

Chapter Five

The Production and Transmission of National History: Some Problems and Challenges

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People should be taught their history, their art, their literature, their theatre, their dances first before being taught other people's cultural achievements ... I am calling for an education for a national patriotic culture ... Ngũgi wa Thiong'o¹

This chapter² will discuss the contemporary production and transmission of national history in Kenya, using three case studies: firstly, the development of the History of Kenya exhibition at Nairobi National Museum, which this author has been monitoring since 2007, and which opened in November 2010.³ Attention will be drawn to some key narratives in this exhibition that also appear in school textbooks, which are problematical and at times contradictory. Secondly, a theme throughout will be the ways in which 'culture' and 'cultural heritage' have come to stand for 'history' in contemporary Kenya, and the likely implications of this trend. Shorter mention will be made of the Kenyan Historical Reconciliation Project, initiated in 2009, which set out to produce a set of shared historical narratives that could cross ethnic divides.

Introductory discussion

Across Africa, the nationalist project – which seemed so urgent and necessary in the years following independence – is widely acknowledged to be dead or terminally ill, by all but the

most ardent nationalist politicians. To put it more kindly, ‘there is now little disagreement in the scholarly community that the entire nation-state project is ... in a state of some disarray.’⁴ Yet nation states including Kenya remain firmly wedded, in their educational and heritage policies, to the production and transmission of patriotic nationalist history to schoolchildren, students and other citizens.⁵ The same, of course, may be said of many nations in other parts of the world. But former colonies – especially those in Africa currently celebrating 50 years of independence – have a particular need to demonstrate what they have achieved since breaking free of the colonial yoke, and seek to reinforce this through curricula, museum exhibits, commemorative events, eulogies to national heroes and heroines, tourism promotion and other means.⁶ In these manifestations, the nationalist project is still very much alive.

In museum spaces, at the annual Mashujaa (Heroes’) Day celebrations, and in popular representations of history (notably in the national media), contemporary narratives tend to be pegged to the idea of Mau Mau as a national (as opposed to primarily Gikuyu) movement and seminal defining chapter in Kenya’s national history, even though it excludes the majority of Kenyans, including many Gikuyu who did not endorse it at the time.⁷ To anyone surveying contemporary popular, state-produced and activist-produced history in Kenya today, Mau Mau often comes across as the only (his)story in town, apart from the exceptions discussed below – tales of tribal origin and early migration, essentialised ethnic culture and folklore. Though a minor player among Kenyan historians, the disproportionate influence of ‘nationalist agitator’⁸ and historian of Mau Mau, Maina wa Kinyatti – who as Atieno Odhiambo described, continues to rage against the scholarly anti-Mau Mau brigade that included the late Odhiambo – can be detected everywhere.⁹ It may also be said that Ngũgĩ’s earlier works of fiction continue to have an unhealthy influence on the production of national history, in their tendency to privilege

specific subaltern histories, suppress others, and to reify Mau Mau ‘as a monolithic nationalist movement devoid of any contradictions.’¹⁰ I concur with Ogude that Ngũgi’s texts should be treated as part of Kenya’s historiography.

At the same time it is widely recognised, by many Kenyan scholars and scholars of Kenya, that Kenya remains deeply ill at ease with both national and nationalist history. The state and its citizens have long preferred to take refuge, as it were, in the sub-national histories of individual ethnic communities rather than attempt to produce a comprehensive and inclusive ‘story of Kenya’. In this regard, the first sentence of the quote from Ngũgi at the start of this chapter can be read another way to that intended by the author: is part of the problem not the fact that there is far too much emphasis on *localised* histories and cultures, at the expense of the national? Is it possible for the latter to be produced at all, while the former flourishes, and political forces encourage its hegemony? As leading historian Bethwell Ogot noted in a 2009 speech: ‘A nation is never built through random documents such as a constitution, but through shared experiences, something Kenya doesn’t have. Too much emphasis is put on tribes rather than Kenyans as a group.’ He also ran a stake through the sacred cow of ethnic diversity: ‘We perceive ourselves as ethnically diverse, while in reality we are quite mixed,’ and gave examples of that mongrelism.¹¹ He has previously written that heterogeneity is the essence of being Kenyan.¹² Acknowledgement of this reality is hard to find in official sources, however, which tend to promote essentialism and difference, while simultaneously urging melting-pot unity – a fundamental contradiction that underpins the history production conundrum, as well as state cultural policy. This is one of my central arguments.

Part of the problem may lie with professional Kenyan historians themselves. A comprehensive volume covering national history has yet to be written, apart from Ogot and

Ochieng's *Kenya: The Making of a Nation*, whose cut-off date was 1995, and a new political history by British historian Daniel Branch, which starts at independence.¹³ A welcome addition to the literature is Macharia Munene's *Historical Reflections on Kenya*, but as the title implies this is a polemical and personal reflection on post-independent Kenya (which he scathingly terms a 'postmodern colony') rather than a detailed history, and the author does not claim otherwise.¹⁴ Munene mentions the accusations brought against Ogot by his students, who alleged he was 'obsessed with pre-colonial tribal histories'. This led, argues Munene, to the history department at the University of Nairobi, which Ogot established, sharing this obsession 'at the expense of recent developments, such as the Mau Mau war.' He contrasts this trend unfavourably with the approach taken by historians in Dar es Salaam in the same period, who looked well above the 'tribal' parapet, influenced as they were by the modernising edicts of Nyerere's socialism, which sought to produce a new kind of post-tribal citizen.¹⁵ Ogot set a trend among some Kenyan historians for publishing monographs on their own ethnic communities.¹⁶ Some of these are serious histories. Others, in Mwaniki's case a collection of unedited oral 'historical texts' gathered from 'four tribal groups' in Embu territory, are less scholarly histories (which would require critique, analysis, debunking where necessary, comparative discussion) than ethno-history and a recitation of cultural myths and traditions. Colonial pedagogy produced the blueprint for this, which Ogot argues 'reduced African history to folklore and anthropology', and that is, in his view, 'not history'.¹⁷ The worst sub-histories contain barely disguised ethnicised political agendas, whose ethno-nationalist roots lie in the colonial and early post-colonial eras.¹⁸

Ogot has long been aware of such criticisms, and refers to 'discontent ... among the younger generation of scholars ... worried that some of us historians, by focusing on particular groups – the Luo, Abaluyia, Kikuyu, Gusii, Meru, Kipsigis, Mijikenda, Maasai, Okiek – were

fragmenting Kenyan history. They argued that history as collections of particularistic studies jeopardized the integrated vision and coherent national story line, which should be the focus.¹⁹ This type of history production may be understood, however, in light of the drive, post-independence, to produce a new kind of historical knowledge that drew upon oral history; historians were encouraged to make a concerted effort to collect African oral testimony, and use it as a ‘liberating social force’. Ogot played a leading role in this, giving ‘leadership and direction to a movement to reconstruct the past – precolonial and twentieth century – through the sponsorship of oral research.’²⁰ So too did the Historical Association of Kenya, under his leadership. Furthermore it was safer, particularly during the repressive Moi years, for historians and other intellectuals to produce work on subjects that predated independence; those who displeased the president found themselves sacked, jailed or worse.²¹ Peterson and Macolo (and other contributors to this edited volume) present a strong case *for* local patriotic histories, however, including those written by ‘homespun’ (non-professional) historians, asserting that Luo intellectuals, for example, did not wait for Ogot to produce his 1967 history of the Southern Luo – they ‘had been publishing morally educative histories of their people since the 1930s.’²²

This type of localised history production remains in vogue and encouraged by the state, as an adjunct to its promotion of culture in efforts to forge ‘unity in diversity’ – a common mantra across post-colonial Africa today. which is especially relevant in post-conflict states like Kenya. Exhortations to utilise cultural heritage in order to promote unity and national integration have become ubiquitous at national and local heritage events that are state sponsored.²³ The state also occasionally acknowledges the problem that ‘Kenyan communities are developing in “parallel” to each other with very little cultural interaction’, something the then Ministry of Culture and National Heritage avowedly seeks to remedy, though it is unclear how this can be

done by establishing cultural centres that only celebrate the mono-culture of a particular ethnic group, which are unlikely to be visited by many (if any) domestic tourists from other parts of Kenya.²⁴ Constructions of culture have long been used by political elites and presidents for more insidious ends. As Branch and Cheeseman observe, both Kenyatta and current President Mwai Kibaki ‘can be said to have embraced a sort of *competitive multiculturalism* in which the government makes no effort to tame local identities or to promote a coherent “national” culture, but neither recognizes the right of minority languages and cultures to protection’ (their emphasis).²⁵ This last point is no longer applicable, since the advent of a new constitution which expressly enshrines such rights. It would also be fair to say that the NARC government made efforts to promote a national culture, without much success – and outright failure when it came to trying to create an acceptable national dress.²⁶ The new constitutional rights provisions are likely to exacerbate the trends here described, and could at worst lead to a retreat into deeper ethnic enclaves and the further essentialisation of culture and history as the newly created 47 counties, to which power and resources will be devolved, engage in branding exercises that feature and are rooted in constructions of discrete ethnic identity.²⁷

Macharia Munene speaks for many local historians in lamenting the low status of history as a scholarly subject in Kenya today:

It is the one discipline that many people can relate to and at the same time it is one of the most despised, despite its centrality to the well being and the identity of a people, acting as the cement for society ... In contemporary Kenya ... an impression exists that history is not needed and that whatever knowledge one needs, can easily be obtained from philosophy, political economy, legal studies, linguistics, military science and strategic studies, and from the media. Subsequently, history as a discipline is not needed and if

history is not needed then certainly Kenya does not need historians – at least not local historians.²⁸

He cautions of the ‘mess’ that results when policy makers adopt this position. Other Kenyan commentators lament that teachers as a whole, not simply historians, are despised by government. Without teachers, there can be no development, veteran newspaper columnist Philip Ochieng has declared – ‘government’s hostility to the teaching profession never ceases to amaze me ... Ever since independence, the teacher has been treated like a street mendicant. During the Moi regime, there was a systematic onslaught on the intellectual class.’²⁹ Yet Moi himself had been a schoolteacher. Life for intellectuals in Kenya today may be no better, especially immediately following the post-election violence. Joyce Nyairo and Johannes Hossfeld have noted how ‘as public universities re-opened their doors [in 2008] the role of the academic as a public intellectual was not automatically welcome.’ Those academics who had frequently contributed, during the long elections campaign and after the crisis erupted, to television and radio debates, penned op-eds in the daily press, or voiced their opinions on blogs, were ‘now seen as [...] tout[s] in search of political patronage and rescue from an unfulfilling life of research and correcting students’ scripts.’³⁰

Curiously, although scholarly history is deeply unpopular, and sidelined in school and university curricula, at the same time *popular* history is ubiquitous: it fills the daily print and broadcast media and is manifest in every public space, political discourses and conversations. The contrast is striking, and suggests that Kenyan citizens have not lost their interest in history at all. But whose history is being produced, and why is a comprehensive and nuanced national history still woefully under-represented in the school curriculum, despite attempts to revise and update it? The answer partly lies in the fact that history is regarded as subversive by political

elites, because it can be utilised to question the legitimacy of those in authority. Furthermore, Kenya's recent history is mired with political assassinations, state-sanctioned torture, politically instigated so-called ethnic clashes, and the rest – 'difficult knowledge'.³¹ Of course, the colonial period was no better, and in some respects far worse. The Task Force on the Establishment of a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission pulled no punches when declaring in its 2003 report: 'The political history and governance of the Kenyan state is a catalogue of gross human rights violations, the arrogance of power, and the commission of mind boggling economic crimes.'³² No wonder the state does not want to go there. I suggest that 'culture' has come to be regarded, therefore, as a comfort blanket, history as a cosh. Only human rights advocates, or victims of past abuses, regard 'dark' history as a central component of the nation's cultural and historical legacies.³³ I will return to history production after discussing the contemporary explosion of 'culture'.

The rise and rise of 'culture'

'Culture could be just the thing that saves us.'

Chief Nyamweya, comic book artist, Storymoja Hay Festival, Nairobi,

15 September 2011³⁴

As history wanes in popularity as an academic subject, at every level from primary school to higher education institutions,³⁵ there is a concomitant nationwide revival of interest in cultural heritage similar to that described for Botswana by Neil Parsons. In the latter scenario, 'cultural heritage is today contested between historical scholarship based in educational institutions and popular and commercial presentations of the past emphasising myths and legends' as well as 'tribal traditions'.³⁶ The desire to generate income from tourism is an important component of

these latter efforts, for both state and citizens.³⁷ This is evident in much of the language employed by the then Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, and National Museums of Kenya (NMK), to describe the importance of heritage to government. The emphasis on economic gain (through tourism, job creation, the sale of traditional crafts and so on) is evident in many speeches and ministerial statements, viewable on the Ministry website, particularly following the launch of a new culture and heritage policy in March 2010. The then Permanent Secretary in the Ministry, Jacob Ole Miaron, said of this: ‘The launching of the national policy ... is a deliberate effort by the government to partner with the private sector to create an enabling environment for the development of creative cultural industries,’ in order to meet the development goals of Vision 2030.³⁸ Another example lies in a call for papers, for a conference organised by NMK in November 2011 on ‘Heritage Management for Sustainable Development’. NMK listed ‘Investing in heritage’ as a sub-theme, noting: ‘Tourism is big business in Kenya. However, ... game safaris, conferences and eco-tourism currently pre-dominate the tourism sector. Kenya can further invest in her rich and unique natural and cultural heritage sites, destinations and activities that increase income from tourism and travel.’ It spoke only of products and economic benefits, without mentioning the other ways in which heritage is of importance to citizens – through the values, emotional and intellectual enrichment and deeper meanings we have highlighted as a research team.³⁹

The tourism-profit motive is also very evident at Bomas of Kenya, the state-owned heritage site established in October 1971 just outside Nairobi, which presents daily cultural performances that largely target local schoolchildren and foreign tourists. Bomas, set up as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Kenya Tourist Development Corporation, describes itself as

‘expected to preserve the authenticity of Kenya’s Cultural values and to portray them in pure form.’⁴⁰ In an undated paper, likely to be early 1970s, it was stated:

we are first and foremost a commercial company whose overriding motive is to make profit. Our merchandize is authentic Kenya culture ... We must sell this commodity at its best, in the form of authentic crafts, artifices, display[s] of skills, folk dances and performances of the genuinely cultured kind.⁴¹ (Emphasis in original)

The author, Bomas’ Chairman Peter Okondo, had very firm views on what constituted acceptable and unacceptable culture. The first should involve ‘performances [that are] attractive and pleasing and so arranged that they are not repetitive, over-suggestive nor savage ... not vulgar or obscene ... We must not allow ignorant and uncouth people to lead us into their messes and sometimes wild inventions under the pretext of tradition ... To me culture means refined as opposed to uncouth ... Thus, the culture has been arrived at by the process of straining the refinable parts from the raw mass of tradition.’⁴² No improvisation was to be allowed, and all crudity and ‘clowning’ banned.

If you go down to Bomas today you will find national cultural heritage presented, much as it always has been, as a series of ethnic snapshots conveyed through dance, song and music-making, with examples ‘collected from the different tribes of Kenya’, performed by quick-change professional artistes in an amphitheatre that holds up to 3000 people. It cannot possibly reflect all the 42 communities that constitute Kenyan society, however, so this is a highly partial and distilled representation of ‘the culture’. According to Edward Bruner, Bomas’ ‘aim is to show that all ethnic groups are equal.’⁴³ It describes itself as having ‘attempted to balance the twin challenges of preservation and development of Kenyan culture.’⁴⁴ When I last visited, elderly domestic tourists made up the majority of visitors that day, and enthusiastically

responded to the performance by dancing in front of their seats, in an apparent nostalgic re-enactment of the dances of their youth.⁴⁵ Bruner claims that ‘Bomas represents what British colonialism was trying to achieve, the detribalization of Kenya’ and ‘succeeds, in performance, in turning Kenyans into national citizens.’⁴⁶ This is merely cosmetic. Moreover, the citizens I witnessed were not moved to dance to any old tune; they were clearly roused by tunes and dances particular to their ethnic group. Theirs was a celebration of *local* citizenship and belonging.

It is worth noting at this point some early tensions within Bomas management, which still resonate in contemporary heritage development. Firstly, in the early days it had an Authenticity Committee whose tasks included deciding which ethnic groups and cultures to feature.⁴⁷ This was, and still is, a deeply political issue. The Committee discussed how to go about constructing ‘traditional huts’ and other items of material culture at a reconstructed village, agreeing in November 1971 ‘that the construction of the huts representing the bigger ethnic groups should be commenced first and construction of the huts representing difficult groups be left for a later date.’⁴⁸ No definition was given of ‘difficult’. The ethnic groups chosen to perform at the village were 16 in total, making up dance teams – three from Central Bantu peoples, three from Western Bantu, three from Coast, one Nilotic, two Nilo-Hamitic, two ‘other’ (Maasai and Turkana), one Western Hamitic (Boran), one Eastern Hamitic (Somali), and one, curiously, given as ‘Nairobi’.⁴⁹ A disproportionate number were therefore Bantu.

Secondly, there were major disagreements over the commercialisation of culture that prompted Richard Leakey, then director of NMK, to resign from the Bomas Board in August 1971. He reminded colleagues at his final Board meeting of the ‘original concept’ of Bomas, saying that ‘as a Director of Bomas he had constantly and bitterly opposed the commercial

aspect of the Company and supported its educational and museum aspect. He maintained that we should not cheapen Kenya's tradition and culture by commercialization'.⁵⁰ Chairman Peter Okondo begged him to discuss the matter and find a way to stay on, but Leakey insisted he 'must resign'.⁵¹ Leakey told the Board that, in his view, the activities of Bomas should fall into three categories:

- (1) The village, in which there would be meaningful traditional dances;
- (2) *Kenya Culture as opposed to individual traditional culture* [my emphasis];
- (3) An Amusement Park, for entertaining visitors on Sunday afternoons.⁵²

Plus ça change. The push-and-pull tussle between the national and the local is an ongoing challenge for heritage managers, as is the competing desire for profit versus education – of both citizens and foreign tourists. In all these manifestations *Ethnicity, Inc.* is winning the day.⁵³

Other trends in cultural production

Two trends are worth noting in relation to the popular production of history-cum-culture. One is the growing popularity of cultural festivals (also a feature of contemporary Botswana)⁵⁴ that attract large numbers of tourists, and simultaneously generate income and raise the profiles of specific ethnic groups, celebrating supposedly discrete cultural traditions under the guise of national multiculturalism. These events are often sponsored by European embassies, notably French and German, keen to support what may appear to them to be non-political causes. One may observe an element of colonial nostalgia in these representations, which meshes with the promotion of particular types of tourism, both by the state and private companies. As I have written previously, 'there is something of what Baudrillard calls the hyperreal about the invention of "vanished savage naturalness" and the re-creation of imagined utopia' in the promotion of wildlife and cultural tourism, upon which Kenya is heavily dependent for hard

currency earnings.⁵⁵ The Ministry of Tourism is currently promoting cultural tourism as part of its plans to ‘diversify from traditional tourism products’ – sun, sand and safaris.⁵⁶ Examples of cultural festivals include the annual Lake Turkana Festival, organised by NMK with financial support from the German Embassy, whose publicity material speaks of ‘helping preserve the cultures’ of eight named ethnic groups.⁵⁷ Then there is the annual cultural festival at Malindi every August, which commemorates an uprising in 1913–14 against British colonialists led by Giriama resistance heroine Mekatilili was Menza; this is organised by the Malindi District Cultural Association (MADCA).⁵⁸ NMK and the Malindi municipal council also introduced an annual cultural festival in April 2010, featuring handicrafts, dancing and a food bazaar, rather than a song and dance about anti-colonial rebels.⁵⁹ A fourth example is the annual Lamu Cultural Festival, heavily tied into coastal tourism promotion, and a fifth the relatively new (since 2010) Taste of Nairobi Festival, whose theme in 2011 was ‘Celebrating Socio-Cultural Diversity’. Most recently, plans are being laid for an annual Maasai Festival starting in 2013 and a proposed cultural museum at Olorgesailie, the world-renowned pre-historic site run by NMK off the main road between Nairobi and Magadi, with the aim of ‘rekindling and perpetuating Maasai heritage in an age of cultural convergence and loss of traditions’. NMK and the Smithsonian Institution of Washington DC support the plans.⁶⁰

The second trend is the flowering, since around 2009, of state-funded cultural centres across provincial Kenya.⁶¹ Some of the community peace museums we have studied may be better termed cultural resource centres, in that they hold collections of material culture, usually those of single ethnic groups, but none has adopted this name. The stated ambition of government is to establish cultural centres nationwide; in 2009 the Ministry announced it was setting aside 40 million Kenya shillings for centres in all 210 constituencies.⁶² The following

year it said it was ‘currently constructing 17 cultural centres in various parts of the country’ with the aim of ‘enhancing peaceful cohesion as well as giving identity and pride to the concerned community.’ In a speech at the Obama Kogelo Cultural Festival in January 2010, the then Minister of National Heritage William Ole Ntimama (or rather, someone reading the speech on his behalf) announced:

The Ministry in its strategic plan has identified development of Community Cultural Centers as an important strategy for harnessing the untapped cultural heritage potential within communities ... The main objective of these community cultural centers is to provide platforms to communities for preservation and promotion of cultural expressions, exchange of cultural goods and services and for cultural dialoguing ... these community cultural centers will further provide focal points for mobilization, promotion and preservation of cultural resources for development within communities and act as linkages for cultural tourism.⁶³

The oddest supporter of this new initiative emerged in early 2011 – the late Colonel Gaddafi. He was visited by a delegation of 130 elders from different Kenyan communities, clad in full ‘traditional’ regalia, who crowned him King of Africa. Gaddafi reportedly ‘promised to construct 42 cultural centres in Kenya for all the communities.’ These were to be sites ‘where the elders would operate’, according to Luo Council of Elders’ member Meshack Ogallo, who met Gaddafi three times.⁶⁴ What these elders appeared to admire about the late dictator was his championing of the concept of a united states of Africa, old-fashioned ‘tribalism’ and patriarchal traditions. After Gaddafi met his end in October 2011, Ogalla praised him as ‘a man and a half’.⁶⁵

The proliferation of cultural centres (built by government and the private sector, including local politicians) is set to increase as constitutional implementation gets underway, and

power is devolved to the new county governments. The counties are already hard at work branding themselves, much of it with an emphasis on cultural heritage that thinly masks ethnicised political interests. Evidence of this can be seen in the ‘Know your County’ features in the County Supplements published each week by leading English-language newspaper the *Daily Nation*. For example, a recent article on Meru featured the Ameru Council of Elders, the Njuri Ncheke. After describing its ‘traditional’ cultural role at the heart of Ameru society, the writer said one of its responsibilities was to ‘eradicate ethnicity’ – surely a contradiction in terms.⁶⁶ Another example, featuring what may be called an extinction discourse, was an article on the Abasuba of Lake Victoria. Below the headline ‘Nilotes or Bantus? Debate rages as the Suba face identity threat’, the writer quoted the chairman of the Abasuba Council of Elders, Apollo Okeyo, lamenting how the Suba had become ‘lumped in with the Luo “who take up the lion’s share of the political cake”.’ He felt they were losing their language, history and identity as a discrete group, as a result of ‘education, a general inferiority complex, and intermarriage’.⁶⁷ Yet the subtext was clear: concern about loss of financial resources was linked to a desire for political power.

To summarise, it appears the governments of Kenya and Botswana, no doubt others too, perceive ‘heritage’ to be less threatening than ‘history’, and thus the state chooses to invest in cultural heritage instead – something evident even within a national history exhibition, as this chapter goes on to explain. The increasing commodification of culture fits with the state’s economic plans – culture is welcomed partly because it can be sold, whereas history can not – and it is an intrinsic component in the branding of Kenya.⁶⁸ The state’s definition of culture does not tend to encompass contemporary urban literary, artistic, musical and dramatic expressions of culture, which are non-traditional and non-ethnicised, although these often address (and in the

case of some brilliant cartoonists and comedians) lampoon Kenya's obsession with 'tribe'. It is worth noting that NMK's Cultural Heritage Department, previously called Ethnography, is one of its oldest research departments. In contrast, NMK has never had a history department or employed full-time professional historians, even for the development of the new history exhibition, which was curated by a former policeman.⁶⁹ This development process will be described below.

Culture and its uses in social unification

The urgent need to address what may be called Kenya's history deficit, and employ cultural heritage as a central plank in unification efforts, became apparent following the 2007/08 post-election crisis, which revealed a crisis of identity, memory and history that will take many years to resolve.⁷⁰ The then Heritage Minister Ole Ntimama, a renowned champion of Maasai cultural heritage in particular, referred to this crisis and subsequent unification efforts in an inappropriately jocular manner in a speech to mark the National Museums of Kenya Centenary Celebrations at Nairobi National Museum, on the evening of 19 November 2010. It is worth quoting at length:

Now we have just started what we call cohesion because of the problems we have had in 2007 and 2008, it is very important to have that as a government and we are assisting them to try and make culture the most important thing in the towns and in the villages and culture builds a human being. *Waswahili wasema mtu asiye na mila ni mtumwa* (Swahili people say he who does not have a culture is a slave). Really, if you don't have a culture you don't have a sense of direction ... This is what we are pushing. We are sending a strong message to the people, what is happening now, we have sensitized the country, the leaders, about how important the culture is especially for the youth and other

people like women. Every Member of Parliament has written to me wanting to build a cultural centre in their own constituencies. And the few that we have built are very helpful indeed and they put the people together. We have built cultural centres where people meet and exchange ideas and they have given those tribes that are normally not very friendly ... through these cultural centres they have developed a uniqueness of trying to live together, of trying to build the nation ... We think we are penetrating into the people and what I have been telling my Minister for Finance is that what we need is money to build these cultural centres ... because they are very very important indeed.⁷¹

The odd thing about this splendid evening, which I was unable to attend, was that a new permanent history exhibition opened the same day at the museum, but was not mentioned in any of the VIP speeches. I had assumed that the event would focus on this. Eager to hear about the launch of the exhibition, since I had been tracking the difficult process of its development for some time, I sent a young Kenyan member of our project team, Gordon Omenya, to cover the event for me. His report did not contain any reference to this exhibition. Rather, the emphasis of the reception was on cultural celebrations and fundraising, specifically the launch of an endowment fund ‘that will see this institution stand strong and firm in the future.’⁷² What better example of Kenya’s history deficit? The elephant in the room did not merit a single mention.

The ‘culture for national cohesion’ theme has become ubiquitous at state-run events. Another example is the annual Kenya Heritage and Cultural Forum Week, whose theme in October 2008 was understandably – months after the nation fell apart – ‘A Bridge Towards Social Cohesion and Economic Growth through Cultural Diversity’. Ntimama was again in attendance, at least for the Cultural Night at the National Museum, when he told his audience that culture was the most important ingredient of national cohesion.⁷³ In focusing on culture, and

making it so central to the development of new exhibitions during the EU-funded refurbishment period (2002–2007), NMK was also responding to visitor feedback. ‘Most visitors (57.7 per cent) stated that their main purpose of visiting the Nairobi Museum was to “see and learn” more about Kenyan culture’.⁷⁴ The need to use material culture displays in order to promote unity in diversity, among the country’s different ethnic communities, was first pointed out to NMK in a consultancy report by Hunting Services in 1999. This noted that some visitors were dissatisfied with the ethnography gallery’s presentation of ethnic identities as distinct and separate from one another, ignoring cross-cultural influences over time. Other visitors complained that too much prominence was being given to Agikuyu cultural identity, and criticised an Agikuyu traditional homestead which used to lie near the Snake Park in the museum grounds; this was removed in 2006.⁷⁵

This leads me into a discussion of the development of the first ‘history of Kenya’ exhibition, a landmark achievement by NMK, given the historical absence of historians and historical collections at the National Museum, and the then lack of trained staff with experience of creating permanent exhibitions of international standard – challenges which must be factored into any critique. This development process is presented as an object lesson in post-colonial public history production.

Development of the History Exhibition at Nairobi National Museum

This was planned as part of a major eight million Euro NMK Support Programme (NMKSP), commonly referred to as the ‘Museum in Change’ programme (2002–2007),⁷⁶ funded by the European Commission at the request of NMK, which saw the flagship museum, Nairobi National Museum, undergo extensive restructuring.

The creation of 12 new permanent exhibitions, staff training and management reforms were among the wider objectives, which have been achieved. However, it is clear from the available documentation, personal observation and other information supplied to me that the whole process was fraught to say the least, and at times it appeared that the project might even have to be aborted.⁷⁷

At a workshop convened by NMK at Naro Moru in July 2005, it was agreed that exhibitions would open by the end of June, 2007 on the separate themes of Nature, History and Culture.⁷⁸ The first and last of these resulted in the Hall of Mammals, Cycle of Life and Cradle of Mankind exhibitions, whereas history took longer to create. By September 2005, three committees had been established to manage each exhibition project team, and a project leader, content specialist, developer and designer engaged for each theme; later on different teams were created for each gallery. No content specialist was appointed for the history team.⁷⁹ Paul Faber, Senior Curator Africa at the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, was recruited to guide the process, and the team was also supported by exhibition developer Paul Ariese. A number of Kenyan historians were commissioned to write scripts for specific themed sections of the storyline. The first task of each gallery team was to prepare a detailed concept paper by the end of the year; more meetings were held, some draft briefs produced, but it was clear by the end of 2005 that little progress had been made. This disappointing lack of progress was to continue, at least with regard to the history exhibition, for the next five years. The history team faced a major challenge: NMK did not possess a history collection. A researcher was employed to locate photographs and documents.⁸⁰ (I and other Kenyanist scholars were asked, by Director-General Dr Idle Farah, to help NMK locate suitable materials; I did what I could to help.) In addition, there was a lack of coordination between different departments and teams, and staff working on this and other

galleries lacked experience in creating permanent exhibitions; sometimes this inexperience led to their reportedly rejecting external advisors' ideas.⁸¹

Of the money set aside for the development of this and other exhibitions from EU funds (53 million Kenya shillings for exhibition production as a whole), relatively little was spent on the history exhibition, apart from consultancy fees to three local historians who developed the scripts.⁸² When the renovated museum reopened in June 2008, it did so without a history gallery and other new permanent exhibitions which were all behind schedule. This was understandable; apart from the serious delays in releasing funds to NMK in the first place,⁸³ some of the people tasked with this work did not have sufficient experience, and initial expectations were probably unrealistic. More funds were obtained from the Treasury; they too were spent, yet the exhibition was still far from completion.⁸⁴ It finally opened several years behind schedule in November 2010. I first became involved in the exhibition development process in 2006, when I was asked confidentially to comment on the draft storyline, and attended a planning meeting at the National Museum in January 2007. I shall return to discussing this script and content development process shortly.

First, I want to start at the end of the process, by describing a telling scene I observed in the exhibition space when I visited it for the first time.⁸⁵ This supports my hypothesis that 'culture' has come to stand for 'history' in representations and performances of an historical nature – both for the exhibitors (curators, heritage managers, interpreters) and public consumers. The first set of exhibits in the first room of the exhibition is entitled 'Identity', as planned in the original storyline.⁸⁶ A long cabinet contains black and white photographs of members of different Kenyan ethnic groups; these are largely undated, but appear to have been taken in the colonial era.⁸⁷

Single artefacts are placed below each photograph (mostly unexplained and undated). The photo captions, where given, are very brief, such as ‘Turkana man’, ‘Kuria Rainmaker’, ‘Grandfather with grandchildren’. A storyboard explains: ‘Kenya became home to more than 42 communities. These had different physical characteristics, spoke different languages, established unique cultural practices and engaged in a variety of economic practices. These factors formed the basis of their individual identity.’ Opposite the cabinet, in pride of place at the centre of the room, stands a life-size model of a ‘Kuria elder in traditional dress’, behind glass.

Striking a chiefly pose with flywhisk raised above his head, the elder wears an elaborate colobus-monkey fur cloak and hat. This kind of old-fashioned diorama is a familiar sight in NMK’s provincial museums.

As I stood there, taking notes, a schoolmaster rushed into the exhibition with a noisy group of 20 or 30 primary schoolchildren. He threw his arms wide in front of the Kuria model, his face lit up, and he declared: ‘This is the *culture!*’ Most of the children paid no attention; they were more engrossed in play and fooling around. The teacher then rushed to the left-hand corner of the room where a three-dimensional map of Africa showed early migration routes of Cushites, Nilotes and Bantu.⁸⁸

At the push of a button, the routes lit up – a big draw for schoolchildren. He talked them briefly through this, and called for responses. ‘Nilotes are those living alongside the lake, are you getting me?’ ‘Yes!’ the children chorused. Moving on to other displays in the room, the question-and-answer teaching method continued. ‘Are you getting me?’... ‘Yes!’ They were getting the message loud and clear that the culture and origins of supposedly distinct ethnic groups are an important part of Kenya’s history. It is an already familiar lesson drummed into pupils every day at school.

But one might have expected culture and ethnography, a central focus of the first room of this four-roomed exhibition (plus a small auditorium), to be covered elsewhere in the museum, such as in the Cycle of Life gallery and temporary exhibitions that often feature cultural matters. Clearly, from information received and my own observations of the struggle to fill the history exhibition space, NMK has had to rely on displaying old photographs and other items of material culture it already held. (I was told by senior staff that a public appeal launched in 2007, asking citizens to donate items for the exhibition, largely failed; few responded, or they demanded payment.)⁸⁹ Secondly, NMK fell back upon describing the origins of different ethnic groups – something already very familiar to schoolchildren reared on ‘origin stories’ that feature heavily in school textbooks. For example, Form One pupils (on average aged 14–16) are taught a 16-page chapter on ‘The Peoples of Kenya up to the 19th Century’, which traces the histories of different Bantu communities (Western, Eastern, Coastal, Highland), followed by ‘the Nilotes’, ‘the Cushites’, reasons for and results of migration, and the settlement of each group. This comes under the rubric of ‘History and Government’.⁹⁰ The questionable term ‘tribe’ is employed throughout, and Chapter 5 (‘Social Economic and Political Organisation of Kenya Societies in the 19th Century’) is also arranged according to ‘tribal group’. An exercise at the end of Chapter 1 (Introduction to History and Government) focuses on origins: ‘While on your holiday, find out how your clan and ethnic community came to be where they are now.’⁹¹ Pupils are given some suggestions, such as finding out the name of their ethnic community and clan, when their community arrived where it is now, where it was before, why it moved, who led it. This is, I argue, part of a relentless diet that can only foster a sense of distinctiveness, belonging or converse sense of loss and displacement, often accompanied by a sense of grievance over lost

territory and rosier times, which at its most extreme was manifested in the 2007/08 post-election violence.

The struggle to produce the ‘Story of Kenya’

To return to the exhibition development process, a series of planning meetings was held from 2005 with local historians in order to discuss the focus of the exhibition and to develop a script. The plan at this stage was to simultaneously produce both a travelling exhibition and a permanent one, both with a cut-off date of 1963.⁹² However, plans for the travelling exhibition were not part of the NMK Support Programme, but an initiative led by Maina Kiai, then director of the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR). Early planning meetings were held at a luxury hotel in Naivasha in May 2006, and at the Windsor Country Club, Nairobi.⁹³ I was told by one participant in the Naivasha meeting, a foreign scholar of Kenya: ‘It was Maina’s baby, he spearheaded the whole thing. The whole agenda was about giving Kenyans a history they can own, something they can share and be proud of.’ It was understood that KNCHR was to bring in the funding. Later, when arguments arose over what shape ‘the story of Kenya’ should take, Mr Kiai reportedly told the other participants: ‘If you write the history the way we [KNCHR] want it to be written, you get the money. If not, you don’t.’⁹⁴ According to others, ‘It stalled because of the lack of time for KNCHR to raise money for it. Maina was too busy elsewhere to give time to the exhibition.’⁹⁵

Initially called ‘the Kenya Independence Struggles Project’, this title was soon dropped.⁹⁶ According to Godfrey Muriuki, who took part in these early discussions and went on to co-write the script for the permanent exhibition: ‘It was stillborn almost from the word go because there was no consensus on what should be included or left out. Indeed, the feeling was that the role of the Kikuyu was exaggerated.’⁹⁷ An emphasis on Kikuyu and Mau Mau, which is evident in the

series of draft storylines and in the Armed Struggle section of the finished exhibition, may be partly attributable to the reported difficulty the developers faced in finding evidence (in a displayable form) of the involvement of other communities in Mau Mau, and the influence of Fredrick Karanja Mirara, who was in charge of exhibition development until his early retirement from NMK in February 2008.⁹⁸ Only the proposed travelling exhibition is still focused on resistance struggles (note plural), though the permanent exhibition has as its centrepiece a struggle narrative that revolves around Mau Mau and Gikuyu involvement in it, not earlier resistance by different ethnic groups which the travelling exhibit proposes to cover.⁹⁹ There was, at this early planning stage, when plans for the permanent and travelling exhibitions were, to some extent, intertwined, a strong human rights focus, evident for example in one of the questions raised: ‘What are the principles of the human rights based approach – participation, accountability, empowerment and discrimination that form the basis of the exhibition?’ Gender sensitivity was also central; for example, a proposed theme was the ‘role of women in independence struggles [including] ‘Mekatilili – gender dimensions must be properly highlighted’. The influence of local historian, writer, painter and activist Zarina Patel (and early planning workshop participant) is evident here; she has painted Mekatilili addressing her followers, and long supported efforts by the Malindi District Cultural Association (MADCA) to commemorate this local Giriama heroine. Critical questions were being asked by the developers: ‘How much TRUTH will the exhibition be telling and what shall we be trying to suppress in the exhibition?’ (emphasis in original) and ‘The message that the exhibition sends out should be irritating and soothing at the same time.’¹⁰⁰ None of these concerns appears to be reflected in the permanent exhibition, although some of the same Kenyan historians were involved in developing the final storyline. After their scripts were approved, however, they were not consulted again.

What seems to have happened is that the initial human rights focus and concern with inclusivity became progressively watered down, after Kiai and the KNCHR withdrew. One can only assume that NMK, or individual heritage managers, did not favour a human rights approach to exhibition development that was likely to present a picture of Kenyan history centred more on ordinary people's struggles and survival than the triumphs of 'big men'. No more was said about the struggles project. Zarina Patel found she was not invited to later planning meetings, though the organisers assured her that this was not deliberate. By January 2007, and the first planning meeting I attended as an observer, the outline of the proposed script went as follows (this is abridged),

1. 1895: Kenya before Kenya. Identity; peoples; livelihoods; social, political and cultural forms of organisation; prelude to colonial rule.
2. 1895–1920: Creation of modern Kenya, including invasion and resistance; the Uganda Railway and effects of; Indian immigration; European settlers; early Nairobi; European control and local resistance; colonial rule and primary resistance; role of religion – Christianity; early formal education, language; World War 1 conscripts and its effects.
3. 1920–1963: Who owns Kenya? British rule; colonial politics (land alienation, creation of reserves, *kipande* system, army, police and legislation); economic changes (white highlands, cash crops, migrant labour, trade, infrastructure); social and cultural changes; churches and schools/education system; the road to independence; African political organisations; armed struggle (Mau Mau); trade unions and labour movement.
4. 1963 onwards: Birth of a new nation. Independence day; self-governance; political developments; constitutional changes; other organisations (e.g. National Youth Service); who owns the land? settlement scheme, new landed gentry, rural areas; urbanisation and landlessness; development of national identity; national media, culture and sports, etc.¹⁰¹

The aim of the meeting was to allow the interpretation team to comment on the outline script, presented by the exhibition curator and his team, and to take it forward.¹⁰² The curator, James Nyagah, spoke to a powerpoint presentation which took us through the draft script. He became increasingly defensive under questioning. After two-and-a-half hours, we had only got as far as discussing the arrival of European settlers and early resistance, because too much time was spent discussing inessential detail. Nothing concrete had been decided. Any queries about twentieth or twenty-first century culture were swept aside; people were told ‘that’s being covered in the ethnography gallery’ or in the pre-1895 section (the year the protectorate of British East Africa was established), as if evolving culture was not pertinent to the modern period. The discussion became most heated when it came to land losses; I was drawn into a discussion about the possibility of featuring Maasai land losses to the British in the 1900s, but some people objected that a focus on this could obscure the fact that many different groups lost land to the colonisers.¹⁰³ There was little discussion of what identity actually meant, other than a badge of ethnicity; ‘identity’ seemed to be a given, though several people challenged the idea of representing identity by a wall of ‘faces’: ‘It’s so simplistic’, opined one person, ‘that identity is all about faces. Is that all that you want to tell?’ Another participant said: ‘Showing only faces for me is not very fascinating. We must show different *facets* of Kenyan life before 1895. Livelihoods also shows aspects of identity.’ Despite these objections, the wall of ‘faces’, in the form of colonial-era portrait photographs with little or no accompanying description, made it to the final exhibition. Of the overall plan, one person correctly anticipated: ‘It seems to me that we are going to have a lot of photos. We need to have more than photos.’

The discussion became liveliest by far when the idea of showing stuffed lions was mooted. These would recreate the famous episode in which the man-eating lions of Tsavo carried

off a number of Indian labourers building the Uganda Railway in 1898. The curator said: ‘We cannot only stuff a lion but have a stuffed coolie.’ [Laughter.] ‘You are showing a person being eaten, which is the challenge, to me. A dramatization.’ Others rejoined: ‘We want drama ... We need the roaring sound of a lion. Growling. After five minutes or so!’ People seemed to love dwelling on the gruesome detail of the victims’ fate.¹⁰⁴ In the end, the lions did not make it back from their home in Chicago. But from observation, visiting children clearly enjoy the railway section of the finished exhibition (which includes the front fender of a steam engine, and some rails), and would probably have loved the lions, too – complete with grisly sound effects.

According to an earlier roadmap, ‘the loose ends of the exhibition’ were to have been tied up by April 2007, but this was clearly never going to happen.¹⁰⁵ Not least because Daniel Mitei, curator and head of the interpretation team, told the meeting that they would have to work with what they had already got, i.e. photographs and artefacts owned by NMK. It was already apparent that these would be insufficient for purpose. In fact, the curator admitted: ‘We don’t have a history collection, we just anticipate that we are going to get [it].’ They faced a very real challenge.

The finished exhibition

The developers gave considerable thought to the ‘emotional and behavioural’ impacts that exhibits should have on visitors; from observation of some reactions, the emotional component, at least, has been achieved. Boys are fascinated, for example, by the display of home-made Mau Mau guns and a cabinet containing Dedan Kimathi’s outsize shorts and pistol. These exhibits are also easily viewable, in comparison to many objects, photographs and explanatory text that are placed far too high up to be readable or viewable by short-statured visitors, let alone schoolchildren.

‘The exhibition should be about showing people’s real experiences’ was one plea voiced at the 2007 meeting.¹⁰⁶ Has this been achieved? ‘Big men’ are all too apparent, unfortunately, and fewer women are visible. But ordinary people are certainly evident in a video featuring interviews with Mau Mau veterans, in a space focused on Armed Struggle.¹⁰⁷

The video livens up this space – however, in only featuring interviews with Gikuyu veterans, it contradicts the claims of human rights groups, recently taken up with enthusiasm by NMK, that Mau Mau was a multi-ethnic movement.¹⁰⁸ While other exhibits, such as those on trades unionist struggle, accurately describe the struggle for independence as involving political mobilisation as well as military action, this more nuanced message tends to be lost in the over-emphasis on Mau Mau. From observation, moreover, teachers and guides whisk parties of schoolchildren past the ‘Trade Unions and the Struggle’ exhibit at great speed, and their attention is not drawn to it. Oral interpretation by guides is key to visitor understanding. I asked one guide, addressing schoolchildren in the Armed Struggle room, what the connection was if any between Kenyatta and Mau Mau, since this was not at all clear from the display. ‘He led Mau Mau but he pretended that he did not’, came the incorrect answer.¹⁰⁹

End of excerpt/

¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Education for a National Culture* (Harare, 1981), pp. 4, 15.

² I would like to thank several people who kindly commented on earlier drafts of this chapter, corrected factual errors and provided useful information. They include Paul Faber, Gonda Geets, Fredrick Karanja Mirara, Macharia Munene, Godfrey Muriuki, Zarina Patel and Chris Thouless.

³ Lotte Hughes: “‘Truth be told’: Some problems with historical revisionism in Kenya’, *African Studies* 70/2 (August 2011), pp. 182-201.

⁴ Adebayo O. Olokoshi and Liisa Laakso, *Challenges to the Nation-State in Africa* (Uppsala, 1996), p. 8.

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- ⁵ Historian Macharia Munene has rightly pointed out to me that there are several very different versions of patriotic history, e.g. those employed by Kenyatta, Moi, Ogot and Kinyatti, and that it would be worth exploring these contested versions. Space unfortunately precludes me from doing so here. Personal communication, December 2011.
- ⁶ In 2010, seventeen African states celebrated 50 years of independence. It will be Kenya's turn in 2013. Carola Lentz and Godwin Kornes (eds), *Stagings of the State, Commemoration Marathon and Popular Festival. Africa celebrates 50 years of independence* (Frankfurt am Main, 2011).
- ⁷ See for example E. S. Atieno Odhiambo, 'The production of history in Kenya: the Mau Mau debate', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 25/2 (1991), pp. 300–307.
- ⁸ E. S. Atieno Odhiambo: 'The production of history', p. 304.
- ⁹ Hughes: "'Truth be told'" cites several articles in the national press which rely heavily on Kinyatti. This trend continues. By 'anti-Mau Mau' I mean scholars who question the dominance of Mau Mau historical narratives in the broader story of the making of Kenya, not those opposed to the movement *per se*.
- ¹⁰ James A. Ogude, 'Ngugi's concept of history and the post-colonial discourses in Kenya', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 31/1 (1997), p. 97.
- ¹¹ From an opening speech, as University Chancellor, given at the International Symposium 'Towards Kenyan National Dialogue, Healing and Reconciliation: Reform Issues in a Modern African State', Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya, 13–15 May 2009. Unpublished report written for this research project by Iain Jackson.
- ¹² Bethwell Ogot and William R. Ochieng (eds), *Kenya: The Making of a Nation: A Hundred Years of Kenya's History, 1895–1995* (Maseno, Kenya, 2000).
- ¹³ Ogot and Ochieng: Kenya; Daniel Branch: *Between Hope and Despair, 1963–2011* (New Haven and London, 2011). Others include W. R. Ochieng (ed.), *A Modern History of Kenya 1895–1980* (London, 1989), and Charles Hornsby, *Kenya: A History Since Independence* (London, 2012). My point, however, is that none of these is comprehensive, spanning the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras, and no such history has yet been published by a Kenyan.
- ¹⁴ Macharia Munene, *Historical Reflections on Kenya: Intellectual Adventurism, Politics and International Relations* (Nairobi, 2012).
- ¹⁵ Munene: *Historical Reflections*, pp. 65, 66.
- ¹⁶ For example, Okello Ayot, *A History of the Luo-Abasuba: from 1760–1940* (Nairobi, 1979); B. E. Kipkorir, *People of the Rift Valley: Kalenjin* (London, 1978); B. E. Kipkorir, *The Marakwet of Kenya: A Preliminary Study* (Nairobi, 2008); Godfrey Muriuki: *History of the Kikuyu*; Godfrey Muriuki,

People round Mount Kenya (London, 1978); H. S. K. Mwaniki, *The Living History of Embu and Mbeere* (Nairobi, 1973); H. S. K. Mwaniki, *Embu Historical Texts* (Nairobi, 1974); H. S. K. Mwaniki, *The Categories and Substance of Embu Traditional Folksongs and Dances* (Nairobi, 1986); Bethwell A. Ogot, *A History of the Southern Luo* (Nairobi, 1967); Bethwell A. Ogot, *A History of the Luo-speaking Peoples of Eastern Africa* (Kisumu, 2009); Gideon S. Were, *A History of the Abaluyia of Western Kenya* (Nairobi, 1967); Gideon S. Were, *Western Kenya Historical Texts: Abaluyia, Teso and Elgon Kelenjin* (Nairobi, 1967).

¹⁷ Bethwell A. Ogot, *My Footprints On the Sands of Time. An Autobiography* (Kisumu, 2003), pp. 145–46.

¹⁸ For Jomo Kenyatta's role in creating these, see Githu Muigai, 'Jomo Kenyatta and the Rise of the Ethno-Nationalist State in Kenya', in B. Berman, D. Eyoh and W. Kymlicka (eds), *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa* (Oxford and Athens, OH, 2004).

¹⁹ Ogot: *My Footprints*, p. 157.

²⁰ Mildred A. J. Ndeda, (2003) 'Nationalist Historiography in Kenya: A look at the changing disposition of B. A. Ogot's works since 1961', paper presented at CODRESIA's thirteenth anniversary celebrations, 10–12 December 2003, Dakar, Senegal. Available www.ccs.uksn.ac.sa/files/ndeda.pdf (10 August 2011), p. 3.

²¹ See E. S. Atieno Odhiambo, 'Hegemonic Enterprises and Instrumentalities of Survival: Ethnicities and Democracy in Kenya', in B. Berman, D. Eyoh and W. Kymlicka (eds), *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*, pp. 17–72, on the detention without trial, and arbitrary arrests, of lecturers in the 1980s. Also, more briefly, on repression under Kenyatta and Moi, see V. G. Simiyu, 'Intellectuals and the state: a historical perspective', in Mbũgwa wa-Mũngai and George Gona (eds), *(Re)Membering Kenya, Vol. 1. Identity, Culture and Freedom* (Nairobi, 2010), pp. 216–17.

²² Derek R. Peterson and Giacomo Macola, 'Homespun historiography and the academic profession', Introduction in D. R. Peterson and G. Macola (eds), *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa* (Athens, OH, 2009), p. 5.

²³ There are numerous examples besides the November 2010 speech given by William Ole Ntimama which I quote in this chapter. On 5 and 6 November 2011 NMK hosted a Culture and Contemporary Dance event at Nairobi National Museum, which was advertised under the banner 'Our Diversity is our Strength'. Also see speeches on the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture website, e.g. speech given by the then Permanent Secretary Dr Jacob Ole Miaron at the opening of a third gallery at Kisumu Museum, 23 February 2009. www.nationalheritage.go.ke.

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- ²⁴ Jacob Ole Miaron, Permanent Secretary, 'Ministerial Statement: Proposed Construction of the Kogello Leadership and Cultural Centre to Safeguard Kenya's Cultural Heritage', 11 November 2009. Available www.nationalheritage.go.ke (10 January 2012).
- ²⁵ Daniel Branch and Nic Cheeseman, Conclusion, in D. Branch, N. Cheeseman and L. Gardner (eds), *Our Turn to Eat: Politics in Kenya since 1950* (Berlin, 2010), p. 245. This echoes John Lonsdale's use of the term competitive ethnic patriotism in 'Writing competitive patriotisms in Eastern Africa', in Peterson and Macola: *Recasting the Past*.
- ²⁶ A national competition was held in 2004 to find a national dress, but the outcome was greeted largely with derision by Kenyans. 'Kenya unveils first national dress', 16 September 2004, BBC News Channel. Available <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3660698.stm> (10 January 2012).
- ²⁷ *The Proposed Constitution of Kenya*, 6th May, 2010. (Published by the Attorney-General in accordance with section 34 of the Constitution of Kenya Review Act, 2008 (No. 9 of 2008))' (Nairobi, 2010). This contains numerous references to rights to cultural heritage, and proposes affirmative action programmes for minorities and marginalised groups to 'develop their cultural values, languages and practices', p. 10.
- ²⁸ Munene: *Historical Reflections*, p. 1.
- ²⁹ 'Without enough teachers Vision 2030 is a big lie', *Sunday Nation*, 10 September 2011.
- ³⁰ Joyce Nyairo and Johannes Hossfeld, Foreword in wa-Mũngai and Gona: *(Re)Membering Kenya*, p. 11.
- ³¹ See for example Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton and Monica E. Patterson (eds), *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places* (Basingstoke, 2011).
- ³² 'Report of the Task Force on the Establishment of a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission' (Nairobi, 2003). Copy supplied to this author by Task Force member Zarina Patel. My thanks go to her for sharing this, and informing me about the work of the Task Force.
- ³³ The report on a needs assessment by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, identifying potential sites of memorialisation in Kenya, is discussed in our Conclusion.
- ³⁴ Benjamin Secher, 'Storymoja Hay Festival Nairobi: 'Culture could be just the thing that saves us'', *The Telegraph* online, London, 16 September 2011. To be fair, he was probably defining 'culture' rather differently, as contemporary literary and artistic production rather than something rooted in ethnicity. Available <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture-hay-festival/8768672/Storymoja-Hay-Festival-in-Nairobi-Day-one.html> (10 November 2011).
- ³⁵ Though this was written before the NARC government came to power in 2003, and before education reforms got underway, tables in K. Mwiria, N. Ng'ethe, C. Ngome, D. Ouma-Odero, V. Wawire and D. Wesonga, *Public and Private Universities in Kenya: New Challenges, Issues and Achievements*

(Oxford and Nairobi, 2007) show clearly the unpopularity of history as a university subject. Sometimes it is not listed at all as a discrete subject, e.g. Table 1.2, 'Undergraduate programmes for self-sponsored students by university, 1998–2002'. Commerce, business management and law are among the most popular subjects, while the authors lay emphasis on the need to train more engineers and technologists in order to meet industrialisation goals.

³⁶ Parsons, Neil, 'Unravelling history and cultural heritage in Botswana', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32/4 (2006), p. 667.

³⁷ The local media regularly carries features on heritage tourism and government efforts to generate income from 'cultural practices', e.g. published under the banner of 'Heritage & Splendour', see Emmanuel Mwendwa, 'Culture reigns as the backbone of tourism', *The Standard*, 16 August 2008.

³⁸ 'Speech by Jacob Ole Miaron, PhD, CBS Permanent Secretary, Ministry of State for National Heritage and Culture on occasion of official launch of the national policy on culture and heritage, strategic plan and service charter at National Museums of Kenya on 3rd March 2010'. Quote is from p. 6. Available www.nationalheritage.go.ke (10 November 2011).

³⁹ '3rd Scientific Conference of the National Museums of Kenya, first announcement and call for abstracts'. The conference was held 9–11 November 2011 at the Multi-Media University Conference Center, Nairobi. Announcement emailed to this author by NMK Public Relations Department 6 July 2011.

⁴⁰ See www.bomasofkenya.co.ke, home page. Vision 2030 is Kenya's development blueprint for 2008–2030. It aims to 'create a globally competitive and prosperous nation with a high quality of life by 2030'. Available www.vision2030.go.ke.

⁴¹ 'Notes: Dances and Singing. Culture is the refined, permanent part of tradition'. Undated four-page xeroxed paper by P.H. Okondo, Chairman of Bomas of Kenya Ltd. NMK archives, Nairobi.

⁴² Okondo: 'Notes', p. 3. Emphasis is in the original text.

⁴³ Edward M. Bruner, *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel* (Chicago, 2005), p. 214.

⁴⁴ www.bomasofkenya.co.ke. Given under Information, Ethnic Groups.

⁴⁵ On its website Bomas of Kenya describes its Mission as 1) to preserve, maintain and promote the diverse cultures of Kenya for tourism development; and 2) to preserve, maintain, educate and promote the diverse cultures of various ethnic groups in Kenya. www.bomasofkenya.co.ke.

⁴⁶ Bruner: *Culture on Tour*, p. 82.

⁴⁷ I have been unable to establish whether this committee still exists. Emails to Bomas of Kenya received no response.

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- ⁴⁸ Authenticity Committee of Bomas to Richard Leakey, 12 November 1971. REL/F/1. Private Files. 1968–71. ‘Bomas of Kenya – Cultural Village Museum’. NMK archives, Nairobi.
- ⁴⁹ The individual ethnic groups represented in the dance teams were Kikuyu, Mbere, Kamba, Luhya, Kisii, Luo, Kipsigis, Tugen, Maasai, Turkana, Boran, Somali. *Op. cit.*
- ⁵⁰ ‘Record of a Meeting of the Bomas of Kenya Board’, held at Nairobi National Museum, 24 August 1971, p. 3. Ref. BK/2/1/9. NMK archives, Nairobi.
- ⁵¹ Letter to Richard Leakey from Peter Okondo, 23 August 1971. NMK archives, Nairobi.
- ⁵² ‘Record of a Meeting’.
- ⁵³ John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago, 2009).
- ⁵⁴ Parsons: ‘Unravelling history.’
- ⁵⁵ L. Hughes, ‘National Parks and the Growth of Tourism’, in William Beinart and Lotte Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (Oxford, 2007), p. 300, citing Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1994. English translation by Sheila Faria Glaser), p. 13.
- ⁵⁶ Unnamed correspondent, ‘Ministry plans to diversify from traditional tourism products’, *Daily Nation*, 4 June 2010. This story referred only to the coast, but is applicable nationwide.
- ⁵⁷ Invitation to the 2011 Lake Turkana Festival, Loiyangalani, 13–15 May. Online. Emailed to Lotte Hughes by NMK PR Department (15 March 2011).
- ⁵⁸ Neil Carrier, ‘Commemorating Mekatilili: From forgotten Giriama resistance leader to national heroine’. Paper presented at the workshop ‘Shaping the Heritage Landscape: Perspectives from East and Southern Africa’, 5–6 May 2010, British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA), Nairobi, organised by Lotte Hughes. Also Celia Nyamweru and Neil Carrier (2011), ‘The (re)creation of a heroine: the case of Mekatilili wa Menza’. Paper presented at the Symposium ‘Commemorating the Past, Creating the Future: Kenya’s heritage crossroads’, The British Library, London, 9 September 2011.
- ⁵⁹ Patrick Beja, ‘Malindi fete’s small beginnings’, *The Standard*, 28 April 2011. This reported that NMK Director-General Idle Farah and Board of Directors’ chair Issa Atimamy attended, without making clear whether this was in 2010, when the festival was first held, or in 2011.
- ⁶⁰ The launch event of the Maasai Heritage Program and Cultural Festival, an initiative of the African Conservation Centre and the South Rift Association of Land Owners in partnership with NMK and the Smithsonian Institution, was held at Olorgesailie, Kenya, on 26 September 2012. The quote above is from the promotional flyer. Speeches included one given by Jacob Ole Miaron, then Permanent Secretary in the former Ministry for National Heritage and Culture, who is Maasai. My thanks to Deborah Manzolillo Nightingale, who is involved in the project, for information.
- ⁶¹ I have been unable to ascertain how many such centres have now been built.

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- ⁶² Joe Kiarie, 'Ministry sets aside Sh40m for cultural centres countrywide', *The Standard*, 19 December 2009.
- ⁶³ 'Speech by the Minister of State for National Heritage & Culture – Hon. William Ole Ntimama MP EGH, read on his behalf by Stephen Mwau, Assistant Director of Library Service during the Kogelo Community Cultural Festival held on 16th to 20th January 2010'. Available www.nationalheritage.go.ke (2 November 2011).
- ⁶⁴ Isaac Ongiri, 'Gaddafi's influence in Kenya', *The Standard Online*, n.d. noted (26 October 2011). YouTube has a video clip of the visit to Tripoli by elders in January 2011, which followed meetings between Gaddafi and some 5000 elders in 2009 and 2010, according to this story.
- ⁶⁵ Ongiri: 'Gaddafi's influence'.
- ⁶⁶ Ciugu Mwagiru, 'Supreme Ameru council with the last word', *Daily Nation*, 10 May 2011.
- ⁶⁷ Story by Daniel Otieno in the Latest County News section, on Homa Bay County, *Daily Nation* online, posted 27 October 2011 (31 October 2011).
- ⁶⁸ Comaroff and Comaroff: *Ethnicity, Inc.* Kenya fits their theories perfectly.
- ⁶⁹ The curator, James Nyagah, was nonetheless described by NMK as a staff historian, e.g. in progress reports on the history exhibition development. Also see Karega-Munene: 'Museums in Kenya'; Hughes: "“Truth be told”". A possible exception to NMK's non-employment of historians was Ogot's directorship of TILLMIAP, the International Louis Leakey Memorial Institute for African Prehistory, but he was never a full-time staffer. See Chapter 12 of Ogot: *My Footprints*. Other information is taken from www.museums.or.ke (14 March 2011). This description of the Department says it 'came into existence in 1970, headed by Anthropologist Jean Brown'. It includes a Culture and History section, but among the listed objectives 'history' does not feature – the emphasis is on tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and its documentation and preservation 'for posterity'. History is only mentioned in relation to 'field expeditions to research and collect information from both rural and urban communities on their practices, beliefs, indigenous knowledge and histories.'
- ⁷⁰ Hughes: "“Truth be told”"; Coombes: 'Monumental histories'; Karega-Munene: 'Museums in Kenya'.
- ⁷¹ Gordon Omenya, 'Report of the National Museums of Kenya Centenary Celebrations held at the Nairobi National Museum on Friday 19th November 2010'. Commissioned by Lotte Hughes for the Managing Heritage research project. Unpublished.
- ⁷² Opening remarks by NMK Director-General Dr Idle Farah, Nairobi National Museum, 19 November 2010. Omenya: 'Report'.
- ⁷³ Unpublished report supplied to Lotte Hughes by research assistant Nicholas Githuku, for the Managing Heritage research project.

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- ⁷⁴ Kiprop Lagat, 'Material culture and Kenyan identity: an examination of displays at the National Museums of Kenya'. Paper presented at the Symposium 'Commemorating the Past, Creating the Future: Kenya's heritage crossroads', British Library, London, 9 September 2011. Organised by this research team.
- ⁷⁵ Lagat: 'Material culture'.
- ⁷⁶ This was the effective period of operations, though it was suspended for a while and funds were only released in 2005.
- ⁷⁷ 'Although the early stages of the National Museums of Kenya Support Programme were very problematic, and at various times it appeared likely that the project would be closed down prematurely, it has achieved considerable success.' 'Final Report – National Museums of Kenya Support Programme, December 2007', p. 44. Copy supplied to this author.
- ⁷⁸ 'National Museums of Kenya Support Programme. Annual Report. Work Programme 2 – September 2005–August 2006', p. 18. Other information comes from a source who prefers to remain anonymous.
- ⁷⁹ The development team consisted of Mishi Wambiji, Fredrick Karanja Mirara, Wycliffe Oloo, Robin Kapsoya, Michael Gachie and Samson Malaki. Later, James Nyagah became the exhibition curator, assisted by Mishi Wambiji as exhibition developer.
- ⁸⁰ 'National Museums of Kenya [NMK] Support Programme. Progress Report. Programme Estimate 3 – December 2006–February 2007', p. 14. Copy supplied to this author.
- ⁸¹ NMK: 'Progress Report', p. 15.
- ⁸² Personal communication with contact who prefers to remain anonymous. The historians were Professor Godfrey Muriuki (University of Nairobi), Dr Kenneth Ombongi (then University of Nairobi, now Kenya Utalii College), and Dr Pius Kakai (Kenyatta University). Muriuki dealt with the pre-colonial period, Kakai with the colonial period and Ombongi with the post-colonial period.
- ⁸³ This was because of problems in securing a local bank guarantee. 'NMK Support Programme. Final Report', p. 10.
- ⁸⁴ In December 2008, the then President Kibaki directed the Treasury to release 150m Kenya shillings (about 2m US dollars) to NMK to fund the completion of the remaining galleries, but I have been unable to establish whether this exact sum was released, and how much was given specifically to the development of the history exhibition.
- ⁸⁵ Visit by this author to Nairobi National Museum on 25 March 2011 and three subsequent days. Research methods included participant observation, and informal conversations with teachers, schoolchildren and guides.
- ⁸⁶ 'Storyline of the History Exhibition 4th December 2006'. NMK, Nairobi. Copy supplied to this author.

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- ⁸⁷ It was said at the January 2007 planning meeting I attended that the photographs were ‘taken by pioneer Europeans’ before 1895, and came from NMK archives. Therefore they were comparatively easy to source.
- ⁸⁸ This map looks like a replica of those printed in school textbooks, e.g. *Primary Social Studies. Living Together in Eastern Africa, Pupils’ Book. Standard Six* (Nairobi, 2010), Unit Two, pp. 48–51.
- ⁸⁹ Newspaper and radio advertisements appealed to the public to donate historical objects. One, for example, was published in the *Daily Nation* on 7 February 2007. There were only about 30 responses in all, but no objects were acquired as a result of the appeal. NMK: ‘Progress Report’, p. 14.
- ⁹⁰ *History and Government. Form One Students’ Book*. Third Edition (Nairobi, 2003).
- ⁹¹ *History and Government*: p. 6. This is a reference to the fact that children who attend boarding school (large numbers do, this is not the preserve of wealthy Kenyans) only spend time in their home communities during the school holidays, when they may get the chance to speak to their parents and elders about the history of their ethnic group.
- ⁹² Hughes: ““Truth be told”” for an update on plans for the travelling exhibition.
- ⁹³ I have been unable to ascertain the date of this, my contacts could not remember.
- ⁹⁴ Personal communication with contact who prefers to remain anonymous. January 2009, Nairobi.
- ⁹⁵ Personal communication with contact who prefers to remain anonymous. February 2012, Nairobi.
- ⁹⁶ Much of the information for this section was kindly supplied by Zarina Patel. I wish to thank her for sharing information including papers and recollections of the early planning meetings. Meeting with Lotte Hughes at the home of Zarina Patel, Nairobi, 24 May 2010.
- ⁹⁷ Godfrey Muriuki (2012). Online. Email to Lotte Hughes (11 February 2012).
- ⁹⁸ Fredrick Karanja Mirara was employed at NMK as Head Coordinator: Education Department, from 2000–2008. A long-standing research informant of mine, he has a strong interest in the history of Mau Mau. His father is a Mau Mau veteran who was involved in the Lari Massacres (Coombes, Chapter 2, this volume).
- ⁹⁹ Hughes: ““Truth be told””.
- ¹⁰⁰ Most of this is taken from ‘Storyline of the History Exhibition. [Subtitle:] Storyline of the Travelling Exhibition. Draft 2, KHCHR.’ Undated paper, shown to me by Zarina Patel.
- ¹⁰¹ ‘History Exhibition Script, Nairobi Museum, 10th January 2007’. Earlier drafts of the storyline, on which this script was based, included ‘Storyline of the History Exhibition 4th December 2006’. Copies supplied to this author by NMK staff.
- ¹⁰² Notes taken on a planning meeting at Nairobi National Museum, 24 January 2007, by Lotte Hughes.

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- ¹⁰³ I was drawn into this because my doctoral work at the University of Oxford focused on Maasai land alienation by the British in the colonial era, resulting in the book *Moving the Maasai: A Colonial Misadventure* (Basingstoke, 2006). I shared with NMK research material for possible inclusion in the exhibition.
- ¹⁰⁴ Two lions killed up to 135 railway workers (though figures are disputed) before being shot dead by Col. John Patterson. The idea of using the actual stuffed lions in the exhibition never materialised, because Chicago's Field Museum, which bought the skins in 1925, and turned them into popular exhibits, has refused to return them, despite calls for their repatriation by the Kenyan government. NMK's existing lions did not fit the bill, the meeting was told, because they are 'just standing, and we'd want to show action'. See 'Kenya presses US to return "man-eaters of Tsavo"', *Daily Nation*, 15 April 2009. It quotes Ntimama as saying: 'We may be forced to contact Mr Obama to help us bring home these lions'. And that 'the maneless lions would help Kenyans reconstruct their history'. Online. (15 November 2011).
- ¹⁰⁵ 'Roadmap for History Exhibition', one-page document, April 2007. Shown to me by Zarina Patel.
- ¹⁰⁶ One reason given for focusing on ordinary people's experiences, however, was in order 'to avoid the problems associated with controversial periods and personalities in Kenyan history'. NMK: 'Annual Report', p. 20.
- ¹⁰⁷ 'Mau Mau: the unsung heroes', film produced by NMK for the history exhibition (2010). It uses a mixture of old newsreels and recent interviews with Mau Mau veterans.
- ¹⁰⁸ Hughes: "'Truth be told'".
- ¹⁰⁹ I do not wish to blame individual guides, but would be interested to know how much training they have received.