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**Mau Mau Crucible of War: Statehood, National Identity, and Politics of Postcolonial Kenya**, by Nicholas K. Githuku. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016. xvii + 555 pp. ISBN 978-1-4985-0698-4. \$146 (hardback). ISBN 978-1-4985-0699-1. \$138 (eBook). **The Power of the Oath: Mau Mau Nationalism in Kenya, 1952-1960**, by Mickie Mwanzia Koster. Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2016. xv + 244 pp. ISBN 9781580465465. \$85 (hardback). ISBN 9781782046523. \$85 (eBook).

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1952 Governor Evelyn Baring declared a State of Emergency in the colony of Kenya in response to the threat posed by the so-called Mau Mau uprising, an armed revolt by mainly Kikuyu and related ethnic groups that contested the injustices inflicted by the colonial regime. Whereas the British lifted the State of Emergency in 1960 after a tough military campaign, a legal manhunt, and the imposition of work camps, Mickie Mwanzia Koster and Nicholas K. Githuku argue in their respective books that a ‘Mau Mau mindset’ or ‘mentalité of struggle’ has persisted and remains ever-present in contemporary Kenya. While the former evinces this claim by discussing the transformation of the Mau Mau ritual of oathing through time, the latter perceives later movements, such as the Mungiki, Sabaot Land Defense Force or the Mombasa Republican Council, as reincarnations of the Mau Mau insofar as their underlying grievances and their disillusionment with the state are concerned. Both authors take an approach from below that centers on the aspirations of the ‘common’ people using archival data and existing literature (Githuku), as well as interviews with former-Mau Mau and their descendants (Koster).

In eight consecutive chapters, ‘Mau Mau Crucible of War’ guides the reader through the political history of Kenya starting from the creation of the East Africa Protectorate (the precursor of the Kenyan Colony) in 1895 up until the presidency of Mwai Kibaki (2002-2013). With the exception of an introductory chapter on the overall aims of the book, each chapter describes in detail how the political and socio-economic configurations of the time frame under study contributed to the emergence, or the persistence, of a ‘mentalité of struggle’, or the state of mind of the aggrieved Kenyan population. Chapters two and three set the stage by explaining the onset of this ‘mentalité’, which arose from the deplorable living conditions of Africans after they had been expropriated of their land, and subjected to unfair taxes and a discriminatory identification pass (kipande). Instead of recognizing the denounced injustices underlying Mau Mau, Chapter four documents how the British tried to smear the rebellion in the germ by demonizing the movement both home and abroad as a “disease of the mind, a plague, a virulent infection and a sore that had to be cut out before it affected other loyal Africans in the region” (p. 189). It were, therefore, the African elites sympathetic to the colonial regime that were co-opted to power with the subsequent advent of independence, rather than the Mau Mau terrorists/freedom fighters. The post-colonial state, therefore, would represent the interests protected and promoted during the latter years of the colonial regime. Independence, Githuku therefore argues in Chapter five, was a pyrrhic victory that left the poor poor. Before concluding (Chapter eight), Chapter six and seven show how this post-colonial disillusionment continued under the governments of respectively Moi and Kibaki, and caused new waves of popular resistance in the form of insurgent movements (e.g. Mungiki), art (e.g. 2012 graffiti blitz in Nairobi), and online communities (e.g. Unga revolution).

Rather than a chronological approach, ‘The Power of the Oath’ is structured thematically. It consists of two parts, each consisting of three chapters. The first part introduces the reader in the world of Mau Mau oathing, unveiling its roots in tradition and sketching its evolution through time. The second part examines how this evolution pushed oath takers to break

taboos and adapt their traditions to the new social configurations and demands triggered by colonialism. In particular, it analyzes how oath taking, once a respected tradition, turned into an unlawful practice (Chapter four); how it changed gender roles by affirming the role of women (Chapter five); and how it got intertwined with the practice of purification – oath takers had to cleanse themselves from the sins they committed as Mau Mau combatants (Chapter six).

Although very distinct in terms of perspective, methodology, build-up, and size, the books show some similarities. First, they both share a long-term perspective (or ‘longue durée view’ in the words of Githuku) that situates Mau Mau well beyond 1952-1960: The movement is rooted in traditions that predate colonialism, and continues to inspire calls to fight injustice, whatever the means or whoever the groups involved. Both books also devote considerable space to describe the grievances experienced by Kenyans, and by the Kikuyu in particular, which justified Mau Mau and its derivatives. This is certainly true for the book by Githuku, whom considers these grievances to be the key to understand Kenya. Lastly, both books are concerned with the grassroots or common people, whom they give ample voice through the inclusion of snippets from, among others, complaints and petitions to the President, court cases, and, in the case of Koster, self-conducted interviews.

While Koster, as well as Githuku attempt to demonstrate that the grievances underlying the Mau Mau rebellion were not confined to the Kikuyu community, the former explicitly aims to show that Mau Mau was, more than a Kikuyu war, a nationalist struggle. Other ethnic groups, she argues, were also involved in the movement, including the Kamba, Embu and Meru. Although adding nuance on its ethnic representation, it would be unjustified to call Mau Mau a nationalist movement given the number of groups represented (in all, there are more than 40 ethnic groups in Kenya) and the geographical proximity and the cultural affinities between the Kikuyu, Kamba, Embu and Meru. There have effectively been efforts by other ethnic groups, nevertheless, that have challenged the colonial regime and its successors based on similar concerns. Secondly, the strong grievance-perspective of both authors seems to leave no room for any discussion concerning opposition to Mau Mau, particularly among the Kikuyu ethnic group itself. The perspective of the so-called ‘loyalists’, notably, is completely left out. What is the most striking, however, is that both books lack to appropriately introduce Mau Mau. Not a single chapter by Githuku documents the make-up, aspirations, and actions of the Mau Mau, while the introductory chapter by Koster is chaotic and only provides bits and pieces. A critical perspective on Mau Mau, furthermore, is absent. While lamenting the demonization by the British, both Koster and Githuku largely refrain from discussing atrocities committed on the movement’s side, whether in terms of ritual practices or in terms of crimes and attacks. On a lighter note, lastly, while the book by Koster misses some depth, the book of Githuku is overwhelming in detail.

While readers looking for an introduction to Mau Mau may remain dissatisfied after reading any of these books, people interested in the particular practice of oathing and those who wish to deepen their knowledge on the grievances driving state contestation in Kenya are recommended to read respectively ‘The Power of the Oath’ and ‘Mau Mau Crucible of War’. The former is a short read that offers interesting insights into the practice of oathing through first-hand testimonies, and is easily digestible. The latter book, on the other hand, demands time and concentration, but offers prospective readers a richly detailed analysis of the ways in which unresolved historical problems and injustices stemming from colonialism continue to haunt contemporary Kenya in return.

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