Introduction

October 20, Mashujaa Day (Heroes' Day), celebrates Kenya's heroes who contributed to the struggle for independence. It commemorates the declaration of the Emergency by the British colonial government in 1952, in the midst of the Mau Mau violent uprising, and the arrest of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, who was accused of leading the Mau Mau movement. Some sixty years later, on October 20, 2015, as I sat in a local canteen in Makutano town, Meru district, an old television high up on the wall was showing the British documentary "End of Empire. Chapter 12: Kenya."[1] One could hear the late politicians Bildad Kaggia and Fred Kubai, who were arrested by the British government alongside Kenyatta on October 20, 1952, affirming in an interview that Jomo Kenyatta was no Mau Mau, and knew nothing about the movement. Due perhaps to the poor quality of sound and image, the program did not arouse much curiosity in the restaurant. No one seemed to care about the documentary: a disinterest that tempered this surprising choice of film to be broadcast on Mashujaa Day.

Less than thirty kilometers away from Makutano is the Mau Mau Veteran Centre of Muthara, still in Meru district. There, the well-known photograph of President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta embracing the Mau Mau leader Field Marshal Mwariama (when the two met immediately after Kenya became a republic in 1964) is proudly exhibited on the picture wall of this humble museum. It has been placed prominently in between pictures of M'Iminuki Linyiru, Meru's first paramount chief, and of Mwariama himself shortly before his death in 1989, his hair cut short and wearing a Western-style beige suit with a black tie. Below is a series of pictures of aged Mau Mau veterans, facing the camera with expressionless faces. This famous picture of Kenyatta can be found displayed in various publications, on Internet

[1] "End of Empire," Granada Television.

websites, and in museums.[2] To historians, the ambiguity that defined Kenyatta's relationship to Mau Mau fighters is no longer doubted. Research has shown how Kenyatta failed to acknowledge the painful sacrifices the Mau Mau war brought to those involved, willingly or not, in the movement.[3] Even so, many veterans continue to affirm that Kenyatta was "the owner of Mau Mau."

The photograph of Kenyatta and Mwariama confirmed the endurance of Kenyatta's ambiguity to this day. It showed, once again, that asking after his "true" relationship to the Mau Mau war continues to produce very different answers in very different settings. The odd combination of photographs, that of a paramount colonial chief, of Kenyatta embracing Mwariama during the crucial meeting that brought together the president and the Mau Mau fighters, and of Mwariama's polished appearance twenty-five years later, far away from any Mau Mau symbolism, seeks to portray a different narrative. It suggests of course a clear continuity between the Mau Mau war and independence. Most importantly, the Mau Mau narrative seems to have overshadowed that of the transition from colony to post-colony. The president is not pictured as a nationalist fighter: he is pictured as a friend of the Mau Mau.

This picture is unique. No other nationalist leader is shown, at least in public Kenyan institutions, embracing Mau Mau leaders. Does this singularity explain how Kenyatta became the first president of independent Kenya? This question goes beyond the findings of historical studies that showed how a new independent state was built to tame the Mau Mau movement, emphasizing in particular the creation of a loyalist government and administration in the wake of the Mau Mau war. It asks, instead, why such a political system functioned with Mzee Jomo Kenyatta as its "sole spokesman."[4] In other words, why Kenyatta?

[2] For further insights on visual construction of these national narratives, see Chloé Josse-Durand, "Le 'Temps des Musées': Bâtir les Mémoires Locales, Donner Corps au Récit National. L'Hybridation de l'Institution Muséale au Prisme des Appropriations Contemporaines du Passé au Kenya et en Ethiopie" (Ph.D. diss., University of Bordeaux, 2016), chapter 4.

[3] See, for example, the work of Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: The Bodley Head, 2014).

[4] I borrow the idea of the "sole spokesman" from Ayesha Jalal's *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Jomo Kenyatta: Biographical Background

Jomo Kenyatta was born around 1895, shortly before the East Africa protectorate formalized the process of colonization initiated in 1888 under the auspices of the (private) Imperial British East African Company.[5] This was a time when British colonization was still at its early stages in Kenya. At the heart of the development of the protectorate was the construction of a railway that was to link today's Kenyan coast with Uganda, facilitating colonial expansion, European settlement, and commerce.[6] From 1902, European settlement was encouraged to boost the export of the British colony.[7] In 1903 and 1904, ever more Europeans arrived, acquiring and claiming ever more land for agricultural and ranching purposes in what became known as the "White Highlands," the central uplands that encompassed the most fertile lands stretching over Kalenjin, Kikuyu, and Maasai territory. Nevertheless, Kenya never officially became a settlers' colony, where colonial immigration implies the displacement and even elimination of natives, in contrast to exploitation colonies that focused on the extraction of production surplus. White settlers and British administrators differed strongly about the politics of immigration and of land alienation to be adopted. White settlers aspired to turn Kenya into a "white man's country," following the South African model. Yet, British government officials were undecided about the type of colonization they wanted to promote in Kenya, seeking also to protect the indigenous rights over land.[8]

British indecisiveness regarding the colony's legal status became an urgent issue as land alienation progressed rapidly. The situation was particularly tense in Kikuyu country, where Kenyatta was from – he

[5] His exact birthday is unknown, Jeremy Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1972), 33.

[6] See John Lonsdale, "The Conquest of the Kenya State, 1895–1905" and Bruce Berman, "Coping with Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State, 1895–1914," in *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa*, eds. Bruce J. Berman and John M. Lonsdale (London: James Currey, 1992), 13–44, 77–100.

[7] Robert M. Maxon, *East Africa: An Introductory History* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2009), 164.

[8] Maurice P. K. Sorrenson, *Origins of European Settlement in Kenya* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 1–5; Robert L. Tignor, *Colonial Transformation of Kenya: The Kamba, Kikuyu, and Maasai from 1900–1939* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 155–156.

was born in Ngenda, in a district later known as Kiambu – and which quickly became a stronghold of colonial occupation. Legal conflicts multiplied over the definition and regulation of land tenure, opposing European formal laws to Kikuyu tribal practices. In 1902, the Crown Land Ordinance was passed: where land was occupied, indigenous rights should be protected, whereas unoccupied land would become the property of the Crown. The ordinance allowed Europeans to own land previously occupied by the Kikuyu, themselves reduced to the status of workers. A year later, the first Kikuyu reserves were created, confining the "natives" and forcing them sell their labor to cultivate land.[9] In 1905, the Colonial Office took over the administration of the protectorate. By then, land alienation had halted in Kikuyu country, but new socioeconomic problems were emerging in the reserves.

The political and economic confusion of the early years of colonization and land alienation produced a fragile status quo. Settler agriculture was developing rapidly (coffee and sisal were particularly successful exports) and as ever more land was alienated, European colonizers found it more profitable to force Africans to sell their labor, imposing taxes, low wages, coercion, and bans on cash-crop growing.[10] At first, they allowed Africans to "squat" – that is, to reside on their land in exchange for cultivation. Yet, the squatters' rights to land became restricted too, as the need for forced labor increased. Already in the early 1910s, the dramatic increase in the number of squatters showed the limits of this compromise. The opportunities within the squatter economy (rapid improvement of their living conditions and a subsequent demographic increase) could not, in an imperial economy, be boundless. The next decade of European economic expansion was accompanied by even more restrictive economic policies limiting their rights to own land, to accumulate livestock, and to grow food crops. A stronger state control was established too. More importantly, as land shortage increased, so did conflicts about land and labor rights.[11] This was a particularly disruptive situation for Kikuyu political, economic, and social organization.

[9] Ibid., 53, 176–186.
[10] Maxon, *East Africa*, 166; Charles Hornsby, *Kenya: A History since Independence* (London: IB Tauris, 2013), 32.
[11] See Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau (1905–1963)* (London: James Currey, 1987), chapters 1 and 2.

The Kikuyu were the largest ethnic group in Kenya, followed by the Luo (second largest ethnic group), Luhya, Kamba, Kalenjin, the Maasai people, and number of smaller ethnic minorities.[12] They were also the most affected by colonial land alienation.[13] Land played a central role in defining the Kikuyu people: land tenure and labor forged and structured Kikuyu social relationships. As John Lonsdale noted, precolonial Kikuyu were not "politically – or in any other sense – a tribe."[14] They constituted, instead, a complex hierarchical society brought together by a common ethnic identity as well as strong lawmaking institutions.[15] They were a self-regulated group in which authority and power were civic virtues acquired through wealth, itself interpreted as a moral virtue.[16] Power and authority were the result of individual achievement and private accumulation that knew no institutional limitations other than those determined by social interaction.[17] With colonization and land alienation, more was at stake than mere economic or even geographical change: the very social organization of the Kikuyu people was disrupted.

[12] The geography of these ethnic groups corresponds roughly with the Kenya provinces after independence: Kikuyu: Central province; Luo, Luyha and Kamba: Western province; Kalenjin and Maasai: Rift Valley; Arab, Somali, and other minorities: Coast and Eastern provinces. Hornsby recalls that, in 1962, the Kikuyu represented 19 percent of the Kenyan population. See Hornsby, *Kenya*, 21–24. For an in-depth discussion of the notion of "tribe," its history and the distinction with that of "ethnicity," see John M. Lonsdale, "The Moral Economy of Mau Mau, Wealth, Poverty and Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought," in *Unhappy Valley*, 315–504.

[13] John Overton, "The Origins of the Kikuyu Land Problem: Land Alienation and Land Use in Kiambu, 1895–1920," *African Studies Review* 31, no. 2 (1988): 112–122. For a history of the development of colonial administration and economy, see Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (Nairobi: East African Publishers, 1990).

[14] Lonsdale, "The Moral Economy of Mau Mau, Wealth, Poverty and Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought," 341.

[15] Ibid. [16] Ibid., 334.

[17] Anne-Marie Peatrik, "Un Système Composite: L'Organisation d'Age et de Génération Des Kikuyu Précoloniaux," *Journal des Africanistes* 64, no. 1 (1994): 3–36; Greet Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997); Yvan Droz, "L'Ethos du Mûramati Kikuyu: Schème Migratoire, Différenciation Sociale et Individualisation au Kenya," *Anthropos* 95, no. 1 (2000): 87–98.

Kenyatta's concern for land issues came rather late. Born under the name of "Kamau wa Ngengi" ("*Kamau, son of Ngengi*") to ordinary peasants, he enjoyed a peaceful childhood in a traditional village. Kamau was still a young boy when his parents died. He went to live with his grandfather, a traditional witch doctor. In 1909, he encountered a white man for the first time, and, according to his biographer Jeremy Murray-Brown, was so fascinated by the stranger's act of writing that he decided to join the Togotho mission, where Scottish missionaries would educate him for the next five years. There, he converted to Christianity and was baptised Johnstone Kamau. He was also circumcised, purportedly according to Kikuyu tribal customs, yet, the circumcision was performed by a mission-trained nurse, Samuel Njoroge.[18]

Kenyatta had just completed his primary education with the Scottish missionaries and was about to leave village life to work in the colonial capital, Nairobi (to the despair of his missionary mentors), when the outbreak of World War I delayed his plans. To avoid forced enrolment, Kenyatta found refuge in Maasailand from 1916 to 1919. This is where he would have earned the nickname of *Kinyatta*, the Maasai word for the beaded belt he would wear.[19] A few years later, in the early 1920s, he was recruited by the Nairobi Municipal Council as store clerk and water reader. With the good salary he earned, he was now "one of the recognised figures of Nairobi," and led the life of a dandy, a privilege few natives enjoyed.[20] He did not show any particular interest in the nascent nationalist politics. Meanwhile, dissent was growing among the colonized population: living conditions worsened, land alienation expanded, and landless people were squeezed into the reserves. Because of the pressing issue of land alienation, the Kikuyu were the first to organize politically. The early 1920s saw the birth of a Kikuyu nationalist association. In 1922, the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) was established to defend historical Kikuyu rights over land; it was to become the most influential political party.

Chance and opportunism led Kenyatta to join the KCA. Because of his good knowledge of English, he first helped the party as a translator in 1925–1926. When, in 1927, the KCA had the opportunity to send a representative overseas, Kenyatta's language skills and urbane

[18] Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, chapter 3. I thank John Lonsdale for this useful piece of information.
[19] Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, 53, 75, chapter 6. [20] Ibid., 95.

manners tipped the scales in his favor. He might have seen an opportunity to further upgrade his lifestyle and to pursue education, for which he had been longing.[21] In 1929, he left behind his first wife and child and sailed for London. There, he struggled to meet Colonial Office officials, and had only few contacts within the small political and intellectual circles interested in African affairs. In 1930, he returned to Kenya, yet only briefly, for the KCA decided to send him again to press for the Kikuyu cause at the Colonial Office a year later.[22] Some KCA leaders doubted his ability to fully represent the Kikuyu (perhaps because his rebellious life had become seen as decadent), so he was accompanied by another Kikuyu, an Anglican from Murang'a (then Fort Hall) district, Parmenas Githendu Mukiri.[23] Once in England, Kenyatta realised, again, that the British authorities showed neither interest in him nor in the grievances of the Kikuyu, and he was quick to understand that he needed to build an authoritative voice, together with a stronger intellectual project before taking on the role of nationalist politician.[24]

Kenyatta's years abroad were that of a solitary figure navigating between political and intellectual mentors. He polished his political ideas through interaction with his few Labour friends, and sharpened his political language with the Pan-Africanist George Padmore, whom he met during his first stay in London and with whom he travelled to Moscow. Their trip eventually gained the attention of British intelligence, which suspected Kenyatta had communist sympathies – although Kenyatta had little liking for the ideology, affirming himself instead as a nationalist and a "big bourgeois."[25] The high point of

[21] Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, 106.
[22] Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, chapters 10–12.
[23] This is an important detail, for it highlights the nascent competition between two Kikuyu districts: Murang'a and Kiambu. See John M. Lonsdale, "Henry Muoria, Public Moralist," in *Writing for Kenya: The Life and Works of Henry Muoria*, eds. Wangari Muoria-Sal, Bodil F. Frederiksen, John M. Lonsdale, and Derek R. Peterson (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 36 and endnote 56.
[24] Bruce J. Berman and John M. Lonsdale, "The Labors of *Muigwuithania*: Jomo Kenyatta as Author, 1928–45," *Research in African Literatures* 29, no. 1 (1998): 16–17.
[25] Woodford McClellan, "Africans and Black Americans in the Comintern Schools, 1925–1934," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 26, no. 2 (1993): 380; Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, chapters 10–18. On British intelligence reports on Kenyatta, see Calder Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War and the Twilight of Empire* (London: Harper Press,

Kenyatta's intellectual journey was reached in the form of a fortuitous encounter in 1934 with the well-known London School of Economics (LSE) professor of anthropology, Bronisław Malinowski.[26] Kenyatta realised that anthropology could become a "miraculous weapon" to defend Kikuyu land.[27] Under Malinowski's supervision, he completed a history of Kikuyu tribal culture, later published as *Facing Mount Kenya*, for which he was awarded a non-degree diploma in anthropological studies. It gave him the expert knowledge with which to advance his political arguments in colonial institutions, and to claim to represent his people as a traditional African leader. With the publication of his thesis in 1938, Kenyatta swapped his dandy outfit for a monkey fur and a hunting spear he found in a London costume shop. He signed himself for the first time under the name Jomo Kenyatta.[28]

2013), 258–273, chapter 6 more generally. Two other biographies were dedicated to Kenyatta as the latter was still alive, but lack the thoroughness of Murray-Brown's, see George Delf, *Jomo Kenyatta: Towards Truth about the Light of Kenya* (London: Gollancz, 1961); Guy Arnold, *Kenyatta and the Politics of Kenya* (Nairobi: Transafrican Publishers, 1974).

[26] See Berman's and Lonsdale's exhaustive research articles on Kenyatta's encounter and writing of anthropology: Bruce J. Berman and John M. Lonsdale, "Louis Leakey's Mau Mau: A Study in the Politics of Knowledge," *History and Anthropology* 5, no. 2 (1991): 143–204; "The Labors of Muigwuithania"; "Custom, Modernity, and the Search for Kihooto: Kenyatta, Malinowski, and the Making of *Facing Mount Kenya*," in *Anthropology, European Imperialism and the Ordering of Africa,* eds. Robert J. Gordon and Helen Tilley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 176. See also Bruce Berman, "Ethnography as Politics, Politics as Ethnography: Kenyatta, Malinowski, and the Making of *Facing Mount Kenya*," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 30, no. 3 (1996): 313–344; John M. Lonsdale, "The Prayers of Waiyaki; Political Uses of the Kikuyu Past," in *Revealing Prophets: Prophecy in Eastern African History*, eds. David M. Anderson and Douglas Hamilton Johnson (London: James Currey, 1995): 240–291; "'Listen While I Read': The Orality of Christian Literacy in the Young Kenyatta's Making of the Kikuyu," in *Ethnicity in Africa: Roots, Meanings & Implications*, eds. Louise de la Gorgendiere, Kenneth King, and Sarah Vaughan (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Centre of African Studies, 1996), 17–53.

[27] "The Miraculous Weapons" is the title of a collection of poems by Aimé Césaire, *Les Armes Miraculeuses* (Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1946).

[28] On the cover of the book, Kenyatta is wearing a fur one of his friends found in a shop selling carnival costumes in London. He grew a beard in solidarity with Haïlé Sélassié, who, at the time, had to flee from an invaded Ethiopia. He has long hair, another difference from the shaved head typical of the traditional Kikuyu chief. Yet, as the anthropologist Anne-Marie Peatrik noted, no elder would wear such a spear, reserved for warriors. Far from the dandy that he was in the 1930s (see the photographs in Murray-Brown's biography), this

As his friend and brother-in-law-to-be Mbiyu Koinange recalled, Jomo Kenyatta's public persona was both a literary and political invention:

> Jomo wore my Hyrax and blue monkey cloak for a photograph to be used in the author's preface to his book "Facing Mount Kenya". We sharpened a piece of wooden plank for a spear. Our main object was to give the book on Agikuyu by an elderly Mugikuyu - an elderly tone in contrast to books written by non-Africans about us … This was followed by the cross-word puzzle to retain "J" in Johnston and the coining of an African name to go with Kenyatta. "Why all this trouble, man, don't you have a name?", I asked. He hesitated for a while still with his pen on the paper. I repeated my question, but his thoughts were still centred on the puzzle before us. "My name is Kamau" - and your father's name? I interrupted. "Ngengi" he replied. "Then why on earth are we taking all this trouble to find names while you have 'Kamau wa Ngengi'? You see, I am known by the name Kenyatta, I want to retain it." We proceeded to make a combination of vowels and consonants until we agreed on "Jomo".[29]

With the publication of *Facing Mount Kenya*, Jomo Kenyatta was no longer just a nationalist: he was a "man of science" *and* a "Kikuyu."[30] When he returned to Kenya in 1946, he was welcomed by a joyful crowd. Few people had read his book, but he was seen as a writer who possessed the "White man's magic."[31] Although he had achieved very little concretely, he was full of political hope. Little is known on Kenyatta's political activity once he arrived back in Kenya after eighteen years of voluntary exile in Great Britain. He married the daughter of the well-respected Kikuyu chief, Chief Koinange, and became "very deliberately, a senior elder."[32] He bought land, and built himself a

construction of authority has no ethnographic foundations. Anne-Marie Peatrik, "Le Singulier Destin de *Facing Mount Kenya. The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (1938) de Jomo Kenyatta. Une Contribution à l'Anthropologie des Savoirs," *L'Homme* 4, no. 212 (2014): 71–108.

[29] Mbiyu Koinange, "Jomo Colleague in the Struggle for Freedom and Independence" in *Struggle to Release Jomo and His Colleagues*, ed. Ambu H. Patel (Nairobi: New Kenya Publishers, 1963), 21–22.

[30] John M. Lonsdale, "Jomo Kenyatta, God & the Modern World," in *African Modernities: Entangled Meanings in Current Debate*, eds. Peter Probst, Heike Schmidt, and Jan-Georg Deutsch (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 33.

[31] Lonsdale, "Henry Muoria, Public Moralist," 271.

[32] John M. 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): 114.

small farm.[33] He was positioning himself on the side of the "landed," and, what is more, on the side of the Kiambu he had represented when he left for England in 1928.[34] He wanted power. By now, he was a middle-aged man, educated in England, but he still needed local political recognition and support.[35] The prospect of working for the colonial institutions quickly faded away, and Kenyatta focused his energies on the African Teacher's Training College, a Kikuyu independent school his brother-in-law Peter Mbiyu Koinange had set up in Githunguri, Kiambu.[36] He was elected president of the Kenya African Union (KAU) in 1947, as James Gichuru (one of the KAU's founding fathers and soon-to-be Kenyatta's brother-in-law) stepped down for him. The KAU provided him with a useful political platform, but he knew the nationwide party could not overtake tribal loyalties. He needed a rural, traditional base just like Githunguri. Yet, in order to breathe political life into the Githunguri school, he needed money.[37] Accounts of his leadership are rather shady. The colonial authorities would later blame him for his corrupt management of the money raised for the sake of the school.[38]

The pace of political change in the aftermath of World War II seems to have left him with limited capacity to control events.[39] The

[33] Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, 230. [34] Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below*, 199.
[35] Delf, *Jomo Kenyatta*, 134.
[36] The Kikuyu Independence School Association emerged in the aftermath of the female circumcision controversy, which opposed the missionaries against the Kikuyu leaders. To defend a practice they considered inherent to their identity, the Kikuyu established their own schools. Kenyatta supported the movement initiated by his brother-in-law and close political comrade, Mbiyu Koinange. See Bodil F. Frederiksen, "Jomo Kenyatta, Marie Bonaparte and Bronislaw Malinowski on Clitoridectomy and Female Sexuality," *History Workshop Journal* 65, no. 1 (2008): 23–48; Theodore Natsoulas, "The Politicisation of the Ban on Female Circumcision and the Rise of the Independent School Movement in Kenya, the KCA, the Missions and Government, 1929–1932," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 33, no. 2 (1998): 137–158. According to Murray-Brown, Kenyatta did not want to join a local council because its political scope was too restricted. He nonetheless became a member of the African Land Settlement Board from 1947 to 1949. See Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, 233.
[37] Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, 233–234.
[38] Frank D. Corfield, *The Origins and Growth of Mau Mau: An Historical Survey* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1960), 182–189. See also Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below*, 199–200.
[39] See Spencer's critical study of Kenyatta's leadership over the KAU in John Spencer, *KAU: The Kenya African Union*, first edition (London: Kegan Paul International, 1985).