THE KAMBA PEOPLES OF KENYA

Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya: Loyalty and Martial Race Among the Kamba, c. 1800 to the Present. By Myles Osborne.

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Myles Osborne has authored a lively, insightful, comprehensive, and much-needed history of the Kamba people of Kenya. The Kamba, who hail from Ukambani, a region southeast of Nairobi, today comprised of Machakos and Kitui counties, have received considerably less scholarly attention than the better-known Kikuyu, Kalenjin, and Luo. Indeed, *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya: Loyalty and Martial Race Among the Kamba, c. 1800 to the Present* is only the second monograph published on Kamba history since the mid-1970s, and it provides an important corrective to the neglect of the Kamba in the overall historiography of Kenya.

When historical and anthropological literature has engaged Kamba people and places, it has tended to treat the Kamba past as episodic, focusing tightly on key events such as the Destocking Controversy (which took place in the late 1930s, when 2,000 Kamba marched on Nairobi to protest compulsory stock sales), or it has attended almost entirely to the stereotype of the Kamba as the 'martial race' of Kenya and the central roles that Kamba have played in Kenya's police and military since the early colonial period. Across an Introduction, Epilogue, and eight chapters, Osborne challenges these more limited understandings, showing how Kamba people have shaped — and been shaped by — the political, civic, supernatural, and environmental forces at play in Kenya and the broader Indian Ocean World from the early nineteenth century forward.

A meticulously researched political and cultural history, *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya* — as its title suggests — undertakes conceptual work that complicates intertwined notions of ethnicity and identity that have been central concerns of Africanist scholarship in the last two and a half decades. *Ethnicity and Empire* provides an overarching narrative history of Kamba sociopolitical development. In so doing, it brings to light central continuities in 'Kambaness' — that is, what it has meant to be Kamba as opposed to Kikuyu, Luo, or Kalenjin, etc. — that span more than a century. The book importantly breaks with the literature that has pinpointed the heart of Kamba identity exclusively in the twentieth century imperial designation of the Kamba as Kenya's 'martial race'. Rather, *Ethnicity and Empire* clearly demonstrates instead how in Ukambani 'virtues connected to raiding and hunting formed core cultural materials in the communities of the region' (4). It shows how these 'virtues, and Kamba men's related skills', in turn, inspired colonial authorities to apply the label 'martial race' to the Kamba. For Kamba men, service in the colonial police and in the military, like hunting and raiding, provided spaces for the 'expression of male virtue in social life' (60). These men used their 'martial' reputation and abilities to make social, economic, and political demands on the British colonial state.

While Osborne clearly articulates the ways in which Kamba identity has been gendered male, he is also careful not to equate Kamba virtue with male virtue. Drawing on oral

histories, as well as on missionary and colonial documentary sources, the book illustrates how Kamba women 'rejected the suggestion that men had a monopoly on honor and respect, or that they alone could delineate the ways in which women earned those attributes' (219). Rather, women promoted a 'vision of community in which the sustenance of the family was paramount' and in which 'those who sustained their home communities were worthy of virtue' (123, 178). From the precolonial era into the twentieth century, women's work, especially raising the crops which sustained Kamba families, was a source of honor in Kamba social life. The character and scope of sustenance changed as Kamba men increasingly left Ukambani to serve in the military, especially during the First and Second World Wars. At those times, women established trading networks and businesses, which enabled them to earn significant wages and sustain their families, as well as to win the support of colonial development officials, who channeled substantial funding towards Kamba women's initiatives. 'By the 1950s', Osborne writes, 'women had come to see themselves as guardians of the community'. The testimony of contemporary informants who insist that the Kamba have 'always had more egalitarian gender relations than Kenya's other ethnic groups' reflects this view (219–20).

The book also intervenes in the extensive body of literature on Kenya which has sought to understand the formation of ethnic identity and the ways in which 'tribes' were brought into being in the colonial era through deliberate imperial policies that hardened ethnic boundaries and deployed tactics of divide-and-rule. Much of this scholarship has focused on the importance of 'ethnic entrepreneurs' — the literate men who produced (claims-staking) vernacular histories of their 'tribes' — and the tribal and social associations that cultivated and debated ethnicity.

As *Ethnicity and Empire* clearly maps out, Kamba processes of identification proceeded differently, as Kamba peoples lacked a coterie of ethnic entrepreneurs and a strong ethnic association. Making (and arguing over) Kamba-ness was instead left to Kamba chiefs, 'who described "Kamba" practices as a way to try to cement their authority, evoking the supposed history of the "tribe" to authenticate their claims' (71). After the First World War, these discussions also involved veterans, as 'the experience of the war became a foundational part of Kamba lore. It was used as an important building block in constructing the history of the "tribe" in the 1930s and 1940s' (73). Kamba participation in the Second World War reinforced this construction. Upon returning from the war, Kamba 'veterans had great influence in inspiring people to think of themselves as "Kamba", and as possessing a shared history around martial service that stretched back to the nineteenth century and beyond' (134).

Finally, *Ethnicity and Empire* also augments the growing body of literature that investigates the function of 'loyalty' in colonial settings. In Kenyan history, 'loyalty' has typically been explored within the context of the anti-colonial Mau Mau rebellion and through the question of why significant numbers of Kikuyu remained loyal to the colonial state. Through meticulous ethnographic research, including copious and carefully analyzed interviews, Osborne shows how in Ukambani the meaning and practice of *ʼwi* — which can be translated as 'obedience' and 'loyalty', depending on context and chronology — has a long and contested history; it has served as a space of individual identification, a site of gendered conflicts, a colonial label, and a political tool.

Overall, *Ethnicity and Empire* provides a welcome and needed addition to the scholarship on the Kamba specifically, and on ethnicity in Kenya and in East Africa more

generally. Scholars of 'martial races' around the world will also find the book's deeply historicized approach productive and useful.

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LABOUR, MOBILITY, AND COLONIALISM IN MOZAMBIQUE

Bound for Work: Labor, Mobility, and Colonial Rule in Central Mozambique, 1940–1965.
By Zachary Kagan Guthrie.
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The inhabitants of late colonial Mozambique's Manica e Sofala District suffered one of the most rigid variants of Portuguese forced labour practices. As Zachary Kagan Guthrie shows in his book, *Bound for Work: Labor, Mobility, and Colonial Rule in Central Mozambique, 1940–1965*, forced recruitment, which had been common under concession rule in the district before 1942, remained an essential experience after the termination of the company's charter and into the 1960s. (Eric Allina's findings on the earlier period serve as the starting point for Kagan Guthrie's interpretation.)[1] The continuous role of forced labour in that mid-century period has been pointed to in earlier work, especially by Corrado Tornimbeni.[2] But Kagan Guthrie explains the inner workings of the system while furthermore conveying how forced labour affected the life options and migration choices of young men and the impact of those processes on women and family constellations. The author uses no fewer than 175 interviews to shed light on the individual trajectories of both men who migrated and women whose lives were affected by their husbands' temporary absences.

In this study, Kagan Guthrie manages to clarify important policy contradictions and moments of transformation. For his region of analysis, he shows that the Second World War produced something of a worldwide smokescreen for colonial powers. At that time, the Portuguese in Mozambique reinterpreted the (initially vague) six-month work obligation for able-bodied men, which allowed administrators to forcibly recruit colonial subjects and send them into underpaid private contracts under drastically bad conditions (a practice called *contrato* in that part of the Portuguese empire), even though this practice remained technically illegal (27–30; 107). Male inhabitants of the region then typically were restricted to one of three choices: volunteer with the same employers, thereby obtaining somewhat better contract conditions; migrate into the city of Beira, where the urban setting

1 E. Allina, *Slavery by Any Other Name: African Life under Company Rule in Colonial Mozambique* (Charlottesville, VA, 2012).
2 See C. Tornimbeni, 'Migrant workers and state boundaries: reflections on the transnational debate from the colonial past in Mozambique', *Lusotopie* 11 (2004), 107–24.