

MASHUJAA · KANDARA · 1921-2005

KAGGIA



*The Freedom Fighter
Who Refused to Get Rich*

KAPENGURIA. NINE YEARS. THEN HE ASKED ABOUT THE LAND.

GRAHAM KASINDO

KAGGIA



M A S H U J A A

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*The Freedom Fighter
Who Refused to Get Rich*

G R A H A M K A S I N D O

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*“I have been elected by the people of Kandara. They are
my boss.”*

— Bildad Kaggia, answering President Kenyatta

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Prologue

KENYA. THE MID-1960S.

The President was angry, and he said so in public.

He was talking about a man who had stood beside him in the dock at Kapenguria, and served the same sentence in the same desert prison. A man who, according to the historians, had probably been the strategic planner on the Mau Mau's central committee.

Now that man was causing trouble. He kept asking where the land was: the land the freedom fighters had fought for, the land the settlers were leaving.

"Kaggia," the President said, according to one widely quoted version of his words, "we were together with Paul Ngei in jail; if you go to Ngei's farm, he has planted a lot of coffee and other crops. What have you done for yourself? If you go to Kubai's, he has a big house and a nice shamba. Kaggia, what have you done for yourself?"

It was meant as an insult.

Bildad Kaggia spent the rest of his life proving that it was the finest thing anyone ever said about him.

CHAPTER ONE

The Clerk

DAGORETTI. 1921.

Bildad Mwaganu Kaggia was born in **1921** at **Dagoretti**, now part of Nairobi. When he was two, his family moved to his father's home district, **Murang'a**.

He went to school at the Church Missionary Society school at **Kahuhia**. He was clever enough to be selected for **Alliance High School**, the best school in the colony for Africans.

His family could not pay the fees.

So he became a clerk, in the District Commissioner's office at Murang'a. He was a small part of the colonial machine, watching it from the inside.

CHAPTER TWO

London

The Second World War.

When the Second World War came, Kaggia joined the army. It took him to the Middle East, and then to **London**.

There, according to his biography, he became a company quartermaster-sergeant at a War Office unit rehabilitating soldiers: the first African to hold the post.

He used his time. He took correspondence courses in **journalism, trade unionism** and **political science**.

And he saw, up close, how the empire worked. He saw the racism. He saw how differently the British treated their own people and the Africans who had fought for them.

In **1946**, he went home to Kenya.

CHAPTER THREE

The Rebel in Church

MURANG'A. 1946.

The first thing he rebelled against was the church.

Kaggia had come to believe that the missionaries' Christianity was part of the colonial system. According to one account, he believed that "western religions were a stepping stone to colonialism."

He began to denounce the church inside its own services. Then he started his own movement: an African church, reading the Bible through African eyes. His followers were called *Andu a Kaggia*, Kaggia's people. The movement came to be known as *Dini ya Kaggia*, Kaggia's religion. It spread across Central Province and as far as Nyanza.

He was arrested, again and again, for holding meetings without a licence.

Slowly, his fight moved from the spiritual to the political.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Organiser

NAIROBI. 1947–1952.

In **1947**, when Jomo Kenyatta became its chairman, Kaggia joined the **Kenya African Union**.

He organised the workers. He founded the **Clerks and Commercial Workers Union**, and became its chairman in **1948**. In **1950**, he became president of the **Labour Trade Union of East Africa**, the union Makhan Singh had opened to all races. In **1951**, he became general secretary of the KAU's Nairobi branch.

He started newspapers, in Kikuyu and Kiswahili: *Inoororia Gikuyu* and *Afrika Mpya*. He campaigned against the colour bar in Nairobi's municipal by-laws, and won.

And in secret, he joined the **Mau Mau**. He sat on its **central committee**. According to his biography, he was probably its strategic planner.

CHAPTER FIVE

Kapenguria

OPERATION JOCK SCOTT. 20 OCTOBER 1952.

On the night of **20 October 1952**, the colonial government struck. In **Operation Jock Scott**, Kaggia was arrested with Kenyatta and the other leaders of the KAU.

He was one of the **Kapenguria Six**.

He was taken first to **Marsabit**, then to Kapenguria, where the trial was held at the end of a long road near the Uganda border. The chief witness against them was paid by the government. The magistrate, it was later reported, was paid too.

On **8 April 1953**, all six were convicted of managing Mau Mau, and sentenced to seven years' hard labour.

They went north, to **Lokitaung**, in the Turkana desert. Later, to **Lodwar**.

Kaggia was the last of the six to be moved from Lodwar. He was not freed from restriction until **17 November 1961**, three months after Kenyatta.

He had been held for nine years.

CHAPTER SIX

The Assistant Minister

KANDARA. 1963.

Kenya became independent in December 1963. The man Kaggia had shared a prison with became its Prime Minister, and then its President.

Kaggia was elected Member of Parliament for **Kandara**, in Murang'a. He was made **Assistant Minister for Education**.

It seemed like the reward.

But Kaggia had a question, and he would not stop asking it.

The white settlers were leaving. Their farms, the rich land of the highlands, the land the Mau Mau had fought for, were being bought out. Who was getting them?

Not the freedom fighters. Not the landless. Not the people who had been in the forests and the camps.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“They Are My Boss”

NAIROBI. 1964.

Kaggia wanted the land given back to the people it had been taken from. He wanted the settlers' farms run as **co-operatives**, for the landless and the squatters. He spoke against the new government's corruption.

Kenyatta told him to stop.

He did not stop. In Parliament, according to one account, he answered the President directly: “I have been elected by the people of Kandara. They are my boss.”

In **1964**, he left the government. The accounts describe it both ways. His family's foundation says he **resigned**, in protest at the government's failure to return confiscated land to its owners. Other accounts say he was **dismissed** for defying Kenya.

Either way, he was out.

CHAPTER EIGHT

What Have You Done for Yourself?

KENYA. THE MID-1960S.

It was around this time that Kenyatta turned on him in public.

The words have come down in more than one version. In the one quoted by the economist David Ndii in the Daily Nation, Kenyatta compared Kaggia with his old cellmates. Paul Ngei had a farm full of coffee. Fred Kubai had a big house and a nice *shamba*. Kung'u Karumba was running his own buses.

“What have you done for yourself?”

In another version, remembered in a play about Kaggia's life: “We were in detention together but look at you. You have nothing.”

It was meant to shame him.

To many Kenyans, then and since, it did the opposite. It told them exactly what kind of man he was.

CHAPTER NINE

The Little General Election

1966–1969.

In **1966**, the left of the ruling party walked out. Twenty-seven MPs resigned from KANU. With **Oginga Odinga**, Kaggia helped form the **Kenya People's Union**, the KPU, and became its deputy president.

The government changed the law to make the rebels face their voters again, in what became known as the **Little General Election**. Kaggia lost his seat, in elections his family's foundation calls "heavily rigged." His petition against the result was dismissed.

In **1968**, he was arrested for holding an "illegal meeting" at Homa Bay, and jailed. The sentence of a year was cut to six months.

In **1969**, he left the KPU. That same year, the government banned it.

CHAPTER TEN

The Posho Mill

KENOL, MURANG'A. 1974–2005.

In the early 1970s, according to his family's foundation, he chaired the **Maize and Produce Board** and the **Cotton Lint and Seed Marketing Board**. In 1974, according to one account, he lost an election and retired from politics.

He opened a **posho mill** at Makutano, in **Kenol**, and ran it for more than twenty years.

In 1975, his autobiography was published: *Roots of Freedom*, 1921–1963. According to his family, it was heavily censored without his knowledge. Everything he had written about what happened after 1963 was cut.

He refused, according to one account, government handouts and political deals. Politicians came to visit him. He stayed at his mill.

His son **Mbugua** died in 1999. That year, he had a stroke. His wife, **Deborah Wambui Kaggia**, died in 2000. He had a second, severe stroke.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Nothing for Himself

7 MARCH 2005.

Bildad Kaggia died on **7 March 2005**, after a long illness. He was in his eighties.

In **2006**, the government built him a **mausoleum** at his home in **Gitura** village. It was unveiled on **13 October 2006**.

His family set up a foundation in his name. It holds a half marathon.

Epilogue

Gitura, Murang'a. Today.

Of the Kapenguria Six, Kaggia was the one who asked the awkward question.

Kenyatta became President. Ngei planted coffee. Kubai built a big house. Karumba ran buses.

Kaggia ran a posho mill in Kenol, and kept asking where the land had gone.

“What have you done for yourself?” the President asked him.

The honest answer was: nothing. He had done it for everyone else.

THE RECORD

NAME	Bildad Mwaganu Kaggia
BORN	1921, Dagoretti
WAR	British Army; first African company quartermaster-sergeant at a War Office unit in London
CHURCH	<i>Dini ya Kaggia</i> , an African church, from 1946
UNIONS	Clerks and Commercial Workers Union, 1948; Labour Trade Union of East Africa, 1950
MAU MAU	Central committee; “probably the strategic planner”
KAPENGURIA	Arrested 20 October 1952; restriction lifted 17 November 1961
GOVERNMENT	MP for Kandara and Assistant Minister for Education, 1963; out in 1964 over land
OPPOSITION	KPU deputy president, 1966; jailed 1968
DIED	7 March 2005

He was asked what he had done for himself. Nothing.
 Cover illustration: an artist's impression.

A Note from the Author

If this story stayed with you, you can buy me a coffee. It keeps the research going and helps bring the next one to you.

LIPA NA M-PESA	
PAYBILL	522533
ACCOUNT	8129965
CLICK MTAA TECHNOLOGIES	

Asante sana.

— *Graham Kasindo*