

MOUNT ELGON, KENYA · 1948

MASINDE

*The Prophet Two Governments
Could Not Break*



JAILED BY THE BRITISH. JAILED BY KENYATTA.

GRAHAM KASINDO

MASINDE



KIMILILI · 1948

MASINDE

*The Prophet Two Governments
Could Not Break*

GRAHAM KASINDO

Copyright © 2026 Graham Kasindo
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the author, except for brief quotations in reviews.

This is a work of narrative nonfiction. Events, names and quotations are drawn from public accounts.

Cover design by Graham Kasindo

First edition, 2026

“One God, but not in one Bible.”

— The teaching of Elijah Masinde, as remembered by his followers

Contents

Prologue	8
CHAPTER ONE The Footballer	9
CHAPTER TWO The Second Wife	10
CHAPTER THREE Dini ya Msambwa	11
CHAPTER FOUR The Madman	12
CHAPTER FIVE Malakisi	13
CHAPTER SIX Pkech	14
CHAPTER SEVEN Kolloa	15
CHAPTER EIGHT Lamu	16
CHAPTER NINE Kenyatta’s Prisoner	17
CHAPTER TEN The Sycamore	18
Epilogue	19
A Note from the Author	21

Prologue

KOLLOA, BARINGO. MONDAY, 24 APRIL 1950.

Three hundred men with spears came down to meet the British.

They were Pokot. At their head was a twenty-eight-year-old preacher named **Lukas Pkech**, who had escaped from prison to carry a message he had learned from a prophet far away, on the slopes of Mount Elgon. The Europeans, the message said, must leave Africa.

Waiting for them was a young British District Officer, **Alan Stevens**, with police officers and askari.

Nobody agrees on who struck first.

When it was over, Stevens was dead. So were two British police officers and an African policeman. So were Lukas Pkech and twenty-eight of his followers.

The prophet whose message had brought them there was not at Kolloa. He was hundreds of kilometres away, a prisoner on the island of **Lamu**.

His name was **Elijah Masinde**.

CHAPTER ONE

The Footballer

Elijah Masinde was born around **1910**, at **Maeni**, in **Kimilili**, in what is now Bungoma County. He was Bukusu.

When he was a boy, the Uganda Railway was cutting through Bukusu land.

He was educated by the **Friends African Mission**, the Quaker missionaries of western Kenya, and became a Christian.

He was also a footballer. He captained a team in Kimilili. And in **1930**, according to the accounts of his life, he played for Kenya against Uganda in the **Gossage Cup**, the regional championship.

CHAPTER TWO

The Second Wife

Masinde's break with the missionaries came over the question of how an African Christian should live.

The mission, according to one account, pressed its converts to give up African customs and take European names. Masinde refused.

Then he married a second wife, as Bukusu custom allowed. The mission suspended him for a year. Then it banned him for good.

He didn't give up on God. He gave up on the mission's version of Him.

"One God," his followers would say he taught, "but not in one Bible."

CHAPTER THREE

Dini ya Msambwa

In the late **1930s** or around **1940**, the sources differ on the year, Masinde founded his own faith.

He called it **Dini ya Msambwa**: the religion of the ancestral spirits. It blended Christian teaching with the old Bukusu religion. It worshipped **Wele**, the Most High God, and honoured the ancestors at shrines. Its holy mountain was **Mount Elgon**, which the faithful called *Sayoni*, Zion.

It was also political. Dini ya Msambwa taught that the Europeans had taken African land, African religion and African dignity, and that they must leave. It campaigned against the **kipande** pass system. It set up its own schools: **Bituyu Primary School** near Kimilili in **1946**, and later others.

It spread fast, among the Bukusu, and then beyond: to the Bagisu across the Uganda border, and north to the **Pokot**.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Madman

By **1944**, Masinde was leading open defiance of the colonial authorities around Kimilili.

He was arrested. He was jailed. He was released, and did it again.

The colonial government tried another tactic. It declared him insane and locked him up in **Mathari Mental Hospital** in Nairobi.

It didn't work. When he came out, he was still Masinde.

CHAPTER FIVE

Malakisi

MALAKISI. 1948.

In **1948**, the confrontation turned deadly.

At **Malakisi**, in Bungoma, Dini ya Msambwa followers clashed with the colonial police. According to a history of the movement published by Kibabii University, **eleven** people were killed.

Those who survived were jailed or heavily fined.

The same year, the government **banned Dini ya Msambwa**. Masinde was arrested, and he was deported to **Lamu**, the island at the far northern end of the Kenya coast.

He would be held there for more than a decade.

CHAPTER SIX

Pkech

The British had locked up the prophet. They hadn't locked up the message.

In the Pokot country of **Baringo**, a young man named **Lukas Pkech** had taken up the faith. He preached that the Europeans would be removed from Africa.

In **August 1949**, he was arrested and sentenced to thirty months of hard labour.

In early **1950**, he escaped. He went back to his people and preached again.

By April, several hundred followers had gathered around him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Kolloa

KOLLOA. 24 APRIL 1950.

The District Officer, **Alan Stevens**, twenty-seven years old, went out with police to confront Pkech and his followers. According to accounts of the day, there were about three hundred of them, carrying spears.

Who started the fighting is disputed.

The official toll, as recorded in British accounts, was four on the government side: Stevens; **Assistant Superintendent of Police George Taylor**; **Assistant Inspector Robert Cameron**; and an African policeman whose name isn't given. On the other side, **Lukas Pkech** and **28** of his followers were killed.

Some local accounts say far more Pokot died.

Afterwards, the people of the area were disarmed and forced to sell livestock to pay compensation. The movement among the Pokot was crushed.

Kolloa was soon forgotten in Britain, overshadowed by the Mau Mau war that began two years later. In West Pokot, Dini ya Msambwa followers still ask for it to be acknowledged.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Lamu

Masinde spent the whole of the 1950s in detention on Lamu.

While he was there, the Mau Mau war was fought and lost. Kenyatta was tried and jailed. The Emergency came and went.

Masinde was released around **1960 or 1961**. The accounts differ on the year. Kenya was on the eve of independence.

CHAPTER NINE

Kenyatta's Prisoner

Independence came in **1963**. The British left, as Masinde had preached they must.

But Masinde had no more time for the new government than for the old one.

In **1968**, the Attorney General, **Charles Njonjo**, banned Dini ya Msambwa again. Masinde was arrested and charged with fomenting hatred of the Christian religion.

He was detained again, this time by an African government. According to one account, he spent almost fifteen years in and out of detention under Kenyatta.

In **1978**, after Kenyatta's death, the new President, **Daniel arap Moi**, released him.

It didn't last. After clashes with traffic police in **Webuye** and **Kitale**, Moi's government arrested him too.

CHAPTER TEN

The Sycamore

Elijah Masinde died in **1987**.

He was buried, according to accounts of his burial, at the spot where a sycamore tree had been uprooted.

His widow, **Sarah Nanyama Masinde**, lived on. In November **2007**, she was reported to be **105** years old.

Dini ya Msambwa was never unbanned. It still exists, without a single leader, among the Bukusu of Bungoma and the Pokot. Its followers still make pilgrimages to Mount Elgon.

Epilogue

Kimilili. Today.

Masinde went to prison under the British and under Kenyatta, and was arrested under Moi. He was declared insane, deported, banned twice, and outlived two of the governments that jailed him.

He's been called a neglected freedom fighter. There is no great monument to him. One writer noted, more than half a century after his first arrest, that not a single tree had been planted in his honour.

But at Kolloa, men died carrying his message. At Malakisi, people were shot for his faith. And on Mount Elgon, his followers still climb to Sayoni.

The British called him a madman.

He was the one who told them to leave. And they left.

THE RECORD

NAME	Elijah Masinde, Bukusu
BORN	About 1910, Maeni, Kimilili
FOOTBALLER	Played for Kenya vs Uganda, Gossage Cup, 1930
FOUNDED	Dini ya Msambwa, late 1930s–1940
COLONIAL DETENTION	Mathari Mental Hospital; Lamu, 1948–c.1960
MALAKISI	1948; 11 killed (per Kibabii University)
KOLLOA	24 April 1950; 4 on government side, Pkech and 28 followers killed
BANNED AGAIN	1968, by Attorney General Charles Njonjo
DETAINED BY	The British, Kenyatta, and Moi
DIED	1987

Jailed by the British. Jailed by Kenyatta. Arrested by Moi.

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*