

## MAU MAU AND POPULAR MEMORY IN KENYA

*Dedan Kimathi on Trial: Colonial Justice and Popular Memory in Kenya's Mau Mau Rebellion.*

Edited by Julie MacArthur.

Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2017. Pp. 432. \$34.95, paperback (ISBN 978-0-89680-317-6); \$90.00, hardcover (978-0-89680-316-9).

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**KEY WORDS:** Kenya, East Africa, courts, decolonization, law, memory, nationalism.

While some critics may question the publication of another book on Mau Mau as opposed to other issues in Kenyan history, this excellent volume is particularly timely. It not only provides an account of Dedan Kimathi's 1956 trial based upon actual court records, but the theme of popular memory lies at the heart of much historical discourse in present-day Kenya. Editor MacArthur has done outstanding work in providing readers with a detailed look at the trial and colonial justice through retrieving the trial transcripts from archives in Kenya and Britain, by penning a valuable Introduction on Kimathi himself, and by putting together a book which goes beyond the courtroom to delve into varied themes and interpretations of the background, meanings, and legacy of Kimathi and the trial.

The book takes the reader through the story of the discovery of the trial records, the trial itself, and the appeals process that followed Kimathi's conviction and death sentence — a narrative driven by primary sources, including letters written by Kimathi as well as court records. The rush to put a wounded Kimathi on trial, the records of the trial itself, and the Court of Appeals for Eastern Africa's summary dismissal of the appeal without a hearing all point to injustice.

The book also includes penetrating and provocative chapters from Kenya specialists, including a Foreword by Michere Mugo and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a chapter on the trial in the context of colonial justice in Kenya by David Anderson, and John Lonsdale's discussion 'Mau Mau debates on trial'. The remaining three chapters by Nicholas Githuku, Simon Gikandi, and Lotte Hughes provide readers with the 'symbolic figure' of Kimathi, the continued significance of the trial, and the role of Kimathi himself as a heroic resistance leader. These raise significant issues related to popular memory in Kenya's past and present, such as who Kimathi really was as scholars seek to navigate through his writings, colonial propaganda, popular memory, and the 'forgive and forget' message encouraged by Kenya's first president.

Although the book was first published in the United States, it is hoped that it will be made available to readers in Kenya at a reasonable price. It will be of interest to a Kenyan public grappling with the circumstances of their motherland divided by ethnic, class, and religious divisions that fuel the politics of exclusion. The report of the Building Bridges Initiative points to the need for 'an official and inclusive history' with experts codifying 'an official pantheon of Kenyan heroes', individuals who reflected Kenya's 'fight for democracy and freedom'.<sup>1</sup> The accounts presented suggest that

<sup>1</sup> Government of Kenya, Steering Committee on the Implementation of the Building Bridges to a United Kenya Taskforce Report, *Building Bridges to a United Kenya: From a Nation of Blood Ties to a Nation of Ideals* (Nairobi, 2020), 100, 102.

Kimathi would be considered such a hero, as his letter of 20 October 1954 (reproduced in the book) shows him to have been an advocate of an inclusive political and social order in contrast to the Kenya within which he lived and died. The chapters by Hughes, Gikandi, and Githuku have much to contribute to this process.

Yet another reason why the book will be of interest and value to a contemporary Kenyan audience is the reliance on primary sources from the trial and the solid grounding of all contributors in such sources as well as an impressive range of secondary works. One has only to recall an article in Kenya's largest circulation daily, available internationally via the internet, in February 2019 to recognize the care that must be taken in producing inclusive history. The article, marking the anniversary of Kimathi's execution, asserted, on the basis of an account of a former colonial official, that Kimathi's death sentence was not carried out at Nairobi's Kamiti Prison but right outside the courthouse where he was tried! Fortunately, the book under review avoids this kind of popular memory in making significant contributions to our understanding of the place of the trial of Dedan Kimathi in Kenya's history.

It is highly recommended as an impressive addition to studies of Mau Mau and Kimathi. Only a few errors caught this reviewer's eye. Map One, purporting to show Kenya in 1956, does not do so with regard to the extent of the White Highlands or Rift Valley Province. Kimathi Street in Nairobi was previously Hardinge Street (not Hardage Street), and Mama Ngina Street was once called Queensway (not Queen's Street). As noted above, the book makes contributions to scholarship and should play a role in discourse within Kenya relating to national heroes and popular memory.

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## **NIGERIA AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

*Nigeria and World War II: Colonialism, Empire, and Global Conflict.*

By Chima J. Korieh.

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**KEY WORDS:** Nigeria, West Africa, war, decolonization, citizenship, intellectual, labour.

Chima Korieh's new book provides rich and compelling insights into the role played by ordinary Africans in the Second World War. Addressing a silence in the historiography, Korieh provides a broad view of Nigerians' contribution to the war effort, what they sacrificed, how they mobilized, and the changes the war brought upon society. To date, the role of African societies in the war has been consistently undervalued by historians, and their active engagement with the conflict has not been sufficiently acknowledged. By examining new sources, including hundreds of petitions written by Nigerians to the colonial administration during the war, Korieh is able to shed new light on the concerns, interpretations, and demands of Nigerians in the context of global turmoil. Korieh provides