MAU MAU AND MASCULINITY:
RACE, GENDER, AND THE BODY IN COLONIAL KENYA

by

CONOR JOSEPH WARD WILKINSON

B.A. (Hons.), Huron University College, 2015

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(History)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

August 2017

© Conor Joseph Ward Wilkinson, 2017
Abstract

This thesis interrogates the role of British conceptions of race, gender, and the body in the detention camps that Britain established in Kenya during the Mau Mau Emergency (1952-1960). It aims to reframe the ways we consider the violence that occurred in these camps. To date, scholars have been largely uncritical about the ways in which masculinity operated during the Emergency. They have not reflected on the way British masculinity affected—and was affected by—the colonial sphere. Those that have considered gender have generally assumed that static, timeless notions of manhood were imported to Kenya, and that tropes about manliness were utilized unidirectionally by colonizers against colonized.

In contrast, this thesis argues that Mau Mau detention camps amplified the hierarchy of racialized masculinity in Kenya to new extremes, resulting in physical and mental torture of tens of thousands of detained Africans. Importantly, British men’s attempts to define and control African detainees’ minds and bodies according to their preconceptions of race, gender, and the body ran jointly with colonial administrators’ efforts to police their own officer corps. Understanding how British men conceived the masculine body—particularly as it related to its racialization (or lack thereof)—is imperative if we are to make sense of the violence done against African men in the Mau Mau camps.

This study accordingly begins by sketching the role of masculinity in the British Empire—particularly as it pertained to the surveillance of the Empire’s colonial troops—and then proceeds to examine the implications of masculinity in Kenya before and during the Emergency. Ultimately it argues that the British did not possess the cultural scripts necessary to sufficiently make sense of what they called Kenyan “primitivism.” In the Mau Mau oathing rituals the colonizers saw African behaviors that flouted the gender norms the British understood as necessary to their colonial endeavour. Many of these norms were informed by codes of racial and sexual purity. As a result, the British widely viewed Kenyan oath takers as culturally unintelligible, as “unreal” bodies governed by illegitimate expression. During the Emergency, violence became the overwhelming British response to this conundrum.
Lay Summary

How can we make sense of wide-scale, brutal violence? Why do former imperial nations struggle with confronting their colonial pasts? These are two questions that I have had in mind while researching the Mau Mau Emergency, which lasted from 1952-1960 in British Kenya. The British government recently acknowledged atrocities and the existence of documents related to Mau Mau detention camps, but only after the United Kingdom Supreme Court ordered it to do so. This long, drawn out process has in some ways obscured rather than clarified what the Mau Mau Emergency means in the twenty-first century. This thesis argues that we must analyze the complex politics of the camps themselves to understand what happened and why. Figuring out how British men understood manliness, and how manliness was connected to skin colour, might go some way in answering these questions.
Preface

This thesis is entirely the original, unpublished, and independent work of the author, Conor Joseph Ward Wilkinson.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii
Lay Summary ................................................................................................................................... iii
Preface ............................................................................................................................................... iv
Table of Contents .......................................................................................................................... v
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................ vi
1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 1
2. Hegemonic Masculinity and the Policing of British Colonial Officers ............................................ 9
3. Settler Colonialism and Racialized Masculinity ........................................................................... 15
4. The Mau Mau Oaths and the Initial British Response ................................................................... 20
5. Gendered Justifications of Violence ............................................................................................... 25
6. Planning a Massacre, Defending the (Masculine) Empire ............................................................... 33
7. Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... 43
Bibliography ...................................................................................................................................... 48
Acknowledgements

I have incurred a considerable number of debts in the formulation, research, and writing of this thesis. The first formative steps were taken at Huron University College, where I had the privilege of learning and working with a remarkable group of historians: Amy Bell, Jun Fang, Geoff Read, Nina Reid-Maroney, and the recently retired Doug Leighton. I benefitted immensely from my four years at Huron, and I am truly grateful for the support that these five people continue to offer me. Geoff’s seminar on masculinity has proved particularly useful, and it was in Amy’s seminar on British state secrets that I first came across this thing called “Mau Mau.”

At the University of British Columbia I have similarly benefitted from a terrific faculty. I have been fortunate enough to learn from the following people: Alejandra Bronfman, Michel Ducharme, Bill French, Eagle Glassheim, Laura Ishiguro, Tina Loo, Brad Miller, David Morton, Paige Raibmon, Coll Thrush, and the late Danny Vickers. Alejandra, Bill, and Paige offered equal parts encouragement, constructive criticism, and warmth during my first year (and thereafter); Michel is always willing to talk and never fails to give his honest opinion; Eagle, Tina, and Coll have been patient and helpful resources for all things grad student-related; Laura and Brad have always been happy to talk, and to provide useful insights; and Danny was one of the most thoughtful people I have met. I thank David for his willingness to talk about “the field” and any and everything else. It has been greatly appreciated. Most importantly, I thank my advisor, Joy Dixon, for her compassion, openness, and perceptiveness. All of Joy’s qualities greatly enhanced both my thesis and my time at UBC. I also want to thank the History Department staff, especially Judy Levit, Tuya Ochir, Jocelyn Smith, and Jason Wu, for their hard work and friendliness.

I also want to thank my friends and fellow grad students that supported me over the last two years. For all the hours I spent with them in the History lounge, the TA offices, and elsewhere, I thank my (c. 1985 edition) Trivial Pursuit partner, David Adie; my most frequent co-conspirator, Barrie Blatchford; my kaæri vinur, Trygvi Brynjarsson; the sagacious Luther Cenci; the erudite Devin Eeg; and he of the bizarre foodstuffs, Aaron Molnar. As well I want to thank Shruti Rao and Iman Baobeid from UBC’s Social Justice Institute for sharing their friendship and brilliance. And finally I want to thank my dear friends Kelly Cubbon, Sydnie Koch, and Neeyati Shah for helping me get away from schoolwork when necessary.

I also would like to acknowledge the institutions that enabled me to research and write this thesis. I received generous financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, UBC’s Department of History, and UBC’s Faculty of Arts. My thanks also go to the organizers of the 2016 Loyola University Chicago History Graduate Student Conference, the 2017 Qualicum History Conference in Parksville, and the 2017 UBC Centre for Near Eastern and Religious Studies Graduate Conference for providing me the opportunity to present my research as it was ongoing. I would also like to thank the staff at The National Archives in London and at UBC’s Irving K. Barber Learning Centre and Koerner Library.

Last but most significantly I would like to thank my family. My parents, Bill and Karen, have been incredibly supportive of everything I have chosen to do so far in life. I want to thank them and my sister, Kate, for showing me how rewarding and useful a History degree can be. And to Victoria James, my best friend-cum-wife, I can only express my thanks and love in so many words. I thank her for being the best life partner I could ask for.
1. Introduction

In 1957, during the height of the Mau Mau Emergency (1952-1960), a group of high-ranking British colonial administrators visited a detention camp in the Embu district of central Kenya, about 100 kilometres northeast of Nairobi. Inside the camp the group observed a demonstration of the “Mwea procedure,”¹ which comprised a series of techniques designed to extract “confessions” from alleged “terrorists,” the majority of whom were members of the Kikuyu tribe indigenous to Kenya’s south central highlands.² The detainees in question were passing through one of the most severe stages of the “pipeline”—a process by which ostensibly “hardcore” African rebels (labeled “black”) were screened, rehabilitated, and released back into the public once they were “white.”³ These screening and rehabilitation procedures were designed to combat what the British perceived as a pathological state of being with which many Africans were prone to be infected, both physically and mentally. The British believed that Africans transmitted this “infection” via mysterious oathing rituals, and they thought that only repeated, public confessions by oath takers could inoculate Africans against the infection to which they had succumbed.⁴

Of the procedures adopted in the 53 camps that the British erected during the Mau Mau Emergency, the Mwea procedure that this group of administrators witnessed in 1957 was among

---

¹ The National Archives (hereafter TNA), Foreign Commonwealth Office (hereafter FCO), 141/6303, “Kenya: detainees and detention camps.”
² TNA FCO 141/5595, “Kenya: Council of Ministers memoranda 261-285 (1954) and 1-51 (1955)”: “Confessions are encouraged with the object of removing from the individual’s mind and soul the poison of the more advanced Mau Mau oaths. Having confessed even to a part of his association with Mau Mau, it is clearly apparent that a load has been lifted from the mind of the person concerned. As he continues to make a clean breast of his past, so he experiences an increasing sense of freedom. He is then receptive to the influences the rehabilitation staff bring to bear, but not before.”
³ TNA FCO 141/5666, “Kenya: Mau Mau unrest; detainees and detention camps.”
⁴ TNA FCO 141/5595, “Kenya: Council of Ministers memoranda 261-285 (1954) and 1-51 (1955)”: “But confession is not considered enough in itself and complete and public renunciation and denunciation of Mau Mau is demanded of anyone who wishes to start to climb the ladder. Naturally those who are implicated deepest have the greatest height to climb […] Once this initial step has been taken, everything is done to build up resistance to Mau Mau.”
the most extreme. It was a modified version of an existing procedure known as “dilution,” which called for hardcore detainees to be housed alongside a larger number of prisoners who had proved themselves cooperative. The rationale behind dilution asserted that, in conjunction with persuasion by Africans who had seen the light of rehabilitation, isolation from fellow “incorrigibles” would sufficiently “dilute” the poison within “black” individuals, thus affording them a higher probability of achieving “white” status. Sometimes dilution extended beyond the realm of the metaphorical, and involved the use of water as a literal diluent; in at least one case this “form of shock treatment” contributed to the death of a detainee. The modified Mwea procedure called for busloads of hardcore detainees to be shuttled into the waiting hands of camp “receptionists” who forced the prisoners to put on designated clothing and to have their heads shaved. Resisters were beaten with fists and open hands, first by fellow Africans, and then, if their “defiance was more obstinate,” by Europeans.

A draft memorandum detailing the Mwea procedure as witnessed by the colonial administrators noted that “[t]here was no attempt to strike at testicles or any other manifestations of sadistic brutality.” This detail belies what occurred in many of the Emergency camps outside of this particular visit. Tens of thousands of people were tortured mentally and physically during the years of the Emergency. This process often included sexual abuse, and it is likely that more than 20,000 people were murdered in the camps. While this memorandum may have been drafted to allay the anxieties of governmental overseers, both in Kenya and in London, the administrators on-site were nonetheless fully aware of the abuses occurring under their watch.

---

5 TNA FCO 141/6304, “Kenya: detainees and detention camps.”
6 TNA FCO 141/6303, “Kenya: detainees and detention camps.”
7 Ibid.
How and why these abuses happened have been two of the most enduring questions for historians, Kenyans, and other interested observers for the last half-century. This thesis seeks to answer this question.

Few series of events in twentieth-century African history have received as much scholarly attention as the Mau Mau Emergency, and perhaps none has engendered more controversy. The publication in 2005 of Caroline Elkins’s Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Imperial Reckoning* has proved to be one of the primary catalysts for dissension. Elkins claimed that a system of state-sponsored torture in detention and works camps that the British erected in Kenya during the Emergency resulted in the deaths of “perhaps hundreds of thousands” of Kikuyu. Whether the argument for genocide is supported by the evidence remains contentious, with one commentator suggesting—perhaps unfairly—that Elkins’s use of the term was “a mere goad to liberal outrage.”

A second criticism has arisen out of Elkins’s framing of the Kikuyu as generally united in their anticolonial cause against the British. Scholarship prior to and since *Imperial Reckoning* has demonstrated that the Kikuyu were never a monolithic political entity, but were rather deeply divided about their relationship to the colonial government. Elkins’s

---


12 Elkins gives some consideration to the anti-Mau Mau Kikuyu known as “loyalists,” but she understates their number and impact. See, for example, *Imperial Reckoning*, p. 29. Even before the Emergency, Kikuyu had long
interpretation of Kikuyu oral testimony as it pertained to “detention camp culture” has also been scrutinized, with one prominent historian questioning the reliability of Elkins’s evidence, and another suggesting that she failed to appreciate the political agency that detainees exhibited in spite of their internment.¹³

For her part, Elkins has argued that recent events have vindicated her scholarship. One of the aftershocks of Imperial Reckoning’s publication was a legal case brought forth by survivors of the Emergency against the British government.¹⁴ Several of these claimants were successful in their bid to sue the government and, due to legal pressure, the UK’s Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition of 2010 to 2015 begrudgingly admitted to the existence of more than 1,500 files that had been kept secret since the early 1960s, several of which I analyze in this thesis. This release has since been termed the “Hanslope Disclosure,” as the files had been residing in a repository called Hanslope Park in Milton Keynes. In total, thousands of files from 37 former British colonies have been made available at The National Archives in Kew.¹⁵ The British government initially refused to acknowledge any liability for the actions of its parliamentary

---


predecessors, but in the case of Kenya, it ultimately agreed to a settlement sum to be paid to 5,228 claimants.\textsuperscript{16}

The Hanslope files corroborate in several instances Elkins’s claims of the scale and systematization of British torture in the Mau Mau camps, though at least one scholar has pointed out that this fact was more or less already known.\textsuperscript{17} As other historians have recently suggested, however, studies of the Emergency should be concerned with the complex and contingent politics of the camps themselves, rather than with the sheer number or brutality of instances of torture and murder committed therein.\textsuperscript{18} I consequently interrogate the role of British conceptions of race, gender, and the body in the detention camps established during the Emergency. I aim to reframe the ways in which we consider the violence that occurred in these camps. Whereas other historians have recently viewed Mau Mau files and testimony through a psychological or legalistic lens,\textsuperscript{19} I seek to build on the body of literature that has documented the history of gender and sexuality in British East Africa, most of which has been concerned with women.\textsuperscript{20}


\textsuperscript{18} See, e.g., Peterson, “Ethnography and Cultural Innovation.”


\textsuperscript{20} In addition to Presley’s Kikuyu Women and Bruce-Lockhart’s “‘Unsound’ Minds and Broken Bodies” (both op. cit.), see Sarah Mirza and Margaret Strobel, eds., Three Swahili Women: Life Histories from Mombasa, Kenya (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Luise White, The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Carolyn M. Shaw, Colonial Inscriptions: Race, Sex, and Class in Kenya (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Jean Davison, Voices from Mutira: Change in the Lives of Rural Gikuyu Women, 1910-1995, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996); Lynn M. Thomas, Politics
masculinity operated during the Emergency. They have not reflected on the way British masculinity affected—and was affected by—the colonial sphere. Those that have considered gender have generally assumed that static, timeless notions of manhood were imported to Kenya, and that tropes about manliness were utilized unidirectionally by colonizers against colonized.\(^2\)

In fact, Africans were just as likely as Europeans to have concerns about manliness. The Emergency-era guerrilla forces known as the Kenya Land Freedom Army, for example, circulated a list of directives to its operatives that variously urged the Army’s male members to “pray and do your revolutionary duties with vigour and determination,” to not “fear death because it is better to die with dignity than to live in slavery,” and to castrate anyone who displayed cowardice.\(^2\) Evidently African men were just as likely as Europeans to view masculine sexuality as intimately tied to particular character traits.\(^2\) Moreover, while the colonial archive is rife with instances of British men agonizing over the libidinal dangers posed by their African subjects, just as common and significant were those instances when British overseers fretted about the masculine “fitness” of the European troops that they imported to their colonies across the globe.

The result was that Mau Mau detention camps became sites where the hierarchy of racialized masculinity in Kenya was amplified to new extremes, resulting in physical and mental

---

1. Masculinity operated during the Emergency. They have not reflected on the way British masculinity affected—and was affected by—the colonial sphere. Those that have considered gender have generally assumed that static, timeless notions of manhood were imported to Kenya, and that tropes about manliness were utilized unidirectionally by colonizers against colonized.\(^2\)

2. In fact, Africans were just as likely as Europeans to have concerns about manliness. The Emergency-era guerrilla forces known as the Kenya Land Freedom Army, for example, circulated a list of directives to its operatives that variously urged the Army’s male members to “pray and do your revolutionary duties with vigour and determination,” to not “fear death because it is better to die with dignity than to live in slavery,” and to castrate anyone who displayed cowardice.\(^2\) Evidently African men were just as likely as Europeans to view masculine sexuality as intimately tied to particular character traits.\(^2\) Moreover, while the colonial archive is rife with instances of British men agonizing over the libidinal dangers posed by their African subjects, just as common and significant were those instances when British overseers fretted about the masculine “fitness” of the European troops that they imported to their colonies across the globe.

The result was that Mau Mau detention camps became sites where the hierarchy of racialized masculinity in Kenya was amplified to new extremes, resulting in physical and mental

---


torture of tens of thousands of detained Africans. Importantly, British men’s attempts to define and control African detainees’ minds and bodies according to their preconceptions of race, gender, and the body ran jointly with colonial administrators’ efforts to police their own officer corps. Making sense of the violence done against African men in the Mau Mau camps requires an understanding of how British men conceived the masculine body—especially as it related to its racialization. This study accordingly begins by sketching the role of masculinity in the British Empire more generally and then examining the implications of masculinity in Kenya before and during the Mau Mau Emergency.

Particularly important objects of gendered observation for the British were the oathing rituals that ostensibly bound together many Africans before and during the Emergency. These oaths typically involved swearing allegiance to African leaders as well as an understanding that breaking the oath would result in spontaneous death. The aspects of the rituals that most concerned British settlers and officers, however, were purported acts of blood magic, bestiality, and cannibalism. These troubling and “barbaric” features of the oaths caused British men an often fantastical anxiety that they sought to cure by discursively feminizing African oath takers. They hoped to “rehabilitate” what they viewed as decidedly anti-modern and unmasculine Africans who succumbed to the Mau Mau infection via the “pipeline.” The metaphor of infection proved to be a crutch for British men to rely upon. The British did not possess the cultural scripts necessary to sufficiently make sense of what they called Kenyan “primitivism.” In the Mau Mau oathing rituals the British saw African behaviors that flouted the gender norms understood as necessary to the colonial endeavour. Many of these norms were informed by codes of racial and sexual purity. As a result, the British widely viewed Kenyan oath takers as culturally
unintelligible, as “unreal” bodies governed by illegitimate expression.\textsuperscript{24} During the Emergency, violence became the overwhelming British response to this conundrum. In situating the Hanslope Disclosure and other Mau Mau-related files in a gendered theoretical framework, I seek to clarify the mechanism by which this camp violence was done.

2. Hegemonic Masculinity and the Policing of British Colonial Officers

Historians and other scholars of gender have argued for three decades that gender roles are socially constructed and mutable. Historian Joan W. Scott has famously helped us to understand that gender is one of the primary ways that individuals signify “relationships of power.”25 In the context of colonial Kenya, sociologist R.W. Connell’s concept of “hegemonic masculinity” is particularly useful. Connell argued that “masculinity as personal practice cannot be isolated from its institutional context.” Instead scholars must interrogate masculinity’s embeddedness in three arenas: the state, the workplace/labour market, and the family (and vice versa).26 For Connell, hegemonic masculinity comprises “the masculine norms and practices which are most valued by the politically dominant class and which help to maintain its authority.”27 In terms of the development of the modern world, Connell located the most influential form of hegemonic masculinity as belonging to the gentry classes of Europe and North America.28 According to Connell, gentry masculinity—the traditional role of which was the protection of kinship and honour, often accomplished through violence—underwent significant transformations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to the rise of industrialization, capitalism, and bureaucracy. Whereas in the premodern world the capacity to commit interpersonal violence was central to Euro-American masculinity, in the modern world violence became a specialty of the army, which was overseen by a select number of political elites.29

29 Ibid., p. 609.
The British Empire’s list of regulations for its public officers serving in the colonies lends support to two aspects of Connell’s theorization, namely that the officer corps “became the repository of much of the gentry code,” and that masculinity became heavily bureaucratized and regulated. On the other hand, as John Tosh has suggested, historical case studies do not invariably support Connell’s contention that the primary purpose of hegemonic masculinity is “maintaining power over women.” In fact, the colonial administration in British East Africa employed hegemonic masculinity—in conjunction with ideas about race and class—for multiple purposes, including suppressing indigenous peoples (both male and female), justifying dispossession of land, and, in a process that is subtler and less well appreciated, regulating its own (strictly male) officer corps. The administration, for instance, imposed strict pecuniary regulations on its officers, who were compelled to disclose and, if instructed, to divest, any investments that might bring them “into real or apparent conflict with [their] public duties.” Part of the rationale for doing so was informed by a desire to control subalterns’ financial autonomy, but it was also taken as a fact that “pecuniary embarrassment… necessarily impair[ed] the efficiency of an officer.” Taken literally, concerns about officers’ efficiency were necessarily concerns about the amount of output (in the form of policing) the administration was getting from the time and energy investment it had made in their officers’ training.

An officer moreover was forbidden from writing or speaking to the press about matters relating to his occupation, regardless of whether he was on active duty. Complementing this form of censorship were regulations that allowed the Colonial Governor to inspect any petition

33 Ibid., p. 12. (Regs. 49 and 50).
an officer might make in regards to his treatment by a superior before it was transmitted to the Colonial Secretary.\textsuperscript{34} Medical examinations provided another technology whereby the Government could police its men. In addition to regularly scheduled health inspections, the Governor could, at his discretion, oblige officers to submit to screenings, always with the intention of “ascertaining whether [the officer] is physically fit for service.”\textsuperscript{35} Tellingly, medical examiners made their reports available to the Governor and to the Colonial Secretary, but never to the concerned officer.\textsuperscript{36} Each of these preceding regulations betrays the general sense of anxiety that the colonial administration held about its officers’ bodies and minds.

Meanwhile, perhaps no series of regulations and related debates encapsulated colonial administrative anxiety better than those concerning mandatory retirement. Evident in retirement debates is a sense of the type of man that the British gentry hoped to transport to (or produce in) their colonies. Colonial administrators and legislators spent considerable time and energy debating and second-guessing the decisions they made about their officers. The age, class, and abilities of individual policemen, for instance, were particularly contentious. The ideal officer was in the physical prime of his life, was educated to some extent, and was vital in spirit and sound of mind. He was, moreover—per the requirements of effective hegemonic masculinity—ultimately malleable. It was understood that individual men who transgressed these expected norms should face swift and decisive action. A series of letters concerning a man named D.D.C. Swayne demonstrates this point. Swayne had joined the Police Force in Kenya in 1927, initially

\textsuperscript{34} Colonial Regulations, p. 19. (Reg. 70). This system resembles the concept of “panopticism” as developed by Michel Foucault, whereby a state can observe and modify societal behaviours via constant surveillance, both real and perceived. See Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), pp. 195-228.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 21. (Regs. 80-84).
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 22. (Reg. 86c).
as a Police Constable,\textsuperscript{37} and he eventually rose to become a Senior Superintendent of Police in 1951, serving in this role in both Nyanza Province and Coast Province. In February of 1955, however, the Commissioner of Police recommended that Swayne “be required to retire from the Public Service under the ‘45 Rule,’”\textsuperscript{38} which stipulated that officers “should be permitted to retire at the age of 45.”\textsuperscript{39} The word “permitted” in this instance belied the truth of the matter.

When Acting Chief Secretary C.H. Hartwell wrote a memorandum later in 1955 to the Kenya Council of Ministers about Swayne’s conduct, he concluded by stating that Swayne would be given the opportunity to retire voluntarily, and would be required to retire “only if he declines to go voluntarily.”\textsuperscript{40}

Hartwell’s recommendation was supported by three reports filled out by Swayne’s superiors, which Hartwell dutifully attached to his memorandum. Each report followed the same template: the reviewing officer filled out a form that asked for his opinion of his subordinate’s general conduct and personal characteristics, his professional ability, his capacity for organization, his cooperation with other officers, his relations with the public, his special aptitudes (if any), his suitability for promotion, and any general remarks. The first two reports, both written by Commissioner of Police M.S. O’Rorke, were filled out in 1951 and 1953, respectively. The first noted that Swayne had “exemplary” conduct, and that he was a “pleasant, presentable, easy going officer with much charm of manner but no great energy.” Unfortunately, however, Swayne was inclined to “shirk responsibility.” O’Rorke also felt that Swayne’s ability was “average,” and that his capacity for organization was “Low average only.” Paradoxically,

\textsuperscript{37} The Official Gazette of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, vol. XXIX, no. 1162 (Nairobi, September 13, 1927), p. 1088.
\textsuperscript{38} TNA FCO 141/5595, “Kenya: Council of Ministers memoranda 261-285 (1954) and 1-51 (1955).”
\textsuperscript{40} TNA FCO 141/5595, “Kenya: Council of Ministers memoranda 261-285 (1954) and 1-51 (1955).”
O’Rorke asserted that Swayne’s “power of command and knowledge of his men [was] good,” but that these qualities were “overshadowed to some extent by a tendency to idleness and not great interest in his subordinates.” In the field reserved for general remarks, O’Rorke stated the following: “An intelligent officer if not very able, would go far if his energy were greater and he accepted correction more readily. He has not great interest in his profession and wishes to retire when he reaches the next grade. Lately his work and interest has [sic] materially improved.” Perhaps because of this material improvement, O’Rorke concluded his report by stating that Swayne was indeed suitable for “normal promotion to Senior Superintendent if he maintains his present standard of interest and work.”

In contrast, O’Rorke’s 1953 report, while admitting that Swayne’s conduct was good and that he had a pleasant personality, asserted that “his sense and acceptance of responsibility, his energy and drive are inadequate.” The problem with Swayne was not necessarily a lack of ability, but his limited capacity “for taking pains.” He was a “good police officer, when interested, but [he had] poor power of command” and did not “get the best of his men because they know he shirks responsibility.” O’Rorke concluded by calling Swayne an officer “who tries to make up for deficient interest and energy by an excess of charm and ‘blarney.’” Although Swayne received a more enthusiastic report from the Assistant Commissioner of Police in Nyeri in June 1954, a year later he was unable to convince Colonel Arthur Young of his continued usefulness as a colonial officer, and he was forced into retirement.

The important thing to understand about D.D.C. Swayne is that he was far from an outlier. As a middle-aged man who provoked intense scrutiny and anxiety from his superiors, Swayne embodied (quite literally) characteristics of particular concern for colonial

---

42 Ibid.
administrators. He was a middling talent at best, an alleged loafer, and, ultimately, an insufficiently manly officer. Swayne represented a manifestation of a particular form of British masculinity that was, in the eyes of Kenya’s administrators, vastly inferior to the gentlemanly virtues that they wanted to see manifest in their men. Even amongst the administration’s own British troops, race also had a part to play. Fears about declining racial “stock” and effeminate “sons of the Empire” circulated amongst upper-class Britons from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, perhaps reaching a fever pitch in the Victorian era.43 Few aspects of public or private British life were immune to anxieties about “normal” masculinity and femininity. The law, medicine, politics, domestic life, religiosity, and popular culture all informed—and were informed by—the gendered tropes that circulated in Britain and its empire.44 As the colonial regulations and the case of D.D.C. Swayne demonstrate, holdovers from the apogee of inward-looking gendered and racialized anxiety can be detected in the Kenyan colonial archive as late as the 1950s. As will become apparent, this form of hegemonic masculinity, instituted beyond European troops and towards Africans, was a key factor in the large-scale and systematized violence of the Emergency period.

3. Settler Colonialism and Racialized Masculinity

When a mix of British settlers, continental Europeans, and British imperial subjects flooded the best farm land in East Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they met Africans and Arabs that had been resident in the area for centuries prior. For whites, the most popular destination was Kenya’s highlands; the area soon became known as the White Highlands, since only Europeans were permitted to settle in this “earthly paradise.”45 Just as indigenous peoples were forced off their land en masse to support settler capitalism in the Americas, Oceania, and Southern Africa, so too were certain peoples in East Africa.46 This process was particularly pronounced among the Kikuyu and Luo tribes.47 In the early years of colonial rule, many Kikuyu relocated and tended arable land that Europeans were initially unable to reach. But by the mid-1920s white settlers began to impose themselves more aggressively on former and existing Kikuyu lands, and they demanded increased labour from Kikuyu residents.48 And yet most British settlers and administrators believed that their arrival in Kenya was not so much an incursion, but an “introduction of order into blank, uninteresting, brutal barbarism.”49


48 Kanogo, Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, pp. 8-34.

They moreover envisioned themselves as having a paternalistic responsibility for the wellbeing of Africans, and for the most part they genuinely believed that they were doing the right thing by bestowing this “gift” of civilization on the region’s inhabitants.50

Europeans exploited the settler colonial state apparatus that they had imported to Kenya to dictate the region’s political economy.51 Customary Kikuyu practices such as animal husbandry were inhibited by destocking campaigns, livestock grazing was rendered unlawful, and Kikuyu claims to land were effectively voided.52 In a Kenyan civil case in 1921, for example, a judge named Sir J.W. Barth held that the effects of a series of colonial laws was “inter alia, to vest land reserved for the use of a native tribe in the Crown and in consequence all native rights in such reserved land disappear—natives in occupation thereof becoming tenants at will of the Crown.”53 But while it may be true that the Kikuyu were in general transformed into an “agricultural proletariat for European farmers,”54 it is hardly the case that they were passive recipients within this system.55 Whereas some Kikuyu became increasingly convinced that wide-scale rebellion was the only solution to settler incursions, others favoured collaboration with or loyalty to the Crown, and still others looked to distance themselves from the issue entirely.56

Similar to other indigenous groups, the Kikuyu did not develop a unified course of action in

---

56 During the Emergency period, for example, a Kikuyu father and son named Gideon and Gathumi Wamai, respectively, left their *shamba* (farm) and relocated to the Lower Tana region in coastal Kenya, “partly because of Mau Mau activities,” per *Law Reports of the Colony of Kenya (Court of Review)*, vol. VI, 1958 (Nairobi, 1959), p. 8.
response to their land being stripped; several different paths were considered and taken by Kikuyu individuals, with some oscillating between different actions depending on the results their actions produced.57

Unsurprisingly, however, the seizure of and eviction from land they had formerly cultivated wrought devastating impacts on Kikuyu society, as well as on the Kenyan colony in general.58 Landlessness had severe consequences for both Kikuyu men and women. Men’s social status, including their ability to marry and support a family, was tied to the land.59 Kikuyu domestic life consequently suffered. British conceptions of Kikuyu men during the early twentieth century typically tied these perceived masculine failures—failures brought on by white settlement—to Kikuyu ethnicity. In the settler imagination, the Kikuyu came to be seen as a particularly brutish and troubling tribe.60 At the same time that they were depicted as lazy, disobedient, and in some cases feminine, they were also seen as too smart for their own good,


59 Kanogo, Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, pp. 10-11.

60 Of course, this process was not entirely unique, as a similar settler imagination developed across the Anglo-world during the long nineteenth century, in places as varied as British Columbia, India, Jamaica, and Ireland. See Adele Perry, On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Mrinalini Sinha, Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Diana Paton, No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780-1870 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and L.P. Curtis, Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature (Devon: David and Charles, 1971). There were antecedents to this process that predated the long 19th century, but earlier social constructions of race and gender were fundamentally different in that they were not influenced by the scientific racism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See Kathleen Wilson, “Empire, Gender, and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century,” in Gender and Empire, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 1-45.
and thus dangerous. A 1939 Kenya Military Report, for example, described the racial hierarchy which was thought to have existed in the colony. There were four main groups of races: Europeans, which were further subdivided into British-born and white imperial subjects (namely “Dutch” South Africans), as well as continental European “foreigners” like the French, Italians, and Germans; the “Asiatic community,” which consisted mostly of Indians; Arabs (both from the Arabian peninsula and from the coast); and, finally, African tribes, whose “characteristics, physique, value for warfare and armament differ[ed] to such an extent that… it [was] necessary to describe each tribe on its own merits.”\(^6^1\) According to the report compiler, Kikuyu contact with “Western Civilization ha[d] caused many of the younger generation to become politically minded.” As a result, administering the tribe was “becoming increasingly more difficult.” As for their abilities, the Kikuyu were thought to be “below the average in physique and stability,” and hence had never been “a great fighting race.” In terms of what they might contribute to Britain’s war effort, the Kikuyu were purportedly of “no value as soldiers but could be used as labourers or porters.”\(^6^2\)

Descriptions of the Kikuyu as a race lacking suitable gendered and racial qualities were not confined to the military. The infamous English explorer and politician Ewart Scott Grogan asserted that the Kikuyu were the “most cowardly tribe in Africa.”\(^6^3\) And yet, paradoxically, the Kikuyu were also often singled out for seemingly positive characteristics, albeit in ways that could be turned against them. In 1952 the Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttleton, wrote that the Kikuyu were Kenya’s “most advanced tribe and [gave] the best work.” Lyttleton reasoned that because the Kikuyu had “not lived by the spear [like their tribal neighbours the Maasai], they

---

\(^6^1\) TNA, War Office (hereafter WO), 287/137, “Kenya military report.”
\(^6^2\) Ibid.
have had to live by their brains.” This apparent compliment, however, was a double-edged sword, as Lyttleton explained:

From having their ears to the ground to listen for the approach of the Masai, [the Kikuyu] have learned to have their ears to the ground to listen for any political tremors and turn them to their advantage. They are sometimes said to be like the Irish in politics, without their humour, and like the Jews in commerce, without Leviticus.”

Evidently the Kikuyu were understood to be intelligent, but it was this very intelligence that made them dangerous to the colonial government. Like the Irish, they were seen as politically savvy rebels liable to stir up trouble, and like the Jews, they were imagined as being shifty and prone to dishonesty. Concerns such as these came to a head in the wake of Britain’s victory in World War II, when Kikuyu frustration over landlessness and cultural suppression finally boiled over.

---

64 TNA, Cabinet Papers (hereafter CAB), 129/57/C(52)407, “Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies,” November 14, 1952.
4. The Mau Mau Oaths and the Initial British Response

All of the preceding conceptions of the Kikuyu in the settler imagination ran alongside the widely held belief that African tribalism would slowly dissipate as the colonial effort continued. The British were confident that primitive beliefs and barbaric cultural practices like clitoridectomy would be replaced gradually by Christian doctrine and morals. That tribal life would crumble was a foregone conclusion.65 Decidedly anti-colonial and anti-modern practices such as the oathing rituals that seemed to spread like wildfire after the Second World War, then, challenged not only imperial authority, but also the self-assured epistemology of the colonial mission itself. What good was talk of “civilizing” the natives when it appeared as though some Africans were reverting to atavistic practices?

The increase in Kikuyu oathing post-1945 actually represented the endgame of an uneven cultural clash that had been ongoing for decades prior. In the 1920s and 1930s European missionaries, with the support of the colonial state, tried desperately to rid the Kikuyu and other “backwards” tribes of their “savagery.” Kenyan churches experienced a mass exodus in 1929 when church leaders demanded that Kikuyu sign a pledge against clitoridectomy.66 In the wake

65 The well-known Kenyan chronicler Elspeth Huxley (her husband Gervas was grandson of Thomas and cousin of Aldous) wrote in her memoir of her time spent with the Kikuyu in the 1930s: “I left Murigo’s camp with a mass of notes and impressions, and the problem of how to turn all this clay, as it were, into a pot. In order to get the background as accurate as possible, an elementary knowledge of social anthropology seemed desirable. Not that I was hoping to trespass on to the territory of anthropologists, but I did hope that, in trying to reconstruct tribal life before it started to crumble, I might avoid some of the more obvious pitfalls…” (emphasis added). Quoted from Huxley, Out in the Midday Sun: My Kenya (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985), p. 195. Cf. Patrick Brantlinger, Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

of widespread Kikuyu disillusionment with European cultural institutions and British land expropriation, the Kikuyu Central Association—founded in 1924 to impress tribal concerns on the colonial government—began to receive mass support. Yet in 1934, despite tremendous efforts on the part of Kikuyu leaders, the Kenya Land Commission upheld European title to former Kikuyu land.\textsuperscript{67} While the colonial government believed that it had resolved a decades-long issue, in reality it had set off a ticking time bomb of Kikuyu indignation. Over the next decade and a half, the Kikuyu population and land hunger swelled, settler hegemony expanded and solidified, and the seeds of rebellion started to grow.\textsuperscript{68}

Considering the colonial government’s refusal to return the land it had stripped from the Kikuyu, it is not surprising that many tribal members became convinced that war was their only option. Still, not all Kikuyu were willing to join a rebellion. Many feared the effects that war and violence would have on their livelihoods, while others—particularly those less affected by land seizures—were more inclined to support the government. Notwithstanding this internal division, from 1940 to 1952 a militant wing of anti-colonial Kikuyu began to conduct oathing rituals with both willing and resistant tribal members.\textsuperscript{69} In response to these actions, the government looked to prosecute oath takers and administrators by relying on Section 62 of the Penal Code, which held that anyone present at an oathing ritual would be committing a felony, the punishment for which was seven years’ imprisonment.\textsuperscript{70}

In spite of this severe punishment, oathing continued apace. The evidence we have available to us suggests that oath ceremonies were dynamic in nature and were adapted to the

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., pp. 35-51.
\textsuperscript{70} Law Reports of the Court of Appeal for Eastern Africa, vol. XVIII, 1951 (Nairobi: n.d.), pp. 139-140.
various circumstances that rebels found themselves in. The description Koigi wa Wamwere provides us of a typical ceremony is evocative. He recalled that, as a child, he could not be let into the secrets of *muuma*, or oaths, but he knew that to take oaths,

people were taken to secret places and taking *muuma* involved slaughtering a he-goat of one solid color, collecting its blood in a gourd bowl and cutting out the chest area of the goat. The goat’s skin was then cut into one long piece, which was tied together to form a large ring. The oath administrator wore loose sheets of cloth and an oddly shaped hat and smeared himself with clay or red soil. The persons taking the oath each put on a large necklace of woven coach grass, and the administrator put the skin ring around them. At the entrance of a ceremonial arch of rushes, there were stalks of sugarcane flanked by arrowroots. Just in front of the arch was a trough filled with Gikuyu foods mixed together with soil and goat’s blood. Those to take the oath were cut seven times and their blood was mixed with that of the goat in the bowl. After the oath administrator had surrounded the people with the skin ring, he asked each one to say what he was. The oath taker would answer, I am a Mugikuyu.

As the oath takers answered the administrator, he would touch their foreheads with a blood-covered stick and say, “You have been marked on your forehead that you have agreed to be united to other black people in pursuit of your country’s freedom.” The oath takers then bit the chest meat, heart, and lungs of the goat, each of which had been dipped in blood, and then the oath takers walked through the soil seven times while repeating the words

If you ever disagree with your nation or sell it, may you die of this oath.
If a member of this Society ever calls on you in the night and you refuse to open your hut to him, may you die of this oath.
If you ever sell a black woman to a foreigner, may you die of this oath.
If you ever leave a member of this Society in trouble, may you die of this oath.
If you ever report a member of this Society to the white man’s government, may you die of this oath.  

It is not difficult to imagine how the British might have felt about the type of ceremony described by Wamwere. The eating of raw goat flesh, the mixing of goat and human blood, and the swearing of allegiance to the rebels’ cause were enough to seriously distress British settlers and administrators alike. As other scholars have demonstrated, British propaganda played a major role in further shaping public reaction to the ceremonies. Official, popular, and journalistic

---


accounts of the Mau Mau emphasized the savagery on display in Kenya. These reports, however, often concealed more details than they provided. Instead readers’ imaginations were stoked with hints at bestiality and torture. Other times Europeans exaggerated or simply invented grotesque details. A prominent settler named Michael Blundell suggested that the ceremonies featured “masturbation in public, the drinking of menstrual blood, [and] unnatural acts with animals.”

In reality, such rumours generally reflected imagined perversion on the part of whites. Yet while the grisly particulars may have been concocted, the sexual and racial anxieties undergirding these fictions were not.

As legislation seemed to have failed them in addressing these anxieties, the British tried to level with Africans by devising a counter-oathing campaign, by which it was hoped that the effects of Mau Mau would be erased. The government also levied massive fines of £2,500 on some Kikuyu reserves, which were the most common sites of oathing. These measures likewise failed to produce the intended effect. Beginning in May 1952, militant rebels started killing and in many cases brutalizing the bodies of Africans who refused to take the oath. Government informers were similarly attacked. Witnesses of attacks frequently went missing or refused to testify against the militants in fear of retribution. As much as the early Mau Mau killings shocked Kenyans of all races, however, it was not until the “terrorism” looked as though it might truly compromise settler hegemony that the colonial administration pushed to implement a state of emergency.

---

75 Ibid., p. 47.
In June 1952 Governor Sir Philip Mitchell, who had served in his post since 1944, left the colony. Mitchell’s paternalistic leadership would seem to have played a role in the state of affairs he left behind in Kenya. At the very least his thoughts mirrored those of the majority of whites in the colony. In 1947 he wrote that Britain’s task in Kenya was “to civilise a great mass of human beings who are at present in a very primitive moral, cultural and social state.” Mitchell’s successor, Sir Evelyn Baring, arrived in Nairobi on September 30, 1952. He immediately recognized the threats, perceived and real, that plagued the settler colony, including economic worries as well as legitimate violence on settlers and government-friendly Africans. Throughout October 1952 several whites were assaulted and some murdered. Just one week after Baring’s arrival, moreover, the most senior African official in Kenya, Chief Wahuriu wa Kungu, was murdered, either by Mau Mau operatives or by representatives of the ostensibly less violent Kenya African Union led by Jomo Kenyatta. Wahuriu, an anti-Mau Mau figure, was perceived as a British puppet by many Kikuyu rebels. On October 20, with London’s blessing, Baring formally instituted a state of emergency. The colonial administration would accordingly possess extraordinary powers for the following eight years.

---

79 Ibid., pp. 55-57.
5. Gendered Justifications of Violence

As the Emergency got underway, the administration acted upon its plans to round up Kikuyu as well as any other Africans they thought prone to Mau Mau infection, including members of the closely related Embu and Meru tribes and of the neighbouring Maasai. The first two years of the Emergency were littered with skirmishes between Mau Mau operatives and loyalist Kikuyu, British troops, and settlers. The first major operation of the Emergency, Operation Jock Scott, saw the British round up a host of Mau Mau leaders in October 1952. The first two years of the Emergency were littered with skirmishes between Mau Mau operatives and loyalist Kikuyu, British troops, and settlers. The first major operation of the Emergency, Operation Jock Scott, saw the British round up a host of Mau Mau leaders in October 1952.80 Just two months later, however, rebels murdered a pyjama-clad settler family and the household African servants with pangas (long knives).81 The British press and government were both quick to seize on the grisly details of the murders. A far more staggering death count arose in March 1953 when Mau Mau rebels massacred several dozen loyalist Kikuyu stationed in Lari.82 The British carried out a series of legally dubious investigations and trials of some 400 Kikuyu rounded up in the aftermath of the massacre, ultimately sentencing twenty-two men to death.83 Then in June a massacre of unarmed Meru by members of the King’s African Rifles, led by British Major G.S.L. Griffiths, was quietly swept under the rug by the newly appointed General Officer Commanding-in-Chief George Erskine.84

As atrocities on both sides of the conflict took place, and a general sense of chaos overcame the colonial administration, the British endeavoured to ramp up both the number of—and control within—its rehabilitation camps. At the same time they hoped to figure out how the

80 TNA WO 276/212, “Operation Jock Scott (operations in Nakuru area).”
83 TNA CO 822/702 and CO 822/783, “The Lari massacre trials.” A full description and analysis of these events can be found in Anderson, Histories of the Hanged, pp. 119-180.
84 TNA FCO 141/6193, “Chuka incident – killing of 22 members of Meru Guard by King’s African Rifles,” June 17-18, 1953.
infection might be eradicated. To do so, the administration initiated two key endeavours. First, it instituted a much more punitive rehabilitation scheme, starting with the internment or relocation of 50,000 Mau Mau suspects in April and May 1954. Operation Anvil, the name given to this mass roundup, saw 20,000 prisoners taken to Langata Camp, and an additional 30,000 placed on reserves. Second, the administration sought individuals to guide its policies, and to justify its heavy-handed regime. This latter endeavour involved the commissioning of a psychological study of the Mau Mau problem, a task which fell to the foremost expert of the “African mind,” Dr. J.C. Carothers. Carothers was a psychiatrist at St. James’ Hospital in Portsmouth and a mental health consultant for the World Health Organization. He had written a seminal report in 1953 entitled *The African Mind in Health and Disease: A Study in Ethnopsychiatry*, which offered ostensibly scientific claims about the effect of Africa’s natural environment on the mind. It also included a comparative study between the “African” and the “Negro in the USA.” His conclusions, which to most twenty-first century readers will seem bizarre and demonstrably false, were not met with much contemporary skepticism. Instead, Carothers’s claim to objective knowledge was supported by his reliance on physical anthropology and psychiatry, two fields which were dominated by well-to-do European men. The literature that circulated among this group of scholars commonly featured discussions of the essentialized racial and gendered make-up of their imperial research subjects. This literature was an important component in Europeans’ justification of all aspects of colonization, including (but not limited to) violence.

85 See the numerous files in the TNA FCO 141 series, WO 276 series, and CO 822/796 regarding Operation Anvil.
To fulfill his mandate Carothers spent some time interviewing Kenyan subjects (many of them European, not African), and produced a 1955 report on the colony’s predicament, which he titled *The Psychology of Mau Mau*. The report asserted that the general precariousness of African existence was worsened among the Kikuyu due to their habitation in forests. According to Carothers, Kikuyu “forest psychology” actually made the tribe anomalous among Africans, for the rest of the continent’s inhabitants had “more music in their souls” due to their living “in much more open and unsecret country.”

Carothers was moreover not immune to the gendered ideas that circulated in the British Empire. He noted some particularly troubling features of Kikuyu manhood that undoubtedly had a role to play in the tribe’s current plight:

...as far as the men are concerned, it is becoming very clear that the generation that remains fundamentally untouched by alien influence is now an aged, and even dying, generation. By and large, it seems that most Kikuyu men below the age of, say, 60 years are persons who have lost much of their conscious faith in native institutions and beliefs, and have only been constrained with difficulty, if at all, by indigenous behaviour patterns. It is equally clear that very few (relative to total numbers) have as yet acquired a solid foundation in the new ways. According to rough but authoritative estimates given to me, only about half of all Kikuyu boys complete 4 years of schooling and only a tenth complete 8 years even in recent years... According to Carothers, the crisis that currently gripped the Kikuyu was as much a crisis of masculinity as it was of anything else. The typical Kikuyu man was presently growing older “without building up a personally integrated and critical approach to life” and he lacked “the sense of personal security that [he] previously derived from the secure and positive convictions of his elders.” His “‘magic’ modes of thought persist,” asserted Carothers, “but his old constraints and faiths are lost.”

---


89 Ibid., p. 7.
90 Ibid.
stem from British expropriation of Kikuyu land, but from his incapacity to understand that “the fault may lie in him[self].”

Carothers’s study also included a more general assessment of the gendered qualities of Kikuyu social life. Carothers saw in Kikuyu society a recognizable form of gendered hierarchy, but he derided this hierarchy as too disciplinary and conservative in comparison to a supposedly liberal British version. When it came to the monolithic Kikuyu woman, Carothers argued that, in spite of the social upheaval experienced by Kikuyu society since European colonization, the woman’s life, “on the whole, has suffered little change; she is as much concerned as ever with her agriculture, her marketing, and the care and feeding of herself and her children.” Carothers expressed shock at how the Kikuyu woman “has contrived to live in a changing world much as she lived before the European’s coming.” Whereas Kikuyu men had left the homestead to lead “a gay licentious life abroad,” the Kikuyu woman’s life had become harder. Carothers offered that, given these circumstances, it would be plausible for the Kikuyu woman to “develop some resentment and contempt directed against her men-folk.” Instead, Carothers had found that “African women, and especially Kikuyu women, are accustomed to do as they are bid by men, to accept the latters’ behavior without questioning.” And in explaining why some Kikuyu women were joining the men in rebelling against the British, Carothers explained that “[w]hat she does feel, it seems, is distressed perplexity and a vague objectless resentment which can only too easily be directed, whither he wills, by any influential man.”

As disturbing as the Kikuyu woman was to Carothers’s sensibilities, her feminine failures still paled in comparison to his further conclusions about the Kikuyu man. Because Carothers

---

92 Ibid., p. 9.
93 Ibid., p. 10.
reasoned that the woman occupied an entirely submissive position in Kikuyu social life, he believed that the crux of the tribe’s present crisis rested ultimately with the man. According to Carothers, Kikuyu men had tried three different solutions to combat their present plight. The first was to try to “turn back the clock” to pre-European times, by way of a “reinsistence on the full rigours of initiation” rituals. Unfortunately, this had accomplished nothing but the “retardation of the women” and an aggravation of intratribal conflict.94 The second solution comprised attempts to adapt to the introduction of Christianity by missionaries, but these efforts were compromised by the fact that, far from hoping to attain true enlightenment and salvation, many Africans were thought to be interested in Christianity only for the upward social mobility that conversion afforded.95 The third and most consequential attempted solution was a turn to Mau Mau. Carothers suggested that some characteristics common to Africans, and especially to Kikuyu, had played a role in pushing the Kikuyu to this extreme. These included “the type of mental structure that develops in Africans” whereby “misfortunes are seldom seen as one’s own fault,” as well as the African’s general sense of “uncertainty and a mild anxiety.”96 It also appeared likely to Caruthers’s European informants that missionaries had inadvertently stoked nationalistic sentiment amongst the Kikuyu through their churches, and this sentiment (alongside technological advancement) had simply overwhelmed the less developed African mind.97

Carothers followed this assessment with a brief summary of the history of European witchcraft, which comprised beliefs and rituals that the West had naturally purged itself of.

94 Carothers, The Psychology of Mau Mau, p. 11.
96 Ibid., pp. 12, 13.
97 Ibid., p. 13. It should be stressed here that studies that fail to account for the divergence in Kikuyu thought and political activity during the colonial period necessarily (if inadvertently) perpetuate the supposed mental and cultural primitivism of Britain’s imperial subjects.
several centuries prior.\textsuperscript{98} Africans, in contrast, were far less developed. The Kikuyu had succumbed to rituals that featured “all the depravity that is imaginable,” including “brutal oaths” and “obscene rituals.”\textsuperscript{99} Carothers’s deepest consternation arose out of his dubious portrayal of the worst of the Mau Mau oaths, known colloquially as the Fourth or Platoon Oath, which he called “shocking by any standard” due to its “insistence on the need to kill one’s brother or one’s father if called upon to do so.” As such, the oath cut “its subjects off from all their tribal roots and from all hope, outside Mau Mau, in this world and the next.”\textsuperscript{100} By and large the administrators and the takers of this oath represented the epitome of all that Carothers deemed unacceptable about Kikuyu society: the oath was mostly confined to men with some education but without good jobs, many of whom had been disavowed by the Church, and all incapable of taking responsibility for their masculine shortcomings. These men now found “perverted pleasure” in their “turn from the ways of God to those of Satan.”\textsuperscript{101}

In the height of the Emergency, Carothers’s rhetoric hardly denoted hyperbole. He even suggested that Mau Mau leaders might be using hypnosis—a process he admitted was not well understood—to secure fighters in their ranks. How else might a physically weak tribe like the Kikuyu produce such a “Sustained and Organized resistance”?\textsuperscript{102} But in fulfilling his mandate, Carothers had to move beyond simply trying to explain the evil that had consumed the Kikuyu; he had to determine if they were redeemable, and if so, how. Ultimately, Carothers expressed confidence in the redeemability of those Kikuyu who had taken lesser oaths, but he believed firmly that hardcore detainees, if at all treatable, would need considerable attention so as to rid

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p. 18.
them of the Mau Mau “poison” and to ensure that they did not relapse.\textsuperscript{103} Even Kikuyu who received good treatment would never be the same again, according to Carothers, which would necessarily make it difficult to trust Kikuyu going forward.\textsuperscript{104} Such a fate was truly lamentable because, as Carothers understood it, compared to other Africans, the Kikuyu were the most like their colonial rulers. They were intelligent and possessed a cultural background and psychology not that dissimilar to the British. While this accordingly made the Kikuyu the most useful and likely ally in developing the rest of Kenya in the future, their particular qualities simultaneously rendered them threatening.\textsuperscript{105}

One practical solution to this conundrum, Carothers suggested, was a continued reliance on “villagization,” a process by which isolated Kikuyu settlements were eradicated from the landscape in favour of closely guarded villages. He moreover concurred with the majority of the administration’s punitive rehabilitation scheme, and Carothers even called for rehabilitation efforts to extend beyond detainees in the camps and towards free Kikuyu as well.\textsuperscript{106} Carothers’s arguments in favour of these initiatives relied on classic paternalistic language that infantilized Kikuyu men and women, in addition to characterizing them as grossly outside the gender norms that the British would need to enforce if the Emergency was to be ended at some point in the future. Villages would no doubt help in “developing opportunities for employment of young men who too often now drift off to townships and return with strange and often false ideas with which to reinfect their credulous country cousins.” Even better, they “would help to solve the problem of family disruption and flatten out the cultural diversity between the men and women which

\textsuperscript{103} Carothers, \textit{The Psychology of Mau Mau}, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 20.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., p. 21.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., pp. 22-23.
seems to have played such a part in giving rise to Mau Mau.”¹⁰⁷ He concluded by admitting that the Kikuyu would not “take kindly at first to such a departure from their traditional rather isolated ways of living,” but, Carothers asserted, “that is just why it could be valuable for them.” After all, despite being “hardly likely to admit [it],” the Kikuyu, “like most people everywhere, … badly want to be told just what to do.”¹⁰⁸ The rhetoric deployed by Carothers in this report both echoed and reinforced what the colonial administration had come to believe was necessary in their fight against Mau Mau. The “perverted” and “bestial” rebels had to be stopped no matter the cost. Only brutal methods would work on such brutal beasts. Armed with a punitive rehabilitation scheme and a complementary gendered rhetoric, the second phase of the Emergency (post-1954) featured state-sanctioned violence on an unprecedented scale.

¹⁰⁷ Carothers, The Psychology of Mau Mau, p. 22.
¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 23.
6. Planning a Massacre, Defending the (Masculine) Empire

Recent years have witnessed a substantial scholarly output concerning the military history of the Emergency period. While much of this scholarship ably sketches the competing political and military aims and operations of the Emergency’s combatants, it tends to suffer from an uncritical eye towards the role of gender (and especially of masculinity) during this period. Instead military histories are often reductive; they tell us things happened a certain way because “that is how the army worked,” rather than explaining the underlying mechanisms that enabled the course of action that was taken. Military history can tell us why men chose certain tactics, but it rarely tells us why they committed torture.\footnote{In addition to Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya*, and French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency* (all op. cit.), see French, *Army, Empire, and Cold War: The British Army and Military Policy, 1945-1971* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) and Huw Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Kenya Emergency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).} The answer to such a question becomes clearer when we accept that military men were likely to buy into tropes about race, masculinity, and sex developed over the long nineteenth century in Britain and its empire.\footnote{John Horne captures this process succinctly: “The emergence of racial stereotypes…in the nineteenth century provided an enlarged arsenal of masculinity expressing a positive self-image of the race or nation beset by decadent or ultra-masculine men who undermined it within or threatened it by annihilation from without.” See Horne, “Masculinity in Politics and War in the Age of Nation-States and World Wars, 1850-1950,” in *Masculinities in Politics and War*, op. cit., p. 29. An excellent case in point is Graham Dawson, “The Blond Bedouin: Lawrence of Arabia, Imperial Adventure and the Imagining of English-British Masculinity,” in *Manful Assertions*, op. cit., pp. 113-144.} Interrogating how hegemonic masculinity came to define British military policy and actions allows us a much better understanding of how and why the violence in the Mau Mau camps occurred. The “everyday” encounters of European colonialism popularized ideas about the manly body and its relations to race.\footnote{It does not follow that all British soldiers were at all times and in the same ways caught up in these discourses. Rather, I am suggesting that there were clearly some underlying structures of British imperialism that frequently shaped men’s lives in tangible ways. Men were both producers and consumers of these “scripts” of masculinity. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). On the “everyday” in colonial Africa, see Michelle R. Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014).} The camps comprised an environment in which discourses related to
insufficient manliness and sexual impurity became reified. Two related circumstances—the Cowan Plan and the Hola Massacre—aid in revealing this point.

The namesake of the Cowan Plan, John Cowan, played a vital role in modifying—that is, exacerbating—the Mwea procedure referenced in the introductory case study. Cowan was a senior prison officer tasked with leading the Mwea prison camps where the procedure was carried out. The British implemented the original procedure—which called for “rough methods,” “overpowering force,” and “frequent and aggressive repetition”—in numerous camps. The disturbing details and grisly consequences of Cowan’s modified procedure can be found among the documents included in the Hanslope Disclosure. The plan, fully endorsed both by Governor Baring and by the original Mwea procedure architect, Terry Gavaghan, centered on forced labour.\textsuperscript{112} It was moreover unambiguous about the administration’s need to beat the insufficiently masculine minds and bodies of recalcitrant Mau Mau detainees.

Cowan and his colleagues felt disquieted by reports in February 1959 of “apparently able-bodied men” at Hola Camp who were “malingering” from their duties, as well as of men who clearly gave less than maximum effort in carrying out their assigned tasks.\textsuperscript{113} In response, Cowan called for the latter “slow-goers” to be inflicted with summary corporal punishment. The malingers, however, faced even harsher consequences. As in the Mwea procedure, a designated platoon of colonial officers divided and isolated intractable detainees before manhandling them to their designated labouring posts. Any disobedience at this point required, in Cowan’s words, “more firmness on the part of the staff.” Cowan attempted to downplay the level of violence necessary to ensure the procedure’s effectiveness, but as John Lewis, Commissioner of Prisons, warned the Minister of Defence in mid-February, the plan would undoubtedly require a level of

\textsuperscript{112} TNA FCO 141/6303.
\textsuperscript{113} TNA FCO 141/5658, “Discipline – Hola Closed Camp.”
force likely to cause grievous bodily harm, or even death. Barely two weeks after Lewis’s warning, he was proved right.\textsuperscript{114}

On March 3, 1959, eleven Hola Camp detainees were killed during the implementation of the Cowan Plan; another 77 men were severely injured. These deaths and the attempted cover-up by colonial officials were not singular events in the course of the Emergency. Several deaths and severe injuries had been reported or swept aside by the administration, dating back as far as the beginning of the Emergency.\textsuperscript{115} The influence of racialized hegemonic masculinity can be detected in the rationale behind the Cowan Plan that abetted the Hola Massacre. A letter from the Ministry of African Affairs in Nairobi directed to District Officer D.A. Marsden provided one of the first hints of the sinister dealings about to erupt inside Hola Camp. The letter-writer informed Marsden that the Government “attache[d] the greatest importance to the settlement camps at Hola,” and that Marsden would be responsible for ensuring that the “administration and security of the camps [were] above criticism.” These earnest directions were followed by a disturbing warning: “Certain persons are always ready to listen to complaints from detainees, even though the statements made are false and exaggerated. It is essential that there should be no grounds for any legitimate complaint.”\textsuperscript{116}

In reality, there existed several legitimate complaints of excessive violence, sexual torture, and murder since the beginning of the Emergency, but Marsden’s instructions made no reference to these previously established (albeit deliberately obscured) facts. The post-independence politician Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, for example, described in his memoir the use of

\textsuperscript{114} TNA FCO 141/5658, note by John Lewis, February 17, 1959.
\textsuperscript{115} See Duffy, “Legacies of British Colonial Violence.”
castration as a tactic in the camps and among colonial officers in the field. Several survivors of the Mau Mau regime have likewise testified in court about the sexual torture inflicted upon them in detention camps or in the countryside. A husband and wife named Kimweli and Naomi, for instance, were both sexually assaulted in December 1952 while en route to a Christmas party. The couple’s three children were taken from them and never seen again, while Naomi, five months’ pregnant at the time, miscarried after being raped with a glass bottle in a detention camp. Kimweli was beaten and castrated with pliers at a separate camp. Thousands of Africans experienced similar violence during the Emergency, but instead of cracking down on the system that enabled this brutality, the Ministry commanded Marsden to oversee rehabilitation, to monitor movement in and out of the camp, and to maintain a “high standard of behaviour and discipline.”

Evidently the British placed greater emphasis on screening detainees, extracting confessions from them, and curing their “infected minds” than they did on preserving the lives of their colonial subjects.

Despite the implementation of the Cowan Plan, however, the difficulty in subduing recalcitrant Mau Mau detainees at Hola remained. Lower-ranking officers tasked with rehabilitating the prisoners became “disgruntled” and their superiors demonstrated a willingness to emasculate their underlings. One official commented that the staff was upset because “they have been asked to make men work, men who have defeated all such previous attempts. The Prisons staff failed, and feel that they are regarded as failures.” In this report we can find the workings of hierarchical masculinity. In response to their perceived failures, the officers blamed

---

circumstances beyond their control for their shortcomings, including the fact that they had not been given “the proper tools for their work” and that they could not possibly “put up a good show” in the “unsuitable buildings” where detainees were held. The phrasing evokes the idea of detention camp policing as performance, whereby the proper tools and a suitable environment became prerequisites for the actors to perform convincingly for the higher-ranking officers.

Often times these performative aspects of camp violence required intricate choreography. On many occasions European officers delegated violent acts to African camp operatives. In these instances, if one of two things happened, Europeans would step in. In cases when African-on-African violence failed to produce the desired rehabilitative effect, European officers might be required to deliver a heavier hand. In these instances, as with the Mwea procedure, the administration reasoned that comparatively feminine Africans could not dole out the proper punishment, and so a rougher hand was required. In contrast, when African-on-African violence resulted in severe injury or worse, the blame lay with bestial impulses residing deep within African subjects—even within loyalists. Whether European men distanced themselves from the violence by forcing or encouraging African guards to inflict punishment, or if they doled out the punishments themselves, the effects of the administration’s desired masculine codes were omnipresent.

The system at play in the camps reflected the gradation that colonial administrators hoped to create. At the top sat Kenya’s administrators, and beneath them were commanding officers, European troops, African loyalists, and detainees, respectively. Within this web there existed opportunities for individuals to act outside of the chain of command, but the underlying structure

---

120 TNA FCO 141/5652, “Comments on D.C. Hola’s Letter.”
121 E.g., a man named Kabbe Macharia was beaten to death in September 1958 by two Embu screeners who were referred to as “uncivilized African assistants.” TNA FCO 141/6332.
was never seriously threatened. Commanding officers, for example, might be more or less lenient than the administration wanted, and likewise detainees could resist in both subtle and overt ways that frustrated their overseers. The overarching effects of British conceptions of masculinity and race, however, generally informed how the camps operated. In the latter half of the Emergency years, some British men became hell-bent on “eliminating” the Mau Mau threat, while others expressed reservations about the brutality occurring in the camps. Ultimately the former won out, pushing detractors out of the regime. The original rehabilitation coordinator, Tom Askwith, for example, was stripped of his duties after protesting the lack of humaneness in later iterations of the internment scheme.

In this regard, what made the massacre unique for its contemporaries and for those of us looking back now was not just the severity of the crimes committed, but the sensational reactions that ensued. Both in the internal reports about the Emergency—many of which were dedicated to concealing the Massacre—and in contemporary press coverage, there exists evidence of the gendered framework that underpinned the Massacre and other instances of camp violence, as well as of the complete lack of adequate cultural understanding on the part of the British to make sense of African behaviours. One original press report stated that a “Mau Mau wail” broke out in Hola Camp on the evening of March 3 after the hardcore detainees left their compounds to go to work. The report echoed the common neurological explanation in the colony for this “primitive” outburst—as one savage African broke into a cry, others followed suit. The Mwea procedure guidelines noted that “it was essential to prevent the infection of this ‘moan’ spreading through the camp.” In one instance, “a resister who started [the moan] was promptly put on the

---

122 See again Peterson, “Ethnography and Cultural Innovation.”
ground, a foot placed on his throat and mud stuffed in his mouth.” If these measures proved fruitless, the troublemaker “was in the last resort knocked unconscious.” Any resisters who answered ‘no’ when asked if they would abide by the camp’s rules were “immediately struck and, if necessary, compelled to obey by the use of force.” These repeated and sharp blows became routine in the camps. From the outset of his camp experience and for the duration of his internment, a detainee could expect brutal corporal punishment, intimidation, and often times humiliation. Continued recalcitrance from hardcore detainees signalled to camp officials not political will power, but rather the consequence of a communal infection that some Africans simply could not resist.

The colonial regime, moreover, typically characterized victims of torture and abuse as agitators. In a secret letter dated April 9, 1959, Governor Baring referred to the Africans at Hola as “the detainees who have caused trouble.” Baring and others discursively framed any “trouble” caused by Africans as the result of general African cultural failures. In contrast, any European men found guilty of transgressions in the camps were dismissed as aberrations rather than as by-products of the racist and paternalistic system that the British had constructed in the colony, and which had become intensified in the camps. Even when the British flirted with accepting some blame for Mau Mau atrocities, as did the House of Lords in July 1959, it was rarely without remonstration. Lord Pakenham, for example, declared the Hola Massacre “the most shameful single event that has occurred in our Colonial history,” and even cited some deficiencies within the Cowan Plan and with the individuals in charge at Hola. The Earl of Perth reminded him, however, that the massacre was “a tragedy for another reason,” namely

---

125 TNA FCO 141/6303, “Use of Force in Enforcing Discipline.”
126 FCO 141/5652, secret letter by Governor Baring, April 9, 1959.
“that it [came] at the end of a long line of successes in dealing with Mau Mau detainees.”

According to Perth, the Kenya Government had effectively “restor[ed] to normal life 77,000 out of 78,000 of the detainees.” The rehabilitative regime accordingly represented “an achievement which, whatever may have occurred on March 3 […] is something from which nothing can detract.”

Thus for many imperial men, the heavy-handed violence characteristic of the camps was not only defensible, but also desirable. The physical and mental violence committed at Hola and at other detention camps across the colony was not only officially sanctioned, but to a large degree institutionalized. One British Nairobi resident who had a letter to the editor published in the *East African Standard* in June 1959 felt it necessary to defend this process, thereby demonstrating a common contemporary feeling:

> I think it is very disturbing that both the Conservative and Socialist Press should have overwhelmed us with righteous indignation concerning the deaths of the Hola detainees, and yet make no mention of the personal tragedies of relatives of people in this country whose kith and kin were slaughtered in the most revolting fashion by adherents of the savage and bestial Mau Mau.

The letter writer finished his piece by stating that while “it appears to be traditional for the British people to have a disproportionate sentimental regard for other people, it may also be timely to point out, with the utmost emphasis, that they have a duty towards their own kind.”

Evidently for this resident, sentimentality and self-flagellation over the brutal deaths of eleven Africans represented an unacceptably soft approach. Instead, upholding ethnic and familial duty, hallmarks of colonial masculinity, were required.

Such sentiments, however, were not necessarily confined to the colony. The Scottish *Daily Post* published a political cartoon in August 1959 that succinctly captured the imperial

129 “Motion—The Hola Camp Disaster,” col. 905.
feminization of Mau Mau adherents. In the cartoon, three African witches, one labeled “Mau Mau” and the others sporting the initials of two secret African societies, stand over a bubbling cauldron labeled “Kenya.” The witches, while compared to the hags from Shakespeare’s Macbeth and drawn as superficially female, nevertheless depict African men. They are drawn in stark caricature, with hooked noses, sharp fingernails and toenails, grotesque hands and feet, and stooped postures. The witches are juxtaposed with the upright, tall, and strong Macbeth, representing the manly presence of the British colonial overseer.131 The cartoon ultimately attests to the investment in hegemonic masculinity that spanned the entirety of the Empire, and that imperial subjects confronted in their daily lives. In British imperial culture, the savagery of the colonized became equated with femininity, while rationality and civilization constituted masculine qualities generally reserved for colonizers.

The preceding examples demonstrate the ubiquity of racialized hegemonic masculinity in the modern British Empire. Whether subtle, as in the regulations that dictated colonial officers’ conduct, or overwhelming, as it became in the Mau Mau camps, the effects of masculinity entangled virtually everyone in the Kenyan colony. When the (masculine) hegemony the British enjoyed in Kenya came under attack by Mau Mau rebels, the colonial government felt obliged to respond swiftly and brutally. It acted upon pre-existing discourses that feminized Africans and deployed tropes that dehumanized detainees in order to ensure cooperation from lower-ranking officers and loyalist Africans. The potential or actual use of force underpinned these discursive practices. While a number of contemporary individuals took issue with the results of these actions, the Empire’s leaders and many of its subordinates ultimately decided that the protection

---

131 Jack Ensoll, “The Hola Debate,” Sunday Post, August 2, 1959. The image has not been included due to copyright issues, chiefly that it requires the payment of a reproduction fee. The image is not available online. It can be viewed in person at The National Archives in FCO 141/5654.
of government and settler manhood—and its related investments in settler capitalism and
indigenous dispossession—far outweighed the tens of thousands of lives destroyed or
permanently altered in the Mau Mau camps. As they struggled to comprehend the perceived
savagery of their colonial subjects, British men fell back on two sets of related practices to tackle
the Mau Mau problem. First, they used tropes about Africans’ racial and gendered failures to
simultaneously reaffirm British ethnic and masculine superiority. Second, and most gravely, they
resorted to violence, a tactic that had served the Empire well for centuries.
7. Conclusion

In 1952, the same year that Governor Baring declared a state of emergency in Kenya, Frantz Fanon argued that, when confronted with the alterity of the black man’s sexual power, “the white man needs to defend himself, […] to characterize ‘the Other,’ who will become the mainstay of his preoccupations and his desires.” \(^\text{132}\) Fanon’s reliance on psychoanalysis may give some readers pause, but white fixation on black sexuality undoubtedly impinged on many colonial interactions. \(^\text{133}\) The scars on thousands of Kenyans’ genital regions—as well as on the rest of their bodies and their psyches—demonstrate the link that British administrators ostensibly found between neurological infection and bodily symptom. \(^\text{134}\) Baring himself was instrumental in devising guidelines for inflicting “violent shock” on alleged Mau Mau perpetrators.

Yet beyond acknowledging the physical and mental damage wrought by British imperialism in Kenya, it is possible to assert that successive British governments have cemented this violence through their bureaucratic institutions. The Hanslope Disclosure and the migration of declassified documents to The National Archives confirmed this fact. It took more than half a century and legal pressure for the British to formally admit to the events that transpired during the Emergency. Yet even in acknowledging the events, the 2010-2015 Conservative–Liberal Democrat government attempted to downplay the seriousness of its predecessors’ actions. Despite the severe discrepancy in casualties caused by the British and the Mau Mau, the official government response more or less equated the two sides’ responsibilities. It also suggested that

---


\(^\text{133}\) On the entanglements of sex in colonial Kenya, see Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*. Similar processes were common to every modern European empire. See the seminal Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

the events were outside the “direct jurisdiction” of British rule, a demonstrably false assertion, considering Kenya did not gain its independence until 1963. Perhaps most troubling was the government’s suggestion that, without the testimony of key witnesses, it did not believe that Mau Mau claims could be “resolved satisfactorily through the courts.” That the colonial era government killed many of these witnesses and hid much of the corroborating evidence—and that successive governments sat on the files as survivors grew old—went unmentioned in the statement. Britain’s agreed upon reparations payment scheme and the erection of a conciliatory statue in Nairobi’s Uhuru Park are fine public relations gestures, but continued attempts to obscure or conceal the truth undercut such efforts considerably.\footnote{Hague, “Statement to Parliament.”}

In spite of these attempts at suppression, the Emergency has remained a common pursuit of historians. The historiography cited in this study is a collective testament to the courage of Mau Mau victims, as well as to historians’ pursuit of justice. Still, those who have treaded into this historical territory have come up against a host of methodological and theoretical obstacles. Each historian of the Emergency has had to make decisions about the reliability of oral evidence, about the best way to combat censorship of relevant files, and about the most appropriate way of framing the historical narrative. Because of time and budget constraints, this thesis could only afford proper inquiry into one side of that narrative. Unfortunately there is a noticeable absence of African voices; this thesis is thus necessarily incomplete, and the privileged ontological order regrettable. As I have argued in the preceding pages, however, a tremendous historical benefit can still be found in interrogating the gendered and racial thoughts and actions of British men in
Kenya. In fact, a close reading of these men’s interactions can actually shed light on the “fragile” or “piecemeal” nature of their rule.136

A generation of scholars of the archive as an institution has ably demonstrated the power imbalance inherent to the creation of the archive. Michel Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* greatly influenced this literature, as it asserted that archives are much more than mere repositories of information—they are also physical and metaphorical extensions of the state. An archive is “the law of what can be said.”137 After all, the damning written evidence of British actions in Kenya exists because the former Empire and the modern state willed it to be so.138 These facts, common to many postcolonial states, allowed the anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot to argue convincingly that “the power to define what is and what is not a serious object of research and, therefore, of mention,” rested with colonizers and their descendants.139 And yet, as Adele Perry has suggested, “colonial archives can alternately and sometimes simultaneously work to defend or challenge the states that create and sustain them.”140 The Hanslope Disclosure represents a case in point. The documents that attest to and perpetuate the violence done by British men against Africans nevertheless expose the extent of British responsibility and coerciveness. The evidence of colonial anxiety—gendered, racial, and so on—moreover shatters

---


the notion of British omnipotence and of African weakness. The power imbalance is evident, but so too is power’s precariousness.

Armed with pseudo-scientific knowledge of the “African mind,” a settler capitalist apparatus designed to nullify indigenous claims to the land, and racially volatile conceptions of the colonized body, the British regime in Kenya constituted in many ways a classic study of modern European imperialism. This thesis has argued that the hierarchy of racialized masculinity endemic to British Kenya became amplified in the Mau Mau camps. This hierarchy included senior administrators, colonial supervisors, subaltern officers, African loyalists, and detainees. The various forms of evidence I have called upon nevertheless confirm that the hierarchy of masculinity in Kenya was not unidirectional and was moreover subject to change. What is clear, however, is that everyone in Kenya and in the Mau Mau camps was “caught up” in the various forms of power that operated in the colony, if not at all times and on equal terms.\textsuperscript{141}

Understanding this state of affairs allows us to make sense of the violence committed en masse against African detainees. High-ranking colonial officials understood the camps as housing bestial and discursively feminine Africans, while at the same time they worried about the fitness of the European troops charged with rehabilitating infected savages. This toxic mix of gendered and racialized anxieties abetted the British campaign of torture in the Mau Mau camps. Detainees became victims of systematically brutal violence as British and loyalist men sought to perform adequately for their superiors, and as they sought to reaffirm their own masculinity.

Recentralizing the complex politics of the camps in this fashion reveals the devastating consequences of Britain’s racist and paternalistic regime in Kenya. At the same time, it makes clear the need for historians and consumers of history alike to conceptualize the Emergency as

\begin{footnotesize}
\end{footnotesize}
contingent on a certain set of gendered and racialized discourses that the British deployed throughout their empire, and across a considerable expanse of time.
Bibliography

Primary Material

Archival Collections

The National Archives, London, UK

Cabinet Office
Cabinet Papers
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
War Office

Government Publications

House of Lords Official Reports (London, 1959)
Law Reports of the Colony of Kenya (Court of Review) (Nairobi, various dates)
Law Reports of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya (Nairobi, various dates)
Law Reports of the Court of Appeal for Eastern Africa (Nairobi, various dates)
Legislative Council Debates of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya (Nairobi, various dates)

Newspapers

East African Standard (Nairobi)
Manchester Guardian
Official Gazette of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya (Nairobi)
Sunday Post (Dundee)

Other Published Material


Secondary Material


