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### III.

## A PLACE OF NATURE

### Cultural and Political Histories Marginalized

In this chapter I again look into Mt. Kenya's 1997 World Heritage listing, but I shift my focus from the individuals that initiated the designation to the wider political conditions in which it materialized. I have demonstrated that Bongo Woodley played a key role in Mt. Kenya's World Heritage nomination process, but in this chapter I depart from the position that his personal efforts only partially account for the mountain's World Heritage designation. The reason for this is simple: Kenya's ruling political elite *could* have undermined Bongo Woodley's World Heritage project at the time, but did not do so. This is a rather basal observation, but it deserves close attention.

Due to a number of historical events, which I describe in the first part of this chapter, Mt. Kenya came to epitomize the culture, religion and politics of Kenya's Kikuyu population. The mountain came to articulate tribal competition over power, most importantly due to the role it played in the 1950s Mau Mau war, and to this day Mt. Kenya symbolizes the wealth and political sway of the Kikuyu elite that formed under Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta. Interestingly, by the time that Mt. Kenya was nominated for World Heritage status in 1996 this Kikuyu elite was no longer in place. It had been marginalized by Jomo Kenyatta's successor, Daniel Arap Moi, who had taken over the presidency in 1978. By the late 1990s, Moi's regime was openly challenged by a large Kikuyu opposition, which expressed profound dissatisfaction about how it had been marginalized. Given that Mt. Kenya symbolizes the unity and solidarity of what, at the time, was the government's strongest

political rival, one may wonder why the Moi regime did not prevent Mt. Kenya's World Heritage designation.

I will argue that Daniel Arap Moi's government endorsed Bongo Woodley's World Heritage project because Woodley's nomination did not address Mt. Kenya's cultural and political potential. On the contrary, it presented the mountain exclusively as a place of nature. As such, Woodley's World Heritage nomination fitted with the censorship of Kikuyu cultural and political histories practiced by the regime, to a greater or lesser degree, ever since it had come to power in 1978. Mt. Kenya's naturalization illustrates just how much the commemoration of Mt. Kenya has been, and continues to be, a source of struggle, and it articulates a post-colonial government's general uncertainty about how to deal with colonial legacies.

### **Mt. Kenya, Kikuyu homeland**

Different explorers and scientists travelled to Mt. Kenya in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to study the area's geological formations and its flora and fauna. In this period, knowledge of Mt. Kenya was largely confined to academics with a professional interest in the region, but in 1938 Mt. Kenya was finally introduced to a larger Western audience. This was due to the publication of *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* written by Jomo Kenyatta, who, as other parts of this chapter discuss, became Kenya's first president.

Jomo Kenyatta spent most of his childhood with Scottish missionaries because his parents had passed away when he was young. In 1924, then in his early thirties, Kenyatta joined the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA). The KCA was a political organization that aimed to make British administrators in Kenya understand colonialism's destructive impact on Kikuyu people (Shaw 1995). In particular, the KCA raised attention for the grievances caused by land alienation (Berman 1996: 316) – as long as white people came and grabbed Kikuyu land, the KCA argued, Kikuyu would be unable to develop into self-governing modern subjects. At the time, the KCA did not have much impact within the colony itself. For that reason, and in an attempt to make its voice heard in the metropole, it sent Kenyatta overseas in 1929 (Shaw 1995).

During his journeys abroad, Jomo Kenyatta initially had trouble finding a suitable partner willing to help him advance the KCA's cause. Initially, he sought shelter with missionaries, a community familiar to him. But he soon distanced himself from his Christian upbringing, for mission societies in Kenya had begun to take a firm stance against Kikuyu female circumcision (Berman 1996: 318-319). In addition, the missionaries withdrew their support once they learned about Kenyatta's relations with European women and his communist sentiments (*Ibid.*). Kenyatta subsequently sought rapprochement with liberal imperialists, who introduced him to the British education system in order to improve his language skills. Yet, these liberal imperialists were primarily concerned with extending British

colonial power, and Kenyatta soon realized that his agenda and their agenda were irreconcilable (*Ibid.*: 320). Subsequently, Kenyatta visited Russia, where he received further education. At first, he had been encouraged by his communist friends, but he fell out with them as well once he saw that their desire to forge a trans-ethnic movement to overthrow colonialism was at odds with his own intentions to promote Kikuyu traditions and values (*Ibid.*: 322-325). In sum, during those first years abroad Kenyatta had primarily been seeking sympathy and recognition. Consequently, he had largely failed to carry out the advocacy work that the KCA had sent him to do. Moreover, the British authorities continuously undermined his authority and refused to acknowledge him, or the KCA, as true Kikuyu representatives. As a result, Kenyatta faced a profound ‘dilemma of representation’ (*Ibid.*: 330), which seriously complicated his mission.

Jomo Kenyatta’s luck changed for the better when he met Bronislaw Malinowski in London in December 1934. It was a meeting that was to be beneficial for both men. On the one hand, Kenya’s Kikuyu population had long fascinated Malinowski. The anthropologist showed a strong interest in how the Kikuyu rejected conversion to Christianity, as that would mean they had to give up their initiation rituals (Frederiksen 2008), as well as in their outspoken bitterness over land loss. In the years before he met Kenyatta, Malinowski had tried to organize a fieldwork programme in Kenya, but he had never managed to pull it off. Now that Kenyatta was in London, Malinowski finally saw an opportunity to increase his knowledge of the people that intrigued him. Kenyatta, on the other hand, found in Malinowski the mentor that he had been looking for since 1929. In light of his previous disappointment in missionaries, liberal imperialists and communists, Malinowski’s scientific approach appealed to Kenyatta, and the latter enrolled himself in the department of social anthropology at the London School of Economics where Malinowski taught. This enabled Kenyatta to further advance his education which, or so he hoped, could gain him credence in the eyes of colonial administrators (Berman 1996: 330). More importantly, anthropology offered Kenyatta a scientific and expert idiom through which he could address colonial injustices and that British authorities could not simply brush aside as anti-colonial African activism (*Ibid.*).

An intimate pupil-instructor relation formed between Jomo Kenyatta and Bronislaw Malinowski. The latter was not only enthusiastic about Kenyatta’s knowledge on Kikuyu life, but also appreciated Kenyatta’s anthropological education for the methodological argument that it made (Berman 1996: 328). Malinowski advocated the practice of participant observation, which was based on the presumption that anthropologists could grasp the native’s point of view through extensive fieldwork that included learning the native’s language and observing his customs and social organization. The method assumed that scientifically trained experts could become knowledgeable insiders of other cultures and Malinowski claimed that the method produced objective scientific knowledge (see for instance Pels 2011). If Kenyatta, after his training, proved capable of writing an unbiased ethnography about his own people then this would further validate the soundness of participant observation,

Malinowski reckoned (Berman 1996: 328). In short, Kenyatta and Malinowski both had a stake in having Kenyatta's work accepted as academically 'pure' and 'value-neutral' (see Pels 1999: 109).

At the end of his studies at the London School of Economics, Jomo Kenyatta wrote a thesis in which he described Kikuyu customs and traditions. *Facing Mount Kenya* was an edited version of this thesis, and it became one of the first modern ethnographies written by an African. Malinowski praised Kenyatta's work for its lack of political purpose and its scientificity, and in *Facing Mount Kenya's* introduction he wrote:

[Bantus and negroes] have been organised into a hatred of European encroachment and into a contempt for the debility of those powers and movements which ranged themselves on the side of Africa, and then, through weakness and incompetence, abandoned the cause of Africa and let it go by default. [...] Mr. Kenyatta has wisely refrained from using any such language as appears in my last sentences. He presents the facts objectively, and to a large extent without any passion or feeling.

Malinowski in Kenyatta (1938: x, original emphasis)

Contrary to what Malinowski suggested, *Facing Mount Kenya* was not at all written 'without any passion or feeling' and it certainly did not present the facts objectively – it was a political manifesto against British imperialism, masqueraded as cultural historical analysis.

*Facing Mount Kenya* positioned Mt. Kenya and its surrounding lands at the heart of Kikuyu culture. Firstly, it depicted the mountain as a Kikuyu spiritual place that served as the residence of the Kikuyu God *Ngai*, or *Mogai*, who founded the Kikuyu tribes. Long ago, Kenyatta wrote, Ngai summoned a male figure called *Gikuyu* upon Mt. Kenya to behold the beauty and the fertility of the area. Ngai then ordered Gikuyu to descend and to establish his homestead in the vicinity of Mt. Kenya. He provided Gikuyu with a wife, *Moombi*, and told them to have many children. Gikuyu and Moombi thereupon had nine daughters who founded nine Kikuyu clans. Ngai gave all these clans their share of land on the foot of Mt. Kenya (Kenyatta 1938: 5-9).

Following this foundation story, *Facing Mount Kenya* emphasized Mt. Kenya's role in Kikuyu sacrifices and prayers. Jomo Kenyatta explained that Mt. Kenya's Kikuyu name *Kere-Nyaga* meant 'mountain of brightness' (Kenyatta 1938: 225), and he portrayed it as a divine place that fulfilled important functions during rituals. For instance, he described how initiates to be circumcised were marked with symbols on the forehead, cheeks, around the eyes, the nose, the throat and the navel that were painted with a particular kind of white chalk called *ira* that was collected on Mt. Kenya (*Ibid.*: 132); he specified how the blood and the content of the stomach of a sheep killed during an engagement ceremony was sprinkled along the gateway of a girl's homestead and towards Mt. Kenya to purify and protect an upcoming marriage against evil, and to cement the bond between the boy's and girl's clan (*Ibid.*: 162); and he described how elders carrying drinking horns filled with beer performed blessing ceremonies towards Mt. Kenya each time a Kikuyu man moved from a first to a second grade of eldership (*Ibid.*: 195). Kenyatta further stressed that, in addition to such exceptional

circumstances, Mt. Kenya played a central role in daily life for Kikuyu always faced the mountain whenever they performed their everyday rituals and prayers (*Ibid.*: 225). All in all, *Facing Mount Kenya* presented Mt. Kenya as the supreme mark of Kikuyu solidarity and alliance.

Jomo Kenyatta used the Kikuyu foundation story and the Kikuyu rituals to argue that his tribe held the exclusive historical, cultural and religious right to populate and cultivate the area around Mt. Kenya (see for instance Kenyatta 1938: xv). Taking into account that by the late 1930s much of the land around Mt. Kenya had come into the possession of European settlers, *Facing Mount Kenya* was essentially a critique on British invasion, as the monograph's conclusion shows:

[a] culture has no meaning apart from the social organisation of life on which it is built. When the European comes to the Gikuyu country and robs the people of their land, he is taking away not only their livelihood, but the material symbol that holds family and tribe together. In doing this he gives one blow which cuts away the foundations from the whole of Gikuyu life, social, moral, and economic. When he explains, to his own satisfaction and after the most superficial glance at the issues involved, that he is doing this for the sake of the Africans, to "civilise" them, "teach them the disciplinary value of regular work", and "give them the benefit of European progressive ideas", he is adding insult to injury, and need expect to convince no one but himself.

Kenyatta (1938: 305)

Jomo Kenyatta was not unique in making land claims through a narrative of historical affiliation. From roughly the late 1920s onwards the British colonial administration was continuously confronted with tribal groups asserting land rights on the basis of cultural histories (Lonsdale 2008: 307). This played into a colonial logic that divided African subjects into solid and exclusive tribal sections and which concealed the actual negotiations and manipulations of tribal identities by colonial administrators and Africans alike (see for instance Hamilton 1998; Pels 1996). This logic rested on what administrators, missionaries and anthropologists took as cultural markers, and it paved the way for a distinct colonial geography of native reserves that assumed a connection between culture and territory (see also Gupta & Ferguson 1997; for Kenya in particular see Parsons 2012). As we will come to see later, in Kenya such logic laid the basis for an ongoing tribalization of the post-colonial state.

*Facing Mount Kenya* conveyed one straightforward message: by occupying Kikuyu land white settlers had disrupted previously peaceful and integrated Kikuyu societies, and the monograph has been depicted as an 'angry denunciation of the West' (Shaw 1995: 131). At the same time, Jomo Kenyatta did not reject all that was associated with the advent of colonialism. For instance, he had been keen to gain knowledge and he celebrated the introduction of education. He also welcomed the arrival of sanitation and medicine (Kenyatta 1938: 305). But Kenyatta's point was that Africans themselves should have the freedom to decide what they were, and were not, willing to adopt.

While Jomo Kenyatta tried to establish himself as the expert on Kikuyu culture in the late 1930s he faced competition from Louis Leakey, the father of Richard Leakey. Louis Leakey was a white

Kenyan who had been raised at the missionary station of his father, reverend Harry Leakey, and who had lived amongst Kikuyu for the first sixteen years of his life. He knew their customs and spoke their language fluently, and later in life he claimed he was a Kikuyu himself (Clark 1989: 383).

Louis Leakey was educated at Cambridge after his parents had returned to England in the aftermath of the First World War. Here, he took classes in archaeology and anthropology and soon gained a reputation for being a promising young scholar, especially after he made some important archaeological findings in Kenya early in his career. But in the mid-1930s, Leakey's work and methods began to be disputed: a professor of geology called Percy Boswell pointed out Leakey's sloppy procedures and his careless dating of hominids, and as a result Leakey's British career in archaeology was shattered (Berman & Lonsdale 1991).

In an attempt to recover his academic reputation, Louis Leakey decided to write an ethnography on the Kikuyu, whom he had known all his life. In order to fund further fieldwork, he applied for a grant from the International African Institute. His request ended up with Bronislaw Malinowski, who dismissed Leakey's application on the grounds that Leakey lacked thorough anthropological training (Berman & Lonsdale 1991: 160). Besides, Malinowski was already Jomo Kenyatta's instructor at the time, and he thought that the latter was in a far better position to analyse Kikuyu culture. This event marked an enduring rivalry between Malinowski and Kenyatta on the one hand, and Louis Leakey on the other (*Ibid.*: 162). This rivalry had its effect on how Leakey came to interpret the Mau Mau rebellion in the 1950s, which in turn had important implications for how the colonial government responded to the upheavals that is described in the next section.

Louis Leakey nevertheless returned to Kenya in early 1937 to carry out his ethnographic studies, albeit without funding. Yet, before he managed to make his findings public, Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* was published. Worse still, Kenyatta's monograph included parts of a paper that Leakey had written earlier, but which Kenyatta failed to mention as a source (Berman & Lonsdale 1991: 162). In early 1939 Leakey nevertheless tried to have his own manuscript printed. However, the document was rejected because it ran to 700,000 words, and Leakey refused to reduce its length (*Ibid.*).<sup>36</sup> Seeing that his plans were again in ruins Leakey offered his services to the colonial state, and in mid-1939 he became an officer of the special branch of the Kenya Police (*Ibid.*: 174). This arguably lost him further respect with Malinowski, who depicted colonial administrators in general as practical men without scientific training, who could 'not be trusted to come up with reliable knowledge about the people they administered' (Pels 2011: 788).

Although Louis Leakey failed to earn respect from the academic establishment he did manage to gain the confidence of key colonial administrators, whom regarded Leakey as an expert on all Kikuyu matters. Like Jomo Kenyatta, Leakey portrayed the Kikuyu as a tribe that, prior to colonial rule, had been harmonious and organic (Clark 1989: 384), and that had been governed by strict rules (*Ibid.*: 387). Yet, Leakey drew different conclusions than Kenyatta: he did not support Kenyatta's calls for Kikuyu self-governance but claimed that, before Kikuyu culture and traditions died out due to the

devastating impact of colonialism, the British administration had to facilitate their recovery (*Ibid.*: 395). Leakey based his understandings of Kikuyu culture on data that he had collected during conversations with male elders, which was a standard practice for colonial administrative ethnology at the time (Pels 2011: 796). These elders had offered Leakey an image of pre-colonial Kikuyu society as democratic and orderly but, as Shaw points out, in doing so had tried to consolidate their own power in a changing political and economic landscape. Rather than describing to Louis Leakey the actual state of affairs, these elders had ‘collaborated in the construction of a Kikuyu past which put them at the apex of political and juridical power and at the centre of the system of redistribution’ (1995: 111).

Essentially, Louis Leakey’s and Jomo Kenyatta’s accounts on Kikuyu culture both drew on notions of pre-colonial integration and tribal solidarity that had never existed, and throughout the 1930s different Kikuyu factions increasingly quarrelled over the interpretation of their shared history as well as over the severity of the colonial injustices done to them (Berman 1996: 316). In spite of such frictions, Jomo Kenyatta cultivated an image of himself as the spokesman of an undivided tribe (*Ibid.*: 315). To further this cause, he was careful not to reveal too much of his cosmopolitan experiences or his Christian upbringing: he changed his name from Johnstone, which was given to him by the Scottish missionaries, to Jomo and he was photographed in a borrowed monkey-fur cloak with spear in hand for the cover of *Facing Mt. Kenya* (*Ibid.*: 332-333). In Nairobi, Kenyatta had primarily been a detribalized native who had moved to the city, but in London he emphasized his exoticism to advance his political cause (Shaw 1995: 128).

In the end, *Facing Mount Kenya* was not at all successful in summoning together a united Kikuyu people. Instead, by the late 1940s the Kikuyu were fighting amongst themselves as much as they were fighting the colonial regime (c.f. Berman 1991; Branch 2007; Lonsdale 1992<sup>c</sup>). But both Jomo Kenyatta’s and Louis Leakey’s commentaries had nevertheless installed a narrative that suggested that the Kikuyu were at least supposed to act as one coherent force. This narrative gained dramatic momentum during the Mau Mau emergency of the 1950s.

### **Mau Mau on Mt. Kenya**

In October 1952, the colonial government declared a state of emergency over the Colony of Kenya. This was a response to a sudden upswing of African revolt that largely took the colonial administration by surprise. Between 1952 and 1960 it fought a brutal war to suppress these revolts, which were carried out in name of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, better known as the Mau Mau. Both Jomo Kenyatta and Louis Leakey were key figures during this period of upheaval.

After Louis Leakey joined the Kenya Police in 1939, he made the investigation of the KCA one of his prime concerns. By December of that year, Leakey presented his superiors with a comprehensive report that argued that the KCA had tried to prevent the colonial administration from carrying out its

duties, and that the organization aimed to arouse anti-government sentiments amongst its Kikuyu followers (Berman & Lonsdale 1991: 174). In the months that followed, Leakey directed searches of KCA's headquarters, of KCA branch offices, and of the homes of KCA leaders. In the aftermath of these searches the colonial administration banned the KCA and two affiliated associations in May 1940. The frontmen of these organizations were arrested and summoned to court in July and August (*Ibid.*: 176). They protested against their imprisonment but Leakey testified against them, claiming that the KCA meant to overthrow the colonial administration (*Ibid.*: 177). He stated that he had evidence that the KCA was collaborating with the Italian enemy, and insisted on the organization's secretive and subversive character by emphasizing its oath practices (*Ibid.*). The colonial court consented to Leakey's evidence and kept the KCA leaders in custody (*Ibid.*: 178).

Louis Leakey claimed that the KCA played a leading role in the coordination of large-scale Kikuyu resistance against the colonial regime. In practice, however, the Kikuyu population that Leakey spoke of as a more or less homogenous lot was divided on a range of topics. In the late 1930s, the colony had gone through economically grim times, and it could hardly pay the metropole the interests on its debts. To increase revenue, the colony had encouraged African agricultural production. This, in turn, had disturbed the relationship between different generations of Kikuyu men, who had previously been joined in patron-client networks (Clark 1989: 388). In the past, senior Kikuyu men had provided young Kikuyu men with the means to marry and to establish a household of their own. But under pressure of raising African production the first had begun to cut such arrangements, and wealthier landowning classes bought out poorer families (Clark 1989: 388) so as to maximize the returns from increasingly scarce and valuable land (Branch 2007: 295). This amplified the contradictions between Kikuyu haves and have-nots, and as impoverished youngsters could no longer count on the support of their elders they had begun to challenge these elders' authority (Lonsdale 2003: 56).

After the Second World War, the colonial government released the KCA leaders, who by then had spent five years in jail, and in 1946 Jomo Kenyatta returned to Kenya. Local KCA figureheads, who generally consisted of older land-owning and affluent Kikuyu men, tried to revitalize their former influential position. In light of this, they administered oaths of loyalty to men they considered responsible household heads, in order to strengthen their overall grip on the Kikuyu constituency (Berman & Lonsdale 1991: 181). But soon Kenyatta and the KCA lost control over this tactic, and by the late 1940s impoverished and dissatisfied young Kikuyu men had begun to copy the KCA's mass oathing campaigns – not to further improve the solidarity among KCA members but to consolidate their own alliance versus elder generations, by whom they felt exploited (*Ibid.*: 182).

All these developments escaped the attention of the colonial government. So when it was confronted with public oathing ceremonies in 1950, which were organized by landless Kikuyu who defied the power of Kikuyu elders and who had begun to call themselves Mau Mau, the government mistook this for a sign of collective Kikuyu revolt against the regime that Louis Leakey had warned

against a decade earlier. It should be noted that, by that time, Leakey's reputation as a Kikuyu expert was far less disputed than it had been in the late 1930s, and he had become the honorary director of the Coryndon Museum<sup>37</sup> in Nairobi – even academic anthropologists, who one and a half decades earlier and under leadership of Bronislaw Malinowski had condemned the kind of administrative ethnography that Leakey practiced (see Pels 2011), had largely come to accept Leakey's expertise (Berman & Lonsdale 1991: 180).

The colonial administration took the Mau Mau to be an anti-white and anti-Christian Kikuyu revolt that was grounded in a revival of tribal customs and religion, and banned the organization (see for instance Anderson 2005<sup>A</sup>; Berman 2007). The ban could not suppress the Mau Mau: by 1952 more oath-taking ceremonies were taking place and some Mau Mau men had begun to raid white settler farms, especially in the highlands around Mt. Kenya that *Facing Mount Kenya* identified as the religious and cultural heartland of the Kikuyu tribe (Berman & Lonsdale 1991: 183). Eventually, the colonial government declared a state of emergency, and moved military troops into the colony in October that year (Anderson 2005<sup>A</sup>: 4).

Immediately after the emergency was announced, Jomo Kenyatta was arrested. The latter had successfully cultivated an image of himself as the leadsmen of all Kikuyu, but in the context of the revolts this image had turned against him and the colonial administration had little doubt about his participation in the Mau Mau uprising. Also, the popularity of *Facing Mount Kenya* made Kenyatta a suspicious character. In 1938, the monograph had sold a mere five hundred copies, but by the 1950s it had become a desirable item and in 1953 it was reprinted to meet the high demand for the book (Shaw 1995: 136). In the context of the Cold War and the rise of Pan-Africanism, British administrators were certain that all Mau Mau followers were 'under the hypnotic control of the demonic Communist and anthropologist Jomo Kenyatta' (Berman 2007: 529).

After his arrest, Jomo Kenyatta was put before a colonial court in Kapenguria, western Kenya, in late November 1952. He was heard together with five other suspected Mau Mau leaders, who together came to be known as the *Kapenguria Six* (Coombes 2011). Initially, Louis Leakey was called in to serve as a Kikuyu interpreter during the trials, but Kenyatta managed to have him removed from the case (Clark 1989: 385)<sup>38</sup> – he understood that his rivalry with Leakey would not work to his advantage, and it has been suggested that the irony of Leakey performing as middleman between him and the colonial government was too much to bear for Kenyatta (*Ibid.*). Although Kenyatta openly disapproved of the Mau Mau, and already before his imprisonment had called Mau Mau followers irresponsible criminals (Berman 1991: 201), colonial officers thought he masterminded the movement and was the 'manager of Mayhem' (Lonsdale 1990: 394). The Kapenguria Six were found guilty and sentenced to jail.

In the meantime, Louis Leakey wrote two books on the Mau Mau: one called *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu* published in 1952, and one called *Defeating Mau Mau* published in 1954. In these two books Leakey portrayed the Mau Mau as delinquents who spoiled the reputation of an otherwise peaceful

and reasonable tribal people. His writings revealed an imperialist nostalgia<sup>39</sup> (Rosaldo 1989) for the loss of what he reckoned had been a 'traditional' Kikuyu culture, and he argued that the Mau Mau deliberately abused Kikuyu traditions and customs in their fight for self-governance. He reduced Mau Mau followers to semi-educated gangster politicians who distorted traditional customs, who undermined colonial improvement schemes, and who manipulated the beliefs of religious peoples to advance their own political cause (Clark 1998: 385). In Leakey's eyes, the Mau Mau was orchestrated by former KCA people, who had begun operating under a new name but who were still under the command of Jomo Kenyatta (Berman & Lonsdale 1991: 146).

Throughout the emergency Louis Leakey had frequent and direct personal contact with senior officials, both in Kenya and in London, whom he advised on the matter (Berman & Lonsdale 1991: 186). As such, he played a pivotal role in how the colonial administration shaped its official narrative on the Mau Mau (Berman 1991). This official narrative depicted the Mau Mau as a savage, violent, depraved and bloodthirsty tribal cult (*Ibid.*: 182). It posited the Mau Mau as agitating against enlightened British rule, and it reduced Kikuyu subjects to a backward people who were ignorant of the advantages that modern civilization offered them.<sup>40</sup> This rhetoric gave way to different positions: while conservatives, for instance, focused on the Mau Mau's terror-laden primitivism, Christian fundamentalists emphasized that the solution was in Kikuyu conversion to Christian values (Lonsdale 1990: 412). Nevertheless, all agreed on the Mau Mau's atavistic, primitive and anti-modern disposition.<sup>41</sup>

The colonial government approached the Mau Mau as a united front, which it fought by force from October 1952 onwards. Mt. Kenya and the Aberdares mountain range were the two main stages where the war against the Mau Mau took place. This further cemented the Mau Mau's depiction as an exclusively Kikuyu revolt, because Mt. Kenya and the Aberdares demarcated an area where the bulk of the colony's Kikuyu population lived, either in native reserves or on the fringes of the white-owned farms that employed them. In reality, the Mau Mau was not limited to Kikuyu and the movement did get support from people with a different tribal affiliation (Lonsdale 1992<sup>c</sup>), such as Jaramogi Oginga Odinga who is introduced later. But the colonial script of Africans organized in tribes largely prevented colonial administrators from noticing this.

Already in August 1952 some Mau Mau leaders had begun to retreat to Mt. Kenya and the Aberdares, to hide in the thick forests and caves to escape the watchful eye of the colonial regime (Anderson 2005<sup>A</sup>: 231). The number of men taking cover on Mt. Kenya and the Aberdares further increased when the emergency was announced, and slowly different Mau Mau forest bands began to take shape. These bands were not immediately the militant troops that they later became. Initially, they largely consisted of men that had simply fled their villages because they had feared prosecution by the colonial administration – they were fugitives rather than soldiers, and they were not used to the forests' wet and cold conditions (Anderson 2005<sup>A</sup>: 237). In fact, most of these men had turned to the Mau Mau only to escape the recruitment campaigns of the Home Guard (*Ibid.*: 253). The Home Guard

was an African brigade that the colonial regime had called into existence to fight Mau Mau rebels (*Ibid.*). It gained supporters quickly, although many early Home Guard adherents had little against the Mau Mau: rather, they had been seduced by Home Guard privileges such as exemption from tax payments or forced labour, they had been intimidated by the threat of punishment such as the confiscation of livestock, or they had simply wanted to avoid suspicion of being Mau Mau (*Ibid.*: 253-254). At least until late 1954 many African Home Guard followers actually sympathized with the Mau Mau, and it has been suggested that about half of them had taken Mau Mau oaths (*Ibid.*: 256).

From early 1953 onwards a draconian war was fought, involving battalions of the King's African Rifles, the Kenya Police, the Home Guard, and different Mau Mau armies that largely operated independently of one another (Anderson 2005<sup>A</sup>: 243-244). All parties involved committed cruel atrocities including torture, mutilation, beheading, cutting of hands and ears, and public hangings. Between twelve thousand and eighteen thousand Mau Mau rebels were killed, and at the peak of the emergency more than seventy thousand alleged Mau Mau supporters were held in detention camps. The Mau Mau in turn killed about eighteen hundred African civilians whom it took as British loyalists, not counting the hundreds of people that went missing and never returned. Relatively few victims fell on the side of white settlers and British troops: records mention 250 killings and casualties (*Ibid.*: 4-5).

The methods employed by the colonial administration, such as the invention of the Home Guard, divided African subjects into British loyalists and Mau Mau followers, and civil war broke out. Most of the fighting took place in villages located on the slopes of Mt. Kenya and the Aberdares – between April 1953 and March 1954 Murang'a, a town south of Mt. Kenya, was one of the worst battlegrounds (Anderson 2005<sup>A</sup>: 263), and at the end of March 1953 a town called Lari, located in Kiambo region, became the scene of a massacre. One night Lari's Home Guard was called out to investigate the murder of a loyalist. Arriving at the scene, the brigade realized it had been fooled – when it returned to Lari it found the entire village in ruins. More than one hundred villagers were killed or gravely injured, and the incident became known as the 'greatest bloodletting of the entire Mau Mau war' (*Ibid.*: 119-139).

During the first two years of the emergency, the Mau Mau armies proved strong forces that were difficult to fight. It was hard to trace their whereabouts due to Mt. Kenya's and the Aberdares' harsh terrain and thick forest cover, and they had developed successful intelligence-gathering techniques. But from mid-1954 onwards these circumstances gradually changed after Waruhiu Itote, better known as General China and the leader of all Mau Mau generals on Mt. Kenya, was captured. Itote became trapped in an ambush organized by the King's African Rifles and the Home Guard in January 1954. He was shot, and surrendered himself. A few weeks later he was called to court and sentenced to death, but he was offered a pardon if he agreed to cooperate in the colonial government's efforts to finish off the Mau Mau (Anderson 2005<sup>A</sup>: 234).

Waruhiu Itote offered his assistance to the regime, and he became pivotal in a large surrender campaign. He wrote more than twenty letters to all Mau Mau leaders on Mt. Kenya and the Aberdares,

asking them to meet with the colonial administration to discuss their capitulation (Anderson 2005<sup>A</sup>: 273). The plan seemed to have potential: more and more Africans had begun to reject the Mau Mau due to its use of extreme violence (see for instance Berman 1991; Branch 2007) and the Mau Mau increasingly received less support from outside, making, for instance, the supply of their forest encampments more difficult. In addition, the Mau Mau had suffered a great number of casualties since October 1952, which further weakened their position.

A handful of Mau Mau leaders responded to Itote's call, and in the first week of April 1954 the first troops came down to announce their surrender. Contrary to what had been agreed, a brigadier of the King's African Rifles called John Reginald Orr opened fire (Anderson 2005<sup>A</sup>: 276). This threw a spanner in the works, and with this event the surrender campaign fell to pieces. Mau Mau leaders no longer trusted Waruhiu Itote, and eventually the latter was sent to a detention camp for he was of no further use. Nevertheless, Itote's intermingling divided the Mau Mau leaders: whereas some openly scolded him, others continued to believe in his innocence (*Ibid.*).

By late 1954, the Mau Mau had largely been defeated. There were only about two thousand fighters left, and the movement no longer posed a real military threat. The colonial government dismissed British troops and installed 'pseudo-gangs' from September 1955 onwards (Anderson 2005<sup>A</sup>: 284-285). These pseudo-gangs largely consisted of former Mau Mau rebels who had changed side, but they also included white highlanders and administrators such as Bill Woodley who painted their faces and disguised themselves as Mau Mau fighters by wearing ragged clothes and dreadlock wigs. By early 1956, these pseudo-gangs had cleared most of Mt. Kenya and the Aberdares of Mau Mau militants (*Ibid.*).

The war officially came to an end in October 1956, when the last standing and most important Mau Mau general on the Aberdares, Dedan Kimathi, was finally arrested. With Kimathi's capture the resistance of the forest armies had been broken and all the Mau Mau figureheads had either been hanged or imprisoned, or were presumed death (Anderson 2005<sup>A</sup>: 328). The civil war came to an end, but Mau Mau detention camps initially continued to exist. However, the horrible conditions within these camps embarrassed the colonial government on different occasions and, fearing more scandals, it finally called off the state of emergency in January 1960. It released all former Mau Mau suspects and began to rehabilitate the region (*Ibid.*: 328-330).

The rehabilitation process had a bearing on Jomo Kenyatta's predicament. After the Kapenguria trial, Kenyatta had been imprisoned for six years, but in 1959 he had been transferred to Lodwar where he continued to live under house arrest. Once the state of emergency was lifted, Kenya's emerging political elite began to lobby for Kenyatta's liberation and his detention was finally cancelled in August 1961. Subsequently, Kenyatta resumed his political career and became the chairman of the Kenya African National Union (KANU), a political party founded the year before.

In anticipation of Kenya's decolonization Jomo Kenyatta launched a charm offensive. He deliberately kept the Kikuyu populism that the Mau Mau represented at bay so as not to offend

loyalists, non-Kikuyu, the colonial government or European settlers (Clough 2003: 255). In a press statement that he gave shortly after his return from Lodwar he echoed Louis Leakey judgement that Mau Mau followers were gangsters, and he declared:

We are determined to have independence in peace, and we shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya. We must have no hatred toward one another. Mau Mau was a disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again.

Taken from Clough (2003: 255)

Kenyatta tried to shake off his reputation as the ‘demonized leader to darkness and death’ (Berman 2007: 536) and he positioned himself as the pillar for reconciliation (*Ibid.*). In the process, he further hardened the division between ex-Mau Mau and Kikuyu loyalists (see for instance Branch 2007), and managed to enhance his reputation in the eyes of colonial officials and white settlers alike – by 1963 they regarded him as the most desirable president of an independent Kenya, who could be trusted to protect Western interests (Berman 2007: 536).

### **A new nation’s troubled past**

On 12 December 1963 Kenya was proclaimed independent. Jomo Kenyatta’s KANU had won the pre-independence elections, and Kenyatta was inaugurated as the country’s first president. On the eve of independence, the British government foresaw an exodus of British settlers who were likely to demand compensation from the public treasury to cover the costs of investments that they had made (Leo 1978: 621). In anticipation of this, the British government funded Kenyatta to buy off some European properties. These land sales were to demonstrate that Europeans would not be chased out, and that their properties would retain their value under the new administrative system (*Ibid.*; see also Branch & Cheeseman 2006). In essence, Jomo Kenyatta meant to communicate that there would be a place for everyone in independent Kenya.

But the Mau Mau history problematized Kenya’s cultivation into a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic state (Lonsdale 1992<sup>B</sup>: 267). Not long after Jomo Kenyatta’s presidential appointment, different memoirs appeared written by former Mau Mau activists. For instance, there was one by a man called Josiah Mwangi Kariuki that was published in 1963, and one by Waruhiu Itote published in 1967. These memoirs did not depict the Mau Mau as a tribalist movement, like the colonial regime had done, but claimed that the Mau Mau had been a nationalist movement that had stood up against British domination (see for instance Berman 1991: 184). Such a depiction tied in with the publication of different academic works that argued that the Mau Mau had been a rational and instrumental response to grievances caused by the colonial regime. These works described Mau Mau followers as conscious political actors rather than as primitive and uncivilized savages. Especially Nottingham & Rosberg’s

*The Myth of Mau Mau: Nationalism in Kenya* published in 1966 was influential in this regard (Berman 1991).

Mau Mau's characterization as a nationalist liberation movement undermined Jomo Kenyatta's ideology of national unity: to acknowledge former Mau Mau fighters as political activists who had advanced and achieved the cause of decolonialization would make independence appear an exclusively Kikuyu accomplishment, and as such glorify one tribal group over others (Berman 1991: 201). So rather than keeping the Mau Mau's memory alive, Kenyatta downplayed the movement's contribution to self-government and literally called upon Kenyans to 'forgive and forget' the past (Atieno-Odhiambo 1991: 303). He initiated a policy of amnesia (Clough 2003: 256), and constantly reminded Kenyans that they had all fought for the country's liberation collectively. As such, Kenyatta set the tone for the marginal and ambivalent role that the Mau Mau episode continues to play in Kenya's official historical narrative. It was also within this context that Kenyatta sent Kiso Munyao to plant the national flag on Mt. Kenya's peak on the night of independence – the act meant to transform the mountain from a Kikuyu shrine or Mau Mau hide-out into a symbol of the colonial hardships that all Kenyans had fought against together.

Jomo Kenyatta's rejection of the Mau Mau had various material effects. In the run-up to independence ex-Mau Mau had hoped that Kenyatta would confiscate and redistribute European land among them, but Kenyatta made it clear that he had no such intentions (Clough 2003: 255). He moreover denied former Mau Mau fighters government positions, and largely selected his ministers and statesmen from loyalist Kikuyu and British collaborators. Some ex-Mau Mau protested against how Kenyatta set them apart, and again retreated into Mt. Kenya's forests after 1963. Castro (1995: 83) suggests that these dissenters did not really threaten Kenyatta's rule because they were poorly armed and small in number. Yet, their self-imposed seclusion did give expression to Kenyatta's limited capacity to enforce national order upon each and every citizen (*ibid.*).

It soon became evident that Jomo Kenyatta's regime not only marginalized former Mau Mau but also cultivated unequal access to wealth and political power more generally. Kenyatta left the bureaucratic structures of his colonial predecessors in place and largely built his regime on the principle of tribal elders and patron-client networks. This consolidated a connection between the accumulation of economic and political affluence on the one hand and tribal solidarity on the other (Berman et al. 2009; Branch & Cheeseman 2006), and it generally benefitted Kenyatta's own political associates. These associates largely consisted of former loyalist Kikuyu and, during Kenyatta's first years, of Luo politicians who had joined KANU in 1960 under leadership of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, a Luo spokesman appointed as vice-president by Kenyatta in 1963. Kenyatta presented himself as the country's *Mzee*, the elder of all elders that brought together all different communities (Berman et al. 2009: 473) and he employed a rhetoric of *harambee*, Kiswahili for all working together (Anderson 2005<sup>B</sup>: 547). Yet, in practice, he favoured his own political cadre at the expense of the rest of the country.

Kenyatta's tribal favouritism expressed itself most dramatically through the Million Acre Settlement Scheme. This scheme was implemented in the Rift Valley and essentially meant to divide previously white-owned farms, which Kenyatta had been able to buy with British sponsorship, into small plots owned by African cooperatives. Its main intention was to re-Africanize an area that, during colonialism, had largely been in white hands. This is not to suggest that all white settlers left the Rift Valley after 1963 – many stayed on, or sold their farms to other Europeans who came to Kenya in the years that followed. To this day, the area is home to a significant white population, whose insecure tenant rights have had a critical effect on Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site, as I will explain in chapters four and five.

After independence, land was scarce yet desirable and the Rift Valley's Million Acre Settlement Scheme gave way to fierce competition over who was to benefit from the programme (Berman & Lonsdale 1992: 1). Simplifying matters for clarity's sake, roughly two camps emerged. On the one hand, there were landless Kikuyu for whom there was no place in the overpopulated Kikuyu reserves, or who squatted on the fringes of white-owned farms. They saw the scheme as an opportunity to regain farmland, after the colonial administration had dispossessed them. On the other hand, there were Kalenjin groups who claimed that the Rift Valley was theirs, because they had occupied it prior to colonization. Maasai groups made similar demands, but these are set aside for now as their claims pertained to one specific area that I will deal with in more detail in the coming two chapters.

The Million Acre Settlement Scheme's purchase system favoured the landless Kikuyu over the Kalenjin groups. It prescribed that land-buying companies, founded especially for the purpose, could buy land at market rates – a similar initiative had been tried in 1961 but had failed at the time due to a lack of readily available farmland, which had given way to prices that no African could pay (Leo 1981). But the Million Acre Settlement Scheme adopted lower prices. This primarily enabled landless Kikuyu to buy themselves in since they were typically more affluent than Kalenjin groups, due to their participation in commercial farming under colonial rule. Moreover, Kalenjin groups refused to pay for land they already deemed rightfully theirs due to pre-colonial inhabitancy (see for instance Anderson & Lochery 2008).

The Million Acre Settlement Scheme enabled the steady influx of Kikuyu communities into the Rift Valley. Kalenjin groups protested loudly against these developments. Their most outspoken representative was Daniel Arap Moi, who was a member of the political party Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU), which had been founded in 1960 in opposition to Jomo Kenyatta's KANU. Between 1960 and 1963, KADU had promoted a politics of *majimboism* as an alternative to nationalism. *Majimbo* is Kiswahili for provinces or counties, and *majimboism* essentially entailed the devolution of government power to a regional level to prevent larger tribal groups such as the Kikuyu from dominating tribal minorities (Anderson 2005<sup>B</sup>). Through *Majimboism*, KADU had hoped to curtail KANU's growing influence (*Ibid.*: 552), but this aspiration fell apart with the pre-independence elections. Subsequently, some KADU members, including Daniel Arap Moi, took positions in the

House of Representatives. But they soon realized that without support and funds from central government they were powerless (Anderson 2005<sup>B</sup>: 562). In consideration of this, different KADU politicians took a pragmatic stance and joined KANU. In 1964, KANU absorbed KADU, which ceased to exist, and Kenya effectively became a one-party state. As a member of KANU, Daniel Arap Moi continued to advocate majimboism. Set against Kalenjin frustrations over the new political establishment as well as over the Million Acre Settlement Scheme, majimboism was no longer merely understood as a particular model of rule – rather, it became synonymous with Kalenjin groups' desire to expel Kikuyu from the Rift Valley (Anderson 2005<sup>B</sup>).

In 1967, Daniel Arap Moi's uncompromising tone changed. In March 1966, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga had fallen out with Jomo Kenyatta, and had resigned from his post as vice-president. Kenyatta then offered the position to Moi and gradually the Kikuyu-Luo alliance, against which KADU had originally been founded, was replaced by a coalition between Kikuyu politicians and minority tribes such as the Kalenjin (Lynch 2006<sup>B</sup>: 234). Moi dropped his majimboism advocacy, and instead began to defend the Million Acre Settlement Scheme's capitalist principle that land was a saleable good and not a historical or tribal right (Anderson & Lochery 2008: 336-337). Moi's former Kalenjin supporters reprimanded him for this, and claimed that Moi had paid for his influential position by giving away the Rift Valley to the Kikuyu (*Ibid.*).

In the meantime, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, together with a number of other former allies of Jomo Kenyatta who had come to refute Kenyatta's clientelistic practices, founded an opposition party called the Kenya's People Union (KPU). KPU members condemned Kenyatta's neo-colonial attitude, and disapproved of how his rule concentrated wealth and political sway in the hands of an influential few. Under the leadership of Odinga, KPU sought popular support from the people who suffered most from Kenyatta's tribal favouritism, and it deliberately reached out to ex-Mau Mau. In the process, it accused Kenyatta and his associates of keeping alive colonial rule, and it called upon the masses to again fight for liberation. In response, KANU took a firm stance against its former Luo allies, whom it began to portray as an 'uncircumcised lot' that lacked administrative competence and that was culturally inferior to KANU's new allies, the Kalenjin (Lynch 2006<sup>B</sup>: 237). Much to KPU's detriment, KANU also sought rapprochement with former Mau Mau fighters, and even pressed for the erection of a Mau Mau monument in Nairobi's Uhuru Park (Clough 2003: 257). When the government eventually banned the KPU in 1969 it no longer needed to lure Mau Mau supporters away from Odinga – it again became oblivious to the movement, and returned to its politics of amnesia.

The government's negligence of the Mau Mau came to a head in 1975 when Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, a former Mau Mau who eventually became Jomo Kenyatta's most popular critic, was found murdered in Ngong Hills in western Nairobi. The public believed that Kariuki had been assassinated by the regime, and protesting masses attended Kariuki's funeral in large numbers. These masses claimed that Kenyatta's administration was trying to rid itself from political opponents, just as the British colonial regime had done, and they drew analogies between Kariuki's murder and the colonial

government's war against the Mau Mau (Clough 2003: 258). These protests undermined Kenyatta's authority, which in turn encouraged others to mock him openly. Among them was the novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who saw the Mau Mau upheavals as an archetypical workers and peasants revolution, and who maintained that Kenyatta's rule was little more than a continuation of colonial oppression (see for instance Waller 2001) – in late 1977 he was put in jail for his criticism. Such conditions characterized the last three years of Kenyatta's regime, which ended when the latter died of old age in 1978.

After Jomo Kenyatta passed away vice-president Daniel Arap Moi became president. By that time the mechanisms of clientelism and ethnic favouritism, which hitherto had benefitted Kikuyu elites, were firmly in place. Moi turned these mechanisms to his advantage and replaced sitting politicians with his own political allies, most of whom sharing his Kalenjin roots. Initially, Moi's seizure of the state apparatus was precarious and he only just survived a coup attempt in 1982 (Foeken & Dietz 2000), which implicated Jaramogi Oginga Odinga and his son Raila Odinga. But gradually Moi marginalized what had remained of Kikuyu and Luo control, and over time KANU effectively became 'KADU reborn' (Anderson 2005<sup>B</sup>: 563; see also Throup & Hornsby 1998).

After Daniel Arap Moi assumed the presidency he initially embraced Kenya's Mau Mau history, and sought an alliance with former Mau Mau leaders. It has been suggested that this coalition meant to serve two purposes. On the one hand, Moi's partnership with ex-Mau Mau was part of a broader populist strategy with which Moi hoped to engender nationwide support (Clough: 2003: 259) – Jomo Kenyatta had lost such support during his last years, and Moi had observed first hand how Kenyatta's loss of authority had hampered his ability to govern. Secondly, Moi's open commemoration of Mau Mau history meant to express that the new president would bring the favouritism towards Kikuyu leaders who had been loyal to the British colonial regime to an end (*Ibid.*).

Throughout the 1980s, Daniel Arap Moi's revival of Mau Mau sentiments aroused scholarly debate about how much the movement had actually contributed to decolonialization. Historians were divided over the matter, which culminated in a hostile row during a 1986 meeting of the Historical Association of Kenya (Atieno-Odhiambo 1991). On the one hand, there was a group of revisionists, which included historians such as Bethwell Ogot and William Ochieng, who claimed that all colonial victims had fought their battles. They advocated against romanticizing the Mau Mau uprising as a form of exclusive Kikuyu resistance, for such an image only aided Kikuyu elites in legitimizing the exclusion of all other Kenyans from the fruits of independence (*Ibid.*: 301). On the other hand, there was a group of more radical thinkers, which included the historian Maini wa Kinyatti and Ngugi wa Thiong'o who had been released after Kenyatta's death, who dramatized the Mau Mau's Kikuyu character. They blamed Ogot, Ochieng and likeminded thinkers for refusing to acknowledge Kikuyu heroism, and claimed that Mau Mau rebellion had been the 'highest peak of Kenyan nationalism' (*Ibid.*: 304) and deserved a prominent place in Kenya's collective memory. These radicals received far more grassroots support than revisionists, and figures such as Josiah Mwangi Kariuki and the

Aberdares Mau Mau leader Dedan Kimathi became the national heroes of the 1980s (Clough 2003: 259).

Daniel Arap Moi's initial celebration of Mau Mau ebbed away in the early 1990s. After the 1982 coup attempt Moi had largely enforced autocratic rule, but in the decade that followed national protest groups increasingly lobbied for multi-party politics and competitive elections. Such lobbying intensified after the assassination of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Robert Ouko in February 1990 (see for instance Grignon et al. 2000) – the murder was clouded in mystery and the rumour spread that Moi had been involved in the killing, which initiated riots in Nairobi. At the same time, international development partners began to call for political reforms (Klopp 2001). It was a time in which different African governments had come to find themselves on the verge of bankruptcy, and in order to receive loans from bilateral financial institutions these country had to commit themselves to widespread democratic reorganizations (Ellis 2000: 42).

Anticipating changes in Kenya's administrative conditions, Kikuyu groups in Central Province once again revived the commemoration of the Mau Mau movement. They began to sing old Mau Mau chants to express their dissatisfaction with Moi's marginalization of Kikuyu politicians, and they called upon all Kikuyu to unite and challenge Moi's rule. In the course of these events the government ordered a ban on Jomo Kenyatta's portrait in May 1990, after which it removed his photo from all government offices and public buildings. The Kikuyu in Central Province reacted angrily, and the measure only added to their discontent (Sabar-Friedman 1995: 113).

National and international pressure groups managed to command political transformations and in 1991, more than twenty-five years after KANU and KADU had merged and Kenya had become a one-party state, multi-party politics was restored. Elections followed in the year after. In the run-up to these elections, Daniel Arap Moi reinvigorated the ideology of *majimbo*, which he had defended before he had become Jomo Kenyatta's vice-president. Moi and his associates capitalized upon decades-old Kalenjin frustrations over the exclusion from the Rift Valley, and made land distribution a high point on the electoral agenda in an attempt to garner Kalenjin voter support (Anderson & Lochery 2008; Hughes 2005). One of Moi's closest followers, William ole Ntimama, deliberately agitated Kalenjin and Maasai groups, and told them they would lose further access to the Rift Valley if a Kikuyu politician won the elections. He intimidated Kikuyu residents of the area and infamously warned them to 'lie low as envelopes or face grave consequences' (Onoma 2010: 87; see also Klopp 2001), insinuating that they would have to keep calm and vote for Moi or otherwise face Maasai and Kalenjin spears. Eventually, Daniel Arap Moi won the 1992 elections by more than one third of all votes. His victory articulated his control over Kenya's entire political apparatus (Throup & Hornsby 1998: 533) and it further fuelled tensions between Kikuyu, Kalenjin and Maasai groups. This came to a dramatic height in Enoosupukia, a place in Narok county, where William ole Ntimama's incitements resulted in a massive clash between Kikuyu and Maasai residents in 1993. Some people were murdered, and many others fled in fear for their safety (see for instance Klopp 2001).

The reintroduction of multi-party politics changed Kenya's political arena in significant ways. Most importantly, it set the stage for the exaggerated enactment of tribal identities, and it fostered tribal polarization as political parties typically formed in keeping with tribal boundaries. This was partially the result of deliberate techniques employed by politicians such as William ole Ntimama but, as Klopp (2001) suggests, it was also an unplanned and unforeseen side effect of politicians trying to stay in control or trying to regain the power they had had under Jomo Kenyatta. The profound tribalization of Kenya's political domain offered the Moi government opportunities that it exploited, but at the same time it contained a big worry: if KANU could summon popular support by playing up tribal grievances, then so could the Kikuyu opposition (Throup & Hornsby 1998: 533).

This Kikuyu opposition had one trump card with which to engender tribal solidarity, namely Mau Mau. But from the late 1980s onwards, open support for Mau Mau became more complicated due to a nationwide upsurge in sect-like movements. One of these movements was *Mungiki*, the precise origins of which are disputed: some have depicted it as an originally religious movement (see for instance Wamue 2001), while others have claimed that it was founded as a vigilante brigade in the context of Nairobi's high levels of crime (see for instance Anderson 2002). During the first decade of its existence Mungiki accentuated its Kikuyu character. It promoted traditional Kikuyu customs and habits, and it rejected all forms of Westernization. Mungiki leaders even claimed that the organization descended from Mau Mau, and stated: 'we have Mau Mau blood in us and our objectives are similar' (Kagwanja 2003: 30). But it did not take long before Mungiki revealed itself as a hostile gang with criminal intentions. Among other things, it aggressively monopolized Nairobi's minivan sector and began to extort taxes from people in shanty towns (Anderson 2002). At least until roughly the 2000s, when Mungiki became less pronounced on its Kikuyu roots and began to adopt an Islamic identity (Anderson 2002; Kagwanja 2003), one's support for Mau Mau could easily be misunderstood as sympathy for Mungiki.

In 1997, Kenya witnessed its second round of elections since independence. This time, international watchdog organizations monitored the events closely, given the distrust surrounding Daniel Arap Moi's triumph in 1992. The Kikuyu politician Mwai Kibaki was Moi's strongest opponent – initially, Kibaki had been vice-president under Moi, but they had fallen out in 1988. Kibaki had left KANU in December 1991 and had founded his own party, called the Democratic Party (DP). After the votes were counted KANU again pronounced itself winner. In response, riots broke out in the Rift Valley, where Kikuyu groups claimed that Moi and his Kalenjin supporters had sabotaged the electoral process for the second time in a row, and both Kenyans and international observers took the position that Kenyan elections did not foster democracy but merely confirmed Moi's totalitarian rule. This, in turn, encouraged scholars to point out that Kenya's electoral system was as corrupt as the government it served, and attention was drawn to vote buying, selective distribution of identity cards, and the strategic division of constituencies (see for instance Foeken & Dietz 2000).

In subsequent years, KANU realized that, in order to survive another round of elections, it needed a significant proportion of the Kikuyu vote. It found a clever solution to this: in the run-up to the 2002 elections, from which Daniel Arap Moi was constitutionally barred because he had already been elected twice, KANU introduced Jomo Kenyatta's son Uhuru Kenyatta as Moi's successor. Some observers have suggested that this was not only a strategy to appeal to the Kikuyu constituency, but that it also meant to take the sting out of the Rift Valley conflict, where violence was less likely to occur if Kalenjin and Kikuyu communities voted for the same president (see for instance Kanyinga 2009: 336). It seemed that this Kikuyu-Kalenjin alliance had already been planned in the aftermath of the 1997 elections, when KANU had awarded Kikuyu politicians such as Joseph Kamoto and George Saitoti influential governmental positions. Critical observers came to call the appointment of these Kikuyu politicians *kabisa* (absolutely or completely): the move divided the Kikuyu vote, which reinforced KANU's grips on the country's political apparatus (see for instance Grignon et al. 2001: 14).

During the 2002 elections, the National Rainbow Coalition (NaRC) was KANU's most important competitor. NaRC was a broad alliance of different parties, which had formed a bloc against Uhuru Kenyatta. Amongst others, NaRC included Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga – the latter had been a member of KANU but had left the party the moment that Daniel Arap Moi had pushed forward Uhuru Kenyatta. Through the involvement of Kibaki, NaRC tried to appeal to the Kikuyu vote, and in an attempt to gain broad support in Central Province NaRC took part in the revival of Mau Mau commemoration that had characterized the region ever since the early 1990s. NaRC succeeded, and it won the 2002 elections. Mwai Kibaki became Kenya's third president.

Initially, Kenya celebrated NaRC's victory en masse, optimistic that it would bring an end to decades of political corruption, violent repression and disproportionate enrichment of politicians. But national euphoria was short-lived. NaRC had run on an agenda of legislative reform and during its campaign tours it had promised to draft a new constitution. Civil society groups had demanded legislative changes since the early 1990s, when it became evident that multi-party politics failed to foster democratic leadership (see for instance Lynch 2006<sup>B</sup>). From the late 1990s onwards, KANU claimed that it was working on such reforms, but it failed to deliver results and NaRC took strategic advantage of this in its election campaign.

Like his predecessor, Mwai Kibaki largely lost interest in changing the country's constitution after he became president. The 'business as usual of corruption and patronage' continued (Berman et al. 2009: 464), and Kibaki filled Kenya's cabinet with his own henchmen. In practice this meant that, on the whole, the statesmen who had served under Kenyatta simply resumed their former influential position (*Ibid.*). Kibaki's government made attempts to review the country's legislation but the process soon stalled, and constitution debates became merely another podium on which to express tribal differences and competition (Berman et al. 2009: Hughes 2005) – these developments were partly due to internal NaRC divisions,<sup>42</sup> but they were also bolstered by an increasingly vocal global lobby that

called for the protection of tribal minority rights. The public soon lost its initial enthusiasm for NaRC, and began to take the acronym for ‘Nothing actually Really Changed’.

In 2003, Mwai Kibaki lifted the ban on Mau Mau membership. When the British administration had called off the state of emergency in 1956 it had not abolished the legal prohibition on Mau Mau participation, and both Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi had kept the ban in place. Kibaki’s repeal had no practical consequences but was highly symbolic: it communicated that his government at last meant to bring an end to the suppression of the country’s Mau Mau history (Coombes 2011: 204). In the years that followed, different official Mau Mau commemoration events took place, and throughout 2006 and 2007 the government erected a number of Mau Mau statues and mausolea (Coombes 2011). But Kenya’s past remained disputed, and the celebration of Mau Mau continued to be a highly controlled state affair. In February 2006, for instance, the police intervened when a group of people tried to organize a memorial service for Dedan Kimathi in the latter’s hometown. The police suspected they were Mungiki, and hence arrested them (*Ibid.*: 213-214). The general public is not unaware of how the commemoration of Mau Mau primarily became a playground for politicians, and the question is whether today there is still much popular enthusiasm for Mau Mau’s celebration: when Kibaki revealed a statue of Dedan Kimathi in front of the Hilton Hotel in Nairobi just prior to the 2007 elections, Kenyans largely rejected the act as yet another round of Mau Mau’s appropriation in the scramble for votes (*Ibid.*: 217) and paid little attention to it.

So far, I have discussed the ways in which the celebration of Mau Mau waxed and waned since the 1960s in line with a number of power struggles, and I have called attention to politicians’ ongoing endeavours to summon tribal solidarity. Before I move on to discuss how this ties in with Mt. Kenya’s World Heritage designation, I want to make explicit that tribal coalitions are not the sole imperatives in Kenya’s political arena – just recall how Daniel Arap Moi formed an opportunistic partnership first with Jomo Kenyatta, and later with Uhuru Kenyatta.<sup>43</sup> But the point is that Kenya’s successive political elites have framed the country’s administrative difficulties in a discourse that focuses exclusively on tribal division and competition (Anderson & Lochery 2008: 339), which obscures other complicating factors including gender differences, class distinctions or racial segregation (see also Lonsdale 2008). The academic challenge is to problematize rather than to reproduce this discourse, and to be careful not to observe Kenya’s political developments purely through an ‘ethnic lens’ (Lynch 2006<sup>A</sup>: 61).

The ways in which Kenyan politicians exaggerate cultural origins in relation to the country’s administration are not unique to Kenya. In fact, different scholars have pointed out how notions of indigeneity and autochthony have become more poignant and pronounced in recent decades, not only in relatively young African nations (see for instance Igoe 2006) but also in Europe, where classifications of cultural insiders and outsiders or distinctions between natives and immigrants have become reiterated themes on the agenda of many a political party (Geschiere 2009; Stolcke 1999). What is particularly troublesome in the case of Kenya, however, is the way in which the rhetoric of

tribal affinity inspires a powerful narrative on land ownership that equates cultural background with rights to land (see also Kuper 2003). This narrative periodically induces violent clashes, especially in times of elections when politicians overdramatize tribal identities in an attempt to rally voter support (Berman 1998). The 2008 elections produced the most disruptive outbreak of tribal conflict over land so far: it lasted for nearly two months, took roughly one thousand lives and created hundreds of thousands international refugees.

In closing, I want to emphasize that I distance myself from primordial understandings of culture and tribe. Rather, I take my cue from scholars who have problematized contemporary processes of belonging, and who have pointed to the inherent tension between the changeable, flexible and contextual nature of cultural identities, on the one hand, and the rigid cultural histories and precepts that such identities can elicit on the other (see for instance Ceuppens & Geschiere 2005; Igoe 2006; Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Geschiere 2009).<sup>44</sup> In Kenya, such tension is obviously at the core of land disputes, but it is also discernable in other developments. For instance, it revealed itself when a famous lawyer called Silvano Meleo Otieno, better known as SM, died unexpectedly in 1986. His widow announced that she wanted to bury him on their farm in Nairobi, but SM's relatives and his Luo age-mates objected. They demanded that SM was buried on family land in Nyamila, Nyanza Province, close to his ancestors. Kenyan media followed the tussles between the widow and SM's relatives closely, and debates over whether SM's cultural background should take precedence over his modern lifestyle or vice versa captivated the public for months. Eventually, the matter was decided upon in court, where a judge ruled that the arguments of SM's Luo relatives outweighed those of his widow. The body was transferred to Nyamila, and laid to rest during a traditional burying ceremony (see Cohen & Atieno-Odhiambo 1992).

The events around SM's death offer another example of how indigeneity can underpin the assertion of rights, in this particular case over a body, and it underscores the political potential of 'strategic essentialism' (Igoe 2006: 417) – in today's geo-political conditions one's ethnic distinctiveness and the mobilization of tradition (see also Meyer 2010) can be effective political tools for giving voice to one's grievances, whether these consist of one's limited access to natural resources, one's marginalized role in decision-making processes, or restrictions in performing one's mode of living openly. But 'cultural distinction' is a process and a mode of positioning rather than an essence (Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Hall 1986), and this demands that we pay close attention to how cultural boundaries are continuously reshaped and re-interpreted. This is not to suggest that temporal cultural identities are devoid of historical depth: Hamilton (1998), for instance, shows that historical events pose limits on cultural invention (see also Hall 1986; Li 2000). As such, she offers a critique on the body of literature that appeared in the wake of Hobsbawm and Ranger's influential *Invention of Tradition* (1983), which, according to Hamilton, overestimated colonialism's influence on the formation of African tribal identities (see also Spear 2003).

Taking note of this, I regard Kenya's 'tribes', 'ethnicities' or 'cultures' as a form of social practice that, among other things, has recourse to socio-economic conditions, political advocacy, historical reference, and adaption to changing circumstances. In the next two chapters, I continue to point out how this practice complicates the country's volatile land issue.

### **Nature dominating cultural and political pasts**

Mt. Kenya's World Heritage nomination came into being at a time when the 1997 elections were pending. KANU politicians and the Central Province Kikuyu opposition competed for power, and in the process both tried to evoke tribal solidarity in order to summon popular support. In this rally for votes, Mt. Kenya offered the Kikuyu opposition a valuable source of symbolic capital for a number of reasons. Firstly, and owing to Jomo Kenyatta's attempt to forge a collective Kikuyu identity in *Facing Mount Kenya* and in his political advocacy more generally, the mountain came to epitomize Kikuyu culture and religion. Secondly, Mt. Kenya was one of the two battlegrounds where the Mau Mau war was fought most fanatically, and as such it became associated with Kikuyu brotherhood and camaraderie. Thirdly, the Kikuyu statesmen that Jomo Kenyatta put in place after he became president largely obtained their wealth in the vicinity of Mt. Kenya, primarily through the Million Acre Settlement Scheme. Thus, the mountain came to denote post-independent Kikuyu entrepreneurship and political sway. In addition, Kenyatta's political associates largely originated from Mt. Kenya, primarily from a town called Nyeri that is located on the mountain's southwestern slope. It is widely believed that not Kenyatta himself but these Kikuyu associates called the shots during Kenyatta's presidency, and they became known as the 'Mt. Kenya Mafia'. When Kibaki obtained power in 2002, many former Mt. Kenya Mafia politicians regained their influential position and thus were able to control the country's administration once more (see for instance Lynch 2006<sup>B</sup>; Murungu & Nasong'o 2006).

In short, for the 1997 Kikuyu opposition Mt. Kenya was a powerful token of tribal liaison, and it tried to capitalize on the mountain's symbolic value in order to encourage the different communities living around Mt. Kenya to vote as one united block (see also Kariuki 2006: 4). In light of this, one might expect that the KANU government would have tried to inhibit Mt. Kenya's World Heritage nomination, as surely World Heritage status could add to the mountain's glorification. But neither President Daniel Arap Moi himself, nor other KANU politicians, prevented Mt. Kenya's World Heritage listing. They easily could have done so, and there are examples of World Heritage nominations that resulted in an impasse after sitting politicians refused to endorse it (see for instance Scholze 2008).

I maintain that KANU politicians did not object to Mt. Kenya's World Heritage listing because the application that Bongo Woodley drafted focused exclusively on the mountain's natural features. It

confined Mt. Kenya to a natural tableau, and it only dealt with geological and ecological characteristics. Bongo Woodley neither spoke of the mountain's Kikuyu connotation, nor of its role in relation to the Mau Mau episode. Instead, he portrayed Mt. Kenya as a wilderness area and merely discussed tree species, animal records and so forth – Mt. Kenya's World Heritage nomination 'naturalized' the area, and effectively downplayed Kikuyu and Mau Mau histories. Meskell (2012<sup>A</sup>) makes a similar argument for South Africa and points out that, in post-apartheid South Africa, the celebration of cultural heritage is an extremely politicized undertaking because it inevitably evokes a history of racism. In this particular historical context, biodiversity conservation and the celebration of natural heritage could emerge as racially neutral and impartial. Meskell draws attention to different archaeological sites in Kruger National Park that represent apartheid's former racist and repressive regime, and shows that Kruger's depiction as a site of natural marvels placed the park in a discursive realm where this history need not be discussed or even acknowledged. From this she draws the wider conclusion that, in light of the African National Congress's ambition to let South Africa recover from apartheid, the nationwide celebration of nature became a strategy to tone down political pasts (*Ibid.*: 212).

Before moving on, I should say that Bongo Woodley did make one short reference to the strong connection between Mt. Kenya and the country's Kikuyu population. He wrote:

Mt. Kenya is regarded as a holy mountain by all the communities (Kikuyu and Meru) living adjacent to it. They believe that their traditional God Ngai and his wife Mumbi live on the peak of the mountain. They use it for their traditional rituals.

The Government of the Republic of Kenya (1996: 5)

Woodley's description displays a static and deterministic understanding of culture and religion but, more importantly, it also shows a complete lack of interest for it is fundamentally flawed: in Kikuyu founding stories, Ngai and Mumbi do not relate to one another as husband and wife, but as deity and progenitor (Kenyatta 1938: 5-6). I once discussed this careless statement with a young woman who considered herself half Kikuyu, half Maasai. She took Woodley's description as a great insult, not least because it was stored in UNESCO's online archive where today it continues to mislead readers. 'How can a deity marry?' she asked me, and added that a white man would never accept an African telling him that his God was married. As such, she brought up a pressing concern that ties in with the issue of white control over African World Heritage Sites more generally, which I addressed in the previous chapter: a white man had assumed he knew what Kikuyu culture and religion entailed, while the people he talked about were not consulted or invited to join in the nomination. And UNESCO experts had credulously taken over his perspective.

Mt. Kenya's World Heritage nomination showed the KANU government that Mt. Kenya had the potential to be an icon of nature, untroubled by the country's tribal competition over power and prosperity – it portrayed Mt. Kenya as a place of national pride, instead of as a place that only one

particular tribal faction could legitimately lay claim to. A former statesman<sup>45</sup> once told me confidentially that non-Kikuyu politicians regard Mt. Kenya too big an asset to leave to the Kikuyu. He alluded to the mountain's natural resources and its commercial timber industry, but also to its potential to provoke tribal concord. This explains why the KANU government readily accepted the World Heritage application that Bongo Woodley drafted: it offered a welcome alternative to other, overtly politicized narratives on Mt. Kenya, and it challenged the historically strong link between the mountain and the country's Kikuyu elite. This dynamic is reminiscent of how, shortly after independence, Jomo Kenyatta tried to downplay the link between the Mau Mau uprisings and the country's liberation, and insisted that not only Kikuyu but all Kenyan's had made their contribution to decolonialization.

Interestingly, all but one of the World Heritage experts whom I asked why Mt. Kenya's cultural and political histories were not acknowledged in its World Heritage status said that these were simply not extraordinary enough to merit World Heritage inscription. For instance, a monuments expert located at the National Museums of Kenya said that although Mt. Kenya is considered a Kikuyu sacred mountain this is not enough to build an entire World Heritage nomination on. He added that Mt. Kenya simply does not have outstanding cultural value. A conservationist working for IUCN in Nairobi gave me a similar explanation, and underscored that the mountain's cultural values are too insignificant to live up to UNESCO standards. Only George Abungu, a World Heritage advisor that I introduce in more detail in chapter five, admitted that Mt. Kenya should have been designated as a cultural landscape rather than only as a natural heritage site.

To spell out just how remarkable this near-total rejection of Mt. Kenya's cultural heritage values is I briefly draw attention to another Kenyan World Heritage Site, the Sacred Mijikenda Kaya Forests. This site consists of a strip of forest land two hundred kilometres long, located on the coastline in Kenya's Coast Province, in which one finds the remains of abandoned fortified villages (*kayas*) that were used by the Mijikenda community around the beginning of the twentieth century. The Mijikenda Kaya Forests resemble Mt. Kenya's forests in important ways, but contrary to Mt. Kenya they were added to the World Heritage List specifically for their cultural relevance: UNESCO claims that the Kaya forests have a 'metonymic significance to Mijikenda and are a fundamental source of Mijikenda's sense of 'being-in-the-world' and of place within the cultural landscape of contemporary Kenya' (UNESCO 2008<sup>A</sup>: 191), and the organization suggests that the area is defining for Mijikenda identity (*Ibid.*).

The Mijikenda Kaya Forests became a World Heritage Site in 2007. At the time, Mwai Kibaki's government faced elections, and it tried to summon popular support from tribal groups other than its relatively stable Kikuyu constituency. In the run-up to the 2007 elections Kibaki therefore visited Mijikenda kayas and received blessings from Mijikenda elders (McIntosh 2009). These events were explained as a win-win arrangement: Kibaki anticipated that respect for Mijikenda elders would win him Mijikenda votes, and for Mijikenda elders a partnership with Kibaki was a boost to their local

reputation and social standing (*Ibid.*: 42). The timing of the Mijikenda Kaya Forests World Heritage designation suggests that the official national ratification of Mijikenda culture meant to further consolidate the coalition between Kibaki's government and Mijikenda groups. As such, I suggest that the World Heritage designation of the Mijikenda Kaya Forests was closely entwined with the election politics that have characterized the country since 1992, just like Mt. Kenya's World Heritage designation had been. I want to stress that the two sites are surprisingly similar in terms of both natural landscape and cultural-religious significance, but that only the cultural relevance of the Mijikenda Kaya Forests was acknowledged and celebrated. I believe that this underscores the importance of considering the exact timing of World Heritage listings, in order to see how the selection of a site's heritage qualities ties in with a country's prevailing political circumstances.

Before closing this chapter, I want to emphasize that even though I maintain that the KANU government only allowed for Mt. Kenya's World Heritage designation because it diverted attention away from uncomfortable cultural and political histories, I do not intend to give the impression that Kenya's political elite deliberately engineered Mt. Kenya's naturalization. I do not understand Mt. Kenya's natural World Heritage designation as a well-planned and preconceived political campaign, directed at suppressing Kikuyu cultural and political history – such an explanation would take too little notice of Bongo Woodley's role and his personal struggles, and it would sketch too rigid relations of cause and effect. Rather, Mt. Kenya's 1996 World Heritage nomination could materialize because the circumstances provided for it: Bongo Woodley and the wider KWS saw potential in Mt. Kenya's World Heritage application for reasons related to their rivalry with the Forest Department, and Kenya's incumbent political elite did not stop the application because it just happened to fit its electoral agenda. Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site was simply the outcome of a combination of events that, in fact, had little to do with one another.