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Remembering Mzee: The Making and Re-making of “Kenyatta Day,” 1958–2010

Abstract: While a concern with memory, in particular of the Mau Mau rebellion, has a well-established place in Kenya’s historiography, little attention has yet been paid to the postcolonial Kenyan state’s official memory regime, to what Kenya’s citizens have been asked to remember. The following chapter aims to fill this gap. It traces the origins of “Kenyatta Day,” celebrated from 1964 onwards on 20th October each year, and the four successive stories that were told about it by first its proponents, figures associated with the KANU government and the state, and then its critics in parliament and civil society whose attainment of power led to the re-dedication of the day as “Heroes Day” in 2010, when Kenya’s “Second Republic” was inaugurated by a new constitution.

In the early hours of the morning of 20th October 1952, British security services in Kenya set in motion the plan codenamed “Operation Jock Scott,” a strategy devised over the course of the previous few days, with the intention of decapitating the so-called Mau Mau movement.¹ The rounding-up of around 150 Kenya African Union (KAU) activists would, it was hoped, leave the movement rudderless, allowing security services the opportunity to regain control in the increasingly fraught circumstances of Kenya’s Central Province and Rift Valley. At the top of the list (and by the time of his arrest, apparently aware of what was coming) was the name of Jomo Kenyatta, leader of the KAU, author of *Facing Mount Kenya*, and future president of independent Kenya.² So began the Emergency, which was to last eight long years.

The roundup was followed by a show trial of Kenyatta and five other men, Fred Kubai, Bildad Kaggia, Paul Ngei, Kungu Karumba and Achieng’ Oneko, ac-

1 For an introduction to successive understandings of Mau Mau, see John Lonsdale, “Foreword,” in *Mau Mau from Below*, ed. Greet Kershaw (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), xvi–xxx.

2 On Operation Jock Scott, see David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain’s Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: W.W. Norton, 2005), 62–63. For an introduction to the tense situation in Central Province and the Rift Valley, see Ch.1. See also David Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau* (London: James Currey, 1987); Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Gabrielle Lynch, *I Say to You: Ethnic Politics and the Kalenjin in Kenya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), Chs. 1–2.

cused by the colonial state of “managing” Mau Mau. Kenyatta, according to Ransley Thacker, a former Kenyan High Court Judge and Attorney-General of Fiji, brought out of retirement to preside over the case, was the “master mind” behind Mau Mau, the man who had “let loose upon this land a flood of misery and unhappiness affecting the daily lives of all the races in it, including,” he made clear, “those of your own people.” The KAU’s leader, he insisted, had taken “fullest advantage of the power and influence” which he held, the product, according to Thacker, of his education and long immersion in British society, where he had lived from the early 1930s to the mid-1940s. He had done so, the judge claimed, in order to turn back the “progress that had been made” under colonial tutelage “towards an enlightened civilisation” amongst his people, preying on “the primitive instincts which you know lie deep down in their characters,” plunging these dupes “back to a state which shows little of humanity,” and persuading them “in secret to murder, to burn and to commit evil atrocities which it will take,” the judge gravely intoned, “many years to forget.” Convinced of his guilt, Thacker sentenced Kenyatta, and the other five, to seven years’ hard labour.³ The future president was to remain in detention until August 1961.

Over the course of the last 60 years, it has been the movement that Kenyatta was convicted (quite wrongly) of managing that has stood “[a]t the heart of Kenya’s modern history.”⁴ Mau Mau has been the central concern of those interested in the question of how “a conscious sense of the past, as something meaningfully connected to the present, is sustained and developed within human individuals and human cultures,” the imperative – etched onto the memorial to the self-declared state of Somaliland’s experience of war under General Siad Barre, and described in this volume by Mohamed Haji Ingris – to “respect and remember.”⁵ Marshall Clough, for example, has traced “the elusive, chang-

3 Judgement of the Crown vs. Jomo Kenyatta *et al*, [1952], Court of the Resident Magistrate at Kapenguria, 8 April 1953, 97–98. On Kenyatta’s trial, see John Lonsdale, “Kenyatta’s Trials: Breaking and Making an African Nationalist,” in *The Moral World of the Law*, ed. Peter Coss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 196–239; and Anderson, *Histories*, 65–68. On imaginations of Mau Mau more generally, see John Lonsdale, “Mau Mau’s of the Mind: Making Mau Mau and Remaking Kenya,” *Journal of African History* 31, no. 3 (1990): 393–421.

4 John Lonsdale, “The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,” in *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa*, Book Two, ed. Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (Oxford: James Curry, 1992), 467.

5 Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2007), 9. On Somaliland, see Mohamed Haji Ingris in this volume. On the imperative to remember, and the need to forget, see also David Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and its Ironies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016). On the postcolonial legacy of Mau Mau, see Nicholas K. Githuku, *Mau Mau Crucible of War: Statehood, National Identity and the Politics of Postcolonial Kenya* (London: Lexington Book, 2016).

ing [and] divisive” memory of Mau Mau in Kenya through successive postcolonial “moments of crisis.” The image of the rebellion, he argued, has been mobilised and counter-mobilised at particular times by both opposition forces, a critique of Kenya’s post-independence direction, and successive governments, a means to disable the effectiveness of their opponents’ arguments and imagery.⁶ “[T]he history of Mau Mau, being so evocative,” wrote E.S. Atieno Odhiambo, summing up this interest, “is often discussed in public in high enough decibels to be shouted.”⁷

Recent writers have been no less impressed by the centrality of representations of Mau Mau in postcolonial Kenya, nor by the difficulty posed by the rebellion. But, in light of the violence that accompanied the 2007 general election, harking back to a theme first considered by scholars in the 1960s, they have added a more central emphasis on the apparent failure or unwillingness of successive Kenyan governments to grapple with Kenya’s difficult history, to seek to create a genuinely national history at the centre of the story, criticising their tendency to take refuge in “culture heritage” at the expense of history.⁸ In the Kenyan case, the need for amnesia has been, according to Annie Coombes, “a persistently repeated refrain” stretching across fifty years of postcolonial history.⁹

Both are significant themes which have an important place in what follows. The Kenyan state did not, however, only forget. Nor was its interest in the cultivation of memory solely reactive. While in other parts of East Africa, scholarly attention has been paid to official memory regimes – the state-led memorialisation of particular aspects of the past – and the way in which they have been used

⁶ Marshall S. Clough, “Mau Mau and the Contest for Memory,” in *Mau Mau and Nationhood: Arms, Authority and Narration*, eds. E.S. Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), 251–267; Marshall S. Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs: History, Memory and Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), especially Ch.8.

⁷ E.S. Atieno Odhiambo, “The Production of History in Kenya: The Mau Mau Debate,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 25, no. 1 (1992): 304.

⁸ See Annie E. Coombes, Lottie Hughes and Karega-Munene, eds., *Managing Heritage, Making Peace: History, Identity and Memory in Contemporary Kenya* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2014), especially Chs. 4 & 5. See also Terence Ranger, “The Politics of Memorialisation in Zimbabwe,” in *Nations and their Histories: Constructions and Representations*, eds. Susana Carvalho and François Gemenne (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 62–76.

⁹ Annie E. Coombes, “Monuments and Memories: Public Commemorative Strategies in Contemporary Kenya,” in *Managing Heritage, Making Peace: History, Identity and Memory in Contemporary Kenya*, eds. Annie E. Coombes, Lottie Hughes and Karega-Munene (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2014), 141.

by both government, as a tool of political persuasion,¹⁰ and its critics, little attention has yet been paid to this in Kenya.¹¹ The following pages aim to begin to fill this gap. Central to this official memory regime, was the 20th October, the date of Kenyatta's arrest, which was enshrined in Kenya's public calendar as "Kenyatta Day" by the Kenya African National Union (KANU) government in the days leading up to independence on 12th December 1963. In this chapter, I trace the origins of this day and the four successive stories that were told about it by, first, its proponents and defenders, figures connected with the KANU government, and then its critics in parliament and civil society (but not beyond¹²), critics whose attainment of power led to the re-dedication of the day as "Heroes Day" in 2010 with the passage of the new constitution, the promulgation of Kenya's "Second Republic."

Colonial Origins

The earliest efforts to mark the 20th October came in 1958, six years after Kenyatta's arrest, as prominent politicians in Nairobi, including Tom Mboya, the leader of the Nairobi People's Convention Party, and the African Elected Members of the Legislative Council, called for the day of Kenyatta's arrest to be commemorated as either "National Day" or "Freedom Day." In the weeks leading up to the date, the question of how exactly the occasion should be marked was a matter of dispute. Consideration was given to the possibility of launching boycotts of "buses and places of amusement" and perhaps even beer and tobacco. The possibility of holding a demonstration to mark the occasion was also mooted. While the desirability and feasibility of such moves were

10 A concept explored by Georg Deutsch in: Jan-G. Deutsch, "Celebrating Power in Everyday Life: The Administration of Law and the Public Sphere in Colonial Tanzania, 1890–1914," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 15, no.1 (2002): 93–103.

11 Felicitas Becker, "Remembering Nyerere: Political Rituals and Dissent in Contemporary Tanzania," *African Affairs* 112, no. 447 (2013): 238–261; and Marie-A. Fouere, "Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa* and Political Morality in Contemporary Tanzania," *African Studies Review* 57, no. 1 (2014): 1–24.

12 There are other locations from which Kenyatta Day could fruitfully be examined, other stories which could be told, but on which my sources have little to say. See, for example, Becker, "Remembering Nyerere" and Daniel Branch, "The Search for the Remains of Dedan Kimathi: The Politics of Death and Memorialisation in Postcolonial Kenya," *Past and Present* 206, Supplement 5 *Relics and Remains* (2010): 314–318, both of which attempt to integrate the view from one region with both the official view and elite criticism. The difficulty of the recovery of memory from the margins, meanwhile, is, in part, the focus of Natacha Filippi's chapter in this volume.

debated, however (the product, not least, of the haunting fear of a publicly visible lack of interest), it was widely agreed within this circle that the central feature of these commemorations should be widespread fasting in recognition of Kenyatta's prison suffering. Efforts were made to publicise these plans in the Nairobi People's Convention Party's newspaper, *Uhuru* (plans which were, in turn, picked up by the English language press), and in Kenya's rural localities, where they received at least some support. The Luhya politician Wafula Wabuge, for example, instructed a meeting of the Eldoret District Congress, of which he was president, "to observe 20th October as a day of fasting as a sign that Africans recognised KENYATTA as their true spiritual leader."¹³ Kenyatta was, on this reading, the leader of Kenya's Africans, imprisoned by a foreign administration bent on the domination of the African population, his release essential to the cause of Kenyan freedom.

It is worth pausing at this point to ask: why Kenyatta and why at this point? While, as we shall see, Kenyatta's life story came to be associated with the far-sighted and ultimately successful fight against colonial oppression, in the 1950s his suitability for this role was perhaps less obvious than it might now appear. From 1947 he had been the leader of a political party, the KAU, which failed in its stated goal of representing the whole of Kenya, struggling to build a base of support beyond its point of origin amongst the Kikuyu in Central Province. Historians have not been kind in their judgements of the party.¹⁴ They were hardly the first to lay such criticisms, however. Kenyatta and his leadership of the KAU were both subject to criticism and closely associated with this failure in the 1940s. The editor of the Luo-language newspaper *Ramogi*, for example, complained in 1948 that "although we have supported KAU in almost every respect, we do not feel it is too early to voice our views," which were, he made clear, that Kenyatta, as the organisation's "new president," "has not made it his duty to make people in Nyanza and Coast Province realise the Union's activities." As a consequence of this neglect, he insisted, the organisation should be avoided.¹⁵

¹³ The National Archives, Kew, London (hereafter TNA) FCO 141/6636, (Kenya: Nairobi People's Convention Party), Office of the Director of Intelligence and Security, "Nairobi People's Convention Party. Freedom Day – October 20th," 18 October 1958. Original emphasis.

¹⁴ The fullest account of the party's history can be found in John Spencer, *KAU, The Kenya African Union* (London: KPI Limited, 1985). For a more sympathetic account, see John Lonsdale, "KAU's Cultures: Imaginations of Community and Constructions of Leadership in Kenya after the Second World War," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2000): 107–124.

¹⁵ Cited in Spencer, *KAU*, 178. See also Fay Gadsden, "The African Press in Kenya, 1945–52," *Journal of African History* 21, no. 4 (1980): 522.

In the six years following Kenyatta's imprisonment, however, the political scene in the territory was transformed, the product of the working through of the Emergency's impact.¹⁶ This impact was two-fold. In the first place, shocked by rebellion, colonial concern to cultivate a loyal class of Africans led to the development of the two-part Swynnerton Plan in 1954, the first part focussing on Central Province and the second on the rest of the territory.¹⁷ Whatever the intention of its author, the implementation of the plan quickly bred significant discontent as (in brief) land consolidation policies, central to Swynnerton's vision of the future, worried migrants absent in towns that they were to be cheated of their rural land, while paternalistic measures designed to promote environmentally sustainable development caused rapidly escalating conflict, most notably in areas of the Rift Valley.¹⁸

The impact of these efforts was seen most clearly in the results of the first African elections which took place in Kenya in March 1957. In the 1940s, African politicians and intellectuals, including Kenyatta and the KAU, had shown themselves to be cleared eyed as to the destructive effects of certain colonial policies, petitioning the colonial government to institute changes of various kinds.¹⁹ In short, they understood the issues.²⁰ But by way of remedy, they had tended to call for reform, rather than colonialism's abolition. Their goal was African paramountcy, a formula which named colonialism's purpose, borrowing its terms

16 This paragraph draws on arguments outlined at greater length in Edward Goodman, "Us in the Time of Strangers: Imagining Community in Colonial Kenya and Tanganyika" (DPhil diss., Oxford University, 2017), Ch. 4.

17 RJM Swynnerton, *Colony and Protectorate of Kenya: A Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1954), i; Bethwell A. Ogot, "The Decisive Years, 1956–63," in *Decolonisation and Independence in Kenya, 1940–1993*, eds., Bethwell A. Ogot and William Ochieng (London: James Currey, 1995), 48–49; Robert Maxon, *Conflict and Accommodation: The Gusii and the British, 1907–1963* (London, Associated University Presses, 1989), 132–133.

18 Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, 1935–72* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), 136–137; and Julie MacArthur, *Cartography and the Political Imagination: Mapping Community in Colonial Kenya* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2016), 195–196; TNA FCO 141/5855, (Kenya: Coast Provincial Intelligence Summaries), Coast Provincial Intelligence Summary for the Month of May 1956, 3; Coast Provincial Intelligence Summary for the Month of June 1956, 3; Coast Provincial Intelligence Summary for the Month of July 1956, 4; David Anderson, *Eroding the Commons: The Politics of Ecology in Baringo District, 1890s–1963* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Ch. 7.

19 See TNA CO 53/537/21 (Memorandum by the Kenya African Union, 1946–1947).

20 Lonsdale, "KAU's Cultures," 110–111.

from the Devonshire Declaration of 1923, rather than repudiating it.²¹ From the mid-1950s, in the face of these pressures, however, African thinkers recast the potential of colonial rule, insisting on its ultimate destructiveness, and demanding that it be removed, a novel call. In the course of those elections, then, all but two of the sitting African members of the Legislative Council, nominees of the colonial administration, were rejected by the newly constituted electorate in favour of politicians who, whatever their differences, shared an emphasis on the absolute necessity of independence or *uhuru*.²²

This development took place, to develop the second significance of the Emergency, in a Kenya politically divided by Emergency-era policies. The colonial government, convinced of the subversive intent of the KAU, banned African political organisations in 1953. In 1955, such organisations were re-allowed, but only at the district level, leaving territory-wide parties out-of-bounds. Politically, then, Kenya was fragmented.²³ In this context, as calls for *uhuru* became increasingly loud, nationalist politicians at the centre of the colony, hemmed in by the restrictions of the 1950s, looked to the symbolic plane in their efforts to bring some sense of common purpose to the people of the colony.²⁴ Kenyatta's long history of involvement with African political organisations, as well as his national and international profile, made him a useful choice. It was, above all, the position he occupied at the time of his arrest that was emphasised, while the movement he was convicted in 1953 of managing, and his relationship with it, were glossed over.²⁵ In Tanganyika, where such restrictions did not apply, the politics of the period prior to the formation of the Tanganyika African National Union in 1954, in many respects similar to those of their northern neighbour, were largely forgotten, as a national movement was built (if not a sense of a shared national identity, which had deeper roots) through the restless movement of the party's leadership unfettered by the restriction to operate only at the local level. In Kenya, in a situation of enforced immobility, the image of Kenyatta, the

21 The Devonshire Declaration of 1923 stated that "if and when the interests of the indigenous people conflict with those of the immigrant races, those of the former shall prevail."

22 On constitutional reform generally in 1950s Kenya, see Robert M. Maxon, *Britain and Kenya's Constitutions* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2011). On the election, see Ogot, "The Decisive Years," 57–58; Maxon, *Britain and Kenya's Constitutions*, 118–121; Lynch, *I Say to You*, 60–61; and Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, 155–158.

23 On the politics of the period, see Keith Kyle, *The Politics of the Independence of Kenya* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999), Ch. 4.

24 On the nationalist movement and the need for a symbol, see Tom Mboya, *Freedom and After* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1963), 62–63.

25 Republic of Kenya, The National Assembly Official Report (*Hansard*), First Session, 1961, lxxvii, 87 and 94–102.

imprisoned political leader of Kenya's African people, as Oginga Odinga told the Legislative Council in 1958, was pushed to centre stage.²⁶

The image of Kenyatta, and the cause of his freedom, figured centrally in Kenyan politics over the following three years, as his incarceration continued. In the spring of 1961, for example, delegations of African politicians made well-publicised efforts to visit Kenyatta in detention.²⁷ His release, indeed, became the central issue of the election held in the April of that year, following which the largest African political party, KANU – the leadership of which Kenyatta assumed on his liberation in the following August – refused to form a government until Kenyatta was released.²⁸ And while their opponents in the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU), proved willing to form a minority government with Kenyatta still detained, they justified their actions, in part, on the grounds that it was easier to fight for Kenyatta's release from a position of strength, and chastised their opponents for their apparent attempts to turn a national symbol – their “beloved leader” Kenyatta – to party political ends.²⁹

After his release, Kenyatta's image became no less central. Half a century before students in South Africa and (then) Britain insisted that Rhodes Must Fall, and similarly animated by the need to Africanise the symbolic landscape, to cultivate an environment befitting an independent African nation, a rebuke to colonial racism and an assertion of the dignity of all human beings, the KANU government made moves in the weeks preceding Kenya's independence on 12th December 1963, to remove statues of colonial figures in Nairobi and to erase their names from Kenya's roads, moves which raised not a whisper of (public) dissent.³⁰ In this effort, Kenyatta's name and image figured centrally.³¹ What

26 Oginga Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru: An Autobiography* (London: Heinemann, 1967), 156–157. See also *Hansard*, First Session, 1961, lxxxvii, 85, & 87–88. On Tanganyika, see G.G. Hajivayanis, A.C. Mtowa and John Iliffe, “The Politicians: Ali Ponda and Hassan Suleiman,” in *Modern Tanzanians: A Volume of Biographies*, ed. John Iliffe (Nairobi: East African Publication House, 1973), 227–253.

27 Kyle, *Politics of the Independence of Kenya*, 127.

28 Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru*, Ch. 11; David Anderson, “‘Yours in Struggle for *Majimbo*’: Nationalism and the Party Politics of Decolonisation in Kenya, 1955–64,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 3 (2005): 552–553.

29 *Hansard*, First Session, 1961, lxxxvii, 71, 105 & 122–124.

30 For an introduction to the aims of these movements, see Amit Chaudri, “The Real Meaning of Rhodes Must Fall,” *The Guardian*, 16 March 2016, accessed 2 December 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/mar/16/the-real-meaning-of-rhodes-must-fall>; And specifically for South Africa, see https://jwtc.org.za/resources/docs/salon-volume-9/RMF_Combined.pdf; And for Britain, see RMFOxford #RhodesMustFall, accessed 2 December 2020, <https://rmfoxford.wordpress.com/about/>. On the need to place the demand that the statues be removed into his-

had been Delamere Avenue in central Nairobi, for example, named in honour of Kenya's most famous settler, became Kenyatta Avenue in time for independence day, named in honour of Kenya's most famous son.³² And, likewise, the postcard designed to commemorate Kenya's *uhuru*, an independent nation's literal greeting to the wider world, depicted Kenyatta dressed in a pinstripe suit, with hat and tie in national colours, sat on a chair clutching his famous fly whisk in his beringed hands, while the *Daily Nation's* independence day edition opened with a similar full page portrait of Kenya's leader, the very embodiment of the new nation.³³

In these final years of empire, occasional reference was made to 20th October and its significance. On his return from the final Lancaster House Conference in 1963, which coincided with the anniversary of his detention, for example, Kenyatta told a rally of, reportedly, 150,000 people, that "October 20 was the most important day in the history of Africa in general and of Kenya in particular." On this day "eleven years ago," he explained, "the imperialists felt that they had silenced the Kenyans never to shout *Uhuru* any more [sic]."³⁴ Nonetheless, beyond such rhetoric, in the years after 1958 little effort had been made to mark the occasion. As independence approached, however, the KANU government promulgated the day as a national holiday, designated no longer as Freedom Day or National Day, but as *Kenyatta Day*, to be celebrated from 1964 onwards, an occasion that came, over the course of the following almost fifty years, to be marked by a remarkable continuity in ritual and form.³⁵

torical perspective, see David Priestland, "The University of Cape Town is Right to Remove its Cecil Rhodes Statue," *The Guardian*, 13 April 2015, accessed 2 December 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/13/cape-town-remove-cecil-rhodes-statue>.

31 As, for example, did Kwame Nkrumah's in Ghana. On this, and the subsequent history of this image, see Kodzo Gavua, "Monuments and Negotiations of Power in Ghana," in Peterson, Gavua, and Rassool, *The Politics of Heritage in Africa*, 97–112. In Tanzania, by contrast, Julius Nyerere's name only came to be used in this way after his presidency and, in particular, after his death in 1999. Similarly, the public holiday which bears his name marks the day of his passing (14th October). See: Fouere, "Julius Nyerere," 7–8; "Nyerere Resists Renaming of Street," *Tanzanian Affairs*, 148 (1994) accessed 14 March 2021, <https://www.tzaffairs.org/1994/05/nyerere-resists-renaming-of-street/>.

32 "Delamere Avenue No More," *Daily Nation*, 5 December 1963, 1.

33 Photo, no title, *Daily Nation*, 5 December 1963, 5; Photo, no title; *Daily Nation*, 12 December 1963, 1. On Kenyatta's rings, see interview with his wife, Mama Ngina: C. Mwagiru, "Kenyatta the Family Man," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1994, Kenyatta Day Special Supplement, 2–3.

34 "150,000 Roar a Welcome to Mzee," *Daily Nation*, 21 October 1963, 1.

35 "Delamere Avenue No More," *Daily Nation*, 5 December 1963, 1.

The First Liberation: Proponents

Rituals of state remembrance were, then, a prominent feature of postcolonial Kenyan life, Kenyatta Day inscribed in the national calendar as a public holiday even before the formal arrival of independence and celebrated each year by an elaborate state ritual. Around its edges, the day was marked by various sporting events bearing Kenyatta's name, including the Kenyatta Cup. It also became associated with an initiative, originating with the Ministry of Health on the occasion of the first Kenyatta Day in 1964, to persuade people to donate blood – giving “blood for Kenya – 1964 style,” as the *Daily Nation* described it, a post-independence counterpart to the sacrifices of their forbearers.³⁶ The heart of the annual celebrations, however, was a series of state-led rallies. On a timetable that changed little between the mid-1960s and the late 2000s, a presidential motorcade wended its way through central Nairobi, in its early years, cheered by significant crowds, stopping briefly after 1978 so that Kenyatta's successor might visit his mausoleum.³⁷ At its destination, the President delivered the speech that was the centre point of the day, outlining some theme judged to be significant to the coming year.³⁸ These celebrations in Nairobi were replicated across the country, with smaller rallies held in administrative centres and sports stadiums, where local dignitaries and officials made speeches to mark the occasion, their details reported in brief in the national press, and where one local official or another read the President's speech to the assembled crowd. In their form, these rallies drew on longstanding tradition of *barazas*, in theory a colonial adaptation of an indigenous practice, *local* meetings at which technical or state officials conveyed information to those called to the meeting, a form widely used by both colonial and postcolonial administrations.³⁹ There was no colonial precedent, however, for the coordination of these meetings in this way, for a “national *baraza*,” a truly postcolonial innovation. As we shall see, however, the significance of this symbolism shifted with the stories that were told about Kenyatta Day and its meaning.

36 T. Hall, “The Tribute,” *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1964, 2.

37 “Kenya Turns Out to Cheer Premier,” *Daily Nation*, 21 October 1964, 2. “Joyous Drive Through the City,” *Daily Nation*, 21 October 1968, 11.

38 Initially this destination was the Kamukunji stadium, the site of Kenya's independence day celebrations, before the event moved to Uhuru Park in the late 1960s and to the Nyayo stadium in the 1980s.

39 Angelique Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Ch.4.

Four successive stories about Kenyatta and the day dedicated to him were developed between independence and the late 1990s, two by figures associated with the state and two by their critics. Each of these stories had a particular focus on the 1950s, and each reworked elements of older stories, adding new significances and new understandings, as layers, rather than outright or directly replacing earlier versions. The following two sections trace the contours of these stories as they appeared in the pages of national newspapers, the circumstances in which they were offered, and by whom, and the ends which it was hoped they would serve.

At independence, the new Kenyan government faced an apparently urgent problem: how to shore up, or perhaps even create, a widely shared sense of national identity, the necessary glue of the “unity” that was widely understood to be essential if the people of the newly independent state were to maintain a true independence in the modern world of superpowers.⁴⁰ This need was rendered more urgent still in Kenya by the divisiveness of the 1950s and its legacies. Kenya in the wake of Mau Mau was a post-conflict society, the legacy of rebellion a potential social fissure. Recruitment of both Kikuyu and members of other ethnic groups into the “loyalist” Home Guard created obvious social divisions. Many people, moreover, accepted the British “tribalist” argument that Mau Mau sought to eject the British in order to install their own ethnocracy, while the image of the oath, and the spectre of sorcery it invoked, led some to fear that the Kikuyu took “illegal oaths” and therefore “we do not know... what they do at night.”⁴¹ Social trust was hard to build. Nor, indeed, did the divisiveness of the final years of colonial rule end with the Emergency. In the almost four years between the first Lancaster House conference in January 1960 and Kenya’s achievement of independence on 12th December 1963, the battle between the two political parties which fought for control of the independent state, KANU and KADU, was rancorous, plagued by prophecies of civil war, a future “ocean of blood,”⁴² as one correspondent told the Regional Boundaries Commission in 1962, the fear that

⁴⁰ See e.g. Mboya, *Freedom and After*, 87; R. Day, “What is Dividing Them,” *Daily Nation*, 28 November 1961, 6; J.B.A. Ohanga, “Forum,” *Jicho*, 27 July 1960, 3; S.K. Kimalel, “Tribal Groups,” *East African Standard*, 1 July 1960, 3.

⁴¹ John Lonsdale, “Moral and Political Argument in Kenya,” in *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*, eds. Bruce Berman, Dickson Eyoh and Will Kymlicka (Oxford: James Currey, 2004), 85; Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, 179–180. C. K. Mulela et al., ‘*Hatutaki Ubeberu Mwingine*,’ *Taifa Leo*, 27 February 1961, 3; TNA CO 897/7, “Meeting with a delegation from the Kalenjin Political Alliance,” 29 August 1962, 150.

⁴² TNA CO 897/4, (Kenya Regional Boundaries Commission: Papers. Memoranda Nyanza Province Vol.1 Nos. 1–68), Memorandum of the Nyanza and Rift Valley Uasin Gishu Union to the Governor of Kenya, 20 July 1962, 2.

Kenya might become a second Congo, East Africa's tragedy.⁴³ This history was, as Kenyatta frequently suggested, difficult.⁴⁴ There was much that seemed worth forgetting.⁴⁵

There were deeper questions, too, about how a national identity could be legitimately constructed, questions which underpinned the battle between KANU and KADU. The Kenyan postcolonial state was a latecomer in the game of identity making, the fate of communities the central topic of public argument across the previous two decades. In that period, thinkers in Kenya had imagined the existence of a range of communities. In general, however, they had argued that the most significant and demanding were ethnic.⁴⁶ Kenya was, as Kenyatta put it in 1964, the "United Nations in miniature."⁴⁷ In this context, in the early 1960s, the central question in Kenyan political thought was: how to create a sustainable unity in the face of honourable and legitimate diversity? As independence approached, supporters of both parties made clear that the accepted need for Kenyan unity could not be allowed to write out of existence legitimate ethnic difference, difference which was widely seen to be both valuable in itself and the only possible basis for the creation of a moral and prosperous Kenyan state, peopled by citizens concerned with corporate flourishing and prepared to work hard for the future. "[I]f governments tried to destroy tribal cultures and customs, languages and ethnical [sic] groupings," wrote Tom Mboya in 1963, giving voice to this consensus, "they would create such a vacuum that the African might find he had nothing to stand upon and [would, therefore,] become a most bewildered person in this modern world." Cosmopolitan liberalism, on this view, threatened only anarchy. Belonging was the necessary basis of creative moral agency. Provided, therefore, that "negative tribalism" was avoided, Mboya argued, "the structure of interdependence within the [ethnic] community, where each man knows he has certain responsibilities and duties and where there are certain sanctions against those who do not fulfil expectations" would provide "the discipline, self-reliance and stability needed in new nations."⁴⁸ The

⁴³ On the Congo, see J.B.A. Ohanga, "Forum," *Jicho*, 27 July 1960, 3; Mboya, *Freedom and After*, 58–59; Kenyatta himself made such a reference in his speech on his return from the Lancaster House Conference in October 1963. See: "150,000 Roar a Welcome to Mzee," *Daily Nation*, 21 October 1963, 1.

⁴⁴ A key theme, for example, in the speech Kenyatta gave on the eve of the first Kenyatta Day, on which see T. Hall, "Kenya's Tribute to the Premier," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1964, 1.

⁴⁵ Clough, "Mau Mau and the Contest for Memory," 256.

⁴⁶ See Goodman, "Us in the Time of Strangers," Chs. 2 & 4 and Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism*.

⁴⁷ Jomo Kenyatta, *Suffering Without Bitterness: The Founding of the Kenyan Nation* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968), 247.

⁴⁸ Mboya, *Freedom and After*, 67–70.

first story of Kenyatta Day and its significance was shaped by these two pressures.

Between independence and the early 1970s, on the days around 20th October newspapers typically contained potted histories of the key events of the President's life – his role in Kikuyu politics in the 1920s, his activities in England in the 1930s and 1940s, his leadership of KAU, and, in more detail, his detention and trial in 1952 – published pictures of both Kenyatta's life and the Kenyatta Day celebrations, and covered, sometimes including full transcripts, Kenyatta's speech, the centre point of the day. In this period, in a climate in which the government placed huge pressure on the press to support its agenda and avoid opposition, pressure which created a culture of significant press self-censorship, it was left to figures associated with KANU and the state to add the gloss to these accounts, establishing the significance of the day, and the significance of Kenyatta.⁴⁹

In the late 1950s, as nationalists in Kenya promoted the figure of Kenyatta, they had tended to emphasise the negative effects of the incarceration of their legitimate leaders by exploitative foreigners bent on perpetuating their tyranny. In the early years after independence, Kenyatta assumed a new significance. Two aspects were emphasised. In the first place, the President's life showed, as Tom Mboya suggested in 1964, Kenyatta's "consciousness" of Kenya's problems over a long period of time – long, Mboya noted, before he himself (then only in his 30s) had been born. Kenyatta's career stood, Mboya made clear, as a model of service and dedication to the national cause. "Each country has its hero," he asserted, "whose utterances, whose actions, whose very life inspires the youth of the country. For Kenyans," he claimed, "this person is Kenyatta."⁵⁰ Kenyatta was, said a KANU spokesman in 1969, as his long career made clear, "the living spirit of unending readiness to sacrifice and work for Kenya's progress, and of faith in the future of our country."⁵¹ Kenyatta stood, therefore, as proof of the possibility that ethnic particularity could be transcended, an inspiration to national service.

The second gloss that tended to be added focussed more closely on the events of 20th October 1952. Oginga Odinga, speaking at a Kenyatta Day rally in Nakuru in 1964, drew attention to the significance of the day when he urged his audience to the "spirit of unity" which, he insisted, had gripped

⁴⁹ On the press, see Mboya, *Freedom and After*, 100–101; and Charles Hornsby, *Kenya: A History Since Independence* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 113–114, 175 & 212.

⁵⁰ "A Premier to be Proud of," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1964, 2.

⁵¹ "A Symbol of Sacrifice, Faith and Defiance," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1969, 10.

Kenya in the wake of Kenyatta's arrest.⁵² Kenyatta Day was, a party spokesman explained in 1969, developing the idea, "a symbol [...] not merely of the elemental human right which underlies a nation's independence, *but also of all the impulses which must spring from such a moment.*"⁵³ On this reading, Kenyatta's arrest was a moment of national birth, the inspiration for the actions of (generally) unnamed patriots across Kenya who in its wake dedicated themselves to working for Kenya's independence, Kenyatta the source of the wider, and disparate, energies which brought down colonial rule. In this story, these figures, the detailed history of the 1950s, or sense of the dynamic which brought colonial rule to its end, remained shadowy, elided in favour of what (apparently) united these efforts: the inspirational figure of Kenyatta. Remembering and forgetting, then, were two parts of the same coin. In this way, the story both allowed space for local histories and local initiative, for valued and valuable difference, and avoided the rawness of the divisions which pocked the 1950s. Kenyatta was the figure that demonstrated the possibility of national unity, while the moment of his arrest was the fount of Kenya's sense of nationhood. On this reading, the "national *baraza*" of Kenyatta Day, can be seen, in a sense, as the re-enactment and reendorsement of this dynamic: with Kenyatta at the centre and the nation arranged around him, Kenya was symbolically re-born and re-dedicated on this day.⁵⁴

In the years immediately after independence, then, Kenyatta Day was supposed to help develop a Kenyan national identity. From the early 1970s, however, state sources began to develop a further emphasis, the second story of Kenyatta Day. The background to this new emphasis was the growth of opposition to Kenyatta's regime from the mid-1960s.⁵⁵ In 1966, Oginga Odinga left KANU to set up a new political party, the Kenya People's Union (KPU) asserting the need for a more redistributive politics. Ethnic tensions, moreover, flared across the country in 1969, in the aftermath of the assassination of Tom Mboya, the victim, it appears, of an intense jockeying for position in the battle to succeed the elderly Kenyatta. Twice in that year, furthermore, Kenyatta found himself physically at-

52 "'Now a Re-birth of Unity', says Mr Odinga," *Daily Nation*, 21 October 1964, 2. See also "Always Remember This Day," *Daily Nation*, 21 October 1966, 27.

53 "A Symbol of Sacrifice, Faith and Defiance," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1969, 10. Emphasis added.

54 "'Now a Re-birth of Unity', says Mr Odinga," *Daily Nation*, 21 October 1964, 2. "A Symbol of Sacrifice, Faith and Defiance," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1969, 10. "Why We Celebrate Kenyatta Day," *East African Standard*, 20 October 1972, 8.

55 On discontent and opposition to Kenyatta's government, see Githuku, *Mau Mau, Crucible of War*, Ch. 5.

tacked by crowds, supporters of the KPU, in one instance, and Luo angry in the wake of Mboya's murder in the other.⁵⁶ In 1971, adding to this sense of threat, evidence was uncovered of an imminent, albeit un-credible, coup.⁵⁷ And across the first half of the 1970s, a small group of radical MPs, led by the charismatic J.M. Kariuki, attacked the record of the Kenyatta government, while in the wake of J.M.'s murder in 1975, students held spirited demonstrations against the regime – which included efforts by those at Kenyatta University in Nairobi to remove the President's name from the institution's name plaque, much to Kenyatta's disgust.⁵⁸

In these circumstances, Kenyatta's government took various steps to shore up its authority, including placing a new emphasis on the significance of 20th October.⁵⁹ "Kenyatta Day," explained the Minister of Commerce, Gikonyo Kiano, in 1975, "serves to remind us of the supreme *sacrifice* that *Mzee* Kenyatta made so that we the people of Kenya might be free from British colonialism."⁶⁰ A similar emphasis was placed by KANU's Nairobi branch, which claimed that "It is a result of torture, and persecution through which *Mzee* Kenyatta and the rest underwent...that brought about the *uhuru* we are enjoying now [sic]."⁶¹ Kenyatta, it was emphasised, had "suffered so that Kenyans can be free." This sacrifice, it was implied, bred an obligation of personal loyalty to the President, a debt incurred by Kenya's population, and the 20th October was cast as "a day to redemonstrate their loyalty, love and respect for the man who inspired the struggle for *Uhuru*."⁶² Kenyatta Day was, as a 1972 editorial in the *East African Standard* put it, "a personal day. Personal to President Kenyatta."⁶³

This emphasis on loyalty was, from the early 1970s, a central part of the commemoration. While occasional examples of the genre can be found before this point, from the early 1970s and throughout the 1980s, bridging the divide

56 Daniel Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963–2011* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 78–81 and 87–88.

57 Ibid, 102.

58 Hornsby, *Kenya*, 223–224, 270, 274 & 283–286. Branch, *Kenya*, 117. Githuku, *Mau Mau Crucible of War*, 267–276. Kenyatta's parliamentary critics featured prominently in the speech he gave on Kenyatta Day in 1972, on which see: F. Nyanga and O. Mak'Onyango, *East African Standard*, "President Hits [sic] at MPs Who Belittle Kenya," 21 October 1972, 1.

59 On their wider efforts, see Branch, *Kenya*, 102–103 & 118. Hornsby, *Kenya*, 211–212.

60 "Thousands to Attend Big *Uhuru* Park Rally," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1975, 1. Emphasis added.

61 "All Set for Rally," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1975, unnumbered back page.

62 "A Proud Day for Kenyans," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1975, 9. See also Hansard, Fourth Session, 1973, xxxi, 1288–1289, and Githuku, *Mau Mau Crucible of War*, 273.

63 "Day of Re-Dedication," *East African Standard*, 21 October 1972, 8.

between the Kenyatta and Moi regimes, the *Daily Nation* often carried prominent declarations of loyalty, sometimes on the front page of the newspaper, from figures associated with the state – ministers, diplomats and so on – the public display of these declarations intended to offer to the wider public a model for their own behaviour and to convince them of the futility of opposition.⁶⁴ And in 1989, the connection between remembrance and loyalty was cemented as 10th October, the anniversary of Moi's ascension to the presidency, was designated a national holiday in the name of Kenyatta's successor.⁶⁵ In this era then, the “national *baraza*” of Kenyatta Day, looked to be less about the enacting of horizontal bonds than the ceremonial acclamation of a glorious leader, a reinforcement of hierarchy.⁶⁶ As we shall see in the next section, however, in the 1990s this emphasis became the subject of vociferous criticism.

The Second Liberation: Critics

Authoritarian as they were, the Kenyatta and Moi regimes had never succeeded in silencing their critics. Central to the thinking of successive opponents of the government, from the KPU in the second half of the 1960s, to J.M. Kariuki and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in the 1970s, had been the memory of Mau Mau and, in particular, the claim that Mau Mau fighters had been disregarded and left impoverished by Kenya's postcolonial governments, the means by which critics of those governments had drawn attention to the inequality that marked Kenyan society and to their wider calls for the greater redistribution of wealth.⁶⁷ In the 1990s in Kenya, as in other parts of the world, however, arguments about the nature of the past took on both a new urgency and a new focus in the course of the (at-

⁶⁴ For an early example, see “Armed Forces Greet the President,” *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1966, 1. For typical later examples see, e.g. “Thousands to Attend Big Uhuru Park Rally,” *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1975, 1; R. Irungu, “Kiambu is Behind KANU All the Way,” *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1975, un-numbered back page; “Mzee Remembered: Kenyatta Day Messages Galore,” *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1983, 4; “President Receives Congratulations,” *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1985, 1. See also *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1986, 12; and Hornsby, *Kenya*, 401.

⁶⁵ See: *Daily Nation*, 10 October 1989.

⁶⁶ On the political economy of authoritarianism, see Daniel Branch and Nic Cheeseman, “Democratization, Sequencing and State-Failure in Africa: Lessons from Kenya,” *African Affairs* 108, no. 430 (2008): 1–26.

⁶⁷ Clough, “Mau Mau and the Contest for Memory,” 256–259. Branch, “Search for the Remains,” 308–310.

tempted) democratic transition, Kenya's "second liberation."⁶⁸ The memory of the rebellion continued to be mobilised by critics of Moi's regime, not now principally as a prop to arguments about the need for economic redistribution, but, as the heart of a somewhat wider pantheon of independence heroes, with a new emphasis on the dangerous absences that marked Kenya's state memory regime.⁶⁹ For roughly the first thirty years of Kenya's postcolonial history, then, it was voices connected with the state which publicly defined the significance of 20th October. From the early 1990s, in the context of political flux, new actors began to develop new narratives, the third and fourth stories of Kenyatta Day.

As Moi's regime became increasingly oppressive and authoritarian in the tough economic conditions of the 1980s, opposition, associated most closely with the Law Society of Kenya and the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK), began to grow.⁷⁰ Kenya's single party state, Oginga Odinga claimed in 1987, breaking his long public near silence and giving voice to this opposition, "stifled" "public debate of national issues" and "genuine constructive criticism of the Government." If the KANU government would not allow space for criticism within the party, he asserted, then room should be created for alternative political parties, a necessary step, it came to be argued in a state that had not seen multi-party politics since 1969, to make government accountable to the people, the servant rather than the master.⁷¹ While momentum initially proved difficult to build, opponents of Moi were galvanised in the early 1990s by the fall of the Soviet Union, an event which both inspired opposition forces across the world to believe that authoritarian regimes could collapse and fall, and changed the global geo-political landscape, encouraging critics of Moi internally and externally. When, asked Rev. Timothy Njoya, in a sermon delivered on 1st January 1990, would the changes seen in Eastern Europe make themselves felt in Kenya?⁷²

68 See Duncan Bell, "Introduction: Memory, Trauma and World Politics," in *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship Between Past and Present*, ed. Duncan Bell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 19–20; and Branch, "Search for the Remains of Dedan Kimathi," 310–311.

69 For compelling critiques of Mau Mau's central place, see Bethwell A. Ogot, "Mau Mau and Nationhood: The Untold Story," in *Mau Mau and Nationhood*, eds. E.S. Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), 8–36; and Lottie Hughes, "Memorialisation and Mau Mau: A Critical Review," in *Dedan Kimathi on Trial: Colonial Justice and Popular Memory in Kenya's Mau Mau Rebellion*, ed. Julie MacArthur (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2017), 339–374.

70 See Branch, *Kenya*, 162. For a detailed consideration of both the Churches and opposition to Moi more generally, see Githuku, *Mau Mau Crucible of War*, Ch. 6.

71 Hornsby, *Kenya*, 405, 471–472, 475, 478 & 480. Githuku, *Mau Mau Crucible of War*, 335–337.

72 Hornsby, *Kenya*, 471–472.

The minister's prayers were soon answered. In the post-Soviet world, external patrons, and above all the United States, began to look more critically at African regimes, including Kenya's, convinced now that economic sclerosis was the progeny of authoritarian politics. External pressure for reform, meanwhile, emboldened Moi's domestic opponents, and in early 1991 the first attempts were made to create opposition political parties. In turn, the Moi regime's clampdown on their internal critics, infamously on *saba saba*, the bloody 7th July 1990, provoked international censure, most seriously for the incumbent government in November 1991, when the announcement that aid would be suspended pending internal reform, quickly led Moi to officially re-allow multi-party politics and to announce that elections would be held in the following year.⁷³

As public opposition to Moi's regime grew and multi-party politics was conceded, opponents of the government began to rethink Kenyatta Day, and the nation's public remembrance more widely, breaking the state's monopoly on the story of the day's significance. The press itself was an important part of this process, as the culture of self-censorship which characterised the first three decades of Kenya's independence broke down, and the *Daily Nation* began to emerge as the informal voice of the opposition, happier now both to uncover scandal and voice dissenting opinions.⁷⁴ One symptom of this shift was the erosion in the press of the imagery of the "national *baraza*" of Kenyatta Day, with the president at the centre and the nation arranged around him, which had in the past stood as a support to the horizontal bonds of national unity and the vertical bonds of loyalty to the state that the day was supposed to foster. In the 1990s, by contrast, local celebrations, so important in the ritual of the day, came to be represented as contested sites, occasions at which political opponents, or factions, battled, while the very appearance of reports on provincial events in the national press became increasingly dependent on the public playing out – often with a significant element of farce – of these disputes. In 1992, for example, the *Daily Nation* reported that "members of the public" walked out of Kenyatta Day celebrations at Kangema Stadium as a local official began to read the President's speech.⁷⁵ Two years later, a report described how a KANU official and a chief fought publicly after the "former was denied time to address *wananchi* at [the] Baricho Stadium in Kirinyanga."⁷⁶ And in 2000, the *Daily Nation* reported, the mayor of Nakuru was forced to drive to local celebrations in his personal car

⁷³ Ibid, 405–487.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 524.

⁷⁵ "Occasion Marred by Walk-Out," *Daily Nation*, 21 October 1992, 5.

⁷⁶ "Chief, KANU Man Exchange Blows," *Daily Nation*, 21 October 1994, 4.

after councillors removed the wheels of his official limousine, accusing him of misusing it.⁷⁷

More broadly, while in the early 1990s, coverage of Kenyatta Day in newspapers continued to include histories of Kenyatta's life and career, space began to be given to new, non-state, voices to outline the significance of the day. Strikingly, in 1992, as the first multi-party elections in a generation loomed, the *Daily Nation* carried extensive interviews with members of the Kapenguria Six, speaking to them about both their experiences in the 1950s and their thoughts on contemporary Kenya and the territory's postcolonial trajectory.⁷⁸ Given the multiple voices involved, there was space in these accounts for tensions and disagreements in their subject's understanding of the world in which they lived and its formation. But, across these interviews, in both their form – the novelty of the decision to seek out these voices on this occasion – and their content, a recurring and significant theme was beginning to be developed: that Kenya's ritual of remembrance was inadequate, that the nation's heroes had been *officially* forgotten. As Achieng' Oneko, for example, "described" the situation in his interview, "the freedom fighters who are alive today are a disillusioned lot, who have to toe the line to win favours and recognition from the Government" – an old complaint now given a fresh significance.⁷⁹

In the state's 1960s version of Kenyatta Day, as we have seen, this was a conscious absence. In the 1990s it was recast as an ethical failure, the abandonment, specifically and importantly by the postcolonial elite, of the battle for in-

77 "Leaders in War of Words at Meeting," *Daily Nation*, 21 October 2000, 3. See also "Leaders Told Not to Incite Public," *Daily Nation*, 21 October 1992, 4; "Chaos Mar [sic] PC's Speech," *Daily Nation*, 21 October 1997, 4; "Mayor in Struggle with DO at Rally," *Daily Nation*, 21 October 2000, 2. Contrast with, e.g., "Kenyans United in Hailing President," *Daily Nation*, 21 October 1968, 4; "Parades, Dances and Speeches Mark Kenyatta Day in Provinces," *East African Standard*, 21 October 1972, 9.

78 See G. Njihia, "Harbour No Bitterness, Urges Uhuru Veteran," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1992, Kenyatta Day Special Supplement, 2–3; J. Githinji, "Down But Not Out....," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1992, Kenyatta Day Special Supplement, 19; W. Nderitu, "A Widow Reflects on the Lot of Forgotten Heroes," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1992, Kenyatta Day Special Supplement, 21 and 23. The newspaper also carried an interview with Michael Blundell, see T. Sittoni, "A Look into the Past, Present and the Future," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1992, Kenyatta Day Special Supplement, 15, 16 and 17. See also the interview with Fred Kubai published on Moi Day: M. Njuguna, "Heroes of Uhuru Suffering Without Bitterness," *Daily Nation*, 10 October 1992, 16–17.

79 G. Njihia, "Harbour No Bitterness, Urges Uhuru Veteran," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1992, Kenyatta Day Special Supplement, 2. On the history of the complaint, see E.S. Atieno Odhiambo, "Matunda ya Uhuru, Fruits of Independence: Seven Theses on Nationalism in Kenya," in *Mau Mau and Nationhood*, eds. E.S. Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), 38–39; and Hughes, "Memorialisation and Mau Mau," 348.

dependence, the most significant episode in Kenya's history, and, it followed, of the national interest more generally, their unwillingness to acknowledge their debts to history, in whose shadow they paled, linked to their alleged failures in the contemporary world. In an important sense, this forgetfulness was not merely symptomatic of the ills opposition figures diagnosed in contemporary Kenya, but *constitutive* of them: state elites, they held, abandoned the nation's past, and so its present and future, any sense of national community.

This injunction to remember, and its significance, the attempted recovery of a past officially forgotten, quickly exploded in the Kenya of this time, and continued to be publicly lamented by Moi's critics across the decade and beyond.⁸⁰ Above all, this lamentation was marked by a new concern with not only the lives of so-called national heroes, but with their deaths. Opposition MPs in parliament, for example, influenced in part by on-going arguments in other parts of the continent,⁸¹ made recurring calls for this failure to be rectified through the dedication of a "Heroes Acre" or "Square" in Nairobi, where, as an MP put it in 1993, "all prominent Kenyans, including politicians, should be buried," honouring those who had served the nation with distinction.⁸² The search for the remains of Dedan Kimathi, the Mau Mau field marshal executed by the British in 1957, and buried in a mass grave, began at this time, the cause taken up by civil society and MPs, and pursued across the next decade and half, all with the intention of giving him a fitting interment – "a state burial with due pomp and ceremony," as an MP put it in Parliament in 1993 – recognition in death.⁸³ And, reinforcing the link between remembering the past and right conduct in the present, the Law Society of Kenya, along with the Churches the vanguard of opposition to Moi's regime, in a statement made in late January 1994, reacting to the death of Oginga Odinga, took up both issues, "urg[ing] the Government to set aside land for the burial of national heroes," and noting that "the remains of the late freedom fighter Dedan Kimathi still lay in an unmarked grave."⁸⁴

The emphasis on official amnesia which emerged in the early 1990s remained the keystone of interest in Kenyatta Day into the next decade. From the mid-1990s, though, critics of Moi's regime, disappointed by the failure to lever him from power in the elections of 1992 and 1997, developed a new concern

⁸⁰ See also Ogot, "Mau Mau and Nationhood," 8–9.

⁸¹ For example, in Namibia and Zimbabwe, on which see: Ranger, "Politics of Memorialisation," 64–65, 69–71, and Coombes, "Monuments and Memories," 143.

⁸² *Hansard*, Second Session, 1993, ii, 1419.

⁸³ *Hansard*, Second Session, 1993, ii, 1420. On Kimathi, see Branch, "Search for the Remains of Dedan Kimathi," 301–320.

⁸⁴ "Honour Heroes, Says LSK," *Daily Nation*, 25 January 1994, 2.

with both the origins of, and the intentions behind, this amnesia, the final story of Kenyatta Day. Multi-party politics alone, it seemed, was not enough to ensure the country's "second liberation." Attention increasingly focussed on the arrogation of power in the hands of the president, and the process by which this had occurred, a recurring theme, for example, in articles reflecting on Kenya's post-colonial trajectory in the *Daily Nation's* special Kenyatta Day supplement in 1997.⁸⁵ Constitutional reform, some form of devolution designed to break the monopoly of power exercised by the Office of the President, and on the agenda of opposition forces since the mid-1980s, came in this context to acquire an ever greater significance, a necessary step, it was held, to permanently break Kenya's authoritarian postcolonial mould.⁸⁶ It was as part of these wider reflections on the power of the incumbent government in the wake of electoral defeat, that Moi's critics came to view, and attack, Kenyatta and Moi Days as an institutionalised form of non-recognition. While in 1992, the first article that appeared in the *Daily Nation's* Kenyatta Day special supplement could confidently begin with the assertion that the day, "could as well have been named 'heroes day' for October 20 commemorates the culmination of Kenya's struggle against colonial domination," following their electoral defeats, Moi's critics came increasingly to argue that the failure of recognition they identified was not an accident, but a deliberate concealment woven into the very fabric of remembrance.⁸⁷ If Kenya was to be permanently freed, then changes were needed in the nation's calendar of remembrance.

This institutional failure of recognition had, Moi's critics in civil society argued, two significant impacts. Giving voice to the first, in a lecture organised by the Citizen's Coalition for Constitutional Change (4Cs), the Kenya Human Rights Commission, and Muslims for Human Rights, clearly linking the event to wider demands for political reform in Kenya, and delivered in Mombasa on the eve of Kenyatta Day in 1997, the scholar Ali Mazrui demanded that "the Government do away with 'unnecessary' national holidays like the Kenyatta and Moi days," which were, he suggested "like the Queen's birthday." If, he went on, "the days were to be celebrated [...] *they should be renamed.*" "This naming of holidays *to celebrate individual achievements or lack of them,*" he insisted, "is an

⁸⁵ *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1997, Kenyatta Day Special Supplement, 10–15.

⁸⁶ Godwin R. Murunga, Duncan Okello and Anders Sjogren, "Towards a New Constitutional Order in Kenya: An Introduction," in *Kenya: The Struggle for a New Constitutional Order*, eds., Godwin R. Murunga, Duncan Okello and Anders Sjogren (London: Zed Books, 2014), 1–6; Branch, *Kenya*, 182.

⁸⁷ P. Ngugi, "Nationalists Remembered," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1992, Kenyatta Day Special Supplement, 1.

overflow of the Executive powers initiated during the post-colonial period. Naming a national day after a President who is still alive,” he lamented, “gives him enormous symbolic power. It should,” Mazrui concluded, “only be admissible under a constitutional monarchy, which Kenya is definitely not.”⁸⁸ The same point underpinned the public unwillingness of civil society organisations, including the “National Convention Executive Council and Church-led Ufungamano reforms initiative,” both centrally involved in the struggle for constitutional change, to recognise Kenyatta Day three years later.⁸⁹ The occasion – which they called “Mau Mau Day” and, in that year, dedicated to Bildad Kaggia – was, they claimed, “being celebrated in total disregard of those who participated in the fight for [the] country’s liberation.”⁹⁰ Pluralism, political and ritual, was the key to the future.

The official idolisation of the figures of Kenyatta and Moi, according to their civil society critics, not only gave authoritarian governments symbolic power but, by ignoring the wider history of the 1950s, deprived Kenya’s citizens of the critical resources they needed to defend their liberties, a double blow. The power of Kenya’s independence struggle was suggested, for example, by the lawyer, MP and longstanding critic of both the Kenyatta and Moi regimes, Wanyiri Kihoro, in a book titled *The Kapenguria Six* and quoted from at length in the *Daily Nation* on Kenyatta Day in 2006.⁹¹ In the story, which began and ended with a child asking the question “Why is today called Kenyatta Day?” a family was brought to tears as the curator of a museum narrated the histories of the five other men imprisoned with Kenyatta, an emotional reaction which suggested the power of the past to influence behaviour in the present.⁹² This history was far from mere dusty antiquarianism.

The connection was perhaps most clearly expressed by Willy Mutunga, an academic, founding member of 4Cs, stalwart of the opposition to Moi’s regime, and later chief justice, in his foreword to the recent book *Dedan Kimathi on Trial*:

⁸⁸ F. Thoya, “Govt. Incapable of Freedom – Mazrui,” *Daily Nation*, 20 October 1997, 32. Emphasis added. Whether or not this symbolic power was as effective as Mazrui, and others, assumed, is far from clear. Further research – a study of “Kenyatta Day from below” – is needed.

⁸⁹ On these organisations, see Wanjala S. Nasong’o, “Revisiting ‘the Two Faces of Civil Society’ in Constitutional Reform in Kenya,” in *Kenya: The Struggle for a New Constitutional Order*, eds., Goodwin R. Murunga, Duncan Okello and Anders Sjogren (London: Zed Books, 2014), 97–115.

⁹⁰ “Plea to Honour Uhuru Heroes,” *Daily Nation*, 21 October 2000, 2. See also M. Wachira, “Kenyans Remember Freedom Heroes as Calls for Name Change Persist,” *Daily Nation*, 20 October 2006, 7.

⁹¹ On Kihoro, see Hornsby, *Kenya*, 416 & 464.

⁹² M. Wachira, “Kenyans Remember Freedom Heroes as Calls for Name Change Persist,” *Daily Nation*, 20 October 2006, 7.

Colonial Justice and Popular Memory in Kenya's Mau Mau Rebellion.⁹³ "As Kenya looks to its future," he wrote, "it must also look to its past and return dignity and honour to the freedom fighters *whose struggle for justice and human rights we carry on in the present*."⁹⁴ On this understanding, those who fought in the 1990s and beyond against authoritarianism and for a new constitutional order continued the work of, and were inspired by the example of, their ancestors. The ability of Kenya's people to affect change in the present, their agency as citizens, was, on this reading, the product of their historical consciousness. Thinking in his 1938 ethnography *Facing Mount Kenya* about the corrosive impact of colonialism on African life, Jomo Kenyatta had written that it was "the culture he inherits that gives man his human dignity [...] teaches him his mental and moral values and makes him feel it is worth while [sic] to work and fight for liberty."⁹⁵ For Moi's critics sixty years later, engagement with a storied history, now focussed on the years immediately preceding independence, was, likewise, the foundation stone of active citizenship.⁹⁶

Both the need for pluralism and a galvanising history led Moi's critics to demand that the state's pattern of remembrance was re-dedicated and re-made, that Kenyatta Day give way to Heroes Day. Alongside the call that the nation's heroes should be recognised through the dedication of Heroes' Square, this demand came to be frequently articulated in the late 1990s and early 2000s, before the victors of the 2002 election, longstanding critics of the Moi government, inscribed the re-dedication of 20th October to the nation's heroes in the both the draft constitution that was offered and rejected in a 2005 referendum and the version that was ultimately accepted in 2010, at which point, Kenyatta Day was no more.⁹⁷

⁹³ On Mutunga, see Nasong'o, "'Revisiting 'the Two Faces of Civil Society' in Constitutional Reform in Kenya," 101 & 110.

⁹⁴ Willy Mutunga, "Introductory Note," in *Dedan Kimathi on Trial: Colonial Justice and Popular Memory in Kenya's Mau Mau Rebellion*, ed. Julie MacArthur (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2017), xi. Emphasis added.

⁹⁵ Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (New York: Random House, 1965), 304.

⁹⁶ Contrast with the attitude of the aid industry and "developers" to history described in Terence Ranger, "Africa in the Age of Extremes: The Irrelevance of African History," in *Rethinking African History*, eds. Simon McGrath, Charles Jedrej, Kenneth King and Jack Thompson (Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies, 1997), 269–291.

⁹⁷ For the linking of the two demands, see, e.g. *Hansard*, 2 November 2006, 3370–3372. On links with constitutional reform, see, e.g., K. Mutunga, "The Essential Jomo Kenyatta," *Daily Nation*, 20 October 2006, Weekend Supplement, 2; Robert Nyagah, "Kenyans to Celebrate First *Mashujaa* Day," *Daily Nation*, 19 October 2010, accessed 2 December 2020, <http://www.nation.co.ke/>

Conclusion

Kenyatta and his connection to 20th October first came to prominence in 1958, as African thinkers recast the potential of colonial rule as the impact of the second colonial occupation bit and, in the shadow of Emergency-era restrictions, sought a national symbol that could unite Kenya's people. In 1963, the day was declared a national holiday by the KANU government, dedicated to Kenyatta. In these early postcolonial years, the state hoped the figure of Kenyatta would stand as proof of the viability of Kenyan nationhood, of the possibility of transcending ethnic difference, skirting the divisions of the 1950s, while leaving principled room for local initiatives and local histories. As Kenyatta's government came under pressure from the late 1960s, the target of growing opposition, his regime added a further gloss: Kenyatta had suffered so that Kenya's people might be free. This past, they insisted, bred an obligation of loyalty, an emphasis which came to characterise the period between the early 1970s and late 1980s, bridging the divide between the Kenyatta and Moi eras. In the 1990s, as opposition to Moi's regime burst into the open, the regime's critics, breaking the state's monopoly, and no less awed by the weight of history's ethical significance, recast again the day's meaning. The nation's heroes, figures beyond Kenyatta, they claimed, had been forgotten by postcolonial governments, this forgetfulness both evidence of and feeding their abandonment of the national interest, their turn to an authoritarian selfish individualism. Stung by their failure in successive elections to lever Moi from power, from the mid-1990s critics of his regime came to see this postcolonial failure of recognition not as a mere accident, but as woven into the very fabric of national commemoration. Days dedicated to Kenyatta and Moi were a deliberate ploy by authoritarian governments to symbolically reinforce their authority at the expense of the critical discussion, the opposition, that healthy society required. The ghosts of Kenyatta's loyalists might have nodded in acknowledgement. The key to the future, Moi's critics suggested, was pluralism, something which required not only the devolution of power and the smashing of the dominance of the Office of the President, but a symbolic democratisation and the cultivation of historical consciousness. Moi and Kenyatta Days, it was argued, should be cast into oblivion, and in their place a more inclusive Heroes' Day raised up, as it was with the promulgation of the 2010 con-

news/1056-1036222-15ao6qs/index.html. On the search for hero(ine)s, see Coombes, "Monuments and Memories."

stitution. Whether their high hopes of this symbolic re-dedication of 20th October will be met, however, remains to be seen.⁹⁸

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⁹⁸ On these hopes, see Willy Mutunga, “Foreword: Timothy is Leah and Leah is Timothy,” in *We the People: Thinking Heavenly, Acting Kenyanly*, T. Njoya (Nairobi: WorldAlive Publishers, 2017).

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