Njama's Supper: The Consumption and Use of Literary Potency by Mau Mau Insurgents in Colonial Kenya

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Our job is thus to identify, in historical situations, within a clearly defined social arena, procedures (differentiated between one actor and another or, if the actors are the same, between one context and another) of enunciation of a same institution, a same practice, or a same discourse (Bayart 1992:37).

In this essay I hope to come closer to an understanding of how Mau Mau insurgents created a world in the Aberdares forest composed of individuals and groups who contested the means for which positive social value could be attained.[1] The world they created was replete with power, and this power was congealed in certain objects and the ability to use them. Many of these objects were literally stolen from the institutions which made up the colonial regime (schools and offices, for example). They circulated within and among groups of insurgents (*itungati*) in the forest and in some way represented and embodied the enchanted power of the colonial state apparatus.[2] Yet the circulation of these objects into new social space (Mau Mau camps), whose constitution they contributed to, both changed the meaning of these objects and clarified and accelerated divisions within the movement. The circulation of literary-bureau-

I have benefited a great deal from the insights and perspectives of a number of scholars, including Jean and John Comaroff, Nancy Munn, John Lonsdale, Andrew Apter, Ralph Austen, Ben Miller, and Adi Hastings, all of whom offered extensive comments on earlier drafts. An earlier draft of this essay was presented at the University of Chicago African Studies Workshop in 1996.

[1] Mau Mau is the name given by whites to the Central Kenyan insurgency that became openly violent in 1952. Most Mau Mau violence was centered in and around the Aberdares Forest, which separated the European "White Highlands" from the African Reserves. Though not entirely a Kikuyu movement, most forest fighters were Kikuyu, and Mau Mau has often been referred to as a "Kikuyu civil war" because so much of the violence was directed at African (mostly Kikuyu) elites and because many Kikuyu (such as chiefs, elites, and Homeguards recruited by the colonial government to fight Mau Mau insurgents) took an active role in denouncing or quelling it. As John Lonsdale (1992) and Bruce Berman (1991) have shown, Mau Mau framed and informed debates about morally appropriate lifeways among a people who were never a cohesive "tribe" and who experienced radically different living and working conditions under colonialism.

[2] Most authors translate *itungati* as "freedom fighter" or "guerilla." Lonsdale (1992) has indicated that the term literally means "rear guard" and probably refers to the self-conception of the original Mau Mau leadership as the rear guard, vis à vis literate nationalists like Jomo Kenyatta, in the struggle for independence.

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cratic objects thus had a dialectically transformative effect, since both subjects and objects were reconfigured through use or consumption. This logic worked also upon individuals, who imagined themselves to be transformed through the acquisition of literacy and education and who thereupon cloaked themselves in their badges. In their own narrations, semi-literate Mau Mau equated the visceral and psychological effects of literacy with the coming of age ceremonies associated with ascension to male warriorhood. In this the Mau Mau tried, without complete success, to forge a link between the value generating activities of the past and those of the present.

I begin by drawing out a passage from Barnett and Njama's *Mau Mau from Within* (1966), in which the latter describes his first encounter with the written word. I then try to explain why the act described in this passage was sensible to Njama by arguing that eating was the means through which the social world was internalized and embodied in the belly in Kikuyu social thought and practice. I argue that the body both extended itself over the world in an attempt to control it and was shaped by the symbolic weight of that world. In the second section, I transpose this dialectic upon the Mau Mau social body, which put the power of literacy to work in new and exciting ways leading to the transformation of literacy's meaning and function, as well as the social and political formation of Mau Mau. In the third section I try to examine the Kenya Parliament-Kenya Riigi split in a somewhat new light, focusing on how the perceived qualities of literacy informed political debate in the forest. This section borrows directly from the historical work of John Lonsdale (1990, 1992, 1994), and is also informed by the work of Luise White (1990), to whom I owe a major debt.

NJAMA'S SUPPER: THE EMBODIMENT OF LITERARY POTENCY

In the act of eating . . . the confines between the body and the world are overstepped by the body (Bakhtin 1984:282).

Consider the remark of Karari Njama, the former mission school instructor and General Secretary to Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi and General Stanley Mathenge:

> Before I learnt how to read and write, I thought that reading was a great miracle in which a person could repeat exactly the words said by another at a distant place, recording his words on a white sheet of paper. I very much admired reading. One day, on my way from school, I collected a piece of printed paper on the road and ate it so that I may have that knowledge of reading within me. I earnestly prayed God to give me the knowledge of reading (Njama, 1966:89).[3]

[3] The ingestion of written words is not uncommon in Africa and has been extensively discussed with regard to Islamic West Africa, where materialized language is seen to provide a direct communicative link to God (*cf.* Goody 1968; Bledsoe and Robey 1986). Goody views these quasi-religious practices (such as the drinking of ink to acquire mystical knowledge or the use of amulets containing written words) in Northern Ghana as emblematic of a "magical" approach to literacy, indicative of societies where literacy is prevented from "fulfilling its promise" of rationalization and egalitarian meritocracy for a number of religious, political, or economic reasons (1968:241).

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Njama was one of three Mau Mau forest fighters with a secondary school education, and his statement expresses an ironic and bemused detachment from what he portrays as childish naivete. But the child Njama's apparently infantile act and his *post festum* interpretation is in fact quite suggestive, revealing much about the cultural and historical specificity of writing's political and symbolic potency. The following elements are particularly relevant for our discussion: first, writing would appear to contain a power beyond its capacity to represent or configure a world which remains exterior to it; second, the body, via the mediation of the physical act of eating, is made to internalize an attribute (literacy) which itself mediates the speech of "another at a distant place" and which is embodied in certain commodities (e.g., paper, ink); third, the written word and its active correlate, reading, facilitate social and spatial mobility, attributes associated with the colonial administration; and, fourth, writing entails temporal fixity (the ability to "record words on a white sheet of paper"), partly as a result of the peculiar life of writing in the colony.

A Practical Cultural Logic of Transformation

The Njama anecdote suggests a practical, lived logic of consumptive production that had many varied manifestations in Kikuyu and Mau Mau cultural life. References to generative consumption occur in many ethnographic and autobiographical accounts of the everyday practices of Kikuyu and Mau Mau, so it is in no way unusual that eating should actualize the above-mentioned transference of a powerful and transformative personal attribute from object to subject—or, rather, between subjects, the paper itself being an animate force with certain qualities and potentialities.[4] The principle at work here was one of mutual transformative generation through incorporation, a theme which infiltrated common utterances related to Kikuyu social reproduction. Thus, to eat was to "seek a woman to the belly" (*gwethera githathi muka*) (Barra 1960:140), to marry the substance of life (food) with the substance of self and generate oneself anew in the process. At the social level, eating signified and operationalized the ritual incorporation of the eaters into a lived community, as well as the

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Bledsoe and Robey, among others (Gough 1968; Street 1984), have argued that, rather than encouraging the liberalization of knowledge, literacy intensifies and reproduces preexisting political hierarchies. However, the debate over whether literacy reenforces or challenges indigenous political hierarchies assumes that literacy and literary objects transform their users without being transformed themselves. I would argue instead that Njama's consumption of paper was not simply an ingestion of a formerly alienated power but was transformative of the object itself and that his act epitomized an indigenous means for the incorporation and transformation of power. Eating, I argue, not only implied that literary education had viscerally transformative effects, but actually allowed the power of literacy to be captured and put to work in ways that transformed the ground for future actions. His consumption can thus be understood as a political act thoroughly in keeping with the remainder of the General Secretary's nationalist autobiography.

[4] For a discussion of belly and other bodily metaphors and their complex articulation with local social and political spheres in diverse parts of Africa, see also Bayart (1992), Mbembe (1992), and Jean Comaroff (1985).

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physical and spiritual appropriation of the social potencies embodied in consumed substances.

Eating was central to the reproduction of the social body, in that through the distribution and consumption of food, formerly inactivated social relationships were reaffirmed and strengthened. Eating may thus be read as the internalization of a substance which carries the trace of, because it remains materially and symbolically inalienable from, a removed social (*e.g.,* kin) collectivity.[5] In the case of ritualized feasts this might be meat with plenty of fat.[6] This logic was evident in the circular exchange of animals, particularly cattle, goats and sheep, which mediated the transformation of value in market and marriage transactions and served as the "recognized standard of wealth among the Gikuyu" (Kenyatta 1965:61). As guarantors of female reproductive capacity, livestock was also the medium through which male rights over reproductive capacities were actualized: In John Lonsdale's words, goats could "substitute for women" (Lonsdale 1992:197). Livestock, as with all productive embodiments of value, carried the trace of its generative social origins. Eating was the process through which this trace was appropriated and social relations reproduced and through which the social power resident in once alien objects was made inalienable, becoming productive and iconic of personal and collective value. Similarly it was livestock, and the distribution and consumption of its roasted flesh at ritualized feasts, that actualized such status transformations as the incorporation of men into the *mariika* (age sets) and into the *kiama,* or council of elders (Kershaw 1972:197). The mutual entailment of convivial consumption, personal and social regeneration, and the fusion of alienated social collectivities continued after death. Thus, ancestors were incorporated into the community, and thereby appeased, through sacrifices of food, the latter again being made to mediate between social groups spatially and culturally removed from one another. As in other East African societies, the centrality of eating to the reproduction of moral economies made it a symbolically loaded act which made possible both the production and subversion of value.[7] In consuming food, one was also consuming social conflicts and contradictions (often expressed through sorcery and sorcery accusations), allowing them to enter into the body and manifest themselves as illness or death resulting from sorcery.

If through consumption Kikuyu internalized the powers and contradictions

[5] Jean Comaroff (1985) has posited a similar practical logic for the South African Tshidi: "The circulation of animals permitted the human persona to extend beyond the spatiotemporal confines of physical being; similarly, grain and beer contained something of the substance of the producer, so that to consume it was to imbibe herself" (Jean Comaroff 1985:126).

[6] John Lonsdale (1992:365) has commented that "Kikuyu power was fat; fatness promised fertility" and uses this observation to explain the self-selected name of Mau Mau General Kimbo, "Kimbo" being the brand name of a local cooking fat.

[7] As many anthropologists have noted, witchcraft in East Africa is often characterized by eating which subverts or destroys domestic groups and communities. Witches, the most palpable embodiments of negative value, are also recognizable by their eating habits, from their unwillingness to share food to their inability to keep food in their mouths.

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of the social world, the digested substance produced by consumption contained that symbolic content within it. As a result, stomach contents (usually those of a goat) were ritually useful and were held to purify a wide range of things which were necessary for social reproduction (see Leakey 1977:552); the crops prior to harvesting, animals presented at dowry negotiations (*ruracio*), neophyte elders whose political obligations required them to be "guided by reason and wisdom and not by emotion" (Kenyatta 1965:195), and the boundaries surrounding newly purchased land (Kenyatta 1965:40). Kikuyu infants, upon their rebirth after one year, were also cleansed with the contents of a goat's stomach (Leakey 1977:558). Stomach contents—the embodied external world—were also used in Mau Mau oaths, which were purifying and transformative in a manner analogous to Njama's eaten paper.[8]

The Politics of Kikuyu Consumption Symbolism

A dialectic of appropriative internalization and generative externalization pervaded Kikuyu belly symbolism, operating as the core motif for personal and social transformation. Eating transformed the eater by transferring to that person a visceral understanding animated by the social and symbolic peculiarities of the eaten food. The Mau Mau General Kahinga Wachanga (1975) had a favorite saying to that effect: "I have you in my belly," meaning that I understand you completely. Eating, power, and knowledge were thus reciprocally intertwined. Eating could also actualize power over a person, as when sorcerers accessed supernatural powers through the consumption of human flesh. Consider, for example, Njama's description of his oathing experience, where "eating" implies the aggressive annihilation of the person:

> As I led my group marching in the cordoned path, [the oath initiators] waved their pangas and swords over our heads and I heard one of them asking whether there was an informer to be "eaten". With a reply that we were all good people from another person, we entered the next hut (1996:117).

This use of consumption to acquire knowledge of and control over someone or something was manifested during the colonial period in attempts to consume, and thereby divert, the social value of the colonizers (the ability to write, for example). In a letter to Governor Sir Evelyn Baring and Brigadier General George Erskine, the then-General Secretary Kahinga Wachanga wrote,

> I, myself, General Secretary Kahinga am giving you a warning—telling you that all Europeans who are here in our mother country, those who came here without our grandfather's knowledge and grabbed our land and property, beware from now on because we are going to eat all your cattle, sheep, wheat, maize and after finishing them, start consuming your flesh until the time of your last man (Wachanga 1975:66).

[8] Mau Mau insurgents continually oathed one another, as well as neophyte members, in an apparent attempt to create a unified and self-conscious social and political collectivity. Oathing was another example of appropriative and recombinative consumption, as oaths themselves were not only enunciative events where people declared their loyalty to the movement but physical embodiments of powerful forces.

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Wachanga concluded his missive by informing the Governor and the General that his itungati were constructing a canning factory in the forest to preserve the flesh of dead British soldiers in tin. Thus, in a curiously ironic inversion of capitalist social relations, the fleshy source and embodiment of the oppressor's value (materialized in livestock, produce, and the body) was commoditized and consumed, in mythic jest of course, by the erstwhile colonized. Note also the reference to nephrophagy, a practice associated with sorcery throughout this region, and how this form of consumption was iconic of the domination of a formerly dominating social group. Eating, then, at once domesticates and captures the social power resident in such powerful objects as flesh and paper.

The belly was not conceived as an organ separated from the subject which then mediated the transformation of objects; rather, the belly was metonymic of the person, as indicated by the Gikuyu expression "A joke must not hit the belly" (Barra 1960:211). The body, or person, opened itself to the world during the socio-physical act of eating, which was simultaneously a space-time in which value was produced or subverted. For example, much Mau Mau internal strife was expressed in accusations of sorcery levelled at those suspected of contaminating the fire with bullets intended to explode during meals (Barnett and Njama 1966:238; Henderson 1958:106).[9] It was thus during the act of eating—the very moment when people were expressing and making their solidarity and social equality—that one was most vulnerable to the malicious designs of others. If the opening of the person entailed in eating allowed for the transformation—the destruction and rebirth—of the individual, it could also be used to incorporate formerly alien and potentially hostile persons into communities. This logic was evident in Mau Mau oathing ceremonies in which the collective consumption of substances metonymic of fertility and regeneration (such as balls of soil moistened with goat blood or stomach contents) by Mau Mau initiates was crucial to their being "reborn again into a new society with a new faith" (Barnett and Njama 1966:120; see also Kabiro 1973:27; Gikoyo 1979:30; Muriithi 1971:5; Mathu 1974:12). Insurgents referred to the oath as "circumcision," thereby associating it with entry into adulthood and the making of solidary communities out of pre-social individuals (see Kenyatta 1965:144). Eating an oath was therefore crucial to the conversion of persons, for it helped African loyalists "return to their normal (anti-government) state of mind" (Wachanga 1975:35) and transformed European enemies into allies:

I told them [the "Mau Mau leaders"] that we could not defeat the government unless we "oathed" them. I told them my plan, which was to have all Mau Mau oath ingredients boiled and stored in a bottle. After an oath administrator had repeated the oath over the water, it was taken to the meeting place. When the black lamb was roasted we would pour the "oath" over the lamb. Thinking that we had used the water to the fire, the government would eat the lamb and become Mau Mau. My comrades agreed wholeheart-

[9] Njama deploys his characteristic voice of reasoned authority to assure us that this explosive effect was produced by heated bamboo.

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edly. We went to meet the government with the "bottled oath". . . . When they ate the meat, they thought that we had become their friends, but we had not. . . . We returned to our camp and reported our success to Mathenge (Wachanga 1975:126).

General Wachanga understood that the act of collective and commensable eating contained the potential for aggressive appropriation and transformation and projected this understanding upon the agents of the colonial state ("When they ate the meat, they thought that we had become their friends") whose intent was subverted through their unwitting consumption of the material substance of the oath. The oath (a physical, consumed substance that congeals social power) is here seen as the perfect means for socializing enemies ("I told them that we could not defeat the Government unless we 'oathed' them") in a situation in which a positive value transformation requires the negative value transformation of the enemy. This logic of dialectical transformation—wherein mundane objects are made socially useful and persons are in turn remade by them—also informed Njama's initial attempt to acquire literacy—to remake himself by consuming a substance made powerful by daily social or colonial rituals (various forms of registration and documentation, newspaper reading, letter writing, schooling, etc.).

Literary Potency and Kenyan Colonialism

In contrast to government views on the subject, literacy did not eclipse "traditional" Kikuyu cultural forms.[10] By the time of the Emergency, education was seen by some (especially, but not only, the "educated") to be the contemporary equivalent of an earlier Kikuyu warrior training. In the 1930s, Kikuyu-owned newspapers such as *Muigwithania* (The Reconciler) printed letters by such literate nationalists as Harry Thuku, Jomo Kenyatta, and Joseph Kang' ethe, arguing that "literacy created and defended private property; readers were the warriors of today" (paraphrasal of several letters to *Muigwithania* in Lonsdale 1992:381). Similarly, pens, which mediated the materialization of the power of literacy in writing, were said to have replaced swords and spears (see Kariuki 1963:13), both fundamental components of a male warrior's accoutrement. Popular folk songs (*nyimbo*), made explicit the association of educational achievement with male warriorhood:

> If it were *Ndemi* and *Mathathi*
> Father, I would ask you for *Kirugu*
> Now, father, I only ask you for education

and, later in the same song,

[10] Although certain semi-educated insurgents scorned or posited sociological and psychological rationalizations for such practices as oaths, sorcery, and the use of prophets and witch doctors, literacy existed alongside and even fed into these apparently "traditional" cultural forms. Kimathi, for example, relied as much upon the advice of prophets (advice which often culminated in sacrifices, ritual cleansing ceremonies, and often the alteration of previous military plans) as upon the literary skills of an Njama or a Wachanga.

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> The need for a spear is gone
> Replaced by the need for a pen.
> For our enemies of today
> Fight with words (Mau Mau song in Barnett and Njama 1966:240).

In the above nyimbo, education is specifically equated with the interdependent themes of warriorhood and the reproduction of the social body through the appropriation of alien livestock. It identifies a present time distinct from the past time of Ndemi and Mathathi, terms which each refer to earlier ruling generations, but taken together mean simply "a very long time ago." Benson's *Kikuyu-English Dictionary* (1964) defines Kirugu as a "meat feast held by a group of men in seclusion for a week or so," whereas Kinyatti (1980:20), in his translation of the same nyimbo, substitutes the phrase "feast of bulls" for Kirugu. "Feast of bulls" is probably a reference to the feasting associated with the *Nguru,* a warriors' dance sponsored by elders which often precipitated raids, the "replenishing of cattle stock" through theft, and the consequent reproduction of the social collectivity (Leakey 1977:253). According to ethnographers, the feasting, specifically the consumption of the bull's roasted flesh and uncooked blood (themselves icons of male strength and courage) was intended to "strengthen" the men physically and emotionally prior to fighting (see also Gikoyo 1979:4). The indoctrination in local lore and custom which accompanied this feasting emphasized deference to male elders and culminated in a spirited mass egress through the rear wall of the hut. The "strengthening" which ethnographers and first-hand informants such as Gikoyo attributed to the meat feasts can in no way be translated into nutritional units, for ascending Kikuyu males were in fact consuming the embodied wealth of the social world (see Leakey 1977:253). Leakey (1977) states repeatedly that "meat was not food," that its consumption was situated within ritualized spheres of personal and corporate status transformation. It congealed symbolic power that strengthened persons and communities. In short, the nyimbo employs the symbolism of eating and the belly to express the fact that resistance to colonialism entails the appropriative transformation of alienated value in a manner analogous to the consumption of stolen meat that characterized earlier Kikuyu warrior feasts. Thus, not only is the literate man a contemporary warrior, but education is the stolen cattle of today.[11] This is underlined by the frequent observation of Kikuyu nationalists and Mau Mau insurgents that education was the source of the Europeans' riches and power, a kind of magical property that bestowed positive social value on its possessor (see Kariuki 1963:5; Waciuma 1969:82; see also Kenyatta 1965:262).

[11] I have linked writing and literacy with warriorhood because of, first, its appropriative and socially oriented nature and, second, its being a status space following upon a rite of passage. Yet, on the other hand, women were also known to be educated and frequently used their education to acquire freedom and authority formerly denied them. Charity Waciuma, the daughter of an African medical doctor and a student during the Emergency, recalled asking her father if she could become an elder later in life. He advised, alternatively, "get educated, and you can be employed as a court registrar" (Waciuma 1969:32).

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The power of literacy was not simply intrinsic but was realized through the creation and control of colonized subjects. Writing was directly implicated in the politics of colonial domination and resistance or, more precisely, in the attempts of differentially positioned subjects to capture and redirect the substance of colonial power. While serving as the primary medium through which colonial domination was made, writing was also a weapon utilized by the dominated against that very power. More than employment and "cultural capital" were at stake here. Although formal education and the attainment of literacy did augment one's earning potential and status, it also clearly enhanced political effectiveness in the colonial sphere. Matthew Njoroge, one of the early founders of the Kikuyu Association, told this story of his family's struggle over their *mbari* land:

> Stephen Kinuthia, my brother and one of the first Africans to read English, was working with Canon Leakey at this time translating the Bible, and so he asked Canon Leakey to write a letter from us to the Government saying that 240 acres of our land had been taken in 1908 and now the Government was taking some more and we had nowhere to go. The letter was written, Stephen and I signed it on behalf of our mbari and it was sent to the Government. They listened and the land was not taken and we all thought the power of this letter a most wonderful thing (In Rosberg and Nottingham 1966:42).[12]

This power was intrinsically ambivalent, for the written word immobilized Africans, while simultaneously enabling them to transcend this condition. The Kikuyu language conveyed the fact that immobilization and surveillance were tied up with writing in colonial Kenya. The Kikuyu and Swahili verb "to write" (*andika*) is also the word for "register", as in "to register for poll tax" (Benson 1964) and is part of the verb for "employ" (*andika wira:* literally, to register or sign up for work). The verb also implies contractual obligation, as in the phrase *andikira mundu mbaara:* to resolve, or register, to fight someone. Kenyan nationalists had for years protested against this rationalization and delimitation of Africans' movement in space, focusing specifically on the dreaded *kipande,* a registration card bearing the holder's name and home location, work and criminal record, and the comments (favorable or not) of previous employers. This was concealed in a metal container which hung from a string tied around the neck.[13] As early as 1922, Harry Thuku had encouraged Kenyans to toss their

[12] Literacy had multifarious functions, each with their own social and political implications. Letter writing (to relatives, friends, and business associates as well as government officials) was particularly important, as were the various nationalist newspapers published in Kikuyu, Swahili, and English. These newspapers were instrumental in the creation of a self-consciously aware Kikuyu collectivity: "literacy gave emergent nationalism much of its energy" (Lonsdale 1992:348).

[13] The economic rationale for *kipandes* is paraphrased by Rosberg and Nottingham (1966) in their history of the development of nationalism in colonial Kenya: "To bring more Africans into the labor market [the Native Labour Commission of 1912–13] recommended that the size of the Reserve be limited and that taxes 'be based upon the number of wives and be progressive,' and they argued it was 'absolutely essential' in tackling the problem of desertion for there to be a system of identification by registration, based upon the Southern Rhodesia Native Pass Consolidation Ordinance" (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966:46).

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kipandes onto the State House lawn (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966:46), and hatred of kipandes was cited by many forest fighters as a principal motivation for their struggle. Mau Mau insurgents ritually burned their identity cards and all other government documents upon entering the forest (Muriithi 1971:17), thereby severing all ties to the bureaucratized colonial arena that they would later reproduce, in all its minute forms, in the forest.

Kipandes were merely a single instantiation of a more general principle: that colonialism in Kenya was predicated, from its very inception, upon controlling the movement of the colonized through space. One had to possess the proper bureaucratic signs to move unmolested through the colony. And at the same time writing facilitated the immobilization of the colonized by finalizing their alienation from mbari land and their subsequent resettlement through a number of unpopular schemes. Writing was the means by which compliance was secured at the final moment, the magical quality which cloaked naked aggression in the disarmingly permanent veil of legal legitimacy. The net effect was spatial exhaustion: in Njoroge's words, "We had nowhere to go." It is no wonder that the young nationalists of the first half of the twentieth century staked their political legitimacy on literacy, the maker and unmaker of self-possessed Kikuyu landowners (Lonsdale 1992). Writing and literacy derived their practical utility at least in part from their symbolic potency, which was itself grounded in the real power of missives, registration documents, census-assessing procedures, and tax forms. I turn now to the appropriation of these bureaucratic state procedures, as well as the powers they embodied, by insurgents in the forest.

EXTERNALIZING LITERARY POWER: THE BUREAUCRATIZATION OF MAU MAU

Mau Mau was, as many have recently argued, "no single thing, but rather a diverse and exceedingly fragmented collection of individual organizations and ideas out of which no dominant conception of Kikuyu national community had emerged" (Berman 1991:199; see also Kershaw 1972, 1997; Cooper 1997:348–60; Lonsdale 1990, 1992, 1994). Yet certain groups and individuals made concerted efforts to centralize Mau Mau, through specific means, including the implementation of standardized bureaucratic rules and procedures. While serving a functional purpose, a reading of any Mau Mau autobiography will also demonstrate a kind of mystical fascination with these objects and with the power of literacy. This feeling was maintained even by those who resented the privileges held by the semi-literate Mau Mau elite and who correctly feared that these individuals were constructing themselves as the mirror images of educated African elites who had refused to enter the forest to fight for *ithaka na wiathi.* The potency that these objects and procedures took on manifested itself in everyday life in what appears to a casual reader as an almost absurd respect for the codes and forms of colonial bureaucracy. This did not escape the notice of the Kikuyu-speaking Kenyan settler, Ian Henderson, head of the Special Branch during the

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Emergency, who stated that, "When Kimathi fled to the Aberdares he took with him a pencil, a notebook, and some carbon paper (Henderson 1958:23)."[14] William Baldwin (1957), an American mercenary recruited to fight Mau Mau, describes a similar occurrence, in which insurgents carrying passes issued by a Mau Mau General argue for clemency from their captors on the grounds that they are "on leave":

> One of the men pulled out a small bit of paper and handed it to Mike. He took it and read: 'The bearers of this pass, Daniel Mugia and Njurage Kuria, are given forty-eight hours leave from duty with the Land Freedom Army' (Baldwin 1957:163).[15]

The mutually imbricated powers of literacy and bureaucracy were not limited to, and sometimes appeared to eclipse, their function. Picture a starving Mau Mau insurgent—cut off from family, fellow forest fighters, and supplies of food, clothes, and weapons—carrying a heavy typewriter on his back through the forest or an "urban guerilla" stealing watches from Nairobi jewelry stores to have something "Mau Mau could use" (Wamweya 1971:57–62) ask, "what is the functional utility of these acts"? The answer, I believe, is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, Mau Mau leaders were attempting to forge a counter-state in the forest which they imagined would serve as a bridge to the production of a post-colonial state. This required the manipulation of space and time (through letter writing, meetings, schedules, and so forth) to transform the forest into a proto-state, a nearly impossible task, considering how difficult it was to organize and control armed (or, more often than not, unarmed) factions in a forest cut off from Nairobi and the African Reserves by large trenches constructed under the auspices of the Kenyan Government. However, literacy and bureaucratic objects were not simply means to this end but also ends in themselves because they symbolized rationalized order, group cohesion, and unity in a social situation where no such cohesion existed. Furthermore, literacy and bureaucracy verified and enhanced personal power (the power of a Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi or a General Secretary Karari Njama) in a social arena where few other validations of authority existed. In this way, the actual implementation of literacy and bureaucracy was somewhat analogous to its use in the colonial arena, where it both controlled and, in some instances, liberated colonized populations. At the same time it contributed to a cosmology which differed radically from what Europeans were trying to teach Africans through literary education: in short, these objects became part of a nationalist theology

[14] Interestingly, a few sentences later Henderson states that Kimathi "welcomed the steady destruction of all links with civilization" (Henderson 1958:24). Evidently, he saw Mau Mau's use of these commodities as in some way magical and not as the precursor of a new rational-political order. As our argument indicates, the truth lies somewhere in between magicality and rationality.

[15] Baldwin relates the conclusion of this episode in his typically macabre fashion: "I addressed the squatting men. 'Do you wish to be shot standing up or sitting down?' The two started to protest vigorously, not moving from their sitting position. 'Down it is,' said Mike—and down it was" (Baldwin 1957:164). Apparently Europeans and Americans did not share insurgents' respect for Mau Mau bureaucratic forms.

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that verified and created an imagined Mau Mau identity linked to control over the physical environment of the forest while promising eventual redemption.[16]

The social implications of literacy and literary-bureaucratic commodities were also paradoxical. On the one hand, the power of these objects, formerly rooted in the colonial arena and used by colonial governments to validate and sacralize their power, was made to constitute and stand for a largely imagined Mau Mau collectivity. Consider, for example, how Njama fuses the "beauty" of the Land Freedom Army with that of its stamp, such that each draws its symbolic potency from the other:

> With the light from the fire, I drafted the long letter, enclosing the patterns for all the records and the necessary explanations. When I finished, I gave it to Kimathi. After reading, he stamped it *Land and Freedom Army.* I was very surprised to see that beautiful stamp (Barnett and Njama 1966:259).

This rubber stamp, as with all the commodities brought into the forest and then stylized to meet specific needs, bore the imprint of Mau Mau in the form of the finalizing authorial stamp of the colonial administrative bureaucracy (see Auslander 1993:185). Yet, on the other hand, the material forms of colonial bureaucracy became physical extensions of personal authority.[17] In this capacity, they served as key symbols of and for hierarchy which drew upon the colonial administration's material and symbolic power. Thus, in recollecting Kimathi's physical appearance, Njama emphasized the "three writing pens [that] were clipped on his top right hand jumper coat pocket, a heap of exercise books in his left hand" (Barnett and Njama 1966:265). Kimathi was also said to carry Napolean's Book of Fates, a Kikuyu Bible, letters, and a diary (Henderson 1958:174), all of which he was rumored to have destroyed prior to his capture. Pens, paper, and record books existed in complementarity with watches (Wamweya 1971:24, 57–62), British army jackets (Gikoyo 1979:54, 76), cameras (Wachanga 1975:117,122; Barnett and Njama 1966:324), radios, and binoculars (Barnett and Njama 1966:332; Henderson 1958:143) as the emblems of political authority. All these commodities found their way into the hands of Mau Mau leaders as "gifts" and became part of their sartorial presentation (Barnett and Njama 1966:384; see also letters to Kimathi from guerillas in Kinyatti 1986).

[16] Mau Mau insurgents often stated that God [Ngai] had set aside the forest for them, creating a refuge with different rules from those which cohered in the world outside. Thus, a horrified Karari Njama paraphrased what he been told by several insurgents whom he identified as *komerera* (see below), who were drinking from an animal watering hole in the forest: "They said that there were no germs or diseases in the forest and that God had blessed everything in the forest to become food to our fighters and that he has allowed the warriors to lift all the taboos (on food)" (Barnett and Njama 1966:316). This attitude scared and offended Mau Mau insurgents like Njama, who wished to socialize and control the forest (and Mau Mau) through the implementation of bureaucratic structures and practices.

[17] In one instance, Njama was addressed as "Doctor" by the illiterate General Stanley Mathenge, whom the semi-literate Kimathi displaced as Field Marshal early in the war (Barnett and Njama 1966:186).

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The deployment of literary-bureaucratic commodities thus consisted in bricolage which at once created the appearance of coherent order and unity (as in the stamp and registration cards and books), and produced stratification and difference. Once entrenched, these objects and practices informed the terms through which insurgents interacted with each other and the outside world. Literacy and bureaucracy allowed Mau Mau to both control the constitution of local space—and the conditions under which outsiders engaged with it—and to extend beyond that space. This became more pronounced and intentional after the *Mwathe* Meeting of August 1953, which marked the formal introduction of a military ranking structure parallel to that of the British army, including the office of General Secretary. It is at this point that we also see the implementation of a standardized system of record keeping (Barnett and Njama 1966:246–7), and a transregional, rather than camp (*mbuci*) specific, set of rules and regulations. After Mwathe, each mbuci was to keep ten sets of books, including a register, a "hymn and song book," a "history book," an "individual loss accounts" book, hospital records, supplies accounts, a daily record of camp activities, and even an incorrigibles file listing enemies and "traitors" (Barnett and Njama 1966:253, 410). Mbuci regulations were equally detailed, having as their primary aim the management of bodily practices and excretia. Camp registers reminiscent of colonial census assessing procedures included each gitungati's name and index number, territorial and geneological origins, and date and manner of entering and leaving the forest. Mau Mau insurgents were obsessed with recording in writing virtually everything that happened to them and sought to establish control over the interpretation of these documents from the beginning, an inclination which informed the introduction of cryptic codes (Barnett and Njama 1966:257).[18] Add to the recorded meetings the system of courts and councils, the "military police" (Gikoyo 1979:57) employed to locate deserters, and the requirement that insurgents carry passes when moving between and beyond mbuci, and one begins to appreciate both the centralizing function and the symbolic power of these objects.

Literary-bureaucratic commodities like record books were "invaluable" (Muriithi 1971:80) because they produced a Mau Mau identity and counter-state which insurgents inscribed on the physical terrain of the forest. Mau Mau wrote this counter-state onto the landscape (for example, in the letter boxes insurgents made out of trees), and in the paths which enabled itungati to coalesce at certain geographic locales.[19] This movement of subjects through space and

[18] The implementation and use of these codes must not have been universal, as the existence of Mau Mau documents by non-Mau Mau translators suggests.

[19] Mau Mau insurgents were constantly on the move, whether searching for food and supplies; delivering messages to Africans in the Reserves, Europeans, and other Mau Mau; or confronting the enemy at any number of sites within or beyond the forest. But consociation—the coming-together of atomized bands of insurgents at events pervaded by the rituals of bureaucracy—was the object of many of these perambulatory migrations. This was especially true for leaders, who spent an inordinate period of time moving about the forest, registering "lost" bands of fighters, assessing

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their congregation at "meetings," themselves permeated with, and constituted by, the material forms of bureaucracy (meeting spaces, officers' quarters, record books, and so forth), comprised the practical creation of a Mau Mau counter state.[20] All of these meetings, and the politicking and infighting that occured in them, were recorded by secretaries in detailed minutes which were then filed in their ubiquitous record books. These artifacts played an active role in inculcating a kind of bureaucratic seriousness, a gravity of intent and purpose at once oriented and validated by meaningful bureaucratic objects. In traveling around the forest, implanting letter boxes in trees, holding meetings, and building camps, insurgents were establishing control over their local space, and thereby creating an identity tied to that space.

In appropriating and redeploying literary-bureaucratic objects and practices, Mau Mau insurgents were putting what they perceived to be their spatial and temporal implications to specific practical use, which is different from arguing that there is something intrinsically permanent about these practices in contradistinction to oral forms of communication. Thus it was possible for the colonized to both resist their being fixed in space-time (the rejection of the kipande, for example) and to embrace this potentiality for specific purposes. Consider, for example, this excerpt of a letter from Dedan Kimathi to the District Commissioner at Nyeri (Kinyatti 1986:59):

> The other way to communicate with me [in addition to contacting his mother] is to organize a special letter box near the liberated territory [the forest] which we could use as a point of contact. However, if your Government wants to write to me directly, my address is:
>
> Field Marshal Sir D. Kimathi (KCAE)
> GMK Ngobo Office
> P.O. Karuri
> Ngamune

Bureaucratic terms and objects ("office," "liberated territory," "P.O Box," "Field Marshal Sir," and an alternative postal system) were used to establish a permanent, separate, and ordered space in the forest that the agents of colonialism were forced to acknowledge and enter into—a domain structurally parallel to that inhabited by colonial administrators. All of this is conveyed in a letter which itself embodies and expresses its content, such that the medium of the letter is the message that it carries.

Literacy also enabled Mau Mau to extend their personalities beyond the

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their physical and mental strength and determination, and instructing them in the esoteric methods of record keeping (Barnett and Njama 1966:275–30).

[20] Meetings were occasions of some consequence, where leaders delivered equally interminable speeches promising certain victory or portending imminent defeat. Here ranks were issued at a dizzying rate, as the number of regular and Brigadier Generals steadily increased and the once FM Dedan Kimathi became in turn the President of the Kenya Parliament and the Prime Minister and Knight Commander of the East African Empire (for the most detailed description see Barnett and Njama 1966:426–55).

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space of the forest. This is clear from the letters that fighters wrote to each other, to the colonial government, and to nations as far afield as England, Tanzania, Uganda, the United States and the Soviet Union (see, for example, Kinyatti's 1986 published volume of Kimathi's letters, as well as Wachanga 1975:66 and Barnett and Njama 1966:350–2, 704). These letters were concealed in specially designated trees throughout the forest which both Mau Mau leaders and British military officers used as depots for communicative purposes throughout the Emergency. Letters to Europeans ranged from polite requests that the latter depart the country to horrific threats of violence, while insurgents received missives containing detailed descriptions of militant actions, as well as complaints about leaders and itungati. Letter writing continued in detention camps, almost leading to the murder of JM Kariuki, whose memoirs are centered on these letters and the awe, respect, and punishments which resulted from their distribution. Kariuki even impressed his warders, who were so "shaken at [his] ability . . . to write such a letter" (1963:136) that they refused to beat him. What circulated in these letters, in addition to their actual written content, was a captured colonial-bureaucratic power that could be possessed by individual subjects who used it to assert and validate their authority.

Not only did Mau Mau bureaucratic objects and procedures permit the rearrangement of space, but they also allowed for the reconfiguration of time, locating insurgents in a present (soon to be past) time so as to establish control over future-time. The permanence that these forms appeared to engender and the aura of power which they conferred upon the colonizers was appropriated, internalized and transformed in a manner prefigured (in an anecdotal sense), by Njama's paper-eating incident. Thus, Kimathi instructed every gitungati to maintain a record of his property losses down to the finest detail in the hope of being compensated after independence, stating that "these documents will be concrete evidence that we fought and died for this land" (Kinyatti 1986:xvii, also 87). Other records, as we have seen, made explicit and permanent the positive or negative contributions of Mau Mau supporters and antagonists (Barnett and Njama on Mathenge 1966:183; Gikoyo 1979:80). According to Kinyatti (1986:xvii), Kimathi's correspondence was later buried in the forest and placed under armed guard.[21] Here we have a concrete, if wholly imaginary, material emblem for a Mau Mau national consciousness—national because it appropriates a sacral form specific to nation states—marking and constituting a space for collective memory in the forest. Mau Mau is inscribed in history, assumes a role in the remaking of historical time and is given a proper place (the forest) which becomes in turn the place of Mau Mau (as opposed to the Kenyan colonial state). There is something overtly religious about this bureaucratized remembrance, as evidenced by the assertion that the deity Ngai had a

[21] Kinyatti claims that this "first national archive" was stolen by the British Army and transported to the Public Records Office in England. However, John Lonsdale has informed me by personal communication that no such documents exist there.

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"big black book" in which were kept the names of national heroes (Henderson 1958:67, 143; see also Gikoyo 1979). Ian Henderson transcribes this prayer to Ngai he heard from a captive.

> You have told us to suffer so that the nine clans of the Kikuyu can be cleansed of all traitors and you have chosen a large red book in which the names of all of us who die will be written, for they will be more important than those who remain alive (Henderson 1958:67).

This concern with recorded memory had certain practical foundations, as many Mau Mau insurgents clearly expected rewards (generally in the form of government jobs) in exchange for their "self-imposed" hardships after independence and debated over how these just compensations should be distributed.[22] The fight for ithaka na wiathi, land and independence or self-reliance, implied a deserved return, a payback that would never come to fruition, but that continues to inform the politics of contemporary Kenya.

Mau Mau's use of literacy was also rhetorical. If it divided leaders from the rank and file, it also provided the terms through which Mau Mau could distinguish itself from the shiftless, insane marauders that the colonial administration claimed Mau Mau to be. Thus, in reproducing the forms of the colonial administrative bureaucracy, Mau Mau insurgents defined themselves for and against their fellow forest-dwelling antitheses, the *komerera,*[23] said by Mau Mau to be isolated bands of criminals and thugs who had come to hide, rather than fight, in the forest. Mau Mau leaders were highly concerned with registering, controlling, and distinguishing themselves from these unsocialized, amoral "others." The utility of writing and bureaucracy in this instance was both material (because it allowed Mau Mau to register "lost" bands of fighters) and symbolic (because it stood for a kind of ordered modernity). At the same time, it provided Mau Mau insurgents with a ritually useful marker for the creation of a coherent quasi-national identity, which they constructed by defining themselves against the uncivilized and illiterate komerera. The line which separated Mau Mau from komerera was actually fluid and contested, as groups of fighters often accused other individuals and groups of being like those who "eat the filth and garbage and the flesh of dead things" (Kariuki 1963:139). During the split between the Kenya Parliament and Kenya Riigi (see below), the boundary separating Mau Mau from these pariah was again rewritten, and members of both sides were accused of "falling into" the komerera way of being.

In short, records and rule books, written histories, letters, pens, passes, stamps, typewriters, organizational meetings, minutes, secretaries, courts, fines

[22] See Kershaw (1997) and Leakey (1954), plus Baldwin (1957).

[23] *Komerera* either stole food from supporters of the movement—or from peasants' fields—or subsisted off the wild produce in the forest. Concerned only with feeding themselves and without a care for where food came from, these recidivists chose not to reproduce themselves by taking from the enemy's property, the generative substance of his power (Wachanga 1975:38; see also Gikoyo 1979:60). Komerera represented the less-than-human portents of what Mau Mau could become in the absence of a strictly enforced code of conduct, and many generals voiced this concern.

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were all the very stuff of disciplined combat, the appropriated colonial stuff that made Mau Mau a nationalist army rather than a rabble of komerera mobsters. The possession of bureaucratic commodities was proof that insurgents were worthy of independence because, unlike komerera, they were initiated into the secret mysteries of colonial power. Mau Mau often boasted about the concealed ubiquity of their followers, that they had "penetrated" to the very heart of the colonial government, Gikoyo going so far as to claim that "Mau Mau was everywhere and could do whatever it wanted (Gikoyo 1979:37)." This ability to open up and demystify colonialism's insides, to encompass its secrets and to selectively appropriate and reconfigure them, was seen by Mau Mau to be their chief strength, as is implied by the following prayer:

> We pray you to shower on us courage in our hearts . . . because we are fighting against a people with powerful weapons which, through your grace, you will pass into our hands and bless them that they may not be retaken (Gikoyo 1979:57)

This can be read as a commentary on the on-going appropriative practice that characterized the Mau Mau's relationship to the erstwhile material emblems of colonial domination. The artifacts are appropriated and deployed against the colonizers, dialectically transforming the objects as well as the subjects who use them. This is structurally analogous to Njama's consumption of paper, since both are dialectical acts of appropriation (internalization) and use (externalization).

In sum, I have described a specific mode of agency and subject formation by which persons and collectivities appropriated potent, formerly alien (and alienating) commodity artifacts, reconfiguring the objects as they transformed themselves through them. Njama's paper-eating incident is a single metaphor for a process that was going on all the time: a dialectic of embodiment and deployment that transformed individuals and collectivities and, in turn, their interactions. In short, Mau Mau was making the future through literacy and the ritualized appropriation of literary commodities. This realized itself in the proliferation of literary-bureaucratic forms which embodied and oriented Mau Mau's directionality, including its emergent internal conflicts and divisions. Although perhaps not an inherently rationalizing or determinative force in world history, literacy was iconic of political potency in the colonial arena, being both the sine qua non for entry into the emergent African elite of teachers, theologians, businessmen,and other professionals and an instrument of political violence immanent in the forms of bureaucratic representation and reification. The fetishized potency of literacy was expressive of its actual significance in the colonial sphere, where it was associated with spatial and social distantiation and encompassment. While serving as the principal mode of entry into the elite, its power was ambivalent because it also distanced young men (both materially and symbolically) from their homes in the rural areas. Furthermore, writing and literacy were crucial to the exercise of colonial power which, enunciated from

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a distant place, came to invest itself upon localities and subjectivities. As we have seen, Mau Mau recreated within itself the larger social division (literate vs. illiterate) that split the colony's African population, institutionalizing it in such bureaucratic forms as record books and ranking structures based in part on educational credentials. Though at first a poached colonial power, during the struggle for ithaka na wiathi, literacy became both the principal site of internal contestation and division and an organizing trope for a whole range of related political issues. This emergent conflict culminated in a factional split among the forest fighters which became fully articulated sometime in late 1954 or early 1955.

THE REVOLT OF THE ILLITERATE: LITERACY RECONSIDERED

In February 1954, Kimathi and his immediate followers began referring to themselves as the Kenya Parliament (KP), a political body of twelve members, the majority having received at least some formal education (Barnett and Njama 1966:329). Kimathi was given the honorific title Knight Commander of the East African Empire (more evidence of the recombinative play of Mau Mau appropriative practice) and, in a ceremonial rite de passage, was promoted to the rank of elder, relinquishing his military accoutrements to the new Field Marshal, Macaria Kimemia (Barnett and Njama 1966:439). The Parliament's critics fell under the leadership of the illiterate Stanley Mathenge, a former Mau Mau Field Marshal who had been succeeded in 1953 by the semi-literate Dedan Kimathi and who had since been the sole forest leader to refuse commissioned rank (Lonsdale 1994:40). At some point in late 1954, the latter group formed the Kenya Riigi (KR), through which they articulated their opposition to the KP and challenged the political and moral legitimacy of the literate leaders. Although no explicit explanation of the appelation was ever published, *riigi* refers to the doors which enclose and protect a domestic household (Benson 1964; Lonsdale 1994:40). According to Lonsdale, the term expressed an axiomatic Kikuyu moral-political principle enunciated in the proverb that "nobody else can close the door of another man's hut" (Barra 1960: no. 782, in Lonsdale 1994:40), which was later appropriated by Jomo Kenyatta as a declaration of resistance to colonial rule. But here, again, the term implied rejection of the odious political leadership of the centralized Kenya Parliament and its semi-literate ministers.

Paradoxically, the KP-KR debate often did not appear to be about literacy at all, yet that category was forever recurrent in the rhetoric of both sides. For one, it is difficult to locate individuals within the debate according to their educational status and, although the Ministers in the KP had received some primary education, most KP supporters were illiterate. On the other hand, the KR leader Wachanga was among the three most educated people in Mau Mau. In reality, the debate was about the illegitimate deployment of authority, a charge that was directed at forest leaders even by the very literate. Mohamed Mathu, for ex-

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ample, one of the most educated men in the forest, was critical of power relations within the movement and deplored what eventually became of the struggle for ithaka na wiathi, lamenting that "the masses of people" had "become the slaves of a handful of black men" (Mathu 1974:87). Even Karari Njama, one of Kimathi's chief supporters, eventually dissociated himself from him to protest the latter's increasing authoritarianism. Thus, underneath the heading of a conflict between literacy and illiteracy (for both groups saw literacy as the fundamental moral and political divider), fell a debate concerning the limits of political authority and the implications of political organization, the merits of a national politics and identity, and the contemporary relevance and efficacy of what were deemed by both sides to be "traditional" cultural practices (see Barnett and Njama 1966; and Lonsdale 1990, 1992, and 1994 on political authority and Barnett and Njama 1966 and Lonsdale 1994 on territoriality and "traditionalism").

To understand the iconicity of literacy—its ability to stand for a range of disparate concerns—we must first consider its specific distantiating capacities. Literacy enabled writing, which was the conduit for the expression of power from a distance in such bureaucratic forms and procedures as laws, letters, tax forms, schools, and census-assessing procedures. Literacy was political, and its potency appeared to emanate from a center whose power was physically embodied in the written materials themselves. Recall here Karari Njama's statement that literacy enabled one to "repeat exactly the words said by another at a distant place," as well as Njoroge's comment about influencing the colonial administration (a locus of power in every way distant from and simultaneously near to colonized Africans) with a letter. Earlier in the movement, Mau Mau appropriated this power, internalizing and embodying literary-bureaucratic objects and the potencies and contradictions resident in them in a plethora of structures and practices ranging from letters, passes, and record books to bureaucratized ranking structures parallel to those of the British army. The specific complaints that Riigi members levelled at literate leaders concerned the fact that they exercised their power from a distance at once spatial and social. This political capability was enabled by such literary artifacts as letters and records books which contained information and instructions for subjects alienated from the privileges of high rank. Literary power allowed KP leaders to extend their authority over geographical space (letters and centralizing rules and courts) and historical time (the fixing of identities, events, and histories in record books). Thus, the alienation of leaders from their itungati was inextricably linked to the specific distantiating qualities of literacy and the bureaucratic forms which embodied its potency.

Spatial and social distantiation was central to the creation of a bureaucratized social structure in the forest. This was evident in such daily practices as eating, since leaders enclosed themselves in "officers' quarters," alienating themselves from other itungati. Riigi protested that leaders ate separately from everyone

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else, that they were the first to eat, and that they had access to the choicest selection of food. Recall here our earlier discussion concerning the politics of consumption, eating being metaphoric of a process of inclusion which at once united the eater with those with whom she or he ate, with the thing eaten, and with its socio-symbolic origins and accessories. Eating was social production of a particular sort, and collective eating signified the inclusion of the consuming subjects into a shared community which was also the site of an emerging political potency. Stratified eating indicated an unequal flow of privileges and actualized the elite's self valorization, which was itself inextricable from the secret power of literacy, irregardless of whether the latter quality was ever possessed by individual leaders. Conflicts over the distribution of food were common in the forest (Barnett and Njama 1966:256; Gikoyo 1979:25, 99), and KR leaders enhanced their popularity and grass-roots appeal by referencing the symbolic potency of eating: As the very popular General Kago said, "Under me there will be no officers or servicemen where rations are concerned. We are all fighters and we shall eat from the same pot" (Gikoyo 1975:112).[24] "We are all fighters" was a denunciation of the explicit differentiation of the two categories in KP rhetoric.

The educated had, in the words of General Kimbo, "dissociated themselves from the revolution when it became red hot" (Kimbo in Barnett and Njama 1966:401, see also 297, 299, 406, 471; and Mathu 1974:17, 83; Muchai 1973:60; Wachanga 1975:54; Lonsdale 1992:44), a comment which suggests both the distantiating capacities of writing (the fact that it enabled powerful persons to control others from a distance) and the related political alienation of African elites, whose mastery of literacy enabled them to distance themselves from the "masses of people," as Mathu had declared. In the beginning of the struggle, this was institutionalized in mbuci architecture, since leaders lived and ate in separate quarters. Later, when constant strafing and steady marginalization made mobility essential, itungati slept in circles around their leaders, constituting in sleep an orbiting coterie around a powerful center (Muriithi 1971:6). This informed General Kahiu-Ituna's critique of the educated leaders, who treated the uneducated like, "stone walls which protected the educated members to carry on their plans and possibly to build on their future" (Barnett and Njama 1966:397). Similarly, the illiterate Gikoyo challenged leaders for presuming to "establish their own rules," reminding them that everything the movement did required the endorsement of "Mau Mau public opinion" (Barnett and Njama 1966:112). Note here that the power of the literate elite, enabled by literary forms and procedures, is associated with the secret deployment of power. For if literacy was a weapon, it could be deployed by ruthless people for their own ends (see also Bastian 1993). The literate were, in this view, a men-

[24] Apparently, warriors had previously divided meat according to performative criteria (that is, conduct in battle), a fact which gave extra credence to the Riigi's cause (Leakey 1977:1054–5; Kenyatta 1965:199).

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ace to Mau Mau (and, ultimately, Kenyan) society. Semi-literate forest leaders resembled, in more ways than one, the Europeans Mau Mau were ousting, since they possessed an esoteric (secret) power which enabled them to produce nothing while simultaneously reaping the surplus of others' labor (ideally, independence, but in more immediate terms, food and other privileges).

One correlate of the distinguishing capacities of literary power was that literacy enabled those who had mastered its potency to enter into a heterogeneous world community of literate readers, a fact which exacerbated their social alienation from most Africans. In a letter to General Erskine, Kimathi boasted (inaccurately, I presume) of traveling to Palestine to meet with foreign dignitaries (Kinyatti 1986:57) and, prior to his capture, Karari Njama was planning on making a trip to Ethiopia to acquire weapons from Haile Selassie (Barnett and Njama 1966:23, 39, 359, 486). Literacy was thus associated with spatial encompassment (the ability to write letters to diverse places all over the world and exercise power from a distance) and the transcendence of locality, while illiteracy was associated (at least for literate leaders) with the gross materiality of the body and the parochial interests and demands of marginalized locality. The Riigi's emphasis on regionalism was, for Parliament leaders, metaphoric of its atavistic and non-nationalist character. Again, quoting Kimathi,

> They only seek the freedom of their region, not the total liberation of Kenya and Africa. . . . They love chieftainship but not work. Let us not be misled by primitive people who hide under trees because they are afraid of fighting (Kinyatti 1986:113).

The literate General Secretary Karari Njama said similarly that "Kimathi stood for Kenya's revolution" while the Riigi "stood for tribal tradition and custom" (Barnett and Njama 1966:413). Kimathi invoked the discourse of literate knowledge and illiterate ignorance in labelling the generals who formed the Riigi "backward" and "primitive": They were ignorant of the spatial magnitude and historical significance of the struggle, an understanding made and marked by literacy and education. In his words, "They do not know where Mombasa or Rudolf is, nor do they know the way from the Cape to Cairo" (Kinyatti 1986:113).

If literacy enabled its possessors to transcend everyday space and encompass global space, then illiteracy relegated subjects to marginal localities. The illiterate were physically and mentally imprisoned in and by their peripheral milieu, a condition which was metaphorically conceived as a kind of bodily entrapment.[25] While the literate could see beyond local space, the illiterate were fully enmired in it; thus, a post-colonial government operated and controlled by

[25] It seems probable that an alternative conception of bodily practice was being articulated by the forest elite when they castigated the Riigi, komerera, and various "backward" tribes for their sensual self-involvement. In the practical bodily cosmology we described earlier, the body was open to and enabled by the external world, while here the body is hampered by and must therefore transcend its immediate social and physical milieu. The body is privatized and its links with the natural and social environment severed, a vision that perhaps expressed the emergent elite's desire to transcend the limitations of ruralized locality (including, for example, kinship obligations).

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the illiterate (as Kahiu-Itruna had suggested to Njama in Barnett and Njama 1966:398) would be a perverse inversion of the natural order, "like the blind leading one with eyes," as Njama disparagingly commented. The illiterate were incomplete, like children. JM Kariuki (1963) made explicit the link between illiteracy and childhood when he lamented having to leave one detention camp, since he hated to abandon his illiterate comrades there like "orphans." Education could rectify this child-like condition, enabling subjects to become fully self-conscious and agentive adults. Thus, General Kamwamba suggested that Mau Mau establish school for those "backward," illiterate tribes whose condition made them incapable of imagining a world beyond the sensorily perceived; in his words, "all they can understand are the things they can see, touch, or feel (Barnett and Njama 1966:280)."[26]

The Parliament-Riigi split, though it ostensibly divided the literate from the illiterate, actually operated on a number of different registers only tangentially related to literacy. Although not intrinsically determinative, writing and literacy did have specific semantic implications expressive of the representational powers with which they were associated in the colonial context. Literacy and writing became, at a specific cultural-historical moment, iconic of certain social and political powers (such as the expression of governmental power from a distance) whose legitimacy was contested by different social groups. In the end, literacy stood for and oriented a social and political condition that was also a way of moving toward this condition. This aspect of the argument is directed at universalizing approaches to literacy (Goody 1968, 1977, 1986, 1987; Ong 1987) which view its attainment by persons and societies as a foundational and determinative element of the dynamic of history, rather than as a signifying practice. The iconicity of literacy was due to the structural logic of social relations in colonial Kenya (such as the fact that literacy was associated with "development" against backwardness and the socioeconomic division of the literate from the illiterate, both in the urban work space and in the rural areas), a logic which was recreated in the forest. The material emblems of literacy and bureaucracy were good for Mau Mau to think and create with, whether for purposes of consolidation (as was the goal of KP leaders) or dispersion.

CONCLUSION

This essay has described a practical cosmology of appropriative internalization and generative externalization operationalized in Mau Mau's use of literary

[26] If the forest elite criticized the illiterate for their entrapment in local space, the Riigi positively valorized this orientation, and scorned the literate elite's "abandonment" of both the struggle and the illiterate itungati. The Riigi chided Kenya Parliament Ministers for forgetting that "home is the starting point" (Mathenge in Barnett and Njama 1966:396), that political authority must be responsive to and responsible for its regional roots. As Lonsdale (1994:43) has pointed out, Mathenge criticized Njama for having obtained such a high position within the Mau Mau bureaucracy, since it had alienated him from the spatially immediate soldiers and people of his district, a district he shared with Mathenge (see Barnett and Njama 1966:394–6).

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commodities. Mau Mau insurgents metamorphasized themselves and their social relationships through the adoption of such potent literary artifacts as record books, writing implements, stamps, and typewriters (as well as uniforms, honorific titles, and organizational structures) while in the process transforming those signifying instruments by implanting them in new social-historical terrain. Mau Mau insurgents transformed literary power, as well as the world in which it was invested, by mimetically reproducing it in ways and in places unintended by its original purveyors (see Appadurai 1986). As the Comaroffs have written in a different context, this appropriation represented an attempt to "capture and redeploy the colonialist's ability to produce value" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:32), for writing was, for Europeans and Africans alike, all about the production of symbolic and material value.

I stress that this ambivalent potency was at work in the everyday life of the colony. The powers of literacy and writing (and the bureaucratic forms with which they were invested) were lived daily, and Africans confronted them not only at such focal sites as schools, courthouses, hospitals, police stations, prisons, and the workplace (spaces where documentary records and procedures for subject identification were particularly salient) but in such quotidian activities as letter writing and newspaper reading as well. Literary potency was a social fact and, in embodying it, Mau Mau insurgents were assuming control and mastery over a constitutive element of the colonial arena. Yet, as the discussion of the Kenya Riigi has shown, it was continually challenged by motivated agents who constructed alternative interpretations and counter-implementations. The power of literacy was not uncontested but open-ended: Its ambivalence was a symbolic refraction of the larger social division (literate versus illiterate) which split that colony's African population.

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