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Book Reviews/Notes de lecture

E. S Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale (eds.) 2003, *Mau Mau and Nationalism: Arms, Authority and Narration.* Oxford: James Currey. 306 pages.

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In the history of Kenya, Mau Mau movement remains one of the widely written about and there seems to be some consensus that the movement that characterized the 1950s shook the grip of British rule over Kenyan colony. However several disagreements have emerged on for example who constituted the Mau Mau movement? To what extent was it a national rather than a Kikuyu uprising resulting from colonial social and economic frustrations? Who are the real Mau Mau fighters? Who deserve to be celebrated as Mau Mau heroes? How should the movement be remembered? Was Mau Mau defeated militarily? And is Mau Mau memory of any relevance to the creation of the Kenyan nation? In attempting to answer some of these questions, the Mau Mau movement has become one of the most divisive anti-colonial movements in Kenyan history. In fact as pointed by one author, any story of Mau Mau remains divisive rather than reformative and its memory has remained for ethnic bargaining rather than as an avenue of national and social transformation. The book under review attempts a critical analysis of almost all the questions that are continuously asked about Mau Mau in Kenya today. It is written by authors who have a wealth of knowledge and understanding about the phenomenon. The authors not only provide the readers with a deeper, intriguing and innovative understanding about Mau Mau, but also on how the movement can be harnessed to build a sense of nationhood in Kenya. The book is divided into twelve chapters with an introduction, but after reading it the issues raised can be divided into two: those that provide a detailed understanding on Mau Mau and those that attempt to build a relationship between Mau Mau and nationhood. A majority of the authors are based outside Kenya and can best be described as Africanist.

In the introduction, Lonsdale and Atieno Odhiambo provide a critical evaluation of trends in the nationalist histories by comparing the

Mau Mau debate in Kenya and what has been going on in other countries particularly Europe, America and other African countries. They contend that national histories tell a bitter struggle about the meaning of nationhood and it is an outcome of protracted argument that nations, if they are to be made at all, must be made. Consensual agreement is a mirage, an African socialist fantasy. Some arguments have broken nations apart, nevertheless, no nation has been born without having to face up to questions about who is to be included, whom excluded; about how equal rights of citizenship can in practice be; what degree of privileged differentiation is tolerable between regions; language and personal status; what in any conflict of rights it means to be subject to more than one rule (p. 2–3). Mau Mau remains one thing in the history of Kenya that all Kenyans must not only come to terms with for the nation to be born but also for the fragile plural nation to survive.

In chapter one B.A. Ogot advances two critical issues about the Mau Mau movement. He firstly examines the creation of various ethnicities and traditions amidst colonial frustrations and argues that process was in place prior to 1952 and was not only confined to Kikuyu. However, among the Kikuyu both the moderates and the radicals were motivated by Kikuyu ethnic pride and Kikuyu nationalism. All Kikuyu leaders emphasized three things: the need for Kikuyu unity, the need to preserve Kikuyu identity and the need for self-help especially in education and development (p. 10). This was the form of Kikuyu nationalism that Kenyatta embraced and was to pose a problem to him in attempting to forge a Kenyan nation after independence. Ogot thus finds it opportune to dismiss Kenyatta's stature as a nationalist and a freedom fighter-as he is the very man who denounced Mau Mau in 1952 by comparing it to poverty, irresponsibility and criminality. In fact he replaced the Mau Mau original version with his own version that 'we all fought for Uhuru'. Ogot then negates the populist version about Mau Mau in the Kenyan history which identifies the heroes and heroines with the forest fighters and places the rest of our freedom fighters, who worked tirelessly for the national project (like Odede, Murumbi, Pio Gama Pinto, Girdhari Lal Vidyarthi, Argwings Kodhek, Hurry Thuku, Makhan Singh and Tom Mboya) to suffer the second death. These leaders are hardly mentioned on the list of Kenyan nationalists. He poses two critical questions i.e. those who died fighting for the national project, what do we do with then? Do they deserve a place in Kenya's Uhuru garden? This takes Ogot to the history of the nationalist project, where he argues that on the whole, this has been a history of conflict and frustration among the invented communities, as they failed

to agree on appropriate policies, strategies and leadership. The failure of this project according to Ogot explains not only the fragmented nature of Mau Mau debates but also of the Kenyan nation. Thus from 1970 to his death in 1978, Kenyatta worked very hard to establish a kind of monarchical court from which he promoted Kikuyu nationalism and entrenched Kikuyu dominance just as the British had predicted. Other Kenyan communities reacted to this by consolidating imagined communities they had established prior to 1952. Kenyan nationalism died and politics became ethnicised.

In chapter two, Atieno Odhiambo summarizes what he calls the seven theses on nationalism in Kenya and how they have been appropriated by ruling classes in order to make false claims on the fruits of independence. All these theses have been advanced in relation to Mau Mau and to posit that it was the constitutionalist who fought for Uhuru; it was the forest fighters who fought for Uhuru; we all fought for Uhuru but, the Kikuyu fought the hardest; the fight for Uhuru was robust in the classroom of Alliance High School; that it was the small man, the working man and the rural masses who fought for Uhuru and deserve to eat; and lastly that there were during the fight for Uhuru, many nationalisms, and many more are yet to be accorded the requisite attention in Kenyan official annals. John Lonsdale argues in chapter three that whether in the forest, at home or on the conference table, Mau Mau emergency and colonial frustration divided Kenyans particularly the Kikuyu along several fissures, dominant ones being gender and authority. That colonialism disturbed the bedrock issues of straightness and growth in Kikuyu community. On several accounts, the Kikuyu petitioned the colonial government about their deplorable condition, but the colonial silence forced them to take oaths of commitment to their culture. This time, however, it was not the male elder who took the oath as customarily dictated, even wives and children found it comfortable taking the oaths – a great vulgarization of authority occurred. Lonsdale concludes by saying that Mau Mau was the outcome of competition for the authority to take action particularly pitting frustrated young men and elders. The unease was also experienced in the forest in the form of gender relations and education, all these impacted on the Mau Mau movement.

Anticipating to fulfill the prophetic assertion of prophet Mugo Wa Kibiru and to maintain Kikuyu unity, Derek Peterson in chapter four analyses the critical role of writing in maintaining the Mau Mau morale in fighting. Writing made the Mau Mau fighters imagine a sovereign state, claim paramountcy over the colonial state, and curtail British monopoly

of law making. To Derek, the Mau Mau oath taking had more to do with rebuilding public order hitherto destroyed by colonialism. He asserts that writing gave dissolute, poverty stricken men reasons to hope that they might live again in national lineages of the future. It was also to remind Mau Mau descendants of their father's private sacrifices. In chapter five Cristiana Pugliese attempts to assess the very varied Kikuyu pamphlets and songs published between 1945 and 1952. From the chapter, readers can easily map out the Kikuyu thinking before, during and after the colonial period but more importantly, what they anticipated in the postcolonial Kenya. One of Henry Muoria Mwaniki's publications (Nyina) depicts the need to develop Kikuyu spirit of patriotism and hegemony. He says

> Kikuyu were also wise...other black people must therefore be guided by them, just as Europeans followed the thoughts of the Greeks: when people go on a journey there are those who lead and those who follow, so we Kikuyu must be good, trustworthy and brave leaders so that black people will acknowledge us hence follow us (p. 161).

This Kikuyu parochialism is further demonstrated in the Mau Mau oaths, thus the Kikuyus various manifestations help us to understand the complexity of Mau Mau political thought, it's all about the very old stories of Kikuyu, land and violence.

Percox in chapter six argues that for the British to sustain their economic survival in Kenya they had to continuously arm the state with all forms of disaffection such as those posed by Mau Mau, Somali secessionists and communism then promoted by Odinga. Without much choice they had to accept Kenyatta, whom they had called erstwhile leader of darkness and death. To Percox, the greater the threat to the state the more massive forces were employed. With the political climate apparently moderated by Kenyatta's rehabilitation, and the circumstances ripe for the withdrawal of formal British rule, the United Kingdom did all it could to bolster Kenyatta's state to ensure that future threats to Kenya's stability could be dealt with only by political means. In tandem with the colonial wishes, Kenyatta thus continued with the state's legitimate monopoly of the use of force and one-party democracy. Thus president Moi may have not been the first nyayoist although he coined the term. Kenyatta was also a nyayoist, he had the British footsteps to follow. But what exactly arming of the state means remained hanging.

In chapter seven David Anderson gives a detailed analysis of Mau Mau land freedom army. He negates the conventional view that it was only the dispossessed, the young, the ex-squatters evicted from European owned farms, the landless, the unemployed, the poor in the sprawling

urban locations in Nairobi that went to the forest to fight in Mau Mau. Instead, he contends that some of the Mau Mau recruits particularly those in the Land Freedom Army (LFA) were forcefully recruited and eventually exposed to unlawful prosecution thus weakening the counter insurgency campaigns. In chapter eight, Kennell Jackson Jr. provides the readers with wartime survival skills paying particularly attention to Mau Mau survival craft–including camps and band life, food acquisition, secrecy techniques and oral traditions. He argues that all these aspects played a critical role in giving the Mau Mau movement a remarkable longevity and forced the British colonialists to consider majority rule as a possible future definition of Kenya nationhood. This he contends makes the conventional idea that Mau Mau movement was defeated elusive. In chapter nine Caroline Elkins attempt one of the most critical questions that faced the colonial government in Kenya during the emergency: how would the Kikuyu oath takers who came out of the forest live a normal life? In answering this question Elkins argues that Mau Mau writers need to go beyond the forest to the civilian arenas of struggle i.e. in the detention camps, Mau Mau prisons and emergency villages. Here the readers are introduced to efforts by the colonial government to rehabilitate Mau Mau adherents to reconstruct Kikuyu into governable citizens and to prepare them for a multi-racial future. Readers are also introduced to some of the limitations the colonial government faced in the process. Nevertheless, after frustrating the Kikuyu on all fronts the colonial administration went ahead with full force to force the oath takers to confess. The result of this destruction of the Kikuyu community has continued to haunt ex-Mau Mau fighters and their families as they are still trying to reconcile their involvement in the movement with postcolonial Kenya, and what it means to be a Kikuyu. One very important aspect missing in this chapter is how the Mau Mau detainees were transported to as far as Mageta over 400 km from central Kenya.

In chapter ten Joanna Lewis takes us through a study on how Kenya's emergency was reported informally, provocatively and manipulatively in key sections of the British popular press namely the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*. He posits that, while the two papers claimed to be independent, in practice they were loyal to a particular political party: *Daily Mirror* was backed by Labour Party while the *Daily Mail* was backed by conservatives.

It was thus not unusual for the *Daily Mail* to back the government, sympathise with the settlers and often share their racial prejudice against African capacity. *Daily Mirror* became completely critical of the govern-

ments response and even attacked the very foundation of British policy in Africa. However, by the end of the 1950s, both dailies seem to have prepared their readers about the unstoppable power of African nationalism.

The last two chapters focus on Mau Mau memory. Marshall Clough explains how Mau Mau has been ambivalently or selectively remembered in Kenya. This has been so in order to make claims on the present political and economic dispensation. He for instance singles out Kenyatta, who at first dismissed the Mau Mau adherents as hooligans and gangsters in need of quick eradication and must not be remembered, yet later he invited Mau Mau ex-generals at his Gatundu home and even to independence celebrations. This he did keen enough not to offend the loyalist, non-Kikuyu, the British government and the European settlers as it was his government's wish to follow a policy of amnesia (forgive and forget) towards the Mau Mau memory. However from 1963 Mau Mau memory has continued to be elusive, changing, diverse and dependent on who is remembering, why, where and when. Amidst all these stunted and opportunistic Mau Mau memories Clough questions if there is a Mau Mau memory of relevance and of value to people of Kenya as a whole. Ogude in chapter twelve similarly examines the stunted memory of Mau Mau in Kenyan literature particularly through the works of Ngungi Wa Thiong'o's oeuvre. In tandem with Grele (1985:251), he compares Mau Mau to events, which are recalled, but their nature, details and meaning are altered, rearranged, exaggerated and reinterpreted in the light of the intervening history or present concern. The past ceases to be fixed category and instead becomes a palimpsest upon which there is a continual inscription of new narratives contingent upon the complex and the ever-changing realities of the moment. To Ogude, because social needs change with the passage of time, Ngugi insists that the memory of Mau Mau, in a similar manner change in response and must continue to act as a critical moment at which the narrative of the nation must begin and be reconstituted against all odds.

The above constitutes the major thrust of the argument in this book and as can be seen, it is not based on much original evidence, but a rigorous and innovative reinterpretation of available Mau Mau literature in Kenya. The issues and the debates are adequately presented, however the most critical question on Mau Mau memory relevant to all Kenyans and to the creation of a sense of nationhood, leave alone national identity remains unsettled. What is clear is that Mau Mau may not be the right banner for Kenyans to rally behind for the fragile nation to survive. Nevertheless the book continues to put to rest some of the sterile debates or the conventional views about Mau Mau. It makes a significant contribu-

tion not only to Mau Mau historiography but also to African nationalist debate in general. I strongly recommend the book to those students interested in Kenyan history particularly in Mau Mau history.

John O. Hunwick, 2003, *Arabic Literature of Africa Volume 4: The Writings of Western Sudanic of Africa*. Leiden-Boston. Brill. 814 p.

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John Hunwick, éminent professeur à l'Université du Michigan aux États-Unis, est un spécialiste réputé de l'Afrique musulmane. L'œuvre qu'il nous présente est une compilation des écrits africains relatifs à la littérature et à la culture arabo-islamiques. Ce Volume 4 ouvre la zone du Soudan occidental ou en grande partie l'ancienne Afrique occidentale française. Il englobe précisément le Sud-ouest nigérien, le Sahara malien, la Sénégambie, la Guinée et la région voltaïque (Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana et une partie du Togo).

L'auteur de cette compilation a voulu à juste titre éviter la division par pays. En effet, les frontières ethniques ou culturelles ne correspondent pas à celles dessinées par la colonisation européenne. Et un travail de cette ampleur qui couvre toute une sous-région, depuis le XIVe siècle jusqu'à une date récente, s'intéresse à chaque zone culturelle avec ses spécificités. Le classement est d'abord effectué selon les tendances religieuses ou les différentes familles dans un ordre chronologique pour les sous-parties.

Le compilateur ne se contente pas de répertorier les ouvrages en arabe. Il ratisse très large y compris des œuvres éditées à large diffusion et d'autres plus ou moins connues du grand public dont il révèle la teneur. Ceux écrits en caractères arabes dans les langues africaines (peul, haoussa, wolof, songhay...) ou européenne (français, anglais) y trouvent leur place; de même que ceux relatifs à l'agriculture, la politique, entre autres domaines. Même les écrits anonymes ont été classés et présentés à la fin de l'ouvrage. Les différents index (index des noms, des titres, index général) facilitent l'accès aux renseignements recherchés.

Une introduction géo-historique permet de localiser les écrits. L'un des grands avantages de cet ouvrage est de faciliter l'établissement des cartes des principaux foyers islamiques, avec les itinéraires des Cheikhs et des divers courants confériques à différentes époques. Cette géographie historique offre la possibilité même de rétablir les chemins empruntés