

## The Role of Mass Incarceration in Counterinsurgency: A Reflection on Caroline Elkins's *Imperial Reckoning* in Light of Recent Events

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Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*. New York: Henry Holt, 2005.

An integrated reading of all the sources . . . yields an astonishing portrait of destruction. I've come to believe that during the Mau Mau war British forces wielded their authority with a savagery that betrayed a perverse colonial logic: only by detaining nearly the entire Kikuyu population of 1.5 million people and physically and psychologically atomizing its men, women, and children could colonial authority be restored and the civilizing mission reinstated.

—Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*

In a world-historical context—or even, in its own national-historical context—the United States' recent establishment of a large-scale network of prison camps in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere—in which thousands of prisoners languish, often for

*Radical History Review*

Issue 96 (Fall 2006) DOI 10.1215/01636545-2006-007

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indeterminate terms and with a limited semblance of due protection under the law—is not new. Nor is Washington’s transport of some hundreds of prisoners half-way around the world to a special, island-bound detention center thousands of miles away from their families and friends; or, the extreme physical and mental abuse to which many of these individuals have been subjected; or, the attempt to use the conditions of their incarceration to persuade many of them to act as agents and informants for their captors; or, the consternation of administrators when they realize that there are many of these detainees whom they feel reluctant to release (since after release, these individuals could talk freely about the ill-treatment to which they have been subjected) but against whom they still hold no reliable evidence of wrongdoing that would stand up in a court of law.<sup>1</sup>

None of these things is new because throughout the past four centuries, there have been many places around the world where a policy of large-scale incarcerations has been used by members of an armed and organized minority population that, seeking to exert hegemonic control over a given geographical space, has had to overcome the ability of much larger but less well-armed communities to retain some degree of control over that same space. Indeed, our understanding of the nature of political control in the Enlightenment world can be deepened by undertaking a broad review of how methods of large-scale incarceration have been used in an array of different historical settings, as well as of the other kinds of control policies often coimplemented along with an incarceration policy *simpliciter*. These other policies include, for example, the systematic use of torture; the establishment of penal colonies inside or outside the contested territory; the forced relocation of entire populations either within territorial jurisdictions (so-called villagization or concentration programs) or outside them (ethnic cleansing); and the large-scale, sometimes intercontinental, transportation of convicts and political detainees. It is worth noting in this latter regard that even the transatlantic trade in enslaved persons was justified by many of its practitioners by recourse to the discourse of punishment. Such a review can also help to reveal the tenuousness and contingency of many of the Enlightenment concepts used to gird and justify the European-originated system of (mainly carceral) so-called criminal justice.

The encounter between a colonizing power and the indigenous population of a territory targeted for colonization is in some ways paradigmatic of the kind of contest between a militarily stronger political elite and members of a much larger subaltern population for which large-scale incarceration is adopted as policy by the better-armed power. In other cases of large-scale incarceration—such as the Soviet-era gulag system, the large detention centers run in post-1994 Rwanda,<sup>2</sup> or situations of prolonged military occupation including Nazi-held Europe, Japan-held Asian lands, or the more recent military occupations in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Palestine—the underlying politics may differ from those of a classic colonial-anticolonial struggle; but many of the carceral and related techniques used remain similar.

In the case of the colonizing efforts launched and maintained by European powers in the post-Enlightenment era, it was not until after the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which allowed these powers to start regulating their relations with each other in their home continent, that—taking advantage of newly emerging technologies and means of financial organization—they started establishing territorially extensive, corporation-based colonizing ventures on distant continents. That move was unprecedented. In earlier eras, several colonizing powers had established, and maintained over long periods of time, coastal or riverine trading posts in countries not their own—including, quite frequently, in countries far distant from their own. But in those earlier times, stronger powers' efforts to control and exploit significant new chunks of territory remained restricted to lands contiguous with, or fairly close to, their own. From the mid-seventeenth century on, however, the development of long-distance maritime capabilities and the emergence of capitalist joint-stock companies gave the colonizing powers of Europe a new ability to move large numbers of people and large tonnages of goods over long distances, and to mobilize the material and human resources needed to establish distant, territorially extensive colonies.

However, as soon as the territorial ambitions of the colonizers became evident to the indigenous peoples of those distant areas, indigenes who had been prepared to get along with outsiders so long as the latter sought only to establish trading posts decided that now their only hope for survival lay in resistance. Thus, in most or all those areas, the scene was set for massive, prolonged conflicts between the indigenes and the territorially expansive colonizers. In these conflicts, the colonial population was often vastly outnumbered by the indigenes. But the colonizers had nearly all the firepower; they commanded superior means of communication; and they had almost no compunction about using violent policies of counterinsurgency and social control against “native” populations whom, in most cases, they did not even judge to be fully human.

One of the earliest decisions the colonizers made concerned the fate of these indigenes. Did they want to subjugate them and put them to work as laborers in the newly established plantations? Did they want to expel them completely from these lands and forego exploiting their labor? Or did they seek simply to exterminate these bothersome counterclaimants to the targeted lands?

In some cases, the colonizers knowingly chose to pursue the physical extermination of the indigenous peoples of a coveted land. Reviewing the fairly well-documented cases of the Aboriginal Tasmanians (1803–47), the Yuki of northern California (1851–1910), and the Herero of Namibia (1905–6), the historian Benjamin Madley has described the colonizers' extermination of these three peoples as “frontier genocide.”<sup>3</sup> In many other cases over the past 350 years—whether in the Caribbean, the Americas, Africa (especially the Belgian Congo), East Asia, and Australasia—European-origin colonizers have similarly wiped out entire language groups or nations of indigenous peoples through some combination of intentional

physical genocide, the grossly negligent treatment of groups of people either taken captive or otherwise rendered completely dependent, and the intentional pursuit of cultural genocide through means such as the capturing and forced resocialization of indigenous children, coercive evangelization campaigns, controls on language usage, and widespread rape campaigns that forced indigenous women to bear mixed-race children.<sup>4</sup>

In some cases, as in the U.S. Congress's passage of the 1830 Indian Removal Act or Israel's treatment of the Palestinians in 1948, the colonizers pursued the expulsion of as many of the indigenes as possible, rather than their extermination. But campaigns of expulsion, like those of physical extermination, deprived the colonizers of a labor pool that, properly subjugated and controlled, could provide plentiful cheap labor for their colonizing and plantation ventures. Therefore the preference of colonizing powers was often for the kinds of policies that could keep members of indigenous populations in place but thoroughly deprived of any right of free access to or usage of the lands and resources that had previously supported them, and equally thoroughly denied all of the civil and political rights that the citizens of the imperial metropolises were coming to demand.

A fourth option used by many colonizing powers was the long-distance transportation of subaltern others who had come under their sway. Sometimes this involuntary transportation occurred on a small scale; sometimes, the scale was massive. In nearly all cases, when justification of this act was demanded from its perpetrators, they referred to some version of the discourse of punishment. Whatever the justification given for such transports, the effect was to provide plantation owners in the lands of arrival with a workforce that had already been socially atomized and remained far removed from any nonsubjugated potential concentrations of supporters.

In North America, the European colonists exploited their control of the Atlantic sea-lanes to bring many millions of enslaved Africans to work on their plantations. At the southern tip of Africa, from 1654 onward, the Dutch colonists on the Cape of Good Hope exploited their control of Indian Ocean sea-lanes to import as slaves scores of thousands of indigenes of the Dutch-controlled East Indies (today's Indonesia and Malaysia) who had been detained by Dutch administrators in the course of successive campaigns of counterinsurgency.<sup>5</sup> The British similarly shipped subcontinent Indians to penal enclaves in Africa; and they shipped large numbers of convicts and social dissidents from their own British penal system to Georgia and, later, Australia. The French shipped recalcitrant Vietnamese to Algeria, and maintained massive international penal colonies on Réunion, in French Guiana, and elsewhere.

Whether the policies pursued by the colonizers focused on the extermination of the indigenes, their expulsion, their subjugation in place, or their transportation to distant lands, the pursuit of all of them relied on the establishment and admin-

istration of large-scale centers of incarceration, whether or not the administrative structures used in the maintenance of these systems had any of the recognizable features of a modern criminal justice system.

The indigenes of these lands came to understand the extent of their impending displacement, while their encounters with the colonizers moved through an often strikingly similar series of phases. Madley noted this process with respect to the three instances of frontier genocide. He identified the centrality of a campaign of total incarceration—the incarceration of all remaining members of the targeted ethnic group—to the three frontier genocides he studied. In the final phase of these genocides, during which the settler governments incarcerate all the remaining indigenous people in physically remote ethnic gulags,

settler governments finalize an indigenous people's dispossession, remove them from economic competition for resources, and complete their political emasculation. Ethnic gulags also provide a relatively hidden venue for continued genocide. These camps or reservations are often publicly promoted as a means of saving or protecting Aboriginal people from settlers and Western Civilization. Yet, like Soviet gulags, the ethnic gulag incarcerates indigenous people under conditions likely or even intended to destroy significant numbers through malnutrition, insufficient provision of clothing, exposure to the elements, inadequate medical care, and unsanitary conditions.<sup>6</sup>

In Tasmania, by 1835, only three hundred Aboriginals remained from a population that, when the British had first arrived there in 1803, had numbered between four and seven thousand. The last full-blooded Aboriginal Tasmanian, a woman named Truganini, died in 1878.<sup>7</sup>

In each of the three cases that Madley examined, he identified evidence of group-extrematory *intent* on the behalf of the relevant colonizing power that he judged sufficiently strong to describe as genocidal the counterinsurgency campaigns in question. Under the Genocide Convention of 1948, a finding of genocide requires that any one of a defined list of group-extrematory acts have been committed, “*with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.*”<sup>8</sup> The extra layer of extrematory intentionality makes the difference between genocide and other forms of atrocity, such as war crimes or crimes against humanity. However, in many of the historical cases of the very violent interactions between colonizing powers and indigenes, it is extremely hard to find clear evidence of group-extrematory *intent* on behalf of the colonizers, even in cases where large-scale, sometimes near-total, group-extrematory *effect* was achieved, as various colonial administrations undertook exactly the same kinds of massively carceral policies as those used in the final phase of the three frontier genocides documented by Madley. For example, Adam Hochschild has estimated that as many as 10 million indigenous residents of Congo perished between 1890

and 1910 due to the inhumane policies pursued by Belgium's King Leopold II;<sup>9</sup> and millions of Native Americans—in addition to the Yukis—perished under the onslaught of European colonists. Many of those kinds of campaigns would today be named crimes against humanity or war crimes; and under present-day international law, such acts are repudiated just as strongly as those that constitute genocide, even if many people in the West now consider genocide as somehow the worst crime of all. From the point of view of the victims and survivors of mass-extermination campaigns, it might make little difference whether all or nearly all of the members of their nation were wiped out with fully genocidal intent, or without it.

Policies of mass detention—generally on a gender-separated basis intended to break up family life—and of forced relocation, whether of detainee populations or of entire communities of indigenes, have underpinned just about every project of territorially expansive colonialism throughout history.<sup>10</sup> The portions of the world that between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries came under the control of European-origin colonial powers became crisscrossed with trails of tears and studded with the mass graves of indigenes (and relocatees) who died under conditions of gulagization, villagization, or forced relocation.

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The historian Caroline Elkins's study of the mass detention and other punitive policies pursued by the British colonial administration in Kenya against the Kikuyu people, 1952–60, gives us a detailed picture of one of these colonial counterinsurgency campaigns. In Britain, her book is tellingly titled *Britain's Gulag*; in the United States, it appears as *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*.<sup>11</sup> At its height, 1954–59, the British counterinsurgency in Kenya involved the incarceration by the colonial authorities, in one or another kind of tightly controlled and highly abusive environment, of three-quarters or more of the entire Kikuyu population of Kenya, which at that time stood at around 1.5 million people.

This counterinsurgency campaign, and Elkins's study of it, is significant in a number of ways. First, the timing of the anti-Kikuyu campaign was notable since it occurred some years after Britain had signed onto the Nuremberg Principles, which stated explicitly that war crimes and crimes against humanity should be punished, regardless of who committed them—and at a time, moreover, during which the British government harshly criticized the Soviet Union for actions carried out in its own extensive gulags.<sup>12</sup> Elkins's work portrays British authorities trying to come to terms with a new era in which empires could no longer be administered by blatantly violent means; they therefore attempted to hide the more violent aspects of British rule.

Second, the relatively recent date of this counterinsurgency means that Elkins was able to interview scores of survivors and some of the former adminis-

trators of the broad carceral system, as well as to do extensive work in the recently opened British archives of that era. Moreover, she learned enough Kikuyu to be able to conduct most of her interviews with survivors of the detention camps in their first language. The timing of her inquiry was nearly optimal: people who may have been unwilling to speak openly previously—both survivors and former perpetrators of the camps' violence—had now reached a greater readiness to do so. Because of these testimonies her work presents an opportunity to view both the workings and, crucially, the effects of a counterinsurgency policy similar to many undertaken by colonial powers in the more distant past, but regarding which we nowadays have no possibility of systematic access to the testimonies of survivors or perpetrators. We do have access to some analogous testimonies regarding the broadly contemporaneous French counterinsurgency campaigns in Vietnam and Algeria, and the lengthy counterinsurgency waged by South Africa's apartheid regime;<sup>13</sup> but Elkins's book remains unique for the breadth of her research, the extent of the sources she draws on, and her ability to weave them together into a single compelling narrative.

Third, the anti-Kikuyu campaign has some contemporary relevance since many portions of its later carceral components were explicitly patterned on techniques used during Britain's counterinsurgency campaign in Malaya—and that slightly earlier campaign, which has been described as producing “the only victory won by a Western power against practitioners of revolutionary warfare,”<sup>14</sup> was also explicitly adduced as a model by U.S. military planners waging the counterinsurgency in Vietnam and, more recently, in Iraq.<sup>15</sup>

A good portion of the carceral system used during the Kenyan counterinsurgency had as its goal the forced Christianization and concomitant subjugation of the Kikuyu, but it was not explicitly genocidal. However, even in the absence of genocidal intent, the losses and suffering inflicted on the incarcerated were extensive. Elkins writes, as noted in my epigraph, that “only by detaining nearly the entire Kikuyu population of 1.5 million people and physically and psychologically atomizing its men, women, and children could colonial authority be restored and the civilizing mission reinstated” (xv). She estimates that the entire counterinsurgency campaign, including both its carceral and its more recognizably military components, “left tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands dead” (xvi).<sup>16</sup> She admits that the war between the British and the Kikuyu anticolonial Mau Mau networks had “left blood on the hands of all involved” (xv). However, even the British reports—which, Elkins notes, were based on incomplete and highly sanitized reporting—referred to “more than eleven thousand Mau Mau killed in action” (xvi) along with some 1,800 (pro-British) Kikuyu loyalists, but fewer than one hundred European deaths in total during the entire campaign (xvi). So if the blood was indeed on the hands of all involved, it was highly asymmetrically so.

In line with a narrative familiar from many other anticolonial struggles, it was after Kenyan soldiers, who had fought with the British Army on various fronts

in World War II, came home and sought to exercise their economic and political rights there that the seeds for the Mau Mau nationalist networks were sown.<sup>17</sup> For example, the Kikuyu writer Gakaara wa Wanjau has written of his work as a clerical officer in the British Army during the Second World War: “In the course of my work I met many Africans from the then British colonies, such as Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Tanganyika, Uganda, Nyasaland and Southern and Northern Rhodesia. I learned much from these people about the hunger and yearning for freedom of colonised peoples. And my contempt for imperialists grew from my realisation that the British colonialists persisted in treating black people as slaves although they were shedding blood for the British cause.”<sup>18</sup>

By the early 1950s, an estimated 90 percent of Kenya’s Kikuyu—including Gakaara wa Wanjau—had taken one or more of the traditional Kikuyu-style covenants or oaths for land and freedom with which the Mau Mau built and consolidated their organization. In early October 1952 Mau Mau activists assassinated “Senior Chief” Waruhiu, one of a select group of men appointed by the British who, Elkins writes, “became enormously wealthy and powerful at the expense of their fellow Kikuyu” (28–29). The newly arrived British governor, Evelyn Baring, hit back immediately, issuing orders to arrest the Mau Mau leader Jomo Kenyatta and scores of other suspected Mau Mau activists. Gakaara wa Wanjau was one of those arrested. Like nearly all the detainees, he never had criminal charges formally brought against him. He spent the next seven years detained in prison camps, some of them places of considerable violence. Throughout most of his detention, however, he was able to keep a bare-bones diary of what happened to him and his fellow detainees. Smuggled out of one of the camps toward the end of his detention, this record provided the basis for an extensive and well-documented memoir of camp life published in the Kikuyu language, *Gikuyu*, in 1983, and in English in 1988.<sup>19</sup> Over the months that followed Waruhiu’s killing, suspected Mau Mau activists undertook three or four gruesome killings of white settlers. They also murdered another high-ranking, British-appointed Kikuyu “chief,” and in one March 1953 rampage killed ninety-five followers of one of those chiefs. British and African soldiers and police officers hit back, killing “as many as four hundred” Mau Mau suspects after the last-mentioned incident (45). Kenyatta and five of his colleagues were among the few of those arrested in October 1952 who ever had criminal charges formally brought against them. In April 1953, a colonial court sentenced the six to a formal sentence of seven years’ imprisonment with hard labor (the maximum applicable to the crime for which they were convicted), “to be followed by a lifetime of restriction” (45–46). The fact that this trial was held at all indicated that—in contrast to the practice of colonial governors throughout most of the earlier part of the colonial age—at least the British were now judging these six men (if not the scores of their also-detained compatriots) to be persons endowed with rights under the law. But the dual nature of this sentence made a mockery of any idea that the



British were promoting the rule of law in Kenya and showed that just eight years after the extent of the Nazi abuses in Europe were made manifest for all to see, the British still did not feel themselves bound by any such concept in this portion of their empire.<sup>20</sup> The judge's mention of a lifetime of restriction also meant that the authorities—who knew that in addition to the six men on trial there were already many other Mau Mau detainees—concluded that they would need to start establishing penal colonies for Kenyans on a possibly permanent basis. Along the way there, a ruling had come down from London that the authorities in Nairobi could not—in the post-Nazi age—“export” their detainees to other territories, as had been their first preference.<sup>21</sup> They therefore decided to build their permanent penal colonies in the extremely hostile desert areas of northern Kenya.

Parallel with the activities of the colonial courts and the emerging non-court-based detention-camp system, the colonial authorities also launched a much larger campaign of forcibly relocating thousands of Kikuyu families. By 1952, British settlers had taken over nearly all the most fertile areas of the Central and Rift Valleys, areas that Kikuyu cultivators and herders had for many preceding generations shared among themselves according to long-established rules of land usage. From the early twentieth century on, however, the Kikuyu were allowed land rights only within some very restricted and economically marginal lands adjoining the Central Valley. These so-called Kikuyu reserves were always overcrowded and overgrazed. But until 1952, many Kikuyu still found a way to live—even if only as “squatters” under colonial law—on or near their family's older lands. Since they knew how to farm those lands, while many of the British settlers did not, this proved a mutually acceptable arrangement for some years. But after the Mau Mau started murdering settlers, the settlers insisted that the Kikuyu squatters all be summarily expelled to the reserves. Elkins writes,

The removals were massive and indiscriminate. . . . Local colonial administrators in the Rift Valley executed the Emergency Regulations with particular zeal. By the beginning of 1953 they had packed thousands of Kikuyu into railcars and lorries for shipment to the already overcrowded reserves. . . . As of May of that year, over one hundred thousand Kikuyu had been deported from their homes and returned to the Kikuyu reserves, a place many of them hardly knew. (57)<sup>22</sup>

So rapid was the rate of the removals, and so ill-prepared the reserves to receive the deportees, that the authorities had to set up transit camps along the way. Elkins notes that the largest of these “quickly became notorious for their squalid and overcrowded conditions. Thousands in the transit camps suffered from malnutrition, starvation, and disease. . . . Most Kikuyu had no means of purchasing food, having been deported without compensation for their livestock or outstanding wages. . . . Thousands of the repatriates languished in the transit camps for months or more,

in part because there was simply nowhere to put them in the Kikuyu reserves” (58). The presence of so many relocatees in these transit camps offered a notable additional benefit for the security forces: they were able to put in place within them mechanisms for the supposedly systematic screening of the deportees for Mau Mau supporters.

This screening relied almost totally on the work of Kikuyu collaborators who, swathed in vast, all-concealing garments, would stand beside the British police and soldiers to pick out those they accused of being Mau Mau. A similar mechanism, also relying on the help of hooded informants, is still in use today in Iraq—for example, in the screening of townspeople wishing to return to Fallujah after its capture by the U.S. military in November 2004—or in the screening of Palestinians at many of the Israeli checkpoints in the occupied Palestinian territories. In the anti-Mau Mau campaign, screening was often much more than simply a process of identifying suspects. It was also a process whereby, in the small huts or pens used for the screening, the security forces (which included many hastily recruited settlers) and their loyalist Kikuyu assistants enacted systematic, intimidatory violence against nearly all the detainees who passed through, whether they had been positively accused of Mau Mau sympathies or not.

Widespread screening of suspected Mau Mau adherents was carried out outside as well as inside the transit and detention camps. Elkins writes that one former settler whom she interviewed in Nairobi remembered her brother, a member of the Kenya Regiment, boasting about the screening-related activities of a renowned settler activist known as Dr. Bunny, “which included burning the skin off live Mau Mau suspects and forcing them to eat their own testicles” (67).<sup>23</sup> That account (corroborated in an interview conducted separately with another settler) paralleled many other accounts of the brutalization of Kikuyu suspects becoming routine during “screening” processes. Elkins includes many very disturbing testimonies of survivors, and a few testimonies by perpetrators. Among the perpetrator testimonies is a written memoir by the American William Baldwin in which, she writes, he “freely admitt[ed] to murdering Mau Mau suspects in cold blood during eight different interrogations. Some he slowly killed with a knife while forcing other suspects to watch” (85).<sup>24</sup>

By July 1953, Governor Evelyn Baring had used his emergency powers to send over 1,500 suspected Mau Mau activists to the long-term internee (detainee) camps hastily built over the previous months. These people—mainly men—were incarcerated without trial, for an indefinite term, under a mechanism called the Governor’s Detention Orders (GDO). Baring’s administration had no capacity to provide anything like a fair trial to this number of suspects; David Anderson’s survey of colonial records shows that between December 1954 and December 1958, the daily average number of Mau Mau suspects held as “detainees” was three to four times greater than the number held as “convicts.”<sup>25</sup> Given the way that much of the

supposed evidence of these people's activities had been obtained, little or none of it would have stood up in a court of law. In addition, providing an open court hearing for these individuals might have allowed them to make their own accusations to a judge and the public regarding the treatment they had received at the hands of the security forces. It was far easier, therefore, for Baring to sign GDOs, which consigned them to long-term (or even possibly permanent) detention without trial. A similar set of concerns has clearly influenced the Bush administration's extreme reluctance to allow detainees in Guantánamo, Bagram, or elsewhere to exercise any right to a free trial.

In September 1953, Hugh Fraser, a member of the Westminster parliament with some responsibility for the oversight of colonial affairs, was sent to Kenya to assess the situation. In the report he later sent to the Colonial Office, he wrote that the expectation in Nairobi was that the detainee population would continue to grow: "Although there are only . . . about 1,500 detained, the number of detainees may well increase by June next year to some 25,000–40,000" (100). He added, however, that colonial authorities could not possibly plan to keep that large a number of detainees in a state of permanent detention—and therefore some way of "rehabilitating" detainees and allowing for their eventual release from detention must be found (100).

In line with this recommendation, and taking some tips from the parallel (and also extremely ferocious) campaign British authorities were waging against anticolonial activists in Malaya, Baring established a massive, multifaceted system of detention-cum-thought control that his administrators referred to as the "pipeline." The theory of the pipeline was that all the Kikuyu detainees would be classified according to their readiness to renounce (or "confess") their secret Mau Mau oaths. At first, it was a simple threefold system: the most recalcitrant detainees were called "blacks," and were sent to the harshest reeducation camps. The less hard-core were called "greys," and were subject to continuous, extremely invasive behavior-modification techniques (and a lot of hard labor) until they were judged ready to be freed from the camp and shipped (as "whites") to the Kikuyu reserves. Administering this classification system once again required endless rounds of screening. In addition, since the Mau Mau oath-taking process was based on some rituals of the traditional Mikuyu belief system, one of the key behavior-modification techniques used in the pipeline was coerced Christian conversion. Indeed, several Christian missionaries and social activists were involved in helping to run the whole pipeline system. The Anglican archbishop of Mombasa even developed a special liturgy, which he led at least three times in one of the camps, wherein detainees were required to publicly abjure their Mau Mau oaths, to "confess the faith of Christ," and to promise to undertake further Christian instruction (231).

By early 1954, Baring and his officials still felt they had failed to break the Mau Mau threat, so they introduced two new carceral techniques in their attempt

to extend their control over the Kikuyu population. In late April, they launched a surprise attack on the African quarters of the capital, Nairobi, cordoning off whole sections of the city and systematically combing each lane, hut, and household for any Kikuyu residents. Nearly all the Kikuyu people—around forty thousand men and twenty thousand women and children, comprising around three-quarters of the city's entire African population—were summarily cleared out of their homes, taken through brutal interrogation/screening centers, and loaded onto trucks. Within two weeks, the operation had been completed. Nearly thirty thousand of the summarily detained Kikuyu were shipped to the Kikuyu reserves, and over twenty thousand were sent to one of the pipeline camps for further screening. Only a small proportion of Kikuyu deemed trustworthy by the British were allowed to stay in the city (121–24).

The second new technique was introduced a few weeks later. This was the summary, forced transfer of all Kikuyu living on the reserves to tightly packed “strategic hamlets” surrounded by fortifications, deep ditches, and watchtowers. The relocatees were not allowed to take livestock or other possessions with them. One of the first things they had to do after relocation was to construct their prisonlike shelters in the tightly packed villages, along with the whole fortification system that would surround them there. As in Vietnam, the aim of this villagization campaign was to tighten the administration's control over the great mass of Kikuyu people, while undercutting any ability they might have had to provide food or other aid to the few Mau Mau fighters at large in nearby forests. “By the end of 1955, less than eighteen months after the measure's introduction,” writes Elkins, “1,050,899 Kikuyu were removed from their scattered homesteads throughout Central Province and herded into 804 villages” (235).<sup>26</sup>

By this point, the mechanisms of totalitarian social control had become even more sophisticated. The British had been able to coerce a nontrivial proportion of the Kikuyu population—described as loyalists—into acting as their underlings. These loyalists were rewarded with looting rights to the possessions and livestock the relocatees had been forced to leave behind when they were villagized. In the reserves, the loyalists' main job was to police and control the strategic hamlets. One January 1956 photo appearing in Elkins's book shows, in the foreground, the tightly packed huts of a strategic hamlet in the Nyeri District, and then slightly uphill behind it, the more spaciouly arranged huts of the loyalists tasked to watch over the village (235). Other photos from the time show the watchtowers, moats, and fortifications that surrounded the hamlets.

Many of the families inside the strategic hamlets were by this point without men, since a high proportion of men from those communities had either been taken to the detention camps of the pipeline, had left to fight with the Mau Mau in the forests, or had already been killed. The mainly female population of the villages thus had to look after its own children—including foraging for food outside the village

during the one day per week allowed. The women had to work on hard-labor projects under the always brutal supervision of British and loyalist security guards. They were subjected to continual anti-Mau Mau propaganda, screening, and rituals of extreme barbarity designed to continuously break their will. These latter included forced disrobements, very widespread rapes and other forms of sexual assault, and being forced to carry and bury the large numbers of dead (and usually also mutilated) bodies of Mau Mau suspects captured in the forests (234–65).

Fairly rapidly, villagized families also faced extreme malnutrition, and even starvation. By November 1955, even the (colonial-controlled) *East African Standard* was reporting on the deaths from starvation of forty-five villagers in one location alone. The colonial Red Cross organization and some missionary groups stepped in with food aid; but still the colonial officials denied any responsibility for the food crisis (260). The diseases accompanying malnutrition, extreme overcrowding, and unsanitary conditions also stalked the strategic hamlets, much as they stalked the scores of thousands of Kikuyu being held in the many camps of the pipeline.

By early 1957, Baring began introducing into some of the pipeline detention camps yet another, even more brutal, policy called “dilution.” The idea of dilution was to use extreme violence and shock tactics to break the wills of as many as possible of the thirty thousand “hard-core” Mau Mau suspects still—some of them now having spent four years in one or another part of the brutal carceral system—refusing to abjure their Mau Mau oaths. According to a memoir of the system carefully penned by one of its architects, John Cowan, during the dilution phase these recalcitrant Kikuyu were trucked to special centers where European officers split them up into small groups, each of which in turn would be surrounded by prison staff. The detainees “were ordered, and refused, to carry out some simple task, and were then forced physically to comply by the preponderance of warders, thus submitting, however symbolically, to hitherto resisted discipline. They were then harangued without respite, by rehabilitation staff and selected detainees working together, until they finally confessed their oaths” (Cowan, quoted on 320). *Forced physically* and *harangued* serve as code phrases in Cowan’s account for the application of extreme physical violence; a continuing small stream of the Kikuyu detainees undergoing this treatment died. In public, a colonial administration that had long ago become accustomed to doublespeak in line with the worst narratives produced by George Orwell called the new system Operation Progress.<sup>27</sup>

The fact that after four years of extremely brutal treatment already received in the pipeline system thirty thousand men (and a significant number of women) still refused to abjure their oaths stands as a testament to these detainees’ strength of commitment and their spirit of resistance. Indeed, throughout the whole period of incarceration—in the camps of the pipeline, as well as in the strategic hamlets on the reserves—networks of resistance and mutual support continually formed and reformed among the Kikuyu. Gakaara wa Wanjau’s memoir provides many

details of how he and his comrades in the detention camps organized committees for many internal functions, created an extensive schooling system inside the camp, and bribed Kikuyu and other Africans employed as camp guards to transmit letters for them and supply the detainees with food packages and other forbidden goods. He writes that performances of semisacred nationalist hymns (the texts for a few of which he had written) and dances served as an important spirit booster for the detainees. This is a very common experience of political prisoners held in large detention systems: similar forms of in-prison organization have been described in the French prison system in Vietnam, in the Apartheid-run prison system in South Africa, and in Israel's prison system in Palestine. In nearly all such cases, the prison systems themselves end up helping to mold and educate a new generation of nationalist leaders. In Kenya, as both Gakaara and Elkins write, the in-detention organizers were able to smuggle to their outside supporters numerous eloquent letters and appeals for help addressed to people and institutions beyond the incarceration system. Only a small number of those missives got through. Many were retained by colonial officials and were never made public at the time. Very frequently, Elkins writes, the authors of the letters were identified and subjected to further beatings, punishments, and even death (213–16).

By early 1959, dilution seemed to be having the desired effect: the number of recalcitrant detainees shrank to a few thousand and continued to drop. Baring made plans for those who continued to hold out to be sent to a single, continuing camp at Hola. In March 1959, news emerged from Hola that a group of ten detainees had died in one incident there. The administration claimed that they had died from drinking contaminated water, but a left-wing British barrister who was in Kenya representing a group of detainees learned that the administration's own autopsies revealed that the men had been clubbed to death.<sup>28</sup> With a general election due in Britain in October, the government hurried to undertake its usual cover-up and appointed an internal investigation by a Kenya-based magistrate. In his report, the magistrate wrote that he could not determine which of the wardens had delivered the fatal blows. But he noted that something he called "the Cowan Plan" (i.e., the dilution scheme), "which apparently had government approval and backing, gave, intentionally or unintentionally, carte blanche in 'forcing detainees to carry out the task. . . .' I do not consider that the orders were so clearly illegal on the face of the orders as to justify my recommending the preferment of charges. That is, however, ultimately a question of policy, which is a matter for the Attorney General and not for me to decide" (quoted on 348). In other words, he kicked the question of whether the lethal beatings constituted criminal acts firmly back up to the political echelon.

When this report was issued to the public, the Labour Party in London immediately tabled a motion condemning the Hola killings and demanding a full public investigation. The parliamentary debate concerning this matter started in June, and it continued into July. Along the way, the Labour opponents of the gov-

ernment's policies in Kenya were joined by some significant figures from the ruling Conservative Party. Members of Parliament were at that same time debating very similar counterinsurgency excesses committed in Nyasaland (later Malawi). In the end, because of an apparent tactical error on behalf of the Labour leadership, the proposal for a full independent investigation of the Hola massacre was never put to the vote. In the October election, the Conservatives once again won, and Harold Macmillan was returned as prime minister. But he realized that the effort to hang onto Britain's remaining African colonies could not be long sustained. He named a new colonial secretary, Iain Macleod, who made arrangements for a relatively rapid withdrawal of the British from Kenya.

The first colony-wide elections in Kenya were held in February 1961. Kenyatta had still not been released. But the Kenya African National Union (KANU), which was loyal to him, won the election resoundingly, and the new KANU MPs refused to take their seats until Kenyatta saw freedom. At seventy years of age, he was released in April 1961, at which time he immediately began advocating a program of forgiveness. There were several indications that while in jail, he had made some important concessions to his captors; and survivors of the carceral system noted bitterly that he never once denounced the activities of his son, Peter Muigai Kenyatta, who became renowned in some detention camps as an enthusiastic pro-British enforcer. Jomo Kenyatta's version of forgiveness extended both to the British settlers, who were told they would be welcome to stay on their large, colonial-era plantations, and to the loyalist Kikuyu, many of whom occupied positions of great influence in Kenya's newly independent administration.

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In the 1950s, there were no international rights monitoring groups of the kind that, today, we hope would identify and publicize gross abuses such as those committed during the counterinsurgency in Kenya, and advocate forcefully for their cessation. Instead, there was just the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); the local—in this case, colonial—Red Cross national affiliate; the missionaries; the highly constrained ability of the Kikuyu themselves to reach out and publicize their own conditions; a handful of whistle-blowers within the colonial administration; a few dedicated reporters and editors in the British media; and a handful of very clearheaded and dedicated anticolonial activists in the British parliament.

Regarding the ICRC—the body that is the international depositary for the Geneva Conventions and the Hague Conventions—Elkins notes that in February 1957, the ICRC delegate Henri Junod made an official two-month tour of the detention camps and strategic hamlets of Kenya. At that point, Baring was just introducing the dilution policy, and Junod had the chance to witness its operation firsthand in one of the camps he visited. Baring later reported to the colonial secretary in London, “I privately discussed this question [a phase of violent shock] . . . with Dr.

Junod. . . . He has no doubt in his own mind that if the violent shock was the price to be paid for pushing detainees out . . . we should pay it” (quoted on 331).<sup>29</sup>

The local Red Cross did provide a limited amount of emergency food aid to villagized Kikuyu, but Elkins has no reports of anyone associated with it raising a public alarm about conditions in the camps and hamlets. Regarding the missionaries, as noted previously, many of them played an active role within the pipeline camps and the strategic hamlets as full accomplices in the project of Kikuyu subjugation and forced resocialization. A few missionaries (and some of their wives) did voice some muted cheeps of alarm about the conditions they encountered; but they did this mainly through private communications with Baring and other officials.<sup>30</sup>

By far the most significant act of faith-based whistle-blowing during the anti-Mau Mau campaign came from Eileen Fletcher, an English Quaker with extensive social-work experience who signed a four-year contract to help run the so-called rehabilitation project in the pipeline camps in the belief that the project really did aim at the constructive rehabilitation of former miscreants. In 1955, with three years of her contract still to run, she resigned in protest over the conditions in the camps. Returning to England, she then penned a three-part exposé of what she had seen—both in the camp for women and children where she had spent most of her time, and in a number of the pipeline camps for males that she also visited. In early 1956, her account was published in London as a small booklet titled *Truth about Kenya: An Eyewitness Account by Eileen Fletcher*. The Labour MP Leslie Hale wrote an introduction; he also led demands for a full explanation into what was happening in Kenya from the Conservative government’s colonial secretary, Alan Lennox-Boyd. A parliamentary debate on the topic was scheduled for June 1956. In the lead-up to it, Lennox-Boyd and Baring engaged in a rapid exchange of telegrams as they sought to put together a credible rebuttal to Fletcher’s allegations. They also did what they could to besmirch her character (286–92). In the three years that followed the publication of Fletcher’s exposé, a slowly increasing stream of further whistle-blowers also came forward, but Lennox-Boyd and Baring continued trying to fend off all such accusations of abuse—until at last, in 1959, the revelations about the massacre at Hola proved to be the final straw that broke the camel’s back of their ability to deny the facts about the brutality in Kenya.

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The goals of all large-scale and nonexterminatory (or in some cases, pre-exterminatory) carceral systems is to extend and entrench the control that the governing authorities exercise over an entire population that they consider to form an obstacle to the realization of their political and socioeconomic goals. Campaigns are justified to members of the dominant population in discourses of ethnic hygiene, of modernization and progress, or of mental hygiene. Within discourses of progress used in these circumstances, progress is usually defined at the narrowest level as happening



when members of the targeted population show themselves increasingly ready to subordination. Thus in the Kenyan system of detention camps and strategic hamlets, “progress” was measured by the numbers of Kikuyu willing to abjure their Mau Mau oaths, to commit to holding only Christian beliefs, and to foreswear their previous efforts to struggle for land and freedom. But progress, like modernization, is also the descriptive ideal of what it is that the stronger power is aiming for throughout the territorial area contested. In this discourse, the lifestyle and folkways of members of the subaltern population are stigmatized as somehow backward, nonproductive, or even abusive; and the coercive reeducation or “rehabilitation” to which the inmates of the carceral system are subjected is perversely portrayed as supposedly liberating them from their previous lifestyles and beliefs. This discourse of liberation is only, it is true, deployed intermittently. In Kenya, it was deployed quite widely by high-level administrators of and apologists for the anti-Mau Mau carceral system. But there, as in many other large-scale carceral systems, the wardens and low-level administrators would often deploy the discourse of liberation with intentionally cruel irony—as in the cases Elkins reports in which detainees were forced to parade around their detention camps carrying the mutilated bodies of captured Mau Mau suspects while guards and others would say things like, “There, see how he won his ‘independence!’” (249).

For its part, the discourse of mental hygiene comes into play when the activists within the targeted population, as well as their supporters, are psychopathologized or diagnosed as having problems adjusting to modernity. Use of this discourse builds on unexamined assumptions about what constitutes mental well-being, and about the intrinsic desirability of the dominant power’s version of modernity and progress. In the 1950s, if a Kikuyu person expressed a preference to stick to traditional systems of landholding and farming, and to traditional, non-Christian belief systems, rather than to participate in the cash-based economy and the missionaries’ version of the Christian religion, then she or he could be (and in many cases was) described by colonial administrators as not only backward but also as having problems adjusting to modernity. The experience in the camps was described as being intended to treat this psychological disorder—just as many portions of the Soviet-era gulags were described as having a psychotherapeutic intention. In the present era, Western analysts also frequently “diagnose” the deeper psychological impulses of Muslim militants as stemming from their societies’ failure to come to terms with modernity. In nearly all instances involving a discourse of mental hygiene, it is deployed in a manner that willfully avoids any self-reflection of the type that might question whether the version of modernization on offer to the subaltern population is actually one to which any fair-minded, self-respecting human equal should be expected to consent; indeed, it is usually deployed in an explicit attempt to avoid dealing with the core political issues of fairness and control raised by the opponents.

But of course, in most of these instances of large-scale incarceration, the incarcerated are not actually viewed by most members of the dominating population as human equals at all. Whether it was the Nazis rounding up and incarcerating entire populations of Jews and Roma, the Americans rounding up and incarcerating the entire population of Yuki Indians, or the British rounding up and detaining the vast majority of the Kenyan Kikuyu, the incarcerated were viewed by their captors as constituting a group of beings worthy of vastly less consideration than other human beings, a group of beings with—crucially—no intrinsic right to the protections of habeas corpus or the other core protections afforded under Enlightenment views of the human condition. Thus it was that in French-ruled Algeria from 1834 on—as in the Nazi-controlled areas of Europe, as in Kenya and other portions of the British Empire even in the 1950s—the ruling powers were able to make an easy segue from behaving like powers that stuck to the basic concepts of the rule of law to behaving—*vis-à-vis* members of subaltern groups—like powers that did not feel themselves bound at all by the constraints of habeas corpus or other basic protections of post-Enlightenment law.

The view of Kikuyu (and other Kenyan indigenes) as significantly less than human was presumably widely held among British administrators in Kenya even before the inauguration of the system of near-total incarceration of the 1.5 million Kikuyu. The conditions in which Kikuyu men and women were forced to live within the carceral system—whether in the detention camps or in the strategic hamlets—then further stripped them of their dignity and individuality, further facilitating their captors' comparing them to animals. Kikuyu entering the pipeline system were stripped not only of all possessions but also of all clothes and issued only a pair of yellow shorts and one or two blankets; a metal wrist tag with a number on it was clamped onto one arm, that number thereafter constituting the only means used by the wardens to identify the person. Washing facilities were quite inadequate, in both the camps and the strategic hamlets. In the camps, cleaning the defecation buckets and disposing of their contents was a frequent punishment; many of the survivors quoted by Elkins speak of inmates being further punished by being forced to walk around for lengthy periods of time carrying leaky defecation buckets on their heads. Enforced public nudity and various other forms of sexual and non-sexual humiliation were—in a culture with strict codes regarding the covering of genitals—a quite common means of dehumanization. Many parallels existed there with some of the conditions reported in U.S. detention centers such as Abu Ghraib and elsewhere in recent years.

In the Kenya of the 1950s, the intent of the colonial authorities was not the physical extermination of all the Kikuyu. However, even without this exterminatory intention, the number who died as a result of the colonial counterinsurgency campaign was extremely large. It certainly exceeded by far the official figure of more than eleven thousand Mau Mau killed in action later reported by the authorities;

and indeed, even that figure does not seem to provide any accounting at all for the large numbers of Kikuyu killed while in the custody of the colonial authorities in the various parts of the carceral system, or for those who died not through direct physical violence but from the starvation, overcrowding, overwork, or other inhuman conditions of that system. Elkins used gross demographic data to try to map how many Kikuyu died as a result of their treatment during the “emergency” and concluded that “if the Kikuyu population figure in 1962 is adjusted using growth rates comparable to the other Africans [of Kenya], we find that somewhere between 130,000 and 300,000 Kikuyu are unaccounted for” (366).<sup>31</sup>

Beyond the deaths of, at the very least, some scores of thousands of Kikuyu individuals, considerable additional damage was also inflicted on the Kikuyu communities. For each person who was killed or died, a whole family was bereaved of a loved one (who in many cases was also a key family provider). Many thousands beyond those killed were left physically mutilated, in many cases through injuries deliberately inflicted on the reproductive systems of both males and females. The bonds that bind families and social networks were deliberately shattered, including through widespread rape campaigns in the strategic hamlets. Elkins includes a very poignant section in her book that deals with the disorientation and shock many men experienced when, after finally being released from the pipeline system, they were sent to the Kikuyu reserve and would try to reunite with their families. They very frequently found that close family members there had been killed and buried in unmarked graves. “Those that they did find alive lived in horrendous conditions,” Elkins writes, “leading many detainees to conclude that life in the villages had, in fact, been worse than in the Pipeline” (269).

In testimony after testimony, too, survivors spoke of “the bittersweet moment of joy and shame” (269) when husbands and wives were reunited. Many of these women had been forced to bear the children of either the British soldiers or the loyalist Kikuyu who had raped them and were trying to raise the children with them in the camps. Elkins writes, “Silence was a widespread remedy for coping with the difficulties of family reunification. Generally women would not provide their husbands with accounts of their sufferings, though the former detainees could often deduce what they were, particularly after local boastful loyalists and colonial officers filled them in on some of the details. Similarly, many of the men also chose not to speak about their Pipeline” (269). Some reunited couples managed to rebuild their marital ties on the basis of such a silence. Elkins quotes one woman survivor, Mary wa Kuria, as saying,

When the men came back, we picked up life where we had left. Even those men who found their wives with children born while they were away did not blame them, but just accepted the children as their own. Everybody understood that we had been forcefully separated, that whatever happened could not be blamed on anybody, because all of us had been living in our

separate hells, where none had had any certainty that the other would survive—that a reunion would ever be possible. This was another divine chance we had been given for a normal life, and we couldn't allow the lost time to interfere with the future. (270)

Elkins notes, however, that many men newly returned to what remained of their families simply could not cope with what they learned at that point. “Throughout Central Province former villagers recall men who spent years in the Pipeline, only to commit suicide when they returned, after finding their families dead or their wives raising half-caste children. Marriages, too, did not always survive. Some men rejected wives who had been raped, particularly those who had borne children from such encounters. Their anger and masculine shame was too much to bear. They had failed in their role as Kikuyu men, as guardians of production and reproduction” (270–71).

The near-total carceral campaign against the Kikuyu inflicted many much broader wounds on Kikuyu society too, and these wounds would take an equally long—or perhaps even longer—time to heal. As has been the case with many campaigns of ethnic gulagization over the decades, a considerable amount of the most brutal (and most brutalizing) “grunt-level” work of controlling the inmates/detainees and of running the detention system at the low levels was done by members of the targeted ethnic group itself. In the concentration camps of Nazi-controlled Europe, much of the work of front-line brutalization and control was performed at the instruction of the Nazi authorities and under their close supervision by Jewish *Kapos* (*Kamaradenpolizei*), who were members of the camp population given some enforcement duties, or by members of other ethnic groups themselves also targeted for gulagization. In Apartheid South Africa, blacks (under the supervision of the whites) had to enforce control over other blacks. In Kenya, much front-line brutality against Kikuyu was carried out (under the supervision of the British “Johnnies”) by other Kikuyu; and those loyalist Kikuyu were then rewarded for their activities by being allowed to divide among themselves the land and other properties of their cousins confined in the camps and the strategic hamlets.

In Kenya, after the fairly abrupt withdrawal of British colonial power, the wounds between the previously pro-British loyalists and the nonloyalist majority within Kikuyu society remained very deep. Unlike in South Africa, the political order that came into power in Kenya after independence did not give any open recognition at all to the courage, commitment, or suffering of the anticolonial networks that had succeeded—in the end—in making the maintenance of colonial rule quite unfeasible. To do so might have risked scaring away those white farmers who remained in the country, as well as other white investors. In Gakaara wa Wanjau's 1988 memoir, he writes poignantly that “veterans of the Mau Mau Liberation struggle . . . still long for the day when the Government of Independent Kenya will

erect Mau Mau Memorial Halls in all the major cities and towns of our nation, in eternal commemoration of the nationalist struggle for independence.”<sup>32</sup>

In addition, in postindependence Kenya, unlike in South Africa, the new regime undertook no systematic effort at all to try to uncover and make public the deeply violent nature of the earlier minority regime. Instead, at Kenyatta’s urging, all Kenyans—including white former settlers, previously loyalist black Kenyans, and previously anticolonial Kenyans alike—were urged simply to draw a veil over the violence of the past and to move on. In line with that campaign, not only were the white former settlers allowed to keep all their landholdings but the previously loyalist black Kenyans were also allowed to keep their properties as well, including all those that had been looted from the inmates of the carceral system during the “emergency.” Therefore, in postindependence Kenya, as the country moved rapidly into a cash-based economy, the long-traumatized communities of pro–Mau Mau Kikuyu found themselves dealing not only with the serious medical, psychological, and social effects of the treatment they had received in the camps but also with a situation of massive pauperization and the realization that in a monetarized world, it would be extremely hard for many of them to regain access to sufficient land and resources to resurrect a sustainable livelihood. Meanwhile, those who had profited from their dispossession could continue to enjoy the fruits of their expropriatory campaigns.

Kikuyu society and culture did, however, survive the campaign of lengthy, near-total incarceration, even if only with deep internal scars. Various reports from the turn of the century testify to the robust survival of the Kikuyu language and the practices of some versions of the people’s traditional belief system.<sup>33</sup> In the early years of the new century, there have been some reports from Kenya about those who suffered from the anti–Mau Mau campaign starting to consider efforts to hold the British government accountable for some of the damage inflicted through the campaign.<sup>34</sup> However, many of the highest-level British officials responsible for the decisions made regarding the counterinsurgency have passed away. At least one, Ian Henderson, the chief of a special-operation anti–Mau Mau unit called the “pseudo gangsters,” had in the interim pursued a long career as head of security in the Persian Gulf state of Bahrain, during a vicious counterinsurgency campaign. What remains, however, is a documentary record in the colonial archives that even after considerable purging, reveals many details of what was done, and what decided and authorized by whom.

Mass-incarceration strategies implemented against the Kenyan Kikuyu population in the 1950s remain relevant today for a number of reasons. At the most overtly political level, it is significant to identify the many links and similarities—and some dissimilarities—between the carceral aspects of the British counterinsurgency in Kenya and those of the so-called global war on terror (GWOT) pursued by the Bush administration today. In this respect, while we can describe the contested territory

between the colonial and anticolonial antagonists in Kenya as the territory of the British “possession” of Kenya, in the case of today’s GWOT, the territory over which the Bush administration seeks to exert total control is much broader—even if not, perhaps, totally global. Another key difference is that although the Bush administration’s policy, like that of all recent U.S. administrations, does seek to make the world “safe” for the operations of U.S. institutions (including the military, corporations, and some nongovernmental groups), it does not explicitly seek to implant and protect colonies of U.S. citizens in the zones targeted. Given these differences in the politics of the two projects, the similarities in the modes of social control that they have utilized appears even more striking.

At a broader level, the multidimensionality, as well as the granularity, of the picture that Carloline Elkins presents of the working of the British carceral system in Kenya gives us key insights into the nature of the carceral project as such. In Kenya, just as starkly as in the Soviet gulags, mass incarceration was used in an attempt to break down, control, and then cautiously remold an entire society in the image that the rulers desired for it. That involved sustained attempts to break down both the wills of huge numbers of individuals, through prolonged violence at both the physical and psychological levels, and the social networks that sustained and gave meaning to those people’s lives. As it happened, in neither the Soviet gulag nor the Kenyan camps did the remolding part of the project work out as planned. Each project ended up in a stalemate, with the remolding effort blocked by, among other factors, the sheer cost of the venture. In Kenya, however, it is unclear whether there ever really existed a viable remolding part of the project. Did the colonial administrators ever really intend to build health clinics in every strategic hamlet? One doubts it.

The breaking-down part of the mass-incarceration project worked only too well in Kenya, and horrific scars were inflicted on all of Kikuyu society as a result. But the society itself survived, and so did a significant number of veterans of the camp system. They have been able to tell their stories and reflect on those experiences in their own words—and in this respect Gakaara wa Wanjau’s book and other testimonies self-written by camp survivors add much to our understanding. By presenting survivor testimonies along with perpetrator testimonies and her own detailed understanding of the archival and broader historical record, Elkins gives us a Kenyan preview of the kind of broadly humanistic history that can one day be written about the detention-camp system that lies at the heart of today’s U.S. counterinsurgency campaign.

## Notes

1. For example, on just one day, the *New York Times* carried separate stories about a Florida jury’s acquittal of Sami al-Arian, a professor who had been held since 2003 on terrorism-related charges (Eric Lichtblau, “Setback for U.S. in Terror Trial,” *New York Times*, December 7, 2005), and about Khaled al-Masri, a Lebanese-German who claimed with

- some credibility that he had been abducted from Macedonia by U.S. agents in 2003 and then transported by them to Afghanistan, where he was subjected to inhumane treatment and coercive interrogations before the CIA — realizing that they had misidentified him — clandestinely flew him back to Albania in May 2004 and released him there (Scott Shane, “German Held in Afghan Jail Files Lawsuit,” *New York Times*, December 7, 2005).
2. See Helena Cobban, “The Legacies of Collective Violence: The Rwandan Genocide and the Limits of Law,” *Boston Review* 27 (2002): 4–15, [bostonreview.net/BR27.2/cobban.html](http://bostonreview.net/BR27.2/cobban.html).
  3. Benjamin Madley, “Patterns of Frontier Genocide, 1803–1910: The Aboriginal Tasmanians, the Yuki of California, and the Herero of Namibia,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 6 (2004): 167–92.
  4. Of these possible forms of cultural genocide, the only one recognized and explicitly criminalized in the 1948 Genocide Convention was “forcibly transferring children of the [targeted] group to another group.” See note 7.
  5. See the online Wikipedia entry for “Cape Malays” at [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape\\_Malays](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Malays) (accessed May 1, 2006).
  6. Madley, “Patterns of Frontier Genocide,” 174–75.
  7. *Ibid.*, 170, 174.
  8. My emphasis. See Article II of the text of the Genocide Convention, available at [www.preventgenocide.org/law/convention/text.htm](http://www.preventgenocide.org/law/convention/text.htm) (accessed May 1, 2006).
  9. See Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Mariner, 1998).
  10. The clearest exceptions to this have occurred in places where the colonizers found no previously indigenous population — as when, for example, the Maori colonizers set about settling Aotearoa/New Zealand.
  11. *Britain’s Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: Cape, 2005). Another recent book on the anti–Mau Mau war is David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York: Norton, 2005). Anderson’s book has a different scope than Elkins’s and contains much less material taken from interviews of survivors and former administrators of the carceral system there.
  12. The text of the Nuremberg Principles can be found on the Web site of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) at [www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/FULL/390?OpenDocument](http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/FULL/390?OpenDocument) (accessed May 1, 2006).
  13. For example, for Algeria, see Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, *Coloniser, exterminer: Sur la guerre et l’état colonial (Colonize, Exterminate: On War and the Colonial State)* (Paris: Fayard, 2005); for Vietnam see Peter Zinoman, *Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), which draws heavily on a body of written survivor testimonies; for South Africa, see the testimonies collected by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), available at [www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/index.htm](http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/index.htm) (accessed May 1, 2006), and the seven-volume report issued by the TRC. Volume 6, issued in 2003, is available at [www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2003/trc](http://www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2003/trc) (accessed May 1, 2006).
  14. Correlli Barnett, *Britain and Her Army: 1509–1970* (New York: Morrow, 1970), 484–85.
  15. On Iraq, see, for example, Bruce Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004). Shortly after writing this paper, Hoffman became a senior adviser on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency to the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Baghdad. In his RAND paper he prominently cited the work of John A. Nagl, especially *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya to Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002). Nagl had taught at the

- U.S. Military Academy at West Point and served as operations officer in the First Infantry Division (Hoffman, *Insurgency*, 4).
16. She explains that she found it hard to be more precise because the colonial authorities had evidently undercounted the casualties from their punitive campaigns very seriously. In addition, many of the relevant records had been expurgated or emptied prior to Britain's departure from Kenya. For explicit confirmation of the pre-independence purging of the records by a former colonial administrator, see John Nottingham's letter to the editor, "Tell Me Where I'm Wrong," *London Review of Books*, July 7, 2005, [www.lrb.co.uk/v27/n113/letters.html](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v27/n113/letters.html). Nottingham wrote, "The British colonial government, on the eve of decolonization, and with the imminent advent of African ministers in senior cabinet positions, deliberately and comprehensively destroyed much of the documentation related to the detention camps and barbed-wire villages. As acting district commissioner in Nyeri, I received orders to destroy all files remotely linked to Mau Mau, and I was aware that other officers received and carried out similar orders. In the years immediately after the Emergency, when I was conducting research, it was already clear that there were enormous gaps in the archival record."
  17. The fact that the British were at the same time giving large new parcels of Kenyan land to ethnic British war veterans helped further stoke Kikuyu resentment.
  18. Gakaara wa Wanjau, *Mau Mau Author in Detention* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1988), x.
  19. The lengthy delay in publishing the memoir may have been related to the deep reluctance of the postindependence Kenyan leadership headed by Jomo Kenyatta to give any credit for the attainment of independence to the Mau Mau—from which Kenyatta had started distancing himself even before independence in 1961.
  20. In Algeria, the French administration maintained a system of indefinite detention without trial, applicable only to the indigenes, from 1835 right through to their final withdrawal in 1962. Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison has noted that there, too, an order mandating such a detention could be issued either on its own or "as a complement to another punishment already pronounced by a court"; and though this measure had been introduced as an emergency measure, it soon became routinized. Grandmaison, *Coloniser exterminer*, 207–8.
  21. Prior to and during World War II, British colonial administrators frequently transported anticolonial activists whom they had detained from one territory to another. Perhaps London's ruling that this was no longer allowed could be seen as constituting progress toward greater respect of human rights?
  22. These removals sound very similar to the mass removals of people from their ancestral lands undertaken by the South African government under the various so-called Bantu Relocation Acts that formed the heart of the Apartheid system in the 1950s and 1960s.
  23. Chapter 3 of Elkins's book includes vivid descriptions of numerous mutilating, sexual, and other humiliating and painful acts—often resulting in death—that she heard both from their perpetrators (usually settlers) and from their survivors.
  24. Elkins is citing William Baldwin, *Mau Mau Manhunt: The Adventures of the Only American Who Fought the Terrorists in Kenya* (New York: Dutton, 1957).
  25. See table 7.6 in Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, 356. Convicts had presumably had the chance of some form of trial. Although Anderson reports in this table that the highest total number recorded held in this period (convicts plus detainees) was 71,346, in December 1954, elsewhere he writes that "in all, at least 150,000 Kikuyu, perhaps even more, spent some time behind the wire of a British detention camp during the course of the rebellion" (5).



26. Gakaara wa Wanjau reproduces, as appendix 5 in his memoir, the text of the Nairobi government's press advisory about the villagization program: "By scattering these scattered tribesmen into villages, protected by Kikuyu Guard posts, the Government is not only dealing a severe blow to the gangs but it is also making a great step forward in matters such as education, health and local government. Each new village will eventually have its own school, health center, women's welfare center and village council." Gakaara, *Mau Mau Author in Detention*, 245.
27. Orwell (whose given name was Eric Blair) was himself a veteran of the British Colonial Service. He served a few years as a district administrator in Burma before resigning from the service in disgust. His later novels *Burmese Days* (1934) and *1984* (1949) each drew on his experiences there.
28. By this time Gakaara wa Wanjau was living in internal exile in a designated colony in Hola not far from the detention camp there. His account of this incident can be seen in Gakaara, *Mau Mau Author in Detention*, 200–202.
29. The brutal director of one of the dilution camps, Terence Gavaghan, later wrote that after touring a set of these camps, Junod told him, "Don't distress yourself. Compared to the French in Algeria, you are angels of mercy." From Terence Gavaghan, *Of Lions and Dung Beetles: A "Man in the Middle" of Colonial Administration in Africa* (Devon, UK: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1999), 235; cited in Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 331. Junod's own version of these conversations is not known since the ICRC keeps its archives closed for a notoriously long time.
30. Though these protests and remonstrance were made privately, they do mean that, at the very least, Baring and his colleagues in charge of the colonial administration could not credibly claim afterward that they did not know about what was going on in the camps.
31. Her conclusion here was contested by at least one persistent critic, the London TV executive David Elstein, but the former colonial administrator John Nottingham defended her use of the demographic data in this way as being "perfectly sound." See Nottingham, "Tell Me." Elstein wrote letters expressing strong criticism of her methodology and conclusions to both the *New York Review of Books* (June 23, 2005, [www.nybooks.com/articles/18096](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/18096) [accessed May 1, 2006]) and the *London Review of Books* (June 2, 2006, [www.lrb.co.uk/v27/n11/letters.html](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v27/n11/letters.html) [accessed May 1, 2006]).
32. Gakaara, *Mau Mau Author in Detention*, 202.
33. On the language, see, for example, the Michigan State University African Studies Center Web site at [www.isp.msu.edu/AfrLang/Kikuyu\\_root.html](http://www.isp.msu.edu/AfrLang/Kikuyu_root.html) (accessed May 1, 2006), which cites 1996 and 1999 sources referring to between 5.3 million and 6 million Kikuyu speakers and notes that Voice of Kenya radio has broadcasts in Kikuyu. On the religious/belief system, see, for example, Harold F. Miller, "Kikuyu Elderhood as African Oracle," Mennonite Central Committee, [www.mcc.org/respub/occasional/26oracle.html](http://www.mcc.org/respub/occasional/26oracle.html) (accessed May 1, 2006); or Edward Miller, "Re-tradition: Revival of Kenyan Religions," *Christian Century*, May 3, 2000, [www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1058/is\\_14\\_117/ai\\_62087407](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_14_117/ai_62087407) (accessed May 1, 2006).
34. See, for example, Ken Opala, "Mau Mau Veterans to Sue Britain for War Crimes," *Monday Notebook* (Nairobi), October 28, 2002, [www.nationaudio.com/News/DailyNation/Supplements/notebook/04112002/story1.htm](http://www.nationaudio.com/News/DailyNation/Supplements/notebook/04112002/story1.htm).