

# To Understand the Crisis in Kenya, Know the British Empire

by Lawrence K. Freeman

After weeks of fighting following the flawed Kenyan election of Dec. 27, 2007, over 1,000 Kenyans have been killed, as many as 600,000 have been driven from their homes, two members of Parliament have been killed (one was an unmistakable assassination), and Kenya's tourist-dominated economy has already lost several billions of dollars. Because Kenya's main seaport at Mombasa on the Indian Ocean serves most East and Central African nations, the conflict in Kenya has the potential to affect over 100 million Africans living in Southern Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, who depend on the shipment of food and fuel, according to the United Nations' IRIN news service.

## British Origins of the Crisis

"If you're looking for the origins of Kenya's ethnic tensions, look to its colonial past," wrote African historian Caroline Elkins, one week after Kenya, a country viewed as the most stable in East Africa, was thrown into profound crisis. Elkins continues in her early January commentary:

"A distinctly colonial view of the rule of law saw the British leave behind legal systems that facilitated tyranny, oppression, and poverty rather than open accountable government. And compounding these legacies was Britain's famous imperial policy of divide and rule, which often turned fluid groups of individuals into immutable ethnic units, much like Kenya's Luo and Kikuyu today. We are often told that age-old tribal hatreds drive today's conflicts in Africa. In fact ethnic conflict and its attendant grievances are colonial phenomena. . . . The British had spent decades trying to keep the Luo and Kikuyu divided, quite rightly fearing that if the two groups ever united their combined power could bring down the colonial order."

Elkins, author of *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*, and David Anderson, who authored *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of the Empire*, describe in great detail how Kenya, one of the British Empire's most prized possessions in Africa, was brutalized in a Nazi-like manner by its colonial master.

From Kenya, there were numerous reports that some of the violence that immediately followed the close Presidential election was pre-planned, with well-organized attacks begin-

ning less than 30 minutes after it was announced that President Mwai Kibaki had been re-elected. One Kenyan specialist asserted that both sides, Kibaki's Party of National Unity, and opposition candidate Raila Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement, participated in vote-rigging, setting the stage for pre-organized confrontations between the Kikuyu and Luo ethnic groups. In addition to playing on ethnic divisions, nurtured during the colonial period, the rage that erupted following the flawed election results arose from the deep pessimism and lack of hope felt by the majority of Africans, whose aspirations for a better life are ground up in abject poverty, and inhuman living conditions.

The British Empire, when finally forced to withdraw its overt colonial rule from Africa during the period of the 1960 "Winds of Change," left behind a simmering pot, ready to boil over at a desired moment of opportunity. When the right strings are pulled, or hot buttons pushed, which the British know very well, individuals and groups can be impelled into behaving in a predictable manner, contrary to the real interests of their country.

A major factor in the current wave of violence that is destabilizing Kenya today, is historically centered in the struggle for ownership of the land in the Rift Valley. Not only is land ownership at the center of traditional culture in Kenya, but it is a matter of life and death to have fertile land to produce food necessary for the very survival of one's family. The British know, village by village, and ethnic group by ethnic group, exactly how to "play" the frustration and antagonisms inherent in these conditions—the very ones they fostered during their decades of colonial rule.

## The Hedonistic Empire

Kenya—like Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and South Africa—is a victim of the British Empire's land/resource grab policy. To wit: steal the land for its resources, use the natives for slave labor, and get rid of the excess population. The highlands of Kenya, called the "White Highlands," because *only* Europeans were allowed to own and farm this land, were desired for their beauty, fertile land, and temperate climate.

Kenya was seized in 1888, by the Imperial British East Africa Company, which was modelled after the British East India Company, the exemplar for all imperial looting com-



ture that the British brought with them, to what they referred to as the “Dark Continent,” filled with savages.

“They enjoyed game hunting and sport facilities, with the Nairobi race-tracks and polo grounds being one of the most popular European social spots in town. Beyond such gentrified leisure, these privileged men and women lived an absolutely hedonistic lifestyle filled with sex, drugs, drink, and dance, followed by more of the same.... They drank champagnes and pink gin for breakfast, played cards, danced through the night, and generally woke up with someone else’s wife in the morning.... [They] enjoyed Japanese prostitutes from the local brothel.... Outside of Nairobi part of the highlands became the notorious Happy Valley, where weekend houseguests were often required to exchange partners, cocaine and morphine were distributed at the door, and men and women compared their sexual notes when the debauchery was over.”

## The Brutish Empire

panies that seized territory in Africa during the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1895, the British Empire directly took over Kenya as the East Africa Protectorate, becoming an official British colony in 1920. The Empire never viewed Africans as human beings. To the British, Africans were beasts, whose only purpose was to serve as cheap labor for the European farmers. Otherwise, the inclination of the Empire would have “delighted in wiping them out,” as one British soldier put it.

Mark Curtis, in his *Web of Deceit: Britain’s Real Role In The World*, bluntly describes British colonial policy in Kenya: “Britain had established in Kenya a system of institutionalized racism and exploitation of the indigenous population.... In reality, the British ideology and institutions of the British settlers and colonial state in Kenya closely resembled the fascist movements of the years between the First and Second World Wars.”

While the British were never able to hide their deep racial hatred of the Africans, neither could they refrain from acting out their own particular degenerate behavior, when they emigrated to Kenya.

Lord Delamere, who settled in Kenya at the turn of the 20th Century, acquired, i.e., stole, 160,000 acres for his estate. Elkins graphically describes in her book the “high” cul-

ture that the British brought with them, to what they referred to as the “Dark Continent,” filled with savages. Their independence following World War II, as President Franklin D. Roosevelt fully intended they would. However, with FDR’s death, and his successor, President Harry Truman, committed to following the British lead, the British and other European colonial powers gained a new lease on life. Yet, the agitation for sovereignty among the subject nations could not be crushed, and became stronger during the early 1950s.

To deal with this problem, the British imperialists devised their own methods, including the deliberate creation of violent “revolutionary” movements that would split emergent nations apart, or destroy them. Lyndon LaRouche, who understands the mindset of the centuries-old commitment by the British Empire to crush any potential for people to become an independent sovereign nation, characterized the Mau Mau operation in Kenya, which emerged during the 1950s, as precisely this kind of British tactic, the equivalent of igniting a “backfire”—deliberately burning out a section of land to prevent a wildfire from spreading. The Mau Mau and the counter-Mau Mau gangs were created by British intelligence (MI5) to cause a bloody insurrection, LaRouche has explained. It provided the pretext for the British to launch their brutal crackdown against the African population.

That crackdown began in 1952.

From October 1952 until January 1960, a state of emergency was imposed in Kenya, and the Kenyan people were forced to live under the boot of a British military-police dictatorship. During this period the British Empire carried out a brutal campaign against the Kikuyu, and the Kenyan population at large. Both Elkins and Anderson describe these atrocities against the Kenyans in terms comparable to the Nazi concentration/slave-labor camps, the Soviet Union's gulag, and the infamous British barbed-wire, diseased-filled concentration camps used against the Afrikaners in the Boer War from 1899-1902, directed by Alfred Milner, a leading member of the elite British Round Table,

At midnight, on Oct. 20, 1952, the new governor of Kenya, Sir Evelyn Baring, with the encouragement of the Tory government of Winston Churchill, launched Operation Jock Scott, a roundup of 60 Kikuyu suspected of being the ringleaders of the Mau Mau. This provided the pretext for the declaration of the state of emergency. Jomo Kenyatta, who was accused of being the mastermind of the Mau Mau uprising, was quickly convicted in a show trial, and sent to a detention camp in northern Kenya, where he was "caged" for the next eight years until his release in August 1961.

In 1948, four years before the state of emergency was declared, 29,700 white farmers, out of an African population of about 5.3 million, owned 2,200 farms. The whites, representing less than 1% of the total population, owned over 20% of the best arable land, while over 1 million Kikuyu, who were considered energetic farmers, were forced to farm in restricted Kikuyu reserves. Population growth forced many to become squatters, farming on the unused land owned by white farmers, or to find work in Nairobi.

The pretext given for imposition of military rule was the need to protect the British farm families from the Mau Mau violence; in fact, the farmers were pawns in the British-orchestrated insurgency. Although many of the killings by the Mau Mau were ugly butcheries, which terrified the white settlers, the number of whites killed totalled only 29 during the height of the emergency from 1952-1956—less than the number killed in road accidents during those years. But 1,819 Africans, mainly loyalists and their families, were assassinated by the Mau Mau. The total number of Mau Mau tried and hanged by British-run courts is recorded at 1,090. Estimates of the total number of Mau Mau, and alleged Kikuyu sympathizers killed during the state of emergency range as high as 100,000-300,000. At that level, the British were clearly out to exterminate a large section of the almost 1.5 million Kikuyu.

## The New Nazis

Gen. George Erskine, who was appointed as commander-in-chief of British forces for Kenya by Churchill, with the support of Governor Baring, and who carried a letter from Churchill authorizing him to impose martial law, launched

Operation Anvil on April 24, 1954 to take total control of Nairobi. Elkins describes the assault:

"Erskine began deploying nearly twenty-five thousand security force members whose mission was to cordon off the city for a sector-by-sector purging of every African area. . . . [T]he entire population was caught off guard. What happened next has been described as nothing short of 'Gestapo-like.' Loud speakers affixed to military vehicles blared directives: pack one bag, leave the rest of your belongings behind in your home, exit into the street peacefully. . . . All Africans were then taken to temporary barbed wire enclosures, where employment identity cards, were used to determine tribal affiliations. The Kikuyu, as well as the closely related Embu and Meru were separated from the rest of the city's African population in preparation for on-the-spot, ad hoc screening. . . ."

Next, those rounded up, still "shaking from fear," were put through a screening procedure, which British Special forces made infamous. The captives were forced to walk past alleged Kikuyu loyalists with their faces covered by a hood called a *gakunia*, who pointed out to the British soldiers standing behind them those they "recognized" as Mau Mau activists or sympathizers. Thus they sealed "a person's fate within a matter of seconds." One could be beaten, tortured, put in a detention camp, sent to prison to work as a slave laborer, all as a consequence of being fingered by a person whose identity was concealed under a hood. This became one of the most terrifying techniques used by the British in their so-called "screening process."

Two months after Operation Anvil, the British War Council in Kenya implemented its policy of "villagization," which was viewed as "the most punitive measure of all." The British set up barbed-wire camps policed by loyalists and the British military, called "villages," which were "little more than concentration camps to punish Mau Mau sympathizers." From June 1954 until October 1955, 1,077,500 Kikuyu were "relocated" in 854 "villages"—almost 80% of the total Kikuyu population. Kikuyu from all over were rounded up, ripping apart any semblance of stability and cohesion in the Kikuyu community.

The British military crackdown, the imprisonment of 25% of adult Kikuyu males, coupled with the mass, indiscriminate killings, was a form of "ethnic cleansing," which also provided a fertile recruiting ground for the Mau Mau gangs. The camps, like the Nazi slave-labor camps, provided the British with free labor for colonial building projects, causing them to ponder whether to kill the Kikuyu, or work them to death.

Elkins recounts a report from a survivor of these camps:

"The askaris [guards] then put his head in a bucket of water and lifted his legs high in the air so he was upside down. That's when Wagithundia, who was the painfully ugly guard from Tanganyika, started cramming sand in Peterson's anus, and stuffed it in with a stick. The other askaris would

put water in, then more sand and Wathundia kept cramming it in with a stick. They kept doing this back and forth, alternating between sand and water, occasionally lifting Peterson so he could breathe. Mapiga, the Mzungu [European] officer in charge of the camp, was standing there the whole time, ordering them to keep shoving the sand and water and stick in his anus. Eventually, they finished with Peterson and carried him off, only to start on the next detainee in the compound."

The British government dismissed complaints about these tortures made to the International Labor Organization Convention, and the European Convention on Human Rights, to which they were a signatory, claiming they were exempted from the convention guidelines because "it was in time of war." However, the British government never referred to the military crackdown in Kenya as anything other than a disturbance.

As late as 1959, when almost all violence had ended, the British still kept the emergency in place, and the International Committee of the Red Cross demanded "to know why the detainees were not classified as prisoners of war, pointing out the lack of this status denied them an important set of statutory rights under the Geneva Conventions ... to which Britain was a signatory on behalf of its colonial possessions..."

The Empire would not be deterred. From 1952-1960, they regularly killed, beat, humiliated, and tortured Africans, in their interrogation sessions (which they euphemistically called screenings), in their detention camps, and in their prisons. Africans rounded up were castrated, had their eyeballs removed, their brains splattered on the ground, and killed in a variety of ways, including being beaten to death with sticks and clubs.

A white settler, known as Dr. Bunny, was called the Joseph Mengele of Kenya, in reference to the infamous Nazi doctor who conducted "medical experiments" on his Jewish captives. Dr. Bunny's exploits "included burning the skin off live Mau Mau suspects and forcing them to eat their own testicles."

Margaret, a victim of the so-called screening procedure, was interviewed by Elkins in preparation for her book. Her report of the treatment she received provides a chilling picture of the bestiality practiced under British military rule: "I was badly whipped, while naked. They didn't care that I had just given birth.... Apart from the beatings, women used to have banana leaves and flowers inserted into their vaginas and rectums, as well as have their breast squeezed with a pair of pliers; after which a woman would say everything because of the pain.... [E]ven the men had their testicles squeezed with pliers to make them confess!"

## No Independence for Africa

Against the Mau Mau, the British deployed Mau Mau "countergangs" under the direction of Capt. Frank Kitson, a British Special Branch officer, and a military intelligence spe-

cialist in covert operations. Kitson created a parallel Mau Mau structure, made up of disguised British soldiers, criminals, Africans, and Mau Mau prisoners who were easily "turned" by simple bribery into joining his countergangs. Kitson's gangs became better organized than the Mau Mau, successfully infiltrating them, and by attacking the Kikuyu population while pretending to be Mau Mau, were able to isolate the real Mau Mau, and drive them into the forests. It is probable that Kitson ended up deploying the Mau Mau through control of his own countergangs.

Kitson's "counterinsurgency" technique provides a textbook example of British operations globally, which rely on the profiling and manipulation of various ethnic groups into "permanent war," in order to prevent them from freeing their nations, and themselves, from oppression.

It is only from this historical vantage point, that we are able to comprehend events as they are presently unfolding today. Through the British Intelligence-run "gang and counter-gang" strategy, the Kenyan population was put through a "meat grinder," which has created the conditions that make possible the current destabilization. Thus, one can truthfully state that Kenya, like so many other African nations, has not been allowed to achieve true independence—has not been allowed to become a true sovereign nation. That was, and still is, the intention of the British Empire.

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