

European and African Encounters in Colonial Kenya's 'Aristocratic Households': Exploring Domesticity from Settlement to Mau Mau

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Abstract

This paper examines transformations in the cultural realm that occurred as Kenya's pioneer white settlers in the Rift Valley and the abutting White Highlands interacted with African squatter communities on their estates and individual servants in their households. In spite of the supposed racial divide between black and white and the prevailing reductive logic which strived to essentialise tribal traits during the formative days of colonial rule ethnic and racial groupings were open networks because of the permeability of their cultural boundaries. Though Europeans and Africans occupied unequal power positions they exchanged ideas and traditions, deliberately and inadvertently, through everyday interactions as employers and employees and landowners and squatters. These encounters unravelled a complex cultural economy which entailed modifications of social practices and identities. The paper examines these alternative experiences to the Manichean conceptions of colonial encounters which view colonial societies through the rigid social grammar of racial and ethnic difference. The paper also shifts attention from mainstream discourses on domesticity in Africa that focus on "womanhood" and "housewifisation" to the experiences of African male servants, and to a limited extent boys, that served European employers in the most intimate of contexts such as households. Considering that these African-European encounters happened in the minutiae of colonial spaces, I argue, it was difficult to maintain the expected separation between whites and blacks in such an intractable web of dependency and entanglements.

Key Words: Domesticity, Encounters, Pioneer White Settlers, Africans, Kenyan Highlands.

Introduction

Starting from 1902 Kenya's colonial government strongly promoted European settlement into the fertile and ecologically rich Rift Valley and the abutting Highlands¹ which some whites conceitedly defined as 'absolutely unoccupied' (Cranworth 1939, 254). Response to these encouragements was so high such that by 1906 the colony boasted of more than six hundred settler farmers (Anderson 2000: 461). Kenya's main attractions to fortune seekers were cheap labour, fertile soils, fine weather patterns, and rich faunal assemblages ideal for the best safaris. Besides the desire to expand British imperial influence, Kenyan settlement and production was imperative in order to make the colony self sustaining and to boost rail freight and ultimately recoup costs for the construction of the Uganda Railway (Cranworth: 254).

In Kenya, white settlers also saw the possibility of leading “the kind of life that was becoming impossible for most people in Europe.”² They could hunt without limit, keep polo ponies, maintain private golf courses, and were the only people “permitted to own land in the White Highlands.”³ In spite of diverse social backgrounds these settlers were “colorfully imbued with the aristocratic notions of honor, fatalism, and daring” and the society they invented was a “semi feudal world, simultaneously raffish and posh, rough and luxurious.”⁴

This paper focuses on transformations in the cultural realm that occurred as white settlers in Kenya interacted with African squatter communities on their estates and individual male servants in their households. In the White Highlands and the Rift Valley, as was the case in much of colonial Africa, prevailing social lore aimed to affirm racial difference. The colonial state also buttressed this by policing race-class boundaries through racialising spatial occupation, dress codes, and criminalizing interracial social and sexual liaisons (Stoler 1991; Pels 1997). In the public sphere whites made every effort to separate, subordinate and oppress blacks. Thurnwald (1935:45) noted that,

...in many cases the native finds himself degraded to a tool. Europeans live in Africa sometimes for decades without arriving at any human relation with a native, without knowing anything about their life, customs, and manners, except what they experience with an abstract boy in the office. Their contact and influence upon the native’s mind is, of course, restricted to a kind of impersonal force.

However, encounters in the sheltered and intimate domestic spheres were somewhat different from Thurnwald’s observations because the relationships between white employers and black employees were not as detached as they were supposed to be in the public sphere. Since the settlers, squatters and domestic servants shared the same social and physical spaces cultural syncretism was inevitable. Both whites and Africans were conscious cultural actors who had some agency in shaping and influencing the colonial domestic values.

African male servants, and to a limited extent young boys, served European employers in the most intimate of contexts, they cooked and served their meals, did their laundry, made their beds, and at times baby sat white kids (Kennedy 1987: 152-153). Considering that these European-African encounters happened in the minutiae of colonial spaces it was difficult to maintain the expected separation between the colonisers and colonised in such an intractable web of dependency and social entanglements.

In fact, in spite of the racial binaries between black and white and the popularity of essentialized ideals of tribal traits and ossified traditions Kenya’s White Highlands and the Rift Valley, I argue, were cultural melting pots. Colonial ethnic and racial groups were open networks because of the permeability of their cultural boundaries. Asymmetry of power relations between servants and employees notwithstanding domestic service was an open door institution from which inmates had several exists and employers and employees mutually influenced each other (Hansen 1989 and 1992; Callaway 1987; Walker 1990). Colonial Kenyan society was made up of many communities, or partial societies that mutually influenced each other

(Shaw 1995) where both whites and Africans became cultural brokers. The cultural synergies that took place in the White Highlands between whites and blacks disrupt the Manichean conceptions of colonialism which view colonial societies through the rigid social grammar of racial and ethnic difference. Hybridity and variation were the major outcomes of interactions between the colonisers and the colonised (Stoler and Cooper, 1997: 9; Arjun 1988: 16-20). Both whites and blacks were active agents in the cultural ordering of the colonial world.

This desktop study is based on the writings by people who settled in and visited Kenya in the first half of the twentieth century. These include memoirists such as Lord and Lady Cranworth, Elspeth Huxley, Roderick Cameron, Osa Johnson, and Isak Dinesen (the Danish novelist, Baroness Karen Blixen). Newspapers and colonial annual administration reports were also consulted. The paper does not directly capture African perspectives, their attitudes and actions are partially refracted through the writings of colonial officials and European writers in their diaries, autobiographies, biographies, travelogues and various types of official communication. The study intends to show colonial cultural entanglements through the racialised lens of white settlers' perceptions. It also reconceptualises linear understandings of domesticity in Africa which has largely been synonymous with private feminized spaces of womanhood, childrearing, cooking and cleaning (Gaitskell 1983; Cock 1990; Walker 1990; Strobel 1991; Roberstson and Chaudhuri 2003; and Adams 2006) by shifting the analytical gaze to African men as domestics in European households in the formative days of colonial rule in Kenya.

In temporal terms, this study focuses more on the settlement period to the late 1940s because during this epoch colonialism had a hegemonic sway in Kenya, Europeans gave orders and to a large extent Africans followed them. In the 1950s the situation took a radical turn with the emergence of the Mau Mau 'insurgency'. Suddenly the 'fine', if not presumably 'naïve', Kikuyu domestics and squatters became deadly schemers and potential murderers⁵ and a completely new environment of racial tensions emerged.

The unfolding narrative is divided into three sections. The first section interrogates the settlers' class and nationality composition and then proceeds to highlight the cultural changes and synergies that took place in the Highlands and the Rift Valley as a result of encounters between European farmers and the dispossessed Africans. Cultural change and borrowings entailed the adoption of Christianity and western education by the Kikuyus and the development of a *lingua franca* with words borrowed from English, Swahili, Gikuyu and other languages. Among the words that invariably appear in the memoirs by writers like Lord Cranworth, Isak Dinesen and Elspeth Huxley are *manyattas* (squatter villages), *Bwana* (boss), *Memsahib* (madam) and *dog-totos* (dog keepers). However, in this section the paper largely focuses on the transformation of Kikuyu Kiamas (elders' councils) and *ngomas* (ritual dances). These were vital cultural institutions among the Kikuyu's because they governed their tempo of life. *Kiamas* settled land disputes and *ngomas* were expressions of successful circumcision and bountiful harvests.

The following section then grapples with servant-employer encounters in the Rift Valley and the Kenyan Highlands. Besides showing that class affiliations of white employers had a bearing on worker treatment the paper also shows change over time in terms of the ethnic affiliations of servants from initial settlement to Mau Mau. Generally, employees preferred certain ethnic categories to occupy various roles in the domestic services. Kikuyus were in most cases the cooks and Somalis assumed command jobs as butlers whom they called chiefs, head servants or major-domos. On the other, the presumed picturesque cousins of nature, the Masai were left roaming in the African savannahs for they were a titillating reminder of and window into a long forgotten past. Disturbing their way of life would have been a gross violation of nature similar to the wanton destruction of rare African faunal and floral species (Blixen 1960:117). The last section examines the effects of Mau Mau insurgency on European and African relations in the Kenyan colony.

‘Aristocratic’ Settlers and the Kikuyu Squatters

The new settlers’ backgrounds encompassed the whole European social gamut; they included aristocrats, the middle-class, former soldiers who came to the colony as beneficiaries of Britain’s post-World War One Colonial Settlement Schemes, and some ruffians. In nationality terms the English, poor Afrikaners, the French and the Dutch had high representation. In spite of these well-defined lines of difference among whites most Europeans emphasized their sameness as white over and against the African “other” (Kennedy: 183). However, the minority English aristocrats dominated settler politics and their culture came to influence most of the settlers. The Highlands and the Rift Valley assumed their popular identity as playgrounds of decadent and petulant racists pampered by several African servants because of these aristocratic scions’ social scandals.⁶ According to Shaw (211) these socialite settlers tended to be “Edwardian trouble makers, gamblers, and philanderers sent to the colony to avoid disgrace at home or wealthy adventurers following earlier European explorers”.

Conspicuous consumption, reckless entertainment, drugs, social scandals and golf tournaments at Nairobi’s world famous Muthaiga Club were the Happy Valley’s main perquisites of empire (Shaw: 179-219). Happy Valley men and women were “invariably heroic and almost always eccentric.”⁷ Louisa Dawkins further noted that, “marriages tended not to last; wives left husbands, husbands left wives, recoupled and got on with the business of harnessing nature and living as unencumbered by governmental regulation as possible”.⁸ Lord Delamere was the quintessential settler in the colony’s formative years and Compton Pakenham affirmed this point by noting:

Few could remember the country before he arrived. No one understood the Masai as he did. He had been the mainspring of so many activities. For thirty years he had been the acknowledged leader, experimenting in every possible industry, fighting in every possible political issue. No new enterprise or problem was tackled without prior reference to him. He had not the personal ambitions of a Rhodes but he had an idea-to demonstrate that the highlands were a Whiteman’s country.⁹

In these pioneer days the settlers lived on their estates with limited state interference, at times they collected taxes from Africans on its behalf (Sorenson 1968; Furedi 1976 and Kanogo 1987).

From 1902 to the First World War's immediate aftermath the undercapitalized white farmers encouraged Africans either to remain or to settle on their farms in lieu of labor. Some Africans moved into the Highlands due to shortage of land in the Central Province reserves. These people became known as squatters and in return for their labor farmers gave them entitlement to land use for cultivation and grazing (Kanogo: 10-67). However, the squatter phenomenon had other versions such as 'Kaffir farming'. Under this practice European land owners would allow Africans to use their land in return "for payment in cash or kind, the latter in the form of milk, manure, stock or crops" (van Zwanenberg). Landowners obliged their squatters and Kaffir farmers to sell their agricultural produce and livestock to them. Settlers would then sell such crops and livestock on the European controlled markets for a profit. In ethnic terms, Kikuyus dominated Kaffir farmers and squatter ranks for example in 1918 out of a population of 9 116 in the Naivasha District, 6 600 were Kikuyus (Kanogo: 14). This was so because most of the alienated land traditionally belonged to the Kikuyus.

Most of the Kikuyus who settled on farms either as squatters or Kaffir farmers did so *en masse* and they implanted some traditional modes of justice, social organization on the farms. As Kikuyus moved into white owned land they had to forgo their land tenure systems. Traditionally land belonged to the clan under the moromati (titular or trustee) (Kenyetta 1953: 32 and Chapter 11). In the plantations this practice came to an end because land right belonged to the settlers and the squatters only had "land use rights".

Among the enduring practices were the age sets, marriage ceremonies and circumcision rites. The most vivid social transplants were cultural and political institutions such as the elders' councils (Kiamas), circumcision (irua) and marriage ceremonies from the Central Province Homeland (Kanogo 75). Kikuyus established Kiamas on most European farms and in spite of strong efforts to maintain age old guiding principles change was inevitable. According to Karanja Kamau traditionally Kiama membership was restricted to elderly circumcised men but on the farms it became a preserve of "elderly and respected squatters or ex squatters still resident on settler farms" (Quoted in Kanogo: 75). If the farm overseer (Nyapara) was a young man, he was required to make a payment of a ram (ngoima) before he could join the Kiama (Ibid). On some farms, settlers joined Kiamas, as equals to other members, upon payment of ngoima fee. Kiamas aimed to ensure healthy social relations and their decisions were outcomes of deliberative collective processes. However, it appears some settlers became titular heads of the Kiamas because whenever these elders' councils passed judgments or made major decisions they would apprise the farm owner who could uphold or slightly alter them (Dinesen 1938: 97-104). Therefore settlers and their headmen became appellate courts.

Traditionally Kiama decision making processes were hierarchical. In the resolution of contentious issues the starting point was the family unit under the family patriarchy (Kenyatta 1953: 194). Above this was the village council (*Kiama gia itora*) composed of all family heads and Kenyatta (195) notes that:

The senior elder acted as the president of the council and this group represented the villagers in the government. Another wider group was formed, and named, district council (*Kiama kia rogongo*), in which all the elders of the district participated; this council was presided over by a committee (*Kiama kia ndundu*), composed of the senior elders of the villages. Amongst these elders the one most advanced in age and wisdom was elected as a judge and president (*mothamaki or mociiri*) of the ndundu. From the district council a national council was formed, composed of several ndundu, representing the whole population.

On the farms this hierarchical governance system fizzled out and in its place inter-farm Kiamas emerged. They settled disputes involving people from different farms. “If the complaint or the accused disagreed with the decision of the joint Kiama, the issue could be referred either to a township chief or to the District Commissioner’s Office” (Kanogo: 75). Kanogo indicates that official discontent with the Kiamas became so great that in 1924 colonial authorities proscribed them (Ibid). Besides accusation of failure to control illegal squatting and grazing, and desertions colonial authorities and farmers “might have felt the need to eliminate a rival hierarchy of authority in the Settled Areas” (Ibid).

After the banning of Kiamas authorities introduced modified “traditional legal entities”. The administration recommended the establishment of a mobile court made up of five respected Kikuyus from Kiambu, Muranga (Fort Hall) and Nyeri (the Kikuyu homelands) to operate in Nakuru, Naivasha and Rumuruti (Naivasha Annual District Reports, 1924, quoted in Kanogo: 76). This court became operational in the White Highlands in 1931 (Ibid). However, even after the establishment of these new Kiamas the old ones continued operating, only difficult or contentious cases were referred to the formal tribunals. Ultimately, increasing accusations of bribery later made the official Kiamas unpopular with officialdom (Ibid).

Besides Kiamas the Kikuyu ngoma ritual dances became a notable social feature in the Highlands. Traditionally *ngomas* were held during circumcision (Cranworth: 49) or soon after harvests in order to thank the ancestors for good cropping seasons. Some settlers got so enchanted with *ngomas* and regularly called the Kikuyus to dance for their visitors. In 1928 Isak Dinesen did exactly that when the Prince of Wales visited her Ngong Farm. Despite government and missionary attempts to curtail *ngomas* they proved irrepressible because of settler indulgence. Isak Dinesen’s *ngomas* were popular in the colony and they attracted singers, dancers, flighty ladies (Dinesen: 159) of Nairobi known as Malaikas¹⁰ and spectators from many parts of the country, including the capital. Dinesen (158) further notes that:

At these occasions we entertained up to fifteen hundred or two thousand guests... We would give the old bald mothers of the dancing Morani and the Nditos, the maidens,

snuff, and the children, sugar, distributed by Kamante in wooden spoons, and I sometimes asked the D. C's permission for my squatters to make tembu, a deadly drink, fabricated from sugarcane.

However, officials and missionaries considered the dances 'savage-like' because people at times people 'lasciviously' danced in their nude, with faces smeared in red ochre, and consumed alcohol.¹¹ Such behavior offended Christian piety and colonial officials' middle class inspired discipline and self restraint. In spite of this opposition proliferated but by the 1950s they had lost their mystic aura and had been reduced to just another form of Saturday entertainment¹² and 'plantation ball room.' The dancers had also added flutes to their repertoire of instruments.

Domestic Service in the Aristocratic Households

Besides squatters whom settlers dealt with as communal collectivities domestic servants constituted a crucial social category in the Highlands. Domestic service was one of the major employment sectors in colonial Kenya. Prior to the 1950s besides agriculture and government/civil service most Africans found employment in domestic services. In 1948 22 896 men were employed as domestics and they constituted 7, 72% of the labor force (Great Britain Colonial Office, Kenyan Annual Report on the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1947, 14). These figures do not reveal the true picture because they excluded domestic servants employed on farms (Ibid). In this section the paper analyzes the social changes and modifications between and among European masters and African servants.

In Kenya's rustic aristocratic enclaves the pretentious settlers imported and transformed European courtly values as exemplified by their hiring of African butlers, whom they identified as chiefs or headman. They also had pages, guards and *dog-totos*. These Kenyan settlers had a high sense of grandeur. Servants were so important to the extent that even those settler families experiencing financial difficulties in the immediate post-First World War era maintained "a variable number of retainers in their homes".¹³ Having servants was a status symbol and a way of affirming the grammar of difference between settlers and the Africans.

Butlers or principal African servants' identification as chiefs or headmen implied that these white men and women imagined themselves as royalty and leading African servants were vassals of some sort. These 'chiefs' helped in monitoring and conveying orders to their subordinates and often, they had brawny, brain and commanding personalities. Rosa Johnson, who stayed in Kenya in the mid-1920s with her husband under the auspices of the American Museum of Natural History¹⁴, hired Bukhari as the head servant. They did so because he had "a reputation of being a better shot than most white men, and possessing a powerful frame and features that told us he was not afraid of anything" (Johnson 1941: 16).

Kenyan settlers pretentiously replicated the English nobility's practices of adorning their servants in uniforms with colors unique to one's household. The uniforms were Muslim style robes

called Kanzus and they were also worn by servants in imperial India. Servants at Equator Farm in the early 1950s put on such robes and Cameron (14) noted:

Ours are dressed in long robes of black and white tricking with broad sashes of chartreuse yellow felt around the waists. On their heads they have high, black tasseled turbushes to match. They look like Tiepolo clowns, only black instead of white. It is supposed to be a sign of disrespect to wear shoes, so they go around bare footed.

The most apparent thing in the employment of African domestics in Kenya Valley was ethnic ranking. Employers preferred people from particular ethnic categories for specific tasks. In the early days of settlement White employers preferred Indian/Goanese cooks and the Kikuyus were in most instances gardeners. In spite of their purported penchant for alcohol Indians came highly recommended into settler households as smart and organized cooks.¹⁵ In the absence of Goanese cooks employers settled for Swahilis and indigenous Africans were the last choice. Remuneration was also discriminatory because in the first decade of settlement the Goanese cooks' wages varied from three pounds to five pounds per month, Swahilis about two pounds, and Africans anything between 10 shillings and a sovereign (Ibid).

As Kenya evolved in the 1920s from a backward colonial enclave dependent on manufactures from the metropole into an industrializing and bureaucratized state Indians withdrew from domestic services into commercial, clerical and skilled jobs such that by the 1940s African men performed all the chores in settler households (Kenyan Annual Report, 1949, 4). In the absence of Indians whites settled for the Kikuyus. The Masai pastoralists remained distant and aloof and most settlers accused them of indolence. However, one can not over emphasize European disdain for the Masai because they were the settlers' favorites, 'Africa's majestic tribe' and efforts were made to maintain their pastoral and nomadic mode of life (Cameron: 8).

The Kikuyu cooks hired in white households learnt their trade by associating with settlers households for longer periods. Some rose through the ranks by starting as low as dog-totos, medical assistants, and cooks' boys or aides (Blixen: 37). At times employers send their workers for additional training at Muthaiga Club or to experienced cooks in other households (Ibid: 38). Isak Dinesen's house became "famous in the colony for its table" and she became one of Kenya's leading socialites. She acknowledged her cook, Kimante's role in all this as follows,

Nominally the Kitchen was mine, but in the course of our cooperating, it passed over into Kimante's hands. For here he understood to perfection what I wished for him, and sometimes he carried out my wishes even before I had told him of them...

Among Dinesen's guests were Sir Northrop Macmillan, Galbraith and Berkley Cole, Lord Delamere, Lord Francis Scott, and Denny Finch-Hatton, a playboy aristocratic safari operator who became her lover. Finch-Hatton died in a plane crash in Kenya in 1931. However, Dinesen hosted her most distinguished guest, the Prince of Wales, later the Duke of Windsor in 1928 (Ibid). During this visit she lobbied for the reduction of 'native' taxes. Whether she achieved this, it's not so apparent.

By the late 1940s European households employed missionary trained domestics with school certificates and a smattering of English (Cameron: 14). Most of the servants at this point were no longer complete rural bumpkins recruited within Kenya alone. The majority of the servants came from the Nairobi vicinity, Mombassa and other coastal towns. Some workers came from as far as the French ruled Comoro Islands.

Besides cooks, butlers also identified as major domos, lead servants or chiefs were the second most crucial category of household workers. Somalis and Swahilis were prime choice because the racist white employers thought these were superior to Kenya's 'Bantu Natives'. Isak Dinesen (*Shadows*: 9) noted that Farah, her loyal Somali butler belonged to an ethnic group "greatly superior to the native population in intelligence and culture" (Ibid). Earlier in 1912 Lady Cranworth had made similar observations.¹⁶

Settlers who arrived in the 1920s onward were not well disposed to the Somalis. They accused them of arrogance, dishonesty and of picking up quarrels easily. Most of these later arrivals were poor wagon driving Afrikaners from South Africa, enterprising middle class Englishmen and ex-soldiers who came as beneficiaries from Britain's post-First World War colonial settlement schemes. On the other, early settlers in the Highlands had been of aristocratic descent. Many of them were younger sons of English families, schooled early in life by elderly, dignified keepers and stablemen and were accustomed to proud servants and mutual respect (Dineson *Shadows*: 17). Dinesen further notes that:

To these later arrivals to the country the Somali, her earliest immigrants, seemed haughty and unmanageable and were, I believe, on the whole as intolerable as to me and my friends they were indispensable. So it came that our particular clan of early settlers-arrogantly looking upon ourselves as Mayflower people-might be characterized as those Europeans who kept Somali servants and to whom a house without a Somali would be like a house without a lamp.

All the leading early settlers had Somali butlers and they included Lord Delamere, the trend setting aristocratic settler, Berkeley Cole, Deny Finch-Huton and Dinesen herself (Ibid). About these servants Dinesen proudly noted "we were the people who, wherever we went, were followed, at a distance of five feet, by those noble, vigil, and mysterious shadows" (Ibid). These aides accompanied their masters even on prolonged visits to other households, especially in Nairobi. For Dinesen Farah was her confidante, driver, and accountant, monitor of other servants and groomer of horses. The relationship was so close and Dinesen actually says "I talked to him about my worries as about my success, and he knew of all that I did or thought" (Ibid: 3). In spite of this closeness, one should note that mutual loyalty rather than equality governed the relationship.

Farah helped Dinesen in her interactions and engagements with her squatters. Dinesen's relationship with Farah resulted in the latter becoming her interpreter to the African world. At times she made controversial decisions on the basis of Farah's advice. For example, when her cook Esa was poisoned by his errant second wife Fatima the latter was not handed to the police on the grounds that,

Farah and I held council as to what we ought to do about Fatima, and we decided to do nothing. It evidently went against Farah to take steps to have a woman punished by the law. I gathered from him that the Mohammedan law does not hold a woman to account. Her husband is responsible for what she does, and must pay the fine for what misfortunes she causes, as he must pay the fine for what damage his horse might cause. But what if the horse throws the owner and killed him? Well, yes, Farah agrees, that is a sad accident (Dinesen 1938: 292).

Besides cooking and laundry, among other chores, African servants also taught white children indigenous languages, values and traditions. In the 1920s and 30s Louis Leakey, Kenya's celebrated anthropologist, who later in life delighted in calling himself a white Kikuyu had such a background. In childhood his nurse regaled him with Kikuyu folklores. Other servants trained him in hunting and tracking. As a teenager he played with Kikuyu boys, visited their villages, and shared the privileges of Kikuyu males (Shaw: 101). Leakey observed Kikuyu initiation ceremonies and after he was married he paid the fees to be accepted as a Kikuyu elder. White girls also related closely with their male servants. For example, Beryl Markham, the first person to fly across the Atlantic in 1936, was raised by her father together with servants on a horse farm in the Highlands. As a child she was a "ferociously antagonistic to schooling and ferociously competitive with her friends, who were African boys."¹⁷

Kikuyus, Mau Mau and Domestic Services

Up to the end of the Second World War the relatively genial relations between white settlers and their squatters and domestic servants came to an end due to the Mau Mau insurgency (Kanogo: 125-176). Mau Mau was a militant Kikuyu dominated nationalist organization that emerged in the early 1950s that aimed to subvert settler hegemony by repossessing former land by armed means. Africans had many grievances against the settler state and foremost was loss of land. By 1940 there were one hundred fifty squatter families in the Highlands and this translated into one in every eight Kikuyu (Anderson 2005: 181-182).

Between 1946 and 1952, more people were forced off settler farms and these evictees swelled the ranks of the landless in reserves such as Kiambu. Africans also hated the denial of political representation, inordinate colonial taxation, the denial to grow cash crops and restriction of movement through the Kipande pass book system. Besides loss of land Africans were discriminated against on the job market, housing and in most pursuits of life. Africans were not allowed in hotels, restaurants, or even in some the shops.¹⁸ Europeans called this discrimination culture bar instead of color bar.¹⁹ A coalescence of these factors compelled the Kikuyus to resort to military means in order to settle their grievances.

The Mau Mau murdered several European farmers and their families and the government responded by declaring a state of emergency in 1952 and arresting Jomo Kenyatta whose control and links with Mau Mau were rather tenuous. The colonial government resorted also to extrajudicial means in order to counter the Mau Mau menace. Among the measures adopted

were capital punishments, trials by ordeal, corruption of the judiciary in order to secure convictions, collective punishments through the establishment of concentration camps, detentions without trial and the arming of loyalist chiefs and Christian militias known as the Home Guards.²⁰ In order to limit politicization the state proscribed all forms of African gatherings, including *ngomas*.²¹

Mau Mau activities resulted in the mistrust and at times dismissal of African servants in white homes. The media regularly warned against baby sitting by African servants. The white dominated East African Women's Association assisted settlers with assessing employment records and political credentials of prospective *ayas* (workers). It only approved those Africans whose loyalty was unquestionable, notably non-Kenyans from the Seychelles.²² These workers had limited attachment to Mau Mau. At times some families who could afford it or had obliging friends in Nairobi or in coastal towns such as Mombasa relocated their children to these places for safe keeping. These included even toddlers.²³

Mau Mau insurgency meant that the loyal Kikuyu servants suddenly became not just untrustworthy but dangerous. Cameron (15) best captures the dilemma of white employers at this point:

It is not safe these days to have Kikuyu servants. All the raids and most of the recent Mau Mau killing of white farmers have been facilitated by information given by the houseboys. Few of the Kikuyus dare resist the orders of the ring leaders to join the Mau Mau ranks. Some have tried to resist and have been found the next day with their heads cut off, their bodies buried upside down with their legs sticking in the air.

Cameron further noted that the old settlers made the mistake of believing that the "sentiment of loyalty entertained by the boys takes precedence over the mumbo-jumbo of the Mau Mau" (Ibid). They underrated the Mau Mau and the power they wielded by playing "on old tribal superstitions. For one generation removed from idolatry, it is a mistake to trust too much in the civilizing effect of Christianity or Mohammedanism", he caustically noted (Ibid). To many settlers Mau Mau was a reactionary movement and a poignant reminder of purported African incapacity to embrace modernity. Although relations between Kikuyu domestics and their employers became tense and suspicious some settlers still insisted on "having their morning tea and other meals served by their Kikuyu servants".²⁴ In 1953 Ross noted the irony of prevailing settler-servant relations as follows:

They ate with a gun on the table beside them, one eye on the servant and the other on the window, but they are not going to change their habits ... they did not bring their wives out to Kenya to do their own cooking.²⁵

In deed Kenya 'aristocratic' settlers have not changed much even now more than half a century after Kenya's independence. According to Chris McGreal "life is still very privileged in the Happy Valley, but the whiff of scandal is never far off, and the detail is astonishingly reminiscent of another age."²⁶ For Example, in the 1990s Michael Cunningham-Reid, a nephew of the late Lord Mountbatten, was the head of one of Kenya's scandal-ridden aristocratic families who still send their children to South Africa and England, especially, Eton for education.

His daughter, Anna²⁷ married Antonio Trzebinski, a son to an equally distinguished and long-established white Kenyan family²⁸, well-known for his surfing, big game hunting, drinking, drug use and womanizing. True to Happy Valley traditions Trzebinski was later murdered by a single shot through the heart as he drove to see his Danish mistress, Natasha Illum Berg, the only licensed female hunter in East Africa. Then a few years later, Anna raised eyebrows by marrying a semi-nomadic warrior, Loyaban Lemarti, in a ceremony that involved the slaughter of a bull. Lemarti wore a toga and lion skin.²⁹

Conclusion

Kenya's Rift Valley and the abutting White Highlands witnessed so much social change between 1902 and the 1950s. In spite of asymmetrical power relations between settlers and the African squatters and domestic servants change was not unidirectional; they all negotiated and exchanged social values. The Kikuyu transplanted their social institutions such as Kiamas and Ngomas from the reserves into the settler's estates. Europeans and young men in positions of power on the farms such as managers could pay their way into the Kiamas. Traditionally Kiamas were a preserve for mature circumcised men but in the settler dominated dispensation excluding settlers and young farm managers would have caused tension on farms by creating an alternative forum of power that could have undermined settler hegemony. Hence settler women like Isak Dinesen attended Kiama sessions on their farms. In some instances African workers acted as Europeans' interpreters to the African world. The settlers also tried to reinvent an exaggerated European courtly culture through the employment of inordinately high numbers of servants such as headmen, pages, cooks, and gardeners. This shows that colonies became theatres of invented traditions where culture was temporal, ever evolving and unique to specific locales and times.

Endonotes

¹ Kikuyus were the inhabitants of the Highlands and some parts of the Valley. Upon the appropriation of their lands they became squatters or labor tenants on the new white owned estates.

² See Santha Rama Rau, "Life Goes on Under Mau Mau's Shadow", *New York Times*, July 19 1953

³ *Ibid.* See also, George H T Kimble, "The White Man's Future in Africa", *New York Times*, February 26, 1961.

⁴ John Updike, "Seven Gothic Tales": The Divine Swank of Isak Dinesen, *New York Times*, February 23, 1986. This semi feudal world is what Dinesen encountered when she settled in Kenya in 1913.

⁵ See Santha Rama Rau, "Life Goes on Under Mau Mau's Shadow."

⁶ For more historical analyses about the salacious details of adultery, drugs and debauchery in the Happy Valley see James Ross' 1982 Film, *White Mischief*, starring Greta Scacchi and Charles Dance. It attempted to capture the nature of "Happy Valley" life by making a rendition of Sir Jock Delves Borough's trial for the murder of his wife's lover, Lord Errol, in 1954.

⁷ Louisa Dawkins, "Steaming to Mombasa", *New York Times*, March 22 1987.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Compton Pakenham, "Kenya as a White Man's Country", *New York Times*, July, 7 1935.

¹⁰ Malaika probably was a euphemism for "prostitute".

¹¹ Dinesen's farewell *Ngoma* in 1931 was banned by the District Commissioner, *Out Of Africa*, 382.

¹² See Santha Rama Rau, "Life Goes on Under Mau Mau's Shadow."

¹³ Elspeth Huxley, *On the Edge of the Rift: Memories of Kenya*, New York, H Wolf, 1962. Soon after the First World War life was tough for some Happy Valley families. Huxley noted that besides overdrafts from the National Bank of Kenya many men indulged in a variety of dubious income spinning activities: "Some men went off to hunt elephants, others to work as transport contractors or as road-gang overseers for the government, one man to collect the skeletons of hippos on the shores of Lake Victoria, pound them up and sell the resultant bone meal as fertilizer. Another way to turn a modest penny was to recruit labor for sisal companies, or for some other large employer. One of our neighbors Jack Nimmo had taken to this. Before the war he had spent his time poaching ivory, leaving his wife to run the farm and returning now and then, always unheralded, to reprimand her for extravagance, sack about half the labor force, repair his boots and disappear again in some unspecified direction". Robin, Huxley's father also joined Jack Nimmo in these labor recruitment escapades leaving her mother Tally in charge of their Thika Farm, 22.

¹⁴ Katherine Woods, "The Adventurous Lives of the Martin Johnsons", *New York Times*, May 19, 1940.

¹⁵ Lady Cranworth, "Hints for a Woman in British East Africa", 87

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 88.

¹⁷ Jane O'Reilly, "The Lives of Beryl Markham: Out of Africa's Hidden Love and Denys Finch Hatton's Great Love", *New York Times*, October 3 1993.

¹⁸ Santha Rama Rau, "Life Goes on Under Mau Mau's Shadow."

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ For more details see David M Anderson, *The History of the Hanged*.

²¹ Santha Rama Rau, "Life Goes on Under Mau Mau's Shadow", *New York Times*, July 19 1953.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Albion Ross, "Life Still Very British Despite Mau Mau", *New York Times*, May 10 1953.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Chris McGreal, "A Lost World", *Mail and Guardian*, October 31 2006

²⁷ *Ibid.* Anna is a well-established designer whose clothes proved a hit with the likes of Kate Moss, Princess Caroline of Monaco and Jemina Khan.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

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