

neither of them accurate, for a children's book on which Achebe and Okigbo collaborated.

These minor hesitations do not detract, however, from the conclusion that *Achebe and Friends at Umuahia* is both an achievement of historical reconstruction and a welcome intervention in literary studies. It will undoubtedly prove generative for scholars not only of Nigerian history or literature but also of education in Africa, colonial institutions, intellectual coteries and literary biography.

NATHAN SUHR-SYTSMA
Emory University
nathan.e.suhr-sytsma@emory.edu
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LAURA LEE P. HUTTENBACH, *The Boy is Gone: conversations with a Mau Mau general*. Athens OH: Ohio University Press (hb \$75 – 978 0 89680 290 2; pb \$28.95 – 978 0 89680 291 9). 2015, 252 pp.

Laura Lee P. Huttenbach's book is the latest addition to the literature on the Mau Mau Rebellion, an episode in African history that has been widely explored through memoirs and academic research. A number of recent developments have reignited scholarly and popular interest in the Mau Mau, most notably the release of over 1,500 documents on the Rebellion from the Hanslope Park archive in the United Kingdom beginning in 2011. Secretly moved to Britain prior to Kenyan independence in 1963, these papers detail the extent and nature of British brutality during this time. They formed the linchpin of a legal case between Kenyan claimants detained during the Rebellion and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The case ended with a settlement in the Kenyans' favour in 2013, and garnered significant attention in the British, Kenyan and international press.

Huttenbach's book is emblematic of the widening scope of interest in the Mau Mau beyond an academic audience. While backpacking in East Africa in 2006, she met Japhlet Thambu, a tea farmer and former Mau Mau general. Through a series of conversations, Huttenbach came to learn about his fascinating life and decided to share it. *The Boy is Gone: conversations with a Mau Mau general* is Japhlet's story. Huttenbach's voice is confined to the introduction, as Japhlet takes us through the trajectory of his life, including his childhood, education at a mission school, teaching career, involvement in the Rebellion, and finally his work as a tea farmer and cooperative leader in independent Kenya.

The majority of the book focuses on Japhlet's experience during the Mau Mau years. For a reader familiar with the Rebellion, Japhlet's account brings the period to life beyond facts and figures. He shares details about the lives of Mau Mau fighters in the forest, such as the ban on wearing shoes to avoid detection by the enemy, and the punishments meted out for transgressing Mau Mau rules. He gives considerable attention and praise to women's contributions to the Rebellion, an element that is often neglected in Mau Mau memoirs. Japhlet also provides a sense of the impact of the conflict on civilians, evident in his own family's experience: his home was destroyed, and his wife, children, parents and siblings all faced various forms of imprisonment or detention for their support of the Mau Mau.

One of the most profound aspects of Japhlet's narrative is his attention to the complexities and ambiguities of this conflict. He shows some sympathy towards the Kenyan Home Guards who fought on the government side, commenting:

'They don't know why they're killing us.' He also recounts the internal debates among the Mau Mau on issues such as the killing of loyalist women and children, as well as the decision to surrender in the face of imminent defeat and extreme hardship. His story illuminates the challenging choices that Kenyans faced, rather than offering reductive narratives of good and evil. Ultimately, the book's emphasis on the personal dimensions of the conflict broadens our understanding of this period beyond the brutality and violence that it is so well known for.

Although Huttenbach provides a cogent and compelling rendering of Japhlet's life, making an admirable effort to honour his voice, the introduction lacks a critical discussion of the limitations and strengths of oral history. While a lengthy methodological section would have been out of keeping with the tone of the book, some reflection on the methods would have been useful. Japhlet provides a detailed and often moving account of his experience during the Rebellion, but as an individual recollection it is necessarily personal and partial. The focus on this 'personal story' is the book's main strength, but Huttenbach misses an opportunity to discuss the merits of oral histories. An examination of the processes, pitfalls and opportunities in oral history research would have been a valuable addition, especially given that Huttenbach has been involved in professional oral history associations and is the founder of an oral history project.

The book is somewhat limited by its parochial tone. Huttenbach frames her discussion of the Rebellion in relation to the American Civil War. She uses words such as 'turncoats', lacking the sensitivity and complexity that Japhlet brings to the subject of loyalists. Although Japhlet draws connections between the two conflicts himself, Huttenbach and her editors overemphasize this point, ending the preface by remarking how Japhlet 'brings the Kenyan experience to bear on US history'. Although there is merit in exploring the Mau Mau's broader relevance, this narrow focus on an American readership neglects the wider significance of this important story.

Despite these limitations, *The Boy is Gone* provides a compelling and accessible narrative that offers valuable insight into the lived experiences of the Mau Mau Rebellion. It is a nuanced reflection on an intense and important chapter in Kenya's past, humanized through the lens of an individual life. The book would be a worthy addition to undergraduate reading lists in African history, and offers scholars familiar with the topic an engaging and informative oral history account.

KATHERINE BRUCE-LOCKHART

University of Cambridge

kdb29@cam.ac.uk

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BARBARA MEIER and ARNE S. STEINFORTH, editors, *Spirits in Politics: uncertainties of power and healing in African societies*. Frankfurt and New York NY: Campus Verlag (pb \$49 – 978 3 59339 915 7). 2013, 265 pp.

This fascinating volume renders visible the public and political roles of the polymorphous invisible agents that transcend African states and religious affiliations. Some of these spirits are remnants of once-visible bodies, as in John M. Combey's chapter on the changing political roles of ancestors manifested in *Poro* societies through Sierra Leonean history, and in Victor Igreja and Limore Racin's chapter on the post-war social agency of dead Mozambican soldiers. Other