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MAU MAUS OF THE MIND: MAKING MAU MAU AND REMAKING KENYA[1]

BY JOHN LONSDALE

Why was Mau Mau believed to be so evil?[2] The horror story of Britain's empire in the 1950s, it was less of a military threat but thought to be more atrocious than either the Malayan Communists or the Cypriot EOKA. The movement has lived in British memories as a symbol of African savagery, and modern Kenyans are divided by its images, militant nationalism or chauvinist thuggery. This essay explores some of these Mau Maus of the mind.

War and freedom

The colonial government first knew of the movement in 1948, with the renewal of unrest among white settlers' Kikuyu labour tenants or squatters. 250,000 of these lived on the 'White Highlands', a quarter of the Kikuyu people and half the farm labour force. Mau Mau was banned in 1950. In 1952 violence flared on the farms, where restraints on squatter cultivation and grazing rights were more sternly enforced in the interest of farm capital and resisted in the cause of peasant clientage;[3] in the slums of Nairobi where crime offered more than employment; and in the Kikuyu reserve where Mau Mau's opponents, 'the resistance' as whites first called them, were killed, often by fire and with their kin's assent, a form of execution once reserved for sorcerers.[4] A new governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, declared

1. Much of my material is derived from a research project on 'Explaining Mau Mau' shared with Bruce Berman of Queen's University, Ontario. Some of the ideas are his, too, but I have been unable to test on him this particular approach, which is preliminary to our larger work, and cannot ask him to share the blame. The classic study of the Kenya whites' imaginative construction of Mau Mau is Carl G. Rosberg and John Nottingham, *The myth of 'Mau Mau': nationalism in Kenya* (New York and London, 1966); this essay is part of the revision to which this work is now subject with the availability of archival material. Four other colleagues to whom I am also grateful for help in understanding the European constructions of Mau Mau are: Frederick Cooper, 'Mau Mau and the discourses of decolonization', *J. Afr. Hist.* 29 (1988), 313-20; Dane Kennedy, 'The political mythology of Mau Mau', paper presented to the American Historical Association, December 1989; David W. Throup, *Economic and social origins of Mau Mau* (London, 1987); Luise White, 'Separating the men from the boys: colonial constructions of gender, sexuality and terrorism in central Kenya, 1939-1959', University of Minnesota seminar paper, 1989. I also see myself as revising the 'Euro-African myth' presented in Robert Buijenhuijs, *Mau Mau twenty years after: the myth and the survivors* (The Hague, 1973), 49-62, which has no consideration of Kikuyu political thought. For this I lean heavily on the unpublished work of Greet Kershaw and on Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the roots of Mau Mau* (London, 1987). Finally, I must thank those who were there at the time and who have shared their thoughts over the years, especially: Tom Askwith, Peter Bostock, Dick Cashmore, Thomas Colchester, Terence Gavaghan, Richard Hennings, Harry Hilton, Cyril Hooper, Elspeth Huxley, Frank Loyd, Tommy Thompson and Dick Turnbull. None of these (it would not need saying to those who know Kenya) will agree with what they read here.

2. I was unable to give a satisfactory answer when John Dunn put this question at a Cambridge University African Studies Centre seminar; this essay is a second attempt. But I end with the same question, which was put to me in 1988 by Justus Ndung'u Thiong'o. Much of the impact of 'Mau Mau' on the mind lay in its name; many different origins have been proposed for it. The most plausible was put to me by Thomas Colchester, lately of the Kenya administration: in Swahili *ka* is a diminutive prefix, *ma* an amplifying one, enhanced by repetition. *Mau* would therefore connote something larger than *Kau* (the colloquial form of the Kenya African Union). The beauty of this explanation is that it needs no originator, merely a play on words.

3. Kanogo, *Squatters*, 129-37; Frank Furedi, *The Mau Mau war in perspective* (London, 1989), chapters 3 and 4.

4. Willoughby ('Tommy') Thompson, Kandara division (Fort Hall) handing over report, 1 March 1955: Rhodes House, Oxford, (RH) Mss.Afr.s.839 (1); Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London, 1938), 304.

been insufficiently recognised. All the contemporary evidence has to be read with these inner tensions in mind. The white conventional wisdoms of the day glossed over them, skimming with care the fragile surface of racial solidarity. They only begin to address the question of evil. But one has to start with them before one can follow the divisions, white and black, which lead one down to the roots of social dread.

Conventional wisdom and private doubt

What then did whites at the time say publicly about the Mau Mau evil? Many thought it uniquely depraved, even in the dirty annals of modern terror and partisan war. There were three parts to the conventional answer, its leader's treachery, the bestiality of its recruitment rituals, and its savage methods of killing. Kenyatta, who had enjoyed the best of British civilisation, including a course at the London School of Economics (LSE) and the love of an English wife, was the most likely artificer of the oaths.[20] British propaganda found it easy to present these as utterly debased and, by intention, debasing. Mau Mau oaths produced Mau Mau methods of murder. Like most conventional answers they tell us more about the interpreter than the matter which is being 'explained'. It will be convenient to take the murder and magic first, leaving the making of Mau Mau's manager till later.

In a big book twice reprinted, which probably introduced more western readers to modern Africa than any other, the American journalist John Gunther remarked that Mau Mau killings were, 'as everybody knows, peculiarly atrocious.' Victims might be 'sliced to pieces or chopped to bits', partly to get every gang member to share the guilt, for security reasons. As further insurance, a corpse's eyes might be removed to prevent it seeing its killers. Kikuyu, after all, were 'profoundly superstitious people.'[21] But perhaps some journalists were too profoundly respectful of what 'everybody knows'. Another distinguished reporter, Graham Greene, thought that a Bren gun wounded as savagely as a *panga*, the heavy farm knife used by Mau Mau, as the British showed by exposing guerrilla corpses.[22] There was also scandal over the army's habit of severing the hands of Mau Mau killed in the forests, to save the labour of carrying entire bodies down for identification by finger print.[23] The only systematic survey of Mau Mau victims suggests that chopping up on the other side was in fact rare. Dr Wilkinson examined 210 dead. Yes, many had multiple wounds. But these were generally superficial. The fatal ones were commonly six blows to the head, almost as if insurgents had been trained to kill in this way, to ensure 'a quick and certain death for their victims.'[24]

Total casualty figures also suggest a picture different to Gunther's. The disparity in death is striking. On official data, Mau Mau (or Africans deemed to be such) lost 12, 590 dead in action or by hanging over the four most active years of war; 164 troops or police were killed in the same period, most of them Africans. Mau Mau killed 1, 880 civilians, nearly a

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20. To use the language of Bishop L.J. Beecher, 'Christian counter-revolution to Mau Mau', in F.S. Joelson (ed), *Rhodesia and East Africa* (London, 1958), 82.

21. John Gunther, *Inside Africa* (New York, 1953, 1954, 1955), 361.

22. Graham Greene to editor, *The Times* (London, 1 December 1953), under the heading 'A Nation's conscience'.

23. Clayton, *Counter-insurgency*, 42, fn. 84.

24. J. Wilkinson, 'The Mau Mau movement: some general and medical aspects', *East Africa Medical Journal* 31, 7 (July 1954), 309-10.

within invented ethnic nationalisms than in a still more imaginary 'Kenya'.

After 1945 these border issues became ever more complex in the spheres of politics, labour and land. The segmentary domains of political control were subject to trespass, as competing economic interests sought access to the centre, Nairobi.[42] Here, the watchword of cooptation was 'multiracialism'; The first African was nominated to the legislature in 1944: Eliud Mathu, witchdoctor's son and Balliol man. But the politics of control still rested in the segregated reserves and the growing powers of African local governments. At both levels there were unstable contradictions. Settler obduracy denied Mathu's moderate supporters, the Kenya African Union (KAU), any success and thus all authority. And while the governor, Sir Philip Mitchell, declared his faith in education as an aristocratic bridge of culture between the races,[43] he also derided any plea that African nationalism might play a welcome, creative role in clearing up the confusions of communal identity.[44] In the reserves, officials promoted progress but distrusted its twin foundations, peasant cultivators who exhausted the soil and 'progressives' not in chiefs' uniform, the egotists and agitators. In the deeper politics of work, the labour department struggled to open gateways of industrial negotiation through the emerging fences of class, against the opposition of both capitalists and workers, neither of whom saw themselves in such exclusive terms. Farmers refused, and urban employers were reluctant, to recognise trades unions; most workers preferred general to craft organisations. White paternalists and anonymous black townsmen were the material of conflict rather than control.[45] The deepest politics of all opposed labour and land on the 'White Highlands', bringing settlers and Kikuyu face to face. Most of the white area had formerly been grazed by the Maasai; scarcely more than one per cent of it -- but the richest part -- had been Kikuyu land. The settlers claimed sole right to the land, by virtue of treaty, investment and achievement; it was their one sure footing in uncertain times. Their Kikuyu squatters claimed at least a share; they had given two generations of labour to taming the land; and had made it ritually home by initiating their young and burying their dead on white farms .[46] Here was a thicket of cross-cutting boundaries indeed. White farmers no longer wanted a tenantry yet refused them the government's solution, off-farm villages and the higher wages which would have allowed squatters to become free labour. Kikuyu squatters had in any case no wish to become mere labour, and reinforced their determination to remain tenants by calling in the resources of tribe. The conflict between settler and squatter, capital and labour, class and tribe, was the most bitterly

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42. Throup, *Origins*; Berman, *Dialectics*. For the pre-war origins of conflict between segmentary and centralised politics see my 'The depression and the second world war in the transformation of Kenya', chapter 4 in David Killingray and Richard Rathbone (eds), *Africa and the second world war* (Basingstoke, 1986), 97-142.

43. An idea which he seems to have first adumbrated in 1938 when governor of Uganda: Margaret Macpherson, *They built for the future* (Cambridge, 1964), 26.

44. Governor Mitchell to Secretary of State Creech Jones, confidential despatch 16, 30 May 1947: KNA, African Affairs file ii (reference noted in 1965 but not checked since the revision of the archives classification).

45. Anthony Clayton and Donald C. Savage, *Government and labour in Kenya 1895-1963* (London, 1974), 265-346; Sharon B. Stichter, 'Workers, trade unions and the Mau Mau rebellion', *Canadian J. Afr. Studies* 9 (1975), 259-75; Frederick Cooper, *On the African Waterfront* (New Haven and London, 1987), 78-203.

46. The earliest reference I have seen to squatters seeing the 'White Highlands' as their own (other than that small portion which was once Kikuyu) comes from Kenyatta in June 1932: *Kenya Land Commission Evidence i* (Nairobi, 1933), 430. Something more than an old retainer's loyalty brought former headman Njombo back to Nellie Grant's farm to die in 1947; eighteen years later his heirs were among those who bought her out in a syndicate called Mataguri ('we have been here a long time') Farm: Huxley, *Nellie*, 165, 270.

and cultural conformity of tribes did not admit of any other than a sorcerous explanation for the cunning and internecine ferocity of Mau Mau.

To deconstruct the confusing evils of Mau Mau is therefore to reconstruct historical boundaries of morally valid knowledge and power. To summarise the rest of the argument, it is to discover not that Mau Mau was an invented myth, as the British left thought, an alibi for suppressing legitimate African nationalism, but a dreadful reality, the more awful for presenting a twisted mirror of the right relations between social groups which ought to order a colonial situation. These relations were in any case in disarray, caught between the myth of what had been and the mirage of what they might become. In the diverse Mau Maus of the European mind whites were negotiating fresh stereotypes, to bring new order out of confusion.[56] In the complex postwar Kenya, Mau Mau was bound to be made in different ways. Two ideas competed to control the conduct of war, with different border trespass in mind. Race was the most obvious boundary under threat. Kenya was the first settler colony in British Africa in which African nationalism challenged that continued dominance of the white minority which had hitherto been the premise of power. The conservative reaction was to call a halt to the liberal promises which had stirred up primitive envy. But if that had been Mau Mau's only border outrage, it could never have been resisted with such cost and brutality in a just war by the decolonising Empire of the 1950s. After all, Kwame Nkrumah was already the Queen's chief minister in the Gold Coast. The compelling construction of Mau Mau, which won the whites the right to fight the war, was more subtle and of wider application. In this the border unrest was in the African soul, on the psychic frontier between tradition and modernity, community and society, past tribe and future nation. Racial repression might sharpen the conflict, but was not its cause. This lay in cultural transition. Mau Mau had to be suppressed, of course. But while diehards fought to keep the Kikuyu on the far bank of the river of transition -- *The river between* as Ngugi the Kikuyu novelist had it[57] -- white liberals knew that it had to be crossed. Peace would come only when Kikuyu society was on the modern side. The need for allies to fight the war, local Africans and the home government, nerved the liberal imagination as never before to translate this conventional wisdom into government action.

This liberal construction of the issue did not, however, win the peace. Still less did its Christian subtext of spiritual rehabilitation. Qualified measures of modernity, education and loyalty, were indeed used to ration out the franchise for the first African general elections to Legislative Council in 1957. Such selection was a precondition for a colour-blind common roll of electors at some later date, in which white 'standards' would be safe. But this making of the future had no future. It was blocked by the refusal of African parliamentarians to cooperate and then killed by the deaths of eleven Mau Mau detainees at Hola camp in early 1959. At the Lancaster House conference in 1960, the modernizing mission gave way to political bargaining. The ideas which cleared the way for, and then controlled, this longer future, were held by those who fought the war and were bound to outlast it, the British army and members of Kikuyu agrarian society. Generals were part of the British establishment; Conservative politicians, their civil counterparts, finally accepted the army's view of the war. Mau Mau fighters, on the other hand, were not privy to Kikuyu authority; they called themselves its *itungati*, its warrior servants. Their seniors were none too grateful for their service but enjoyed its rewards.

December 1952, 'The African point of view'.

56. I am grateful to Malcolm Ruel for clarifying my thoughts on this.

57. (James) Ngugi (wa Thiong'o), London, 1965.

against the bush; water glinted in their dams; windbreaks marched straight over the horizon; lawns were greener than any 'at home'. Farms also satisfied. They supported not just a white family but dozens of black ones too. Only the ignorant or malevolent could talk of 'stolen lands'. Most of the Highlands had been wastefully grazed by a few Maasai in the past; even a Fabian critic said so.[63] So the African farm families were immigrant strangers too, other than on the coffee estates of Kiambu. To employ resident farmworkers was to bestow privilege. Colonial rule had brought peace, health and rising population; some settlers added to these general benefits the paternal care of black communities who owed them the reciprocal duty of loyal service. But that was the problem; farms also unsettled. Squatters were not a dependent class, tied by a moral community of protection and service. They were a fifth column, a menace. They created their own communities in hidden corners of white estates. They reintroduced the African bush. Nobody knew how many there were. Part of white domestic life and yet unknowable, the sullenness of race undid the duty of class.[64] Worse still, after the war farms began to accuse. Farm districts enacted new local council rules which restricted squatter rights to cultivation and pasture, and required more labour. Settlers squeezed the livelihood of their dependants partly because wartime profits enabled them at last to farm intensively, using more capital than labour. But the consolidation of civilisation was more important. The Highland achievement must become unequivocally white, and farmworkers' claims be met with a wage alone, not land. Squatters resisted the new contracts, muttering among themselves of settler 'sin' and 'hypocrisy'. Even white officials used the language of 'moral entitlement' on behalf of labour.[65] Many settlers refused or failed to curtail their squatters' rights. Nevertheless, the growing squatter resistance had to be deprived of moral advantage. Some settlers regained the moral ground by infantilising their workers. One district council urged that 'the African' was 'still a savage and a child', who responded to 'firmness' with a new 'respect' for whites who removed his freedoms.[66] It is difficult not to conclude that white guilt was assuaged by racial contempt. Africans ought not to make their masters behave so badly.

Most whites experienced Mau Mau as the squatter armed. The frontline was at home, between supper and bedtime. Tools became weapons. The man who wore one's cast-off trilby was fingering his panga.[67] Mau Mau was an ungrateful stab in the back, 'a revolt of the domestic staff... It was as though Jeeves had taken to the jungle'.[68] Two of the first settlers murdered were doctors, known for giving free treatment to squatter families;[69] the six year-old son of one of them was also killed; the press pictured his bloodstained bed, with chamber pot and clockwork train-set on the floor. And what must, alas, be the best known account of Mau Mau, Ruark's oft-reprinted novel *Something of Value*, centres on the friendship between the settler's son Peter and the squatter's son Kimani. Kimani grew up in Nairobi's slums to become Mau Mau. Friend was now beast. In a blood-curdling book, the most chilling sentence for its settler readers must have been Ruark's statement of Kimani's purpose when he left the forest, gun in hand and murder in mind: 'This time Kimani was going

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63. Kingsley Martin, 'The settler case', *New statesman*, 29 November, 1952.
64. Among the useful phrases for settler wives to learn in Swahili or Kikuyu, in the *Kenya Settlers' Cookbook* (St Andrew's Church, Nairobi, 1959), was the injunction 'it is better not to be sulky'.
65. Kanogo, *Squatters*, 45, 65, 72.
66. Uasin Gishu district council resolution, April 1947, quoted in Furedi, *Mau Mau war*, 35-6.
67. This was the picture on the blood-red dustcover of Wilson, *Kenya's warning*.
68. Graham Greene, *Ways of Escape* (London, 1980), 188; I owe this reference to David Throup.
69. Wilson, *Kenya's Warning*, 56.

determined not to fight a racial war. In the empire of 1952 that was in any case impossible.

Liberals and transitionals

Conservative settlers made themselves plain. Liberals dissembled. This was partly because ignorance and panic made them share conservative views. It was also to preserve a united front. On his first visit to Nairobi, Lyttelton, colonial secretary, maintained that Mau Mau was not the child of economic pressure.[78] That was to calm the settlers; he himself knew better than that. Two months earlier his officials had considered reforms which might answer 'any legitimate grievance of law-abiding Africans' and raised them with Baring before he flew to Kenya. They had discussed housing improvements, civil service promotion, crop prices, even the question of African farming on the White Highlands. Baring called reform his 'second prong', to make his first, repression, look presentable. It was also an essential tactic of war. The Kenya government must stop driving moderate Africans into the arms of the extremists and, instead, split the KAU. Baring might well have to decide 'either to "bust" or "buy" Kenyatta.'[79] Events precluded that. But London had to buy the settlers, or they might bust the government. Some of them howled 'appeasement' when Baring revealed the second prong. If he was to keep the settlers at heel he would have to mind his tongue.[80] Official statements on Mau Mau toed the conservative line.[81]

Official action was different, and action remade Mau Mau in enough official minds. Government policy steered between two complementary aims. First, no increase in ruling influence must be allowed to the settlers; the precedents of two world wars were not encouraging in that respect. Nor must they be stampeded into a ferment which could be quietened only by concession. Yet the state had to respond to African grievance, despite some whites' fears of betrayal. For the second need was to prevent Mau Mau 'infecting' other African peoples; there was anxious evidence that it might. Brutal repression of their fellows was stirring angry passions.[82] The deputy head of the colonial office, Sir Charles Jeffries, squared the circle with some dog-eared official wisdom. 'The only sound line', he believed, was to 'build up a substantial "middle class" of *all* races to be the backbone of the country.'[83] He did not know how it should be done; nobody did, but it was by now the standard magical spell for conjuring new order out of colonial confusion. Racial barriers must melt into class coalitions. Meanwhile a war had to be fought and its methods were hardly middle class. Yet most of Kenya was at peace and must so remain. African rural ambitions must be satified, urban discontents relieved and, more

78. Lyttelton, radio broadcast from Nairobi, 4 November 1952 (transcript in KNA, CO.5/173); and repeated in Lyttelton's statement to Parliament on his return: *House of Commons Debates*, 5th series, vol. 507 (7 November 1952), col.459.

79. W. Gorell Barnes to Baring, 10 September 1952; note of a meeting with Baring, 23 September 1952: PRO, CO.822/544. The KAU was already split; official belief in its unity, in thrall to Mau Mau, caused it to be banned early in 1953.

80. At least, that was Kingsley Martin's reading of the situation: *New Statesman*, 8 November 1952.

81. For instance, official press handout no.70 of 19 April 1953, purporting to show a Mau Mau central committee circular, omitted all references to 'peace' and 'freedom'; Baring to Lyttelton, 19 April 1953: PRO, CO.822/440. Wilson, *Kenya's warning*, 63, made considerable play with what the government did allow to be made public, including threats to drink the blood of enemies and to castrate and decapitate anybody who helped the government.

82. Rogers, minute to Gorell Barnes, 24 October 1952; Rogers, minute to Sir Charles Jeffries, 16 February 1953; Lyttelton to Baring, 5 March 1953: PRO, CO.822/440.

83. Jeffries, minute to Lloyd, 17 February 1953 (original emphasis): CO.822/440.

cohesion in their souls (he could scarcely have been more wrong on both counts) unusually ill-adapted to the transition. It is less well realised that, in its later pages, his report was also a charter for deliberate modernisation. Mau Mau had exploited the insecurities of transitional man; Africans must be given the reassurance of modernity. The confusion of categories must cease, especially within the family, where traditional woman could not be companion to modern man.[90] New boundaries of order must be drawn. Again, this was the opinion of practical men. Askwith believed that recovery from Mau Mau was secure only in the context of regular employment and family life. Other senior officials had long come to a similar conclusion as the remedy for wider ills.

In the post-war era, it was generally agreed in British colonial Africa that both peasant economy and unskilled urban labour were no longer able to sustain social order, let alone provide the basis for development and improved welfare. Neither sector of African life was complete in itself, each was debilitated by what connected them, the steady oscillation of male wage labour. As Carothers fitted Mau Mau into his concept of the transition, so many officials did the same. Their transitional man was flesh and blood in the migrant worker. Mau Mau had travelled home with him from work. The cesspit of the slum had infected the countryside with the incessant movement between them.[91] Two government plans and unprecedented sums of public finance were now devoted to separating them. The Carpenter Committee proposed radical improvements in urban African wages and conditions so as to create a new basis for society, the urban African family, where before Nairobi had accommodated loose atoms, labour units, bachelor workers.[92] For the countryside the deputy director of agriculture, Roger Swynnerton, proposed a freehold revolution in land tenure to produce the rural mirror image, the peasant family able to earn a rapidly increasing income on its own land by its own labour, neither subsidising its bachelor sons in town nor yet needing their monthly remittances. The conflicting bundles of rights which characterised customary land tenure, the fragmentation of plots, the continual drain of litigation, would all be swept aside with registration, consolidation, fencing, contour-ploughing and tree-crops.[93] Disorder would give way to cadastral survey and straight lines. Each government department, Labour and Agriculture, seized the opportunity created by Mau Mau to argue, with a conviction which almost two decades of frustrated persuasion had sharpened, that the risks of pushing African tribal communities through the transition to market society were as nothing to leaving them hanging betwixt and between. Each talked openly in the language of class as the basis of order and power. If Mau Mau was a disorder of the beginnings of progress the only cure was to bring progress to a successful end.

Missionaries had their own ideas of what that progress had been and should be. At the outset of the emergency both the 'established' mission societies, the Anglican Church Missionary Society and the Church of Scotland Mission, associated themselves publicly with the multi-racial aim of the late governor, Mitchell, to 'evolve from components at present heterogeneous, a harmonious and organic society.'[94] But they had a private

90. Carothers, *Psychology*, 22-4.

91. The best summary statement of the district commissioner's view is in Margery Perham, 'Struggle against Mau Mau II: Seeking the causes and the remedies', *The Times* (London), 23 April 1953; while reprinted in her *Colonial sequence 1949 to 1969* (London, 1970), 112-15, it has been given the disastrously wrong date of 1955.

92. CPK, *Report of the committee on African wages* (Nairobi, 1954).

93. CPK, *A plan to intensify the development of African agriculture in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1954).

94. For Mitchell's statement, see Church Missionary Society [CMS], *Mau Mau, what is it?* (London, 1952), 8; and Church of Scotland Foreign Missions Committee [CSM], *Mau Mau and the church* (Edinburgh, 1953), 4, where

had a role only as part of a political response to the whole range of Kenya's problems. Moreover, the churches had a particular disability which must be honestly faced. This was the nature of Revival in Kenya. Hitherto it had produced Christian men and women so convinced of the power of Christ that, while often martyrs to Mau Mau, they also refused to take up arms against it. The district administration was suspicious of their pacifism and often refused them the 'loyalty certificates' which would have allowed them freedom of movement.[101] Conversely the churches despaired of using such spiritual conviction in social action. Christianity could only work its miracles of reconciliation once the political and economic justice had been created by other means. That, too, was conventional Christian wisdom.[102]

Such beliefs and actions helped men in authority to fight the war of transition with a clear conscience, and to bring to justice some at least of their subordinates who fought a different, dirty, racial war. But it is not at all certain that this construction of Mau Mau provided a foundation for the peace. Two men at the centre of this bid for liberal authority warned explicitly that it would not. The forgotten part of Carothers' report on Mau Mau's psychology warned that it was futile to try to remake the Kikuyu in the individualist English image unless they were given the chance to exercise responsibility, which meant power. Rehabilitation would be complete only with democracy.[103] Tom Askwith, in charge of the detention camps, conducted rehabilitation on the same assumption. The first was only an adviser, the second was sacked for not forcing the pace, when in 1957 the African elections demanded altogether more urgency.[104] The views of the army were quite a different matter.

Soldiers and Politics

The army also fought against Mau Mau's military confusions. These were quite different from those which haunted the liberal myth of modernisation. General Erskine, commander during the critical first part of the war, took a simple soldierly view of the oaths which so disturbed the understanding of most observers. He recognised that Mau Mau had grievances and an aim, to eject Europeans. The connexion between strategic end and nauseating means was entirely rational, as he explained with crisp economy. 'Secrecy was necessary, hence oaths were administered. Money was necessary, hence the oath had to be paid for. The whole tribe had to act as one, hence oaths were administered forcibly. Discipline was necessary, hence judges and stranglers became part of the organisation. It was perfectly clear from the nature of the oaths that violence was intended. Oaths became more and more binding and bestial.'105 Cooling the mind the better to know the enemy was carried still further by the soldier who had the best Mau Mau war and later became a theorist of similar 'low intensity operations', the then Captain Kitson. He found the racial myth of Mau Mau bad for tactical intelligence. 'Looked at over one's shoulder the oath was a frightful business, suffused in evil.' If one looked at it straight, what was left? 'A cat hung on a stick; poor pussy. An arch of thorns with

101. The one notable exception to Christian pacifism was shown by the independent Africa Christian Church in Murang'a, whose headquarters at Kinyona was so bellicose that Mau Mau fighters christened it 'Berlin': 'A book of forest history' recovered by Willougby Tompson in Decewmber 1953: RH.Mss.Afr.s.1534.

102. As in all other aspects of this essay, there is a much deeper history to be told; the analysis here is derived principally from a paper by S.A. Morrison, 'What does rehabilitation mean', 5 June 1954, seen by courtesy of Greet Kershaw who was employed by the CCK in the 1950s.

103. Carothers, *Psychology*, 19-20, 28-9.

104. T.G. Askwith, in conversation, 27 July 1989.

105. General Sir George Erskine, despatch, 'The Kenya emergency June 1953-May 1955', 2 May 1955: PRO, WO.236/18 (seen by courtesy of Mr Heather).

the oath turned men into beasts, and that Mau Mau lacked rational objectives.[114] Even Kenyan-born white police came to accept these subversive truths and found that Mau Mau commanded their respect. After 68 hours of interrogating the captured 'General China', Superintendent Ian Henderson, the boys' own hero of the settlers' war, concluded that his prisoner was indeed 'a complete fanatic'. Was he then mentally ill? Not at all. Henderson found that China had 'a good brain and a remarkable memory.' And he knew why he was fighting. 'At the time of his interrogation, his sole wish was to expound his political testament before Legislative Council and then walk to the gallows without trial.'[115] When he too was later captured, China's successor in Mount Kenya's forests, General Kaleba, outlined that 'ultimate political objective' as 'the achievement of more land and power of self-determination. They do not consider this will be achieved by violence alone, but they firmly believe that those who are sympathetic to their cause can only succeed if Mau Mau continue to fight.'[116] The opposing generals understood each other. Each acknowledged their limitations in a political war. They could only exert the military pressure needed to force a political peace.

But it took the tragedy of Hola camp, in which eleven 'hard core' detainees were beaten to death in the name of modernisation, to bring the British government round to the military view. As Margery Perham put it, 'hard core' defiance was moved by their determination to prove that they 'were not in the grip of some remedial obsession but pursuing logical and irrevocable political aims.'[117] The detainees would have put it rather differently. The immediate issue was work and its refusal. Their case was simple. They were political prisoners, not criminals. To work to order would be to admit to wrong. Work was a proper demonstration of responsibility for the free man; under any other condition it was slavery.[118] The colonial government did not agree, but that was no longer relevant. The liberal campaign for westernisation, as both the bridge of transition and condition of political rights on a qualified franchise, had been superceded as an organising priority. Political change could no longer wait on repentance and the development of a politically responsible (that is, guilt-conscious) middle class. Britain could not continue to pursue the remaking of Kenya by force at a time when other colonial powers, France and Belgium, were abandoning attempts to remodel colonial rule for the moral high ground of informal empire.[119] A political war had to be ended by political means. Civilisation had to be gambled on concession and

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114. For settler outrage see, Blundell, *Mind*, 189-92, but full discussion of the surrender offers must await Mr Heather's findings.

115. 'Interrogation of "General China"', para 14.

116. 'Flash Report No.1 -- Interrogation of Kaleba', Special Branch Headquarters, 28 Oct 1954, para 37: KNA, DC/NYK.3/12/24 (by courtesy of Mr Heather). This statement accurately summarises two themes of guerrilla doctrine. Their common name for their movement was '*ithaka na wiathi*', which is better rendered as 'land and moral responsibility' or 'freedom through land', the highest civic virtue of Kikuyu elderhood, rather than the more common 'land and freedom' which invites the retrospective connotation of 'land and national independence'. The 'power of self-determination' by which *wiathi* is rather well translated in this police report was essentially moral and individual. Secondly, they invariably called themselves *itungati*, the old name for the reserve of seasoned warriors who neither commanded nor attacked on raids but acted as bodyguard to the leaders, and then beat off counter-attacks as a successful raiding party withdrew. For these military details see, Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London, 1938), 206; Lambert, *Kikuyu Institutions*, 70f; Leakey, *Southern Kikuyu iii*, 1051-3.

117. Foreword to J.M. Kariuki, *'Mau Mau' Detainee* (London, 1963), xv.

118. Gakaara wa Wanjau's prison diary, published as *Mwandiki wa Mau Mau ithaamirio-ini* (Nairobi, 1983) and *Mau Mau author in detention* (Nairobi 1988) is driven by such reasoning. Wanjau's father, a Presbyterian minister, was killed at the outset of the war; he himself was a noted political songwriter and pamphleteer.

119. As argued by John Darwin, *Britain and decolonisation: the retreat from empire in the post-war world* (London, 1988), 244-69.

political change was fought between the men of authority like Kenyatta on the one hand, who was the son-in-law of not one but two official chiefs and, on the other, the dispossessed and legal minors. The reputable, it began to appear, could not win power except at the appalling price of owing its achievement to men they despised. These latter, the hard men of Nairobi, took over the oath of respectable unity which Kenyatta knew, and pressed it, by force, deception and persuasion on those who hoped that desperate deeds, *ngero*, would earn them what they needed, the adulthood which entitled them to share the fruits of victory. These were the men and women whom Kikuyu knew as Mau Mau, not all those many who had taken the oath of unity but the few who had taken the second, fighting oath.[126] But then, however much Kikuyu may have denounced Mau Mau within, few were so careless of communal solidarity or their own lives that they betrayed it without. Most Europeans mistook this fear and solidarity for tribal unity, a mystic force. It was this myth of tribal unity which found Kenyatta guilty. He was the Kikuyu leader; he had to be responsible for everything done in his name.

Throughout his political career, with unswerving consistency over fifty years, Kenyatta taught that authority was earned by the self-discipline of labour, as he had learned from his grandparents. In 1928 he had warned of the fate of native Australians, whom the British 'found were decreasing by reason of their sloth... and so they got pushed to the bad parts of the land'. The Kikuyu ought, rather, to follow the example of the Maoris. The British had found them 'to be a very diligent people. And now they are permitted to select four men to represent them in the Big Council...'[127] In this simple contrast was summed up all his later political thought. On numerous occasions between his return from England in 1946 and his arrest in 1952 Kenyatta publicly denounced those who no longer worked their land, as the enemies of political advance: 'if we use our hands we shall be men; if we don't we shall be worthless.' Among the vast crowds who listened, those who no longer had land did not thank him for this sermon.[128]

So Kenyatta, too, made a meaning for Mau Mau. In front of a huge crowd at Nyeri in July 1952 he compared Mau Mau with theft and drunkenness. Henderson, the police observer, thought that he was equivocating; and the provincial commissioner later believed this meeting marked a turning point in the swing of Kikuyu opinion to Mau Mau.[129] But Henderson also reported Kenyatta as saying 'I pray to you that we join hands for freedom and freedom means abolishing criminality.'[130] That is not an obvious point for a nationalist orator to make, but precisely what one would expect of a

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for any Mau Mau class ideology is Kaggia, *Roots*, but the nearest he comes to that is syndicalism; no memoir of Mau Mau initiation suggests that the political education given to recruits contained reference to class struggle; conversely, an allegedly 'typical notice' of a Mau Mau initiation to counter the pre-emergency 'resistance' contained, as its sole programmatic statement, a threat to 'all those who try to stop us selling our goods where and when we want': *Corfield report*, 164.

126. Rosberg and Nottingham, *Myth*, 234-76; Kaggia, *Roots*, 78-115, 193-5; M. Tamarkin, 'Mau Mau in Nakuru', *J. Afr. Hist.*, 17 (1976), 119-34; John Spencer, *KAU, the Kenya African Union* (London, 1985), 202-49.

127. Editor (Kenyatta), 'Conditions in other countries', *Muigwithania* i, 3 (July 1928), translation by A.R. Barlow of the Church of Scotland Mission. KNA, DC/MKS.10B/13/1.

128. Profile of Jomo Kenyatta in *The Observer* (London, 2 Nov 1952), doubtless by Colin Legum. The *Corfield Report*, 301-308: Appendix F, (Assistant Superintendent Henderson's report on KAU mass meeting at Nyeri on 26 July 1952, with 25,000 estimated present) shows the difficulty Kenyatta could have in controlling a crowd.

129. KNA: Edward Windley, Central province annual report, (1952). This was certainly true of at least one future forest leader of Mau Mau: see, Barnett and Njama, *Mau Mau from within*, 73-80.

130. *Ibid.*, 305.

The agricultural revolution of the war of modernisation had gone on without them. On emerging from the forests or detention they were landless still, indeed more so than before in a rural world which had now been realigned by land consolidation and freehold title. They remained debarred from the creation of order, outside its boundary fence. And on his release back to political life in 1961 Kenyatta took up his old refrain. His government would not be hooligan rule; Mau Mau had no moral claim on power. He no doubt intended to calm white farmers and foreign investors. But he had a still more anxious audience to reassure, with nowhere else to go. Most Kenyans, certainly all household heads, were relieved to discover that Kenyatta was on the side of domestic order, after all. Their traditional civilising mission has now become a modern ruling ideology. By criminalising Mau Mau once more in the public mind, as he had tried a decade earlier, Kenyatta restated his authority to remake the politics of Kenya.[140]

There are therefore many answers to the question I was asked two years ago by a landless taxi-driver. As a schoolboy he had taken General Matenjagwo -- General matted hair -- his last bowl of beans before he met his death in action. His mother had lost her land rights to the senior wife during land-consolidation. 'Why', he asked in some indignation, 'why did they call us *imaramari*?'

SUMMARY

This article explores the imaginative meanings of Mau Mau which white and black protagonists invented out of their various fearful ambitions for the future of Kenya. Within the general assumptions of white superiority and the need to destroy Mau Mau savagery, four mutually incompatible European myths can be picked out. Conservatives argued that Mau Mau revealed the latent terror-laden primitivism in all Africans, the Kikuyu especially. This reversion had been stimulated by the dangerous freedoms offered by too liberal a colonialism in the post-war world. The answer must be an unapologetic reimposition of white power now and a segregated future. Liberals blamed Mau Mau upon the bewildering psychological effects of rapid social change and the collapse of orderly tribal values. Africans must be brought more decisively through the period of transition from tribal conformity to competitive society, to play a full part in a multi-racial future dominated by western culture; this would entail radical economic reforms. Christian fundamentalists saw Mau Mau as collective sin, to be overcome by individual confession and conversion. More has been read into their rehabilitating mission in the detention camps than is warranted, since they had no theology of power. The whites with decisive power were the British military. They saw the emergency as a political war which needed political solutions, for which repression, social improvement and spiritual revival were no substitute. They, and the 'hard-core' Mau Mau detainees at Hola camp who thought like them, cleared the way for the peace. This was won not by any of the white constructions of the rising but by Kenyatta's Kikuyu political thought, which inspired yet criminalised Mau Mau.

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140. Jomo Kenyatta, *Suffering without bitterness* (Nairobi, 1968), 124, 146, 147, 154, 159, 161, 163-8, 183, 189, 204. My view of Kenyatta's attitude to Mau Mau at this time is thus entirely different to that proposed by Buijtenhuijs, *Mau Mau twenty years after*, 49-61, and is supported by the picture facing page 57 in this book, showing ex-Mau Mau in 1971 with the slogan 'Mau Mau is still alive: we don't want revolution in Kenya.'