

MAU MAUS OF THE MIND: MAKING MAU MAU AND REMAKING KENYA¹

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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 threat but thought to be more atrocious than either the Communists in Malaya or the Cypriot EOKA. It has lived in British memory as a symbol of African savagery, and modern Kenyans are divided by its images, militant nationalism or tribalist thuggery. This essay explores some of these Mau Maus of the mind.

¹ An earlier version of this essay was read to the Royal Historical Society in December 1989 and will appear in the society's *Transactions*. 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 my ideas are also his, 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.*, xxix (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: constructions of gender, sexuality and terrorism in central Kenya, 1939–1959', *Int. J. Afr. Hist. Studies*, xxiii (1990), 1–27. I also see myself as revising the 'Euro-African myth' presented in Robert Buijtenhuijs, *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 For this I lean heavily on the unpublished work of Great Kershaw and on Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau* (London, 1987). Richard Waller has commented wisely. 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, Desmond O'Hagan, Tommy Thompson, and Dick Turnbull. They bear no responsibility for my conclusions, which I hope they will find not too distorted by hindsight.

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, 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 comes from Thomas Colchester, lately of the Kenya administration: in Swahili *ka* is a diminutive prefix, *ma* an amplifying one, enhanced by repetition. *Mau* would thus 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 common play on words.

War and freedom

The colonial government first knew of the movement in 1948, with the renewal of unrest among Kikuyu labour tenants on white settler farms. 250,000 of these squatters 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 an emergency in October. Jomo Kenyatta, alleged to be the manager of mayhem, was arrested with 180 others. Mau Mau did not, as expected, collapse in terminal frenzy; after months of phoney war it was transformed into a formidable guerrilla force. The British did not win the initiative until early 1954. Their army was then a full infantry division with six King's African Rifles (KAR) battalions and five British, backed by Royal Air Force bombers. The police had multiplied threefold, and the Kikuyu 'resistance' had become a patchwork private militia, the Kikuyu Guard, over 20,000 strong. The army was withdrawn from operations in late 1956, after a four-year war.⁵

The causal relationship between the containment of Mau Mau and the concession of majority rule has yet to be unravelled, but its intimacy can be suggested by citing three coincidences. Over white protest, the first African was appointed minister in 1954, in a reform of government designed to quicken the war; two months later the army cleared Mau Mau, and thousands of Kikuyu, from Nairobi. Then the first African general election was held in March 1957, barely a month after Mau Mau's forest leader, Field-Marshal Sir Dedan Kimathi as he entitled himself, was hanged. Finally, the emergency ended in January 1960 as delegates went to London for a conference which promised African rule. The right-wing settler leader, Group-Captain Briggs, called this remaking of Kenya 'a victory for Mau Mau'.⁶ His supporters felt overcome by the evil out of which they had imaginatively made the rising. In a suitably Biblical gesture one of them threw thirty pieces of silver at the feet of Michael Blundell, whose liberalism they believed had betrayed white supremacy.⁷

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.

⁵ For a brief outline of the war, see Anthony Clayton, *Counter-insurgency in Kenya 1952–60* (Nairobi, 1976). My research student Mr Randall W. Heather, whose Ph.D. thesis on the intelligence war is nearing completion, has been generous with material and ideas.

⁶ George Bennett and Carl Rosberg, *The Kenyatta Election: Kenya 1960–1961* (London, 1961), 22.

⁷ Sir Michael Blundell, *So Rough a Wind* (London, 1964), 283; similar symbolism was used by white demonstrators in Pretoria on 10 February 1990, the day before the release of Nelson Mandela.

Ignorance and imagination

This essay tries to explain neither Mau Mau nor its connexions with decolonisation. It addresses the prior question of how to read the evidence. We must know how Mau Mau was intellectually constructed before we can decide what it was and how it may have changed history. Behind the surface solidarities of war, myths of Mau Mau were more disputed than has been thought, with Africans as divided as whites. This should not surprise us. The future of Kenya was more anxiously contested after the second world war than at any time in its stormy past, behind rival dreams of social order; the social authorisation of murderous violence is an anxious issue in any culture; and all contenders were ignorant of their situation. True of any political conflict, this was true twice over of Mau Mau. It was mainly, but not entirely, a Kikuyu movement, and whites knew little of Kikuyu society. Few spoke Kikuyu. Most were content to know 'what everybody knew', the stereotypes that explained the daily uncertainties of Africa. The ignorance of whites was therefore structured. To them the Kikuyu were a 'tribe', but already an unusual and unsettling one. Mau Mau then fundamentally challenged the imaginative structures of race and tribe which underwrote the colonial order, forcing whites to choose between punishing a tribe and dissolving race as strategies of survival.

Kikuyu were just as ignorant, and as uncertain how to maintain or recreate social order. Always a fragmented set of parochial societies whose ruling principle was 'local government run mad',⁸ they were, increasingly, a divided and mutually hostile people. Their oaths of political allegiance reflected both periods of this history. Most remained mundane rituals of initiation which imposed on aspirants the costs which promised seriousness of open, public purpose in a small community. But some now demanded hidden, factional loyalty to persons often unknown, outside the immediate locality, on pain of death. For Mau Mau emerged as the militant wing in a struggle for allegiance in which, as will be shown, authority and energy were ill matched. That is the tragedy which, when carried to extremes, marks all contexts of political terror. Mutually apprehensive ignorance ruled. Competition was secret, not public, since the main issue was not social honour but effective action. In any case, the obvious political vehicle, the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), was already banned. As subject people, further, Kikuyu were under pressure to cloak real divisions under an invented common front. Political purpose could not be freely debated. Divided loyalties could not be openly recorded. A leader's public authority could with impunity be whisperingly invoked in his followers' private interest. Lies and intrigue flourished. Secrecy exacts that price.

Once battle was joined, ignorance and imagination were poor guides to action. As the enemy had to be better known, allies courted, and decisions faced, so four mutually incompatible meanings of Mau Mau occupied white minds, conservative, liberal, revivalist and military. These divisions were clouded by a common assumption of white superiority and that tacit evasion of dispute which survival demands in horrific times. Whites preserved a united front of counter-insurgency by damning what all saw as Mau Mau's

⁸ W. S. and K. Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People* (London, 1910), 195.

savagery which, all agreed, had to be destroyed. But they divided over its civil remedies, which governed their view of its causes. Their debates sometimes forced their way furiously to the surface. The ostensible issues of dissension were generally military, over rules of engagement and interrogation, how clean or dirty, and surrender talks, whether Mau Mau should be offered them at all. But the conduct of war was disputed, as always, with an eye to the construction of peace. As peace neared and the future had once more to be faced directly, so the coalition fell apart. This was because the war had only doubtfully been won. Briggs was soon to say it had been lost. For the settlers had become dependent upon dubious allies with diverse Kenyas in mind: the British government, the leaders of 'loyal tribes' which had furnished police and troops, and, above all and most ominously, the 'loyalist' Kikuyu guard (KG).⁹

While whites negotiated unity, it seems that the Kikuyu were forced into it by the first fury of repression. An official enquiry secretly admitted as much. Mau Mau members generally had one set of enemies. Their opponents often had two, 'Mau Mau on the one hand and the forces of law and order on the other'. Many Kikuyu, who had welcomed the emergency as a defence against terror, 'became disillusioned' when all Kikuyu were treated as rebels.¹⁰ Kingsley Martin, visiting Kenya, reported the same effect of 'Black-and-Tannery'. This caused bitter hatred of whites among Kikuyu, of whom 'only a very small section' had supported Mau Mau a few weeks earlier.¹¹ These views were part of the liberal construction of the movement; it was a product of its environment. But many settlers believed that up to 80 per cent of Kikuyu had taken the first oath of initiation by October 1952, in agreement with or out of fear of their fellows, not from fear of whites.¹² This reflected the conservative view, that terror was inherent in Kikuyu society. Estimates of the movement's growth were political claims on the future. The more initiates there were before the emergency, the more the entire tribe was a criminal gang which had forfeited all prospective liberties. The very limited data available from the screening teams, which certified people's loyalties, support the liberal view. They suggest that half the Kikuyu men on white farms or in Nairobi had been oathed before Kenyatta's arrest, and under 20 per cent in the Kiambu district of the reserve. This last figure more than doubled in the first five months of the emergency.¹³ If one were treated as Mau Mau by police, it looks as if it seemed prudent to become one.

⁹ From his upcountry retirement, former governor Mitchell warned settlers that 'loyalists' would expect fundamental change after the war: Sir Philip Mitchell, *African Afterthoughts* (London, 1954), 268.

¹⁰ 'Report on the sociological causes underlying Mau Mau with some proposals on the means of ending it' (mimeograph, 21 April 1954, seen by courtesy of Greet Kershaw), paras. 2 and 34.

¹¹ Kingsley Martin, 'Kenya report', *New Statesman and Nation* (London), 15 November 1952.

¹² Rob Buijtenhuijs, *Essays on Mau Mau* (Leiden, 1982), 35–6, discusses Mau Mau recruitment rates.

¹³ Figures seen by courtesy of Greet Kershaw; full discussion must await her own publication, but some of her evidence suggests that many joined Mau Mau during Kenyatta's trial in late 1952 and early 1953. They both wished to support Kenyatta and were reassured that Mau Mau could not have been as dreadful as they imagined if he had, after all, been in charge of it.

Even while Kikuyu were being lumped into Mau Mau by casual white violence, the government anxiously split them more sharply between Mau Mau and 'loyalist' resistance, by arming chiefs and tribal policemen. These latter suffered terribly in the first year of war, with a death rate of around 10 per cent,¹⁴ perhaps because they had what Mau Mau needed most, guns. Chiefs then enlisted among waverers and those who had joined Mau Mau under duress, creating the KG by a similar mix of threat and persuasion. Recruits had to prove themselves with public confession and a traditional oath of cleansing.¹⁵ Most KG units had substantial numbers of ex-Mau Mau. The insurgents also used these early months to gather their forces, with larger units and stronger oaths.¹⁶ A Kikuyu civil war was being prepared. But many on both sides tried to evade the barbed invitation to fight the wider battle by local feud. While the KG killed more Mau Mau than any other formation and in some places acquired a grisly reputation,¹⁷ some units conspired with insurgents to keep the local peace. Conversely, Mau Mau leaders claimed to subjugate violence to the social audit of local communities which would have to live with the aftermath of murder.¹⁸ And Mau Mau warriors, like any soldiers in battle, displaced their guilt and fear on to gangs other than their own.¹⁹ Like Kikuyu society it was a parochial war, obsessed with parochial honour. When the war was over, many were obsessed with its shame.

These blurred distinctions on both sides, in which the divided opinions of peace were compromised by the tactical agreements of war, have been insufficiently recognised. The evidence must be read with these 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 ritual, and its savage method of killing. Kenyatta, who had enjoyed the best that Britain could offer, study at

¹⁴ S. H. Fazan, *History of the Loyalists* (Nairobi, 1961), 78.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 12–16.

¹⁶ Donald L. Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau from Within* (London, 1966), 153–97.

¹⁷ For some details, see, D. Macpherson (Criminal Investigation Department) to Commissioner of Police, 23 December 1954: Arthur Young papers, RH Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 486 (3), seen by courtesy of Mr Heather; Judgement by Acting Judge Cram, Supreme Court of Kenya, criminal case No. 428 of 1954 ('the Ruthagathi case'), given on 10 December 1954, and published as a 33-page mimeo by the Federal Independence Party, under the title 'Kenya's Belsen?'; more generally: Clayton, *Counter-insurgency*, 46–7.

¹⁸ Barnett and Njama, *Mau Mau from Within*, 138–9, 142, 155, 193–5; 'Interrogation of Waruhiu s/o Itote, alias "General China"' (Kenya Police Special Branch, Nairobi, 26 January 1954), para. 219: privately held.

¹⁹ This point is briefly developed at the end of the essay, with reference to the *komerera*.

the London School of Economics (LSE) and the love of an English wife, was the probable artificer of the oaths.²⁰ British propaganda found it easy to present these as utterly debased and degrading. Mau Mau oaths produced Mau Mau murders. Like most conventional answers they say more about the interpreter than the matter '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 'chopped to bits', partly for security's sake; all gang members had to join in and share the guilt. They might also remove a corpse's accusing eyes, for Kikuyu, after all, were 'profoundly superstitious'.²¹ Perhaps some reporters were too superstitious of what 'everybody knew'; for another, Graham Greene, thought that a Bren gun wounded as savagely as a *panga*, the heavy farm knife used by Mau Mau, as the British pointedly demonstrated by exposing guerrilla corpses.²² There was also scandal over the army's habit of severing the hands of insurgents killed in action, to save the labour of carrying their bodies away to be identified 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 make '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 so described) lost 12,590 dead in action or by hanging over the four most active years of war; 164 troops or police died in the same period, most of them Africans. Mau Mau killed 1,880 civilians, nearly a third of them KG and all but 58 of them black.²⁵ This is a tragic total, but it may be thought to be not large when one considers how vulnerable their targets were at night, dispersed in broken country without light, guns, or wire until the villagisation programme of mid-1954. Settlers believed that all Kikuyu domestic and farm servants had taken at least one oath;²⁶ yet very few felt impelled to kill their masters. Mau Mau killing looks on the whole to have been rather restrained, at less than one sixth of their own dead, as if it was indeed under some social control. Against this, it should be said that insurgent attacks were largely confined to the first two years of war, and to specific battle zones in the districts of Nyeri and Fort Hall (Murang'a). Again, it was a parochial war

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, n. 84.

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

²⁵ Statistics from Colonial Office, *Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau* (Cmd. 1930, May 1960), 316 (hereafter cited as *Corfield report*), and Clayton, *Counter-insurgency*, 53.

²⁶ As in Nellie Grant to Elspeth Huxley, 20 Oct. 1952, in Elspeth Huxley (ed.), *Nellie: Letters from Africa* (London, 1980), 179.

and on both sides, in some places, dirty and bloody, with local peasant conflicts driving on the bitterness as much as wider political frustration.²⁷

As to the oaths, they made sensational reading which official sources and journalists exploited with a coyness which titillates while it repels. It was reliably reported that recruits committed their lives to the cause in swallowing a stew of mutton or goat, vegetables and cereals, sprinkled with soil, marinated in goat's blood, watched by uprooted sheep's eyes transfixed on thorns. All this was cruel, not bestial.²⁸ But that was just the beginning of horror. For it was reported, possibly less reliably in some respects, that oaths became more ghastly as the war dragged on and insurgents despaired. Many writers left the details unsaid and readers' imaginations free to range in fascinated self-disgust. Police interrogators, rather less delicately, may have invited their prisoners to invent some more.²⁹ Other authors adopted a formula which claimed to deny the reader 'the full details' but then gave specifics which one could scarcely bear to think of as less than complete. If it was enough to say, with Blundell, that they included 'masturbation in public, the drinking of menstrual blood, unnatural acts with animals, and even the penis of dead men', then even a dirty mind must shrink from exploring further.³⁰ A parliamentary delegation thought the rituals too beastly to lay before the British public. They were hidden in an appendix to their report, privately available only in the House of Commons library.³¹ Similarly, while fresh British troops were given a booklet, *The Kenya Picture*, to prime them against the enemy, the account of the 'advanced' oaths was inserted on a loose sheet of paper. This had to be returned after being read, a charming protection for wives and girlfriends in the days before the photocopier.³² Yet, in spite of everything, many whites continued to employ Kikuyu. They badgered officials to waive emergency rules in respect of their employees.³³ Whatever they said in public, whites acted in private as if cross-racial trust and the wage relation were stronger than any oath, however bestial.³⁴

²⁷ Compare Terence Ranger, 'Bandits and guerrillas: the case of Zimbabwe', in Donald Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa* (London, 1986), 373–96; Norma Kriger, 'The Zimbabwean war of liberation: struggles within the struggle', *J. Southern Afr. Studies*, xiv (1988), 304–22.

²⁸ All this is to be found not only in white narratives and Mau Mau memoirs but also in a scholarly Kikuyu account: R. M. Githige, 'The religious factor in Mau Mau with particular reference to Mau Mau oaths' (M.A. thesis, University of Nairobi, 1978). The attitude of most Europeans to the oaths can conveniently be found in *Corfield report*, 163–70.

²⁹ As suggested by Josiah M. Kariuki, '*Mau Mau*' *Detainee* (London, 1963), 33.

³⁰ Blundell, *Wind*, 168; one must be thankful that the British popular press did not then include *The Sun*.

³¹ *Report to the Secretary of State for the Colonies by the Parliamentary Delegation to Kenya January 1954* (Colonial Office: Cmd. 9081, 1954), 1. Nellie Grant provided her usual back-handed sanity, remarking that in the first world war some Australian troops billeted in Wiltshire were said to have given some polo ponies venereal disease 'and no one worried much.' Huxley, *Nellie*, 299 (letter of 28 February 1954).

³² Clayton, *Counter-insurgency*, 7, n. 12.

³³ R. D. F. Ryland (Officer-in-charge, Nairobi extra-provincial district) to R. G. Turnbull (Minister for African Affairs), 23 December 1954: Kenya National Archives, Nairobi [KNA], MAA. 9/930.

³⁴ KNA, Rift Valley Province annual report (1953), 2, 16, reporting the systematic

Boundaries and infiltrators

After this public horror it is instructive to remember that the principal white authority on Mau Mau, Dr Louis Leakey, said absolutely nothing about their ritual in his initial explication of the oaths. Their malign power lay, rather, in combining a heightened tradition with its deliberate violation. The initiates' deeds did not offend custom; in any culture legal oaths were strong meat. It was the sociology of oathing which, he thought, subverted Kikuyu values. Customary oaths-at-law were voluntary acts of responsible adults, taken in the open, before witnesses and by agreement with relatives who risked magical harm in the event of a litigant's perjury. Mau Mau oaths, by contrast, were often taken under duress, at night, in unlit huts, in the presence of persons unknown, without consent of kin. Worse still, in order to tie their proverbially loose tongues, Mau Mau officers oathed legal minors, women and children, on whom such heavy moral demands ought not to be made.³⁵ While Leakey did briefly mention the Mau Mau cocktail in his second book, nearly two years later, he again stressed something different, the morally liminal status of initiates. These had to undergo for a second, customarily unthinkable, time the passage between careless youth and tested adulthood, by crawling through the circumcision arch of sugar cane and banana leaves before taking the oath. Leakey believed that enforced and unexpected re-entry into this fluid state must cause intense shock.³⁶ Blundell thought that oathing sowed a 'mind-destroying disease'.³⁷

Leakey was no disinterested expert; he was committed to the fight against Mau Mau, as Kikuyu elder first and settler second. From his accounts one can infer an explanation of the evil imputed to Mau Mau not only deeper than any mere drinking of a devil's brew, but one to which many Kikuyu also subscribed.³⁸ What disturbed Leakey was the mixing of moral and social

screening of the remaining Kikuyu farmworkers after large-scale repatriation to the reserve in early 1953: while 95 per cent were shown to have been oathed, no less than 80 per cent were allowed to remain at work. Much evidence could be cited which casts doubt on the factual details of the 'advanced' oaths other than in the minds of some interrogators. But there is no reason to doubt the public masturbation (mentioned also by Frank Kitson, below). See, L. S. B. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903* (London, 1977), vol. 1, 24; vol. 2, 691–2; and H. E. Lambert, *Kikuyu Social and Political Institutions* (London, 1956), 53–4, for the ceremonial group rape-cum-masturbation performed by circumcision initiates in the past, to symbolise the ending of adolescent restrictions. Leakey's material was collected in 1937, Lambert's in the 1930s and '40s.

³⁵ L. S. B. Leakey, *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu* (London, 1952), 98ff.; but the social horror of women's oathing in the minds of Leakey's informants may be part of the Kikuyu male imagination of Mau Mau. Larger numbers of women took the oath (on Kershaw's data) and played a more active role than can be explained by their men's reluctant induction of them; see also Cora Presley, 'Kikuyu women and their nationalism' (Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University, 1986).

³⁶ L. S. B. Leakey, *Defeating Mau Mau* (London, 1954), 77–81.

³⁷ Blundell, *Wind*, 171.

³⁸ See Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Weep not Child* (London, 1964), 83–4, where the elderly Ngotho saw no harm in Mau Mau oaths but was shocked that they were administered by his son. Also, B. A. Ogot, 'Revolt of the elders', in B. A. Ogot (ed.), *Hadith 4: Politics and Nationalism in Colonial Kenya* (Nairobi, 1972). Born in 1903 in Kikuyuland, Leakey was an initiated first-grade elder by his early thirties: L. S. B. Leakey, *Kenya, Contrasts and Problems* (London, 1936), vii. The other white Kikuyu expert, superintendent Ian

categories which Kikuyu culture had previously separated in creating order. This was to take the liberal view, that Mau Mau was a product of cultural decay; the more common preoccupation with the paraphernalia of the oaths reflected the conservative position, that Kikuyu were savages. But Leakey may also have come close to portraying the horror with which Kikuyu faced the problem of violence far more intense and internal than could be controlled by conventional ritual means.³⁹ Mau Mau's offence lay in its confusion between persons of hitherto distinct legal status, gender and generation; its subversion of morally responsible legal tests, which resolved disputes, into coerced submission to unknown wills; and its inversion of actions proper to the day, social time, into the deeds of anti-social time, of darkness visible and spiritual.

Disease enters society, body and mind by subverting order or infiltrating boundaries, natural or socially constructed. This was the internal Kikuyu evil of which Leakey warned, with the elders. But Mau Mau presented whites with a violent concentration of all the dangers to which their own Kenya was also exposed, seemingly suddenly since the second world war. The essence of treason was social dissolution, twice over. If tribes were tottering, could white supremacy survive?

Before the war the colonial world had rested on a mental construction of social separations. Rulers and ruled were distinguished, and differentially valued, by race. Different subjects, otherwise anonymous, were recognised by tribe. Tribal authority and the extended family underpinned control. It was believed, even by sympathetic observers, that tribal character was inherited in a mystic union protected from neighbours by cultural isolation, 'like a fragile orchid, native of some windless forest'.⁴⁰ Africans had never enjoyed that secret of British progress, a vigorous commerce of ideas and social conflict. Nor did tribes produce workers. Colonial rule, cash and Christianity, in creating 'useful citizens' and 'industrious assets',⁴¹ must come as a whirlwind of change which uprooted communal fences, especially around the fields of labour and learning. Here Africans invaded the white world⁴² and injured their own. 'Detribalised' and 'semi-educated', they were failures in themselves and a reproach to whites, as well as a threat. To profit by Africans it seemed that whites must subvert them. On entering Kenya, therefore, settlers also entered a nineteenth-century South African debate on how to construct political security and morality on shifting sands. It was never resolved, whether in white opinion or in the priorities of the colonial state. Conservatives thought Africans inherently primitive, liberals that they were retarded children who promised well as modern men. The former thought order lay in 'adaptation', propping up reformed tribal authorities against the gale in segregated local governments; the latter trusted in 'assimilation' to replace external controls with the self-disciplines

Henderson, gave as flat an account of the oaths as Leakey in his prosecution evidence at Kenyatta's trial, when one might have expected him to be more colourful: Montagu Slater, *The Kenyatta Trial* (London, 1955), 95-6.

³⁹ Leakey, *Southern Kikuyu*, vol. 3, 1037-48, 1056-67, 1234, 1238, 1269-70, 1276, for the customary controls on violence.

⁴⁰ Norman Leys, *Kenya* (London, 1924), 303.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 305-6, quoting an *East African Standard* editorial of February 1924.

⁴² The metaphor is John Gunther's: *Inside Africa*, 9.

of educated Africans, westernised men. Similarly, some reckoned the answer to African unrest was repression, others that cooptation was cheaper and even safer in the end.⁴³ Africans were similarly divided. More tried to link the imperial and household civilising missions within invented ethnic nationalisms than in a still more imaginary 'Kenya'.

After 1945 these border issues became ever more complex. The segmentary domains of political control were subject to trespass by competing economic interests seeking access to the centre, Nairobi.⁴⁴ Conflict wracked all political levels. At the centre, 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 settler obduracy denied Mathu's moderate supporters, the Kenya African Union (KAU), the political resources which might have secured their effective cooperation. The governor, Sir Philip Mitchell, combined belief in education as a cultural bridge between the races⁴⁵ with contempt for the idea that African nationalism might creatively purge the confusions of communal identity.⁴⁶ In the segregated reserves the local politics of control rested on the growing powers of African councils. Officials promoted progress but distrusted its twin foundations, peasants 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 relations 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. Yet white paternalists and anonymous black townsmen personified conflict, not control.⁴⁷ The deepest politics of all opposed labour and land on the White Highlands. The Maasai had formerly grazed most of this area. Little more than one per cent – but the richest part – had been Kikuyu land. Settlers claimed sole right to the land by virtue of treaty and achievement; it was their one sure footing in uncertain times. Their squatters claimed a share. They had given two generations of labour to taming the land and had made it ritually home by

⁴³ For the debate in Kenya see, Robert G. Gregory, *Sidney Webb and East Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962); B. E. Kipkorir, 'The Alliance High School and the origins of the Kenya African elite' (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1969); Kenneth J. King, *Pan-Africanism and Education* (Oxford, 1961); Bruce Berman, *The Dialectics of Domination* (London, 1990); and in South Africa for the same period, Saul Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa 1919–36* (Basingstoke, 1989).

⁴⁴ 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', in David Killingray and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Africa and the Second World War* (Basingstoke, 1986), 97–142.

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ 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).

⁴⁷ 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*, ix (1975), 259–75; Frederick Cooper, *On the African Waterfront* (New Haven and London, 1987), 78–203.

initiating their young and burying their dead on white farms.⁴⁸ White farmers no longer wanted a tenantry, and squatters had no wish to become free labour. Settlers called in the police, squatters called on what they now saw as a tribe. Here was a thicket of cross-cutting boundaries indeed. The conflict between settler and squatter, capital and labour, class and tribe, was the most bitterly complex border dispute in all the unfinished business of Kenya.⁴⁹

Mau Mau blew indecision apart. It outraged tribal elders and household authority at the foundations of control. Kikuyu militance also subverted, fractured and then seemed to dominate the pan-ethnic urban elite in the KAU, the only possible basis of African co-optation. Mau Mau thus destroyed past and blasted future images of social control, communal segregation and a multi-racial state. Policy could no longer wait on events. It had to be made. But a scapegoat must also be found for the catastrophe of confusion, an infiltrator-in-chief. It could only be the culture-rustler, Kenyatta.

Most whites feared and loathed Kenyatta, probably more for his English marriage than his trips to Moscow.⁵⁰ District officers resented the way in which his oratory had broken the politics of progress in Kikuyuland, when women downed hoes and refused to terrace hills against erosion.⁵¹ Missionaries, who may once have nursed him back to life, feared him.⁵² After his return home in 1946, Kenyatta presided over the Teachers' Training College at Githunguri, the apex of the Kikuyu independent school system which competed with the missions; he was also said to attack the Christianity which had saved him.⁵³ Settlers blamed him for stirring up squatters.⁵⁴ Governor Mitchell must have included him in his scorn for the manufacturers of premature nationalisms.⁵⁵ The rise of Mau Mau then proved Kenyatta, the enemy of tribal progress, to be a tribalist traitor to the African elite. Only he was thought clever enough to invent the oaths, perhaps from his reading in the LSE where, it was guessed, his anthropology had covered European

⁴⁸ 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*, vol. 1 (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.

⁴⁹ Kanogo, *Squatters*; Furedi, *Mau Mau War*; Throup, *Origins*, chapter 5.

⁵⁰ Kikuyu politicians must have distrusted Kenyatta as much as whites; before his departure for England they had sworn him against going with white women. Conversely, it seems that Kenyatta was more terrified by Moscow than inspired; see, Robin Cohen, editor's 'Introduction' to A. T. Nzula *et al.*, *Forced Labour in Colonial Africa* ([Moscow 1933] London, 1979), 15. I owe this reference to David Throup.

⁵¹ Throup, *Origins*, 152-64, shows that the administration little understood Kenyatta's position in this heavily politicised 'terrace war'.

⁵² Jeremy Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (London, 1972), 45, reports how the young Kenyatta was nursed through phthisis by Scots missionaries in 1910; by 1951 phthisis had become 'some spine disease', an operation for which saved his life: see W. O. Tait, memorandum, May 1951, in press cutting file on Kenyatta with *The Standard*, Nairobi.

⁵³ M. G. Capon, 'Kikuyu 1948, a working answer', September 1948: KNA, DC/MUR. 3/4/21.

⁵⁴ Throup, *Origins*, 129-30.

⁵⁵ As in footnote 46 above.

witchcraft.⁵⁶ He also had charisma. His campaign tours in early 1952 had everywhere been followed by, and must therefore have instigated, spates of Mau Mau oaths and murder. He had got Kikuyu to boycott bottled beer. Yet his denunciations of Mau Mau, at government request, were ineffective; his heart therefore cannot have been in them. This was the chief supporting evidence in Baring's request to call an emergency.⁵⁷ The presumed backwardness and conformity of tribes did not admit of any other than a sorcerous origin for the cunning and internecine ferocity of Mau Mau.

To deconstruct the evil of Mau Mau is to reconstruct past boundaries of morally valid knowledge and power. To summarise the rest of the argument, it is to find not that Mau Mau was an official invention, as the British left thought, an alibi for suppressing legitimate African politics, but dreadful reality, a pathological image of the right social group relations which ought to order colonial life. These relations were in any case in disarray, between the myth of what once had been and the mirage of what they might become. In the several Mau Maus of their minds whites negotiated fresh African stereotypes, to bring new order out of confusion.⁵⁸ In simpler times the white model of African cultural transition had been a linear, compensating, process of loss and gain in which small, tribal identities were diluted into a larger, civilised one; educated natives might agitate the untouched, but each could be calmed by a combination of adaptation and assimilation. Mau Mau smashed that innocent picture. Transition now looked like trauma. Loss of identity seemed to stir somnolent savagery. Education did not lead modern men out of the past; it made amoral men who manipulated its darkest fears. With a linear, if always subversive, model of progress now challenged by a movement which suggested that modernity could recreate savagery, whites had to rethink their ideas of social explanation. Mau Mau was bound to be made in divergent ways.

Two ideas competed to control the conduct of war, with different border trespass in mind. Conservatives stressed the unchanging danger of the primitive. Race was the most obvious boundary under threat and was simplest defended by hardening the polemical frontier between white civilisation and black savagery. They demanded an end to the liberal imperial promises which had aroused primitive envy. But if that had been Mau Mau's only border outrage, it could never have been punished 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

⁵⁶ Carothers, *Psychology*, 16, is cautious on this point; Beecher 'Christian counter-revolution', 82, much less so, comparing him with Marx and Engels in the British Museum. This accusation lingered long after it was understood that there was nothing exotic about the oaths, which merely reworked Kikuyu symbols of dangerous power: the strongest white attack on Kenyatta on this point was also the last; see, *Corfield report*, 169-70.

⁵⁷ Baring, top secret telegram to Lyttelton, 10 Oct. 1952: PRO, CO 822/443, and reproduced in Charles Douglas-Home, *Evelyn Baring, the Last Proconsul* (London, 1978), 227-8. That a beer boycott and Mau Mau should be thought to be of equal existential weight is an extraordinary indication of the assumption of African malleability. See also, Kingsley Martin's reports in *New Statesman*, 22 November 1952, 'The case against Jomo Kenyatta'; and 6 December 1952, 'The African point of view'.

⁵⁸ I am grateful to Malcolm Ruel for urging me to clarify my thoughts at this juncture.

to fight the war, was more subtle and of wider application. Liberals saw border unrest within the African soul, on its psychic frontier between tradition and modernity, community and society, past tribe and future nation. Racial repression might have sharpened the conflict, but was not its cause. This lay in the trauma of transition. Mau Mau had to be destroyed, 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 it⁵⁹ – white liberals knew it had to be crossed. Peace would come only when Kikuyu society was on the modern side. The need for wartime allies, local Africans and the home government, nerved the liberal imagination as never before to convert this conventional wisdom into government action. Whites thus failed to agree on a fresh African stereotype; Mau Mau split their previous indecisions into opposite camps. They fought the war on different premises. Privately, many thought any means tolerable for punishing ancient savagery; publicly, government strove to force the modern transition.

This public, liberal construction of the issue did not, however, win the peace. Nor did its Christian subtext of spiritual conversion. Measures of modernity, education and loyalty were, it is true, used to ration out the franchise for the first African general elections in 1957. This was seen as a precondition for a colour-blind common electoral roll in due time, in which white 'standards' would be safe. But this liberal control over the future had no future. It was blocked by African parliamentary boycotts 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 liberal mission gave way to hard political bargaining. The ideas which cleared the way for, and then controlled, this longer future were held by those who fought the war and who were, under any circumstances, bound to outlast it, the British army and members of Kikuyu agrarian society. Generals asked not how one modernised Africans but who would hold power. They were part of the British establishment; Tory ministers, their civil partners, 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, most of them 'loyalists', begrudged their service but enjoyed its rewards.

Settlers and supremacy

The iconography of the war was horrible, with pictures of hamstrung cattle grotesquely knelt upon the grass and burned black babies lying decapitated in the ashes of their homes. It looked very like a war between savagery and civilisation. On the side of order blond youths in slouch hats, backed by honest spearmen in blankets, represented the finest examples of their race, each in their proper place. African troops were also shown with guns, starched into civilisation by the creases in their khaki. On the side of chaos crouched wild-eyed men in rags and ringlets, just out of the trees.⁶⁰ A local publisher toasted the 'emergency alliance of men and women of all races and

⁵⁹ (James) Ngugi (wa Thiong'o), London, 1965.

⁶⁰ Two illustrated accounts of Mau Mau are Granville Roberts, *The Mau Mau in Kenya* (London, 1954), and anon, *Mau Mau, a Pictorial Record* (Nairobi, nd., ?1954).

tribes' which gave hope for the future.⁶¹ That was too simple. The ambiguities of adaptation and assimilation were now armed. Spearman in blankets were politically sound but militarily doubtful. Trousered gunmen were essential in war but rivals in peace.

Mau Mau's horror united whites in demanding its forcible suppression. But the ambiguities of security, based on adapting African authorities or assimilating black individuals, divided them over the sort of power to which force must answer. Conservatives demanded a return to white supremacy and tribal discipline. Liberals thought that white control would be more surely preserved if Mau Mau were isolated in African opinion. This must mean some sharing of power between the races, as represented by their educated individuals. Divided contemplation of the future invited new appropriations of the past. White Kenyans wrote history now as never before, their own and that of the African peoples.⁶² One cannot reduce their mutual differences to class interest, between, say, liberal businessmen and hardline farmers. Theirs was too small a community for that, too closely tied by marriage, church and club. Nonetheless, the insecurity of farming on a mortgage was probably the closest that Europeans came to living out a personal analogy of their community as a whole, an experience which put 'firmness' foremost in race relations.

The highland farm mocked white supremacy in its daily confusion of categories. A tribute to middle class English effort, it was also the site of black peasant expansion. In hock to the banks, whites had made the 'untouched land of Africa' into farms, 'with all that a farm implies'.⁶³ Farms meant civilisation; farms pleased. They were fenced 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 only 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.⁶⁴ African farm families were immigrant strangers too, other than on the coffee estates of Kiambu. To employ resident labourers was an act of generosity. 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 not a conquered people who had lost the right to liberty. They were a fifth column, a menace. They created their own communities in hidden corners of white estates. They reintroduced the African bush within the fences of the farm. Nobody knew how many there were. Part of white domestic life and yet unknowable, the

⁶¹ *Ibid.* Foreword.

⁶² For histories of white settler achievement, see J. F. Lipscomb, *White Africans* (London, 1955) and *We Built a Country* (London, 1956); M. F. Hill, *Cream Country* (Nairobi, 1965); there were farm memoirs too. For works which contrasted this with African stagnation or worse, see C. J. Wilson, *Before the Dawn in Kenya* (Nairobi, October and December 1952, January 1953) and *Kenya's Warning* (Nairobi, 1954); C. T. Stoneham, *Out of Barbarism* (London, 1955). The only work sympathetic to African civilization was Leakey's *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu*.

⁶³ Lipscomb, *White Africans*, 82; Wilson, *Kenya's Warning*, 13.

⁶⁴ Kingsley Martin, 'The settler case', *New Statesman*, 29 November, 1952.

sullenness of race undid the duty of class.⁶⁵ Worse still, after the war farms began to accuse. The tensions of the squatter relationship broke into conflict. White district councils enacted orders to restrict squatter rights to cultivation and pasture, and to require of them more labour. Settlers squeezed their dependants' livelihood partly because wartime profits enabled them to farm intensively, using more capital than labour. But the political consolidation of civilisation was still more urgent. 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.⁶⁶ Many settlers refused or failed to repudiate their squatters' rights. Nonetheless, squatter resistance had to be deprived of legitimacy. Some settlers regained the moral ground by infantilising their workers. One district council urged that 'the African', 'still a savage and a child', would respond to 'firmness' with a new 'respect' for whites who removed his freedoms.⁶⁷ 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 knew Mau Mau as the squatter armed. The frontline was at home, between supper and bedtime. Tools became weapons. The man with one's cast-off trilby fingered his panga.⁶⁸ 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'.⁶⁹ Two of the first settlers murdered were doctors, known for giving free treatment to squatter families;⁷⁰ 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 home.'⁷¹

The conservative response was the settler alarmed. It had six strands, entwined in a circular argument. The first related grievance and terror. Kikuyu had no grievance; white settlement had allowed them to colonise

⁶⁵ Among the useful phrases for settler wives to learn in Swahili or Kikuyu, in the *Kenya Settler's Cookbook* (Nairobi, 1959), was the injunction 'it is better not be sulky'.

⁶⁶ Kanogo, *Squatters*, 45, 65, 72.

⁶⁷ Uasin Gishu district council resolution, April 1947, quoted in Furedi, *Mau Mau War*, 35–6.

⁶⁸ Pictured on the blood-red dustcover of Wilson, *Kenya's Warning*.

⁶⁹ Graham Greene, *Ways of Escape* (London, 1980), 188; I owe this reference to David Throup.

⁷⁰ Wilson, *Kenya's Warning*, 56.

⁷¹ Robert Ruark, *Something of Value*, (London, 1955), 368. For Kimani's earlier appreciation of settler hospitality to Kikuyu squatters on Maasai land, see *ibid.* 272–4. It was one of the ironies of Mau Mau, as Richard Waller has reminded me, that the squatters shared the settler view that they had cultivated civilisation on Maasailand's transhumant pastures: see Mugo Gatheru's reflections on his squatter childhood, *Child of Two Worlds* (London, 1964), 7–8.

Maasailand. Since Mau Mau could not appeal against wrong, it had to impose by fear.⁷² Then why had it emerged? Since 1945, in Kenya as elsewhere, 'the spineless policies of the rulers seemed to encourage the revolt of their subjects'.⁷³ Savages respected firmness. Talk of democracy showed weakness, which invited questions. Once privilege was questioned, envy stirred; if not, then agitators were free to stir it. Thirdly, democracy was a 'fantastic idea'⁷⁴ for people whose recent history showed them unfitted to exercise it. Settlers were prepared to accept that Africans were potentially equal; but they were observedly different, improvident, incurious, ungrateful, superstitious and slothful. Search their history and one found alternating autocracy and anarchy. Mau Mau warned how thin was the modern veneer; it foreshadowed an African self-rule as bloody as the court of Kabaka Mutesa, not a century before. Fourth, western education had not improved Africans; Kenyatta's career suggested the reverse. Islam might be better than Christianity; it neither demanded nor promised so much. Fifthly, as for the squatters, so for Africans generally, firmness, even force, was the language they understood. This was especially true of the Kikuyu, once terrorised by a secret council of wizards, from which Mau Mau was perhaps descended.⁷⁵ Finally, the answer was plain. European dominance must be restored. In centuries to come, white discipline might have shaped African potential. For the moment, they must respect whites more than they feared Mau Mau. The chief instrument of correction ought to be, not blundering British battalions, but an expanded KAR 'drawn largely from tribes inimical to the Kikuyu', officered by settlers 'experienced in dealing with black men'.⁷⁶ If all this was too much for Whitehall, lately ruled by woolly minded socialists, then the settlers knew where to find friends, further south in Africa.⁷⁷

For many whites the emergency offered, more simply, the prospect of revenge. That was why Baring had to reinforce its declaration with airlifted British troops. He feared that settlers would otherwise supply, privately and without restraint, any violence the state appeared to lack.⁷⁸ From the start,

⁷² Most succinctly put by Wilson, *Kenya's Warning*, 59.

⁷³ Stoneham, *Barbarism*, 105.

⁷⁴ 'The voice of the settler', anonymous correspondent to *New Statesman*, 4 October 1952, 378.

⁷⁵ In April 1952 the director of intelligence and security submitted a memorandum on Mau Mau (KNA, GO. 3/2/72) which, while comparing the movement to Nkrumah's Convention People's Party in the Gold Coast (whence the director had recently been posted), traced it back to a supposed 'Supreme Council of Elders', all 'experts in witchcraft' who in days past had specialised in cursing wealthy upstarts. This information was said to have been supplied by 'a well known authority', but nothing remotely like it can be found in the obvious sources, Routledges, *Prehistoric people*; C. W. Hobley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic* (London, 1922); and C. Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu* (Turin, 1933). Neither Lambert's nor Leakey's works were then available (see footnote 34 above), nor do they support the idea of a wizard's council. It is possible that it was derived from one of the earliest Kiambu settlers, W. O. Tait, an amateur historian who claimed to have been a member of the council (Stoneham, *Barbarism*, 112-13), and who twenty years earlier had spoken of 'a secret society among the Kikuyu which nobody ever gets to know much about': *Kenya Land Commission Evidence*, vol. 1, 590.

⁷⁶ Stoneham, *Barbarism*, 122.

⁷⁷ This composite picture is drawn from *ibid.*; and Wilson, *Before the Dawn* and *Kenya's Warning*.

⁷⁸ Baring to Lyttelton, 9 October 1952: PRO, CO 822/443.

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

Liberals and transitionals

Conservatives said what they meant. Liberals dissembled. This was partly because ignorance and panic made them share conservative views. It also preserved a united front. On his first visit to Nairobi, Lyttelton, colonial secretary, maintained that Mau Mau was not the child of economic pressure.⁷⁹ That was to calm the settlers; he himself knew better. Two months earlier his officials had considered reforms which might meet 'any legitimate grievance of law-abiding Africans' and raised them with Baring before he flew to Kenya. They had discussed housing schemes, 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 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'.⁸⁰ Events precluded that. But London had to buy the settlers or they might bust the government. Some cried 'appeasement' when Baring revealed the second prong. If he was to keep the settlers at heel he would have to mind his tongue.⁸¹ Official statements followed the conservative line.⁸²

Official action was different, and action remade Mau Mau in many official minds. Policy steered between two rocks of disaster. First, the settlers must be allowed no increase in influence; the precedents of two world wars were ominous in that respect. Nor must they be stampeded into a ferment which could be calmed only by concession. Yet the state had to answer African grievances, despite white 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.⁸³ 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.'⁸⁴ He did not know how it should be done; nobody did, but it was

⁷⁹ Lyttelton, radio broadcast from Nairobi, 4 November 1952 (transcript in KNA, CD. 5/173); and repeated in his statement to parliament: *House of Commons Debates*, 5th series, vol. 507 (7 November 1952), col. 459.

⁸⁰ 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.

⁸¹ I have adopted Kingsley Martin's reading of the situation: *New Statesman*, 8 November 1952.

⁸² For instance, official press handout no. 70 of 19 April 1953, purporting to show a Mau Mau central committee circular, omitted all its references to 'peace' and 'freedom'; Baring to Lyttelton, 19 April 1953: PRO, CO 822/440. Wilson, *Kenya's Warning*, 63, made much play with what was made public, including threats to drink the blood of enemies and to castrate and decapitate anybody who helped the government.

⁸³ 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.

⁸⁴ Jeffries, minute to Lloyd, 17 February 1953 (original emphasis): CO.822/440.

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 satisfied, urban discontents relieved and, more urgently, tens of thousands of Kikuyu in detention weaned from Mau Mau. An awful war needed a beastly enemy. A solid peace needed radical reform. An ideology which joined the two in causal sequence emerged from the daily discourse of harassed men.

This liberal doctrine adopted as its subject a new stereotype, 'the African in transition'. It diagnosed Mau Mau as a disease which demanded as cure none other than the government's best intentions of the postwar years. It was offered by Dr Colin Carothers, who had been a local medical officer for twenty years and now practised psychiatry in England. He had been asked back to reassure the commissioner for community development, Askwith, that his approach to rehabilitating Mau Mau detainees was on the right lines.⁸⁵ He assumed that they were possessed by evil and must be cleansed by public confession as performed in Kikuyu law, paid manual labour, literacy classes, instruction in the beneficent colonial history of Kenya and, if they chose, by Christian witness.⁸⁶ It was a working theory of a guided transition. Carothers was asked to comment on the ideas of practical men; his doctrine was dug from experience, theirs and his. He himself was a self-taught psychiatrist.⁸⁷ But he did much more.

Carothers' contribution to constructing Mau Mau was to theorise the detention camps' commonsense concept of a crisis in modernisation, a war for the soul of transitional man. He had just published a general treatment of the liberal approach to African psychiatry, which stressed the influence of environment rather than heredity on mental capacity. The preliterate tribal personality, he had argued, was moulded from outside by the conformity of the community. Literate western man was inner-directed, disciplined by the competition of society. This general work neither mentioned Mau Mau nor forecast any unusual psychiatric problems for 'the African in transition'.⁸⁸ But when he came to investigate, he found that Mau Mau was, in part, a reaction to psychic insecurity. Transitional men would have lost many cultural supports while still dreading the power of external, magical 'wills'. Their grievances would tell them that whites controlled a richer store of these than they did themselves. Here lay the cunning of Mau Mau; its oaths promised redress of the magical balance.⁸⁹

Carothers has often been misinterpreted, perhaps because he allowed his understanding to change as he wrote, without then revising earlier passages, 'an approach which held the writer in as much suspense as any of his readers'.⁹⁰ It is remembered that he thought that the Kikuyu, as secretive

⁸⁵ T. G. Askwith, typescript memoirs, chapter on 'Mau Mau', p. 8, seen by courtesy of the author.

⁸⁶ Colony and Protectorate of Kenya [CPK], *Community Development Organization Annual Report 1953* (Nairobi, 1954), 2-3; CPK, *Annual Report of the Department of Community Development and Rehabilitation 1954* (Nairobi, 1955), 21-33.

⁸⁷ Dr J. C. Carothers, in conversation, 26 July 1989.

⁸⁸ J. C. Carothers, *The African Mind in Health and Disease* (World Health Organization, Geneva, 1953), 54-5, 130-3.

⁸⁹ CPK: J. C. Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau Mau* (Nairobi, 1954), 6-18.

⁹⁰ J. C. Carothers, 'The nature-nurture controversy', *Psychiatry: J. for the Study of Interpersonal Processes*, XVIII (1953), 303; this was in response to critics of his WHO

forest-dwellers with little of the music of social cohesion in their souls (he was badly advised on both counts), unusually ill-fitted for the transition. It is forgotten that his report concluded with a call for deliberate modernisation. If Mau Mau abused the inner bewilderment of transitional man, Africans must be given the self-assurance of modernity. Confusion of category must cease, especially in the family. Disorder reigned where the river of transition separated traditional woman from modern man.⁹¹ New boundaries of order must be drawn around modern genders. Again, this was the view of practical men. Askwith believed that recovery from Mau Mau was confirmed only by regular employment and the companionship of family life. Other senior officials had long called for a similar remedy for wider ills.

Post-war British colonial policy assumed that neither peasant economy nor unskilled urban labour could sustain social order much longer, let alone provide for development and improved welfare. Neither side of African life was self-sufficient; each was debilitated by what connected them, the oscillation of male wage labour. As Carothers fitted Mau Mau into his concept of transition, officials did likewise. Their transitional man was flesh and blood in the migrant worker. Mau Mau had travelled home with him. The slum had infected the countryside with the incessant movement between them.⁹² Two government plans and unprecedented sums of public finance were now devoted to separating them. The labour department pressed for improved wages and conditions, to create a new basis for society, the urban African family, where before Nairobi had accommodated loose atoms, labour units, bachelor workers.⁹³ The department of agriculture embraced 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 bachelor sons in town nor yet needing their monthly remittances. The conflicting bundles of rights which confused customary land tenure, fragmented holdings, the constant drain of litigation, must be swept aside with registration, consolidation, fencing, contour-ploughing and tree-crops.⁹⁴ Disorder would give way to cadastral survey and straight lines. Both departments seized on the emergency to argue, with a conviction which more than a decade of frustrated persuasion had sharpened, that the risks of pushing African communities through the transition to market society were as nothing to leaving them hanging betwixt and between. If Mau Mau was a disorder of the beginnings of progress the cure must be to bring progress to a successful end. Moreover, and this was

monograph, but the same method was openly employed in his pamphlet on Mau Mau. See, *Psychology*, 20-1: 'assessments of other people must continually be based on reassessments of oneself.' The first half of the pamphlet described the Kikuyu in admittedly 'derogatory' terms; the second half turned the tables on the whites; for Kikuyu were, of Kenya's African peoples, 'the most like ourselves'.

⁹¹ Carothers, *Psychology*, 22-4; a message to which I have been alerted by the work of Luise White.

⁹² 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.

⁹³ CPK, *Report of the Committee on African Wages* (Nairobi, 1954).

⁹⁴ CPK, *A Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1954).

vital, they could not be accused of appeasing Mau Mau; to the contrary, they were disciplining with individual obligation the collective disorders of transitional society. Each talked openly of class as the basis of order and power.

Missionaries had a not dissimilar idea of progress. While the two 'established' British missions, Anglican and Presbyterian, publicly supported the multi-racial aim of the former governor, Mitchell, to 'evolve from components at present heterogeneous, a harmonious and organic society',⁹⁵ their private history taught them that their particular role in the war against Mau Mau was to transform individuals. They had reason to hate the movement. Their congregations and school enrolments withered in mid-1952; pastors and teachers could not be paid. Some Christians were martyred. The missionary sense of history almost welcomed the catastrophe. For this was the second great test for the young Kikuyu churches, purging them of nominal believers to reveal the faithful remnant of rebirth. Presbyterians in particular had suffered similar persecution in 1929, in the 'female circumcision crisis'. The KCA had led the resistance to their teaching against clitoridectomy and then spawned independent churches and schools which were thought to have inspired the new savagery of Mau Mau.⁹⁶ Their origin in a backsliding defence of an 'old, cruel and degrading practice'⁹⁷ showed their dark potential. Moreover, just as the earlier opposition had followed on an unprecedented period of church growth, so Mau Mau seemed to have been galvanised to defeat the new challenge of Revival. This largely lay movement, potentially anti-clerical and schismatic, challenged missionary authority with the priesthood of all 'saved' believers.⁹⁸ It took much missionary humility, racial and clerical, to avoid schism. Having demolished their own defences, missionaries saw Mau Mau as a counter revival, to rescue Kikuyu belief for nationalist ends, to break racial comity once more.⁹⁹

Missions willingly assisted the government's rehabilitation work in the *gulag* of detention, which in 1954 housed one-third of Kikuyu men and not

⁹⁵ 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 'organic' is rendered, in a splendidly illustrative slip, as 'organised'.

⁹⁶ The colony's director of education conducted a survey of the first detainees to investigate the sources of their schooling and discovered that they showed no significant difference from other Kikuyu; there was thus no solid evidence for the general suspicion of the independent schools, another private doubt which did not sway the conventional wisdom: CPK, *Education Department Annual Report 1953* (Nairobi, 1955), 39-40.

⁹⁷ CMS, *Mau Mau*, 5. An indication of the aroused imaginations of the time is given on the same page, where the difficulty of obtaining evidence against Mau Mau is compared with the fruitless enquiry into the murder and sexual mutilation of a woman missionary in 1930. Yet there was never any suggestion that Mau Mau murders involved circumcision - or, indeed, rape.

⁹⁸ For two Kikuyu accounts, see E. N. Wanyoike, *An African Pastor* (Nairobi, 1974), 151-68; Obadiah Kariuki, *A Bishop facing Mount Kenya* (Nairobi, 1985), 46-59, 78-9; Kariuki gives a glimpse of his relations with Kenyatta, his brother-in-law, *ibid.* 79-81.

⁹⁹ CSM, *Mau Mau and the Church*, 5. For Kikuyu comparisons between Revival and Mau Mau see, Wanyoike, *African Pastor*, 175, 180-85, 195f. By contrast, Githige, 'Religious factor', arguing from oral reminiscence, is doubtful of Christianity's influence on Mau Mau, whether as inspiration or antagonist.

a few women. Confession of sin and Christian teaching could restore dead souls. Thus far Christians agreed; like everybody else they then divided. Most thought that individual conversion was all they could properly pray for, but a few came close to a concept of structural sin. The first approach, to which fundamentalist belief attracted most missionaries, got more publicity. Its limitations were, nonetheless, well appreciated at the time.¹⁰⁰ The best known attempt to resolve political conflict by confession of racial brotherhood, at the Athi River camp, was the work of Moral Rearmament, thanks to the private interest of a senior prison official. The Christian Council of Kenya (CCK), which represented the Protestant missions, never approved; and the experiment was soon abandoned.¹⁰¹ The CCK had humbler hopes of conversion. Guided by their secretary, Stanley Morrison, who had come from working with Palestinian refugees, they understood Mau Mau to be a complex phenomenon, political, economic, and social as well as spiritual. Individual conversion could thus be only an adjunct to political change, not a substitute for it. Moreover, the churches faced a particular disability, the nature of Revival. Hitherto it had produced men and women so convinced of the power of Christ that they often chose martyrdom by, rather than armed resistance to Mau Mau. District officers so mistrusted their pacifism that they refused them the 'loyalty certificates' which allowed free movement.¹⁰² Conversely, the churches despaired of using such private conviction in social action.¹⁰³ Christianity could work its miracle of reconciliation only if justice had been created by other means. That, too, was conventional Christian wisdom, at least in the liberal theology of the CCK. Its separate members, the locally rooted missionary churches, had little interest in a theology of power or, therefore, in political reform.¹⁰⁴ Neither fundamentalists nor liberals exercised the influence which has been attributed to Christian rehabilitation as a whole.

Liberal beliefs, reinforced by pragmatic action, helped officials 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 this construction of Mau Mau failed to provide a foundation for peace. Two men at the centre of the bid for liberal authority warned explicitly that it would not. The forgotten part of Carothers' report on Mau Mau psychology argued

¹⁰⁰ Which may not be sufficiently clear from the brief treatment in Rosberg and Nottingham, *Myth*, 340.

¹⁰¹ CPK, *Annual Report of the Department of Community Development 1954*, 26.

¹⁰² 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 Thompson in December 1953: RH.Mss.Afr.s.1534. See also, David P. Sandgren, *Christianity and the Kikuyu: Religious Divisions and Social Conflict* (New York, 1989), 158.

¹⁰³ T. F. C. Bewes, *Kikuyu Conflict: Mau Mau and the Christian Witness* (London, 1953), 41-2, 68.

¹⁰⁴ As in all other aspects of this essay, there is a deeper history to be told; this analysis is derived principally from 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. For an indication of a wider approach see, John Lonsdale, with Stanley Booth-Clibborn and Andrew Hake, 'The emerging pattern of church and state co-operation in Kenya', in Edward Fashole-Luke *et al.* (ed.), *Christianity in Independent Africa* (London, 1978), 267-84. (My two co-authors were also CCK employees in the 1950s).

that it was futile to try to remake the Kikuyu in the individualist English image unless they were given the chance to exercise the responsibility of power. Rehabilitation would be complete only with some kind of democracy, however that was defined.¹⁰⁵ Askwith 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, and the administration decided that persuasion must be stiffened with 'compelling force'.¹⁰⁶ The views of the army were quite a different matter. It trusted neither in controlled reform nor in compelling force.

Soldiers and politics

The army fought against Mau Mau's military confusions. These were very 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 crisply rational.

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.¹⁰⁷

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 conservative obsession with savagery 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 goat's eyes impaled on them: a silly scarecrow to frighten the feeble... what next? The initiates are abusing themselves into a bowl of blood – prep school stuff... The whole business when looked at carefully is no more than the antics of naughty schoolboys.¹⁰⁸

Kitson made his sense of Mau Mau by assimilating it to his own experience, more lurid than that of many of his compatriots one might think, even of those who had endured boarding school. At a more workaday level, he recognised the guerrillas as army types, skivers and time-servers whose kindred spirits once swarmed over base areas in the second world war.¹⁰⁹

The colonial secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, was struck by a nobler likeness

¹⁰⁵ Carothers, *Psychology*, 19–20, 28–9.

¹⁰⁶ T. G. Askwith, in conversation, 27 July 1989; Terence Gavaghan, in conversation over the years.

¹⁰⁷ 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).

¹⁰⁸ Frank Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-gangs* (London, 1960), 131.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 158; for his later thoughts, see his *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping* (London, 1971).

between forest fighter and British soldier. A veteran of the Great War, he respected men who, contrary to their 'tribal reputation', had 'more than once pressed home attacks against wire, and in the face of hot fire, and heavy casualties.' He had asked no more of his Grenadiers. If Mau Mau gallantry was explained by 'dutch courage...doped with hemp', had he not too, like others in his war, braced himself with rum before battle?¹¹⁰ Such recognition of equivalence, so contrary both to the racialism which denied a common humanity and the liberalism which pitied dupes, was politically important. On a visit to London, Blundell (whose own respect for Africans came from commanding them in war), was shocked to find that Churchill thought the 'fibre, ability and steel' of the Kikuyu deserved to be acknowledged by an offer of terms.¹¹¹

Erskine thought like Churchill. The settlers never trusted him after his statement that Mau Mau required a political rather than military solution.¹¹² But that was a soldier's reaction to guerrilla war, the most difficult of all wars to fight. It poses the keenest moral problems for its participants, on both sides of the hill. It blurs the distinction between military and civil and so too, more than other wars, between victory and massacre, gallantry and crime.¹¹³ Insurgents can win political battles by an underhand refusal to fight open, soldierly, ones; they muddy the aims and reputation of security forces by denying them the clean tactical objective of a 'fair target' or 'fair fight'.¹¹⁴ After clearing the army of the political confusions created by others, Erskine then strove to restore proper distinctions to the battlefield itself. Forest and mountain became prohibited areas, where troops could operate on a 'straight forward [sic] war basis knowing that anybody they met must be an enemy.' He reserved these zones of simplicity to the army, leaving to the police the inhabited areas where 'pressure and persuasion' had their murkier role. White settlers were as messy as Mau Mau. Erskine's compulsory evacuation of elderly and isolated white farmers from the front line, to avoid dissipating his forces as scattered farm guards, was almost his most unpopular act.¹¹⁵

Erskine angered whites most with his successive surrender offers to the forest fighters. These thwarted the lust for revenge. Negotiation also denied two fundamental beliefs of the conservative myth, that the obscenities of the oath turned men into beasts and that Mau Mau lacked rational aims.¹¹⁶ Even Kenyan-born white police found that Mau Mau commanded their respect. After sixty-eight hours of interrogating the captured 'General China', superintendent Ian Henderson, the boys' own hero of the settlers' war, concluded that his prisoner was 'a complete fanatic'. Was he then mentally ill? Not at all. China had 'a good brain and a remarkable memory'. He knew

¹¹⁰ Lyttelton, secret and personal telegram to prime minister Churchill, 18 May 1953: PRO, CO 822/440; Oliver Lyttelton, *The memoirs of Lord Chandos* (London, 1962), 41, 59.

¹¹¹ Blundell, *Wind*, chapter 4 and p. 184.

¹¹² James Cameron, 'Bombers? Kenya needs ideas', *News Chronicle* (London), 15 Nov. 1953.

¹¹³ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (Harmondsworth, 1980), chapter 11.

¹¹⁴ The quoted phrases come from Erskine's despatch of 2 May 1955, para. 17: PRO, WO 236/18; and Kitson, *Gangs*, 46.

¹¹⁵ Erskine's despatch, 2 May 1955, paras. 15, 17, 40, 74.

¹¹⁶ For settler outrage see, Blundell, *Wind*, 189-92, but discussion of the surrender offers must await Mr Heather's findings.

why he was fighting; 'his sole wish was to expound his political testament before Legislative Council and then walk to the gallows without trial.'¹¹⁷ When he too was captured, China's successor in Mount Kenya's forests, General Kaleba, outlined his 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.¹¹⁸

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.

It took the tragedy of Hola camp, when 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, the hard core were determined to prove that they 'were not in the grip of some remedial obsession but pursuing logical and irrevocable political aims'.¹¹⁹ The detainees might have put it 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 free men; under any other condition it was slavery.¹²⁰ 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, could no longer govern policy. Political change could not wait on repentance and the development of a politically responsible (that is, guilt-conscious) middle class. Britain could not continue to remake Kenya by force when other European powers were abandoning attempts to remodel colonial rule for the moral high ground of informal empire.¹²¹ A political war must be ended by political means. Civilisation had to be gambled on concession and agreement,

¹¹⁷ 'Interrogation of "General China"', para. 14.

¹¹⁸ '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. They called their movement '*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 called themselves *itungati*, a 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 former military tactics see, Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London, 1938), 206; Lambert, *Kikuyu Institutions*, 70f.; Leakey, *Southern Kikuyu*, vol. 3, 1051–3.

¹¹⁹ Foreword to Kariuki, '*Mau Mau*' *Detainee*, xv.

¹²⁰ 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.

¹²¹ As argued by John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: the Retreat from Empire in the Post-war World* (London, 1988), 244–69.

not enforced by the tyranny of good intentions and warders' truncheons. Within months of Hola came Lancaster House and the prospect of majority rule.

Freedom and crime

The remaking of civilisation in Kenya, then, had to be a political creation, not a confessional crusade. But whose? The man who won the peace was the man found guilty of causing the war, Kenyatta. The government had charged him with imposing evil on the Kikuyu. But Mau Mau could never have been a simple imposition. There were too many Mau Maus for that. They were the product of deep political conflict within Kikuyu society. Their militants were inspired by Kenyatta, of that there is no doubt. But his exhortations were overtaken by their compulsions.¹²²

On the surface, Mau Mau was an anti-colonial revolt to recover Kikuyu land and to press the claim to much of the remainder of the White Highlands which had been lodged by two generations of squatter labour.¹²³ But what gave the revolt its shape and inner meaning was its junior status in a long struggle for patriotic virtue within Kikuyuland. Kikuyu virtue lay in the labour of agrarian civilisation, directed by household heads. Honour lay in wealth, the proud fruit of burning back the forest and taming the wild, clearing a cultivated space in which industrious dependents too might establish themselves in self-respecting independence; the possibility of working one's own salvation was the subject of more Kikuyu proverbs than any other.¹²⁴ But by the 1940s this myth of civic virtue began to mock the majority rather than inspire. Big men no longer welcomed dependents, they expropriated them. Wages fell behind prices, whether of food, housing, land, or marriage transfers. Young men asked if they would ever earn enough to marry and mature.¹²⁵ Those who had most cause to fight colonial rule had the least chance to merit responsibility. Those whose deeds might deliver power would have no right to enjoy it. That was the Kikuyu tragedy, a struggle over the moralities of class formation, not mental derangement.

Kikuyu were engaged in a struggle about class, not in class struggle. They were not yet morally divided, however much their material chances diverged. They argued within one myth of virtue. A Mau Mau leader recalled how the trade unionist Makhan Singh taught him that the Kikuyu were once communist; but he meant a communalist society, in which 'the community took care of everyone and his family.'¹²⁶ Nobody had a socialist

¹²² As African leaders complained to Kingsley Martin: 'The case against Jomo Kenyatta', *New Statesman*, 22 November 1952.

¹²³ As Governor Mitchell almost said in retirement: *Afterthoughts*, 268.

¹²⁴ G. Barra, *1000 Kikuyu Proverbs* (Nairobi, 1974, first edition 1939); Ngumbu Njururi, *Gikuyu Proverbs* (Nairobi, 1983). What follows is a too brief sketch of Kikuyu political thought which I intend to develop elsewhere.

¹²⁵ See, Meja Mwangi's novel, *Kill me Quick* (Nairobi, 1973).

¹²⁶ 'Classification report no. 3468: John Michael Mungai', (17 May 1956), 9-10: RH, Mss.Afr.s.1534; the only direct indication I have found of Makhan Singh's thought on pre-colonial Kenya is in his *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement, to 1952* (Nairobi, 1969), 1-2, from which the quotation comes.

Mau Mau in mind.¹²⁷ The right to force political change was contested between the men of authority like Kenyatta, who was the son-in-law of not one but two official chiefs, and the dispossessed, 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 would entitle them to share the fruits of victory. These were the men and women whom Kikuyu knew as Mau Mau, not all those who had taken the oath of unity but the few who had taken the second, fighting oath.¹²⁸ But, 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. Europeans mistook this fear and solidarity for tribal unity, a mystic force. This myth of tribal unity found Kenyatta guilty. If he was the tribal leader he was responsible for everything done in his name.

Throughout his career, with sustained 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'. Kikuyu ought to follow the Maori example. 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...'.¹²⁹ This simple contrast 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.¹³⁰

So Kenyatta also made a meaning for Mau Mau. In front of a huge crowd at Nyeri in July 1952 he compared it with theft and drunkenness. Henderson, the police observer, thought he equivocated; and the provincial com-

¹²⁷ Kingsley Martin studied extracts of the vernacular press and found there only liberal nationalism, not Marxism: 'Kenya report', *New Statesman*, 15 November 1952. The most likely source for any Mau Mau class ideology would be Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom 1921-63* (Nairobi, 1975), but the nearest he comes to that is syndicalism; no memoir of Mau Mau initiation suggests that the political education given to recruits referred to class struggle; conversely, a 'typical notice' of a Mau Mau initiation 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. Maina wa Kinyatti (ed.), *Thunder from the Mountains, Mau Mau Patriotic Songs* (London, 1980), gives a retrospective, socialist, twist to insurgent thought.

¹²⁸ Rosberg and Nottingham, *Myth*, 234-76; Kaggia, *Roots*, 78-115, 193-5; M. Tamarkin, 'Mau Mau in Nakuru', *J. Afr. Hist.*, xvii (1976), 119-34; John Spencer, *KAU, the Kenya African Union* (London, 1985), 202-49.

¹²⁹ Editor (Kenyatta), 'Conditions in other countries', *Muiguithania*, i, 3 (July 1928), translation by A. R. Barlow of the CSM. KNA, DC/MKS.10B/13.1.

¹³⁰ Profile of Jomo Kenyatta in *The Observer* (London), 2 November 1952, doubtless by Colin Legum. The *Corfield report*, 301-8: 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.

missioner believed this meeting marked a turning point in the swing of opinion towards Mau Mau.¹³¹ But Henderson also reported Kenyatta as asking the crowd to 'join hands for freedom and freedom means abolishing criminality'.¹³² That may not be an obvious point for a nationalist orator to make, but precisely what one would expect of a Kikuyu elder.¹³³ Freedom and criminality were at opposite poles in Kikuyu thought. Freedom was *wiathi*; this enjoined not only independence from others but also self-mastery. It came from disciplined effort, whether as herdboys, warriors, dependent workers, or household heads. Criminality was *umaramari* or *ngero*. The former term derived adult delinquency from childhood disobedience; the latter carried connotations of failing a test.¹³⁴ Kenyatta was not alone in making a delinquent Mau Mau in the mind. A former Mau Mau fighter has called it a council of *ngero*.¹³⁵ Even the chairman of its central committee or *kiama kia wiathi*, Eliud Mutonyi, would have not demurred. A self-made businessman himself, he regretted that in the Nairobi slums, from which Mau Mau recruited so many fighters, 'poverty knows no patriotism',¹³⁶ a modern rendering of the old, dismissive proverb, 'poverty has no responsibilities'. The path of crime, *umaramari*, could never lead to its opposite, self-rule, *wiathi*.¹³⁷

In the forests the struggle for respectability was as fierce as the fight for freedom. Guerrillas remembered in song what Kenyatta had said at Nyeri: 'Vagrancy and laziness do not produce benefits for our country.'¹³⁸ Perhaps also revealing their own anxieties about socially unauthorised killing, they anathematised ill-disciplined gangs, always the ones over the next hill, as *komerera*, an appellation which pairs the concepts of idleness and concealment, mere thugs who perpetrated anti-social violence and refused to cook for their leaders. They personified the nightmares not only of military

¹³¹ KNA: Edward Windley, Central Province annual report (1952). This was certainly true of at least one future forest leader: see, Barnett and Njama, *Mau Mau from Within*, 73–80.

¹³² *Corfield report*, 305.

¹³³ I assume that Kenyatta spoke Kikuyu at this point, as remembered by Henderson a few months later at his trial (Slater, *Trial*, 93), and as recalled for me by one who was there as a schoolboy, Professor Godfrey Muriuki (in a letter of 7 February 1990); elsewhere, Kenyatta's Swahili was translated into Kikuyu by the KCA leader Jesse Kariuki.

¹³⁴ For these and other translations I depend on T. G. Benson (ed.), *Kikuyu-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1964), and on help from friends, especially John Karanja, Tabitha Kanogo, Mungai Mbayah, Henry Muoria Mwaniki, Godfrey Muriuki (both of whom advised Benson), and George K. Waruhiu. Both *ngero* and *umaramari* have Maasai forms, on which Richard Waller has advised.

¹³⁵ Joram Wamweya, *Freedom Fighter* (Nairobi, 1971), 52.

¹³⁶ Eliud Mutonyi, 'Mau Mau chairman', undated typescript, copy in author's possession.

¹³⁷ This Kikuyu political logic is strong ground for thinking that Kenyatta was sincere in his denunciations of Mau Mau; if he did equivocate, he had good reason to do so in the threats made on his life by the Nairobi militants: evidence of Fred Kubai for Granada Television's 'End of Empire', screened 1 July 1985. While Wilson (*Kenya's Warning*, 54) made much of the mass Nyeri meeting of 26 July 1952, quoting long extracts from the *East African Standard's* record of the other speakers, he passed over Kenyatta in half a sentence, as if his pieties were indeed difficult to square with his demonic reputation.

¹³⁸ Barnett and Njama, *Mau Mau from Within*, 180.

discipline but also of civic virtue.¹³⁹ Forest fighters also argued out the question of gender and the social order. They divided between literates, who assumed the adult status required to form a household, and illiterates, the 'Kenya *riigi*', who saw themselves as a warrior age-set below the age of marriage, for whom sexual relations were more free.¹⁴⁰ Even in the forest, to outsiders the very fount of evil, literacy was becoming associated with respectable class formation, threatened by the illiteracy of a junior generation, in which one can dimly discern the emerging contradiction of a lower class. Mau Mau faced within itself the confusions of the rest of Kenya.

But while Nairobi's hooligans crawled under the arch of Mau Mau circumcision in search of the responsible 'spirit of manhood' and then persevered in the forests to earn their right to land,¹⁴¹ they did not win. The remaking of Kenya and their place in it were decided by others. The agrarian revolution of the war of modernisation had gone on without them. On emerging from forest or detention they were landless still, indeed more so than before in a rural world now 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 had now become a modern ruling ideology. By criminalising Mau Mau once more in the public mind, as he had tried a decade earlier, Kenyatta reasserted his authority to remake Kenya.¹⁴²

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 their land rights to the senior wife during land-consolidation. 'Why', he asked in some indignation, 'why did they call us *imaramari*?' They still do. White conservatives and liberals may have gone, and the regiments departed. Household heads, many of them now reinforced with fundamentalist Christianity, remain.

SUMMARY

This article explores the imaginative meanings of Mau Mau which white and black protagonists invented out of their fearful ambitions for the future of Kenya. Within

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 213, 221, 293–5, 376, 390, 397, 479, 498; Waruhiu Itote (General China), *Mau Mau General* (Nairobi, 1967), 139–41.

¹⁴⁰ Barnett and Njama, *Mau Mau from Within*, 471–8; Itote, *Mau Mau General*, 78, 127–38. White, 'Separating the men from the boys', has much more on all this.

¹⁴¹ The full title of Gakaara wa Wanjau's 1952 pamphlet was 'The spirit of manhood and perseverance for Africans', as translated in an appendix in *Mau Mau Author*, 227–43.

¹⁴² 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'.

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. Liberals blamed Mau Mau on 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.