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Author(s): Mwangi Wa-Githumo

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THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MAU MAU MOVEMENT: THE MOST POPULAR UPRISING IN KENYA

Mwangi Wa-Githumo

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Abstract

Between World War I and World War II there developed deep sentiment within the ranks of some of the Kenya's proto-nationalists that the political, economic and educational aspirations of the people of Kenya could never be realized short of organized armed action. Between 1946 and 1952 this sentiment was translated into the creation of a movement, which later came to be known as the Mau Mau. The history of the Mau Mau movement is, therefore, inextricably the history of the struggle for the return of all lands that had been expropriated from Kenya's agrarian and pastoral communities at gun point by European empire-builders, commercial companies and settlers. It was the first revolt in colonial Kenya to seek workers' and peasants' support in an organized manner. The popular view of the meaning of the Mau Mau movement was reinforced in its early stages by a series of political and religious awakenings through oath-taking as well as patriotic songs, which the colonial authorities characterized as seditious: The Mau Mau freedom fighters' attitudes toward Britain's incursion and vampirism in Kenya, as well as her draconian land ordinances further contributed to the idiosyncratic nature of the Mau Mau movement. These freedom fighters believed, and many shared their beliefs, that the colonial land and labour policies and their accompanying legislations were dispecably riddled with hypocrisy, repression and bigotry. The purpose of this article is to provide a brief but incisive picture of the Mau Mau Movement. The article is not a historical treatise on the movement, but it does direct attention to that history by emphasizing political, economic and social concerns of the past.

Those who oppress do not respond to petitions, demonstrations, and the demands of the oppressed. The oppressor murders at his leisure and does not cease until the oppressed, recognizing that the oppressor has not right to oppress, assert their right to live by using the only language the oppressor has ever used and the only language that he understands — the

sound of gunfire, the sound of dynamite, the sound of his own death in his ear.

—Julius Lester (1970) *Revolutionary Notes*,
New York: Grove Press

Although it is not intended to trace the entire history of the Mau Mau uprising, or to tell its full nature in any detail here, a few facts should be noted about this movement, for it will help our understanding of some of the aspects of African nationalism, as well as the politics of land in Kenya.¹ It must also be realized that Kenya was the only British colony in Africa whose economic and racial policies, as well as land question paralleled those of Rhodesia and South Africa. It therefore occupies a significant position in the study of nationalist movements in Africa.

The first of these facts is that viewed from both unbiased and an appropriate angle, the most dynamic aspect of African nationalism in Kenya has been the Mau Mau uprising. It was a revolutionary and military response to the imperialists' incursions, aggression, land expropriation, as well as the exploitation of the Africans' natural and human resources. Although the movement did not reach its height until 1952, it had began long before it became an identifiable and cohesive movement. Not only did the movement grow out of land grievances as reflected by and articulated in persistent demands and militant agitation of the proto-nationalist organizations of the early 1920's, but the movement also reflected political realities which became more permanent in the struggle for political and economic independence in Kenya. This is one of the reasons why the movement resolutely challenged the propensity of the so-called white settlers, who had persistently and stubbornly refused Africans to share with them the very best lands which they had expropriated and which belonged to Africans by right. Most important, the movement questioned the professed legal rights and justification which the British settlers used when they unilaterally declared Kenya in 1915 a 'white man's country' at least for 999 years, during which period no economic or political changes were to take place, especially if those changes were intended to improve the economic status or the lot of the black peoples of Kenya.²

One of the earliest and leading roles that the Mau Mau movement played in the struggle for Kenya's Independence was to politicize and to mobilize the agrarian sectors in Kenya in order to shape their political awareness and economic thinking, and to set the stage for future national consciousness of the whole country. It was this consciousness which passionately stirred the peasants of Kenya out of decades of somnolence that was characterized by passivity and docility. Not only was this awakening vital and inevitable, but it also helped, in the long run, to stimulate a growing and militant sense of human dignity in one's

land hitherto experienced in colonial Kenya. Thanks to the courageous Mau Mau freedom-fighters who exerted with a balanced virtuosity the deepest intensity of conscious influence among the rural population, especially in the Central and the Rift Valley Provinces, thus making an uprising inevitable. It is also true that the Mau Mau movement was the logical and the most observable peak of the agrarian nationalist sentiments, whose political and economic grievances had their roots in the land question that goes back to the 1890's.

Analytically, when compared with other nationalist movements that affected Kenya in the colonial period, the Mau Mau movement was the most revolutionary, sophisticated and the most effective nationalist movement ever launched in Kenya against British colonialism in general and land expropriation in particular between 1952 and 1956. Equally important, it was the most dynamic movement that successfully dismantled the repressive feudal-like colonial policies that had guided Kenya throughout its years of colonial disaster, thus disintegrating the settler-dominated slavocratic system of economy and government, both of which unalterably embraced the colonial land policies. The Mau Mau revolt was part of a fabric of audacious action which caused the brain of the adamant and entrenched European settlers to reel. The movement provided maximum political leverage to the united Mau Mau freedom-fighters.

Unquestionably, the Mau Mau uprising of the 1950's marked the highest point of the nationalist temper and potential of the black man's revolutionary struggle for his lost land. The uprising was an explosion that came about after a long process of subjugation and ruthless exploitation of Kenya's human and natural resources by European imperialists. It should also be emphasized at this juncture that no preparation for eventual independence for Kenya had ever been made by the British Government before the Mau Mau rebellion. Consequently, for those of us who looked to radical nationalist movements as the hope for the future of Kenya, the Mau Mau revolution marked not only a turning point in Kenya's political history, but also the most important period for celebration. The movement was also a conscionable call upon the British Government, the colonial administration, as well as the recalcitrant European settlers in Kenya, who were themselves guilty of excessive voraciousness and of an egregious abuse of African land rights, to correct their racist and prejudiced attitudes toward the African peoples and owners of the land that they were unconscionably prostituting and, at the same time, to heed the cry of the unjustly assaulted and deprived peasants.

The basic character of the Mau nationalists was that they were from the beginning imbued with the idea of wiping out colonial rule from Kenya roots and branches. The Mau Mau nationalists themselves were fundamentally and consciously connected with the ongoing agrarian efforts of the 1890's through

1930's to cast off the settlers' economic and political domination in order to take charge of their own land, as well as of other political and economic affairs. One of the most notable contributions of the Mau Mau movement to the overall nationalist sentiments was that it stirred the slumbering parts of Kenya into uncontrollable fires and flames of national consciousness.²⁴ The Mau Mau freedom-fighters pursued their struggle for the stolen lands in a manner that was commensurate with the entire framework of the people's needs, the needs which were purely broad-based upon the people's expectation and will. The martyred Mau Mau freedom-fighters and the concept of land rights were the fundamental and ideological guide as well as inspirer of the Mau Mau movement itself. The Mau Mau freedom-fighters were also imbued with a revolutionary commitment and vehemence which made them willing to sacrifice their lives in the cause of 'land or death'.

Objectively, the Mau Mau movement was the most articulate public spokesman for African peasants yearning for the restoration of their forcibly and illegally obliterated land rights. In truth, before the Mau Mau freedom-fighters registered their grievance, this yearning seemed a dim and distant reality in a country where economic, political and judicial powers were in the hands of the white minority, and where the majority of the black peoples remained at the mercy of the white man's claws and teeth. Given the greed and the appetite of the white settlers, the Mau Mau freedom fighters knew that the white man was not in a position to hand the lost land back to the black peoples of Kenya on a platter. The success of the Mau Mau movement in politicizing, mobilizing and revolutionizing the rural masses in the Kikuyu, as well as its armed victories over the British troops and their African puppets had a profound psychological effect on Kenya as a whole, despite settlers' efforts to characterize the movement as a purely Kikuyu agitation.

The distortion and misinterpretation of the authentic aims of the Mau Mau movement in Kenya stemmed primarily from the lack of understanding, hypocrisy and racial biases on the part of the Europeans about the changes which were taking place in East Africa, especially during the period following World War II. The growth of nationalist movements in Kenya was regarded by most European settlers as an expression of deviant behaviour — something that could never lead to any political equality between Africans and Europeans.²⁵ As for an example, commenting on Kikuyu nationalism in Kenya, two Western writers, namely E. Stillman and W. Pfaff, have described the Mau Mau movement and the entire Kikuyu nationalist movement as a nonpolitical phenomenon, characterized by 'terrible atavism and barbarity' and as 'a savage revenge which sought escape in a pathological violence that had no real objective'.²⁶ As J.C. MacLean rightly observed in (*Africa: The Racial Issue*, vol. 26, No. 1, 1954), press

dispatches from Nairobi during the Mau Mau movement stated that European settlers refused to place much weight on economic motives, 'preferring to characterize Mau Mau as an atavistic phenomenon, yet Africans could list a number of Kikuyu grievances, political, economic, and land-hunger, without compensating opportunities and instances where the white community had had successfully interceded with the Colonial Office to retard African political representation'. The truth about the Mau Mau movement was that in addition to fighting for land and freedom and against other forces that embraced exploitative capitalist inherent ideology, the movement served as a voice which spoke loud and clear for immediate national independence that was to be followed by full economic liberty and full rights for constructive political participation, without first making political or economic accommodation with the oppressive British imperialists.

The most disturbing and equally inescapable fact, which most biased Western writers who have written about the Mau Mau movement appear to have been unable to see or to admit is that the economic frustrations and the brutalization of the political organizations of black Africans in Kenya were the work of the colonial administration itself, that significantly precipitated the upheavals of the colonial era. Evidently, it was their short-sightedness and biased attitudes toward the black peoples as well as toward their nationalist movements which prevented some of the Western writers, such as Edmund Stillman and William Pfaff, from seeing that it was the unsympathetic European settlers, with their discriminatory economic and political policies and racist institutions, who had created and perpetuated subhuman conditions under which the black man was forced to serve the white man. For one to characterize the African struggle against colonialism as terrible atavism and, at the same time, to rationalize the oppressive and equally racist behaviour of the white settler is not only incredible, but it is also nothing short of monstrous. Stillman and Pfaff and those who share their arguments and beliefs would have been accurate had they been able to observe that the behaviour of the white settlers had undoubtedly created a breeding ground for the Mau Mau movement, and that it was the white community in Kenya that was responsible for the racial and economic pathology of colonial Kenya.

Specifically land robbery and forced labour in Kenya between 1901 and 1939 produced a nationalist independence movement that nourished the spirit of the nationalist groups all over Kenya. Because of this spirit, the Mau Mau freedom-fighters and their sympathizers were not only hated by most Europeans, but they were also projected as irresponsible terrorist guerrillas without genuine support from the masses. This was a wrong and biased projection. While the avowed purpose of the Mau Mau movement was to secure the return of the stolen lands, the British used their deadly and sophisticated guns and bombs to suppress the

movement, charging that the Mau Mau revolt was characterized by pathological violence that had no identifiable objectives or grievances. On the contrary, the Mau Mau movement had bold, clear and decisive objectives of high order and vision. In reality, it was the white settlers under the umbrella of the British troops and imported police dogs from South Africa, who resorted to unprecedented killings of innocent people while, at the same time, using the press, radio and biased films to discredit the Mau Mau freedom-fighters; to deceive the world and to cover their unwarranted barbarous and iniquitous actions against the black peoples of Kenya. Writing on the spectre of Mau Mau, R.K.P. Pankhurst sharply argued:

For some time past the settlers had been focusing attention on 'Mau Mau outrages' and urging the need for strong measures to combat the 'crime wave', though in fact no great increase in violence had been recorded and crimes of violence were as yet scarcely more common in Kenya than in nearby Tanganyika and Uganda. The European settlers, however, paid great attention to such incidents as occurred, for the 'Mau Mau movement' was 'pledged to drive the white man out of Africa'. The settler press gave great publicity to the 'outrages', killing of cattle, etc., and described them in detail, thereby conjuring up the spectre of Mau Mau.²⁷

With the declaration of a state of emergency throughout Kenya in 1952, the settler-dominated press and radio network remained virtually the only medium for informing the world of what was going on in Kenya during the next eight years, and for keeping up with the development of the fight between the Mau Mau freedom-fighters and the British troops that were backed by the NATO forces. It should also be remembered that the real political power in colonial Kenya was always held by the power-giddy Nairobi-based white settlers, with the London-based British Government serving as a benign co-conspirator of Africans' economic and political rights. Not only were these settlers favoured by the press, but they also enjoyed strong backing among the intransigent South African and Rhodesian settlers as well as among the British land speculators and business tycoons in London and Pretoria.

Contrary to the wrong and biased impression and distortion by the colonial government about the Mau Mau movement, it is as significant for the adherents of truth as it is painfully unavoidable, to bear in mind that the confrontation between Great Britain and the Mau Mau freedom-fighters was the result of deteriorating political and economic relationships between European settlers and African peasants, accentuated by the persistence of European feudal-like landlordism and economic racism in colonial Kenya.

Consequently, it is highly desirable that the facts about violence during the

struggle against foreign incursions and aggressors be clearly spelt out and understood. The author does not deny that the Mau Mau freedom-fighters also used violence in their campaign against the British troops — his argument is that the Mau Mau freedom-fighters had no recourse but to use defensive violence when confronted by the well-armed British soldiers who did not speak or understand any other language other than that of violence and shooting at the first glimpse. Admittedly, it was very difficult to deal with European settlers or British troops nonviolently, especially between 1952 and 1956.

It is absurd to claim, as some writers have done, that it was the Mau Mau terrorists who committed outrageous, violent crimes, while the settlers, the colonial army and police, as well as the British troops, used peaceful and civilized means to restore peace, law and order in Kenya. The author, who was himself one of the victims of the British violence, observed between 1952 and 1956 that violence had become so much a way of life in Kenya that the white man could still shoot a black man who approached him non-violently, or on his knees with his hands up in order to turn the other cheek to be hit. It was during this time when the author came to realize how stupid it is for one to turn his cheek politely and passively to someone who does not believe in the teachings of the Bible and who does not share his religious beliefs; for such an infidel or person will, without paying attention to the Biblical teachings, violently and deliberately land a crushing and merciless blow on your face.

Commenting on violence and the distortion of the Mau Mau movement, Ngugi wa Thiong'o has eloquently argued that violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man.²⁸ But violence to protect and preserve an unjust oppressive social order, Ngugi further argues, is criminal, and diminishes man.²⁹ Disagreeing with and accusing Fred Majdalany, the author of *A State of Emergency: The Full Story of Mau Mau*, of having both failed and doggedly refused to tell the full story of several crucial incidents that took place during the Mau Mau movement, Ngugi rightly concludes that 'Mau Mau violence was anti-injustice; white violence was to thwart the cause of justice.'³⁰ Moreover, there are situations in which great and cancerous social injustices can be cured only by the 'surgery of armed force'.³¹ In our aversion to violence, W.O. Stanley succinctly reminds us, we must not forget either that war, in some instances, 'is the only alternative to slavery or that the right of revolt against an undemocratic and oppressive social order, supported by an arbitrary government, is a fundamental tenet of the democratic tradition'.³² Consequently, no one will deny the fact that it was the uncompromising revolutionary armed forces of African freedom-fighters that enabled Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique to successfully carry on an unfaltering campaign against European

imperialists, and finally to defeat the virulent Portuguese imperialist forces.

Unfortunately, what has not been so generally recognized is that because of lack of economic compassion and political sensitivity, some European settlers suggested a 'scorched earth policy' during the Mau Mau war in order to exacerbate the bitterness and terror of their departure. How could any European who professed to be civilized, so considerate in dealing with the so-called uncivilized Africans, seemingly lack such compassion and sensitivity to the winds of change that were blowing in East Africa? The unrealistic and equally biased attitudes of the European community in Kenya during the colonial days amply demonstrated the existence of grave dangers to the people — hence, the struggle for political self-determination had become inevitable. Another reason why the aims of the Mau Mau movement were distorted by the colonial government was that these aims represented a clear threat to the settlers' freehold titles of land and other property rights. For example, under the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915, all the *bona fide* capitalist settlers in Kenya were unalterably to enjoy these rights for 999 years!

While the Mau Mau movement had become a committed struggle the die-hard white settlers the colonial and equally settler-dominated government refused to acknowledge the fact that much of the economic and racial distress and political disturbances affecting the country were, by and large, due to a settler policy of dehumanization and humiliation, a policy which called for widespread political and economic changes. It is worthwhile to note that even the *London Times*, which had been one of the public spokesmen for European settlers in Kenya during the state of emergency had to accept the truth when it eloquently acknowledged that the trouble in Kikuyuland 'must be regarded as a phase in the struggle of African nationalism to assert itself — a struggle which bore a distinctive character because it was the first time in a British African colony that such a movement had taken place on the very doorstep of European settlement'.³³

Having ignored the principles of international law and natural justice, the British Government decided between 1952 and 1954 to act contrary to justice and common sense. As a result, 'British Imperial troops continued to be flown in to reinforce the Kenya armed forces; there was indiscriminate arming of the settler population; tracking dogs used to chasing Africans were imported from South Africa; and loyal Kikuyus were ordered to form Home Guard Units for the defence of the settler systems'.³⁴ Despite all this, the Mau Mau movement eventually produced clandestine organizations to defend itself. Consequently, British repression rapidly unleashed a chain of events which set fire to the powder barrel.³⁵ R.K.P. Pankhurst has described the episodes of British repression thus:

On the European side power slid more firmly into the hands of the militant settlers, who were transformed overnight into an armed phalanx. Settlers' commandos were recruited. In the situation of panic thus produced, more than 500 settlers from all over Kenya gathered at Kalou to reiterate their traditional demand: 'Government of Kenya by Kenyans under European leadership' and a 'free hand' without interference from 'overseas politicians'. On the African side, the wholesale arrest of moderate responsible leaders also produced panic and confusion, which necessarily placed policies of moderation and 'responsible action' at a discount, whilst opening the field to any advocate of more drastic policies.³⁶

In order to cripple the Mau Mau movement, the declaration of the state of emergency in 1952 included the banning of all African political organizations and the arrest of the prominent nationalist leaders. Some of these leaders were later tried under concocted charges after which they were convicted, jailed and effectively silenced. All the African nationalists owners and editors of various progressive newspapers, such as *Mumenyereri*, *Muthamaki*, *et cetera*, the majority of which were written in vernacular or local languages, were arrested, taken to the detention camps and their newspapers proscribed, thus muzzling Kenya's hitherto progressive and most widely read papers.

Although there had been indiscriminate mass arrests in the Kikuyu country between September 1952 and March 1953, it was in 1954 that these unwarranted arrests reached their highest peak. For example, in April 1954, under the so-called 'Operation Anvil', hundreds of thousands of male Kikuyu were arrested and taken to the concentration camps without explaining to them why they had been arrested or the crimes they were alleged to have committed. Their only crime seemed to have been suspected of membership in or sympathy with the Mau Mau movement. The rising voice of protest was no longer a murmur of the Kikuyu community, it had become a country-wide outcry. The Kikuyu women in the rural areas seemed to feel sorrow rather than antagonism when they saw the police, the army and the home guards treating their husbands, daughters and sons like objects rather than decent human beings. 'It is both sickening and terrible', said one aggrieved woman of Ihiga ria Mbari-ya-Mwaniki in July 1954, 'but what can we do?' She asked. Most of the arrests which were made during these emergency operations had absolutely no justifiable reason or excuse for them. Some of these brutal arrests were accompanied by kidnappings, arson, torture of the kidnapped and illegally arrested persons and forced confession. Nevertheless, the Kikuyu rural population continued to support the Mau Mau movement under the belief that it was a revolution that belonged to the masses. The "Operation Anvil" of 1954 apparently aimed at depriving the Mau Mau freedom-fighters in the forests and

other hideouts of the moral, political and material support that they were receiving from their compatriots and sympathizers living in the urban areas. The whole country was shocked at these repressive measures that went hand in hand with dastardly murders of innocent Africans. Certainly, these measures could only turn the victimized people against the white community in Kenya, as well as its African collaborators who had so embarrassingly and unconscionably betrayed their trust by joining foreign enemies. What the author terms to have been both inexplicable and inexcusable was the manner in which the loyal and equally opportunistic Africans in the police and the army forces, some senior civil servants, the chiefs and the ruthless home guards, ingenuously followed the orders and the footsteps of their white masters, even when the question at issue was that of torturing or murdering their innocent black brothers and sisters.

To thwart the political aims of the Mau Mau movement and in order to deflect people's attention from Mau Mau victories, the British Government introduced in September, 1952, a number of stringent emergency decrees which prohibited Africans from taking the Mau Mau patriotic oaths, aiding Mau Mau freedom-fighters in any way, attending all African meetings (except, of course, those sponsored by African stooges), participating in demonstrations, processions or strikes, shouting pro-Mau Mau political slogans, singing nationalist songs, possessing or carrying firearms or publishing and circulating literature which the white man regarded as likely to cause disturbances in the colony. The most popular tunes of the Mau Mau patriotic songs were those that frequently invoked the death and name of Waiyaki and the nostalgic glories of the expropriated Africans' lands.

Since the history of the Mau Mau movement had been marked by a greater degree of co-existence between the Mau Mau freedom-fighters and the Kikuyu tillers of the soil, the colonial administration decided at the height of the state of emergency to dilute this co-existence between 1953 and 1955. This was accomplished by forcing the Kikuyu people to dig a trench measuring ten to twelve feet deep by fifteen to sixteen feet wide around Mount Kenya in order to starve the Mau Mau freedom-fighters to death and to prevent them from coming out of the forest; by destroying and burning their crops and homesteads; and finally by confining them into the crowded and filthy so-called emergency villages.

Between 1952 and 1956 the situation was so bad that whenever the interests of the white man and those of the black man diverged, both the colonial administration and the British government chose to protect the interests of the "white man" at the expense of those of the "black man", — the rightful owner of the land. Admittedly, not only did these ill-orchestrated emergency measures and decrees exacerbate the political situation in Kenya, but they also sparked

emotional responses from the victimized African communities, particularly those who were active in circles that opposed the policies of the settler regime in Kenya.

Despite many setbacks in their ranks and files, lack of well-trained men, poor communication and the unequal armed forces viewed from the perspective of their avowed commitment, the Mau Mau freedom-fighters were able to engage a courageous struggle against the formidable and well-equipped British troops for five years. This struggle, the first of its kind in Kenya, and perhaps in East Africa, paved the way for the end of a sordid and despicable era of colonialism and, at the same time, laying the ground for a new chapter in Kenya's history. In retrospect, the Mau Mau movement was possibly the most crucial resistance movement to take place in colonial Africa during the years following the Second World War II.³⁷ The reason, quite simply, is that it accelerated the pace of nationalism and ensured that British East Africa as a whole achieved independence much sooner than otherwise might have been the case, with additional repercussions upon the process of decolonization further south.³⁸

More encouraging, while the Mau Mau movement had some weaknesses emanating from administrative discipline and inexperience in dealing with the entire masses of Kenya and in educating them politically, the movement inaugurated and carried forward the most dynamic agrarian revolution of any movement in East Africa. Not only that, the Mau Mau movement brought about the most needed changes that constituted one of the most fundamental challenges to settlers' political hegemony and economic dominance — the most devastating and perhaps irreversible political and economic defeats of the adamant and entrenched white settlers. The Mau Mau movement was not only opposed to land thievery, but also to settlers' efforts to impose their will and their economic values on Africans by a preponderance of hypocrisy and imperialist blackmail. The Mau Mau freedom-fighters themselves remained united in their uncompromising opposition to the existing colonial policies, especially those affecting land rights.³⁹

Unfortunately, when Jomo Kenyatta became President of Kenya, one of his first political undertakings was the elimination and crushing of political opposition as well as the progressive elements in the country, thus stultifying the creative revolutionary energies of the Mau Mau movement that had been rekindled by the Mau Mau freedom-fighters during Kenyatta's imprisonment and exile. Even the good intentions of the Mau Mau movement were compromised. By 1966, not only had Kenyatta succeeded in building for himself a semi-authoritarian pinnacle of power, but he had also become the favoured grand old custodian and guarantor of the white settlers' economic interests in the independent Kenya. The crucial point here is that the first political group to get hold of the reigns of power in independent Kenya was either disinterested in, or

incapable of carrying the struggle for economic independence to the projected conclusion. The group at issue here appeared retrogressively satisfied with political power which it used to amass wealth and to repress political opposition and critics of the regime generally.

Probed from any angle, the author thinks that he is absolutely right in concluding this argument by stating that the indiscriminate killing of the Mau Mau freedom-fighters, innocent peasants, as well as their children by the British troops, was an act of gross irresponsibility that greatly intensified Kenya's vulnerability to political coercion by the arrogant and racist European settlers of zeal. Not only that, these barbaric killings of the innocent peoples of Kenya, regardless of whether they were guilty or not, were fundamentally and inherently racist and inhuman.

Needless to say, national sentiments in colonial Kenya meant no more or less than the right of the peoples to determine their own destiny — starting with the control of their land-based economy. To be specific, what the peoples of Kenya were asking for, especially during the period between 1952 and 1956 was not a philanthropic charity or benevolent paternalism from Britain. They demanded that their rights to land which had been brazenly expunged by the colonial administration, be restored and, at the same time, recognized. As such, the pre-colonial nationalist movements in Kenya were the ultimate outcry or protest against colonialism, forced labour, political oppression, economic racism and social degradation, as well as all other forms of economic exploitation at the hands of imperialists, the perpetrators who vampirically gorged themselves on the flesh, blood and bones of the sons and daughters of the soil. Contrary to the popular belief, the Mau Mau movement was not 'anti-European or anti-white'; it was 'anti-oppression' and 'anti-exploitation'. Natural enough, although it appeared in 1953 that the struggle was going to be a long one, and that a period of greater stress and trial lay ahead, the peoples of Kenya could not have passively waited for nine hundred ninety-nine years for the British Government to come to Kenya on a humanitarian, or in rescue mission in order to loosen their fetters. However, when the Mau Mau uprising freedom-fighters resolutely took responsibility to free the country from the shackles of colonialism and when the people of Kenya began to deal with political and economic issues by a more practical and revolutionary approach, they were branded rebels, radicals, militants and terrorists.

Logically and conceivably, is it wrong for one to be a rebel, or to say 'no' to oppressor? Is it wrong to question or disobey oppressive regime and its laws, or reign of terror for that matter? Is it a bad thing to be a progressive revolutionary or a resister, or to feel that 'if I do not hurt anybody, then I should not get hurt'? Was Rosa Parks (a Black woman) wrong when in 1955 she refused to stand or to

give up her seat in a commuter bus in Montgomery, Alabama, so that a white man could sit? Was she wrong when she refused to move to the back of the bus, where Blacks were traditionally confined? Was she wrong when she refused to obey segregation law which had for many years relegated Blacks to second-class citizenship? According to Albert Camus, a rebel is a man or woman who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation; a man or woman who says yes, from the moment he or she makes his or her first gesture of rebellion.⁴¹ In other words, a slave who has taken orders all his life suddenly decides that he cannot obey some new command.⁴² Specifically, what does a man or slave mean by saying 'no'? Does he mean to be stubborn, dissident or civil disobedient? In a simple language, he means that 'this has been going on too long, up to this point yes, beyond it no, you are going too far, or again, there is a limit beyond which you shall not go.'⁴³ In other words, his 'no' affirms the existence of a borderline.⁴⁴ The same concept is to be found in the rebel's feeling that the other person is 'exaggerating' that he is exerting his authority beyond a limit where he begins to infringe on the rights of others.⁴⁵ Thus the movement of rebellion is found simultaneously on the categorical rejection of an intrusion that is considered intolerable and on the confused conviction of an absolute right, which in the rebel's mind, is more precisely that he has the right to. . . .⁴⁶ Consequently, rebellion cannot exist without the feeling that, somewhere and somehow, one is right.⁴⁷ Intrinsically, in every act of rebellion, the rebel simultaneously experiences a feeling of revulsion at the infringement of his right and a complete and spontaneous loyalty to certain aspects of himself.⁴⁸ That is to say, he implicitly brings into a play a standard of values so far from being gratuitous that he is prepared to support it, no matter what the risk.⁴⁹ For to remain passively silent is to give the impression that one wants nothing, and in certain cases it really amounts to wanting nothing.⁵⁰ Admittedly, if the individual, in fact, accepts death and happens to die as a consequence of his act of rebellion, he demonstrates by doing so that he is willing to sacrifice himself, for the sake of common good which he considers more important than his own destiny.⁵¹ And in this light, if he prefers the risk of death to the negation of the rights that he defends, it is because he considers these rights more important himself.⁵² Even more strongly, a committed freedom fighter acts in the name of certain values which are still indeterminate but which he feels are common to himself and to all men.⁵³

Fundamentally, not only does the revolutionary love the people and life, but he also loves the world.⁵⁴ Understandably, though the revolutionary suffers intensely his own affliction and the affliction of all his brothers, he lives in order to destroy that affliction.⁵⁵ In other words, though the rebel, freedom-fighter or revolutionary lives in a world of misery, injustice, and hatred; though he feels

more keenly than anyone the misery of all humanity, he exists in order to change that world.⁵⁶ That is to say, though he lives in an earthly hell of hatred and strife, he exists in order to transform it into an earthly paradise — a world of love.⁵⁷ This being the case, to be revolutionary is to love the world and the people, to love life, to be happy.⁵⁸ Consequently, the revolutionary does not flee from life or death, he understands that it is his duty to live for the fight.⁵⁹ The crucial point is, to die for life the way the Vietnamese, or a Mau Mau freedom-fighter died, is happiness; to die for the death of slavery, oppression, colonialism, imperialism and vampiric capitalism; to die for the death of hunger, misery, and ignorance, is even greater happiness and honour.⁶⁰

According to Hugo Blanco Galdo's, to die is no disgrace when it brings nearer the dawn; when you see, you feel the massive awakening of the peasants; when you see students marching hand in hand with workers and peasants, conscious of their historic mission.⁶¹ Intrinsically, a fighting death is no disgrace since for the revolutionary that is the natural way to die. Moreover, life in the struggle is never lost. Fundamentally, since the crucial factor of any movement is its outcome, in studying the aims and actions of any rebellion and its results, we shall have to say, each time, whether it remains faithful to its first noble promise or if, through indolence or folly, it forgets its original purpose and plunges into a mire of tyranny or servitude.⁶²

Since the factors contributing to the rise of protest, rebellion, revolution, or nationalist movements are, in many cases, similar, the very moment the slave refuses to obey the humiliating orders of his master, he simultaneously rejects the condition of slavery.⁶³ The act of rebellion, therefore, carries him far beyond the point he had reached by simply refusing.⁶⁴ Not only that, he exceeds the bounds that he fixed for his antagonist, and now demands to be treated as an equal.⁶⁵ Writing on protest, resistance and revolution, Julius Lester, once wrote:

To protest is to speak out against, to let it be known that you do not like a certain action of another. To protest is an act of intellectual commitment. It is to say (Sir, I protest) when you are slapped in the face. To protest is to dislike the inhumanity of another. To resist is to stop inhumanity and affirm your own humanity. Revolution is the ultimate cry of humanity that humanizes those who before were dehumanized. There is no protest if permission must be sought and rules abided by. For to resist is to say No!⁶⁶

By unequivocally saying "no" to Britain and settler regime in Kenya, the Mau Mau movement resolutely forced the British imperialists to change its colonial policies whose aims were to retain Kenya as a permanent settlers' fief for 999 years!

Ideally, the revolutionary is he who has reached that stage of psycho-social evolution where the alleviation of his own pain is secondary to alleviating the pain of others.⁶⁷ The point is, the revolutionary recognizes that to attempt to alleviate the pain of individuals alone is to become engaged in unending acts of frustration.⁶⁸ For the people are economically and politically oppressed *en masse*, not separately.⁶⁹ If this is true, then, they can only be freed *en masse*.⁷⁰ Consequently, the revolution is concerned with a total change in a society's institutions, for it is institutions which change the individual.⁷¹ Politically, organizationally and ideologically, the revolutionary understands that to change the institutions he must change himself.⁷² That is to say, he and his comrades must become new men, for it is from new men that the new institutions will come which, in turn, will create the new society.⁷³

Admittedly, throughout the colonial world the development of the economy and the advance of modern economic, political and technological ideas eventually reach a stage when the indigenous people begin to demand and to urge far-reaching claims upon the foreign rulers.⁷⁴ To be specific, not only do they begin to voice demands for better education and the right to participate in legislation, but they also declare that the validity of a government must be judged, not by the alien rulers, but by the ruled, that the purpose of government policy must no longer be to provide comfortable lives for administrators and markets or raw materials for the so-called "home country," but an increasing standard of life and greater self-realization for the native people, whose lives have hitherto been ruthlessly exploited and squandered, and are therefore literally at stake.⁷⁵ Moreover, the awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation.⁷⁶

According to some revisionist Kenyan social scientists, including historians, the Mau Mau movement had been militarily a failure but this kind of argument is irrelevant for the simple reason that the Mau Mau freedom-fighters were not fighting for a military victory: they were fighting for political and economic victory. However, while it is true that the Mau Mau freedom-fighters did lose some battles, they never lost the war. The inescapable truth is that the movement made remarkable achievements and contributions on many aspects which remain a historical reminiscence of its economic and political aims. Between 1952 and 1956, the Mau Mau freedom fighters delivered what later became a death blow to settlerdom and European landlordism with far-reaching political consequences and economic ramifications. The period from 1952 through 1956 is particularly important because it was during this period when much blood was shed by the few so that many should lead dignified life in their country. Equally, important, it was a period of great realization: that only by resisting and by dedicatively risking one's life that human dignity and economic freedom are obtained or won.

About the Author

Mwangi Wa-Githumo holds a Ph.D. from New York University. He is currently Senior Lecturer in History in the University of Nairobi, Kenya.

Editorial Note

The editors welcome comments on this provocative paper. We hope to publish these comments in our next issues of the Journal.

1. For a detailed discussion of Mau Mau, see C.G. Rosberg and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of "Mau Mau"* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1966); D.L. Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau from Within* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1966); J.M. Kariuki, *Mau Mau Detainee* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963); R. Buijtenhuijs, *Mau Mau Twenty Years After* (Paris, 1973); J.L. Brom, *Mau Mau* (Paris, 1956); P. Maina, *Six Mau Mau General* (Nairobi: Gazelle Books Co., 1977); Maina-Wa-Kinyatti, "Mau Mau: The Peak of African Nationalism in Kenya", *Kenya Historical Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1977), pp. 287 – 311.
2. The dissatisfaction of the Africans in Kenya with their status as colonial labour subjects dates back to the close of the nineteenth century, and continued to increase vigorously into the mid-twentieth century when the majority of the people in the country became more and more victims of land expropriation and forced labour coupled with unfair system of taxation. It was the feeling of discontent among the masses which in turn made them rally behind the Mau Mau movement.
3. It was the years of colonial anarchy and turmoil — 1884 – 1939 — coupled with land robbery, rather than any other single reason which provoked the peoples of Kenya to revolt against the British government and European settlers simultaneously.
4. C.G. Rosberg and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1966), p. 233.
5. See E. Stillman and W. Pfaff, *The New Politics: America and the End of the Postwar World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), pp. 118 – 119.
6. R.K.P. Pankhurst, *Kenya: The History of Two Nations* (London: Independent Publishing Co., 1954), p. 86.
7. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1973), p. 28.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 28 – 29.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
10. W.O. Stanley, *Education and Social Integration* (New York: T.C. Press, Columbia University, 1967), pp. 142 – 143.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
12. Quoted in Pankhurst's *Kenya: The History of Two Nations*, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
13. Pankhurst, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
16. G. Arnold, *Kenyatta and the Politics of Kenya* (Nairobi: Tran-African Publishers, 1975), pp. 110 – 132.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
18. One of the most important viewpoints to stress here is that although Kenya achieved her economic independence in 1963, nationalist sentiment directed against European settlers, who remained in illegal occupation of the stolen lands after 1963, did not automatically cease to

manifest itself as an identifiable moving force capable of pursuing its original and independent course of development. In fact, this force has persistently remained the vanguard of the radical demand for economic changes in independent Kenya, a demand that continues to play a decisive role in revolutionizing the political minds of the younger generation, as well as progressive scholars and politicians.

19. A. Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 13.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 15 – 16.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
32. See Hugo Blanco's "Letter to his People" in *Land or Death: The Peasant Struggle in Peru* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), p. 97.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. Camus, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. See J. Lester, *Revolutionary Notes* (New York, Grove Press, 1970), pp. 3 – 26.
45. See Introduction to *Ibid.*, p. ix.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*, pp. ix – x.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*
52. Pankhurst, *Op. cit.*, p. 75.
53. *Ibid.*
54. See F. Weffort's Preface to P. Freire's *Educação Como Prática da Liberdade* (Rio de Janeiro, 1967).
55. See Hugo Blanco's "Letter to his People" in *Land or Death: The Peasant Struggle in Peru* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), p. 97.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*

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60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*
62. Camus, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*
66. Lester, *op. cit.*, pp. 3 – 26.
67. See Introduction to *ibid.*, p. ix.
68. *Ibid.*
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*
71. *Ibid.*, pp. ix – x.
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*
74. R.K.P. Pankhurst, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
75. *Ibid.*
76. See F. Weffort's Preface to P. Freire's *Educação Como Prática da Liberdade* (Rio de Janeiro, 1957).