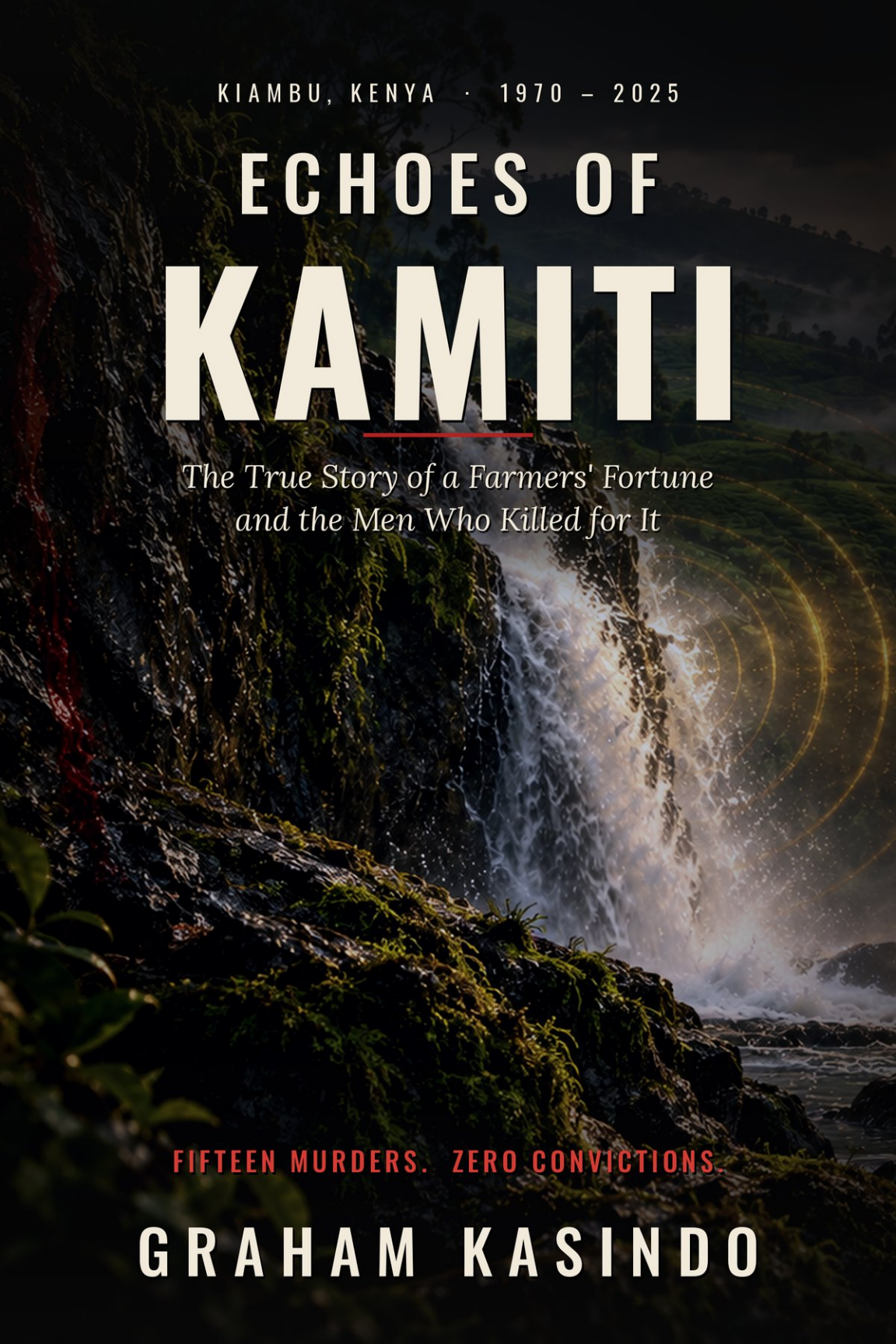




KIAMBU, KENYA · 1970 – 2025

ECHOES OF KAMITI

*The True Story of a Farmers' Fortune
and the Men Who Killed for It*

FIFTEEN MURDERS. ZERO CONVICTIONS.

GRAHAM KASINDO

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*“We slaughtered a goat and poured its blood and dung
in the river and swore that we shall never take anything
belonging to the shareholders.”*

— James Ndung’u, founder, Mbo-i-Kamiti Farmers’ Company

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Prologue

KWAMAIKO–KIAMBU ROAD. 17 NOVEMBER 2011. 9:00 A.M.

Stephen Waweru Njenga had been attacked five times in two months.

He had written to the police asking for protection. The day before, he had stood in a Nairobi courtroom, accused of murder, and listened as High Court judge Nicholas Ombija set his bail at one million shillings. Cash.

Now he was driving from his home in Githunguri toward Nairobi, and a saloon car had pulled across the road ahead of him and stopped.

A man got out. He walked to Njenga's window. He did not hurry. Three shots.

People near the blocking car heard voices: "*We have finally caught up with you.*"

When the news reached his wife, Jennifer Ngendo, she said the murder "did not come as a surprise."

No one was ever arrested.

To understand how a man could be hunted down on a public road in daylight, and why no one in Kiambu was shocked, you have to go back forty-one years. To a small waterfall on the Kamiti River, and three men with a plan.

CHAPTER ONE

The Oath

KAMITI RIVER, KIAMBU. 1970.

Water drops over the rocks, strikes stone, and throws back a sound. In Kikuyu, that sound is *mbo*. An echo.

Three men stood at the edge of it and counted their money.

Gachanja Nduga had Sh83,000. **James Ndung'u** had Sh47,000. **Bernard Kimani** had Sh24,000. Between them, Sh154,000, a bank account, and a target: **Kamiti Valley Ltd**, a land-buying firm that controlled coffee and tea estates across Kiambu. They would buy it up, share by share.

They named their company after the river. **Mbo-i-Kamiti Farmers' Company Limited**. The echo of Kamiti.

President Jomo Kenyatta gave his blessing on one condition. The doors had to open. Not for the founders, not for the wealthy, but for the people who had bled on the settler farms: the farmhands, the labourers, the widows of Mau Mau fighters. Sh500 bought you in. One day, you would own a piece of the land.

And at the river, according to the last surviving founder, the three men did something no company registrar would ever record.

“We slaughtered a goat and poured its blood and dung in the river and swore that we shall never take anything belonging to the shareholders,” James Ndung’u would recall, decades later.

A curse. On anyone who stole from the company.
Remember it.

CHAPTER TWO

The Good Years

It started slowly. By 1976, the members had raised only Sh3 million.

But the company was eating. **Olmorogi** in Naivasha. **Bradgate** in Ruiru. **Gachoroba** tea estate in Kiambu. Nine properties in all. Tractors. Lorries. Coffee mills. A bank balance that kept climbing.

In 1977, after unsold coffee stocks were cleared, the company paid its first dividend to 3,000 shareholders. Then another. Then another.

For five years, Mbo-i-Kamiti made **Sh300 million a year**. The ledger was clean. The members were patient. More of them joined every year, until the register held 8,000 names.

It was, by every measure, a success.

Which is exactly what made it worth taking.

CHAPTER THREE

The Meeting

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING. FEBRUARY 1982.

The agenda had one item: declare the fourth dividend.

A representative of the provincial administration stood up and read a different agenda. New management would be voted in today. And none of the sitting board members, he added, would be eligible to stand.

Then the police walked in.

The board was ordered to vacate the offices immediately. They were not to touch anything. Not a file, not a pen.

In the company's account that morning: **Sh45 million.**

The founders were shown the door. From that day, the state had its hand inside Mbo-i-Kamiti, and the man at the top of the state was paying attention. In **1988**, President Daniel arap Moi presided over the company's AGM personally. A new board was elected. **Gladys Waithera Kamau**, a KANU activist, took the chair.

The farmers' company was gone. What remained was a prize.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Harvest

Nobody smashed the safe. It was done with paperwork.

Directors pledged the company's title deeds to secure bank loans, "to revive the firm." The loans were never repaid. The banks auctioned the land. Other parcels were sold quietly to local tycoons. The accounts ran dry.

The Gachoroba tea estate, worth about Sh4 million a month to the company, was traded away for **Twiga Farm** on Thika Road. It was a deal that would haunt the company for the rest of its life.

At the factories, the machinery was stripped until only shells remained. The coffee bushes were cut down and the wood sold to charcoal dealers.

The 8,000 shareholders received nothing. The 1,000 workers went **two decades** without full pay. A **Sh540 million** debt to the National Bank of Kenya sat on the books, growing.

On paper, the company was worth more than **Sh4 billion**.

Each shareholder was still worth the Sh500 they'd paid to get in.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Ledger Men

Theft on that scale leaves records. And the people who held the records started to die.

Early 1990s. Director **Wagicio Ngatha** was poisoned in the middle of a feud with his fellow directors. No arrest.

1996. Accountant **Moses Kamau** was beaten to death. He had evidence of stolen company funds and was due to testify in court. He never took the stand. “Those who held damning evidence had to be bumped off,” a former employee would say.

2000. **Mbugua Karanja** was set upon by men with pangas on his way home.

2001. Two more. A man in **Kahawa Sukari**. A woman in **Juja**. Both killed in front of their families. Both with **nails driven into their skulls**. Police confirmed the killings were linked to Mbo-i-Kamiti. Their offence, as far as anyone could tell, was taking a side on the sale of company land.

In Kiambu, police officers came to dread the files. These were not robberies gone wrong. The OCPD called them “well planned by rival groups.” The pattern never changed: a body, a file, ten people questioned, the file closed.

Then the next body.

CHAPTER SIX

Blood in the River

KABAZI ESTATE. 5 JANUARY 2010.

Treasurer **James Ngamau Machua** was standing at a matatu stop on company land, in broad daylight, when he was shot dead. He had been working on a verification of share certificates: an audit of who actually owned what.

He was the first member of the modern-era board to die.

Afterwards, the directors went back to the waterfall. To the place called Mbo, where the founders had spilled the goat's blood. They held a cleansing ceremony and swore, again, to protect the company's assets.

It did not stop the blood.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Accused

Which brings us back to the Kwamaiko road.

The man charged with James Machua's murder was **Stephen Waweru Njenga**, a former chairman of the company.

But Njenga told a different story. He had gone to the High Court to block the sale of the company's land, and he said the attacks on him came from people who wanted that sale to go through. He counted five attempts on his life in the two months before he died. He had asked the police to protect him.

On 16 November 2011, he walked out of court on bail.

On 17 November, a saloon car blocked his road.

Accused killer or marked man, the court would never decide. The only verdict was the one delivered through his car window.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Count

Gladys Waithera Kamau, the chair Moi had installed in 1988, left her home in Lari and went into hiding after strangers began asking where she was.

KILIMANI, NAIROBI. 10 FEBRUARY 2012.

Lawyer **Rose Waruingi** was shot dead in her own house. She had been locked in a Sh20 million legal dispute with the company. Police charged two men with robbery with violence. Her name went onto the list of Mbo-i-Kamiti deaths all the same.

TWIGA FARM, RUIRU. 20 DECEMBER 2012.

The police came with bulldozers. Thousands of families had been living and farming on Twiga, and they were to be evicted. The houses came down. Shots were fired. When it was over, three squatters lay dead.

The running tally: **at least fifteen high-profile murders.**

Convictions: zero.

CHAPTER NINE

The Highway

While the board bled, the ground beneath it changed value.

The **Thika Superhighway** went in. Bypasses cut across the county. Almost overnight, the company's old farms — Anmer, Kabazi, Twiga, Kiura — became some of the most coveted land on the edge of Nairobi.

Twiga Farm. Roughly 1,100 acres. Five kilometres from Ruiru. Frontage on the superhighway. Court records put its value at **Sh2.5 billion.**

It had stopped being a farm. It was a fortune.

And in Mbo-i-Kamiti, fortunes got people killed.

CHAPTER TEN

The Last Chairman

The man who finally broke the deadlock was the board's chairman, Dr. **Thuo Mathenge**. He had watched colleagues buried and the debts pile up. He was not going to be frightened off.

"A lot of people out there are unhappy with my various attempts to protect our company's assets," he said from his Nyeri home, "but I won't be cowed. I will soldier on and see to it that shareholders get a chance to enjoy fruits of their assets."

He did what no board before him had managed. He sold the **Kiura estate**, cleared the Sh540 million debt, and paid the 1,000 workers their twenty years of arrears.

Then he started cutting up the land.

That plan, handing the estates to the shareholders, was the fault line behind much of the killing. Some of the older directors had fought it hard. To them, undivided land was power. Divided land was just plots.

The subdivision went ahead.

Then came the final ballot. Twiga Estate, the last 1,075 acres. Every one of the 8,000 shareholders drew a plot, fifty feet by a hundred, no matter how many shares they held.

Mathenge declared it over. *"This is the end of Mbo-i-Kamiti as a company since shareholders have taken over their property. It also marks the end of wrangles which have led to loss of lives."*

And then, more quietly: “It is unfortunate that several people including three former directors were killed over the land. All that is now history.”

Epilogue

Not everyone agreed it was history.

Shareholder **Evanson Thiong'o** called the dissolution “false.” No shareholders’ meeting had been called, he said. No books of account had been read. “The company owns billions of shillings in property and a few people cannot wake up one day and say the company has been wound up.”

His group, the Mbo-i-Kamiti Welfare Group, took it to the top. They wrote to Interior Cabinet Secretary **Joseph Nkaissery**, alleging that directors “in office illegally in cahoots with the Lands ministry” were issuing Twiga title deeds to people who “masquerade as shareholders.” Handing the land to anyone but the original allottees, they warned, was a clear path to bloodshed.

The lawsuits kept coming. One, filed in 2011 by the Twiga Estate Squatters Society, who said the land had been left to them by a white settler, dragged on for fourteen years before the Environment and Land Court delivered judgment in January 2025.

But the company was gone. The land was in pieces. The ledgers were closed.

Back in 1970, three men had poured blood into the Kamiti River and cursed anyone who would steal from the shareholders.

Somebody stole anyway. Fifteen people died.

Nobody was ever convicted.

THE RECORD

FOUNDED	1970, Kiambu County
FOUNDERS	Gachanja Nduga, James Ndung'u, Bernard Kimani
SHAREHOLDERS	~8,000
PEAK ANNUAL REVENUE	Sh300 million
PEAK VALUE	Sh4+ billion
PROPERTIES	9 estates across Kiambu, Naivasha, Ruiru, Gatundu
DIRECTORS KILLED	Six, per press reports
TOTAL MURDERS LINKED	15+
CONVICTIONS	Zero
FINAL ASSET	Twiga Estate, 1,075 acres, balloted to shareholders
STATUS	Wound up

The river still echoes. No one is left to listen.

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

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Asante sana.

— *Graham Kasindo*