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Mau Mau Experience In British Colonial And Post Colonial Kenya

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Abstract: *The Mau Mau Uprising is a revolt against colonial rule in Kenya, lasted from 1952 through 1960 and helped to hasten Kenya's independence. Issues like the expulsion of Kikuyu tenants from settler farms, loss of land to white settlers, poverty, and lack of true political representation for Africans provided the impetus for the revolt. During the eight-years uprising, 32 white settlers and about 200 British police and army soldiers were killed. Over 1,800 African civilians were killed and some put the number of Mau Mau rebels killed at around 20,000. Although the Uprising was directed primarily against British colonial forces and the white settler community, much of the violence took place between rebel and loyalist Africans. Detention camps were a cornerstone of the British strategy to suppress the uprising. Notoriously, Hola Camp became a symbol of the extreme brutality inflicted upon detainees. These camps bore witness to heinous acts of torture and abuse. Men, women, and children were subjected to barbaric methods of interrogation, including beatings, floggings, and electric shocks. The repercussions of such treatment were often severe, leading to lasting physical and psychological damage, and in many cases, death. After Kenya independence, Jomo Kenyatta the first President of Kenya, did not suggest any substantial change in the colonial structures, rather he continued treating Mau Mau as a rebels and he refuses to address the land alienated problems*

Keywords: Mau Mau**,** Experience, British Colonial, and Post –Colonial Kenya

Introduction

The Mau Mau was a significant resistance movement of men and women from different communities in Kenya who embarked on an armed struggle against the colonial government in a quest to reclaim land and to secure overall independence from the British (Mavenjina, 2021). Mainly comprised of Kikuyu people, but also including some tribes like Embu and Meru (EAAF ANNUAL REPORT 2003:108).This armed struggle, the Mau Mau Uprising, eventually led to the declaration of a state of emergency from October 1952 to December1959, when many Kenyans accused of participating in the rebellion were either killed or incarcerated in detention camps, and subjected to torture and other forms of cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment while in detention. It is estimated that over 90,000 Kenyans were executed, tortured, or maimed, and about 160,000 were detained in appalling conditions. Detainees were subjected to severe beatings and other forms of torture by the colonial administration, including castrations and severe sexual assaults, which in many cases left these men and women with lifelong physical and mental scars. Many of those who died while in custody were buried in mass graves, and their loved ones could not give them a decent send-off or pay their last respects (Mavenjina, 2021).

After a protracted struggle and eventual negotiations with the colonial administration, Kenya finally attained its independence in December 1963.While this was a significant moment in Kenya's history, the Mau Mau remained an outlawed movement as a result of repressive colonial legislation that had not only branded them as terrorists but also left behind a legacy of human rights violations. Forty-one years after independence, in August 2003, the Kenyan government lifted a ban on the Mau Mau, who were now recognized as freedom fighters. This paved the way for the Mau Mau to begin their pursuit for justice against colonial repression by the British government for the numerous violations during the emergency period (Mavenjina, 2021)

The major challenge in this journey was when the National Archives in Kenya informed the Kenya Human Rights Commission and the Mau Mau that there were no records on the Mau Mau. Efforts by the government of Kenya and the British government to gain such information were fruitless, which posed a huge threat to the surviving fighters' which required redress. However, in 2005, two ground breaking academic studies, by Caroline Elkins and David Anderson historians at Harvard and Warwick University, respectively on the British colonial administration during the emergency period changed the accepted understanding of this historical moment. Both studies, which were based on extensive archival research and witness evidence from Kenya and the UK, concluded that there was regular and widespread abuse of detainees during the emergency period (Mavenjina, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

This work is anchored on "theory of post-colonial State". Its focus is to explain the analysis of cultural legacy of colonialism. That is, the set of theories formed among scholars to explain the aftermath of colonialism. Alavi (1972), Ake (1985) Elekwe (1985) Ibeanu (1988) In Tochukwu, 2013: Williams, 2018) popularized the theory of post-colonial State. The theory asserts that:

- The post-colonial State is the creation of imperialism characterized by a legacy of dependence and underdevelopment of the post-colonial State through the exploitation of local human and natural resources and inhuman treatment of man by fellow man.
- The ruling class that took over from the colonialist had a weak economic base.
- The inherited State therefore served as platform or source for improving personal economic base investment and development of the ruling class.
- The post-colonial State however continued to be weak as shown by the inability of the State to control its agents and agencies to carry out their statutory function of planning and working for a better economy. This is because of the desire for corruption and unproductiveness by the successor ruling class who failed to use their resources to develop scientific technology that would launch an industrial based economy like that of developed countries.
- This situation perpetuates the State as the only fastest source of income and power to the successor ruling class. To effect this, their preoccupation is to ascend the position of leadership to be able to accumulate wealth; the strategy towards this political and economic goals is to create factions through divide and rule policy and are unwilling to mediate to bring about genuine conflict resolution and reconciliation; rather they engage in grim factional battles for the control of machinery of government which at the end provides avenue for negotiation that makes the ruling elite thrive in richness and power while the masses, and bureaucrats continue to be dependent on the rich political and economic ruling class.

Reasons for the Emergence of Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya

It was as a result of the issues that dominated African politics from 1903 to 1952. It is important to notes that forced carrying of Identity card and passbook that were introduced after the First World War (1914-1918) without which no Africans could leave his or her Home to seek employment, caused a lot of pains and general tension in Kenya. Also European settlers would punish "errand" African workers by tearing of up their Identity card and passbook , thereby making it impossible for them to get further employment (Julius 2014:27).In addition, the European settlers punished their laborers with kiboko, that is a wipe made of rhinoceros hide. They would flog their African workers from time to time and justify their cruel actions with trivial excuses. As Anderson avers, "by the early 1920s, the deaths of several Africans servants from beatings at the hands of their European masters earned Kenyan's white settlers reputation for brutality" Other issues that dominated the African politics from 1903-1952 were a concern for land alienation and displacements that made people squatters in in their own country, the insensitivity of the European settlers who abused, sacked, beat, insulted and generally harassed their workers with impunity, the low level of Africans wages, and the view that Europeans were immortal beings than the Africans (Julius 2014:27).

The Kikuyus alone lost over 500,000 acres, of land for which they received not one penny of compensation. Since the end of the Second World War, 16,000 square miles – the most fertile parts of Kenya – have passed into the hands of two thousand European settlers and 50,000 square miles of inferior waterless country have been reserved for five and a half million Africans (Padmore, 1953: 358).The problem was that by the late 1930s the industrial and commercial sectors in Kenya could not absorb all those Kikuyu who were by various means being pressed off the land. Hence a major rural rebellion could be undertaken by land-hungry Kikuyu peasants (Stichter, 1975: 263).Africans was not privileged to have a fair jury trial. They were tried by a magistrate advised by tribal elders representing the accused's tribe. Where the Kikuyu were concerned, these elders represented the interests of wealthy and pro-British Kikuyu (Edgerton, 1990: 35).

Kenyan Passbook (1957)

Aims and Objectives of Mau Mau

According to Kimathi the Mau Mau leader explain the aims and objectives of Mau Mau thus: we will fight the white man until the end of the world unless he gives us back our land and freedom. That is the first point. I would like to remind you all that we are here in the forest not to hide or play but to fight, and we must fight with our entire strength. With god's blessing we shall be saved by the prayers of our parents (Wachanga 1991:167: Shamsul Alam : 2007). And again, in the same speech, Kimathi argued, "Kenya Africans are ready for self-government. Even our forefathers governed themselves before the coming of the white man, we know all the systems of government, and we are capable of making our own laws" (Wachanga 1991:169). Kimathi was a dedicated letter writer. He wrote many letters to people all over the world. From those letters we can also deduce he was a brilliant political thinker and tactician. To quote a few: If fighting for our land and freedom is a crime, then we shall fight to the last drop of our blood. We shall never give up until we have driven away these foreign murderers from our beloved country. We reject colonization in Kenya because it has turned us into slaves and beggars (Kanogo 1992: 92: Shamsul Alam : 2007).

To understand the Field Marshal as a freedom fighter,we depend heavily on Kimathi's Letters: A Profile of Patriotic Courage (1986), edited by Maina wa Kinyatti.In February, 1954, the Kenya Land Freedom Army (KLFA), the military wing through which Mau Mau was fought, converged at a congress at Karathi, Nyandarua, and approved the formation of the Kenya Parliament. The Parliament appointed Kimathi as president and spokesman. In that capacity he not only coordinated the military aspects of Mau Mau but also worked hard to explain the political significance of the movement and to express a vision of postcolonial Kenya. Once we have won this war and regained our freedom and independence, the land which now is being occupied by the Europeans settlers will be redistributed to our people the landless, the poor, the squatters, and those of us who are fighting and dying in these forests and mountains. Our government will make sure that all the stolen land is returned to the owners. The European settlers will be expelled from our country and the Kenyan traitors will be arrested to answer for all the crimes and atrocities they have committed against the people (Wa Kinyatti 2000: 91: Shamsul Alam : 2007).

Thus, by touring various camps between 1953 to 1954, Kimathi tried to provide the ideological context of Mau Mau, as well as his vision of the kind of postcolonial Kenya that he and his fellow Mau Mau fighters wanted to establish. At one point Kimathi said to his fellow fighters: I do not lead rebels, but I lead Africans who want their self-government and land. My people want to live in a better world than they met when they were born. I lead them because God never created any nation to be ruled by another nation forever (Roseberg and Nottingham 1966: 299). And again in a letter to his former teacher, an African, Kimathi seems to hint at a role for white people in postcolonial Kenya: We are not fighting for an everlasting hatred but are creating a true and real brotherhood between white and black so that we may be regarded as people and as human beings who can do to each other everything (Roseberg and Nottingham 1966: 299). According to (Waruhiu, 1976:141) The "General China" Who commanded the Mau Mau fighters on month Kenya, cites as his political awakening the experience he had while fighting in Burma in the Second World War and talking with Indians nationalist and blacks Americans in India. He states very unambiguously that, "our aims were the return of our land and the achievement of freedom from foreign rule.

Mau Mau Experience during British Colonial Rule in Kenya

During the British colonial rule in Kenya in response to Mau Mau threat. The colonial administration also committed a similar massacre in Hola in 1959 in which 11 detainees were clubbed to death, with 77 having permanent injuries. The submissions of Michael Gerard Sullivan, the colonial officer in-charge of Hola camp to the commission investigating the death of the detainees revealed the firm instructions from Compell, the deputy commissioner of prisons, to torture the Mau Mau detainees by denying them drinking water for a number of hours, weeding rice fields with bare hands and use of batons on the non-co-operative ones. Elkins has indeed demonstrated the in-justices meted on the Mau Mau by the colonial police and the loyalist. For example she argues that electric shock was widely used, as well as cigarettes and fire. Bottles (often broken), gun barrels, knives, snakes, vermin, and hot eggs were thrust up in men's rectums and women's vaginas. The screening teams whipped, shot, burned and mutilated Mau Mau suspects, ostensibly to gather intelligence for military operations and as court evidence. Between 150,000 and 320,000 Africans were detained for varying lengths of time in more than 50 detention and work camps (The Platform, 2015).

The treatment in the camps, staffed by little trained non-Kikuyu, loyalists and European settlers, was often brutal. The information about what was happening there was carefully controlled and the colonial office and the governor systematically denied reports of mistreatment. Elkins' extended descriptions of the regime of torture, one is struck by its predominantly sexual nature. Male detainees were often sexually abused 'through sodomy with foreign objects, animals, and insects, cavity searches, the imposition of a filthy toilet bucket-system, or forced penetrative sex'. Women had 'various foreign objects thrust into their vaginas, and their breasts squeezed and mutilated with pliers.' Variations abounded, with sand, pepper, banana leaves, flower bottles (often broken), gun barrels, knives, snakes, vermin, and hot eggs being thrust up men's rectum and women's vaginas. A common practice during interrogation was to squeeze testicles with pliers (The Platform, 2015).

Josiah Mwangi Kariuki (popularly known as J.M Kariuki) was detained in 14 detention camps between 1953 and 1960. In his book 'Mau Mau Detainee', he wrote that his experience at Kwa Nyangwethu detention camp was the worst: Kwa Nyangwethu was, however, particularly bad and was notorious not for mere beatings, but for castration. I have seen with my own eyes that Kongo Chuma whom I first met in Nakuru before he was detained and who is now living at Kianga in Embu district, has been castrated. He had not been like this when he was in Nakuru but when we met in the detention camp at Athi River he told me what has been done to him by the screeners at Kwa Nyangwethu. He also told me that bottles of soda water were opened and pushed into the uterus of some women to make them confess. Kongo said these things were done by the Africans but the European officers knew what was going on (The Platform, 2015).

To establish the root causes of Mau Mau, the colonial administration appointed the Corfield tribunal, which relied extensively on psychologist JC Carothers and in their report recorded 11,503 Mau Mau dead. It was understandable that the number was under-estimated to disguise the ferocity of the colonial office response to Mau Mau. A thousand were hanged upon being convicted by courts, while more were killed by troops in the forest. There were also extra-judicial executions by the colonial police and home guard units. Moreover, the beating and torture of Kikuyu suspects was commonplace, and the security forces murdered hundreds. The Mau Mau war did not only mark the end of the African resistance against colonial rule, but it was the climax of colonial atrocities on Africans suspected to be members of Mau Mau (The Platform, 2015).

(Eliot, 2016)

Mau Mau Experience in Post-Colonial Kenya

The attainment of Kenya's political independence on the 12 December 1963, with Jomo Kenyatta as the first Prime Minister, marked the culmination of 68 years of anti-colonial struggles waged by Kenyan Africans to free themselves from British domination, oppression and exploitation. In August 1963, Kenyatta addressed approximately three hundred white settlers in the Nakuru area and explained to them that their land would not be reacquired and that they were free to stay and continue helping the new Kenyan government in its nation-building efforts (Maloba, 1993). Independence however did not bring justice for Kenyans certainly not for the Mau Mau veterans. Kenyatta, even before being sworn as president in 1963, had denounced the Mau Mau as terrorists (Information, Society and Justice, 2007).

However, in his independence speech, Jomo Kenyatta did not suggest any substantial change in the colonial structures. The colonial state would remain intact despite the fact that the fight for national independence had been dominated by demands for social justice, egalitarian reforms, participatory democracy, prosecution of those who had committed mass killings and other forms of crimes during the war of independence, and the abolition of the colonial state and its oppressive institutions. Also, in his independence speech, Jomo Kenyatta never mentioned the heroism of the Mau Mau movement. No Mau Mau freedom songs were sung, no the Kenya Land Freedom Army (KLFA), the military wing through which Mau Mau was fought (KLFA) leaders was not allowed to speak during the historic day. Instead, Kenyatta asked the people to forget the past to forgive and forget the atrocities committed against them by the British and their Kenyan supporters during the war of independence. He became no radical on nationalization of foreign held assets including land (The Platform, 2015). Mau Mau veterans that are still alive, along with their children and grandchildren, live in abject poverty, landless and without formal education (Information, Society and Justice, 2007).

"General China" reinforces this image of the embittered former guerrilla by claiming, "Some of those. Who now enjoy the fruits of independence, who sit in places made available to them partly through the blood and sweat of those who fought, look down upon the fighters as fools," and "many former Freedom Fighters (Mau Mau) remain disappointed by the efforts of the Government to help

them, and others deplore the attempts to make everyone's contribution to independence appear of equal weight and importance ((Itote, 1976 :Ronald,1985:) according to Venys also feels that the former fighters and detainees were left out of the post-insurgency political process, as he states that even after the parliamentary elections of 1963, besides Jomo Kenyatta, only five former Mau Mau activists had reached any position of national political prominence (Venys,1970).Therefore the first issue which Jomo Kenyatta had to deal with was the Mau Mau a movement whose main agenda revolved around land and the colonial land alienation among the Kikuyu, which had created a special group of Kikuyu without land. Before independence, Kenyatta had pardoned the remaining Mau Mau detainees in prison and issued an amnesty for Mau Mau fighters to leave the forest and surrender their weapons. More than 2,000 did so in the first weeks after independence far more than the British had expected. But after the amnesty for Mau Mau expired in January 1964, the post-colonial Kenya government started treating the remnants as criminals. By early 1965, most of the remaining Mau Mau hard-core fighters had been captured and killed by the new independent government. The Mau Mau who made their threat to return to the forest under the slogan of 'Not yet Uhuru,' Baimungi, (not yet independence) were quickly executed. Kenyatta's message in the 1960s was clear - there would be nothing for free (The Platform, 2015).

In the 1970s, it was politically imprudent to be called Mau Mau. Although on paper, Kenyatta acknowledged the role Mau Mau had played in the struggle for independence; his government persistently downgraded its importance and did nothing to reward those who had suffered. Despite President Kenyatta's promise in 1964 that the land confiscated during the Emergency would be returned, nothing happened. The British removed and hid most records of the war on the eve of independence to protect loyalists from reprisals and themselves from demands for compensation for atrocities. Ex-Mau Mau was no given preferential treatment in access to land and jobs. The ex-Mau Mau fighters were thus short-changed after independence (The Platform, 2015).

The squatters were not any better in their continued demand for cultivatable land across the highlands. Those living in the former White Highlands were evicted. In the majority of the settlement schemes in Nakuru and Nyandarua, the existing squatters were simply removed by force, with new claimants chosen to occupy the plots. The situation of the landless did not improve with the sale of larger farms under the 'willing buyer, willing seller' model. A decade after the implementation, one sixth of the settler lands were found to have been sold intact to the emerging African elite comprising Kenyatta, his wife, children and close associates. These elites did not even need much money to buy settler farms, as they were also able to raise loans from government bodies such as the Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC), Land and Agriculture Bank (The Platform, 2015).

Mau Mau Victims versus British Government: Legal Tussles

On June 23, 2009, the Mau Mau, with the assistance of the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and Leigh Day law firm, issued a claim for compensation for alleged torture against the British Government on behalf of five elderly Kenyans who had been detained and tortured by the British colonial administration during the Kenya Emergency rule, in the case of Ndiku Mutua & Others versus. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Case No: HQ09X02666OF2012. The British government challenged the case on two grounds: state succession and limitation. The British Government argued that it was not liable for atrocities committed by the British colonial regime. If such liability did survive, it was transferred to the Kenyan Republic via section 26 of the Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Act, (Act No 28of1964). The British government also argued that the claims were time-barred by virtue of the Limitation Act (1980). They lost on both grounds. In October 2012, the claimants won a historic legal victory (Mavenjina, 2021).

The Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and Leigh Day continued their investigations and identified over 5,000 further victims of colonial-era torture in Kenya (who subsequently became their clients). These victims of colonial-era torture had little or nothing to do with the Mau Mau but were detained without trial for suspected connections with the insurgency. While waiting for a decision on its appeal, the British government decided to engage in negotiations with the claimants so as to reach an out-of-court settlement. The negotiations yielded a settlement on June 6, 2013, in which the British government abandoned their pending appeal and further agreed to issue a statement of apology that was delivered in the British Parliament, acknowledging that Kenyans had been subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment at the hands of colonial authorities and that the British government expressed "sincere regret" for the same. The out-of-court settlement also included the British government paying out a compensation package of £2,600 per claimant for the 5,228 victims identified by Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and Leigh Day, financing the construction of a memorial in Kenya in remembrance of the victims of torture during the colonial era, and paying all the legal costs of the case. The statement of regret was issued by British Foreign Secretary William Hague at the House of Commons on June 6, 2013, and payments of the compensatory package have since been paid directly to each claimant. On September 12, 2015, thousands of Mau Mau war veterans traveled to Nairobi to witness the unveiling of a memorial monument for victims of torture, and cruel and ill treatment during the emergency period (Mavenjina, 2021).

Despite this historic victory, this out-of-court settlement did not comprehensively address numerous underlying issues of colonial repression. The critical question of accountability was never addressed; there have been no prosecutions of any soldiers, police officers, or prison guards who were responsible for some of these crimes against humanity. Further, it is painful to have to state that

the governments of independent Kenya, for whose existence the Mau Mau died in the Land and Freedom Army, have turned a deaf ear to the grievances of the liberators. For over fifty-five years since they liberated Kenyans from colonialism, these freedom fighters continue to languish in poverty. Many Kenyans continue to grapple with the critical issue of land, which has remained one of the most explosive issues facing Kenya more than fifty years after independence from Britain. This has been further exacerbated by the Kenyan government's inability to address the critical issue of land ownership in Kenya by British aristocrats, business executives, and other foreign investors (Mavenjina, 2021).

Conclusion

The Mau Mau uprising, initially sparked by economic grievances and inequities, rapidly evolved into a broader fight for national sovereignty.This revolt posed a formidable challenge to the colonial establishment, threatening to upend British control. The British response was a calculated and ferocious crackdown designed to quash the rebellion and reinforce colonial dominance. Detention camps were a cornerstone of the British strategy to suppress the uprising. Notoriously, Hola Camp became a symbol of the extreme brutality inflicted upon detainees. These camps bore witness to heinous acts of torture and abuse. Men, women, and children were subjected to barbaric methods of interrogation, including beatings, floggings, and electric shocks. The repercussions of such treatment were often severe, leading to lasting physical and psychological damage, and in many cases, death.

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