

Mau Mau – Kuririkana - Gitene¹

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“Past conflict between social movements and ruling powers has always attracted historians, and not just because it makes for a good story. It creates an abundance of evidence, often about the sort of ordinary people on whom the past is normally silent; it stimulates questions about the nature of social order as much as disorder; and its supposed lessons may often inform – or foreclose – the decisions of today.”²

¹ Kikuyu for “Mau Mau: Remembering the Past”

² Lonsdale, John. In the forward to, Greet Kershaw. *Mau Mau from Below*. East African Studies, Oxford: 1997) p.xvi.

Introduction

This paper aims to look at the Mau Mau Revolt in Kenya and note how this uprising, which historian Wunyabari Maloba has dubbed one of the most important events in African history³, was documented by the popular press. It will look at the English speaking newspapers of Kenya from the 1950's and 1960's and examine the rhetoric and cultural remembering of the non-Western newspapers and magazines and contrast that with what was documented and how this event in Kenya's history was perceived by the British press, as well as a few United States Newspapers to give a little broader Western perspective of how the Mau Mau. Recognizing that the East African Standard was really just *The Times* (London), Nairobi edition, memoirs and autobiographies written by those involved in the Mau Mau itself have to be used to provide a more balanced perspective of this play for independence from both sides.

On October 7, 1952, Senior Chief Waruhui is speared to death in broad daylight on a main road on the outskirts of Nairobi. He had recently spoken out against increasing Mau Mau aggression against colonial rule.⁴ Within two weeks, British troops began arriving in the colony and on October 21, 1952, the colonial Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring

³ "Without a doubt the Mau Mau movement was one of the most important events in recent African history," <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/36/095.html>) captured on 10/23/04.

⁴ Njama, Karari and Donald L. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within: Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt*. (Garden City Press, London: 1966). There are some differing accounts of this incident. Some early reports cite the date for this event as October 9, however the majority of the newspaper reports, memoirs and secondary accounts do cite October 7 as the date of this event. Robert Edgerton in *Mau Mau: An African Crucible*. (The Free Press, New York: 1989) cites an account from Wachanga, H.K. *The Swords of Kirinyaga: The Fight for Land and Freedom*. (East African Publishing House, Nairobi: 1975) which states that Waruhui was shot in his car by rebels masquerading as police officers. discounts the "spearing" as instrument of death and instead

declared a “State of Emergency”

“A public emergency has arisen which makes it necessary to confer special powers on the Government and its officers for the purpose of maintaining law and order.”⁵

The “State of Emergency”, which was only intended to be a short-term state for the colony lasted until November 10, 1959.

Despite the impressions given by the media and the colonial government publications that the Mau Mau was slaughtering white settlers in droves, only 32 settlers were killed throughout the tenure of the emergency.⁶ “Official records say about... [another] 100 British soldiers were killed by the Mau Mau.” Some historians estimate that about 30,000⁷ Mau Mau fighters were pitted against the British army and their African supporters with up to 15,000 Kikuyu being killed⁸ either as Mau Mau fighters or loyalists, It is estimated that 80,000 to 100,000 were placed in rehabilitation camps or detention camps.⁹

⁵ Proclamation No. 38 of 1952, *Kenya Proclamations, Rules and Regulations*. 1952, p.490. As quoted in Nottingham, John and Carl G. Rosberg, Jr. *the Myth of “Mau Mau” : Nationalism in Kenya*. (Praeger Publishers, New York: 1966) p. 277.

⁶ Hawke, Beverly G. ed. *Africa’s Media Image*. (Praeger Publishers, New York: 1992) p.58.

⁷ The entire Kenyan population at this time was estimated to be about 5.5 million.

⁸ Chege, Wambui. “Kenya Seeks to Rewrite History with Mau Mau.” *Reuters US Online Plus*. 3/31/2003.

⁹ Edgerton, Robert B. *Mau Mau: An African Crucible*. (The Free Press, New York: 1989) p. viii – ix.

The Problem of Definition

In looking at the conflict of memory that surround the Mau Mau one must first attempt to define exactly what Mau Mau is. What and/or who is Mau Mau? Where did it come from? What did it mean then? What does it mean now?

In “Mau Mau” Detainee, Kariuki questioned the use of “Mau Mau” at all arguing that rebels never called it by that name, that the term was imposed by the British, and that he was only using it (with quotation marks) because it had unfortunately gained worldwide recognition.¹⁰ Fred Majdalany wrote in 1963 that the meaning of the name “Mau Mau” had never been established. It is a “word without meaning, said the Kikuyu¹¹ mysteriously. It seems likeliest that it was a code word.”¹² Majdalany goes on to note that the similarity between the word MAU and KAU (the political party, the Kenya African Union) suggests a connection between the two. He even lays out a more complex theory of the meaning of the name that “it was an anagram of ‘Uma Uma’ (which means ‘out out’ and was a codeword based on a secret-language game the Kikuyu boys used to play at the time of their circumcision.”¹³

Waruhiu Itote, also known as ‘General China’, in his second book chronicling his involvements as one of the leaders of the movement recounts a conversation with one of

¹⁰ Kariuki, J.M. *“Mau Mau” Detainee: The Account by a Kenya African of his Experiences in Detention Camps 1953-1960.* (London, Oxford: 1963) p.24.

¹¹ “Kikuyu” is the British spelling of the word. It is more common in Kenya to use the spelling “Gikuyu”. This paper will follow the lead of the majority of Western scholars in their treatment of Mau Mau and use “Kikuyu” with the exception being where direct quotes are used that use the alternative spelling.

¹² Majdalany, Fred. *State of Emergency: The Full Story of Mau Mau.* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston: 1963) p.75.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.75.

his fellow fighter's on the meaning of "Mau Mau". "... the Europeans had converted the word from Uma-Uma which means "Go Go". This is not true...In Kikuyu the word for oath is Muma, but because of its pronunciation the Europeans wrote it as Mau Mau"¹⁴

One of China's colonels raised his hand and announced that he knew the meaning of laughter. "Muthungu athii Ulaya Mugikuyu ahoote uthamaki!"¹⁵

The leader of the movement, Dedan Kimathi was opposed to the use of the term Mau Mau to describe the guerrillas. He preferred them to be called the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA).¹⁶

Background

In the 1880's Britain, as well as Germany, France and other nations took their pencils to the map of the African continent and carved up their piece of the geographic pie and all the resources held there within. It was in 1895 that the British declared a protectorate over the area of East Africa, what would later be called Kenya. As early as the 1920's, Africans in Kenya began to demand compensation for land that had been taken from them and eventually a return of stolen lands as well as African representation within the existing government.

African, mostly Kikuyu peoples began to form political groups and organizations to achieve these goals. The first formed in 1919 called the Kikuyu Association (KA). This

¹⁴ Itote, Waruhiu (General China). *Mau Mau in Action*. (Transafrica Books, Nairobi: 1979) p.167.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p.167. Translated into English "Let the Europeans go to Europe, let the Kikuyu get independence (or the government)"

¹⁶ Kabogo, Tabitha. *Dedan Kimathi: A Biography*. (East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi: 1992) p.23-25.

later became the East African Association (EAA), led by Harry ThuKu. In 1924, this organization gave way to the more radical Kikuyu Central Association. Throughout all of these political groups, the gist of their demands remained the same: return of stolen lands, increased educational opportunities, improved labor conditions, decreased unemployment, and self-representation within the government.¹⁷ The colonial government did not hear the protests of these groups. The government did, however, in 1925 establish Local Native Councils (LNC) and viewed these groups, under their control, as the appropriate avenues for allowing the complaints of Africans to be heard. The Kikuyu who were members of these political organizations did not feel that these LNC's adequately represented their voice and that this wasn't real government representation. It was these organizations, the KA, KCA, EAS, and KAU that published and distributed underground newspapers written in Kikuyu. Publications with names like (when translated to English) the Reconciler, the Unifier, the Guardian, the Conversationalist, the Caretaker, and Stay Alert.

The KA, EAA, and KCA were all precursors to the Kenyan African Union (KAU) in 1944. This was the first attempt at forming a political party. Many of the party's members and leadership was comprised of African elites. One member of these elites, Jomo Kenyatta, assumed the party's presidency in 1947.¹⁸ Kenyatta, an advocate of non-violence, was seen as politically moderate when compared to the leaders of "Mau Mau." But being the most outspoken and articulate, Kenyatta embodied everything that white settlers feared and desired to suppress. It was from the KAU and these other groups from

¹⁷ By "self-representation" it is meant that they desired to be represented in the colonial government by one of their own. Not a white settler or missionary or even an African from another region (who was probably a foreign educated, Nairobi elite), but desired one their own people to represent them in the government.

¹⁸ Majdalany, Fred. *State of Emergency: The Full Story of Mau Mau*. (Houghton Mifflin, Boston: 1963) p.57-59.

which many of the leaders of the Mau Mau came. In Rosberg and Nottingham's account, *The Myth of Mau Mau*, there is a picture of the KAU members circa 1951 which includes Kenyatta, but also Mau Mau, or soon to be, leaders including notable names such as Dedan Kimathi and Jesse Kariuki.¹⁹

While it seems that colonial Government reached its last straw with the murder of Chief Waruhui in the fall of 1952, the transfer of power from one governor to the next and the lengthy span of time from the outgoing governor's departure to the arrival of the new governor could be seen as a contributing factor to the declaration of the State of Emergency.

Sir Philip Mitchell, while anything but a champion for the freedom of African independence, never felt during his tenure that the situation with the Kikuyu people warranted sustained military action to suppress insurgents. And despite the fact that many white settlers were calling for stronger action from Mitchell and the government, Mitchell's last official colony report to London stated that, "the general political feeling in Kenya was better than he had known it in years."²⁰ It was at the end of June 1952 that Mitchell officially left his post as colonial governor and returned to England. It was after his departure that Michael Blundell and other white settler leaders who had been begging

¹⁹ Nottingham, John and Carl G. Rosberg, Jr. *the Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya*. (Praeger Publishers, New York: 1966) p. 300-301.

²⁰ Mitchell, Sir Philip. *African Afterthoughts*. (Hutchinson, London:1954). As quoted in Majdalany, Fred. *State of Emergency: The Full Story of Mau Mau*. (Houghton Mifflin, Boston: 1963) p.87. There is some disagreement as to whether or not Mitchell truly believed that the political climate was actually the best it had been since he had been the colonial governor or if he was just a soon to be retired politician just watching the clock waiting to punch out not really giving much mind to his responsibilities. See Maloba, Wunyabari O. *Mau Mau and Kenya: An Analysis of a Peasant Revolt*. (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN: 1993) p.72-74.

Mitchell for a declaration of Emergency began, in the absence of a colonial governor, to begin the grassroots campaign for white settler support, as well as colonial politicians for a declaration of emergency. The new governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, did not arrive until September 1952 and upon doing so received even more pressure from white settlers for an Emergency than did Mitchell. All this played into the murder of Chief Waruhui, which was the event that finally swayed the new colonial governor to call in British troops for an operation called “Jock Scott”.

This operation is the name the colonial government gave to the rounding up of as many that could be associated with Mau Mau and were either exiled or sent to ‘rehabilitation’ camps. Jomo Kenyatta was the most notable one arrested and was exiled, only to return in 1963 to become independent Kenya’s first president. Whether not Kenyatta actually had Mau Mau ties or not became immaterial. It will never be known if he would have maintained a stance of non-violence or would have joined with the Mau Mau fighters.

The ‘State of Emergency’

In January 1954, a British Parliamentary Delegation to Kenya, in its published report characterized the Mau Mau movement as “a conspiracy designed to dominate first the Kikuyu tribe and then all Africans and finally to exterminate or drive out all other races and seize power in Kenya.”²¹ Shortly after the Emergency was declared, in the Times (London), the colonial secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, held that Mau Mau was a secret society, not “the child of economic conditions. He also reported that it was “an anti-European, anti-Asian, and anti-Christian” movement that committed the “worst crimes

²¹ *Report of the Parliamentary Delegation to Kenya* (HMSO, 1954), p.4, as quoted in Hawke, Beverly G. ed. *Africa’s Media Image*. (Praeger Publishers, New York: 1992) p.51-61.

you can imagine.”²²

It wasn't just in quoting official representatives of the colonial regime that the Western press disparaged Africans, specifically those involved in the “Mau Mau” by making them out to appear as savages. Time magazine had a two-page spread of photo's depicting the “Mau Mau.” One picture displays a dead cat hanging from a tree with a note “written in blood that any person who works for whites will be destroyed by the power of this Oath.”²³

— Not to be left out, the New York Times, while avoiding some of the assumptions about communism²⁴ that other Western media outlets jumped to in the early stages of the cold war, still reported that the Mau Mau movement was a result of “the frustrations of a savage people neither mentally nor economically able to adjust itself to the swift pace of civilization.”²⁵ Two popular films released in 1955 and 1956²⁶ use the Mau Mau as a backdrop to its plot. The UK -released 1956 film, *Safari*, is a look at the Mau Mau revolt through the eyes of a wealthy European couple taking a safari vacation that encounters

²² *The Times* (London), November 7, 1952, p. 6.

²³ *Time* (November 10, 1952): p.30-31.

— ²⁴ These link between Mau Mau and communism was largely made as a result of Jomo Kenyatta's visit to the Soviet Union in 1932-33. See Wunyabari O. Maloba. *Mau Mau and Kenya: An Analysis of a Peasant Revolt*. (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN: 1993) p.76, 98, 111-112, and 158. It is interesting to note that despite being arrested early on in the Emergency for Mau Mau connections, Kenyatta always spoke out against the use of violence as a means for change and had no direct link to the Mau Mau. Yet because he was one of the more outspoken activists before the Emergency the white settlers and colonial government assumed that he must be part of the insurgents. Thus, the Mau Mau connection communism is based on the unproven claim that Kenyatta was a leader of the Mau Mau. A strong

²⁵ *The New York Times*, October 20, 1952, p. 6

²⁶ As of 12/15/04, pdf's, the movie poster's can be obtained through the following url's. http://www.arbor.edu/~rbolton/safari_movie_poster.pdf and http://www.arbor.edu/~rbolton/simba_movie_poster.pdf.

the ‘violence and horror of Mau Mau’²⁷ The U.S. released 1955 film, *Simba – Mark of Mau Mau*²⁸, opens with a scene of a young African man riding up on a bicycle into a field where a white settler lay in the throes of death, presumably after a Mau Mau attack. The man calmly walks up to the white settlers, kneels down as if he were to offer him aid and then pulls out a machete and takes a few hacks with his sword to finish the white man off.

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— While this film does make an attempt to show the plight of the Kikuyu and the situation in Kenya, the only salvation that could come to the African is either from or through the white man. This film does show the complexities of the civil war that resulted in taking sides either for or against the colonizers and the predicament that even well intentioned white missionaries found themselves in. The film even quoted early on one of the white settler’s whose sentiments were echoed by most of the whites in the film, “[Asking] why, [that] doesn’t apply to the African, anymore than it does to a backward child”

— There is even an obvious reference to the previously mentioned November 10, 1952 Time magazine photos when one settler says to the others that, “Time to start worrying is when they string dead cats on your front door.”

— According to documentation in the NAACP archive, the United States clearly was concerned about any ties foreigners in the country may have to ‘Mau Mau terrorists’. The Immigration and Naturalization Services of the United States attempted to have an Kikuyu student, on a school visa to study as an undergraduate at Lincoln University (PA),

²⁷ Young, Terence (Director). (1956). *Safari*. [Videotape]. London: Columbia Pictures.

²⁸ Hurst, Brian (Director). (1955). *Simba – Mark of Mau Mau!* [Videotape]. Hollywood: Lippert Pictures.

deported.²⁹ Were it not for the efforts of the NAACP and others, Reuel Mugo Gatheru would have been deported because he came from an ethnic group that from which ‘terrorists’ with communist connections.

In this first section we only received a large dose of the British/colonial/Loyalist story of why the Emergency came about with examples in the western press and media that portrayed any insurgent in a disapproving manner. As one historian puts it, “It can hardly be denied that the major objective of this negative portrayal was to deny the revolt any legitimacy or respectability.”³⁰

Massacre at Lari

On the night of March 26, 1953, two well-organized Mau Mau raids took place at Naivasha and Lari. The raid in Naivasha was on a police post, which was taken by surprise. The police who were easily overwhelmed and under-manned, quickly fled. “Our warriors broke into the camp, released all the prisoners, broke into the armory and made off with all the arms and ammunitions.”³¹ The other raid, in Lari, was on Chief Luk and his supporters. The Chief and his family were killed and their houses were set ablaze. “I learned from friends who witnessed, that in the morning the Government killed ten times as many persons as the ones who had been killed and set more houses on fire.”

²⁹ NAACP 1940-55. *General office file. Africa -- Kenya, 1952-55* [microform]. Papers of the NAACP. Part 14, Race relations in the international arena, 1940-1955. (reel 2, fr. 0851-)

³⁰ Hawke, Beverly G. ed. *Africa's Media Image*. (Praeger Publishers, New York: 1992) p.60.

³¹ Njama, Karari and Donald L. Barnett. *Mau Mau from Within: Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt*. (Garden City Press, London: 1966) p.137.

In Dedan Kimathi's published letters, the glossary defines Lari as, "an apparent reference to the Mau Mau attack on the village of Lari, in which Chief Luka was killed. In return, British and Loyalist forces entered the village and massacred hundreds of civilians, and then blamed Mau Mau for their well-calculated actions."³² Mau Mau leaders such as Kabiro, Kariuki, Mucai, and Njama to name a few, all insist, in their published memoirs or biographies that "[Chief] Luka was the only target in Lari and that Loyalists did the bulk of the killing and then blamed Mau Mau for the high body count"³³

In the New York Times' initial report of this incident they refer to the Mau Mau as, "...a secret terrorist cult, mainly among the Kikuyu, whose aim is to drive the whites from Kenya."³⁴ The Mau Mau fastened doors to the huts and set them on fire. As the men, women, and children attempted to escape the flames they were hacked to death with swords and hatchets.³⁵ "...elderly Chief Luka was hacked to death, all limbs being severed and his skull smashed." One woman was even forced to watch her child's head be cut off slowly. Another woman reported being forced to watch her son's throat slashed and his killers then drink his blood.³⁶

"Too often in the recent past has the cumulative villainy and bestiality of the Mau Mau

³² Kinyatti, Maina wa. *Kimathi's Letters: A Profile of Patriotic Courage*. (Zed Books, Ltd., London : 1986). p.xi.

³³ Corradini, Stephen. *Chief Luka and the Lari Massacre: Contrary Notions of Kikuyu Land Tenure and the Mau Mau War*. (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI: 2000) p.3.

³⁴ *New York Times*, March 28, 1953, p.1.

³⁵ *East African Standard*, March 28, 1953, p.1.

³⁶ *New York Times*, March 28, 1953, p.1.

been glossed over...without guidance the loyal tribesfolk will inevitably provide more victims for the blood-hungry simis of the terrorists.”³⁷ Even the U.S. released film *Simba – Mark of Mau Mau*, written only two years after the massacre at Lari weighs in with its interpretation of this event with the following line, “Orphaned boy? What happened to him? Mau Mau killed his parents and family at Lari. 200 of our people were killed by Mau Mau at Lari, maybe more.”³⁸

The Kalamazoo (MI) Gazette with its report on the massacre at Lari provides an account of this incident from a rural, small-town America perspective. The writer, Dudley Hawkins, likens the Mau Mau to the Gestapo, noting that the scene at Lari would even make Heinrich Himmler sick.³⁹ Hawkins provides gruesome details of the day after at Lari, which both Loyalist and freedom Fighter would attest to. On April 6, 1953, the New York Times reported that 69 Africans were brought to court on charges of being involved in the attack on the village of Lari. The paper article concluded with noting, “... Mau Mau terrorists, whose program is to drive whites from Kenya, massacred more than 100 natives at the Lari settlement last month.”⁴⁰

These two diverging accounts of the Massacre at Lari are probably the most polarized of the major events during the State of Emergency. On side we have the Mau Mau fighters acknowledging that they were out to kill Chief Luka and his family (around 26 -30), but claim that they have no idea how the other 100 or so in the village were killed. They maintain that it was the British and the Loyalists who then viciously killed the remaining

³⁷ *East African Standard*, March 30, 1953, p.4.

³⁸ Hurst, Brian (Director). (1955). *Simba – Mark of Mau Mau!* [Videotape]. Hollywood: Lippert Pictures.

³⁹ *Kalamazoo (MI) Gazette*, April 9, 1953, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *New York Times*, April 7, 1953, p.19.

members of the village⁴¹, either because they weren't sure who was Mau Mau and who wasn't, or because they were intentionally trying to frame the Mau Mau fighters with the brutal deaths of over a hundred innocent women and children. On the other side, we have the Loyalist/colonial government, and the press on their side, saying that they Mau Mau completely took out the entire village, citing cruel acts of torture and brutal killings. One thing is certain as the photographic evidence of the aftermath of the Massacre at Lari confirms over 100 were left dead. Many of them women and children and many bodies were left mangled after being ferociously murdered.

Dedan Kimathi

Dedan Kimathi was finally captured on October 21, 1956 after a three year long man-hunt. "Many Africans regarded Kimathi as a sort of Robin Hood. To others he was a monster. Officials said that he is responsible for at least 29 killings."⁴² Kimathi, the self-proclaimed Prime Minister of Kenya, was hanged on February 19, 1957. He was sentenced to death for the unlawful possession of a revolver and six rounds of ammunition.⁴³

Then and even today, there is a great disparity in how Kimathi should be remembered. He was a charismatic leader and commanded respect for "Kimathi is still buried at Kamiti Prison. But he will forever live in the collective memory of the Kenyan people.

⁴¹ Such a cover-up and violent killing by the British/Loyalists is certainly possible as there have been other incidents to serve as an example during the State of Emergency. See the Hola Detention Camp Masacre below.

⁴² *New York Times*. October 22, 1956, p.3.

⁴³ *East African Standard*. February 19, 1957, p.1. Much of the full page and a half spread that this newspaper devoted to the execution of Dedan Kimathi, was an account by Ian Henderson of how Kimathi was apprehended. For a more detailed account of how the colonial government finally caught Kimathi see, Henderson, Ian. *The Hunt for Kimathi*. (Hamish & Hamilton, Ltd., London: 1958).

Like... many other patriots before him.”⁴⁴

In announcing his execution, the New York Times referred to Kimathi as “Mau Mau terrorist leader” and going on to say “[that] he took a prominent part in spreading Mau Mau propaganda and was one of the first Mau Mau leaders to take to the forests to organize terrorist gangs.... Jealousy, suspicion, and resentment of his increasing dictatorial attitude to other terrorist leaders... made him unpopular with the Mau Mau rank and file. In the end, he was deserted by the remnants of the movement he had created.”⁴⁵

During the waning months before his capture, Kimathi became fearful of any lone terrorists he encountered, assuming that they were betraying him and would turn him over to the enemy. According to Ian Henderson, the Senior Supt. who led the search for Kimathi, “any [lone] terrorist who attempted to join up with Kimathi was immediately shot or strangled... on several occasions Kimathi himself was the executioner... [preferring] to use his bare hands.”⁴⁶ In an editorial, the East African Standard went on to say that he was a “puffed-up mau mau degenerate... Dedan kimathi was the scourge of Kenya... Nobody, least of all the Kikuyu tribe he betrayed, will mourn his passing.”⁴⁷

Hola Detention Camp Massacre

Unlike the previous sections where we looked at the diverging viewpoints of the same event or individuals, this incident really only has one side to it and for the most part, the

⁴⁴ Thiongo, Ngugi Wa. As quoted in Maina Wa Kinyatti, *Kenya's Freedom Struggle: The Dedan Kimathi Papers*. (Zed Books Ltd., London: 1987) p.109.

⁴⁵ *New York Times*, February 19, 1957, p.10.

⁴⁶ *East African Standard*. February 19, 1957, p.4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.4.

details of the events are rarely disputed regardless of where ones loyalties may lie. The Hola Detention Camp Massacre is an example of a cover-up by the colonial government to hide the atrocities that they committed that might give credence to the rebel cause or might even compel the Western world to sympathize with the plight of the revolutionaries.

Hola camp was established to house detainees classified as “hard-core.” By January 1959 the camp had a population of 506 detainees of whom 127 were held in a secluded “closed camp.” This more remote camp was reserved for the uncooperative of the detainees. They often refused, even when threats of force were made, to join in the rehabilitation process or perform manual labor or obey orders. The prison department outlined a plan that would force these obstinate detainees to bend to work. On March 3, 1959, the camp commandant put this plan into action. Tragically, eleven of the detainees were clubbed to death.⁴⁸

The first report to surface about this incident was in the East African Standard. The front-page article reported that ten died at the Hola detention camp. The paper quoted the official government statement, “The men were in a group of about 100 who were working on digging furrows. The deaths occurred after they had drunk water from a water cart which was used by all members of the working party and the guards.”⁴⁹ The newspaper report goes on to note that work was immediately stopped when the first two workers collapsed and all other detainee’s who appeared to be ill were immediately sent

⁴⁸ Maloba, Wunyabari O. *Mau Mau and Kenya: An Analysis of a Peasant Revolt*. (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN: 1993) p.142-143.

⁴⁹ *East African Standard*, March 5, 1959, p.1. This first report indicates that only 10 detainee’s died, but as other later reports corrected it was actually 11 who perished.

back to camp.⁵⁰

It was only a couple of weeks after this that the truth about this incident came out. An investigation into the deaths ensued and it was discovered that the 11 detainees' did not die of drinking foul water, but as a result of violence. The medical examiner said, "They had died from either lung congestion or shock and hemorrhage following multiple bruises and other injuries." The coroner reported, "The injuries of a number of Mau Maus apparently were consistent with their allegations that they had been beaten."⁵¹ A couple months later it was announced that disciplinary action would be taken against the soldiers responsible for the 11 deaths. It was reported, "uncooperative prisoners had been beaten by guards, apparently with the consent of the commandant."⁵² The colonial government attempted to change the name of the location from Hola to Galole. Some have made the claim that this was an attempt by the colonial government of Kenya to confuse people in hope that they would forget the incident that occurred there.⁵³

Some of the early accounts do not even mention this incident, partly because many of the early accounts are either government or settler supported publications or secondary texts. Most of the secondary texts published during first decade or so after the Emergency were sympathetic to the British/Colonist/Loyalist point of view. It was this event that ultimately ended the State of Emergency. These eleven deaths spread back to England and the British parliament realized what a terrible situation the colonial government had gotten itself into. It took only eleven deaths to accomplish what over 15,000 previous

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.1

⁵¹ *New York Times*. March 23, 1959. p.2.

⁵² *New York Times*, may 12, 1959.

⁵³ Itote, Waruhiu (General China). *Mau Mau in Action*. (Transafrica Books, Nairobi: 1979) p.184-185.

ones could not.

Remembering the Past

“I continue to gaze into the valley of memory. And my fear now is that as soon as a memory forms it immediately takes on the wrong light, mannered, sentimental as war and youth always are, becomes a piece of narrative written in the style of the time, which can’t tell us how things really were but only how we thought we saw them. I don’t know if I am destroying the past or saving it...”⁵⁴

The first question one must ask is in the 45 years since the end of the Emergency is, how has Mau Mau been remembered? First published accounts in mid to late 1950’s and into the early 1960’s, note a very pro-Loyalist/anti-Mau Mau bent. In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, many of the memoirs and biographies of Mau Mau leaders began to be published. In the first published bibliography on Mau Mau by a Kenyan, R.N. Ndegwa notes in the forward of the anti-Mau Mau clique amongst intellectuals, mainly from the University of Nairobi, that was developing in the late 1970’s.⁵⁵ In the 1980’s and 1990’s, we can begin to see an upswing in the support of the Mau Mau as heroes and patriots, in large part due to the literature and activism of Ngugi wa Thiongo.

In regards to how the Mau Mau has been remembered in the Western world, one Mau Mau historian writes that, “memory has undergone many changes in Kenya, yet when Mau Mau is remembered in the United States and Britain it continues to be exoticized, the expression “mau mau-ing” will occasional appear in the U.S. media in reference to

⁵⁴ Calvino, Italo. *The Road to San Giovanni*. (Doubleday, New York:1995) p.85. As quoted in Marshall S. Clough. *Mau Mau Memoirs: History, Memory, and Politics*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, London:1998) p. 3.

⁵⁵ Ndegwa, R. N. *Mau Mau: A Select Bibliography*. (Kenyatta university College, Nairobi: 1977) p.i.

the white authority figures by radical African-American activists. Oddly enough, in Britain, “mau mau” is a label of trendy men’s clothes”.⁵⁶

The second question that must be asked is how are Kenyans currently remembering the Mau Mau and the fight for independence. In 2001, Kenya declared that sites linked to the Mau Mau rebellion would be memorialized as national monuments, including the location where Kimathi was shot and captured.⁵⁷ In 2003, Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki has promised to honor the “heroes” who spearheaded the Mau Mau, announcing that Dedan Kimathi’s body would be exhumed and he would be given a state funeral 46 years after he was executed.⁵⁸

The following excerpt is from a secondary school Kenyan History and Government and textbook:

“While Kenyatta and other leaders were pushing for a constitution and trying to reach a satisfactory compromise on the issues many Kikuyus were becoming impatient and were ready to use force to wrest away land from European settlers. These people began using violence. For young extremists, the time was running out and they organized the Mau Mau movement. They took oaths binding themselves to kill whoever their leader called on them to do so. They also started killing people who were opposed to them. Kikuyu leaders and chiefs who dared to speak against the Mau Mau were murdered. By 1952, thousands of young men had gone to the forest to form the ‘Kenya Land and Freedom Army’.”⁵⁹

This textbook was used up until just about two years ago. Out of the 200 pages, there is

⁵⁶ Clough, Marshall S. *Mau Mau Memoirs: History, Memory, and Politics*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, London:1998) p.ix.

⁵⁷ *The Observer*. March 11, 2001, p. 21.

⁵⁸ *The Daily Telegraph (London)*. February 13, 2003, p.18.

⁵⁹ Form 3 “Concise History & Government” (Kenya high school textbook from Nairobi), p.188

no other reference to the Mau Mau. The closest this text comes to calling Mau Mau fighters, patriots, or heroes is where it refers to the Mau Mau fighters by their preferred name, the Kenya Land and Freedom Army. It seems to be no mere coincidence that around the time this text a new political party and president had been elected into office that viewed the Mau Mau fighters, such as General China and Dedan Kimathi as patriots and champions of African independence. This textbook has probably already been replaced with another that portrays Kimathi and Mau Mau fighters in a more favorable light and instrumental part of Kenya's independence. As political analyst, Mutahi Ngunyi noted recently, "the children of the Mau Mau have taken over and for them this is the chance to right that wrong. This runs very deep. For them, it is a personal agenda, Ngunyi's father was a Mau Mau fighter."⁶⁰

Even though, Kimathi and the Mau Mau fighters are being commemorated and recognized as martyrs and heroes, there are still those who don't feel that the leaders of the Mau Mau or the movement itself should be celebrated. In a recent letter to the editor of the Daily Nation (London) one reader wrote "The Mau Mau rebellion was an attempt by one faction to ensure that it got more than its fair share of the pickings. They committed atrocities, mostly against their fellow people. The real heroes were those who refused to join the ranks of the Mau Mau despite the most dreadful intimidation to persuade them to do so... To the Mau Mau we owe nothing except our heartfelt gratitude that, by the grace of God, they failed to get their bloodthirsty way."⁶¹

One native Kenyan is quoted as saying "People have to realize what Dedan Kimathi did

⁶⁰ Chege, Wambui. "Kenya Seeks to Rewrite History with Mau Mau." *Reuters US Online Plus*. 3/31/2003.

⁶¹ *The Daily Nation*. November 2, 2003.

was terrible. They (Mau Mau) engaged in cannibalism, drank human blood. It was a superstition of the worst kind and I believe it is a chapter we ought to bury."⁶²

Conclusion

“Truth is not in the middle, and not in one extreme, but in both extremes.”⁶³ Or so says the 18th century British theologian Charles Simeon. While Simeon was speaking of absolute Truths, Truth with a capital T is no longer valid in the post-modern (or even modern) era. Nonetheless, as one wades through the mire and the muck of the violence that took place during the fight for Kenyan independence one can turn to Simeon’s axiom in trying to determine “what actually happened” or the “truth” in the atrocities that were committed by Mau Mau fighters, Loyalists, and colonizers alike. Whose story is to be believed? Whose story is more correct than the other? These are questions that are worth pondering, but one should never expect to find final answers. Who was in the right, justified in their actions? With the help of Simeon one can say both, and neither. At the macro level, it is easy to demonize the forces of imperialism and colonialism, but at the micro level all parties in these events violated human rights and yet all parties to some extent are justified in defending themselves.

A recent letter to the editor of the Daily Telegraph (London), from a reader writing from a Kenyan perspective, sums it up well “The Mau Mau years were difficult and countless atrocities were committed by both sides. It is not a war for anyone to remember with nostalgia, but from a Kenyan... perspective, the Mau Mau did hasten an end to colonial

⁶² Chege, Wambui. “Kenya Seeks to Rewrite History with Mau Mau.” *Reuters US Online Plus*. 3/31/2003.

⁶³ Carus, William, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Charles Simeon*. London, J. Hatchard & Son:1847) p.600.

rule – something that all Kenyans appreciate.”⁶⁴

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⁶⁴ *The Daily Telegraph (London)*. February 15, 2003, p.27.

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