CAIRN.INFO
INTERNATIONAL EDITION

# JOMO KENYATTA AND KENYAN INDEPENDENCE: THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF MEMORY

Hélène Charton

Presses de Sciences Po | « Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire »

2013/2 No 118 | pages 45 - 59

ISSN 0294-1759
ISBN 9782724633344

This document is a translation of:

---

Hélène Charton, « Jomo Kenyatta et les méandres de la mémoire de l'indépendance du Kenya », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 2013/2 (No 118), p. 45-59.
DOI 10.3917/ving.118.0045

---

Translated from the French by Cadenza Academic Translations

Available online at :

---

http://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_VING_118_0045--jomo-kenyatta-and-kenyan-independence.htm

---

How to cite this article :

---

Hélène Charton, « Jomo Kenyatta et les méandres de la mémoire de l'indépendance du Kenya », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 2013/2 (No 118), p. 45-59.
DOI 10.3917/ving.118.0045

---

Electronic distribution by Cairn on behalf of Presses de Sciences Po.

© Presses de Sciences Po. All rights reserved for all countries.
Reproducing this article (including by photocopying) is only authorized in accordance with the general terms and conditions of use for the website, or with the general terms and conditions of the license held by your institution, where applicable. Any other reproduction, in full or in part, or storage in a database, in any form and by any means whatsoever is strictly prohibited without the prior written consent of the publisher, except where permitted under French law.

Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

# Jomo Kenyatta and Kenyan Independence: the Twists and Turns of Memory

Hélène Charton

**The process of democratization, palpable in numerous African countries since the 1990s, led to political change in Kenya in 2008. The regime, based on a new Constitution adopted in 2010, has renamed the national day "Heroes' Day" instead of "Kenyatta Day." A return to the creation of the figure of Jomo Kenyatta as a hero of independence and Father of the Kenyan Nation during the 1950s and '60s shows the development of an official narrative concerning the foundation of the Kenyan nation, and the legitimization of a government that came about as a result of Kenyan Independence in 1964. This return elucidates the impact and political significance of the fact that the expression of competing memories is no longer suppressed, as it has been in the past.**

On October 20, 2010, Kenya officially celebrated Heroes' Day (*Mashujaa* Day) for the first time. Ever since 1964, this day had been dedicated to, and named after, Kenyatta in memory of the arrest of the nationalist leader in 1952 after the colonial government had declared a state of emergency. At the time when the republic was beginning to emerge from the political crisis and violence that followed the elections being cut short in 2007, the redefinition of ways in which to commemorate the country's independence took on major political significance.

Symbolically speaking, the replacement of Kenyatta Day by *Mashujaa* Day marks the pluralization of the memory of the struggle for independence, a struggle that was no longer represented by a single person, a nationalist hero and Father of the Nation, but by the dozens of individuals who had, in various ways, participated in the creation of Kenya. The various interpretations of a single historical event exemplify the process behind the creation of a national imagination, one which is inseparable from the country's political history; the former (with its myths and allegories) serving precisely to legitimize the latter. In the case of Kenya, the creation of a political myth centered round the figure of Kenyatta, with its roots in the nationalist struggle against colonial power, served to legitimize a regime that had outlived its founder before being swept away by political change at the start of the 21st century.

Firstly, we will show how, after the advent of the Republic of Kenya on December 12, 1964,[1] the country's memory was closely bound up with that of its founding father. The national imagination was effectively centered round the figure of Jomo Kenyatta, whose very name symbolized the nation. Secondly, we will see how the emergence of this great man as Father

(1) The Republic of Kenya was proclaimed a year after the country's independence on December 12, 1963. Jomo Kenyatta, the then prime minister was to become President of the Republic.

Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

of the Nation was rooted in a foundation story in which the future president was portrayed as the hero of the struggle for independence. This founding myth functioned as a powerful political instrument, legitimizing the government then in place and undermining any competing memories. Lastly, we will broach the question of the revisiting of suppressed memories relating to independence that has accompanied the process of the "refounding of the nation" in progress since 2002. It is a question of challenging the founding myth and foundation story that had prevailed up until this point in favor of a new, more inclusive national myth, in which the figure of Kenyatta is no longer the principal focus.

## The Foundation Story

Jomo Kenyatta died on August 22, 1978 when he was over eighty. His contemporaries and peers marked the death of the "nation's beloved father"[1] by paying tribute to him. For Kenneth Kaunda, the president of Zambia, "he was one of the greatest leaders, a man and a hero in the struggle for African liberation."[2] The following appraisal made by the president of neighboring Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, was in the same vein: "Without his work and his leadership, our struggle for liberty would have been longer, harder, and more bitter. . . He was a source of inspiration to millions of Africans who had never seen him and kept up the spirits of all the devotees of liberty who had the good fortune to meet him."[3] It was during the struggle for independence (from 1952 when the state of emergency was declared to independence on December 12, 1963) that the Kenyatta myth, so vividly recalled by these other "founding fathers," was fashioned.

### *Kenyatta – the Hero of the Struggle for Independence?*

Jomo Kenyatta was arrested on October 20, 1952, as part of a vast police operation carried out at the time when the colonial government had declared a state of emergency in the colony in order to eradicate the Mau Mau organization. This diverse movement, in violent opposition to the colonial order, developed rapidly in the central, predominantly Kikuyu, Kenyan province and in Nairobi. Campaigns involving oaths of allegiance to the Mau Mau cause and the assassination of leaders or individuals close to the colonial government, and, in a more limited fashion, the European settlers, multiplied from the 1950s onwards. The six leading figures of the Kenya African Union (KAU), the first political association on a national scale to be authorized after the war and whose leader was Jomo Kenyatta, were among the one hundred and six individuals imprisoned during the crackdown known as Operation Jock Scott. They were tried at a show trial held at Kapenguria between December 3, 1952 and April 8, 1953, and were condemned to seven years of imprisonment accompanied by hard labor in the semidesert wilderness of northern Kenya.[4]

Contrary to the descriptions given out by the colonial authorities, African nationalism, promulgated by the KAU, was far from being homogeneous. The "Kapenguria Six" (Jomo Kenyatta, Bildad Kaggia, Fred Kubai, Paul Ngei, Achieng 'Oneko, and Kungu Karumba) were representative rather of the diversity of nationalist sentiments– sentiments affected by divisions that were at once social, economic, and generational–and were expressed in the means by which their objectives could be attained by men whose opinions remained divergent. It was against this varied political backdrop that

(1) Official program for the state funeral organized in Nairobi, August 31, 1978, Kenya National Archives (KNA), MSS/29/21.

(2) *The Financial Times*, August 24, 1978, Kenya National Archives (KNA), MSS/29/121.

(3) Ibid.

(4) David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of the Empire* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2005).



Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

Kenyatta, who supported the implementation of gradual constitutional reforms, represented the moderate nationalists. The radicals, who gathered round Fred Kubai and Bildad Kaggia, advocated the use of violence and the physical elimination of moderate nationalists; Kenyatta's name was, moreover, blacklisted by them.[1] Kenyatta's trial followed by his detention gave credence to the myth, largely fabricated by colonial propaganda, identifying him as the brains behind, and the leader of, the Mau Mau movement.

The declaration of a state of emergency on October 20, 1952 and the arrest of the KAU leaders heralded a cycle of violence that was to shake the Kenyan central province between 1952 and 1957. The colonial authorities countered any support, acts of violence, and punitive operations carried out by the rebels with fierce repression affecting the whole Kikuyu population not identified as loyalist, forcing individuals to align themselves with one side or the other in accordance with classic civil war reasoning.[2] During the second half of 1957, the surrender or arrest of the principal rebel generals, the breakup of hideouts in the Aberdare forest and on Mount Kenya as well as the eviction of the Kikuyu population from Nairobi following Operation Anvil in April, 1954, ensured the victory of the colonial forces. The repression was carried out in a variety of ways (internment and transit camps and the systematic policy of villagization in the central province, for instance), with the state of emergency being lifted only in January, 1960.[3] At the same time as these military operations, the exit strategy for the crisis implemented by the colonial authorities from 1954 favored the loyalists politically, economically, and socially, to the detriment of those suspected of Mau Mau sympathies, who were systematically harassed.

The first national elections were organized in March, 1957, with a view to appointing seven African representatives from seven provinces to the Legislative Council.[4] Only the regional political parties were eligible and, in the central province, the vote was restricted to adults who were able to present a loyalty certificate issued by the colonial authorities (7.4% of the electorate).[5] This first election saw the emergence of a new generation of politicians, frequently younger, sometimes educated abroad, and more moderate in their demands,[6] epitomized by Tom Mboya, who came from the west of Kenya and had newly been elected to the Nairobi constituency.[7] From a trade union background and head of the Kenya Federation of Labor (KFL), he led the nationalist movement, which he endeavored to unify by demanding the acceleration of constitutional reforms and Kenyatta's release. With the slogan "Kenyatta and independence"[8] being chanted at political meetings, the figure of Jomo Kenyatta came

(1) Ibid., 41.

(2) Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War and Decolonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

(3) For the types and means of colonial repression, see the work by Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005).

(4) In each of the colony's eight provinces, a representative was elected to the Legislative Council for the first time in accordance with a complex system of franchises granting the most qualified voters up to three votes (W. J. M. MacKenzie, and Kenneth Robinson, *Five Elections in Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960).

(5) Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, 154.

(6) Hélène Charton, "La genèse ambiguë de l'élite kenyane" (PhD diss., Université Paris-VII, 2002), 392.

(7) Born in 1930 on Rusinga Island in South Nayanza, he had been employed as a sanitary inspector at Nairobi City Council. After the KAU had been banned in May, 1953, he became involved in trade union activity and led the Kenya Federation of Labor (KFL). As far as the colonial authorities were concerned, he represented a viable alternative to Kikuyu nationalism epitomized by Kenyatta and the Mau Mau rebels. After studying for a year at Ruskin College, Oxford, he spent two months in the United States where his encounter with trade union circles intensified. When he returned to Kenya in the autumn of 1956, he was victorious in the 1957 election, beating his adversary in Nairobi, Clement Arwings Khodek, who was known as "the Mau Mau lawyer."

(8) "*Kenyatta na Uburu*." (Tom Mboya, *Freedom and After* [Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1963, 1993], 80–81).



Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

to represent independence; he symbolized the country's liberation and the ending of the repression which had begun in 1952. Moreover, this demand enabled the legitimization of the political activities of the moderate nationalists who had remained outside the armed conflict.

Much to the surprise of the European settlers and the colonial administration, Kenyatta's release was central to the negotiations put together in London in January, 1960. The two African representatives (Tom Mboya and Ronald Ngala) effectively demanded his release as a prerequisite to any discussion. The general elections organized in February, 1961, against the background of this constitutional process, sealed a victory for the Kenya African National Union (KANU), the political party heir to the KAU, founded in May, 1960 by Tom Mboya, James Gichuru, and Odinga Odinga. Their elected members refused to form a government as long as Kenyatta remained in prison. This demand, which was adopted by the elected representatives of the Kenya People's Union (KPU),[1] resulted in Kenyatta's release on August 14, 1961. After the victory of the KANU in the legislative elections, he was appointed prime minister on June 1, 1963.

Raised to the status of an icon in the struggle for independence during his imprisonment, Kenyatta embodied a combination of all forms of opposition to the colonial order; namely, trade-union, insurrectional, or reformist. However, the question remained: of what national heritage was he ultimately custodian? Far from being the enraged Mau Mau rebel he was made out to be in colonial propaganda, "the African leader to darkness and death,"[2] throughout his political career he had endeavored to reconcile differences of opinion in favor of unity and the greater good of the group. But which group? The clan, the ethnic group, or the nation?

*Kenyatta – a Nationalist Hero?*

When Kenyatta was released in 1961, Kenyan memories of civil war were still very fresh, particularly among the Kikuyu from the central province. Numerous Mau Mau prisoners found their lands occupied by loyalists when they returned from detention.[3] The principal motivation in the anticolonial struggle and a focal point of convergence for all nationalist demands (moderate and radical) since the nineteen-twenties, the return of the lands, which had been transferred by the Europeans, once again represented a topical subject, revealing profound divisions in the emerging African political class.

So as to protect the interests of European farmers and prevent future violence, in 1962 the colonial government organized the sale of 1.2 million acres of European lands to smallholders through a system of loans as part of the Million Acre Scheme.[4] Jomo Kenyatta chose to support the British, arousing a feeling of betrayal among a number of nationalists, who would have preferred the property question to be resolved by an African government. The Million Acre Scheme recognized the right of the European minority to sell lands which did not "belong" to them. Moreover, the conditions under which loans were granted favored an African proto-bourgeoisie, at the cost of more disadvantaged populations lacking land or employment. The property question

(1) The KPU was founded in June, 1960 by Masinde Muliro, Ronald Ngala, and Daniel Arap Moi in order to represent minority populations.

(2) "The African leader to darkness and death" was the expression coined by the governor Patrick Renison when he returned from the conference at Lancaster House in 1960 and related by Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*, 120–125.

(3) On the manner in which the Swynnerton Plan involving the regrouping of lands and agricultural modernization was exploited by the provincial administration for political ends during the state of emergency, see Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, 120–125.

(4) On the political stakes of the Million Acre Scheme, see the analysis by John W. Harbeson, "Land Reforms and Politics in Kenya, 1954–70," The Journal of Modern African Studies 9, no. 2 (1971): 231–251.



Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

therefore became a point of major political friction, in which supporters of land redistribution, Bildad Kaggia for instance, who was seen as the custodian of nationalism and the defender of the poorest, and the landowners, who supported government policy, opposed each other.

After his release, Jomo Kenyatta sided with order against the threat of corruption. At the beginning of 1962, he therefore declared: "We are determined to have independence in peace, and we shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya."[1] A few months later, in a speech delivered at Nakuru in April, 1962 in front of a gathering of 400 European farmers, Kenyatta advocated reconciliation by forgiving and forgetting: "There is no society of angels, black, brown, or white . . . We are human beings and as such we are bound to make mistakes. If I have done a mistake to you, it is for you to forgive me. If you have done a mistake to me, it is for me to forgive you."[2] Within a matter of months, European feelings towards Kenyatta passed from profound hatred to veritable adulation.[3] Formerly billed as a major threat to the interests of this community, he became a shield against the most radical nationalists such as Odinga Odinga and Bildad Kaggia.

This moderate or–more accurately conservative–nationalist, who had assumed the leadership of the KANU in 1961, was no different from the man who had led the KAU between 1946 and 1952. Throughout his political career, both in Kenya and abroad, he worked tirelessly to achieve the convergence of positions and opinions, contributing to the creation of a hybrid form of political thought that was sometimes ambivalent.

Jomo Kenyatta, who was born during the final decades of the nineteenth century, when the British were including Kenya within the Protectorate, was a witness to, and one of principal actors within, the profound transformation of Kenyan society. In the early nineteen-twenties, he was living and working in Nairobi where he witnessed the violent repression of the first political demonstration organized by Harry Thuku in 1922. He became the general secretary of the Kikuyu Central Association[4] (KCA) in 1928 and endeavored to defend the unity and interests of his people, particularly by seeking to bring the two rival Kikuyu associations, the Kenya Association (KA)[5] and the KCA, closer together. He was sent to England by the KCA in 1929 to defend the African cause before the Crown with respect to the land transfers made for the benefit of European settlers, ultimately spending sixteen years in Great Britain. This stay was crucial to his political and intellectual development. He made contact with internationalist circles (Communists, pan-Africans, and the International League for Human Rights) and, at the London School of Economics, he was to explore the ethnic and cultural dimension of his commitment to nationalism, alongside Bronislaw Malinowski, the functionalist anthropologist thinker.[6] Based on writings by Jomo Kenyatta, John Lonsdale

(1) "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 should never be remembered again." (Jomo Kenyatta, *Suffering without Bitterness: The Founding of the Kenyan Nation* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968), 189. Quoted by Marshal Clough, "Mau Mau and the Contest of Memory," in *Mau Mau and Nationhood*, edited by Elisha Stephen Atieno Odhiambo, and John Lonsdale (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), 255.

(2) Jomo Kenyatta, "White and Black – Harambee!" Time, August 23, 1963.

(3) Peter Knauss, "From Devil to Father Figure: The Transformation of Jomo Kenyatta by Kenya Whites," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 9, no. 1 (1971): 131–137, http://www.jstor.org/stable/159257.

(4) The Kikuyu Central Association was founded in 1924 after the East African Association (EAA) had been banned.

(5) The Kenya Association was founded in 1921 by the leading Kikuyu chiefs in order to defend their interests, their property in particular.

(6) Jomo Kenyatta published an anthropological essay on the Kikuyu in 1938 entitled *Facing Mount Kenya*, *The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938), translated by Gabriel Marcu and Pierre Balla as *Au pied du mont Kenya* (Paris: François Maspero, 1960).



Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

has demonstrated how the myth of the Imperial monarchy promulgated by the British authorities might be reflected in a form of "Kikuyu constitutionalism" developed by Kenyatta, relying precisely on reciprocal obligations linking the boss with his clients and protégés, the king with his subjects, and the father with his children.[1] It was, in fact, as a "boss" that Kenyatta returned to Kenya in September, 1946. He was quick to obtain prestige by acquiring some land and marrying within the two most powerful Kikuyu clans. He became president of the KAU and attempted to assemble the emerging multi-ethnic political forces in support of his political plan for constitutional reform. In a speech delivered on July 26, 1952, which appealed to all Kenyans to unite behind the KAU in its struggle for the recognition of their rights and liberties, he reaffirmed his commitment to reform by distancing himself from the Mau Mau in particular.[2]

In sum, for over thirty years, between his entry into politics as a member of the KAU in 1928 and his release in 1961, Kenyatta kept out of the limelight with respect to the political scene in Kenya, although his shadow loomed in the background as a constant reminder of his presence there. As in 1946, it was as an arbiter that he returned to politics in 1961. His imprisonment during the state of emergency, followed by the political significance of his release gave him the status of a hero in the nationalist struggle, despite his moderate position, which was viewed by a number of radical nationalists as ambiguous. The power of the myth, adopted by the moderate nationalists particularly, lay precisely in the fact that the divisions inherited from the struggle for independence were bypassed. The head of state created an image of himself as the Father of the Nation precisely by capitalizing on his status as a hero. To this end, he devised a founding myth of origins exclusively centered round himself, lending historical legitimacy to the new regime as well as reinforcing his position by the systematic elimination of any competing memories.

## Kenyatta, Father of the Nation

On October 20, 1964, Kenya, which was on the point of becoming a republic, officially celebrated the anniversary of the declaration of the state of emergency under the name of Kenyatta Day for the first time.[3] The transformation of this commemoration into an eponymous celebration marks the accession of the Father of the Nation, staged precisely to coincide with this first celebration. In the foundation story of the new nation, Kenyatta was a figure synonymous with the struggle, sacrifices, and sufferings endured for the sake of the liberation of Kenya. This narrative served as an anchor for the myth of the hero and Founding Father of the Nation, legitimizing the new regime.

### *Kenyatta Day and the Birth of a Hero*

"It is the day on which we wish to show the world our respect and loyalty to the Father of the Nation, the pioneer and founder of our nationalist movement, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta."[4] The quasi-religious symbolism of the setting for this ceremony of homage in honor of Jomo Kenyatta's accession to the role of Father of the Nation lent to these festivities the semblance of a coronation. In each of the eight provinces, thanksgiving ceremonies were celebrated in all

(1) John Lonsdale, "Ornamental Constitutionalism in Africa: Kenyatta and the Two Queens," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34, no. 1 (2006): 1–17, doi:10.1080/03086530500412132.

(2) Speech delivered at a meeting of the Kenya African Union, Nyeri, July 26, 1952, quoted in Franck Derek Corfield, "The Origins and Growth of Mau Mau," Sessional Paper no. 5 of 1959–1960 (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, HMSO, London, 1960) at http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1952kenyatta-kau1.html (accessed February 4, 2013).

(3) Government of Kenya, Legal notice 135 (May 29, 1964).

(4) Tom Mboya, Chairman of the Kenyatta Day celebrations, KNA, KA/4/3/, Kenya's News Handout, September 25, 1964. At that time, Tom Mboya was Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs.



Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

the churches and mosques. In order to commemorate the blood that had been spilt and the sacrifices made for the sake of independence, a national blood collection campaign was organized: "This is symbolic of the struggle through which we have passed and the readiness of our nationalist leaders to shed their blood for Kenya and for their fellow men."[1] In 1965, the traditional gala banquet, which served to raise funds for the KANU, was presented by the Government Communications Service as a Last Supper: "This occasion will commemorate the Last Supper which H. E. Mzee Jomo Kenyatta had at his house that unforgettable night in October 1952 before the imperialists arrested him."[2] The procession organized in the streets of Nairobi, in which all the state services were united, with Kenyatta at its head, was ultimately endowed with a heroic symbolism: "He will on that day enter Nairobi like a fighter and conqueror he is, and drive along the streets in procession so that he may once more see and be seen by the people he leads."[3] Even the football match, in which members of the government and parliament competed against representatives from diplomatic delegations, seemed to symbolize the independence and vitality of the new nation in the face of the rest of the world. Against this allegorical backdrop, which revealed the almost divine and heroic nature of the Father of the Nation, his public speeches were also of central importance.

When Kenyatta Day was first celebrated in 1964, in a message which was broadcast on the radio and concerned the struggle for national liberation, Jomo Kenyatta insisted on his role within a long process, the beginnings of which dated back to the 1920s. This historical depth brought the Mau Mau episode (in which October 20 was moreover a significant date) into perspective with preference being shown to a more inclusive and consensual interpretation of the struggle for independence. It was in the name of reconciliation that Kenyatta advocated an official policy of amnesia: "Let us agree that we shall never refer to the past. us instead unite, in all utterances and activities, in concern for the reconstruction of our country and the vitality of Kenya's future."[4] October 20 was, from 1965 on, the date set aside for the official celebration of the *Mzee*'s[5] birthday instead of his birth date, as it was seen as representative of the seal of the symbolic union between man's destiny and that of the nation.

This founding ceremony, held in honor of the accession of the Father of the Nation and sole repository for the memory of the struggle for independence, also had a precise political purpose. It dramatized the nation's allegiance to the Founding Father. On October 20, 1964, the Prime Minister addressed a crowd gathered in the Kamukunji Stadium and announced the immediate release of all the Mau Mau prisoners. The crowd, which was invited to decide whether to establish a one-party regime by the end of 1964, voted overwhelmingly in favor of the idea.[6] The ministers and regime dignitaries also presented their compliments to the head of state at this ceremony. These communications were signs, however, of tensions and power struggles within the regime. Tom Mboya remembered in detail the role that both the trade unions and he himself played in pursuit of the struggle for independence following the arrest of the KAU leaders. For his part, Bildad

(1) KNA, KA/4/3/, Kenya's News Handout, Kenyatta Day Celebrations.

(2) H. E., the Vice President, KNA, KA/4/3/, Kenyatta Day celebrations.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

(5) KNA, KA/4/3/, letter from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 7, 1965, "President's birthday." *Mzee*, which means "old person" in Kiswahili, is a title of respect and one of the names associated with Kenyatta.

(6) Prime Minister at Kamunjuki rally, KNA, KA/4/3/, Kenya News Agency Handout.



Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

Kaggia, Kenyatta's prison cellmate, openly called for an even-handed division of the fruits of independence by implicitly denouncing the shift in the significance of the event of October 20 effected by the new regime. The representatives of the ethnic minority groups within the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU), whose merger with the KANU was scheduled, showed restraint in terms of the wording of their allegiance to the head of state and the one-party system. Thus, its president, Daniel Arap Moi, complimented the prime minister (and not the Founding Father) on his commitment to the nation. From the moment when Kenya was on the point of abandoning the first federal constitution in favor of a centralist republic, relations between the center and its marginals became a sensitive issue. In 1965, a number of county commissioners denounced the heavy financial burden placed upon them for organizational purposes, given that the benefits granted them were scant compared with the sums allocated to Nairobi.[1]

In sum, the first Kenyatta Day celebrations, which marked the start of the "official campaign for the hero-worship of the head of state,"[2] represented a decisive stage in the creation of the Kenyatta myth, enabling the subsequent legitimization of the new regime through the elimination of any competing myths.

*The Political Uses of the Myth*

In the new foundation story that took shape from 1964 on, October 20 was oversimplified, deprived as it was of its historical significance. It no longer commemorated the declaration of the state of emergency, but alluded to the struggle for, and the accession to, independence, embodied solely by the figure of Jomo Kenyatta. This original form of symbolic representation, to all intents and purposes the personification of the memory of independence, recalls in some respects the "Gaullist resistancialism" defined by the historian Henry Rousso as "less like a glorification of the Resistance (and certainly not of those who participated in it) than a celebration of a people in resistance personified by the man of June 18."[3] The resistancialist myth, which was created by Charles de Gaulle at a time when crisis had been averted and there was national reconciliation, enabled the divisions brought about by the Occupation to be concealed. He celebrated an abstract vision of France, cut off from its historical reality in which those who had participated in the resistance were stripped of their memories so that the struggle of a whole nation united behind its leader could be glorified.[4] The new commemorative function assigned to October 20 might be interpreted as a form of Kenyan resistancialism, in which the glorification of the saga of the national hero celebrates, as though a symbolic process, the struggle for independence experienced by an entire nation.

In terms of memory, this was expressed by stifling individual memories of the struggle in favor of creating an official metanarrative. This official memory, resolutely amnesic and part of a project of reconciliation, came up against competing memories, frequently embodied by minority or dissident groups.[5] Each of the three major political crises experienced by Kenya between 1963 and 1978 was

(1) KNA, KA/4/3/, letter, September 23, 1965.

(2) Mordechai Tamarkin, "The Roots of Political Stability in Kenya," *African Affairs* 77, no. 308 (1978): 298, http://www.jstor.org/stable/721836.

(3) Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, de 1944 à nos jours (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), 32. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer as *The Vichy Syndrome. History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1991).

(4) Ibid., 89.

(5) Marshal Clough, "Mau Mau and the Contest," 253, where Michael Kammen is quoted regarding the memory of slavery in the United States (Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chord of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* [New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1991], 13).



Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

accompanied by a crisis in terms of memory, where every time the myth of origins was reactivated and exploited in order to counter competing memories and reaffirm the regime's legitimacy.[1]

The first tensions in the union government formed by the KANU in May, 1963, appeared a few months after independence. Radical nationalists, such as Bildad Kaggia and J. M. G. Kariuki, were represented within it, as were former Mau Mau generals–Waruhiu Itote for instance–alongside more conservative politicians, sometimes close to loyalist circles, such as Charles Njonjo, Julius Kiano, and Njoroge Mungai. It was also at this time that the first autobiographical accounts written by Mau Mau insurgents were published.[2] They often painted an idealized picture of the struggle for independence carried out in the forests, emphasizing the movement's principles of equality and social justice as well as its nationalist dimension. These memories of combat were echoed in the demands expressed at that time by villagers, namely, the demand for a greater share in the fruits of independence, especially concerning access to land. The harsh suppression meted out by the government against the popular demonstrations organized in Nairobi between 1963 and 1964 culminated in the political assassination of the radical left-wing leader, Pio Gama Pinto, in February, 1965.

The following year, in 1966, a number of members belonging the former KADU left the KANU after Odinga Odinga and Bildad Kaggia as a protest against the regime's descent into a conservative "neo-colonialism," as they put it. They formed the KPU. The dissidents presented themselves as the heirs to the nationalist struggle, the program of which they defended. The KANU retaliated in kind, giving priority to the Mau Mau legacy (meetings with former soldiers and memory). Jomo Kenyatta chose this moment to publish his memoirs under the title of *Suffering without Bitterness: The Founding of The Kenya Nation* (1968). The wording of the title and the subheading linked the individual experience of suffering and sacrifice to the nation's destiny. Half of it consisted of reproduced official speeches made between 1963 and 1967, yet this book appeared as the official history of the struggle for Kenyan independence, in which Kenyatta's activities occupied a central place.[3] The adoption of the memory of independence at the time of this crisis raised the question of the nation's imaginary boundaries, defined precisely by the myth that had been created at the time of independence. In his speech to the nation made at the occasion of the sixth anniversary of the commemoration of the formation of the first autonomous government (Madaraka Day), on June 1, 1969, Kenyatta vehemently denounced the unrest that was being carried out by a handful of protesters by referring to them as enemies of the nation: "If they are not for nation building, then they are against it."[4] By defending the unity of a nation being threatened by dissidents, the head of state

(1) I have adopted the chronology established by Marshall Clough in his article concerning the political uses of memory associated with the Mau Mau (Marshal Clough, "Mau Mau and the Contest").

(2) In their pioneering study devoted to the Mau Mau Uprising, Carl Rosberg, a British political scientist, and John Nottingham, a former colonial administrator-turned-editor, have demonstrated the propaganda and colonial mythology created around the Mau Mau, at the same time as emphasizing the anticolonial dimension of a movement that was interpreted as a form of nationalism (Carl Rosberg, and John Nottingham, *Nationalism in Kenya: The Myth of the Mau Mau* [Nairobi: Transafrica Press, 1966]). Among these first, frequently autobiographical accounts, we might mention: James Mwangi Kariuki, *Mau Mau Detained: The Account of a Kenyan African of his Experience of Detention Camps* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963); Karari Njama, and Donald Barnett, *Mau Mau from within: Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt* (New York: Modern Reader, 1966); Waruhiu Itote, *Mau Mau General* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967).

(3) Jomo Kenyatta, *Suffering without Bitterness: The Founding of the Kenya Nation* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968).

(4) H. E. the President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, Speech on the Occasion of Madaraka Day, June 1, 1969, KNA, KA/4/23.



Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

called to mind the fact that the only acceptable way that conformed to "Kenyan nationalism" was the way espoused by the KANU, the principles of which were recorded in his manifesto published in 1961. After the assassination of the politician Luo Tom Mboya, who had become Kenyatta's rival, and the subsequent riots in the west of the country, the KADU was once again forbidden. However, in order to reaffirm their unity and the historical legitimacy of Kikuyu power, Kenyatta's close supporters organized oath-swearing campaigns, pledging unity and loyalty. Echoing the Mau Mau oath-swearing, the revival of these traditional Kikuyu practices established a historical line of descent which started with this period of struggle and resistance, as well as demonstrating a restrictive notion of citizenship, the frontiers of which matched those of the Kikuyu nation–indeed, those of some clans only.

The third political crisis undergone by the regime during the early 1970s centered round critics of Kenyatta and his management of government as a national heritage. The regime was characterized by its close centralization, in which all the apparatus was narrowly controlled by the president and his close allies (the security forces, the cabinet, parliament, the regional administration, and the one-party apparatus since 1969). Within this political and administrative structure, all posts of any significance were awarded to Kikuyus closely associated with Kenyatta's clan.[1] It was also this group that benefited the most from land transfers during the –1960s and '70s, opening up unprecedented possibilities for the accumulation of economic, social, and political power.[2] This patrimonial power structure and the distribution of state resources nourished a system of vertical patronage relationships guaranteeing a certain stability. However, a significant part of the population remained outside these symbolic and material exchanges.

Numerous intellectuals and politicians therefore denounced the shift in terms of authority and national heritage, considered by some as a betrayal of the nationalist cause.[3] Before his forced exile to the United States , the Kikuyu writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o endeavored, from his home, to restore the memory of the anonymous soldiers in the forests at the same time as denouncing Kenyatta's regime.[4] The 1975 political assassination of the populist leader J. M. G. Kariuki, a former Mau Mau prisoner and spokesman for those who had been marginalized by the regime, and the wave of arrests of political opponents that followed revealed, in all its brutality, the repressive and exclusive character of an increasingly personal regime.

The growing personification of the government was borne out by the celebrations marking ten years of Kenyan independence in which the work of the Father of the Nation was highlighted. The Government Communications Services produced an apologetic film in which Kenyatta was the protagonist: "[The film is] about the President and the people of Kenya and what together they have achieved in a decade of independence, and so we open up with a sequence of the film which deals with the President."[5]

(1) Denis-Constant Martin, "Dépendance et luttes politiques au Kenya, 1975-1977: la bourgeoisie nationale à l'assaut du pouvoir d'État," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines* 12, no. 2 (1978): 233-256; Mordechai Tamarkin, "The Roots of Political Stability."

(2) Ibid.

(3) Bildad Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom, 1921-1963: The Autobiography of Bildad Kaggia* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975); Mohammed Mathu, *The Urban Guerilla, the Story of Mohammed Mathu* (Richmond: Liberation Support Movement, 1974); Kiboi Murithi, and Peter Ndoria, *War in the Forest* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971); Joram Wemweya, *Freedom Fighter* (Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1971).

(4) See in particular: Ngugi wa Thong'o, *Petals of Blood* (London: Heinemann, 1977) and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (London: Heinemann, 1976).

(5) Letter from Dietrich Berwanger to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for Information and Diffusion concerning the film marking the tenth anniversary of independence, April 11, 1973, KNA, KA/4/32.



Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

The places at which the struggle for independence was commemorated–the Kamunjuki Stadium for instance–were gradually abandoned and replaced by new commemorative locations specifically dedicated to them and associated with the regime. Thus, Kenyatta placed the first stone in the monument to independence erected on December 12, 1973, in Uhuru Gardens in a suburb of Nairobi, and a statue of the president was unveiled on the same day at City Square in the city center. The increase in his public appearances and radio broadcasts also contributed to the omnipresence of the figure of the Father of the Nation, whose charisma and rhetorical talents were universally acclaimed.[1]

When Jomo Kenyatta died in his sleep on August 22, 1978, it was indeed as the Father of the Nation, whose body was displayed at State House, mourned by his people. However, as Tamarkin has emphasized, he was perhaps less the nation's Founding Father (the demarcations of which remained nebulous) and more the founder of a regime which outlasted him thanks to the permanence of the myth associated with him. His successor, Daniel Arap Moi, who came from a minority ethnic group, inherited his legitimacy and his political alliances from Kenyatta. The wave of democratic protests of the 1990s, which caused the one-party regimes to fall, also dispelled the myths upon which they were founded.

## From Hero to Heroes: The De-mythification of, and Rivalry among, Memories

The elections of December 2002, marked the advent of a new era with the defeat of the KANU (in power since 1963) and its leader Uhuru Kenyatta, one of the sons of the Father of Independence.[2] The victory of the opposition coalition, led by Mwai Kibaki, represented the outcome of the process of democratization begun during the 1990 following the example set in many African countries, and in which human rights organizations and churches played a decisive part. The challenging of the authoritarian and exclusive regimes, followed by their removal, necessitated the deconstruction of their founding myths, allowing for the creation of a new foundation story. Kenyatta clearly remains an icon for the current government: one of the first measures adopted by its ministers involved reprinting the bank notes with his effigy to replace those of Moi. However, he will be, henceforth, the host in a pantheon enlarged by the new government.

### *The Nation's Renaissance*

In his investiture speech given on December 30, 2002, Mwai Kibaki unveiled a program for the refounding of the nation centred around two main axes, unity in diversity and a split from the Moi regime: "Look around you, see what a gorgeous constellation of stars we are, just look at this dazzling mosaic of people of various ethnic backgrounds, race, creed, sex, age, experience, and social status."[3] The National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), which won the elections in December 2002, appeared to be a metaphor for the nation, whose political and ethnic diversity it represented. However, the restoration of democratic principles and social contract–a priority for the new government–could be interpreted as a confrontation with the past and a rejection of every form of amnesia: "One would have preferred to overlook some of the all too obvious human errors and forge ahead, but it would be unfair to Kenyans not to raise questions about certain deliberate

(1) During the summer of 1977, one year before he died, Kenyatta participated in ninety-two official ceremonies in the Coast Province where he had practically retired (Eric Aseka, *Jomo Kenyatta* (Nairobi: Kenya Litho, 1992): 81.

(2) The symbolism of names was still very obvious since Uhuru means "independence" in Kiswahili.

(3) The text of the speech is available on the following Internet site: www.statehousekenya.go.ke/speeches/kibaki/2002301201.htm (accessed on 20 August, 2009).



Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

actions or policies of the past that continue to have grave consequences on the present."[1]

In April, 2003, the government considered the establishment of a Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC). This idea had been put forward by a number of organizations in defence of human rights in the context of the "Campaign against Impunity" initiated between early 2001 and the end of the following year. In their report, Makau Mitua, the head of the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), and Kiraitu Murungi (the Minister of Justice and founder of the KHRC) recommended the establishment of a commission responsible for examining the most common crimes and abuses perpetrated between independence in December, 1963 and the end of the Moi regime in December 2002. The supporters of a transitional justice system, frequently from organizations, which had campaigned for Human Rights and democracy during the nineteen-nineties, considered it to be a crucial step in the reconstruction of the nation: "The past must be confronted, the state must be audited, and the country must be exorcized of the ghosts of the past that still haunt it. Amnesia would simply lead to the certain death and failure of state and society."[2]

The government refused, however, to apply these recommendations, which were buried along with the project for constitutional reform and the failure of the Rainbow Coalition.[3] It was only after the post-election violence in January 2008 that a Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission was established. Current legal hearings are concerned with abuses and crimes committed in Kenya between 1963 and 2008.

*The Return of History and Memory*

The principle of a transitional justice system as an instrument of national reconciliation is being used to bring a remedial dimension to historical discourse. This catharsis, which is part of a more universal movement towards democratization, has contributed to the release of individual memories that had, in part, been stifled by official metanarrative. It might be observed that since 2002 there has been an explosion of memories often stimulated by the action of certain groups defining themselves as victims.[4]

At the time of the national convention organized on October 16 and 17, 2008, in order to prepare the work to be undertaken by the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission, a lobby group was formed in the name of "the victims of past and present injustice" so that they could make their voices heard by the Commission. The Kenya National Victims Network, supported by the leading organizations in defence of Human Rights, has brought together a large variety of victim support organizations–The Mau Mau Veterans Association and The Victims of Historical Land Injustices, for example. Their demands have a very wide spectrum exceeding the TJRC's mandate. The regulation of the property question, the establishment of a Truth and Justice Commission centered on the victims' causes, and the recognition by the state of crimes and legal violations committed during the colonial and post-colonial periods, as well as compensation for them, might be cited among them. These

(1) Ibid.

(2) Republic of Kenya, Report of the Task Force on the establishment of a Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (Nairobi: Government Press, 2003, 10).

(3) From 2004 on, the members of the coalition confronted each other concerning the project for constitutional reform that was finally rejected at the time of the referendum in 2005. The government refocused itself round the group of Kikuyu faithfuls, of which Kiraitu was one of the pillars, while the opposition regrouped within the Orange Democratic Party behind Raila Odinga (the son of Odinga Odinga, Kenyatta's contemporary and rival). The two camps were vehemently opposed to one another during the December 2007 elections. The crisis ended up by being resolved by a division of power between Kibaki as president and Odinga as prime minister.

(4) Marie-Emanuelle Pommerolle "Les mobilisations de victimes de violences coloniales: investigations historiques et judiciaires et débats politiques postcoloniaux au Kenya" *Raisons politiques* 30 (2009): 107–129.



Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

organizations use the work of the TJRC as a sounding board for their demands, of which some, which are linked to the negotiations for independence, were veiled under the official policy of amnesia. These appeals accord with the approach adopted by certain groups consisting of people with memories, such as the Mau Mau veterans associations that have initiated legal proceedings against the British government so as to obtain recognition and compensation for the crimes committed during the state of emergency.[1]

This reawakening of memory, which sometimes appears in the guise of particular causes and appeals, is inseparable from the more understated work concerning the demythification of the official history carried out by historians. The first questioning of the myths associated with memory connected with the state of emergency goes back to the 1970s, with the publication of a number of works concentrating on the complexity of the Mau Mau movement and the diversity of those who took part within it.[2] The proliferation in the number of works concerned with the period since the 1980s indicates the importance of heritage at this key moment in the creation of modern Kenya in terms of referents associated with memory[3] and the dynamics of history.[4] The plurality in terms of a historical discourse, which harks back to the diverse nature of the memories associated with independence,[5] has created a discourse shaped by the consequences of elections bringing about political change.

*The Return of the Hero*

October 20, when the declaration of the state of emergency of 1952 was commemorated, has been celebrated since 2010 under the name of Heroes' Day (*Mashujaa* Day). This change of terminology is symptomatic of the process involving the redefinition of the national imagination. In his inaugural speech at this commemoration, President Kibaki described the new national heroes in these terms: "*Mashujaa* are men and women who have made a lasting mark in the lives of Kenyans and in the history and development of our country."[6] The nationalists, women, and politicians of

(1) Ibid.

(2) Robert Buijtenhuijs was one of the first to criticize the nationalist Mau Mau myth by emphasizing the movement's complexity and internal tensions (Robert Buijtenhuijs, *Mau Mau Twenty Years After: The Myth and the Survivors* (La Haye: Mouton, 1973). At the same time, the Kenyan historian, Bethwell Ogot, concerned with the diverse nature of the participants in these conflicts. (Bethwell Ogot, "Revolt of Elders: An Anatomy of the Loyalist Crowd in the Mau Mau Uprising, 1952–1956," *Hadith* 4 (1972): 134–148).

(3) Elisha Stephen Atieno Odhiambo, and John Lonsdale, *Mau Mau and Nationhood*. The memory of the Mau Mau has a significant place in terms of the historiography of the subject. Marshall Clough has been involved with the political interpretation of Mau Mau memoirs (Marshall Clough, Mau Mau Memoirs: History, Memory and Politics [London: Lynn Rienner, 1998]). In the volume, which they edited in 2002, Elisha Stephen Atieno Odhiambo, and John Lonsdale examined the place occupied by the Mau Mau in the creation of the national imagination (Elisha Stephen Atieno Odhiambo, and John Lonsdale, *Mau Mau and Nationhood*).

(4) The first overviews to examine the social and political origins of the revolt were published at the end of the nineteen-eighties. Tabitha Kanogo insists on the place occupied, and the role played by squatters in the structuring of the movement (Tabitha Kanogo, Squatters ad the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905–1963 [London: James Currey, 1987]), while David Throup emphasizes the specificity of colonial policies (David Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau, 1945–1953* [London: James Currey, 1987]); and some, Franck Furedi for instance, interpret the movement in terms of class conflict (Franck Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective* [London: James Currey, 1989]).

(5) Pioneering works carried out on the lesser known participants in the conflict, women for example, (Cora Ann Presley, *Kikuyu Women, the Mau Mau Rebellion and Social Change in Kenya* [Boulder Co.: Westview Press, 1992]) or the ordinary population studied from the point of view of oaths of allegiance (Great Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below* [London: James Currey, 1997]) have contributed to the reawakening of individual memories. The most recent works, such as those by Caroline Elkins concerning the memory of the victims of repression (Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*), Daniel Branch on the loyalists and their heritage (Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*), and David Anderson (David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*) testify to the multifaceted nature of these memories.

(6) Speech made by Mwai Kibaki at the first Heroes' Day to be held on October 20, 2010. Quoted in "Kibaki's Speech on Maiden Shujaa Day," *The Standard*, October 20, 2010. http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/article/2000020689/kibaki-s-speech-on-maiden-shujaa-day.



Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

various origins are every bit as much resistance fighters as recognized sports personalities and scientists.

*Mashujaa* Day is officially written into the new Constitution adopted as a national celebration on August 27, 2010. It had already figured, however, in the first constitutional project submitted to referendum in 2005. This initiative adheres fully to the new political and memorial dynamic that has been in place since 2002. October 20 will, henceforth, sanction the reconciliation and unity of the nation (these have taken on more of a significance after the post-election violence of 2008), no longer embodied by a single Father of the Nation, but by all the heroes and heroines that have created Kenya. In March, 2007, the Minister of Culture appointed a commission responsible for establishing the criteria enabling them to be identified by relying particularly on research carried out in the country as a whole.[1]

This reconfiguration of memorial space is also being achieved by means of a new rhetoric concerning the spaces associated with memory. One space in the course of construction will be dedicated henceforth to the nation's heroes and heroines, namely, Heroes' Acre in Uhuru Gardens. A statue to Dedan Kimathi, one of the Mount Kenya guerrilla leaders who was executed on February 26, 1957, was erected in the center of Nairobi in February 2007. The official recognition of the memory of one of the heroes in the armed struggle against the colonial government, fifty years after his death, testifies to the process involving the pluralization of memory instituted by the new government. It is through the memory of Kimathi that all the heroes of the Mau Mau struggle are honored, those from Nyeri in particular. Politically speaking, it is for the new president and his clique, who are natives of Nyeri,[2] to establish a symbolic line of memorial descent from a founding period preceding independence, as well as defending the region's memory and identity against an official memory centered up until this point on Murang'a, the place of origin of Kenyatta's clan. The homage paid to Dedan Kimathi and the problem of the heroes and heroines appear to be inaugurating a new founding myth:

> Kenya's independence was brought about by our Freedom Heroes/Heroines like Kimathi, whose sacrifices should not be seen to have been in vain. ... Let us do our Independence Heroes/Heroines proud by embracing a culture of love for one another as our Kapenguria Six heroes, for example, loved one another and struggled for a common purpose "Kenya's liberation" in spite of their diverse ethnic backgrounds.[3]

Fifty years after Independence, at the time when Kenya is entering a new phase in its history with the adoption of the second Constitution, we are witnessing the creation of a new national narrative based on the plurality of the memory connected with Independence and the diversity of the contribution made by its heroes. This creation of the national imagination, a creation that is ongoing, emphasizes the predominantly political dimension and function of the founding myths that anchor these narratives.

The authoritarian and centralized regime, which was created by Jomo Kenyatta and inherited by Daniel Arap Moi, relied on the symbolic figure of the hero in the struggle for

(1) Republic of Kenya, Gazette Notice No. 3179, "Task Force for Country-Wide Date Collection on Criteria and Modalities of Honouring National Heroes and Heroines," March 27, 2007.

(2) Michaela Wrong condemns the backward slide of this "mafia from Mount Kenya" (Michaela Wrong, *It's Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistle Blower* [London: Fourth Estate, 2009]).

(3) Speech by the Permanent Secretary office of the vice President Ministry of State for National Heritage and Culture, during the 52nd Commemorative Kimathi's memorial service on 26th February 2009 in Nyeri. http://www.national-heritage.go.ke.



Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po

independence, a figure that became the Father of the Nation. Similarly, in numerous African countries, the wave of democratization of the 1990s that relied on regime changes made a dent in the myths around which the original regimes were created. Jomo Kenyatta, who is no longer at the heart of the creation of the national imagination, continues however to occupy a central place in the nation's collective memory, a memory that will be connected henceforth with heroes abandoned by the Jacobin spirit of nationalism of the 1960s. In Kenya, where the regime change was negotiated in 2008 with bitter consequences, the pluralization of the national imagination implemented by the new regime was precisely the product of rival memories inherited from the period of independence. Thus, the defenders of a narrow Kikuyu ethno-nationalism embodied by Kibaki have continued to oppose the representatives of other segments of the nation. The combination of these competing memories, symbolized by the new heroic rhetoric, is at the heart of the creation of a new political myth, henceforth centered around the image of a diverse, but unified nation.

*Hélène Charton*
*Les Afriques dans le monde* (LAM), CNRS,
33607, Pessac cedex, France.
helcharton@gmail.com

**Hélène Charton** is in charge of research at the LAM department of the CNRS [The French National Centre for Scientific Research] at Bordeaux University. Her work involves the history of Kenya and the history of the international education policies in Africa. She has recently published an article entitled "Réformes éducatives et légitimation politique au Kenya" (*Cahiers de la Recherche sur l'éducation et les Savoirs* 10 [2011]: 219–237), and "Acteurs, victimes et témoins de la violence dans l'histoire: l'exemple Mau Mau" (Cahiers d'*études africaines* 201 [2011]: 169–192).

## Abstract

*— This article explores how the figure of Kenyatta, hero and father of the Kenyan nation, has been constructed and deconstructed. The way national mythology has been constructed around Kenyatta's actions and personality closely mirrors the political history of the country. One of the main consequences of the democratisation processes of the 1990s has been to dent the official mythologies on which the first, often authoritarian, regimes were built. Fifty years after independence, a new national narrative is being constructed around a plurality of memories of independence and on the diversity of the contributions made by its national heroes which define the limits of the national imaginary.*

Document downloaded from www.cairn-int.info - Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris - - 193.54.67.93 - 14/03/2017 16h42. © Presses de Sciences Po