



LUND
UNIVERSITY

Department of Political Science

STV102
Tutor: Annika Kronsell

The Mau Mau and the Nation State

Speaking about history in contemporary Kenyan politics

Mia Olsson

Abstract

This essay examines contemporary political discourses about the Mau Mau insurgence, which took place in Kenya in 1952-1960. During the Mau Mau, the people living in the Central Highlands region, mainly of the Kikuyu ethnic group rebelled against colonial rule. The British came down hard on the Mau Mau, detaining, killing and torturing large portions of the Kikuyu population. There was a divide within the Kikuyu between those loyal to colonial administration and those who fought for independence, which is to some extent still present today.

In Kenya ethnicity is important; I argue that there is no nation state; that Kenya is a state consisting of several nations. If and how political discourses about the Mau Mau are connected to the nation building process is a central theme. Kenya is going through a democratic transition and the silence, which has surrounded the Mau Mau is being broken. Who speaks about the Mau Mau, what their political goals are and how it is discussed are elements of this study.

In order to investigate this I have conducted qualitative interviews with politicians, human rights advocates and Mau Mau war veterans. I have conducted a discourse analysis of the interviews, looked at inconsistencies and compared them to historical discourses.

Key words: nation state, Mau Mau, ethnic politics, discourse, Multi party democracy

Sammanfattning

I den här uppsatsen undersöks samtida politiska diskurser om Mau Mau-upproret som ägde rum i Kenya 1952–1960. De som var bostatta i Central Highlands, varav de flesta tillhörde Kikuyufolket, gjorde uppror mot kolonialismen. Britterna slog ner upproret och internerade, torterade och dödade stora delar av Kikuyufolket. Efter upproret slut delades Kikuyufolket i två läger: de som varit lojala emot den koloniala administrationen och de som slogs för självständighet. Skiljelinjen mellan dessa grupper finns kvar idag.

Etnisk politik är ett viktigt inslag i kenyansk politik. I min mening går det inte att tala om en nationalstat, det finns en stat och flera nationer. Om och hur Mau Mau-upprorets politiska diskurser påverkar nationsbyggande processer är av centralt intresse. Just nu pågår en demokratisk övergång i Kenya. Tystnaden om Mau Mau håller på att brytas. Vem som talar om Mau Mau, vad deras politiska syften är och hur ämnet diskuteras är centrala element.

För att undersöka detta har jag gjort intervjuer med politiker, förespråkare för mänskliga rättigheter och krigsveteraner. Jag har gjort en diskursanalys av intervjuerna tittat på motsägelser och jämfört dem med historiska diskurser.

Nyckelord: nationalstat, Mau Mau, etnisk politik, diskurs, flerpartisystem

Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	2
1.1	Why Study the Political Implications of the Mau Mau Insurgence?	2
1.2	General Relevance of the Study	3
1.3	Research Questions	3
1.4	Limitations	4
2	Historical Events and Discourses	5
2.1	What was the Mau Mau?.....	5
2.1.1	The Mau Mau and Ethnicity.....	7
2.2	The Mau Mau Insurgence after Independence and Today	8
3	Investigating Political Discourses	9
3.1	Interviews	9
3.2	Theories on Interviews and Discourse Analysis	10
3.3	Ethnicity, Ethnic Politics and Changing Identities in Kenya	12
4	The Mau Mau and the Democratic Nation State	14
4.1	Is a Nation State Necessary?	14
4.2	What is the Perception of an Ideal State?.....	16
4.3	The Connection between the Mau Mau and the Moi Era	17
4.4	Rediscovering History	20
4.4.1	War Veterans; Speaking about the Mau Mau	22
4.4.2	What the Politicians are saying about the Mau Mau.....	23
5	Conclusion	27
6	Appendixes	29
6.1	Appendix 1: List of Abbreviations.....	29
6.2	Appendix 2: Interviewees’	30
7	References.....	31

1 Introduction

1.1 Why Study the Political Implications of the Mau Mau Insurgence?

Kenya is going through a time of democratic transition. This signifies more than the introduction of free and fair elections. Atrocities committed by the former government and earlier on in Kenyan history are being unravelled. As Kenyans are coming to terms with their history, voices demanding an end to a culture of political impunity, corruption and abuse of power are growing louder.

I have chosen to study the political implications of the Mau Mau insurgence, and how the time leading up to independence is discussed. The primary focus is to examine the discursive shift in how the issue is talked about. I will examine if the issues of power and ethnicity been resolved, and if the same meaning is ascribed to them today as during the Mau Mau. I will examine why the prevailing ethnic discourses during the Mau Mau insurgence have yet again become important issues in politics. In the context of ethnic politics¹ the insurgence may have taken on a new meaning. Bringing the Mau Mau back to light may be interpreted as an attempt to reconcile ethnic groups; a nation building process as the Mau Mau was an important part of Kenya's struggle for independence. In a contrary view, describing the Mau Mau and the Kikuyu people² as heroes may be a way of winning political and economic advantages. In an era where most Kenyans vote according to ethnic sensibilities, rather than other political issues at hand the Mau Mau insurgence could be used to create an image of "the other"; the Kikuyu people who fought for freedom, and the others who did nothing.

I believe that there is a discrepancy between those speaking out about the Mau Mau, and those who do not. The issue of redistribution of wealth and power has not been addressed adequately.

¹ The concept of ethnic politics will be discussed later on in this essay.

² The Kikuyu people were the group, which was primarily involved in the rebellion. Other ethnic groups also played an important part. The Meru and Embu people, which are smaller ethnic groups and who are closely related linguistically and culturally to the Kikuyu were very much involved.

1.2 General Relevance of the Study

An increasing number of African states with complex ethnic and political realities have or are in the process of shifting from single to multiparty systems. In these new democracies, groups that have been silent about colonial oppression or suffering caused by despotic governments are beginning to speak out and are demanding retribution or redress. This process is not uncomplicated due to political and ethnic power structures that are in many cases important factors in contemporary African politics. Many of these states, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and Angola to name a few, are facing similar challenges with building democratic nation states out of many ethnic nations. My ambition is to provide insight into how the issues are dealt with in Kenya, as political discourses change and to investigate what challenges human rights advocates and politicians face when with legitimate claims for redress and demands for rediscovery of history are weighed against the risk of ethnic strife.

There has been much debate about the rise of ethnic politics and ethnic violence. In what Mary Kaldor defines as “New Wars” (2000), ethnicity is often used to pit different groups against each other. There have been some clashes with ethnic characteristics particularly during the elections in 1992 and 1997 even though Kenya has not seen war since independence. There are tendencies that more serious forms of political violence may erupt. During the late months of the summer of 2005 there were riots in the streets of Nairobi about constitutional changes made by the government³. These events had ethnic dimensions, as there is an ethnic divide concerning opinions expressed about the new constitution. The issue of ethnicity is connected to the events that took place during the Mau Mau.

1.3 Research Questions

How are political discourses about the Mau Mau insurgency being used in the nation building process?

Are discourses about the Mau Mau changing?

³ I was in Nairobi at the time and experienced that ethnic violence may erupt in Kenya, even though it seems peaceful on the surface.

1.4 Limitations

Land and resources are key issues in Kenyan politics, and were important during the Mau Mau rebellion. I have chosen not to do an in depth analysis of these issues. The methods I have chosen are not well suited for this purpose, as it would mean analysing statistical data on land and wealth distribution, rather than analysing political discourses.

However, as the areas discussed are closely interconnected with land and resources it would be difficult to avoid the subject all together. I have chosen to include some indications of the interviewees' perception of the subject and analyse these sections when they are relevant to my main field of interest.

2 Historical events and discourses

Understanding the events and inner logic of the Mau Mau is essential for coming to grips with the political discourses of that era and how they have changed. This chapter provides insight into what the Mau Mau was, who the actors were and what the ideas were. In this section I have chosen to focus primarily on political discourses, although some relevant historical facts and figures about the Mau Mau have been included as well. Special attention is paid to the issue of ethnicity.

There is also a general overview of the political situation in Kenya since independence. The centre of attention here is how the Mau Mau has been discussed by politicians and in society; what the political discourses about the issue have been.

2.1 What was the Mau Mau?

The Mau Mau was a rebellion against colonialism and white supremacy in Kenya, which started in 1952 and ended in 1960. Prior to the war, the movement had been recruiting members and conducting attacks on farms and those loyal to the British for several years. The British declared an emergency and sent troops to Kenya shortly after the arrival of the new Governor Sir Evelyn Baring (Clayton 1975:4ff).

In the early nineteen fifties the British settlers, the colonial administration and the British government had good reason to believe that Kenya would remain a colony for many decades to come (Anderson 2005:3). One of the main arguments for this position was that Kenya like Rhodesia⁴ and South Africa and unlike neighbouring Uganda and Tanganyika⁵ had a considerable number of European settlers. The sentiment was that the presence of these settlers would ensure European influence. Independence was discussed in the context of the white settler population gaining supremacy over the territory, as was the case in South Africa, rather than introducing majority rule (Clayton 1976:61). In many ways the analysis the British made of the situation is not surprising, as colonised territories had resulted in independent states dominated by whites such as Australia and New Zealand. There was a prevailing discourse of “virgin lands”, which were free for whites to

⁴ Renamed Zimbabwe at independence 1979

⁵ Renamed Tanzania when Tanganyika and Zanzibar entered into union in 1964

own, develop and civilise, regardless of the sentiments of the native populations (Lindqvist 2005:134).

On the eve of the insurgence the number of whites who had settled in Kenya amounted to approximately 42 000 people. Their numbers increased during the Mau Mau uprising. In 1960 just four years before Kenya became an independent state the number of white settlers was 63 000 (Anderson 2005: 345). The majority of the settlers lived in the Central Highlands or in Nairobi, a region, which was populated by the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru ethnic groups. There was little land left for Africans to utilise and with less labour intensive farming methods, more and more people found themselves landless and unemployed (Clayton 1975:1). Local populations were forcibly removed from land belonging to white settlers to Kikuyu reserves, as more land was now being farmed. The Mau Mau movement was formed because of discontent with British rule and landlessness, poor working conditions and wages on the farms owned by settlers.

There were elements of force involved in taking a Mau Mau oath⁶. Des Njage, who as a boy ran errands for the Mau Mau explains:

We were afraid of everyone, the British and the Mau Mau. We would lie in our house at night and hear people passing, and we would be quite so they wouldn't notice that we were there. [...] My father ran the market in our village, so he had to co-operate with the British, but he would give information to the Mau Mau. My mother went to the forest with food for them. If the Mau Mau came to your house you would support them, but if the British came, you would have to support them too.

The Mau Mau rebellion is a history of violence and brutality on both sides of the conflict. The Mau Mau, were describes as savages with their minds set on brutally murdering white men, women and children by western media and the white settler population in Kenya during the first years of the emergency (Kennedy 1992:255). This image was reinforced by many Mau Mau renouncing the Christian faith. Despite the horror invoked by a few gruesome murders, just 32 white civilians were killed by the Mau Mau during the insurgence (Anderson 2005:84). In comparison, almost the entire Kikuyu population 1 1/2 million people were detained or forcefully moved into barbed wired villages; many were tortured, deprived of food and medical attention (Elkines 2005:v) There are no records of how many people were killed by the British and those loyal to the colonial

⁶ The Mau Mau used the traditional Kikuyu practice of oathing to bind its followers to the Movement. The same individual could take several oaths promising not to disclose secrets, swearing to support the movement or to take part in the armed struggle. This is sometimes described as stages, where the more oaths an individual had taken the stronger their support would be. The practice of traditional religion and the worship of the God N'gai, praying to Mount Kenya were important elements of the struggle; it was a way of rejecting all things European, including the Christian faith. There were some Christian supporters of the Mau Mau in independent churches across the Central Highlands (Elkines 2005:27f).

administration during this period. However, most scholars estimate that 100 000 – 300 000 people were killed in detention or on the battlefield (Elkines 2005: 366, Anderson 2005:5).

When the rebellion ended in January 1960, the last of the Mau Mau fighters were driven out of the forests where they had been hiding and raiding army and home guard posts⁷ throughout the country side. The leaders or presumed leaders of the uprising were all detained, executed or had deserted to the British side. The British had learned that it would be costly to maintain colonialism due to the discontent of the Africans (Clayton 1976:66). Kenya gained independence in 1963; an event that I believe would not have been possible without the Mau Mau insurgency.

2.1.1 The Mau Mau and Ethnicity

Ethnic groups and identities were created, reinforced and altered during the colonial era in many parts of Africa. The British administration depended heavily upon tribal hierarchies and loyal Chiefs to implement colonial law and taxation in Kenya. In the case of the Kikuyu people this was done through creating power structures that did not exist prior to the arrival of Europeans (Elkines 2005: 14ff). There are several reasons why this strategy of divide and rule was efficient in the colonial administration; if Kenyans were united then an uprising against the British would have severe consequences. As the Mau Mau rebellion has shown, it was possible for the British to defeat a rebellion by one ethnic group. Wielding power through African Chiefs was also more economically beneficial; a larger colonial administration would have been more costly.

The emergency created a divide within the Kikuyu people. Those loyal to the British, Chiefs, home guards and some other individuals, were compensated financially through tax reductions or materially by the redistribution of land which had belonged to those detained or killed (Elkines 2005:72). In fact, more Kikuyu were killed by other Kikuyu during the insurgency than by British military forces or colonial administration (ibid: 272f). This divide remains an issue in Kenyan politics and society. Many Chiefs and home guards and their descendants hold political and financial power today. There have been few attempts to rectify these inequalities.

⁷ The home guard was a militia formed and armed by the British to counter the Mau Mau. It was presented as a purely Kikuyu initiative by the colonial power (Anderson 2005:240).

2.2 The Mau Mau Insurgence after Independence and Today

Prior to the introduction of multi-party elections in Kenya in 1992, the Mau Mau uprising was rarely discussed in Kenyan politics. In fact, the ban on the Mau Mau movement implemented by the colonial government was still in place until November 2003 when the National Rainbow Coalition⁸ (NARC) had been in power for a year. Prior to 2002 Kenya African National Union (KANU) had been in power since independence in 1963 though a *de jure* or *de facto* single party system⁹ (Wanyande 2003:128).

The emergency villages and the work- and detention camps constructed by the British during the Mau Mau have been completely dismantled. Bodies of those who perished still lie scattered in shallow unmarked graves in the Kikuyu countryside (Anderson 2005: 343). In Poland, Rwanda and Cambodia such sites have been preserved as memorials, reminding us never to forget the victims of the past. Children were not taught about the uprising in school (Elkins 2005:367). Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta¹⁰ preached forgiveness declaring time and time again that: "We all fought for freedom" and that the nation must "forgive and forget the past" (Kenyatta quoted in Elkins 2005:360).

Recently, survivors of colonial violence during the uprising have demanded redress and an apology from the British government (bbc.co.uk/a). In 2001 some of the important sites in the battles of the Mau Mau were turned into national monuments (bbc.co.uk/b). Efforts are being made by human rights groups and others to bring justice to those who suffered and to recapture the history of what many call Kenya's war of independence. These are indicators that the silence surrounding the Mau Mau insurgence is being broken.

⁸ NARC consists of several political parties, which joined forces to topple the KANU party's dominance in Kenyan politics.

⁹ Kenya was a *de facto* single party state 1964-66, 1969-1982. It became a *de jure* one party state from 1982-1992. The country held its first multi-party elections in 1992 (Wanyande 2003:128). The elections of 1992 and 1997 were deemed not free and fair by the Kenya Domestic Observation Programme (When Kenyans Spoke 2002: 10).

¹⁰ Kenyatta was a key individual in Kenya's independence movement. He was imprisoned during the emergency by the British as they believed him to be a Mau Mau. There was no hard evidence to prove this affiliation. In fact Kenyatta preached moderation and co-operation, he fell out with Mau Mau leaders during his detention (Anderson 2005:63ff). He was part of the Kikuyu elite and owned large portions of land. His son Uhuru Kenyatta ran for the presidency in 2002, but was defeated by the current president Mwai Kibaki. The family is still immensely wealthy. They own a five star hotel, a commercial airline and a commercial farm.

3 Investigating Political Discourses

In this chapter I present the methods I have worked with in order to discern political discourses. First, I present why and how I have chosen to work with interviews and who the interviewees' are. In the next section I explain how I intend to analyse the interview, providing methods for the chapters to follow.

As this essay is concerned with certain key concepts, I have included a section to explain how these are used, and why some of them are problematic. It provides a theoretical framework for the discourse analysis of the interviews and other material used.

3.1 Interviews

Few studies have been conducted on current discourse about the Mau Mau; hence there is a lack of secondary sources. Interviews with relevant individuals provide insight into how the issue is discussed; they are a source of discourse. How politician and other key individuals experience the relevance of the Mau Mau is interesting in this context because they have the formative power to change discourses, or the political incentive to do so.

The people interviewed are high-ranking members of political parties, activists and others with an interest in the issues¹¹. The interviewees can influence society and politics to a varying degree. Peter Kenneth and Paul Muite are MPs and can influence political decision-making and official policy directly. Maina Kiai is the chairman of Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), which is an independent institution established by the Kenyan parliament and has the ear of the Kenyan political elite. He is often featured in Kenyan newspapers, and regularly criticises the state of human rights and corruption. KNCHR and Mr. Kiai have recently been in the spotlight for disclosing information about the number of luxury vehicles provided to ministers and other politicians by the government. He has to some degree fallen out of favour with some political elites. Other interviewees can scarcely influence political decision-making or discourses, as they are not in positions of power, their interviews are of interest because they replicate discourses.

¹¹ All the interviewees' are listed in appendix 2 on page 30.

Of the seven persons interviewed, only one is female, and she is not in a position of political influence. This is a reflection of how political power is distributed in Kenya rather than a conscious choice on my part¹².

Some of the questions are the same for all participants. These include questions about the importance they think is ascribed to ethnicity politics, how they relate to rediscovering history and whether or not talking about the issues could lead to ethnic strife. In addition to these questions I ask questions that are specific to the individuals' professional role or personal involvement with the issues. The interviews then develop into conversations, which, although the direction taken is controlled by me, provide a more relaxed atmosphere where the participants can express themselves more freely. When possible, the interviews have taped and transcribed. When this has not been possible, I have taken notes, writing down quotes as accurately as possible¹³.

3.2 Theories on Interviews and Discourse Analysis

I will conduct a discourse analyses on these interviews, using methods developed by Sanna Talja, who holds a PhD in Information Sciences. I have chosen work with her methods because they combine interviews and discourse analysis, and provide tools to understand ambiguities.

Taljas main argument is that the participant replies in qualitative interviews are context dependant and variable. Contradictions, which occur regularly in qualitative interviews, should not be seen as duality in real meaning, but rather as duality in discourses created in a social and political setting. Traditionally, the participants opinions could be summarised when contradictions occur, and the researcher weigh which reply better fits the study. As Talja puts it:

[...] such summary solutions are problematic, because consistency is an achievement of the researcher rather than a feature of the participant's discourse, and the context-dependent nature and cultural logic of the answers are missed. In different sections of the interview, the interviewee approaches the topic from different angles and expresses mutually contradictory views. (1999:462)

Instead Talja suggests that the conversation should be interpreted as a work in progress by the interviewee to produce a discursive version of the issue at hand, in

¹² According to the Inter-parliamentary Union 7.3% of the seats in parliament are currently occupied by women (www.ipu.org). My impression is that there are few women in chairman positions in Kenyan organisations and institutions.

¹³ The interviews, which were not taped, are: Des Njage, Paul Miute and Peter Kenneth.

the case of this essay the Mau Mau. In the interviews, ambiguities become signs of how prevailing discourses and counter-discourses influence the interviewees' speech (199:465).

As the purpose of the study is investigating if and how the discourses about the Mau Mau insurgency are changing, tracing the interviewees' replies to earlier documentation and accounts of discourses is essential. Who, what individuals, organisations and groups of professionals have the power to create and change discourse is ever changing and relevant to the study (Bergström, Boréus 2005 330f). Because of the transitional elements of Kenyan politics; one would expect that these dimensions are in a process of change.

In order to investigate previous discourses about the Mau Mau, I will use secondary sources and accounts of the insurgency and of the single-party era. The authors of these sources are subjective, as are the interviewees' selected for this study. However, they do not belong to the category of people that would be viable to interview for this study; they are not Kenyan and they have little or no influence in Kenyan politics. Drawing on previous research also has many advantages, as ideas and facts presented may be of great use in this study.

The most extensive studies of the Mau Mau in recent years are David Anderson's *Histories of the Hanged – Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of an Empire* and Caroline Elkins' *Britain's Gulag – The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya*. Susan Carruthers presents a review of these books; she criticises Elkins' account on the grounds that her personal indignation makes her prone to exaggerate not the events and discourses (2005:492f). According to Carruthers, Anderson's angle of vision is quite different; the crimes committed by the colonial power are not as graphically described, instead he focuses on investigating the inner logic of the Mau Mau, courts and military action (ibid:494). Elkins and Anderson are western scholars, due to under funding and that the silence about the Mau Mau has only been broken recently, there are few Kenyan researchers writing about the Mau Mau. Using both of these sources and other less extensive studies provides insight into the fact that there is no grand narrative about the Mau Mau, there are many different accounts.

Other sources of discourse about historical aspects of the Mau Mau come from the interviewees' themselves. The two who have experienced the Mau Mau first hand and can articulate what the discourses were.

3.3 Ethnicity, Ethnic Politics and Changing Identities in Kenya

The concept of ethnicity is complex and in a process of perpetual creation and recreation. In a state with hundreds of ethnic groups, tribes, clans and sub-groups, ethnic identity is a matter of negotiation. According to Gabrielle Lynch, ethnic groups form, co-operate and relate to others is a matter of common interest in Kenya. Groups may emphasise closeness or distance even claim to be the same as political realities change (Lynch 2005: *passim*). The fact that NARC, which consists of several parties with different ethnic affiliation, came to power in the 2002 elections strengthens Lynches argument.

These theories are interesting; however most of the persons interviewed in this study do not consider ethnicity to be a matter, which is difficult to define. When asked about their own ethnic affiliation, none expressed any ambiguities. Ethnicity was seen as something that was ascribed greater or lesser importance depending on social and political circumstances.

Karolina Hulterström argues that language, culture, customs and religion can be used as objective markers to define what ethnicity is and who belongs to a certain ethnic group (2004:53). I agree with this notion; identity is more than how we see ourselves subjectively. As my Kenyan friend Ester put it: “A Kikuyu politician can’t just change and become a Luo¹⁴. People would never accept that. It just doesn’t work that way”. However, I find that Hulterstöms definition needs to be modified; ethnicity has both subjective and objective dimensions. As Hulterström points out: “[...] ethnic belonging rests on a cultural characteristic, which is not *easily* changed” (Hulterströms italics (ibid: 53)). Both the importance ascribed to and what an individual ethnicity entails can and does change, albeit slowly. In fact how individuals relate to the Mau Mau may be seen as an ethnic identity marker, and how these discourses are changing exemplifies subjective and objective changes in identity.

This essay is concerned with high level politics; how politicians, organisations with a political agenda and veterans of the Mau Mau war seek to influence discourses and actions taken with regard to history. A definition of politics, which would include the striving for, as well wielding of power is necessary. The ethnic dimensions of this means that there is an ethnic pattern to political actions taken not only by politicians, but also by other actors such as voters and NGOs. In her

¹⁴ The Luo people are the second largest ethnic group in Kenya. Traditionally they live on the shores of Lake Victoria. There are also many Luos in Tanzania and Uganda.

study *In Pursuit of Ethnic Politics*, Hulterström uses voter patterns, distribution of public goods and public positions as an analytic frame work to determine to what extent the Kenyan government is influenced by ethnic politics (2004:57ff). However, in my study, some of the most important actors are individuals and organisations that do not strive for parliamentary positions, or to wield power over Kenyan politics in general, yet their actions and discourse forming agenda must be interpreted as political. My definition of politics includes striving to change discourses, which have a public interest. What message the government and other actors convey about ethnicity should also be included in the concept of ethnic politics. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda is an extreme example of how the governments' discourses on ethnicity may have fatal consequences. The Rwandan government today and its actions to erase ethnicity from the agenda are at the other end of the spectra¹⁵.

¹⁵ In 1994, the Rwandan government and government sponsored militia carried out a genocide killing 800 000-1000 000 individuals, mainly of the Tutsi minority. Propaganda, the spreading of enemy images and creating animosity through fear were tools used spread the ethnic discourses, which made genocide possible. In Rwanda today, the government position is to attempt to erase ethnicity all together from the political agenda by promoting feelings of unity and nationhood, rather than community through ethnicity. There is no active policy of sharing power between ethnic groups, which according to some observers has resulted in the Tutsi group holding too many key positions in government and the administration. The criticism is met by the Rwandan government with a policy of eliminating ethnic groups altogether. As Rwandas President Paul Kagame puts it "We are all Rwandans" (www.pewfellowships.org)

4 The Mau Mau and the Democratic Nation State

In this chapter discourses about the Mau Mau in the interviews are investigated in relation to the Kenyan state, ethnicity and nation building. The first section is concerned with if a nation state is necessary. In the next section I will investigate discourses about the ideal state and how these have changed since the Mau Mau. The third section is dedicated to a deeper understanding of what discourses about the Mau Mau were during Daniel Arap Moi's rule. That provides insight in what the discourses are changing from.

I conclude this chapter with an analysis of what the perceptions of rediscovering history are. I have divided this into sub-sections signifying the groups of individuals interviewed.

4.1 Is a Nation State Necessary?

All of the interviewees agree that there are ethnic divisions in Kenyan society. Most would even say that there is no nation state, that there is a state and several nations. I would be counterproductive to discuss nation building with the war veterans because their knowledge and experience is of a more personal nature. However, all interviewees expressed an opinion about their government's relation to ethnicity, ethnic politics and the Mau Mau. Fred Jonyo statement is typical of the replies I received when I asked about nation building in Kenya:

We built a state, thinking that the state would now cover up ethnic divisions. But we needed also as we were building the state to also build a nation. So what we ended up with was building the state, but leaving the nations in a very unstable situation. That is why there is no congruence between the nations and the state. The state is up there, and the nation, that is ethnic groups are fighting over here. When colonialism was over we were keen to be independent, but we were also not able to understand what nation building is.

Politicians, veterans and members of human rights organisations are in agreement; ethnic divisions are a problem for Kenya, and the formation of a nation state is essential for democracy to prevail. When asked about other forms of democracy based on alternative forms participation, none believed that that would be a viable course of action. This a modernist approach to democracy rather than a post-

modern one. David Held argues that with the increase of globalisation, in particular international trade, the nation states are finding it more difficult to wield power over industry and people (2000:20). Ideas about other forms of democracy are developing, as the nation state weakens. The nation state is still the most important actor on the global arena, although other actors such as supranational organisations and corporations are becoming increasingly important. My interpretation of this is that other options are seen as utopian or that they may increase ethnic animosity. In a system where there is a risk of violence changing too much, too rapidly may destabilise the situation. Despite the international scholarly debate about the future of nation states, the politicians and others I interviewed seem to have a traditional view of the nation state and its functions.

This coheres with the findings of Karolina Hulterström, who states in her conclusion that: “In the Kenyan case, all those elements¹⁶ converged in support of an ethnic cleavage.”(2004: 233). I argue that there is more to the agreement than awareness of the state of affairs in Kenyan politics, ethnic politics is viewed as negative for the common good. On a discursive level, this may be connected to the prevailing view among several scholars¹⁷ that ethnic divisions can be used by political actors to channel grievances towards other ethnic groups rather than towards the political leadership. Maina Kiai of the KNCHR is one of the interviewees who connect ethnic politics with ethnicity.

It is important, because one of the things we have seen is the ethnicity issue, the tribalism issue, is a big political issue. It causes division and it also causes conflict, it is a source of conflict.

It is interesting to note that there is a strong mental connection between conflict and the risk that violence will escalate and ethnic politics. In comparison with other African states, the modern history of Kenya does not strike me as exceptionally violent, despite the fact that there are and have been strong elements of ethnic politics (Hulterström 2004:*passim*). Although there are many examples of violent and non-violent conflicts in Africa, which have ethnic dimensions¹⁸, there is no indication that ethnic politics as such escalate violent conflict. The perception that ethnic politics is harmful may imply that there are still elements of the colonial policy of divide and rule in Kenyan politics, or that the interviewees’ perceive that this is the case. I argue that this discourse poses a risk. Politicians are conveying a message that there is a risk of ethnic strife. This may be self-fulfilling, as few solutions to the problem are presented, yet the issue is at the top of the agenda.

¹⁶ Hulterström is referring to the elements of her analytical frame work, the operationalisations used to in her thesis to study the presence of ethnic politics. See page 12.

¹⁷ See for example Mary Kaldor, Paul Collier etc.

¹⁸ The genocide in Rwanda being the obvious example, the conflict in South Sudan, eastern Congo and the war in Somalia are other cases of conflicts where ethnicity is an important element.

4.2 What is the Perception of an Ideal State?

When the interviewees express themselves about the nation state and how it should develop, there are several questions left unanswered. If the ideal is a nation state, what kind of state are they implying, what is the idea of the state in Kenya? How is this influenced by the political discourses of the Mau Mau?

Salomé, who is a Mau Mau veteran, said that her MP, Mr. Paul Muite was very easily accessible. Her friend Jane had gone to see him about some health care issues. The relationship between those in power and their voters seems to be that of patron-client, rather than people pushing for political change. Tracing this discourse to the Mau Mau insurgence, the role of the MP is similar to that of the Chiefs that were instated by the British colonial power. The Chief would in an arbitrary manner decide who would receive support from the authorities. There is also a paternalistic element to this state of affairs; no demand is made on the citizens to truly understand what political issues are being debated in parliament or insist upon influencing politics. Some of this can of course be put down to low levels of literacy and a poor understanding of the political system. However, being illiterate doesn't mean not being aware of what issues are important for the community. There is very little open protest against this system; people seem to be voting for the individual they believe would be the best patron for their constituency. Looking at the data provided by Hulterström, this decision is at least in part made on the basis of ethnicity (2004:92ff).

Speaking to Peter Kenneth it becomes clear that he spends several working days a week in his constituency speaking to the citizens there. The connection between popularly elected representatives and the people may work to increase the populations say in political matters, improving the state of Kenyan democracy. I asked Mr. Kenneth what his constituents come to speak to him about:

The most common complaint is about healthcare. They come to me when they or someone they know is sick, asking for financial help. Some come to me asking for me to support their children's education.

So no one speaks to you about the new constitution, or other issues they want you to press?

No, they are not interested in issues; it is a matter of putting food on the table, getting healthcare and education. We need to separate the institutions from the MPs if we want to change this.

In his view issue based politics and independent institutions are preferable. However, there is some inconsistency in the way he speaks about politics. I asked him about his stand point on some relevant political issue. Mr. Kenneth replied:

“When people asked me “are you with the oranges or bananas¹⁹” I replied I’m fruits!”. Not taking a stand in one of the most important political concerns Kenya has faced during this term of office does not encourage voters to consider issues other than ethnicity and personality. I interpret this discrepancy as signs of changing discourses about governance. Mr. Kenneth is influenced by patron-client discourses, as well as counter-discourses of an issue based political system. The ideas about leadership during the Mau Mau, when Chiefs and colonial administrators wielded power in an arbitrary manner, are still the established discourse today. I understand Mr. Kenneth’s incoherence to mean that with a climate more open for debate new ideas are beginning to influence individuals’ way of thinking in Kenya.

4.3 The Connection between the Mau Mau and the Moi Era

In recent history and during the Moi era, ethnic politics has played an important part. The legacy of colonial rule meant that ethnicity was used as a means of gaining support. The meaning of saying no to ethnic politics may be the same as saying no to the political oppression during colonial rule and the Mau Mau and after independence under Kenyatta and Moi. The only interviewee that had anything positive to say about Daniel Arap Moi is Peter Kenneth:

Even though there were many problems during the Moi era, Moi left Kenya with peace and economic development. Other African countries have had much more conflicts. However, the legacy of Moi will be the way in which he left.

Moi still holds some political influence in Kenya today. Even though he was voted out of office in 2002, there is still some co-operation between Moi and politicians that are active today, among them the serving president Kibaki. It is not surprising that Mr. Kenneth, being in government, is reluctant to criticise Moi with much intensity. During the Moi years, he was a member of the KANU-party. It is interesting to note that Mr. Kenneth earlier on in the interview discussed the torture chambers and political oppression during the Moi era, and he is the only interviewee who used the word genocide in connection to the Mau Mau. This inconsistency, where he in the same interview gives the Moi rule credit and talks about the horror of historical events is a sign that political discourses are changing. As Sanna Talja puts it, discourses and counter-discourses influence the way he is trying to create discursive meaning about the subject (Talja 1999:461).

¹⁹ Oranges were used to symbolise the “No” team and bananas the “Yes” team when there was a referendum about the new constitution in 2005. The fruits were used to help illiterate voters understand the ballot papers. Kenyan and international media caught on and used the terms in the debate leading up to the referendum.

My interpretation of these inconsistencies is that Moi as an individual and the atrocities committed during his rule are not usually discussed jointly, thus it is possible for politicians to be supported by Moi, and at the same time condemn the torture and other wrongs that took place during his rule and during the Mau Mau.

When I asked Salomé about what the situation was like before multi-party elections replied:

Nobody talked about it during Kenyatta, we were betrayed by him. Moi, he killed many. It was said that the Mau Mau time had come back. [...] Moi and the British are the same; they killed and they tortured.

This statement shows that there is a connection between how she perceives these two eras. Many of those who were educated by the British and held positions within that administration went on to work for the government or became MPs during the Moi and Kenyatta eras. It is likely that the same people that Salomé was afraid of during the Mau Mau were in positions of power during the Moi era. Some of those people are still in power today. Salomé mentions John Michuki²⁰, who is Minister of Internal security as one of those who was a home guard during the Mau Mau and then went on to torture people during the Moi era. She says it is difficult to trust politicians when he has not been brought to justice. I have not found any reliable information to support Salomé's claims about Michuki, however it is a rumour that I have heard before from several sources. Whatever the truth is in this matter rumours like this create a sense of injustice, a sense that the state is not trustworthy, a connection, which is also discussed by Mikewa Ogada at the KHRC:

[...] the British applied their policy of divide and rule, and divided the Kikuyu people early on from the 1910s 20s and 30s, they created a Kikuyu elite, making them headmen or Chiefs. They recruited a home guard [...]. A number of them actually became very prominent in the years after. So the Mau Mau fought for independence but those who were in collaboration with the British government are the ones in power today, including the Minister of Internal Security²¹, [...] was one of the one who tortured people at that time. [...] many people who got the spoils of the war were collaborating with the enemy of the Africans.

This statement suggests that there is a culture of impunity in the Kenyan political elite. Those who committed crimes; tortured people and gained advantages through embezzlement can still stand for elections today. There have been no consequences, and although President Kibaki made promises about a truth and reconciliation committee in 2003, one has still not come about. Mr. Kiai doubts that one will ever be set up.

²⁰ I requested an interview with Mr. Michuki, which he politely declined.

²¹ Mr. Ogada is referring to John Michuki

The presence of a culture of impunity becomes clear in view of recent events in Kenyan politics. As mentioned earlier, Daniel Arap Moi is still an important figure in Kenyan politics. He is held in high regard by the current president Mwai Kibaki. Those who were in power have a financial interest to stay in power, despite democratic multi-party elections and the victory of the opposition. As Fred Jonyo puts it:

If you look at Kibaki's government also, it is a government run by people who have property, Moi has property, Kibaki has property, and they are old. So, they are united in a class property ownership. So they will not want a system that will disturb this. And Moi would feel that it is better for Kibaki to come back again because that way they are united in terms of protecting their property.

My opinion is that there are probably many high ranking politicians that have much to lose by discussing the Mau Mau and bring those who have committed crimes in the past to justice. This is of course not said out loud by politicians; that would be an admittance of guilt. Mr. Ogada speaks his mind about the issue:

[the political elite] would probably not argue at the level of public discourse, but they would do anything they can to sabotage.

But they would not speak openly?

No, they would not want to do that.

The fact is that the Mau Mau lost the war, they were driven out by the British, and as a result did generally not hold positions in the administration during the years leading up to independence. Independence was a relatively peaceful event, Kenyans with power stayed in power or were promoted as a direct result of their co-operation with the former regime. In the British administration, there were still remnants of discourses about the Mau Mau from the time of the emergency. Discourses about savagery, evil and the refusal to accept modernity²² still prevailed. Evidence of this is that the Kenyatta and Moi regimes kept the ban on the Mau Mau making it impossible for the movement to gain political influence after independence. This created the current political elite, even though many of the individuals in power then have passed or are retired, they are to a large extent related to collaborators of the colonial regime.

²² See page 6.

4.4 Rediscovering History

As the Mau Mau was not discussed after independence, it is argued that Kenyans have been deprived of knowledge about an important part of their history and Kenya's struggle for independence. Reclaiming the history of how Kenya became a state is argued to be important for the nation building process. Maina Kiai, who advocates using historical events in the nation building process talks about bridging the ethnic divide:

One of the reasons we are doing this²³ is to give every community a sense of Kenyaness. It is also to show the Kikuyu that they do not have the monopoly of the fight for independence. Sometimes you get a sense of entitlement among the Kikuyu population, of which I am a member. We are the largest community, and therefore we deserve to rule. We fought for independence, for liberation; therefore we deserve to be in power. We are trying to show; look we are not alone in this country.

A contrary view is presented by Fred Jonyo:

To be honest with you my take on it is that the Mau Mau represented a very good struggle in which Kenyans were asking to be given the opportunity to run their country. But at some point the Mau Mau got entangled with ethnic politics. A lot of it was being seen as a Kikuyu affair.

I argue that if what Mr. Jonyo is saying is the established discourse about the Mau Mau, there is certainly a risk that bringing historical events to light will increase feelings of ethnic animosity. This view is reinforced by Mr. Kenneths opinion that: "History doesn't play much role in politics.". This opinion is essential to understanding how the Mau Mau and other events in history have been dealt with prior to the 2002 elections. With the pretence of ethnic unity, the Mau Mau has not been talked about at all, history has been ignored. These issues are still not debated by politicians, the power to formulate and change political discourses no longer lies exclusively with politicians. The public space has opened up to other political actors.

There is some debate about whether or not the Mau Mau had nation building aspirations. If this becomes the dominant discourse, then I believe that using their history would not carry as much risk of increasing ethnic animosity. An individual's opinion about this issue seems to have a bearing on their views on if speaking about the Mau Mau could have an impact in the attempts to change

²³ KNCHR are heading a project to put together an exhibition at the National Museum about the history and Kenya's road to independence.

Kenya from a state with several nations to a modern nation state. Maina Kiai talks about the Mau Mau veterans:

Now they are veterans because of fighting in the war, but, the struggle was for freedom, it was for land and freedom. It was very clear; it was the freedom of Kenya. There were many facets to it; I think the liberation struggle was not just one armed struggle. There was also a political struggle that went on [...]. It was a broad based liberation struggle and I think you call all those people freedom fighters.

Calling the veterans freedom fighters has political meaning. Even though the Mau Mau was defeated by the British, Kiai is saying that the rebellion was essential for independence. This connects to the political discourses of the British in the early discussed earlier on in this paper²⁴. As Kenya was a settler colony they did not believe that independence would be granted for a very long time. When Kiai says that it was clear that it was the freedom of Kenya the Mau Mau were fighting for and that it was a broad based organisation, he is implying that the Mau Mau was connected to the KAU (Kenya African Union) and other groups. Bildad Kaggia²⁵, who was politically active during the Mau Mau, wrote his autobiography in 1975. In that book he makes clear that there was a connection between the elites of the different African political movements in the 1950s that transcended ethnicity (1975: *passim*). Again, Mr. Jonyo is of a deviant opinion:

They talk about *their* nationality. But we ask them: “What happened just now? Does that mean that you are only nationalistic because you were fighting for independence or did you have a vision for the country?”. We have not seen that. Mau Mau struggled and fought for independence, but after they became irrelevant. They were not able to sustain themselves within the independent Kenya. They could not rise above ethnicity and rise above social divisions to really say: “We as Mau Mau, this is what we fought for, and we cannot sit back and watch the country go back to the dogs.”

I argue that both approaches were present in the Mau Mau; Elkin and Anderson agree that a very large portion of the Kikuyu population took a Mau Mau oath, and that there was no strong central leadership in the movement (Anderson 2005:240ff). The reasons for persons to take an oath, and what the oath was could vary greatly; evicted squatters on settler owned land may have had another outlook than well educated anti-colonial activists in Nairobi, yet the ideologically minded did not have the power to formulate one discourse around which the movement revolved.

²⁴ See page 7

²⁵ Bildad Kaggia was one of the more prominent members of Kenya African Union (KAU), an independence movement in the 1950s. He was put on trial and imprisoned with Jomo Kenyatta, and was active in the Mau Mau prior to and during his arrest.

Both Mr. Kiai's and Mr. Jonyo's opinions are signs that the Mau Mau is debated, which would surely please Mr. Ogada: "There were certain things that were ignored like the Mau Mau is ignored; we need to rediscover that history, and debate it nationally, have a national dialog."

Fred Jonyo argues that bringing up history is not important for nation building, and that it carries risks. His alternative solution is economic development:

Economic development that provides more opportunities for people will actually fundamentally reduce ethnicity. Ethnicity only becomes important because we are struggling for a few resources and we are not able to get them equally.

In Kenya, development is connected to government initiatives, which provide resources or land. When a region is more developed, literacy rates are raised, making it possible for people to participate more actively in politics. As resources are still distributed according to ethnic sentiments (Hulterstöm 2004), I believe that reducing the importance of ethnicity through economic development alone may be a difficult endeavour.

4.4.1 War Veterans; Speaking about the Mau Mau

The veterans agree with Mr. Kiai in the sense that they both feel that it is important for them to speak about what happened during the Mau Mau. Salomé expresses herself on the subject:

Ten years ago I would have gone away if you would have come here to speak to me about the Mau Mau. I would have been dangerous. I have told my family about what happened, but during Moi it was dangerous to speak about it to strangers. Things have changed, now we can speak openly.

Salomé agreed to speak to me about the Mau Mau because she feels that it is important to educate people about history and the events that took place during the Mau Mau. She shares these sentiments with Des Njage:

I am upset that my children were not taught about the Mau Mau in school. Even now I sometimes argue with my son about the Mau Mau, he just doesn't know the facts, so he says things about it and doesn't listen to me. Lifestyles have changed; here in Nairobi people don't meet their grandparents who can tell the story. Soon there will be none left to tell.

Justice for those who suffered during the Mau Mau is an issue often touch upon by Mr. Kiai and Mr. Ogada. My impression is that Des Njage and Salomé don't place as much emphasises on the matter of redress. Mr Njage speaks of the distribution of wealth after most of the British settlers left at independence:

Those who could afford it were able to buy land. They were the ones who collaborated with the British. But isn't that always the case? People get wealthy in many different ways. I'm not sure it would have been any better if the Mau Mau got all the land.

Mr. Njage and Salomé are critical of the Mau Mau, even though they were both a part of it. There were very few options for the rural population of the central highlands during the rebellion, either you took a Mau Mau oath or you collaborated with the British or you did both. Salomé says that:

If the British came people confessed to taking an oath, regardless of the truth. Then you were forced to become a home guard. If you did not confess, then you would be detained or killed. Many never came back, and those who did were broken. The Mau Mau would come with weapons and force people to take an oath. Many were killed by the Mau Mau too.

As they don't hold the Mau Mau in high esteem, the idea of giving the status as freedom fighters and granting them compensation from the government is alien; to them there were positive elements of the Mau Mau, but they do not attempt to revolutionise power structures or wealth distribution in Kenya.

The opinions expressed by Mr. Njage and Salomé are a far reach from the nation building aspirations that the human rights groups have. Although they are both critical about the fact that they could not tell their story, and that the Mau Mau insurgency, in which many of their friends and family perished is a forgotten war, they don't connect it to a greater sense of Kenyaness. Rather, I interpret their views on the matter to be more connected with their communities and kin; those who were and still are directly affected by the Mau Mau and its political and economic aftermath don't have knowledge about the event that took place. There is no recognition as to what their struggle was about and what was achieved in their immediate surroundings.

4.4.2 What the Politicians are saying about the Mau Mau.

It is obvious that representatives of the former government do not have an interest in addressing the historical events of the Mau Mau. Mr. Ogada says:

[KANU] would basically have been shooting themselves in the foot to talk about any kind of reopening of history because KANU is the source of the problem. Even today, when they are in opposition they will still not be supportive of this. They are the human rights violators. There is conservative elite who will try to stop this.

Many of those who had leading positions in the Moi government are ministers in the current one. Political parties do not play an important part in Kenyan politics, as the voters do not vote according to ideological or issue based sensibilities. Peter Kenneth is preparing to run for another term of office for his constituency Gatanga. I asked him which party he was planning to run for, he smiled and replied: “We breathe fresh air at the mercy of someone else”, implying that he would join whichever coalition was likely to win.

Mr. Paul Muite who, while he is also an MP, is representing Mau Mau war veterans in a lawsuit against the British state feels it is important to separate his work as a lawyer from his role as an MP. He spoke to me about the lawsuit and the importance of justice for those who suffered. This is confirmed by Mr. Ogada, who is working with Mr. Muite on the case: “Mr. Paul Muite was not particularly vocal if I recall about this particular issue of transitional justice at the time of the elections.” Mr. Muite states that: “It won’t be an important issue in the upcoming elections²⁶.” Traditionally, Kenyan politicians have had the power to formulate political discourses about the Mau Mau; after all Kenyatta and Moi’s governments successfully managed to bury the issue for about forty years. Now that freedom of speech and organisation is gaining a foothold in Kenya, more actors are able to engage in the political debate, and create counter-discourses.

Mr. Muite’s statement can be interpreted in several ways. Considering that the Kenyan state has many patron-client elements, it is possible that very few issues will be debated and that voters will make their decision based on other factors. Another understanding would be that the political elite have much to lose by addressing historical injustice and honouring the Mau Mau war veterans for their part in liberating Kenya from colonial rule. It could also be argued that bringing these historical events to light would ignite the powder magazine of ethnicity in Kenya leading to conflict; politicians may want to avoid the issue speaking about the issue of ethnicity because it may have severe consequences. Mr. Kiai talks about how he thinks the transitional justice will be talked about in the campaign:

If the space is crowded by ODM and NARC Kenya it won’t be an issue. They only speak about ethnicity. [...] As long as they remain as they are then, no issue will be a campaign issue but that. The campaign will be a nasty, dirty, violent campaign. [...] And yes some will talk about issues, HIV/AIDS and education, but they won’t mean it. NARC wants to keep power by all means necessary, ODM Kenya want to take power. They are all exactly the same, thieves, killers and murderers.

The issue of ethnicity takes up all the space, leaving no room for other issues. Talking about politicians as thieves, killers and murderers relates to Kenya’s culture of impunity. My position is that there are several reasons why the Mau Mau is not discussed by politicians.

²⁶ Parliamentary and presidential elections are scheduled for 2007.

Mr. Kiai was appointed by the Kenyan parliament. They were well aware that Mr. Kiai is an outspoken advocate, as he is the founder of KHRC. The meaning of this is that there must be some political will on the part of MPs to rectify historical disproportions and uphold human rights. The appointment is a significant sign that changing discourses are having an impact on politicians.

Mr. Kenneth says that he sometimes does speak to voters about the Mau Mau, but always one-on one, never in the media or during campaigns. In his constituency many Mau Mau fought and died and there are still scars from the war. My interpretation of this is that Mr. Kenneth may need to assert that he is a Kikuyu and has a connection to the area. His mother was a Kikuyu, but his father was an American. His actions suggest that there is a fluid element to identity. Mr. Kenneth is and feels more or less Kikuyu depending on circumstances. He uses his white background kind of like a joke: “vote mzungu²⁷! The people who were illiterate came to the polling station and said “I want to vote for the mzungu!”” I argue that joking about it signifies belonging rather than distance from the Kikuyu group, and affirms that ethnicity is important in politics. I can sense he is proud of his uncle who was a Mau Mau, he even wanted me to meet him for an interview, and offered to drive me to his home for an interview²⁸. As discussed earlier, Mr. Kenneth doesn’t believe that history is an important political issue. Pared with his sense of pride in his uncle and that he actually does speak of the Mau Mau in his constituency, there is inconsistency. This may suggest that Mr. Kenneth in trying to make discursive sense out of the changing political climate; the Mau Mau has become a political issue, but it is not discussed by politicians. Tapping into this change, Mr. Kenneth feels that he has things to say about it.

There is a discrepancy between *how* and *why* the Mau Mau is discussed by the war veterans and the human rights representatives. Both want to reclaim the history of the war, but for different purposes. For the human rights groups, the main objective is to give Kenyans a sense of their history, commonality in how they struggled for independence or more frequently how they suffered during colonialism. Although the Mau Mau and the internment camps are the most evident example of oppression in Kenya during colonial rule, other peoples in other regions suffered the consequences of British rule. The argument is that if these different struggles and grievances are discussed openly, taught in schools and displayed in museums, this will contribute to the nation building process and reduce the importance of ethnicity in contemporary Kenyan politics and conflicts. Mikewa Ogada and Maina Kiai both agree with this discourse

There is a discrepancy between how the veterans speak about the Mau Mau and how it is discussed and used by KHRC and KNCHR. There is a potential for conflict if the veterans perceive that “Their story” is being used for political

²⁷ Mzungu is the Kiswahili word for white person, it is used in a slightly derogatory manner.

²⁸ Unfortunately this never took place, as Mr. Kenneth's uncle had been taken to hospital for eye surgery.

purposes. The core issue is to whom the history of the Mau Mau belongs. Can the veterans claim ownership? In my view, the history of a state belongs to everybody. Claiming that human rights advocates cannot use the Mau Mau in nation building processes is like saying that only those who were influenced directly by the Second World War should debate it.

5 Conclusion

The Mau Mau is being talked about in Kenyan society; the silence has been broken about this unspeakable era in history. Although the interviewees in this paper have different points of view about how the issue should be handled, they all agreed to speak to me and were not afraid to express their opinions about the Mau Mau and Kenyan politics. Some were very critical of the current government, yet ramifications for speaking their mind was not considered a risk. This new freedom of expression has deprived the political elite of the discourse forming monopoly; other actors shape, change and debate discourses about the Mau Mau and other issues. In this time of transition organisations are making full use of these new opportunities, working hard to ingrain democratic values in Kenyan hearts and minds so that reverting to despotic leadership will be more difficult.

Those with an interest in bringing the history of the Mau Mau to light, and justice to those who suffered are not politicians. They are human rights activists and to some extent the Mau Mau veterans themselves. Claiming that the Mau Mau is an important part Kenyan history and that it has political implications today is presenting a counter discourse to the prevailing discourse of impunity and silence. The same persons and organisations are demanding justice and redress for crimes committed by the Kenyan government against its people later in Kenyan history. I had a difficult time finding politicians that were willing to speak to me about the Mau Mau. However, two politicians did agree. This in itself is a sign of increased openness, even though I am convinced that politicians with personal interests at stake would not have agreed to an interview. I am especially grateful to Mr. Kenneth, as he is a representative of the current government.

Silence about the Mau Mau is not desirable or even achievable since Kenya enjoys freedom of expression; however how the emergency is talked about does have political implications and risks. In many violent conflicts and wars, history has been used to spark ethnic animosity and incite violence²⁹. If politicians use the Mau Mau in campaigns, there is good reason to be wary if the ethnic aspects are emphasised.

KNCHR and KHRC wish to reopen history and stress how all ethnic groups in Kenya fought for independence and suffered during colonial rule. There is an element of nation building, and this approach may minimise feelings of ethnic

²⁹ In the Bosnian conflict, historical events were used to a large extent in this manner (Kaldor 2000:45).

inequality. The intentions of these organisations are good, and the message about the Mau Mau that they wish to convey is one of unity and understanding. However, reaching out with this message is another issue altogether. What they are trying to convey will be filtered through the media and other actors, making it difficult to discern the consequences of bringing history to light. The Mau Mau insurgency was the most dramatic and violent struggle for freedom in Kenyan history. There is still a possibility that their efforts may open Pandora's Box of ethnic animosity.

I believe that the government has to be on board for the nation building aspects of the Mau Mau to be successful. What is taught in schools about Kenyan history has to change; there need to be national information campaigns as well as moves made to commemorate those who fought and died. No organisation has the ability to do that without the government's explicit support. Talking about the Mau Mau and other events in history in local communities, in the media and with those who are in power may influence political discourses; inciting the public to demand that action is taken. Still, it is unlikely that the individuals in power now will support transitional justice and nation building by readdressing history due to the apparent danger of being brought to justice. Political discourses in the political elite need to change dramatically if this is to take place.

The majority of those in power do not wish to change the state of affairs in Kenya. In fact, many of them have much to lose by a change of system where historical and current disproportions are brought to light. Ending the silence about the Mau Mau opens up a window for discussing social evils of a later date, which would bring many of those in power today to justice. Talking about history may bring about a new breed of political leadership in Kenya.

6 Appendixes

6.1 Appendix 1: List of Abbreviations

KAU- Kenya African Union

KANU- Kenyan African National Union

KHRC- Kenya Human Rights Commission

KNCHR- Kenya National Commission on Human Rights

NARC- National Rainbow Coalition

OMD- Orange Democratic Movement

6.2 Appendix 2: Interviewees'

Njage, Des, Retired, Mau Mau veteran. Mr. Njage has during his professional life worked with government funded youth programmes, including the Presidential Award presented to youths with exceptional academic achievement. Most veterans of the Mau Mau are Kikuyu. Mr. Njage, however belongs to the Meru ethnic group. They can provide information about their experiences during the Mau Mau, after independence, during the Daniel Arap Moi era and after the change of power in 2002. Here, the interest is how their experiences have been received and talked about by society as a whole, their communities, families and politicians.

Salomé³⁰, Farmer, Mau Mau veteran, takes care of three young grandchildren, as two of her children are deceased. She is widowed and lives close to Kikuyu town outside Nairobi.

Jonyo, Fred, PhD in Political Science at Nairobi University. He has written several articles about ethnic politics in Kenya.

Kiai, Maina, Head of Kenya National Human Rights Commission (KNHRC), which is government funded and aims at observing human rights violations in Kenya.

Ogada, Mikewa, Programme officer for Mau Mau case, Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), an independent NGO, which monitors human rights in Kenya. He is working with Mr. Muite to win redress for the victims of colonial violence during the Mau Mau in British court. An other aspect of his work are then nation building aspects of the Mau Mau.

Muite, Paul, Member of Parliament, Safina Party. Mr. Muite is a lawyer and is currently representing victims of violence during the Mau Mau insurgency against the British government.

Kenneth, Peter, Assistant Minister of Finance, Member of Parliament, NARC. Mr. Kenneth is the MP for the Gatanga constituency, which is Kikuyu dominated and where violence took place during the Mau Mau insurgency. His uncle was in the Mau Mau and spent the emergency fighting the British.

³⁰ At the interviewees' request, her family name is not disclosed.

7 References

Anderson, David, 2005, "Histories of the Hanged –Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of an Empire", Phoenix Paperback, London, UK

Bergström, Göran, Boréus, Kristina, 2005, "Textens mening och makt – Metodbok I samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys", Studentlitteratur, Lund

Carruthers, Susan, 2005, "Being Beastly to the Mau Mau", Twentieth Century British History, Vol. 16, No. 4, p. 489-496

Chandra, Kanchan, 2005, "Ethnic Parties and Political Stability", Perspectives on Politics, June 2005, Vol. 3, No.2

Clayton, Anthony, 1976, "The Killing Fields of Kenya 1952-1960 –British Military Operations against the Mau Mau", Transafrica Press, Nairobi, Kenya

Clough, Marshall S., 2005, "Imperial Reckoning-The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya (review)", The Journal of Military History, Vol. 6, No.3

Elkins, Caroline, 2005, "Britain's Gulag –The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya", Pimlico, London, UK

Held, David, 2000, "The Changing Contours of Political Community –Rethinking democracy in the context of globalization" in Holden, Barry, 2000, "Global Democracy", Routledge, London, UK

Holden, Barry, 2000, "Global Democracy", Routledge, London, UK

Hulterström, Karolina, 2004, "In Pursuit of Ethnic Politics: Voters Parties and Policies in Kenya and Zambia", Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Skrifter utgivna av Statsvetenskapliga föreningen i Uppsala, 160

Jonyo, Fred, 2003, "The Centrality of Ethnicity in Kenya's Political Transition" in Oyugi, Walter O., Wanyande, Peter, Mbai, C. Odhaimbo (editors), 2003 "The Politics of Transition in Kenya – From KANU to NARC, Heinrich Böll Foundation, Nairobi, Kenya

Kaldor, Mary, 2000, "Gamla och Nya Krig", Diadalos

Kennedy, Dane, 1992, "Constructing the Colonial Myth of Mau Mau", the International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 25, No. 2, page 244-266

Kaggia, Bildad, 1975, "Roots of Freedom –The Autobiography of Bildad Kaggia", East African Publishing House, Nairobi

Lindqvist, Sven, 2005, "Terra Nullius- En resa genom ingens land, Bonnier pocket, Albert Bonnier Förlag, Stockholm

Lynch, Gabrielle, 2006, "Negotiating Ethnicity: Identity Politics in Contemporary Kenya", Review of African Political Economy, No.107, p.49-65

Oyugi, Walter O., Wanyande, Peter, Mbai, C. Odhaimbo (editors), 2003 "The Politics of Transition in Kenya – From KANU to NARC, Heinrich Böll Foundation, Nairobi, Kenya

Talja, Sanna, 1999, "Analyzing Qualitative Interview Data: The Discourse Analytic Method", Library & Information Research, Vol. 21, No. 4, p. 459-477

Throup, David, Hornby, Charles, 1992, "Multi-Party Politics in Kenya", James Currey Ltd., Oxford, UK

Wanyande, Peter, 2003, "The Politics of Alliance Building in Kenya: Search for Opposition Unity" in Oyugi, Walter O., Wanyande, Peter, Mbai, C. Odhaimbo (editors), 2003 "The Politics of Transition in Kenya – From KANU to NARC, Heinrich Böll Foundation, Nairobi, Kenya

"When Kenyans Spoke, 2002 General Elections Report", Kenya Domestic Observation Programme (K-DOP)

bbc.co.uk/a
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5411030.stm>
Retrieved on 13/11/06

bbc.co.uk/b
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1236807.stm>
Retrieved on 13/11/06

www.ipu.org
<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>
Retrieved on 30/12/06

www.pewfellowships.org
http://www.pewfellowships.org/stories/rwanda/rwanda_latest.htm
Retrieved on 30/12/06