarily interested in writing a biography of chief Njiri wa Karanja, and thus mentions chief Kathuru only when giving examples of other chiefs.

Mchael F. O'Leary (1979), in his PhD thesis also has occasion to refer to chief Kathuru as a very progressive chief whose reputation went beyond his locational boundaries. He, however, does not say more about the chief and one is left wondering what is actually meant by the word "progressive". Likewise, Carson, J.B in his book, life story of a Kenyan chief (1957) describes chief Kathuru as a leading and the most senior chief of the Wathagicu of Mwingi District. He, however, does not discuss much about the chief. Though Carson carried out some oral interviews with the late chief Kathuru, he doesn't provide a detailed account of the biography of chief Kathuru.

The existing literature on colonial chiefs in general and colonial chiefs in Ukambani in particular do not provide detailed account of senior chief Kathuru. Few historians like Ochieng W. R. (1972), Ndambiri. M. (1972) and O'Leary F. M. (1979) only mention Chief Kathuru in passing without giving an insight as to who he was and how and why he became what he was. This is quite understandable since their works were concerned with providing biographies of other colonial chiefs and only mention Chief Kathuru in passing especially when giving case studies of those colonial chiefs who lived up to the requirements of their offices and who were concerned with the well-being of their people. Even Carson J. B. (1957) who carried some interviews with the late Kathuru doesn't give a systematic, coherent and objective account of chief Kathuru hence the need for this study is to demystify and expose who chief Kathuru was and how and why he had become what he was.

### **1.12.2 Theoretical Framework**

The study adopted great man theory and collaboration theory to uncover Chief Kathuru Nyagah. The great man theory was propagated by Thomas Carlyle who was a 19<sup>th</sup>-century historian. Carlyle (1993) centered on the influence that great men had on major historical events. Carlyle argued that most of the great men had been born with some inherent gifts which made them become leaders. Carlyle held belief that it is only through encouraging the reproduction of people with desirable traits that can lead to the advancement of humanity. The primary idea behind this theory is that leaders are born and not made. The qualities possessed by leaders are intrinsic and innate. Carlyle meticulously talked about some grand personalities such as Napoleon, Shake Sphere and Mohammed. This theory considers history to be a completely determined process taking

into consideration unpredictable circumstances and accidents. The theory claims that leadership is related to upper class and aristocracy.

Carlyle (1993) pointed out that those ordinary people within the society had no time to become actors or creators. He alleges that the great men played a critical role in spring of hope for humanity. Herbert Spencer raised some criticism against great man theory. Spencer (1896) claimed that great leader was merely a product of the society they lived and worked. In other words, great men did not shape the society rather they were shaped by the society. Spencer argued that the great men did not deserve to be accorded any honor since they were just the products of the social environment. The debate that leaders are born and not made was widely acknowledged by scholars. The great man theory did not concentrate on effective leadership rather it concentrated on whether it was possible to make good leaders. Carlyle (1993) stated that great leaders possess some godly motivation and have some unique personalities compared to the ordinary men. Carlyle concludes that history is comprised of biographies of great men. Chief Kathuru Nyagah was a great man who cannot be neglected taking into consideration that he was born by a well-known village headman in Thagicu by the name Nyagah Nta'mbaye. It is possible to conclude that he was born with some leadership traits which he inherited from his father.

Chief Kathuru was a great leader in Kenyan colonial history being a staunch supporter of the British administration. He was a leader who ruled his people for many years after the death of his father. Chief managed to rule for so many years since when he was at age 16 years, he was endowed with some leadership attributes which most of the colonial chiefs failed to possess. He had the interest of his people at his heart in spite of being a collaborator hence the significance of this theory.

It is also apparent that this study falls under the realm of the phenomenon of colonialism and therefore the study will also tend to employ a theory related to colonialism which is the collaboration theory. Collaboration theory was propagated by various scholars including Robinson, Wood, Louis, Owen, Sutcliffe, and Gallagher. However, Robinson is the man credited with making important contributions to the advancement of collaboration theory. In reference to Robinson (1972), colonialism was a product of European imperialism that was inspired by political and economic deliberations. The choices of the local collaborators determined the character, depth and the organization of colonial rule. Collaborators governed the pace and direction of economic growth in ways which were accompaniment to the needs of British financial markets.

Robison (1972) highlighted the significance of local collaborators as intermediaries between the Metropolitan and the indigenous economic and political system. The success of European was determined by the loyal collaborators who existed in the societies. The British government worked to maintain and establish their paramount by whatever means which suited the conditions of their diverse regions of interest. Louis, Robinson, and Gallagher (1976) pointed out that local condition was very imperative for the success of imperial expansion. The authors point that in cases where collaboration turned into non-cooperation it resulted into decolonization. Colonial power was able to sustain itself through shifting the basis of its rule from time to time, dropping one set of collaborators and taking another.

The collaboration theory affirms that working for colonialism was determined by the indigenous political system which connected the colonized component with the colonizers. The collaboration was the foundation of colonialism. The choice of

collaborators decided the character and organization of the colonial rule. Collaboration theorists challenged the Eurocentric perception of the Orthodox view of imperialism (Robinson, 1972). According to Robinson (1972), local collaborating groups were used as mediators between Europeans and the indigenous economic and political system. The collaborative mechanism had added advantages to the Europeans such as being able to rule large areas effectively.

Loyalties represent powerful forces which are used to shape the human history. Collaboration theory suggests that to strengthen “national state” loyalties that exist towards other large communities must be destroyed or weakened. The colonial government was compelled to leave in a circumstance where they run out of indigenous collaborators. Collaboration theory explains why the colonial government was able to rule large areas cheaply despite having few troops. Collaborators made it possible for the British to successfully rule vast empires without incurring significant expense, without the regular use of military force (Owen and Sutcliffe, 1972). Robinson (1972) explained that imperialism depended on the absence or presence of indigenous collaborators. The transition from one phase of imperialism to another was governed by the need to uphold and reconstruct collaborative systems that were breaking down.

The colonial government wanted to achieve their exploitative ambitions through working directly with the traditional institutions which were headed by chiefs. Many benefits attracted indigenous tradition leaders to become collaborators. The collaborators were either traditional or modern elite, passive or active who collaborated with colonial government at local or central levels (Louis, Robinson and Gallagher, 1976). Some indigenous leaders collaborated administratively, commercially and ecclesiastically.

Colonialism offered substitute sources of power and wealth that had been exploited to preserve the social standing of indigenous leaders and advance their modern opportunities. Some of the indigenous leaders collaborated with missionaries in pursuit of their religious satisfaction while others collaborated so that they can obtain monetary gain, material gain, and prestige (Owen and Sutcliffe, 1972).

Chiefs were prominent among the collaborators, and the colonial government used to administer their territories through the use of indigenous political system and chiefs. Traditional institutions were significant, and they helped the colonial government to administer their rule effectively. The colonial government did not have enough qualified personnel to administer their territories thus they had no choice than using the traditional leaders (Tignor, 2015). Colonial chiefs acted as channels which facilitated putting across of colonial government policies to the people. Colonial chiefs served as the mediators and the representatives between their people and the colonial government. The colonial government only came up with policies they needed to be executed and passed them down to the colonial chief for implementation. Moreover, the people ruled used to pass the grievances they had to the colonial government through the use of chiefs (Wood and Gray, 1991).

The colonial official and chiefs acted for the mutual benefit of each other. The moral presence of the colonial government was enhanced by the cooperation of the indigenous chiefs. The colonial government highly safeguarded the position of chiefs. Through the use of chiefs, the colonial government managed to rule in spite of not having enough European officials. It can be argued that collaboration was a cheap system which was used to rule since the colonial chiefs were poorly paid. The colonial chiefs were highly

submissive to their masters, and they did their best to please them. Colonial Chiefs were harsh to fellow Africans compared to how they were to the colonial government (Tignor, 1971).

Most of the time colonial chiefs were caught between unpopular criticism and government pressure. Colonial chiefs were always in a dilemma since they could not alienate their people and the colonial government since they needed both for their survival. Colonial Chiefs used to put into consideration the interests of people they ruled in order to maintain a close relationship and also satisfy the colonial officials so that they continue to rule. Therefore, it is within this framework and context of the two theories that the biography of senior chief Kathuru Nyagah will be analyzed and examined.

### **1.12.3 Research Design**

A research design implies to the overall approach that integrates different components of study in a consistent and articulate ways of making sure that the research questions are addressed efficiently. Research design represents an outline for measurement, gathering, and analysis of data (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the study used qualitative research design to uncover Chief Kathuru's life, contributions and developments he made during his reign in Thagicu location in form of a biography.

### **1.12.4 Methodologies**

A combination of different methodologies was used to obtain essential data for this study. Accordingly, the research was based on the existing literature that is archival materials and oral interviews. Extensive document analysis of archival materials was conducted at the Kenya National Archive. Consulted archival material included both the available official and non-official documents. Field research was conducted in Thagicu area of

Mwingi District. Oral interviews were not administered on structured questionnaires. However, some guiding questions were formulated on the spot to give researcher a wide margin for formulating additional questions as new issues arises.

The informants were sort through snowballing method since they are scattered within and outside the location under study.

#### **1.12.5 Location of the study**

The study was carried out in Thagicu location-Mwingi District, Kitui County. The location was selected since it is the birth place of the late senior chief Kathuru Nyagah and also where he grew up, became a leader and died in the same location.

#### **1.12.6 Target Population**

The accessible population was small since the researcher applied the non-probability sampling technique to select only elderly those with rich information about late chief Kathuru. The researcher targeted 100 participants aged 60 years and above who were believed to have reliable information concerning the topic of study. To implement the study purposive sampling technique was utilized to come up with 100 respondents with extensive knowledge about Chief Kathuru and who were willing to take part in the study.

#### **1.12.7 Sampling Design**

“A sample is subset of population which is chosen to stand for the entire group as a whole” (Kothari, 2004). The researcher used non-probability sampling technique which entails selecting only those individuals who have rich information about late chief. In the selection of informants, various criteria were utilized. The researcher also applied

snowballing technique to get some of the informants who directed him to the individuals who had significance know-how for the Study.

#### **1.12.8 Data Collection**

Data was obtained from secondary and primary sources. Secondary sources was vital and included archival sources, newspapers, unpublished thesis, official records, published accounts of colonial administration, journals and reports. The researcher developed some leading questions to act as a guide in the process of collecting information from the respondents. The data collections tools included interview schedules, camera, questionnaires and voice-recorder. Most of the oral interviews were conducted on an individual basis. Also a group of informants were interviewed at the same time. Most of the interviews were recorded on a video-recorder for easier transcribing. The use of the video-recorder gave the researcher adequate time to fully listen and take part in the interviews.

#### **1.12.9 Data Analysis**

The data gathered was analyzed thematically. In references to Boyatzis, (1998) historical and other qualitative data should be organized thematically. The thematic method involved six phases which included data familiarisation, coding, looking for themes, reviewing themes, naming and defining themes and lastly writing up. Therefore, data obtained was analyzed in reference to the main objectives of the study.

## **1.11 Ethical Considerations**

### **1.11.1 Ethical Considerations Related to Researcher**

Prior to the data collection process, the researcher applied for and sort for research permit from Mount Kenya University. The researcher upheld anonymity preservations of respondents hence reporting the data as a pool. Further, all sort of real and potential actions or utterance that could harm the subjects of the study or inducing them to perform reprehensive act were equally avoided by the researcher. In addition, the researcher played critical role in overseeing the research process from beginning to the end he was to be answerable to the decision making of the study and also take responsibility for the outcome of decisions.

### **1.11.2 Ethical Considerations Concerning Participants**

The participants of this study received an introduction letter from the researcher seeking their informed consent to participate and an assurance that the anonymity principle will be safe guarded by the researcher. The respondents maintained their free will in participating in the research voluntarily or refuse to do so. The privacy of subjects was highly adhered to where the investigator avoided delving in issues that touches the private realm of the interviewee. The subjects of the study were truthful, honest and open in giving information on the subject matter of the study.

### **1.11.3 Ethical Considerations Concerning the Research Process**

Throughout the study exercise, the researcher observed ethical principles to avoid individual exposure. The study at all the stages of settings, style and circumstances observed the non-disclosure principle of confidentiality where research information was

never availed to unauthorized third party or others who may use the data for their own gains and goals. Ethical standards were maintained throughout data collection, analysis and dissemination stages. The information acquired from respondents was adequately protected against all possible negative eventualities that may have harmed the credibility and authenticity of study.



## **CHAPTER TWO: GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING OF THE REGION**

### **2.1 Geographical setting of Thagicu region**

Topographically Thagicu belongs to two different physical regions. The land above 3000 feet in altitude that falls within the eastern Highlands of Mt Kenya, and the territory below 3000 feet elevation that lies within the low foreland plateau of Mt Kenya. The Thagicu region falls predominantly within the area extending from Kitui town to Mwingi on the western side of the district. The eastern side of the highlands contains hills which run in the north-south direction, while the monotonous landscape of the lowlands is broken by the occurrence of rivers. The central highlands are drained by rivers and streams, which either join the Tana River to the north or south. All the rivers and streams except the Tana and the Athi are usually dry during the height of the dry season. It is important to note that the two rivers do not traverse the district. Tana River borders the district on the north-western side, while Athi River borders on the south-western side. There are notable hills and hill-ranges, which form visible landmarks. To the far the Mumoni hill is about 3000 feet in altitude, while Kiyeye hill is about 4000 feet.

### **2.2 Rainfall**

The region experiences two rainfall seasons, the short rains and the long rains. The short rains start in October and continue through December. This is known as mbura ya mweere (the rain of millet), so called because during his season people used to plant and harvest millet in plenty. Then follows a period of drought in January and February, which menaces the young crops. January is one of the hottest months, and the temperatures in lower altitudes may go as high as 90. The long rains on the other hand begin in March and continue through May. The Thagicu people call these rains mbura ya munya (rain of

sorghum). This is because traditionally sorghum is attained in plenty during this season. Dry cold weather continues from June to August, July is the coldest month, and the temperatures may be as low as 40c. Dry weather then falls in late August and continues until the resumption of the short rains. Rainfall in Thagicu is not reliable. Rainfall reliability is used here to refer to probability that the precipitation of a season is sufficient to provide an adequate harvest. Since crops vary in the amount of rain they require, then rainfall reliability is a question of crops planted e.g maize and beans, the dominant crops grown in thagicu requires about 380 mm of rainfall per season, while millet, sorghum couples the major crops planted in the lowlands that require about 254 mm per season. The November/December rain average about 264 mm per season, while the March/April rain average about 362 mm. From this it can be seen that the average rainfall is hardly enough to ensure good regular crops every year. In the matter of water-supply, the region has been treated very scurvy by nature. The lakes and rivers are usually dry, except during and directly after the rainy period. The shortage of water becomes a troublesome problem during the dry season.

### **2.3 Vegetation**

The vegetation of Thagicu region falls into several types, and their occurrence coincides largely with rainfall. Most of the land is covered with dry bush-land and thickets. In this category, two types of vegetation are recognizable. First are the low bushes and shrubs that may shed leaves once a year or remain green all the year round. The second type of vegetation consists of woody-interlacing bushes similar to the first and it is sometime difficult to distinguish between the two. The acacia savanna comprises another cluster of vegetation. In distribution, it is second to the bush-land and thickets. This vegetation is

typified by such plant species as euclea acacia, commiphora, and interspersed with these plants is tall grass of which hyparrhenia species dominates. There are no thick forests found in Thagicu except on top of some of the higher mountains such as Mumoni hill where there are to be found small remains of primeval forests. These undoubtedly had greater extension in earlier times than they have today, but the Thagicu are an agricultural people and require the slopes of the hills for their fields. One can often see that a forest existed in a place which is bare as evidenced by solitary trees and immense stumps present. Indigenous forests have long since disappeared owing to the shifting cultivation which was practiced by the local people.

#### **2.4 Social ties of kinship**

The basic unit in Thagicu social organisation is muyi. The word muyi literally means a “family”, and is also used to refer to a home. Thus, as Ndeti clearly points out, the word muyi combines both residence and affinal-consanguinal relations. Hence, among the Thagicu people, muyi assumes at least three broad relations. The first one is monogamy. This refers to the man, his wife and their children. The second relationship is polygamy. This type of relationship, where a man married more than one wife and was most popular in traditional Thagicu society. The capacity of a man to marry more than one wife depended on his wealth. Only those who could afford to pay bride-price could marry another wife. And in Thagicu traditional society, only old established men could afford the luxury of more than one wife. A young man depended largely on the good will of his father for the payment of the bride-price, hence the father determined whether his son would get a second wife or not. Often, if a man was wealthy and could afford to pay the

bride-price, he took a second wife with the consent of his parents and, of course, that of his first wife.

The last relationship is that of the extended family. This includes both monogamy and polygamy. Strong ties of consanguineous and affinal relationships over three generations namely, grandparents, parents, siblings, and also collateral relatives, are generations maintained primarily, this is a functional social unit which allows for mutual dependability and symbiosis relationships. Each member of the extended family contributes to the welfare of the family according to his or her experience, age, wisdom and skill. For instance, the grandparents stay around the home with their grandchildren, teaching them the wisdom of age-old traditions, while the rest of the able-bodied pursue various economic activities and other necessities of family life. The clan ranks second to family in the kin structure and function of the Thagicu people. The functions of the clan merge on many points with those of family, but they differ both quantitatively and qualitatively. The first distinction between the two is membership. The membership of family is usually small in relation to that of clan. Clan comprises several families that can trace their descent to a remote common ancestor. Clan can therefore be characterized as a clan organization which traces its line of descent from a known hero, although finer distinctions of direct relations to the founding hero remain unclear. Traditionally, each clan derived its name from the some activity of its founder.

One of the functions of the clan was to make sure that its members adhere to the codes proclaimed by the founding fathers. These codes included general good conduct and disciplining any member who failed to fulfill their obligations of family. For example, in a case of a man who beat his parents or mistreated other people, his age-group could

come together and punish him. Also a father who became cruel to his grown-up children or mistreated his wife could be reported to the clan and be punished by his age-group members of the clan. A cruel wife could also be punished by the husband's clan age group. Among the Thagicu, clan provided codes and means of social control among its members. For example, if a man could not afford to pay the bride-price for his wife because of being poor and if members of the clan recognized that such was the case, then the clan ordered its members to contribute towards the payment for the same. The contributions had to be made, and any one failing to pay could receive severe punishment. This was the case, since all proclamations made by the clan were binding on all its members, and the last entanglement a person wanted was one involving clan. It can therefore be argued that clans used to undertake major social-economic problems cooperatively. They bore the immediate responsibility of disciplining their members as well as helping those in economic crisis.

## **2.5 Political organization**

The age-set and class ranks among the Thagicu were the basis of their political organization. The highest age-set and class rank was composed of elders. For one to be recognized as an elder, he had to make payment to those who were already elders. It is, however, important to underscore the fact that all elders were not on the same level. The highest in rank were those who administered the affairs of the clan and watched over religion. These were known as the council of elders and shrine elders. According to Lindblom, the attainment of a higher grade among the elders was chiefly a question of economic means. However, this was only one aspect. Other considerations were made when moving from one grade to another. For instance, age was an important factor. It

was uncommon to find middle-age elder in the council of elders. This was a preserved for the senior members of the clan, and experience and knowledge of clan traditions were also considered.

The affairs of the clan were therefore in the hands of a council of elders. However, not all elders were members of the council of elders. In fact, the elders' grade did not in itself carry with it the right to a seat in the council of elders. Any elder who wished to be admitted in the council of elders had to make a special payment to the sitting council members and had to be a member of the immediate lower grade. It was the sitting council members who had the right to appoint and determine the suitability of the new recruits. The most important function of the council was to form a court which dealt with and decided all kinds of cases. The court meetings usually took place in the open air usually under a tree in a designated place, and a crowd of interested listeners were allowed to attend the proceedings. The word *nchama* in Thagicu means "secret" and was possibly used as the name of the court because after the disputing parties had been heard and the case debated among the council members, the oldest and most experienced elders among the council members went to a secret place where they would decide on a verdict. A verdict was based on the evidence induced by the disputing parties as well as on the witnesses cross-examined by the council elders. It was upon the selected elders to decide on the strength of the evidence given on what verdict to be arrived at. Sometimes the elders acting as judges could not reach a consensus on the verdict. This was usually because the disputing parties did not want to make bad statement hence making it difficult matter to decide. At this point the elders were forced to vote so that they can decide what verdict to give.

The verdict arrived at was supposed to be binding to both parties. However, when either party felt dissatisfied with the verdict, or even when the elders could not come to a decision in any other way, the use of muuma (oath) was resorted to. The muuma was used as a last resort, and both parties were supposed to swear that they were right. The breaking of an oath sworn over muuma was considered to be followed by death, and the consequence was that the guilty party either confessed or refused to swear, in which case he was at once judged guilty. At the end of the trial both parties would often swear that they were to perform exactly what had been imposed on them. They also used to swear to their honest intention, in the case of internal feuds, to keep any agreement entered into. The executive authority of the nchama was discharged by the elders, who were supposed to put into effect the decisions arrived at by the nchama. If, for example, the plaintiff refused to be present at the trial, members of the nchama would go and fetch him. When anyone persisted in disobeying, the elders could be instructed by the council elders to impound a certain number of his goats or cattle as a fine. At the same time the men of nchama were required to be present when cases were tried, and listened so that they could later on, in return gain admission to the nchama.

These old men of the nchama and the shrine elders were the custodians of the tribe's traditions, in the manners and customs pertaining to which they were well versed. They saw to it that they were maintained, and they had on the other hand the authority to prevent the rise of customs which they considered harmful and they could abolish customs which were already in existence. Anyone who was in doubt as to how he ought to proceed in a certain case according to the customs of the tribe went to the elders for information for which he paid a small fee such as a goat or a bull if he was a rich man.

## **2.6 Pre-colonial Thagicu economy**

The topography of the land inhabited by the Thagicu people practised a mixed farming economy of animals and crops. Traditionally, the Thagicu people cultivated fields along the river valleys. On their fields, they planted maize, sorghum, millet and other traditional grains. For tubers, they had various kinds of potatoes, yams and arrowroots in the river valleys and swamps. They planted various kinds of legumes, including cowpeas and pigeon peas, while common creepers were gourds (or calabashes), sweet potatoes and pumpkins. The animals kept by the Thagicu included cattle, goats and sheep. Animal wealth had a high prestige, with cattle the most prestigious. Those people who kept large herds of cattle were held in great respect. In other words animal wealth defined the social status of a person. As a result, every man strived hard to own as many cattle as possible since the Thagicu attached great value to cattle. Apart from meat, goats gave milk, which was used only to supplement the commonly used cow milk. On the other hand, the fat-tailed African type of sheep was also used to supplement meat, and its fat was used for cooking, seasoning and also for ceremonial rituals. Many people had a belief about sheep's fat being a protection against witchcraft when eaten. At the same time, animal skins were used as baby cribs, knife-sheaths, quivers, men's hats and bags as well as sandals. They were also used as clothes and bedding after intensive beating and conditioning.

The animals were also used for traditional payment of bride-price. Traditionally, the bride-price among the Thagicu, was paid in terms of so many cows, goats and sometimes (but not common) sheep. There was not a standard amount set for bride-price but it was a common practice that the girl's bride-price should be the same as that of her mother.

However, it was the number of goats that varied not cows, unless one counted cows in place of goats. The Thagicu people were also expert hunters. With their bows and arrows, they could hunt during the day. They killed carnivores to protect their livestock, and they hunted game animals to supplement their food. Other than hunting, they also used trapping method, whereby string traps were used for small animals and pitfall traps for the larger animals. For a pitfall trap, they dug a large hole in the ground along the animal tracks. The soil was thrown away and the top of the hole was covered, first by a little grass twigs to let the place look natural as possible.

During the pre-colonial period, the Kitui region supported a wide variety of wildlife due to the presence of thick forests and thickets. These included such animals as elephants, buffaloes, lions, leopards, monkeys, gazelles, hyenas and many others. These animals provided food and items of trade. For instance, the Thagicu were well known sell their trading commodities to Kamba who were known for their long-distance trade in ivory with the coastal people during the pre-colonial period. The distribution of the larger animals in Kitui has been affected by human settlement. Few, if any, wild animals are now found in areas of high population density. Most of the larger animals have been driven into the neighbouring Meru and Tsavo National Parks.

## **2.7 Historical setting**

Two historians writing on the subject agree that the Thagicu came to their present homelands from the south. Jackson locates the place of origin of Thagicu migration northwards in the stretch of countryside that radiates outwards from Mount Kilimanjaro. Munro is less definite and states that no such precise siting can be made because the Thagicu use the name Kilimanjaro simply to represent the southern point of the compass.

He claims that the Thagicu immigrants came to the Mount Kenya as part of the dispersal of the north-eastern Bantu-speaking peoples sometime between the 14th and 16th centuries. It is, however, evident that many historians agree that the ancestors of the Thagicu came to the present area from the south-east through Mount Kenya route. They, however, disagree on the place of origin, some claiming that the Thagicu came from the area around Mount Kilimanjaro, while others place the ancient home of the Thagicu down towards the central in the neighborhood of Gikuyuland. Yet still some claim that the Thagicu, together with the other Bantu-speaking peoples of the eastern highlands, came from the Shungwaya area to the northeast. The land which the Thagicu came to settle was largely hill country bordered in the west by the Tharaka and in the north by the Kamba. To the east, it bordered the Tana River which curves round the solitary hill known as Mumoni to flow to the southeast.

### **2.8 Early immigrants to kitui**

The Thagicu moved into what is today Thagicu sub-county from Mount Kenya, which is believed to have been the initial place of settlement of the Gicu. It is important to note that the territorial expansion was a continuing process taking place not in any series of sharply defined stages but rather in a slow, protracted advance. The main dynamic was a slow growth in population and a relative abundance of land matched the needs of the growing population for land to cultivate, for grazing of livestock and for trees on which to hang beehives. Land was quite plentiful and permitted the abandonment of the unit of agriculture when the soil had been exhausted. Abundance of land encouraged high degree of mobility and as a result a continually expanding frontier of settlement resulted. Individual pioneers moved into the bush or wasteland and established their own

homesteads and were joined by members of other clans who settled nearby. As a result, a custom evolved whereby elder sons left home to set up their own homesteads. The group of Thagicu who left the Mount Kenya area and crossed the Tana River into Kituiland must have been attracted by the plentiful open grazing and hunting opportunities which the Kitui bush country offered. Another reason for this migration could have been that the Kamba were trying to escape from the raiding Maasai. The migration into Kitui was a continuing process, yet the physical separation was sufficiently strong to permit the development of a number of differences between the two sections both in language and in styles of personal adornment.

Another migratory route from the central block of mountains went northwards through Kiyege hill ranges, reaching as far as the hills which surround Thagicu. At Thagicu, one migratory route continued northwards reaching the Mumoni range, while the other followed Tana River eastwards. At Ciapiu, this migratory path split. One route moved northwards to the tsikuru hill ranges while the other route turned southwards towards the hill complexes of Gatue and Gituri ranges. It is believed that before they migrated from Mount Kenya into the area, some parts of this area were inhabited by the Galla. According to Dundas, by the time the Thagicu were crossing the Tana River into Kitui, the Galla inhabited Kitui as far east as the tsikuru hills and Mumoni hills. The Thagicu made uninterrupted war against them, driving them gradually back until they seemed to have retired into their own country. The Galla were few in number but they were fierce and warlike while Thagicu were many hence outdoing them. The Thagicu were also in constant conflict with the Tharaka people and the Embu people as they migrated further north. It is believed that the Kamba people occupied the northern part of present-day

Kitui District long before the Thagicu moved on to occupy the area. And once they did occupy the area, they waged constant attacks on the Kamba people, raiding them for cattle, and hence pushed them further north into their present-day area of occupation.

## **2.9 Establishment of colonial rule in kitui district**

From 1895 to 1902, Kitui region was part of a loosely defined Mwingi District, which was governed from Kyuso some seventy miles west of Kitui station. Mwingi District was one of those districts which made up what was known as Ukamba province. However, from 1902 onwards Kitui region was administered as a separate district with its own District Commissioner (D.C.). This marked the beginning of effective colonial rule in Kitui District. One of the first colonial officials to serve in the newly established district was Mr. Charles Dundas, who was posted to the district in 1908 as a District Officer (D.O.). According to Dundas, Kitui had in the previous years been regarded as one of those backward regions that did not merit more attention than that needed to keep the flag to maintain after a manner the King's peace and to collect taxes as best one might from penurious natives disinclined to pay them.

It should be remembered that once the British conquered and established their rule over Kenyan societies, the next pressing problem was how to administer this large country- A sound administrative system had to be adopted. Several factors dictated the kind of administrative system which came to be followed. In the first place, the colonial government was in short supply of funds. Secondly there was an acute shortage of trained European officials to work for the colony. Thus, owing to the above factors and for administrative purposes, the British divided Kenya into a small number of provinces, which were in turn divided into districts and locations. Provinces and districts were under

the jurisdiction of British officials, the Provincial Commissioners (P.C.'s), D.C.'s, D.O.'s and Asst. D.O.'s respectively. Kitui District was one such administrative unit created by the colonial government for the sole purpose of effective colonial administration of the area. After the creation of Kitui District, the plan was to divide the district into sub-sections termed locations, over which presided an administrative chief appointed by the D.C. on his assessment of the candidate's leadership qualities. Some of the leadership qualities which were considered included the previous attempts of the candidate to lead his people against raids, the candidate being a distinguished hunter. For example Rug'ego was appointed the first headman of Nthangani location, he had emerged as a natural leader in pre-colonial days when he organized the defense of Thagicu against the raids of the residents.

In appointing chiefs, the D.C. sometimes relied on the wishes of the people. The people of a location were given the opportunity to nominate those among themselves whom they thought could be their leader. This confirms the argument by Munro that, "in filling the posts of chiefs and headmen, the initiative lay with the people of the area rather than the over-worked and rapidly rotating D.C.'s. Likewise, the D.C., commenting on the appointment of new chiefs in 1951, confessed that they were the best men available and that all were either first choices of the people or on the list of those nominated. It should, however, be pointed out that it was not always that the people were consulted whenever the D.C. had to make an appointment of a chief. There were instances when some men were appointed to the position of a chief without the people's approval. This occurred mostly when the person preferred by the people did not possess what the D.C. considered to be good leadership qualities. It was therefore necessary for the D.C. to make an

appointment regardless of the wishes of this troublesome location. Initially Kitui District was divided into twenty-four administrative locations, each being presided over by a headman with sub-headmen as assistants. Two of the locations however, some were amalgamated with others so that towards the end of colonial rule in Kitui district had less than twenty administrative locations,

From 1902 onwards, the principle occupation of colonial administration in the district was collection taxes, inducement of men to work outside the district, particularly on white settler farms and plantations, the establishment of trading centres, the building of roads, and to a minor degree the improvement of local practices in agriculture and the introduction of formal schooling. The policy of taxation was linked with the aim of extracting labor from the district. It was expected that at least some people would be forced to seek employment outside the district to meet tax payment requirements. These were the functions which the newly appointed chiefs were required to perform. Their effectiveness and suitability to occupy their offices was determined and judged according to how well they carried out these duties and functions.

#### **1.10 Effects of colonial rule on the Thagicu**

With the establishment of colonial rule in Kitui, the long tradition of Thagicu independence was approaching a fateful time. Initially the Thagicu people had lived with minimal interference from outside their territory. Save for the minimal interactions with their neighbours, mostly the Maasai, Kikuyu, Embu and Tharaka during times of famines and wars, the Thagicu lived an independent life free from outside interference. The establishment of an alien rule over the people brought with it Significant changes in their way of life. It brought social, economic and political changes which adversely affected

their previous way of life. On the political front, the British introduced a new administrative system based on setting up one individual (referred to as chief) as the one and only local authority. This was something totally new to the Thagicu people since traditionally they did not have any government with structured powers for kings, chiefs or headmen.

### **2.11 The local native council (LNC)**

In 1925, a substantial step was taken to involve the Kitui in their own development with the setting up of a Local Native Council under the chairmanship of the PC. This was in accordance with the Native Authority Ordinance of 1924. In theory the public was free to nominate candidates to the LNC. In 1925, there were ten councilors in the Kitui LNC and by 1928, this number had increased to twenty-two. The council had the same number of members in 1950, one for each location and two nominated members. The LNC had jurisdiction over health services, use of land, markets, water supply, the establishment and maintenance of the district road network, education, agriculture and livestock development. It was empowered to make by-laws and to levy cess in order to finance its schemes. In some cases, the chief was also the location councilor. However, where this was not the case, dispute often emerged between the councilor and the chief over who was to be rightfully engaged in the development of the location. The LNC itself became dominated by a solid phalanx of chiefs in the front bench. The LNC's were the forerunners of African District Council's (ADC's) instituted by the ADC Ordinance of 1946. Local government became closer to the people with the introduction of the locational councils which were created by the ADC and had such powers as were delegated to them by the latter. The locational councils assisted in the implementation of

Projects in agriculture and livestock management, water schemes and education. They, as instruments of public opinion, were thwarted in some instances by a small number of influential people like the chiefs. In 1954, it was reported that, locational councils by committee system is still very much part of this district and so locational councils continue to be largely representative of the ruling classes. However, they were later were put on a more democratic footing by balancing group interests in the location.



## **CHAPTER THREE: KATHURU'S EARLY LIFE AND OCCUPATION**

### **3.1 Kathuru's early life, birth, childhood and early occupation**

Senior Chief Kathuru Nyagah was born and brought up at Kamatumo village in present day Kamatumo sub-location of Thagicu location in Thagicu sub-county in Kitui County. His exact date of birth is uncertain. This is quite understandable since during the pre-colonial and colonial period, the Thagicu people dated things from the years of famines. Kathuru himself estimated his date of birth to be the year 1918, for he was about ten years old at the time of the greatest famines nicknamed by the Thagicu people (ngakwaan-gwete) to mean I will die holding of 1928- 29 and the famine was so called because it was experienced in almost every part of country, Kenya. It is therefore quite plausible to say that the late Senior Chief Kathuru Nyagah was born around 1918.

His father Nyagah Ntambayee died when Kathuru was in his tender age and in accordance with Thagicu traditions his mother was inherited by his uncle who infacts was like his natural father. Kathuru was therefore brought up by his mother, who was called Karianyama wa Nyagah. According to Thagicu traditions, once a man died, his wife was taken care of by one of his brothers. As such Kathuru grew up under the care of his uncle. His father Nyagah Ntambayee was headman in the days before the Europeans came to Kenya and consequently die. It was discovered that during the pre-colonial period, the Thagicu community, like others so called stateless societies did not have chiefs but headmen. Among the Thagicu people, chiefdoms were the creation of the British colonial officials. There were, however, people of outstanding leadership qualities who could qualify to be called 'chiefs' by modern standards.

Kathuru's uncle was a great warrior and hunter. He normally led raiding expeditions, for during the pre-colonial days among the Thagicu people, life was a series of raids and counter-raids. There was continual strife among the Thagicu themselves and occasional raids by the Kamba and Kikuyu, both of whom used spears while the Thagicu used poisoned arrows. The Kamba generally only raided for cattle, but the Kikuyu also took away young women as well. Once, a Kikuyu raiding expedition attacked Kathuru's village. There was fierce fighting and the attackers escaped with livestock, women and some foodstuff. It was a very successful raid on the part of the Kikuyu while it was a big loss on the side of the Thagicu. After a short while, as was the tradition, the Thagicu organized a counter raiding expedition which was led by Kathuru's uncle himself. They went to Kikuyu land to try and get back the women and cattle which had been taken away from them. They made several raids, of which a few were successful while others were not.

It was during this great fight that Kathuru's uncle, the leader of the Thagicu expedition, fell into the hands of his enemies. He was speared to death, prompting the Thagicu to flee with whatever little they had secured with the death of their leader, Thagicu were driven away from Kikuyu land. At the time Kathuru was maturing, his uncle was the undisputed leader of the thagicu living around Kanthungu having taken the leadership after the death of his brother, Nyagah Ntambayee. It was during the great famine of 1928-29 that Kanthungu/Kamatumo villages were attacked by Kikuyu from Fort Hall and some Kamba from Machakos under the leadership of Mwatu wa Ngoma who was a great warrior. The Kamba from Machakos had some guns from Mombasa, which they had obtained from the Swahili traders in exchange for ivory. The fact that they had guns

meant that they had better weapons. There was a big fight in which Kathuru together with his mother and a few other people were captured and taken away as war prisoners. At the time when Kathuru was captured together with his mother, the boy was only a few years old. It was such a bad experience for the young boy. After a short while, a rescue party was organized to pursue the raiders before they reached their destination. By good luck, the rescue party was able to free those taken prisoners, and at the same time Mwatu wa Ngoma was taken prisoner but his people fled. Through the efforts of rescuers, Kathuru and his mother returned home safe at Kamatumo.

As a young boy, Kathuru performed those duties which were carried out by other boys that included, among others, looking after cattle. As such Kathuru's earliest occupation as a boy was looking after the cattle, sheep and goats since his father was very rich in terms of livestock he had secured during the raids. As such among the Thagicu people, the economic status of a person was judged in relation to the number of livestock which he possessed. Wealth in thagicu terms constituted cattle, sheep and goats, and anyone who possessed these in large numbers was considered to be rich. Nyagah Ntambayee had many cattle, sheep and goats and could not compare with anybody in Kamatumo village. After his death, all his wealth was taken over by his brother in accordance with traditions since he also inherited his wife. Young Kathuru therefore primarily occupied himself with the task of looking after his uncle's cattle.

As a young boy, he accompanied his elder brothers and other boys from the locality to herd the cattle. The boys did not need to take the animals far away from home since grazing land was plentiful. It was only during the times of famines or at times when the rains failed that the animals were taken to graze far away in the fields in search of pasture

and water. It was a usual practice for the livestock from the same locality to mingle and graze together. Boys and young men from each homestead drove their cattle to the fields to graze together until evening when each had to take back their own livestock home. Secondly, this method of grazing the cattle together offered the herd's boys the opportunity to co-operate and interact freely. It was a means of socialization. The boys would play various games such as archery, jumping, racing, throwing and hide-and-seek, while the cattle grazed in the fields or even rested in the shade. This way the herd's boys overcame the feeling of loneliness and boredom throughout the day. Given all these circumstances, the boys enjoyed grazing the animals together.

As a grown boy, Kathuru sometimes accompanied the other boys and the young men to herd the livestock out on the plains. Some of the livestock was taken out onto the plains (kieengo) where they were grazed together in turns by mixed teams of boys and young warriors for specific periods of time, mostly during the dry season. While out on the plains, the herders lived in temporarily constructed shelters and food had to be delivered by their respective families. The warriors kept themselves busy by practicing battle drills and dancing, while the herd's boys in their turn occupied themselves with a variety of games such as hide-and-seek. As he was growing, Kathuru distinguished himself as a great hunter. Whenever he went out to graze the cattle, he rarely came back empty-handed. He made sure that he came back home carrying a gazelle. Even when his fellow herdsman went home empty-handed he would usually have something to take home. At times he would kill more than one animal, one of which would be roasted while in the field. As a result he was loved and respected by his fellow colleagues since they knew that with him around they would always have plenty of meat to roast.

It so happened that one day he went to graze the cattle far away from home and away from where they usually grazed them. He was only accompanied by his elder brother. While, in the fields, they were attacked by a lion which killed a cow and was about to attack another when Kathuru shot it with a poisoned arrow killing it instantly. This was a proof enough that young man was a courageous person since he did not fear even a dangerous animal like a lion. His qualities of being courageous and a great hunter were equaled only by those of his father.

As a young man, Kathuru was quite well known locally because he was the leader of the local dance (Kivuucho/Nchai). Being the leader of the local dance, he was responsible for the organization of dancing competitions between different clans in the same locality and also between different localities. He was the best dancer in Kamatumo village and as a result he commanded a lot of respect among his peers. He represented his clan as well as his village during the dancing competition. Besides this, he also participated in the training of up-coming dancers. His fame went beyond Kamatumo village as best dancer for were known over long distances since these dances were highly valued during the time.

During the pre-colonial period as well as the colonial days in Thagicu, dancing was one of the major activities among the youth. Dancing competitions were organized either during the day time or even during the night, and there were particular centers set aside for that purpose. Every village had a place where the youth usually met to practice dancing and also to watch the best dancers dance to their tune. Drums and other musical instruments were used during the dancing. Within a locality, there was one big field which was used for competition by members of different clans within the same locality as

well as those of different localities. Dance leaders from every village were well known and very much respected by their colleagues since they were a source of entertainment to others. Kathuru was one such person who had distinguished himself as the leader of his local dance.

The dances were used as a means of socialization among the youth. It was therefore where both girls and young men met and interacted freely. In fact the presence of married people in the dances was not allowed. It was purely a youth affair. Once a person married, he was supposed to keep away from the dances for he was taken to be an adult and a responsible person. It was also during the dancing ceremonies that the youths got the opportunity of identifying their future spouses. It is therefore no wonder that the best dancers won themselves the hearts of many girls. Many of the girls would identify with the best dancer though times this was very risky for the dancer for he would become the subject of the envy by the fellow colleagues. Being the leader of the local dance, may have paved the way for Kathuru's future leadership position as it helped him develop desired leadership qualities.

### **3.2 kathuru at the government school in kitui**

The first school in Tagicu, was built in 1917 at Ciampiu township and was started with the intention of educating the sons of chiefs and headmen in arithmetic and literacy and Kiswahili in order for them to assist later in the administrative work of government. The first generation of chiefs, old, illiterate, and incapable of exercising the authority commensurate with their rank, had proved a failure as far as the colonial officials in Mwingi District were concerned. There was, of course, the problem of communication between the illiterate chiefs and the colonial officials, which hindered effective

administration. The performance of these early chiefs was summarized by the D.C. when he pointed out that, 'It is difficult to make the chiefs and their headmen realize their responsibility and powers and in many cases it is necessary to inflict heavy fines on them when they fail to carry out orders'. In order to make the administration of the locations more effective, it was necessary to train future chiefs and as far as the colonial officials in Mwingi District were concerned, chiefs were to be succeeded by their sons which was, of course, in conformity with Thagicu traditions whereby leadership was hereditary. Owing to above sentiments, the colonial government conceived the idea of building a school in the district with the sole aim of training the sons chiefs and headmen in order for them to succeed their fathers as good and qualified administrators.

Once the school was completed in April 1917, the D.C. sent orders to the chiefs and the headmen instructing them to take their sons to school. Kathuru's uncle, being the headman of the location at the time, was the recipient of such an order and who was very pleased to nominate Kathuru, who was his nephew, to attend school at Ciampiu. As a result Kathuru ended up being among the first pupils to attend the government school at Ciampiu in Mwingi District. However, his mother was not very happy with the idea of sending her son to school. In fact she was reluctant to let her son go to school but since it was an order from the D.C. she had no alternative but to oblige. A few days after the boys were sent to school, a rumor went round that the children had been taken under false pretenses and that they were really to be sent by the British as slaves for the Portuguese. The rumor was very terrifying to the parents and most of them lost no time in getting their sons back home. Karinyama, Kathuru's mother, was no exception. She brought Kathuru home and so his school career ended after only one month.

This was a big blow to Kathuru who had been excited by the idea of schooling. He would have wished to continue with school but at the same time he could not over rule the decision of his mother. When he was first nominated by his uncle to go to school, he was overwhelmed with joy and had expressed outright desire for education. Most of the initial entrants into the school left after a short while due to the rumors which had spread like bush fire. In fact by the end of 1917, the school had only fourteen scholars out of thirty-five initial entrants. Lack of interest among the pupils led to it being closed down in the following year. It was not until after the First World War when the interest in education emerged again in the area. By 1921, two more schools were opened one at Kyuso for government and another one at Katse primary school.

Kathuru did not acquire formal education. This was a missed opportunity. He had dropped out of school owing to factors far beyond his control, and even though he had wished to continue with schooling, it was not possible for his mother was totally opposed to the idea. All the same, what Kathuru had failed to acquire in the classroom, he would acquire later through experience, even though his level of literacy remained low. His many travels during his service in the K.A.R. and the trips he made abroad, most notably the trip to England and the Middle East while he was a chief, coupled with his interaction with many people of different races during this time, gave him the basic knowledge required in administration. Through the above, he was able to overcome the main administrative handicap of not being able to read and write, for with time he was able to read and write though with some difficulty. In fact illiteracy seemed to be a minor challenge to him throughout his tenure.

### **3.3 kathuru's early association with colonial officials**

After dropping out of school, Kathuru became more and more involved in the activities of the colonial officials in place. He had made himself known to the officials long before being taken to school. For example, when Mr. Charles Dundas was posted to Kitui in 1928 as a young D.O. Kathuru was among the first persons to make friends with him. So it happened that Mr. Dundas was doing some survey work in the district, and so he engaged young Kathuru to be his aide. Kathuru used to carry some of his loads as they moved all over the district doing surveying. As a result, the two men became good friends. In 1932 when Mr. Dundas returned to Kitui as the D.C., he remembered Kathuru and gave him a job as a headman in charge of safari parties. The two were to meet later in the K.A.R. at Voi when Kathuru was a lance-corporal and Mr. Dundas a captain. The former acted as the latter's orderly. The two meet later in 1943 when Kathuru, then the chief of Thagicu location, was coming back from a trip in the Middle East and Sir Charles Dundas was the Governor of Uganda.

It was not only Mr. Dundas whom Kathuru got on well with, but all the colonial officials in Kitui. The D.O.s and D.C.s in Kitui found Kathuru quite valuable for his distance during the safaris. They would employ him as their tour guide as well as being among those hired to carry their luggage. When Mr. Dundas put him in charge of safari this gave Kathuru the opportunity to meet and interact with most of the colonial officials in Kitui. It can therefore be said that after leaving school, Kathuru spent quite some time working for the colonial officials in the district, thus making him well known to them, a situation which was together with the fact that he was well known locally acted as an instrument in paving the way for a career in the military and later in the colonial administration.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: KATHURU'S CAREER AS A SENIOR CHIEF OF THAGICU**

### **4.1 kathuru's career as a chief and councilor of thagicu**

#### **Location background to his appointment as chief**

The colonial administration in Mwingi District was already aware of the good performance of Kathuru while in the K.A.R. Thus, when he returned home in 1948, the PC wanted to make him a chief just like his uncle, but people objected, saying that he was too young and had not yet married. People could not accept to be ruled by someone who was not married since it was considered to be a sign of immaturity and a taboo in accordance to Thagicu traditions. The D.C. was, however, determined to appoint him to a position of leadership, and so he ended up appointing him the headman of Kamatumo sub-location in 1949. It was not until two years later, in May 12, 1951, that he was made the chief of Kanthungu location.

Before Kathuru's appointment as chief, Kanthungu location had been under chief Mutegi Rug'ego, who was dismissed in order to pave the way for Kathuru whom the D.C. had been wanting to appoint as chief since 1948. It was Mr. Crewe-Read, by then D.C., who had appointed Kathuru a headman in 1949. Two years later, the D.C. Mr. Davenport made Kathuru a chief. This was after he had married his first wife, Karianyama as a result of which his appointment was duly approved by the elders of the location. The appointment of Kathuru to the chieftainship was not only approved by the D.C. but was also endorsed by the elders of the location. This was largely because the elders had seen the leadership qualities which Kathuru was endowed with. It was his record of service in K.A.R that convinced the local administration in Kitui and Mwingi that he was the best choice they could make at that time.

Kathuru was appointed chief at the age of thirty-three, and he served the colonial government for forty-seven years before he was assassinated in 1998 at the age of eighty. During his career as a chief, he rose through the ranks to become a Senior Chief in 1954, thus becoming the most powerful and influential chief in Mwingi District. Although he was appointed a chief in 1951, Kathuru did not receive confirmation until 1954 when his name was gazetted, and when he was given the chiefs' stave by the D.C. Commander Mackay. The three years between the appointment and confirmation appear to have been a probationary period during which time his performance was closely monitored.

During these years, Kathuru proved quite successful, for in 1954 his appointment was gazetted and the location was also enlarged. Kanthungu location was found to be too small for chief Kathuru, who had shown that he was capable of good leadership. Consequently, in April 1954, Kanthungu, Kamatumo and Tharaka locations were combined to form a new enlarged Tharaka location, which was also known as location . Chief Kathuru was appointed the chief of the new Tharaka location in April 1954. The new location was much larger than the original locations, and in fact it was the largest location in the district with an area of over 1000 square miles. The promotion of Kathuru was a result of the conviction of a criminal offence and eventual dismissal of chief Mutegi kagwima. Mutegi was known to be a mischievous person who did not respect his superiors. He could at times fail to carry out orders from the D.O or even from the D.C. He could even fail to attend the D.C.'s baraza (meetings) without a proper reason.

By increasing the size of the location entrusted to Kathuru, the colonial officials showed they believed he had the capacity to control a much larger area. Thus it is no wonder that Tharaka location ended up being the largest in the district and also the most populous.

Chief Kathuru controlled the new enlarged location effectively. This is evidenced by the D.C.'s comment in his Annual Report in 1955 to the effect that, "Chief Kathuru is a very good chief and has his people well under control". As a chief, Kathuru was in charge of a location which was the smallest administrative unit in the colonial administrative machinery. As a chief, he was directly responsible to the D.C. who could appoint and dismiss chiefs at will even though he had to make recommendations to the P.C. Kathuru was thus the direct representative and agent of the government in his location. He was answerable to the D.C. for anything that happened within his location.

The duties demanded of him as a chief included the maintenance of law and order, reporting crime, arresting criminals and issuing as the occasion required, instructions for certain definite purposes to be obeyed by the inhabitants of his location. He was also responsible for the collection of local government taxes as well as the implementation of government policies and directives. In order for him to carry out these duties effectively and efficiently, chief Kathuru was assisted by a staff which included the tribal police commonly referred to as the tribal retainers appointed and remunerated clerks, headmen and a team of unofficial and unpaid sub-headmen and elders who owed their positions to the chief. Chief Kathuru performed the above duties extremely well. He made sure that taxes were collected promptly and that he did not wait for the D.C. to remind him when the taxes were due. Law and order were maintained and quite often offenders of such crimes as illicit beer-brewing, excessive drunkardness or theft were heavily fined to ensure that they did not repeat the offences.

#### **4.2 kathuru's work as a councillor of the thagicu local native council (Inc), 1949-1998**

Chief kathuru served for nine, three-year consecutive terms as a councilor of the Thagicu LNC from its inception in 1949 until his death in 1998. From 1951 to 1964, he was one of the elected councilors for Mumoni Division, while he was a nominated councilor thereafter. The LNCs were intended to give the Africans a voice in the management of their own affairs in several ways. First, they had to assist in the formulation of legislation for their respective geographical areas. Secondly, they had to advise the district administration in matters pertaining to their own people. Thirdly, the councils were supposed to bring matters of importance, which affected their people, before those in authority. Fourthly, they had to show how the locations could be better administered. The Thagicu LNC, like all the other LNCs in the colony, was presided over and rigidly controlled by the DC.

Kathuru, being a powerful and an influential chief, was among the very few councilors who dominated the thagicu Council in his lifetime. This is attested by a number of factors. One, kathuru was very often proposed or seconded the Council bye-laws or resolutions as they were then referred to. Secondly, he often participated and contributed to most of the Council debates. Thirdly, he was every year chosen to be the chairman of at least one of the permanent LNC sub-committees - especially the Public Works, the Agriculture and Veterinary, and the Agricultural Show Sub-Committees. Fourthly, he was for many years the Council's representative in the Local Land Board and in the District Education Board. Fifth, he was always a member of the delegation which represented the Council at the joint Eastern Province LNC.s' meetings at Kitui. Lastly, he

was frequently appointed to important temporary LNC sub-committees which were occasionally set up to investigate specified issues and report to the Council.

It is, therefore, evident from the above that Kathuru, as a councilor, was a representative of the whole district because the LNC was primarily concerned with the welfare of the entire district. As a consequence, he strongly backed diverse causes which he believed would benefit him and the people of the district. Such measures embraced many aspects of life such as education, health, agriculture, commerce, religion and hygiene, among others.

#### **4.3 Kathuru's promotion of educational facilities**

The fact that chief Kathuru never acquired formal education doesn't mean that he did not value education. On the contrary, he was aware of the benefits which accrued from education. During his ten years' service in the K.A-R- he had travelled widely all over East Africa, and had met and interacted with many people. His interaction with those who had acquired education made him regard it with high esteem. His love for education coupled with the fact that as a chief he received orders from the D.C. to the effect that he had a duty to ensure parents sent their children to school, and also the fact that as a councilor he had to promote education in his location, this led Kathuru to be fully involved in educational matters.

The first school in Thagicu was constructed in 1951, the same year when he was appointed chief. This was the third school in Mwingi District after the Government school in Kitui Township and katse primary school in katse location. The school was completed in December 1952. Upon its completion, chief Kathuru called a meeting of the parents who had school-age children and explained to them the need to take their children

to the newly built school. There was outright opposition from the parents, who argued that their sons were best suited to look after cattle. They could not comprehend why they were being asked to take their sons to school yet from the times of their grandfathers, the occupation of young boys had been to look after their father's livestock. As a result there was a lot of resistance. On the other hand, the children themselves were not willing to be taken to school. Sometimes many would desert home whenever they discovered that there was a plan to take them to school. It is no wonder that chief Kathuru faced an uphill task of ensuring that the D.C.'s orders of having children sent to the newly built school were complied with. To ensure this was done, Kathuru would send word to a parent informing him that his/her son was among those nominated to go to school. The son was therefore to be sent to school, failure to which the parent would be arrested and fined as much as two cows.

Those parents who were wealthy ended up bribing the chief in order to have their children exempted from going to school. A parent could offer up to three bulls in order to have his child exempted. This way only the sons of those parents who could not afford to bribe the chief, together with the sons of chiefs and headmen, ended up attending the school when it opened its doors in December 1952. As a result, it was reported that most of the 39 pupils who were registered when the school opened were sons of the chiefs, headmen and home elders. Chief Kathuru's efforts to encourage parents to take their children to school were not in vain, for in the following years the number of those wishing to be registered increased. Though the school was initially intended to be a mixed institution, the parents could not agree to their daughters being taken to school. According to them daughters were supposed to stay at home helping their mothers with

domestic duties until they reached a marriageable age. They would then be married off in exchange for dowry. Daughters were in fact a source of wealth to their parents. They often looked forward to the day when their daughters would be married so that they could receive the dowry. It was a common belief among the parents that if girls were taken to school, they would become prostitutes since they would be away from their mothers and grandmothers who were supposed to ensure strict vigilance over them. As a result the girls would fail to get married and this would mean their parents missing dowry. No parent could afford to miss dowry since it was a source of wealth as well as a prestigious thing to have their daughters married. It is therefore no wonder that among the first 39 pupils registered in the newly built Ciampiu primary school, there was not a single girl. They were all young boys aged between fifteen and twenty years old.

Chief Kathuru also encouraged missionaries in Kitui District to open schools in his location. The earliest missionary society to establish itself in Kitui District was the Africa Inland Mission/church (A.I.M.), which settled at Kitui town in 1915. It was followed years later by the Catholic Mission, the Holy Ghost Mission (H.G.M.) which established itself at the outskirts of Kitui town, in 1945. Apart from the mission of preaching the word of God, the missionaries engaged themselves in other humanitarian activities such as building schools and health centers. Some of their schools were aided by the government while others were exclusively managed by the missions. Chief Kathuru, himself an early convert of the A.I.M. was instrumental in prevailing upon the A.I.M. to build schools in his location. He believed that his people would be able to benefit from the mission schools since, apart from providing formal education, the mission schools also offered spiritual guidance. Thus Tharaka location was the beneficiary of some of the

first mission-sponsored schools to be built by the A.I.M. in the district. The first school to be built by the A.I.M. in Tharaka location was Kamatumo primary school. It was also at Kamatumo where the A.I.M. had opened its first branch and two missionaries were stationed there permanently.

The H.G.M. also made an effort to open a school in Tharaka location. On 28 April 1955, Fr. White, in charge of the H.G.M., wrote to chief Kathuru about a school plot. It was, however, not until 1958 that the H.G.M. opened a school at Nthangani in Kanthungu location. The delay in opening the school could have been occasioned by the fact that Kathuru did not offer outright support to the H.G.M. compared to the A.I.M., the obvious reason being that he did not share their faith. It can therefore be said that through his association with the missionaries, particularly those of the A.I.M., chief Kathuru was able to improve education in his location. This can be seen against the background of the many schools opened by the A.I.M. in Tharaka location as compared to other locations in the district. For example, by 1960, out of the eleven schools run by the A.I.M. in Kitui District, four were built in Tharaka location while in the northern locations there was none. By 1960, there was one junior secondary school at Katse, a secondary school at Gankanga and twenty-six primary schools in the district. The schools were run by three bodies, namely; the District Education Board (D.E.B.), the A.I.C. But in Tharaka location alone, the A.I.C. ran four schools with the D.E.B. having two schools.

#### **4.4 Kathuru and agricultural development**

Throughout his career as a chief and councilor, Kathuru was very much concerned with the improvement of agriculture in Thagicu. He was always at the center-stage encouraging his people to use modern methods of farming, such as contour terracing and

use of manure. In those days famines were quite frequent and it was advisable for the people to produce enough food for consumption and storage in case of a shortage of rainfall in the next season.

In Thagicu, increased agricultural production was encouraged, and through the effort of chief Kathuru the location cultivated locational shambas. This was occasioned by the increased demand for food, especially for the soldiers who were in the army during the Second World War. The administration in Kitui, as in any other part of the colony, encouraged the chiefs to increase their production so that other surplus food could be sent to those serving in the army. In addition to producing food for soldiers in the armed forces, surplus food obtained from the locational shambas was sold to other locations in need of it, hence earning some money for the location.

Chief Kathuru, having served in the K.A.R. knew that the men in the battlefield had to be supplied with food. He therefore believed that it was necessary that the people back home had to increase food production in order to have enough for themselves and also surplus to be supplied to the men serving in the army. With these ideas in mind, he organized for the cultivation of locational shambas in his locations. He formed a committee and appointed twelve elders chosen for their knowledge and experience to be in charge of the locational shambas. The elders were to act as managers of these shambas. Chief Kathuru kept the D.C. informed about the progress of the locational shambas. He even went ahead and requested the D.C. to register his committee, which he did, and the committee was approved on 1949.

Thagicu committee is said to have been the first co-operative venture in his location. It was a brainchild of chief Kathuru and it proved to be a success. Kathuru believed that one

way of increasing food production in his locations was through working together as a group and it was with such an idea in mind that he organized for the cultivation of the locational shambas whereby everybody in the location was required to take part in one way or the other through planting, cultivating or harvesting. The idea behind the whole venture, apart from producing food for the soldiers in the army, for which the colonial government paid, was to create food reserves for the location. The large quantity of food produced on the locational shambas, was stored for future use in case of a famine or any other disaster. The food was also given to people in short supply, as well as to the families whose menfolk were taking part in the Second World War, though the food was not distributed freely. In 1951, when there was famine in the southern part of the district, the Thagicu-committee was able to sell food obtained from the locational shambas to the famine stricken areas.

The committee requested the D.C. to allow them to use Local Native Council Lorries to carry the food, and in December 1951 the committee sent seventy bags of various food stuffs to the southern part of the district as relief food. Two years later, in 1953, when there was famine in the northern parts of the district, the committee once more requested the D.C. to let them have a lorry. He obliged and in May that year the committee sent 300 bags of cassava, maize and beans to the northern locations. The money got from the sale of the food was deposited in the Post Office Savings Bank for future use. This money was also used to remunerate the persons employed on these shambas as well as the elders managing them.

In 1954, Thagicu was invaded by locusts which destroyed the crops. This brought about a threat of famine. Once more the locusts invaded the location and destroyed the crops the

following year. When the askaris were returning home from the army, again there was considerable famine in the district which became more serious by 1956. The committee then utilized the money which it had got from former sales, which this time had of course accumulated considerable interest, to buy food for the people in the location.

This project of cultivating locational shambas seemed to have been quite different from other 'forced' projects such as dam-building. The fact that chief Kathuru was able to organize such a project successfully is quite revealing. The success of the project required the cooperation of so many persons, and it is a clear indication that Kathuru was able to convince the people of the importance of the project to the extent that even those who hated and disliked him because of the way he handled other projects, were able to offer their support to this particular project.

It can thus be seen that Kathuru being both the chief and councilor of his location, was totally committed in the field of agricultural development. He ensured the cooperation of his people in order to increase food production. He also worked in cooperation with the agricultural officers in the district, who were always available to give advice and instructions whenever it was necessary. However, lack of enough agricultural officers was a hindrance to the development of agriculture in the district. For example, though there was one agricultural officer in the district in 1958, any progress in agriculture was very limited since his staff was small and instructors were paid by the LNC whose funds were also very limited. Thus, there was hardly enough agricultural officers in the district, though with time more and more assistant agricultural officers were trained and their work became invaluable to the success of agriculture in the district.

Another secret to chief Kathuru's splendid performance in the field of agriculture was that he quite often liaised with the agricultural officer to ensure that assistant agricultural officers were sent to his location. He further liaised with the D.C. and his D.O.s for the services of agricultural officers. For example, in a meeting with the D.O., Mr. F. R. Wilson, after touring Thagicu location in 1957, Kathuru out rightly expressed the desire to have an agricultural officer sent to his location to assist in giving instructions on how the terraces were to be dug. Kathuru also quite often took the advice of the agricultural officers very seriously, which he would later disseminate to his people. As a result the people of Thagicu benefited from the expertise of the agricultural officers in the district. Likewise chief Kathuru, through the co-operation of the agricultural officers in the district, encouraged the use of modern methods of farming, especially the digging of terraces and cut-offs to prevent the top fertile soil from being washed away from the shambas. He also encouraged the use of manure and fertilizers, which were intended to boost food production. In 1956, the agricultural officer in the district had an occasion to report that there was increased activity in the planting of fodder crop in areas where it had never been grown before in Thagicu location. There was also an increased use of manure. Another factor which contributed towards the uplifting of agriculture in Thagicu, from chief Kathuru's commitment to ensure the same, was that he set himself as an example for the others to follow. His shambas were well terraced, and he applied manure to increase production. They were so well maintained that they were used by the agricultural officers for field-days trips and demonstration purposes. As a result, those who saw how well his shambas were maintained would endeavor to have theirs look the same.

Kathuru is also credited with having been the first to start a dairy farm in the location. He was, however, at pains with the fact that the cattle of Thagicu were small and that through lack of grass they could only lactate for one month at stretch. He consulted the agricultural and veterinary officers about the possibility of acquiring grade cattle like the many he had seen on European farms in the central province. It was found that the climate of Thagicu could not guarantee the survival of grade cattle. All the same, chief Kathuru selected the most healthy- and best-looking cows which he kept for milk production. He also encouraged his people to start dairy farms to ensure increased milk production.

It was concluded that Kathuru's involvement in agricultural matters in his location was outstanding, an indication that he was concerned with Improvement of the living standards of his people. Though it was the policy of the colonial government to improve agriculture in the district, without the efforts of chief Kathuru as a leader of his people, Thagicu could not have attained much of what was attained in agriculture. The efforts of the government were fully implemented. There was always enough food in store obtained from the locational shambas in case of a famine. Thagicu was also able to export food to other locations whenever the need arose.

#### **4.5 Chief Kathuru and soil conservation measures**

On the list of government policies which the colonial chiefs were required to implement in their locations was that of soil conservation. Chiefs were under instructions that their people were made aware of the importance of preventing soil erosion and as such the colonial government, through the co-operation of the chiefs, sought to put measures in

place to ensure that soil erosion in the district was properly controlled. This was one area where chief Kathuru excelled.

The topography of thagicu is such that the area is covered by alternating high and narrow ridges. The high ridges with steep sides were very prone to soil erosion. As a result, thagicu attracted the attention of the government's soil conservation campaign. Chief Kathuru was quick to notice the importance and benefits of digging contour terraces. Thus he embarked on a campaign to ensure that terraces were dug communally and individually throughout the location.

In order to set an example to others, chief had terraces dug in all his shambas and also on his land which was not under cultivation. This way, he hoped that his people would be able to emulate his example. However, he was disappointed to learn that his people were not willing to dig terraces. After all, farming land was in plenty and people practiced shifting cultivation, abandoning a piece of land when it became less productive. Given these circumstances, they could not comprehend the importance of digging terraces.

When chief Kathuru was issued with the order to ensure that terraces was dug all over his location, he moved into action with a lot of vigor. His first course of action was to request that the assistant agricultural officers be sent to Thagicu to do the work of the contour terraces in every shamba in his location. He then made it compulsory for the people to dig terraces in their own shambas. Those who were not willing to work voluntarily were forced to do so and those who failed to comply with the chief's directive were arrested and prosecuted at Thagicu Tribunal Court. At times chief Kathuru personally imposed fines on those who failed to dig terraces by their livestock confiscated. Thus, the location

became the scene of a having compulsory anti-soil erosion terracing campaign, a policy which created a lot of friction and bad feeling between the administration and the local people.

In order to ensure that his orders were fully followed, Kathuru worked in close collaboration with his aides. He instructed his tribal retainers, together with the headmen, to go round the location checking on how well the terracing work was progressing. They would then report back to him with names of those whose shambas were not terraced. This made it easier for Kathuru to identify those who were not taking the work seriously and also made it hard for people to exempt themselves from the exercise. Through that terracing was extensively carried out in the entire location. With regard to soil conservation measures, Thagicu location became a shining example to other locations. By 1953, of the three locations which were leading in the work of terracing, Thagicu was far ahead of the other two. Any government official who visited Thagicu could not fail to notice the impressive work on terracing being undertaken in the location. Chief Kathuru could not have received all this praise for nothing. Of course his work on soil conservation was outstanding compared to other locations, and this is why his superiors were always full of praise for him. Though he had at times to force many of his people to dig the terraces by threatening them with fines and prosecution in court, he nonetheless produced good results which were all that his superiors wanted.

Other than forcing people to dig terraces in their shambas, chief Kathuru also employed other strategies in order to ensure that soil erosion was controlled. He held numerous barazas during which he explained to the people the importance of digging terraces on the uncultivated land and the fallow land which had been cultivated and abandoned. He also

had terraces dug in those areas which looked more prone to soil erosion, such as along the banks of streams and valleys and on hill sides. He issued orders to his headmen and tribal retainers to recruit labor force in large numbers and those who showed non-cooperation were arrested and fined.

During the numerous barazas which Kathuru held throughout the location, he used to tell his people that though they were not willing to dig terraces, they would only realize the benefit of the same in future. That, though they were getting free services from the assistant agricultural officers, in future they would pay for the same services. This way many realized the importance and benefit of conserving the soil and with time more and more people came to appreciate his efforts. Even those who at first thought that chief was harassing them by forcing them to dig terraces against their will, later realized that he was only doing that for their own benefit. One respondent was quick to point out that chief Kathuru was surely like a prophet for most of the things he told us came to pass. It is thus no wonder that this culture of digging terraces has persisted where most of areas are heavily terraced

Chief Kathuru was certainly a forceful personality in the sense that he did not hesitate to use force whenever his people showed unwillingness to obey his orders. On other hand, the fact that he held barazas to explain to the people the importance of his directives means that he was by no means thoroughly coercive. During such meetings he would persuade and convince the people to dig contour terraces even those who were at first opposed to the idea. Thus, chief Kathuru used coercion and persuasion together as a means of obtaining compliance from his people.

## **4.6 construction of dams, bore holes and roads**

### **4.6.1 Dams and bore holes**

Water shortage was a severe problem faced by the people of Thagicu, owing to the fact that there are no permanent rivers passing through the area. Thus, one of the major concerns of the colonial government was to provide Thagicu residents with an alternative water supply. To ensure this was done, the government embarked on the programme of having dams and bore holes constructed in the location. In 1951, the year when Kathuru was appointed chief, he supervised the construction of the first dam in the location with the help of Mr. Fezzan, one of the first D.O.s to interest himself in building dams, which were greatly needed in the district.

Thagicu dam, also known as Kamwerini dam and Ndegea at Ciampiu were started 1952 and labor was called out from Thagicu location under the Native Authority labor Ordinance of 1944. Kathuru being the chief of location worked hard to ensure large numbers of people were turned out for work. He used his headmen to assist him. Each headman had to provide a list of all able bodied young men and women in his village so that they could be assigned the number of days they were supposed to work. Only young boys and girls and the aged were exempted from this communal work. Those who failed to turn up for communal work were arrested and chief Kathuru would force them to spend the whole day working in his shambas. Women would be sent to work at the chief's compound or at the camp, attending to such duties as planting and watering trees, gathering grass for thatching or even sweeping the compound for general cleanliness. On the other hand, men would be taken to the chief's shambas where they would spend a whole day either digging terraces, cultivating or harvesting, depending on the nature of

work available. As a result, Kathuru made sure that nobody in his location escaped communal labor.

Water shortage was a Serious problem in Thagicu and the government could do little to alleviate the hardship which this brought because, as chief Kathuru pointed out in one of his interviews with Mr. Carson, in those days there were no funds available designated for particular projects. The government could not be wholly relied upon to construct earth dams and bore holes. It was upon the chief to organize his people to construct dams on their own. The government's role, apart from sometimes providing the materials required, was purely supervisory.

It was with this idea in mind that chief Kathuru embarked on the programme of constructing dams and bore holes in Thagicu. In 1954, three dams were completed in Thagicu location. These were Kamwerini in kamwerini village, Macharugwa dam in Kanthungu village and ndegea in ciampiu village. He further supervised the construction of many dams in the location. He believed that his people would benefit from these dams. It was not an easy task, since initially not many people were willing to provide labor for they were not paid. They had at times to be forced to work. In 1956, two more dams were constructed.

In total, it was to chief Kathuru's credit that by 1957 Thagicu had eight dams, all of which were constructed permanently. In 1957, a full day's tour was arranged to enable chiefs to visit some of the large successful dams which had been built the previous year in Thagicu and Katse locations, together with the large dam programme in progress. The chiefs were able to report that in Thagicu great enthusiasm was being shown for the dam

building programme in particular at Ndegea in Ciampiu, where a large body of workers had openly requested chief Kathuru to rest, as there was no need for him to use any persuasion to get people to work. This was a clear indication that the relationship between the chief and his people had improved over time with the former managing to persuade the latter to accept the responsibility of constructing dams and bore holes. The problem of water shortage in Thagicu also made Kathuru prevail upon his people to contribute money to be used for drilling bore holes in those areas where there was shortage of rainfall and water. The money was collected from those who volunteered to pay as well as from those who were not willing to pay, since Kathuru knew that the bore holes would be for the benefit of all the people in his location.

It is interesting to note that the circumstances and the behavior of chief Kathuru seemed to be changing with the passage of time. Whereas in 1957, when the first dam was to be built in Thagicu, he had to use coercion in order to obtain labor, in the 1960's it seems that he had made a breakthrough in having the people realize that the construction of dams and bore holes was intended for their own benefit. As a result, the people no longer required to be supervised or even pushed, for they were willing to work voluntarily as evidenced by the Ndegea incident in 1952. We can therefore conclude that the relationship between Kathuru and his people improved over time to the extent that in the 1960's he did not have to use force in a regular way when dealing with the people.

#### **4.6.2 Construction of roads**

On the side of road construction, the first road tracks in the district were opened up by forced communal labor mobilized by the chiefs and kiama elders under instructions from the D.C. Thus, organization for road construction was one of the early functions of chiefs

and headmen. Chief Kathuru on his part organized and supervised the construction of many roads in his location. He was responsible for the provision of labor when the Mwingi-Katse-Irira road was being constructed through his location.

In the early 1950's the public works department, in conjunction with the LNC, provided funds for road construction and maintenance in Kitui District. At times some of funds were used to remunerate the work parties employed. It is important to point that the funds from the public works department and the LNC were not enough for construction and maintenance of all roads in the district. Consequently, the work of the construction and maintenance of the roads fell on the chiefs. They were to recruit labor for the construction of new roads as well as for the maintenance of the existing ones. This was one area where chief Kathuru excelled. He made sure that the roads in his location were well maintained and kept in passable condition.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: KATHURU'S FAMILY AND PRIVATE LIFE AFTER APPOINTMENT**

### **5.1 Kathuru's family and private life after his appointment**

#### **5.2.1 Kathuru's family life**

Chief Kathuru was among the first converts of the African Inland Mission (A.I.M.) when the missionary society established its second out post at Kamatumo in Thagicu sub-location in 1935 and two European missionaries were posted there permanently. The missionary society had first established itself at Kitui Township in 1915. It was the practice of the missionaries to work closely with the colonial administration. This was intended to make their work easier since they would be guaranteed of security as well as making it a bit easier for them to reach the people. They would liaise with chiefs and headmen who would in turn offer them any assistance they required. Hence, missionaries would make first conducts with local administrators. When the A.I.M. mission was opened at Kamatumo, the two missionaries posted there found it necessary to make contact with the local chiefs and headmen. By this time, Kathuru had been appointed the headman of Kamatumo. Hence, he was one of those whom the two missionaries sought assistance from. This was his first conduct with the A.I.M. missionaries. Kathuru had interacted with Europeans before as early as 1930s and even when he was in the K.A.R. and had come to admire anything associated with them. So, once the word of God was preached to him, he did not hesitate but out rightly accepted to become a Christian. He was therefore among first people to be baptized by Rev. Leone, one of the two missionaries.

Kathuru was a staunch Christian and he never failed to attend church services. He was an active member of the church. In fact with the assistance of Rev. Leone, he had helped to build up a church in his home area at Kamatumo village when there was hardly any other church in the whole Mumoni Division. He became church elder and he could lead the congregation when the pastor or father failed to turn up. This shows that he was really a committed Christian. Also as a show of his support to the church, in 1972, he donated a piece of land near Gankanga on which a church was built which he helped to construct in both morally and financially.

It was noted that Kathuru had got on very well with the missionaries in Kitui. Especially those of the A.I.M. to whose doctrines he ascribed. His relationships with the missionaries were cordial. Besides giving spiritual guidance to its missionaries were also interested in undertaking other humanitarian activities such as establishing schools and health centers. Therefore chief Kathuru's association with them was deemed to be beneficial to the people of Thagicu. It was therefore needful for chief Kathuru to cooperate with the missionaries especially in the field of education. To his credit, most of the schools established by the A.I.M. were concentrate Mumoni Division.

In spite of being a committed Christian, Kathuru Nyagah was nevertheless, a polygamous man. Though the Christian teachings demanded that he marries one wife, traditional inclination and some other factors prevailed upon him to do centrally to the teachings of the church though he had embraced the new faith.

Therefore, he ended up marrying a total of eight wives. Being a polygamist, he did, in fact lead some difficulties with the A.I.M. For one, according to the teachings of the A.I.M,

polygamy was unacceptable. A man was expected to marry only one wife. However, when the missionaries realized that even their new converts were reluctant to abandon the practice, they also abandoned the idea of refusing those who had married more than one wife attending church hoping that the practice would die out with time. In this way polygamists like chief Kathuru ended up being accepted as bona-fide members of the church.

Several factors combined to motivate and encourage him to marry many wives. In the first place, the underlying motive behind the multiple marriages was his desire to maintain his social status in the society. In traditional Thagicu society, a man's social status was judged among other things by the number of wives and children one had. Those who had many wives commanded a lot of respect from the people since they were considered to be real men. Taking care of more than one wife was considered to be a very difficult task. Besides this, one had to be very rich so as to be able to Pay the bride price for all one's wives as well as providing for them. Therefore, Kathuru's marriage too many wives can be directly attributed to his desire to be on an equal footing with his wealthy and polygamous colleagues in the district, especially Chief Mutegi Rugeg'o and duet Karovwe wa Ikunga of Mumoni.

Secondly, chief Kathuru married many wives since he wanted to have a large family because to have many wives and children was also considered a symbol of success, wealth and status. Men who had large families were held in high esteem in the society. They were considered to be men of high standing and were usually very influential in community affairs. In order to gain and maintain social standing and respect among his people, it was necessary for chief Kathuru to have a large and extended family.

Thirdly, Mary Kamola. Kathuru's first wife seems to have influenced her husband's decision to take another wife. She kept on complaining whenever Kathuru failed to come home in the night, She found it difficult to believe that the chief spent so many nights out owing to his official duties. She constantly kept quarreling him for spending many nights out since she suspected that he was having secret affairs with other women. Chief Kathuru had also acquired enough wealth so as to enable him pay bride-price for many wives. He had enough to pay for the bride-price as was required and also enough to support his many wives. Besides this, being a powerful chief offered him an advantage in the sense that many young girls found it a prestigious thing to be married by chiefs who were considered to be men of high social standing in the society. Likewise any parents found it an honor to have their daughters married to a chief. Some were even willing to give their daughters free of charge to the chiefs as a way of creating leakages. Becoming a father in-law to the chief was considered to be a big honor. This is how many of the colonial chiefs ended up becoming polygamists.

Last but not the least; Kathuru's mother was also very instrumental as she constantly kept on urging her son to marry many wives so that they could keep her company. She constantly kept on reminding him that a man's standing in the society was gauged by the size of his family. Therefore, the more wives he married the better. As an obedient, chief Kathuru ended up marrying eight wives. His first wife was called Mary Kamola, whom he married in 1948, a year after he returned home from the K.A.R. The D.C. had wanted to make him the area chief to succeed his uncle but the elders had resisted the move arguing that since he was not married he could not be in a position to have influence over the people. As a result, Kathuru married his first wife that same year as a prerequisite to

being appointed a chief. Between the year 1948 and 1965, he married all his eight wives and had over seventy-six children. Chief Kathuru paid the full bride-price for all his wives. He never took peoples' daughters by forcing them to becoming his wives as some colonial chiefs were accustomed to doing. He usually paid all that was sanctioned by custom and tradition in exchange for his wives. By so doing he avoided being accused of misusing his position as a chief to harass other peoples' daughters. In this regard he was morally upright man.

According to Thagicu traditions, it was unusual for a man to build houses for his two wives in the same compound. As per practice, once a man married his second wife, he built a new home for her at some distance from that of his first wife. This was intended to limit conflicts between the two wives. By keeping them apart, the husband hoped that each woman would concentrate on the matters concerning her home, and this would limit conflicts and confrontation which could result if the two were living together sharing compound and kitchen. In conformity with this practice, chief Kathuru did not keep his wives in the same compound. He acquired land at different places within Kamatumo sub-location where he builds houses for his wives. Initially his original home was at Kamaindi village where his father lived, and this is where he built houses for his first wife and last wife. He was, however, to move his first wife from Kamaindi to Kamatumo in 1950 after he had acquired land there and built a home on that piece of land. Out of the eight wives, the late Senior Chief is survived by only three, the others having passed away. The late chief, in total had 76 children; forty-eight sons and twenty-eight daughters. His was such a big family.

Chief Kathuru did not discriminate against any of his wives as is the case with men who marry more than one wife. He treated all of them quite fairly. This was demonstrated mostly when his wives were in conflict. For example, when two of his wives had a quarrel or even fought as was the case sometimes, he would punish both without showing favourism to either the offender or the offended. This was likely intended to discourage his wives from constant conflicts. Chief Kathuru treated his wives harshly. He could not hesitate to use force such as punishment through beating to extract disobedience from them. As a result, his wives cared and respected him and could not do anything which could bring them on the conflict path with their husband. This is one aspect of chief Kathuru's character which shows that there was no much difference between his official life and his informal life. In spite of being a strict disciplinarian, he nonetheless took care of all his wives. He provided for them well and also made sure that he met all of their needs without failure, in other words he was a responsible family man.

Likewise, chief Kathuru's relationship with his children was that of a strict parent. He wanted his children to be an example to others in the neighborhood in all aspects, discipline included. He could not hesitate to discipline his children whenever they wronged. He also avoided discriminating against children of different wives. He was committed to provide for his children especially with respect to education. He made sure that his children had access to education and that they succeed in life hoping as most parents do, that they would be able to take care of him in his old age. This is evidenced in an incident which occurred in 1978 when chief Kathuru gathered his family for a get together. He then instructed his wives to bring along with them all his clothes. He had invited all his sons. The clothes were put on the ground and then Kathuru instructed his

sons to collect any of the clothes which any of them had bought for him. There was only one suit which had been bought for him by one of his sons for which he received some blessings. Without further business, he declared the meeting over. Such an act portrays the behavior of chief Kathuru with regard to his family life.

Chief Kathuru, though not having acquired formal education himself in his youth, nonetheless greatly valued education. He was quick to realize the benefits which accrued education and as such he encouraged his children to strive for the highest possible educational attainments. He not only wanted them to be good examples to other peoples' children, but also to be abreast of the children of other chiefs. All his children therefore attained basic education. Most of them attended Kamatumo intermediate school before proceeding to Kitui government school and then to Machakos high school.

The fact that chief Kathuru valued the education of his children was underscored in 1956 by the District Officer for Northern Division. Mr. J.W. Balfour when he noted that, Chief Kathuru is a bit jealous of the highly educated chief's sons and is very anxious to get one of his sons on an educational trip to England. This attitude demonstrated that chief Kathuru did not want his children to be left behind by those of other chiefs. Consequently, he made sure that all his children received quality education. He was among the first parents in the location to send his daughters to school. This he did among other things to set an example to others. Initially, parents in Kitui District were skeptical about sending their daughters to school. They believed that girls should stay at home under strict supervision of their mothers and grandmothers until they attained marriageable age. Then they would be married off in exchange for a bride-price, in other words daughters were considered to be an alternative source of wealth to their parents,

hence, parents were reluctant to send girls to school. As a result, chief Kathuru could set an example to other parents to follow by being the first to send his daughters to school.

There was a common belief among the parents that if the girls were allowed to go to school they would become prostitutes since they would be away from their parents most of the time. This would prevent them from getting married since no man would like to marry a prostitute. And there was nothing more dishonorable to a parent than to have his daughter remains unmarried. This was considered to be a bad omen. This partly explains why many parents were reluctant to send their daughters to school in the first place. However, chief Kathuru made sure that his daughters received quality education alongside his sons. He did not discriminate. He therefore sent his daughters to school, and by 1966 two of chief Kathuru's daughters had acquired secondary level of education and had taken up the task of teaching the women of the district, instructing them on how to live better lives and make good homes.

It was also noted that chief Kathuru had miserably failed to secure scholarships for his sons to study abroad. The position which he held in the colonial government and his social status would normally have meant that he should have secured scholarships to enable his sons travel abroad. Alternatively he could have used his wealth to send them abroad. This was unlike some of the colonial chiefs of his standing such as Senior Chief Waruhiu wa Kungu, Senior Chief Koinange and his powerful Senior Chief Mutegi Rug'eg'o, each of whom were able to send more than one of their sons for higher education. This was because the well placed colonial chiefs it's easy to secure government scholarships for their children.

It can therefore be seen that it was the wish of chief Kathuru to have his children succeed in life. First, he was keen to see to it that they received at least some basic education. As a result most of his children attained secondary level of education which in return enabled them to acquire good and well-paying jobs. It is therefore no wonder that some of chief Kathuru's sons and daughters became prominent personalities in Thagicu location and Kitui District at large in the post-colonial Kenya.

### **5.3 private family activities**

#### **5.3.1 Acquisition of western material culture**

Chief Kathuru was in the forefront in the acquisition of western material culture and in the adoption of new technological innovations in many aspects of life. In so doing, whether consciously or unconsciously, he acted as a pace-setter for his people to follow towards change and modernity. To begin with, he built modern decent houses for his wives. By 1956, he had built a sun-dried brick house with corrugated iron sheets. The house was big enough to accommodate two of his wives. It was the only house in the whole of Kamatumo sub-location built of corrugated iron sheets besides the chief's camp at Katse. The house was advanced enough by the standards of the time considering the fact that the majority of the people lived in dwellings made of wood and mud walls with thatched roofs. In fact in 1959, after the outbreak of the Second World War, they had to put grass on top of the iron sheets so as to prevent the house from being allocated by the enemy. The grass covering was intended to hide the easy location of house. Chief Kathuru was among the first persons in Kitui to build a good and decent modern house. By 1950s, he had constructed a one-storey house for his first wife at Kamatumo. The house was built of unburned sun-dried bricks with corrugated iron sheets roofing. This

was the first storied house in the whole of Thagicu. The house however collapsed after several years owing to the fact that it was built of sun-dried bricks. Thereafter, in 1960s, he built an ultra-modern maissonette probably the most decent house in the whole district at that time.

In 1977, the District Officer, Mr. F.R. Wilson, visited Thagicu location upon which after touring the location, chief Kathuru invited him for a cup of tea in his house. The D.O. in his report had the occasion to describe chief Kathuru's house as the most luxurious house in the location. As such chief Kathuru was quick to acquire western-styled mode of buildings. Chief Kathuru also had well maintained latrines when many people in the location were either had none or were unwilling to have them. In fact as early as the 1950's, many People in Thagicu location rejected the idea of digging pit latrines at their homes. Many Parents were opposed to the idea of having to share the same latrine with their children. It took a lot of time to convince some men that it was morally right for them to share the same latrines with their daughters. According to the societal norms did not advocate for such in Thagicu.

However, chief Kathuru, having travelled widely, had come to appreciate the importance of having latrines in every homestead. According to him it was unhygienic not to have latrines at home. He therefore, built latrines in all his homes to act as an example for other people to follow. On top of this, many visitors he hosted recommended that he had well-kept latrines. It was as a result of this that by 1975 he had installed a modern type of toilet at his Kamatumo home which frequently hosted visitors.

His compound was always kept neat and tidy. Besides the many workers who were employed to keep the compound clean, he also had those people, mostly women, who failed to take part in communal work, brought to his home to spend the day doing general cleaning of the compound. They would spend the whole day cutting grass, attending to flowers, watering trees and generally sweeping the compound. As a result chief Kathuru's compound was kept clean and tidy as though in readiness for distinguished visitors!. Chief Kathuru was likewise in the forefront in the acquisition of western material culture in the form of utensils, tools and implements. He did not buy local household equipment. He mostly bought utensils which were not commonly used by the local people. As such his household equipment was classic and similar to what was commonly used by Europeans during that time. It is therefore no wonder that whenever he travelled outside the district, he bought anything good which he came by. He did his shopping in Nairobi a times and while on a tour outside the country.

Senior Chief Kathuru was among the first people in Kitui District to own a bicycle and motor vehicle. In 1958, he bought two bicycles. He used one of the bicycles to ride when he moved around his location, while the other bicycle was strictly reserved for visitors. It was purposely to be used by any of his visitors who wished to accompany him on his endless tours to meet his people and also as he moved around the location supervising the various development projects being initiated.

He was the first in Mumoni Division to own a vehicle when in 1960 he was the ground owner of a Chevrolet pick-up. He bought the car brand new while on a safari in Nairobi in 1970. The car had cost him Ksh 5,000 which was of course a lot of money during that time but he managed to pay the whole amount promptly. Then, immediately afterwards in

1966, he bought a brand new lorry which was used both for public transport as well as for commercial purposes. In 1968, two years after the chief had been involved in an accident, he bought a Land Rover. After a short while, he sold it and bought yet another new Land Rover. In 1972, he bought a Mercedes Benz lorry. This was the last vehicle which chief Kathuru ever bought. Besides vehicles, he also owned a tractor which he used to plough his farms of nearly hundreds acres.

The fact that chief Kathuru could afford to purchase so many vehicles is a clear indication that he was really a rich man. He had acquired enough wealth to enable him to enjoy the kind of luxuries which only his white masters could afford. He was in fact a wealthy man according to the standards of those days.

### **5.3.2 Distinguished visitors to his home**

Senior Chief Kathuru was the recipient of many distinguished visitors to his home at one time or the other. Colonial officials in the district as well as from outside the district paid him a courtesy call at his luxurious house at Kamatumo. Colonial officials on their tour of Mumoni Division never failed to pay a visit to chief Kathuru after touring the division. In 1957, the D.O., Mr. F.R Wilson, after touring Thagicu location took tea with chief Kathuru at home. He was full of praise for chief Kathuru's compound which he described as being exceptionally neat and clean. There was hardly any D.C. who served in Kitui who did not come to pay chief Kathuru a visit.

In 1959, His Excellency the Governor, Sir Philip Mitchell, accompanied by the Provincial Commissioner paid chief Kathuru a visit. They were on their way from Kitui to Garissa. Another Governor to visit chief Kathuru's home was Sir Evelyn Baring in

1960. This was shortly after Kathuru had been attacked by a gang of malcontents among his own race. Baring had written a letter of sympathy to him while he was hospitalized at Kitui general hospital. In April 1961, the Governor came over to see chief Kathuru at his Kamatumo home a months after being discharged from the hospital. He had come specifically to give his personal sympathy and also to assure the chief that the colonial government had been sympathetic towards the misfortune which had befallen him. He also brought some presents.

Other prominent personalities who visited chief Kathuru included the late Mzee jomo Kenyatta. who was then the president of the Kenya African Union (K.A.U.) and Mr. Eliud Mathu, who was the first African member of the Legislative Council. The duo visited chief Kathuru at his Kamatumo home in 1957. Obviously the visit was aimed at selling the K.A.U. policies to the chief and the people of Thagicu and Kitui at large. Since chief Kathuru was among the most influential persons in the whole district, the two must have reasoned that if they could win his support then he would in turn be able to persuade his people to become followers of K.A.U. This was, however, not to be. Chief Kathuru, being aware that the activities and the approach of K.A.U. were anti-government, could not compromise the trust and support which the colonial officials accorded him by succumbing to their demands. Other visitors on record were some of the distinguished colonial chiefs in the colony. These were some of the chiefs whom Kathuru had met and made friends with during his numerous tours of the colony. Among the chiefs who visited him were Senior chief Koinange from Kiambu, chief Munyiri Kombo, chief Kasina Ndo and chief Murwa Tetu from Embu, and many more paid a courtesy call on chief Kathuru at his home at Kamatumo.

### **5.3.3 Kathuru's business ventures**

Colonial chiefs were among the first few Africans to engage themselves in commercial businesses. This was the case because they had access to money and power by virtue of being colonial administrators. Wamagatta argues that colonial chiefs were generally at the vanguard of many commercial enterprises such as retail shops, whole sale enterprises and transportation. They dominated all sorts of businesses as a means of enlarging their incomes and enhancing their social status in society. Senior Chief Kathuru was not left behind in the field of business. Like most of his fellow chiefs, he was engaged in businesses of different types. This fact was underscored by the District Officer for Northern Division Mr. C.G. Hemwood, when he noted in his Handing over Report that chief Kathuru was engaged in all sorts of businesses and various fiddles. The statement was to be echoed a year later, when the sitting D.O. for Northern Division, Mr. A.L.K. Liddle, stated that chief Kathuru was a little inclined to usurp his authority in trade matters and that he, together with his family, were engaged in trade of all sorts. It is therefore clear that chief Kathuru had established himself as a very successful businessman.

One of the main business occupations which he engaged in was that of trading in livestock. He went round the district during market days looking for cows, goats and sheep to buy. He would in turn sell the animals he had bought in Ishiara, Ciakaringa and Tsekuru districts, usually at very high profits. He bought the livestock cheaply since during this the market value of the livestock in the districts was very low. As a result, he would make huge profits from the sale of the livestock. He also employed his close relatives, who usually went round the district during market days and at auctioning

centers to purchase the animals on his behalf. He also bought livestock which was confiscated from tax-defaulters usually at very low prices. For example, if a person owed a tax worth Ksh 9, a cow confiscated for the payment of the same could go for the same amount even if the true market value of the said cow was Ksh 10 or more. He could give his men money to buy the livestock that were auctioned. He could not buy himself so as not to be seen as engaging in high level of corruption. This was however, outright exploitation and as such chief Kathuru made huge profits from such deals.

Chief Kathuru also had an interest in the honey industry. He traded in honey in large quantities. He bought the honey from the people locally, which he would in turn sell to the Indian traders at Kitui. Honey gathering was one of the main economic occupations at the Kitui. As Muthiani points out, in the tropical jungle-like grassland which covered most of the Thagiculand, a lot of bees were to be found some of this made honey anywhere, in holes on the ground, hollow tree trunks or in man-made beehives. Hives were large trunks of certain trees that could not crack easily in the heat of the sun. As such the Thagicu people produced honey in large quantities. Besides buying the honey from the people, chief Kathuru also personally produced honey from the many beehives which he possessed. He employed some people to make the beehives for his as well as forcing men to derive ready-made beehives to him as a way of buying freedom whenever they were caught with certain offences. This is one aspect of chief Kathuru's ethics which portray him as being selfish and unjust when dealing with his people. It can therefore be deduced that chief Kathuru made a good share of fortune out of the sale of the honey.

Another area of business operation where chief Kathuru dominated was in the running of retail shops. He usually opened retail shops for his sons and relatives virtually in every trading Centre in Mumoni Division. There was hardly any trading Centre in the whole of Mumoni Division where a retail shop belonging to Senior Chief Kathuru could not be found and he sold almost everything in the retail shops including food stuff, clothing, household wares and other items.

It was in Katse and Mukuyu trading Centres where chief Kathuru had acquired many plots. As the area chief and councilor, he was directly responsible for determining who should be allocated a plot and who should not. And this was an area where chiefs applied high level of nepotism. They would allocate many plots of land to their kin as they wished. After the attack on chief Kathuru in 1959, he was convinced that his attackers were members of the K.A.U. and Mau Mau. Since most of the ex-soldiers were suspected to be K.A.U. members and indeed most of them possessed K.A.U. Membership tickets, chief Kathuru confiscated the plots which he had allocated to the ex-soldiers in his location and is said to have distributed them among his relatives. It can therefore be concluded that chief Kathuru sometimes used his position in government to acquire plots for himself as well as for his relatives.

#### **5.3.4 Kathuru's land acquisition**

Chief Kathuru inherited some land from his father. Being a leader of raiding and hunting parties, Kathuru was a relatively rich man. He owned a large piece of land as well as herds of cattle. According to Thagicu traditions, family property belonged to the family as a whole under the direct responsibility of the male head. In theory, property of the head of the family belonged to all the members of that family. However, in practice,

family property belonged to the sons as rightful heirs. That was the rule of thumb concerning Thagicu property ownership. The easiest way of acquiring land and property was by inheritance. When the head of the family felt that death was approaching, he called his sons and described his wealth and debts (if any) to them. Then he divided it among them, giving the eldest son largest share because he would take over the responsibility of the family when the father is died. This meant that if anything had to be financed for security of the whole family he would do it usually without the contributions of his brothers.

It can therefore be said that in Thagicu traditional society, land was usually acquired through inheritance. It was the obligation of the father to ensure that he sub-divided his land according to the number of sons he had. Every son had to get a piece of land as inheritance from his father. Land was considered to be an important component of Thagicu life. Being traditionally agriculturalists, the Thagicu people valued land very much. To be landless was considered to be the most unfortunate thing to befall a man. It is within this context that even mboywa (foreigners) had a right to own land. Initially the owner of the land would give it to mboywa to cultivate for certain seasons during which he would acquire enough food stuff which he would give the owner of the land in exchange for the piece of land in question. Then the piece of land would become his own property. Through such arrangements, foreigners were allowed to acquire land among the Thagicu people.

Apart from the land which he had inherited from his father, chief Kathuru gradually increased his land holdings immediately after he became a chief by buying cheaply from those of his neighbors who were willing to sell to him for one reason or another. He

usually bought land from those people who could not raise their tax money. Since tax payment was a compulsory exercise, those people who could not raise money to pay tax and who did not have any other property which they could sell besides land found it necessary to dispose of some of their land so as to pay tax. It was such people that chief Kathuru targeted. He would buy the land cheaply since the owners were in desperate situation. He also purchased land from those who had urgent and pressing money problems. Likewise he also bought land belonging to people who for one reason or another emigrated from the area to other areas outside his location.

Besides buying land, chief Kathuru also obtained some pieces of land in the form of gifts from among his people. In Thagicu traditional society, traditional gift-giving was an accepted practice and sometimes it was a form of reciprocity between the powerful and supplicants. Some people could offer land to the chief in exchange or even in appreciation of a favor done to them by the former. The favor could be in the form of exemption from tax payment, exemption from communal work or even a passage of judgment in favor of the concerned party in case of a dispute. As Tignor notes, local inhabitants were prone to the practice of continually plying the chiefs with gifts. Colonial officials, however, looked at such practices as a way of enhancing bribery and corruption. It can, however, be argued here that sometimes what the colonial officials ailed corruption was mainly the result of the misapplication of European norms of good movement to quite dissimilar societies. At the same time, chief Kathuru obtained land which was not claimed by anybody, owing that not suitable for human settlement.

However, with the coming of the Europeans and the establishment of colonial rule, the traditional ways of life also began to evolve gradually. The teachings of the missionaries

usually conflicted with these traditional beliefs and practices. Hence, early converts to the Christian faith such as chief Kathuru started to view things differently from their grandfathers. For example, the belief that some places were infected with rinderpest became irrelevant to the new converts. Thus it is no wonder that chief Kathuru obtained land in those areas which were initially designated as unsuitable for human settlement. Afterwards people began to acquire land in such places.

There were also times when chief Kathuru forcibly took away other people's land without their consent and without compensating them. A case in point was the fertile Rimuura valley. When he bought a piece of land around Kamaindi, it did not take long for him to realize the agricultural potential which Rimuura valley entailed. The area was exceptionally Productive for crops such as maize, millet, sorghum, cow pease, green grams, yams and cassava. Using his Position in the government, he claimed the whole land to be his, disregarding the initial owners of the land. One of the victims was Makira Muchungu who swore to have revenge one day. True to his words, he carried out the revenge when he nearly killed the chief after he attacked him in 1968. Though he had been hired by the Mau Mau militants and chief Kathuru's enemies, the underlying objective behind the attack was revenge for his lost land.

Chief Kathuru acquired large tracts of land all over his location. There were several factors which motivated and compelled him to acquire land. In the first place, land acquisition elevated him socially and economically and placed him at the same level with other leaders in the district. Land ownership was considered to be an expression of the social status of an individual, hence those who possessed large tracts of land were considered to be very rich and to be men of high social standing in society. It was

discovered that Kathuru acquired land so as to among other things enable him to maintain his social and economic position in society. Secondly, chief Kathuru believed that land acquisition was the best form of investment. Considering the fact that he had a very large family, he must have reasoned that he had to acquire more land so that he could be in a position to give each and every son his own share of inheritance in accordance with Thagicu traditions and practices. This argument can also be supported by the fact that whenever chief Kathuru acquired new land at a particular place, he also builds a home for one of his wives on that piece of land. The motive behind this arrangement was so that the sons of those wives could claim inheritance in that particular piece of land. The fact that chief Kathuru owned large tracts of land enabled him to donate some of his land for construction of schools and setting up of other development projects. For I example he donated the piece of land on which both Kamatumo primary school and Gankanga secondary school are built. He also donated land for the construction of a church within his homestead.

Though chief Kathuru owned a large amount of land, it should be emphasized that not all his land holdings had been acquired through orthodox means. One colonial official in the district had an occasion to report that chief Kathuru's wealth and land of course had not been all acquired by entirely orthodox means. Another report stated that throughout his career as a chief, he had been engaged in countless shady deals over land. These reports point to the fact that chief Kathuru did not acquire all his land holdings by entirely orthodox means. There were some instances when he irregularly took by force land belonging to other people, such as the land within Rimuura valley

### **5.3.5 Development on kathuru's land**

Chief Kathuru was a great farmer, farming nearly six hundred acres of land and practicing modern agricultural methods. He had big and numerous shambas located at different places. Each wife had her own shamba. There are factors which explain the reason behind his success in agriculture. The first one was willingness to adopt modern farming methods such as the use of fertilizers, manure and soil conservation measures in order to prevent the loss of soil fertility. Secondly, he received valuable advice from agricultural officers who also used his farms for various demonstrations. As a result, when the rains were enough, he usually harvested huge yields. He had surplus food crops such as maize, beans, millet, sorghum and peas. These were the basic food crops among the Thagicu people. Besides the food crops, Kathuru also planted some cash crops. These included sisal and cotton. The two cash crops have been known to do very well in Kitui. Chief Kathuru also tried to plant both coffee and wheat as cash crops. However, they failed to do well due to climatic conditions.

Chief Kathuru produced huge yields of food crops owing to the fact that he applied advanced farming methods. Some of the harvested yields were sold while the rest was stored for future use and in case of famines. Besides cultivating food crops, chief Kathuru also practiced pastoralism. He kept large herds of cattle, sheep and goats. He employed a good number of farm-hands to assist in the management of his holdings. Some herded the cattle and large flocks of sheep and goats. Since he owned a large piece of land, he could manage to keep as many cattle, sheep and goats as he wished because grazing land was available.

By 1967, he had expressed the idea of starting a dairy farm in Thagicu though he was disappointed by the fact that the cattle of the place were small and that through lack of grass, they could only produce milk for one month at a stretch. This nonetheless did not prevent him from keeping cattle for milk production. He had wanted to keep grade cattle in his farm like the many which he had seen in European farms in the central parts of the country. After consultation with the District Veterinary Officer, it was decided that grade cattle could not withstand the climate of Kitui District thus he had to drop the idea of ever owning grade cattle. Needless to say, he selected the type of cows which he kept for milk production. He selected the best breeds available locally and those which could yield much more milk. As a result he produced a lot of milk which was used for domestic consumption while the surplus was sold.

Chief Kathuru was the first person in Thagicu to construct cattle dips with the help of the veterinary officer. These were intended to prevent the animals from various diseases caused by ticks. Afterwards he supervised the construction of cattle dips all over location. He also arranged for routine inoculations of his location's cattle against the dreaded rinderpest disease. He kept livestock for various purposes. Most important was the provision of milk which could be used either fresh or sour. Normally sour milk was not used before it was churned. The animals also provided meat as a source of food. Kathuru also used the livestock for the payment of bride-price for his wives and also for the wives of his sons. The fact that Kathuru was in a position to pay for the bride-price of his wives plus those of his sons' wives is a clear indication that he kept large herds of cattle. They were so many such that some had to be taken to designated places known as kiengo, far away from home where they grazed. Only herders stayed there in the kiengos looking

after the cattle in semi-permanent built structures. Food and other necessities had to be taken for them on weekly basis.

In conclusion, it can be said that there was not much difference between chief Kathuru's official and informal life. His character and behavior when dealing with his family members was more or less the same as when he was dealing with his subordinate or even the people of his location while on official duty. For example, he could not hesitate to use force while enforcing his authority both to his wives and children. At the same time he used force especially when implementing communal projects such as construction of dams, roads and schools as well as when dealing with tax defaulters.

#### **5.4 The death of senior chief kathuru**

**“GREAT THAGICU LEADER SLAIN.** That was the front-page headline in the colony's only daily newspaper announcing the death of Senior Chief Kathuru. Underneath the bold print was written, Senior Chief of the Thagicu location, Kathuru Nyagah was murdered in an ambush at Katse trading center, yesterday afternoon. This had not been the first attempt to kill Kathuru. Several abortive attempts had previously been made against his life before that fateful day he finally met his violent death.”

##### **5.4.1 previous attempts against kathuru's life**

The first attempt to kill Kathuru took place in 1959, when the houses of his two newly-wed wives, were set on fire. His mother's house also caught fire in the process. There was no doubt that the arsonist(s) was/were after him as he/they thought that he might be in either of the houses of his wives. Fortunately, Kathuru was at Gankanga on the other side of his farm. His laborers' houses, which were in the same compound with the burned

houses, had been fastened from the outside to prevent them from going to the assistance of the intended victims. To the amazement of Kathuru, most of the neighbors' who could be seen standing outside their houses, did not go near the inferno for fear of being implicated with the incident. Although the houses were completely burned to the ground, nobody was, however, injured. This was a relief to Kathuru who stated that 'if it is only the wood that has been burned, then that is nothing'. If anything, the incident prompted Kathuru to build better houses with corrugated roofs, unlike the ones destroyed.

Although Kathuru could not understand why somebody might be after his life, several suspects were, nonetheless, arrested in connection with the arson. But they were later released for lack of concrete evidence against them. Hardly had the burned down houses been reconstructed than the second attempt on Kathuru's life was made. An ambush was laid for him at night outside his house. But owing to a case of mistaken identity, his son, was slashed on the head when he came out to draw water from a storage tank. Martin, who was tall and well-built, almost like his father, was then on his school holidays from the Kitui High School, where he was a student. On this occasion, his father was on the other side of his farm with his other wives.

Although Martin was seriously injured, he was, however, taken to Kyuso Hospital where he was treated and later discharged. He even went back to school when the new term started as he appeared to have fully recovered from the injury. But the injury inflicted by the attacker had been more serious than had been suspected. A suspect, Kiteme Mwinzi, had been arrested and charged with attempted murder. He had been arrested on the basis that Kathuru's son had recognized him. Kiteme Mwinzi was subsequently convicted and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment.

Kiteme indeed appeared to have a motive for wishing Kathuru dead. He was from Kyuso Location and a member of Senior Chief Mwendwa wa Kivuti of the clan of kitondo. He had worked as a tribal retainer at Thika until he was sacked owing to a misunderstanding between him and Kathuru. He could have, therefore, been trying to avenge himself on Kathuru who was responsible for his dismissal. But whether Kiteme was responsible for the attack or not, it is notable that no further attempts were made against Kathuru's life for at least a decade.

It was not until in December 1971 that the next abortive bid on Kathuru's life took place. A man tried to spear Kathuru, with a spear fastened to a long pole, through the window as he lay in bed fast asleep. But the wire mesh gave the would-be murderer a hard time in trying to maneuver the spear to a suitable angle so as to come into contact with the sleeping chief. The noise that the wire mesh made aroused his wife, who was sleeping in the same room with her sick child in a separate bed. On turning on the dimmed lamp, she was met by the horrifying spectra, which made her to instinctively shriek in terror in a desperate attempt to warn her fast asleep husband. Kathuru woke up in a state of confusion and instinctively thought that the child had died. But he quickly came to his senses and frightened his attackers away by shouting, let me shoot them.

A local man was subsequently arrested on circumstantial but strong evidence and charged with the attempted murder. But the incident appeared to have had no political significance so far as investigations could ascertain. Kathuru had had the man prosecuted and fined for illegal possession of liquor. The suspect was, however, acquitted for lack of conclusive evidence against him. Another unsuccessful bid to liquidate Chief Kathuru was made after the August 24, 1972 Kitui rally. The house of his wife was set on fire.

Unlike in 1959, people rushed out and quickly extinguished the fire. As a result, only the roof of the living room was burned down. Whoever did it might have had the notion that Kathuru was in the house and probably hoped to get him as he fled from the burning house. Once again, Kathuru was on the other side of his farm. Nevertheless, he did not venture out into the night as he was aware that it was him that they were after. In 1959, Senior Chief Kathuru was also fought at the psychological level by the Mau Mau. As he got deeper and deeper into the Mau Mau quagmire of turmoil and insecurity, so did the psychological warfare against him rise in magnitude. This warfare involved anonymous threatening letters and other documents. Some of them were deposited in his compound at night. Others, which were addressed to him, were found beside decapitated or strangled animals such as cats and dogs. The threats were designed to either scare him off into capitulation to the machinations of the Mau Mau or to instill in him a sense of permanent fear and insecurity. Apart from threatening him with a violent death, the anonymous documents also 'advised' him to set his house in order as they would get him sooner rather than later.

Kathuru's wives and friends became concerned with his safety as the Mau Mau claimed more and more victims. His wives constantly urged him to be extra careful and to avoid spending nights out or arriving home late in the night. His friends also advised him to be careful as he was treading on dangerous ground which might collapse at any time and thus render his children fatherless at an early age. Chief Kathuru did not take the threats on his life and the advice of his wives and friends lightly or for granted. He kept his superiors well informed about everything. For example, in mid-August 1960, Kathuru reported to N.F. Kennaway, the DC, that his life was in grave danger from the Mau Mau.

As a consequence, the authorities adopted some precautionary measures in an endeavor to safeguard Chief Kathuru's life. First, Kathuru turned down a proposal to provide him with a bodyguard as such a measure would have given the impression that the Mau Mau threats had got into his nerves. Secondly, the DC directed Superintendent Alistair John Allen, who was in charge of the Mumoni Police Division, to issue Chief Kathuru with a Smith and Wesson revolver and ammunition. The superintendent also gave Kathuru some instructions in the use of the firearm for his self-protection. Thirdly, Kathuru would secretly seek for night refuge and protection in the house of H.T. Wells, H.T. Wells was the leader of the local European farming community in the area. Lastly, Kathuru could never use the same road twice in a day if he could help it and neither could he share meals with strangers.

In spite of the threats and the danger the Mau Mau posed to his life, Kathuru never faltered or quivered. He nonchalantly continued with his fight against the Mau Mau as if the sword of Damocles was not dangerously hanging over his head. His determination to help the government stamp out the Mau Mau was expressed in the following words by the C.N.C: He was at his best in difficult times and during recent months, undaunted by the threats of thugs and outlaws, boldly took the lead in the work of restoring law and order and decrying the proscribed Mau Mau Society. Although he knew his life to be in danger he was undeterred in his condemnation of the deliberate terrorism and cowardly crimes which have shocked the colony and the outside world.

Nevertheless, Chief Kathuru at times voiced his doubts as to whether he would survive the Mau Mau menace if the movement was not routed out in the foreseeable future. But he philosophically consoled himself by reasoning out that death was ultimately inevitable

as no one would live forever. He was, therefore, not afraid of dying and as he put it: It is good for a man to die when he does not know the hour of his death, for he will get up in the morning, wash his face and go out to his death without fearing. But it is very bad for a man who has killed another to go to court, and be convicted. He knows that one day he will be killed, when all appeals have failed, what do you think he feels then?

Having accepted death as being inevitable and unavoidable at any rate, Kathuru began to distribute his property among his family as if in response to the advice in the anonymous threatening letters. Some of the measures, however, were in conformity to the religious promise he had made in order to be re-readmitted to the Church. Work for constructing her house was already in progress when he died. He had also deposited Shs. 500 with the Kitui DC for the milk of the child of his daughter. It was also at this time that Kathuru was planning to set aside some of his land for an agricultural demonstration farm. But he was never given time to make the rest of his will known as he was murdered just before doing so. The occasion rather than the cause of Kathuru's death was a land case at Katse, which is in Katse Location, about miles from Katse trading center.

#### **5.4.2 The land case at katse about thagicu and akamba community**

The case involved the immigrant Akamba and Thagicu who were originally owners of the land in question. It was an appeal to the Local Native Tribunal Court (L.N.T.C) against a 1950's judgments delivered by the Kyuso Tribunal Court presided by Divisional Chief Kathuru. The court had allocated Akamba 320 acres of land at Kanzinwa near Katse and the rest went to Thagicu. Akamba appealed against this ruling in 1998 as they wished to be allocated at least 600 acres because Akamba's land was over 3,000 acres.

Accordingly, the LNTC served Kathuru with summons and also secured authorization from the DC for him to attend the proceedings as a witness of the court. The DC's permission was essential because the regulations stated that: No chief may act as advocate, councilor or village elder in any civil suit whatsoever, nor may he appear as a witness therein unless specifically so authorized for the particular case by a District Officer. As if they could foresee him not returning alive, his wives pleaded with him not to attend the hearing of the case. But Kathuru would not change his mind as doing so would have amounted to a gross disobedience of the DC's order which had bade him attend. Kathuru also appeared to have a premonition of his impending fate. His last words to his wives were: 'let me go and if I come back, well and good, but if I don't, then that is it'.

He left for the land case on Wednesday morning, the 26th of October, 1998. Besides Kathuru, there were five other people who accompanied him in his car. They were his driver, two women and two age-mates of Kathuru. One was his great friend Gitavi NKundi while Kimanzi Muli was from Kamba tribe. Kimanzi Muli had gone to collect Mr Kathuru and had remained at Kathuru's home since Sunday, the 23rd of October, 1998. After stopping for a while at Mwingi and then at Nairobi where they dropped the two women, they arrived in court at around eleven o'clock.

But it was discovered that the file containing the previous proceedings and judgments of the case in the lower court had been forgotten by the LNT at Kyuso. The proceedings could, therefore, not commence unless and until the file had been retrieved from Kyuso. Accordingly, the LNT's clerk) and a member of the LNT were dispatched to Kyuso to fetch the file. They arrived in Kyuso when the offices had been closed down during the

lunch hour and it was not until after two o'clock that they got hold of the file. It is around quarter to four o'clock when they returned, and by then the case had already been postponed to be heard on the following day. Kathuru was thus forced to spend the night at Nairobi in one of his friend's house.

The proceedings of the case commenced at around nine o'clock on the following day, the 27th of October, 1998. By the time Kathuru finished giving his testimony, their lunch was ready. After he had lunched, he addressed those present. Ironically, he began by reminding them that a leader, does not die before he says his last word. He went on to talk about the Mau Mau terrorism and lawlessness. He asked the elders to advise their children to desist from lawlessness and evil deeds. He compared the Thagicu/entire Kenya and the Europeans in the country to nippier grass growing in water and water in a river respectively. He told them that as the shaking nippier grass does not stop the water flowing, so they too could not hope to violently dislodge the Europeans from Kenya. He concluded by warning them that if they did not heed his words, then they would recall him when calamity befell them sooner than they realized. It was a few hours later same day when Kathuru got in his car and left toward his home location when the Thagicu king met his untimely death Mwing-Katse road that evening.

#### **5.4.3 The assassination of chief kathuru nyagah**

There were four people in his car as he was returning home from Nairobi. He was accompanied by the President of the Thagicu Tribunal Court, who was sitted in the front seat next to the driver. Kathuru and Kirochi were reclining in the back seat. Kathuru was sitted to the left with his car window lowered. The chief's car had to cover about three hundred miles before it came out of the main Nairobi-Garisa road. After they had covered

about a five miles, the driver informed the chief that there was a car following theirs at a high speed. He also added that he did not know where it had come from since he had not seen any other car on that road. What he did not know then was that the car had emerged from a thick-tail grass in the area, where it had lain in ambush covered with branches. Kathuru turned round, then assured those with him that the car was one of those that roamed about in the reserve. All the same, Kirochi enquired from Kathuru whether he had his gun with him. He reassured him, though he never withdrew it in readiness. Interestingly, the gun, which was wrapped up in a paper bag, was in the front pocket of the car while the ammunition was in Kathuru's pocket.

Just then, they came to a wider stretch of the track and the car behind tried to overtake them. When the two cars were almost level with each other, the overtaking car hooted so as to be allowed to pass. But Chief Kathuru instructed his driver not to give way. If the car had overtaken them, then that spot would have been the scene of Kathuru's death. About one hundred miles from the main road, there was a fork in the track. The track to the right was a temporary one that had been made by vehicles to avoid potholes in the main track. Both tracks joined the main road at a distance of about half a mile from each other. The chief's car took the right track while the other car sped down the other track at such a high speed that Kirochri was audibly amazed. Kathuru's rejoinder was that, that was precisely why he could not trust his driver alone with his car as he would be driving in a similar manner. But if they thought that was the last they had seen of the car, then they were mistaken.

Just before the chief's car joined the main road, they saw the other car, a fawn coloured Ford Consul taxi; stopped at the mouth of their track. It was then reversed into the mouth

of the track at such a high speed that it appeared as if it was moving forward. The car then came to an abrupt stop with its rear bumper almost touching the front bumper of the Hudson. Kathuru's driver thought that the taxi was reversing so as to turn round and head for the way it had come. But he was proved wrong. Even at this critical moment, Kathuru never reacted in the way a person in constant danger ought to have done. He neither withdrew nor loaded his gun in readiness for any eventuality. Kathuru's hesitation and lack of alertness cost him his life because by the time he realized what was happening, it was too late for him to do anything to save it. What happened next after his car was brought to a standstill was accomplished within about fifteen seconds.

Barely had the Hudson come to a halt than a light-skinned man, who was in a jovial mood, emerged from the front left-hand side of the taxi. He was wearing a dark brown tarpaulin jacket with a zip fastener, a red and white spotted scarf around his neck, khaki trousers and brown shoes. Immediately he got out of the car, he unzipped the jacket. He then put his right hand in the inner left-hand breast pocket of the jacket. This action gave those in the Hudson a false notion that he was probably removing a letter for the chief. Once the man had passed Kirochi, he stopped next to Kathuru, peeped at him and saluted, 'Yes Senior Chief Kathuru!'. Even before the words were out of his mouth, he had withdrawn a Smith and Wesson gun and fired at the chief at point-blank range, thereby killing him instantly. The assailant next fired at and punctured the front left-hand tyre of the Hudson to avoid any possibility of pursuing them. He then laughed as he casually walked back to the taxi. The Ford Consul car, which took off as if from a motor rally check-point, headed for the capital. No wonder the assassination was described by the police as a murder in the best Chicago style.

The assassin shot Senior Chief Kathuru five times. The first bullet went into his mouth while the other four penetrated into his chest. All five bullets formed no exit wounds. A post mortem examination by Dr. Gerald Dockeray, the State Pathologist, revealed that Kathuru had died from shock and hemorrhage from gunshot wounds in the lungs and vertebrae. None of the other three occupants of the Hudson was hurt. But they were terribly shocked and flabbergasted by the ghastly and bloody deed. Before the assassin had finished firing at the chief, they were all out of the car rolling on the ground with fright. Kirochi was so stunned that he ran and walked all the way to Katse, about five hundred miles away. It was the driver who ran back to those they had parted from case earlier and informed them of the assassination. Some of the elders plus the driver immediately boarded a nearby truck and reported the crime at the Kitui Police Station.

The police quickly swung into action and cordoned off the area. John Timmerman, an Assistant Commissioner of Police and also the boss of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) took charge of the investigations. All police stations in the Kitui, Mwingi and Nairobi area were given a description of the vehicle alleged to have been used by the gang. Road blocks were mounted across many of the main road stations. Traffic along the Mwingi-Garisa road was brought to a standstill as CID experts took photographs and examined the chief's car for clues. Many police officers worked nonstop throughout that night. Police patrols combed many parts of Kitui and recorded and checked statements from the suspects. By the end of that night, over 100 people had been interrogated on the spot though no arrests had been made. On the following day many members of Akamba-men, women and children were arrested and detained at Kitui for

questioning. They were so many that a temporary barbed-wire enclosure was constructed for them when the cells could hold no more.

The police even offered a reward of Sh. 5,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the perpetrators of this murder. This reward was increased to Shs. 10,000 on the following day by a number of anonymous Europeans. But this huge and tempting reward was never claimed. Nobody came forward to volunteer any information for fear of being victims of the invincible Mau Mau executioners. The assassination of Senior Chief Kathuru also forced senior government officials to hold emergency consultations on 28th October, 1998. The discussions were for mapping out their next strategy against the formidable Mau Mau. Meanwhile, messages of condolences and of condemnation of the murder of Senior Chief Kathuru poured in from various individuals and organizations. The messages in themselves clearly indicated that Senior Chief Kathuru had not been just an ordinary chief in the colonial cycle.

#### **5.4.4 Messages of condolences**

The highest authority to convey his condolences on behalf of his government was Oliver Lyttelton, the Secretary of State for the Colonies. He sent the following message to the governor: 'I have learned with very great regret of the murder of Senior Chief Kathuru. Please convey my deepest sympathy to the relatives. Those guilty of such a crime must be accounted enemies of the whole law-abiding community of Kenya, not least its African members. The government of Kenya with the full support of Her Majesty's Government will not rest until they have been brought to justice'.

The Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, who had been in the colony for nine years, paid the following tribute to Kathuru whom he had met on his first day in Kenya: 'I was horrified at the news of his death. I have heard on all sides of his great strength of character, the admirable work he has done for his own people and his good relations with people of all races in Kenya'. E.R. St A. Davies, the LNC, who was a good friend of Kathuru, paid tribute to the memory of the chief in the Legislative Council. In addition, he sent a long appreciation which read in part: 'Today the colony mourns the death of one of its leading citizens...Grief for the murder of one of the ablest and most respected man the colony has produced is mingled with horror at the manner of his cold-blooded and dastardly murder. He has set an example of shining courage, of devotion to duty and of service to the people of the colony which will serve as an inspiration to all who try to follow in his path'.

The Eastern Province PC, E.H. Windley, who had been a DC at Kitui, sent an almost similar appreciation to the one above. An extract from it reads: 'The disgust and horror of this brutal murder of our friend is shared by a large circle of his Kitui friends and admirers...He was upright, tolerant, just, kindly and courageous and held in great respect by all who knew him. The loss we feel can only be compensated by the hope that his ideals will be remembered by entire Kitui in future generations who aspire to achieve his standards'.

The Executive Committee of KAU likewise sent their heartfelt condolences to the family of the late chief. KAU denounced in the strongest terms the cowardly and dastardly act committed against such a leader and a friend of the people. The condolence message added that Kathuru's death was an irreparable loss they and the country had sustained.

The message concluded by urging the public to assist the government in bringing the assassins to book.

Michael Blundell, the leader of the European Elected Members of the Legislative Council, described the death of Kathuru as a loss of a wise and well-beloved chief and counselor. He added that Kathuru was admired by all people of good will for his forthright presentation of the African viewpoint without rancor or hatred.

Eliud Mathu also sent a telegram on behalf of the African Members of the Legislative Council. It read: 'The tragedy of the murder of your father has reached us....I send you and your family our condolences in this time of great sorrow to many....Kenya has lost a faithful public servant who had devoted almost all his life to the welfare of all people in the colony. He was an outstanding chief.he will be missed....and it will be hard to replace'. Such was Kathuru's fame that a memorial service was held for him at the Moral Rearmament Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland. Both the Europeans and the Africans who knew Chief Kathuru spoke at the memorial service. The gist of their speeches was that: Long years of bitterness have created this. Hatred will not bring freedom to the world..The only way out is to live the spirit of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, so that unity and peace can be achieved for Africa....From the blood of martyrs like Chief Kathuru, the tree of unity and liberty is watered.

Another prominent individual who also condemned the murder of Kathuru was Chanan Singh, an Indian Member of the Legislative Council. The United Kenya Club was also not left behind in paying tribute to Chief Kathuru who had been an active member of the

club at Kitui. By the time Kathuru's funeral took place, his murderers had not yet been apprehended.

#### **5.4.5 The funeral**

The funeral was held on Friday, the 9th of November, 1998 at three o'clock on his farm at Kamatumo his home village. The funeral was attended by over 1,000 mourners who included about 100 Europeans and Asians. Among the mourners were the Governor, the LNC, the PC, DC, DO's and other administrative staff. Other prominent Europeans present included Sir Charles Mortimer, Member for Land, Education and Local Government, Alderman Dr. J.R. Gregory, the Mayor of Nairobi, and two members of the Legislative Council. Many African leaders from all over the district were also in attendance. Among them were Mathu, chiefs, councillors and other dignitaries.

Senior Chief Kathuru was accorded the full honors deserved by a fallen British hero. His body had left the Nairobi Mortuary at nine o'clock under police escort. The cortege had made a brief stopover at the DC's Office in Kitui. In the afternoon, the coffin, draped with the Union Jack, was brought to Kathuru's house. It was carried by six African bearers. In the procession were clergy from all churches in the district, followed by family members of the late chief, including his aged mother, who was over 100 years old. Next came the Governor with his party, followed by other Kenyan leaders. Also in the procession were Boy-Scout and Girl-Guide officials and many other Europeans.

The graveside service was conducted by Rev. G.M. Calderwood, the Moderator of the A.I.C. He was assisted by Rev. Charles M. Rareri, a clerk of the PCEA Synod and Rev. W. Kamawe, who was the local PCEA Moderator. Prayers and hymns were said and sang

in local dialect before Rev. Calderwood read the twenty third Psalms. The benediction was given by Rev. David Steel, the Minister of the St. Andrew's PCEA Church in Nairobi.

The Governor then paid a final tribute to the departed civil servant. He lamented that: 'This is a sad day. We are here men, women and children of different races - to say goodbye to a great man....Chief Kathuru who was a great Thagicu leader. But in addition, he was more - he was a great African and a great citizen of Kenya. He had spent his life and he had met his death in the service of God, his people and his Government. His was a faithful service. All his life he had worked for justice and a better understanding between the peoples of Kenya. May we all follow his splendid example'.

An old European farmer who was living in Kitui, H.T. Wells, paid tribute to Kathuru on behalf of the European farmers in the region. His was brief and to the point: 'He tried to show us all how dependent we are on others. He saw the storm gathering around him trying to destroy his ideals, but did not falter. He did his duty and gave up his life for that course'. Kathuru was laid to rest beside his first wife, who had passed away in February 1970s. After the coffin was lowered into the grave, a party of six askari of the Kenya Police, led by a sergeant major, fired a volley. A bugler of the police band then sounded the last post and Reveille. The ceremony was concluded by the laying of wreaths on the grave. The Governor and the European mourners were the first to do so. They were followed by the Thagicu mourners, who placed their bunches of flowers among the more ornate European wreaths.

The repercussions of Kathuru's untimely death began to be felt on the day he was buried. On that day, the government imposed a curfew throughout Mwingi District. The curfew affected only the Africans and was operative between the hours of 7.00 p m and 5.30 a m. A curfew was later imposed on all troubled areas in the colony.

#### **5.4.6 The trial**

The preliminary inquiry into the death of Senior Chief Kathuru opened on 2nd January, 1999 before Crawley, Magistrate. The prosecution endeavored to prove that the murder of Senior Chief Kathuru was a political one by calling witnesses. But the press was cautioned by the court to exercise restraint in the use of witnesses' names to avoid Mau Mau reprisals against them. The magistrate gave his verdict on 2nd March, 1999. He discharged five of the accused for lack of evidence against them. The magistrate, however, found sufficient grounds in the evidence submitted to him to put each of the nine accused on their defense in the Supreme Court. Three of the nine were charged with the murder of Kathuru, while the other six were charged with conspiracy to Kathuru's murder.

The six charged with conspiracy to murder Kathuru appeared before Justice on 12th April, 1999. They were Ex-Senior Chief Kathuru. Their lawyers were dingle Foot and Dudley Thompson. The prosecutor was still the Solicitor-general. The case against the six solely depended on the evidence of one witness. The prosecution's case was that the six accused were present at a meeting held in the house of Joshua on Saturday, the 4th of October, 1998. The conspiracy to murder Kathuru before the East African Royal Commission arrived in Kenya to review the land problem was planned during this meeting. The Crown contended that the motive of the conspiracy was political the sense

that Chief Kathuru was not only opposed to their political aims but he was also an obstruction to the attainment of them. All the accused pleaded not guilty to the charge. The judgment was delivered on 15th April, 1999 after a five-day trial. After a thirty minute summing up of the evidence, the Judge rejected the uncorroborated evidence of the only witness who narrated the alleged happenings. He further noted that there had been discrepancies in the evidence she had given in the lower court and her testimony in the Supreme Court. Although the six accused were acquitted, they were, however, re-arrested after they had left the courtroom and detained again.

The case against Kimanzi, who had been indicted with Kathuru's murder, had commenced on 30th March, 1999. The trial Judge was Justice Rudd, while the Solicitor-General still appeared for Kathuru while Dudley Thompson appeared for Kimanzi and Mwinzi. The courtroom was guarded by armed policemen and each African entering the Law Courts was searched. The Crown case was that the three accused had met together on the weekend before the murder of Kathuru. During that meeting, Mwinzi (accused No. 3), had issued instructions that Senior Chief Kathuru be killed. He had also provided Kimanzi (accused No. 1) with the gun which was used to commit the murder. The case against Mutisya, who had been implicated by Kimanzi, was that he planned and procured the murder by instructing the others to commit it.

The second accused, Mwaathe, who was a taxi-driver, was accused of being the driver of the fawn coloured Ford Consul taxi that had been used by the assassins. He had been the first to be arrested after his taxi, with the registration No. KCM 902Y, was traced to a garage in Nairobi on the day following the murder. Kimanzi was a shopkeeper from Katse Location. He was arrested on the Saturday following the murder. He was

implicated by Mwinzi in his statement to the police. He was alleged to be the man who actually fired the shots that had killed Senior Chief Kathuru. The three accused denied the charges facing them. Mwinzi gave evidence on oath, Kimanzi made an unsworn statement while Mutisya elected to say nothing. Mwinzi maintained that he had met Kimanzi for the first time on the Saturday before the murder. He could, therefore, not understand why Kimanzi had implicated him in his confession that he shot the chief on Mwinzi's instructions.



## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 CONCLUSION

The image and reputation of many of Kenya's colonial chiefs has not been good and that of Chief Kathuru is no exception. During the colonial period, chiefs were often dismissed by their own people as being collaborators and stooges of the white man. To many people, chiefs were as oppressive as their colonial masters. They were often accused of promoting their own interests and those of the Europeans at the expense of their own people.

The reputation of Senior Chief Kathuru suffered most when he was discharging his chiefly duties. Some people believe that he was an autocrat and a tyrant who handled his people with an iron-fist hand. Others believe that he spent all his life serving the interests of the Europeans. Others still claim that he was concerned with amassing wealth and material gain for himself at the expense of his people. In other words, he has been accused of having compromised the interests and well-being of his own people for his personal material gain.

Chief Kathuru was one of the few exceptional colonial chiefs who were endowed with administrative and leadership skills. He was an extremely ideal and a prototype colonial chief who was committed to his duties as a colonial chief. He performed his duties so well that the colonial government had no cause to regret for having appointed him a chief in the first place. He was one of the staunchest supporters of the colonial government in Thagicu, Kitui District. Thus the colonial government could not have made any other better choice than him at the time.

He never spared himself in his efforts to serve the colonial government. Unlike some of his contemporaries, he was conversant with the duties which he had to perform and so he did not wait to be reminded on what to do by his superiors. In many instances, he applied his own initiative and knowledge when performing his duties. As a result, his location was always far ahead of others in all aspects. As already discussed, many schools, bore holes, earth dams and roads were constructed in Thagicu location through his efforts.

There are several factors which explain his extraordinary performance. In the first place, he acted immediately he was issued with an order. He could never rest until an order was fully and satisfactorily implemented. He never argued with his bosses over the validity and suitability of a directive. Even if he had anything to complain about a directive issued by his superiors, this would come later after having already implemented the said directive. In any case, his complains were rare.

Secondly, chief Kathuru was endowed with leadership qualities which most chiefs during his time lacked. His greatest and indispensable assets were his powers of eloquence, persuasion and diplomacy. He could persuade his people to obey what they considered to be unpopular decisions made by the colonial officials. He had an accomplished baraza technique and was very useful for putting points across and explaining them to his people. He was an outstanding orator. His oratorical skills were comparable to none in the district. He often used his powers of oratory in swaying a crowd. As such he commanded a considerable respect from many of his parishioners. He was truly a born leader.

His other secret to success in his administrative work was his spirit of initiative. Not only was he conversant with his duties which he performed as a colonial chief, but he never waited to be prodded unlike most of his colleagues who had to be constantly reminded of their duties. He was very clever, gifted, intelligent and a born leader and was explicitly committed to his duties as a chief.

Fourthly, chief Kathuru must have realized from the very beginning that he owed his appointment to the D.C. and that as a government agent; he was duty-bound to obey and respect his superiors. Thus, he handled his superiors with dignity, respect and caution. He quite often avoided anything which could hurt his bosses or antagonize him.

In this way, he was able to maintain a good working relationship with his masters. It was due to his efficient control of his location that put him on the side of his masters. He had earned a good name for himself and as such he received commendable reports such as being an outstandingly efficient and a thoroughly reliable and dependable man with an astute mind whose illiteracy seemed to be little handicap to him.

The fact that chief Kathuru was always totally committed to his duties as a chief, and the fact that he discharged those duties with a lot of zeal, prompted many people to conclude that he was concerned with the promotion and protection of the interests of the Europeans at the expense of his people. It was during the process of discharging his chiefly duties that his reputation and popularity suffered the greatest blow. The duties which he had to perform as a colonial chief were unpopular, and this made him unpopular too. It was when carrying out these 'unpopular' duties that he quite often collided with those who failed to observe the law. He had to convince his masters that he merited being appointed

a chief and this he could only do by making sure that he strictly carried out his chiefly duties according to the standards set forth by his colonial masters. In other words chief Kathuru acted as the cutting edge of the colonial sword and the result was that he at times collided with the people

He was responsible for making sure that people were arrested and prosecuted before the Kitui Tribunal court for various offences such as illicit liquor brewing, excessive drinking of local brew, tax defaulting and theft among others. The colonial measures he put in place, such as provision of communal labor, compulsory terracing programs and compulsory education, were viewed negatively by most people. The victims of such measures could not comprehend, leave alone appreciate, what he and the colonial government were doing for them. They often associated him with the unpopular and unjust colonial measures that he enforced and implemented on behalf of the government. Being the government official in direct contact with the people, he received the wrath of the people who could discern little difference between him and the colonial masters. It is therefore no wonder that many malicious rumours which portrayed him negatively were widely spread against him.

Chief Kathuru did not snatch other peoples' wives or daughters as some other colonial chiefs were accustomed to do. He paid all that was sanctioned by traditions with regard to bride-price. With very few exceptions such as the fertile land along Rimuura valley which he grabbed from owners, he never confiscated other peoples' property for his own use, even though he relied heavily on his chiefly influence to acquire much of his wealth. He paid for his land holdings from the profits he made out of his long chain of businesses as well as the profits he made from his better and advanced farming techniques.

There are several factors which account for chief Kathuru's disrepute. Those people who were forced to provide labor during the construction of dams and implementation of other projects developed hatred and dislike for the chief. Most of the measures enforced and implemented by chief Kathuru were supposed and designed to benefit his people. Such measures as uplifting their hygienic standards by digging pit latrines, increasing food production through increased soil conservation by digging terraces, ensuring adequate availability of water through increased dam construction were in fact intended to benefit the people. They, however, did not seem to appreciate such measures simply because they had emanated and originated from the colonial government which was considered by many to be alien and oppressive. They therefore thought him a bother for urging and compelling them to uplift their living standards. Also most of those whom he persecuted or collided with for such crimes as illicit beer brewing and tax defaulting, for one reason or another quite often would spread malicious rumours against him out of bitterness.

The brutal attack on Senior Chief Kathuru by the Mau Mau militants together with his opponents in Kitui District further worsened his reputation and popularity. The episode provided his critics with a basis to portray him as a bad and unpopular chief. They portrayed him as a blatant collaborator and one who was concerned with promoting his material well-being at the expense of the economic and political rights of his people. His loyalty to the colonial government and his uncompromising stance against the activities of the Mau Mau adherents finally convinced the Mau Mau militants that they could not liberate themselves from the colonial yoke while he was alive. As a result, they sought ways and means of eliminating him, hence the attempted assassination.

The fact that the Mau Mau militants targeted chief Kathuru and not any other chief in Kitui District provided his opponents with an opportunity to paint him as a bad and unpopular chief. However, as it has already been shown in this thesis, chief Kathuru had risen above all the other chiefs in Kitui both in influence and administrative work. He was administratively second to none. As a result, the colonial officials in the district used him more than any other chief in their efforts to stamp out Mau Mau. Likewise, some of the subordinate chiefs could take refuge under him while enforcing colonial directives in regard to suppressing Mau Mau. This had the effect of projecting chief Kathuru as the originator of such harsh and unpopular directives.

Chief Kathuru tended to avoid issues and situations that could antagonize the authorities and thereby jeopardize and compromise his position. He never supported or associated himself with those organizations or bodies such as Mau Mau which the colonial administration considered to be anti-government. This is one reason why his critics and opponents thought that he compromised his own peoples' economic, social and political rights.

It is evident that chief Kathuru did indeed try to promote and safeguard the interests of the Europeans to a certain extent. This was expected and quite procedural. As a government employee, there were official duties delegated to him by the District Commissioner which he had to perform well in order for him to maintain his position in the colonial government. The worth of the colonial chiefs was judged on the performance of their duties. Hence, for chief Kathuru to keep his chieftom, he had to convince his masters that he was worthy by performing his duties well.

Likewise, as a government employee at the grass-roots, his services were supposed to be geared towards the pursuit of good government. It was, however, a government that was mostly concerned with the welfare of the Europeans in the colony at the expense of the other races. As a result, it was while he was discharging his duties that he was seen by many people to be promoting the welfare of the Europeans.

Chief Kathuru quite effectively combined the roles of a chief and a councilor. As a chief, he had the responsibility of making sure that government directives were implemented without failure. On the other hand, as a counselor, he was supposed to act as the representative of his people. The fact that he was able to combine these two positions enabled him to reap the maximum possible benefits that he could for his people. Some of the measures which he put in place were intended and designed to benefit his people. For example his protracted fight against excessive drinking of local brew and dancing at odd hours was intended to encourage and compel the people to spend much of their time in constructive and productive projects which would help uplift their living standards.

His soil conservation campaign was aimed at curtailing soil erosion thus preventing the washing away of the top-fertile soil, hence improving agricultural production. Likewise, his constant reminder to his people on the importance of applying manure and other modern farming methods was intended to help his people increase their food production. It is important to note here that the importance of the soil conservation measures that he so vigorously and enthusiastically enforced was realized and well appreciated by his critics many years later as the benefits of his campaign became obvious to everyone.

Chief Kathuru's wish to have the government construct cattle dips in the district was motivated by a genuine desire to enable his people to keep healthy cattle free from tick-borne diseases. Likewise, he made sure that various taxes collected by the government were used for the welfare of the people. The money provided many facilities such as those in the fields of education and health. The roads and bridges that he helped to construct and the hygienic measures that he so rigorously enforced were clearly to the advantage of his own people.

It is therefore evident that chief Kathuru used his position in the colonial government to reap the maximum benefits for his people. His stalwart collaboration with the colonial government enabled him to acquire a lot of benefits for the people of Kitui District and more specifically for the people of Mumoni Division. It can therefore be concluded that chief Kathuru did not wholly compromise the interests and well-being of his people at the expense of those of his masters. On the contrary, his contribution in uplifting the welfare of his people was quite unequaled.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be said that Kathuru's performance as a chief was excellent. To his colonial masters, he was an obedient, hard-working, trustworthy and an efficient chief who was quite indispensable to the success of colonial rule in Kitui District. On the other hand, to his people of Thagicu location in particular and Kitui District in general, he was a chief who was concerned with uplifting the living standards of the people. He fought for his peoples' social, political and economic advancement.

This is evidenced by the many projects both of social, political and economic nature which he put in place using his chiefly influence. It is therefore important to point out

here that the factors advocated to account for chief Kathuru's disrepute don't qualify to describe Kathuru as a bad and unpopular chief. In other words his advantages as a colonial chief far much outweigh his disadvantages. The fact that chief Kathuru was able to balance the interests of his colonial masters and those of his people is quite revealing.

This is one area where many of the colonial chiefs not only in Kitui District but in colonial Kenya as a whole failed and hence ended up receiving the wrath of the colonial officials from above and that of the people from below. On his part, chief Kathuru was able to pass this test thus becoming the most powerful and highly respected colonial chief in the whole of Kitui District. This makes chief Kathuru an important personality in the study of colonial history of Kitui District.


Looking at the contributions which chief Kathuru made towards assisting his people as well as his spirit of initiative while carrying out his duties, it can be concluded that he did not blindly collaborate with the colonial officials. While on the one hand he was expected to do only what pleased the colonial government for that is why he was appointed as a chief, on the other hand he exploited all the opportunities which came across in order to assist his people both economically, socially and spiritually as well as assisting himself as an individual. This is in total contrast to those other colonial chiefs who collaborated with the colonial government blindly since they feared being accused of promoting the interests of their people at the expense of those of the colonial government. Such chiefs ended up doing nothing for the people they ruled apart from benefiting as individuals from the few benefits, which accrued from their collaboration. It can therefore be concluded that chief Kathuru used the colonial government to attain certain ends while at the same time he was used by the colonial officials to achieve their administrative goals.

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## APPENDIX I: THE LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO GO TO THE FIELD FOR DATA COLLECTION

  
**Mount Kenya University**

**DIRECTORATE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

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MAHS/2018/26828  
30<sup>th</sup> August, 2021

*The Director, Research Coordination Division  
National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation  
Utalii House, 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
P.O Box 30623- 00100  
NAIROBI*

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: PETER MUGENDI - REGISTRATION NO. MAHS/2018/26828**

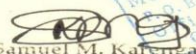
The purpose of this letter is to introduce the above named student who is pursuing Master of Arts in History Studies in the Department of Languages and Humanities in the School of Social Sciences.

The title of his research is "A Biography of the Late Senior Chief Kathuru Nyagah of Thagicu - Kitui County, Kenya, 1918 - 1998."

He has been cleared by the University's Ethics Review Committee (Certificate attached) and now has to proceed to the field to collect data for his research between September and November, 2021.

Any assistance accorded to him will be highly appreciated.

Thank you.

  
Dr. Samuel M. Kafenga, Ph.D  
Director, Graduate Studies  
Enc.

Main Campus, General Kago Road, P.O. Box 342-01000 Thika. Tel: +254 67 2820 000,  
Cell: +254 720 790 796, 0709 153 000  
Email: info@mku.ac.ke, Web: www.mku.ac.ke  
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## APPENDIX II: CONSENT FORM

### A BIOGRAPHY OF THE LATE SENIOR CHIEF KATHURU NYAGAH OF THAGICU-KITUI COUNTY, KENYA, 1918-1998

I am conducting a study on a biography of the late senior chief kathuru nyagah who was not only a colonial chief but a light to the entire society of Thagicu during colonial time and who is very little known about him scholarly. It also aims at documenting his social life, political life and his assassination in 1998.

You were selected as a possible participant because you interacted with him and experienced his leadership impact. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

This study is being conducted by Peter Nduku Mugendi, History master student in Mount Kenya University, school of Social Science, my contact: 0795503283. My faculty advisor for this project is Dr. Peter Wafula and Dr. Ruth Nyambura, department of humanities.

**Procedures:** If you agree to participate in this study, I would ask you to feel free to give the information you have concerning the late Chief Kathuru which can help the researcher to know who Kathuru was and how he contributed towards growth and expansion of Thagicu community at large during his tenure.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Mount Kenya University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Risks of being in the Study:** The major risk of the study is only the informant giving the false and biased information about the party under the study because future researchers may never consider you name again for further study of the subject.

**Benefits of being in the Study:** The benefit of participation is that the researcher will hold to your wide and deep knowledge on the matter under study and recommend you to future researchers who may have interest on the same subject.

**Privacy:** The records of this study will be kept private. I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject in any paper or presentation I make based on this research. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

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<b>Your name.</b>	<b>Your contact (if possible).</b>	<b>Your signature.</b>
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**APPENDIX III: AN APPROVED RECOMMENDATION FORM FROM  
ETHICSREVIEW COMMITTEE (ERC)**

**Mount Kenya University**



REF: MKU/ERC/1855  
TO: PETER MUGENDI

Date: 28 July 2021

REG: MAHS/2018/26828

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: A BIOGRAPHY OF THE LATE SENIOR CHIEF KATHURU NYAGAH OF THAGICU- KITUI COUNTY, KENYA, 1918-1998**

This is to inform you that **Mount Kenya University** has reviewed and approved your above research proposal. Your application approval number is **928**. The approval period is **28/07/2021 - 27/07/2022**.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements;

- i. Only approved documents including informed consents, study instruments, MTA will be used
- ii. All changes including amendments, deviations and violations are submitted for review and approval by **Mount Kenya University**
- iii. Death and life threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to **Mount Kenya University** within 72 hours of notification
- iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affect the safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to **Mount Kenya University** within 72 hours
- v. Clearance for export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal
- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days upon completion of the study to **Mount Kenya University**


Prior to commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) <https://oris.nacosti.go.ke> and also obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr. Peter G. Kirira**  
Chairman, Mount Kenya University IERC

The Chairman  
Mount Kenya University  
Ethics Review Committee  
P. O. Box 342 - 0100, Thika



**APPENDIX IV: THE NACOSTI PERMIT LETTER TO CARRY THE RESEARCH**



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

**RESEARCH LICENSE**

**Ref No: 833071**



**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR  
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION**

**Date of Issue: 17/November/2021**

This is to Certify that Mr. Peter Nduku Mugendi of Mount Kenya University, has been licensed to conduct research in Kitui on the topic: A BIOGRAPHY OF THE LATE SENIOR CHIEF KATHURU NYAGAH OF THAGICU-KITUI COUNTY, 1918-1998 for the period ending: **17/November/2022.**


License No: **NACOSTI/P/21/13912**

**833071**

**Applicant Identification**

Director General

**Verification QR Code**



**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR  
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION**

OTE: This is a computer generated License. To verify the authenticity of this document,

scan the QR Code using QR scanner application

## **THE SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION ACT, 2013**

The Grant of Research Licenses is Guided by the Science, Technology and Innovation (Research Licensing) Regulations, 2014

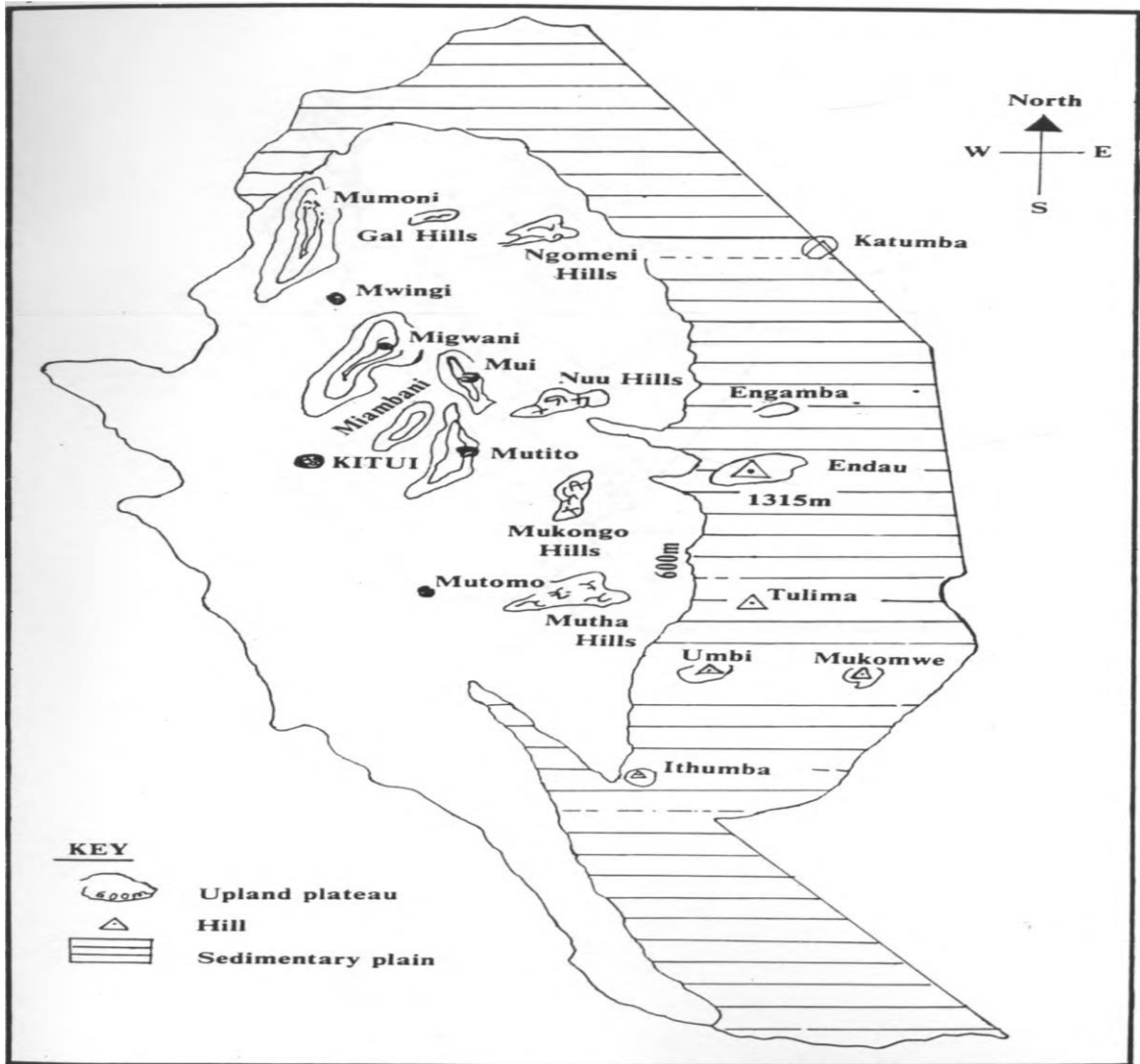
**CONDITIONS**

1. The License is valid for the proposed research, location and specified period
2. The License any rights thereunder are non-transferable
3. The Licensee shall inform the relevant County Director of Education, County Commissioner and County Governor before commencement of the research
4. Excavation, filming and collection of specimens are subject to further necessary clearance from relevant Government Agencies
5. The License does not give authority to transfer research materials
6. NACOSTI may monitor and evaluate the licensed research project
7. The Licensee shall submit one hard copy and upload a soft copy of their final report (thesis) within one year of completion of the research
8. NACOSTI reserves the right to modify the conditions of the License including cancellation without prior notice

National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation off Waiyaki Way, Upper Kabete. P. O. Box 30623, 00100 Nairobi, KENYA Land line: 020 4007000, 020 2241349, 020 3310571, 020 8001077 Mobile: 0713 788 787 / 0735 404 245 E-mail: dg@nacosti.go.ke / registry@nacosti.go.ke Website: www.nacosti.go.ke



**APPENDIX VI: MAP 2. KENYAN MAP SHOWING MWINGI DISTRICT**



**APPENDIX VII: THE PHOTO OF LATE SENIOR CHIEF KATHURU NYAGAH**



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## APPENDIX VIII :Similarity Index

### A BIOGRAPHY OF THE LATE SENIOR CHIEF KATHURU NYAGAH OF THAGICU-KITUI COUNTY, KENYA, 1918-1998

