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African Resistance History Series

Anarchism & Revolution in Black Africa

Stephen P. Halbrook

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Regional Tribalism or Revolutionary Transformation?

Zabalaza Introduction to *Anarchism & Revolution in Black Africa*

Stephen P. Halbrook wrote this article, which forms part of our *African Resistance History Series*, in 1971 at a time when he was completing his PhD in philosophy at the Florida State University (attained in 1972). It appears that Halbrook went on to become a leading legal figure in defence of the American constitutional right of its citizens to bear arms, basing his arguments on Switzerland's "armed neutrality" stance during the Second World War. He has written extensively on the issue, but it is not easy to determine at a glance whether his defence comes from a Right- or Left-wing perspective as both camps in the US have embraced the right to bear arms for defensive reasons and Halbrook speaks in the "neutral" tone of the lawyer. Nevertheless, if Halbrook subsequently defected from libertarian socialism to the Right, we would say we'd had the best of him while he was with us.

And that best, perhaps reflected in this pamphlet, is flawed by two interlinked hopes that the indigenous insurgencies of the Mau Mau of 1950-1962, the liberation struggle of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) of 1963-1974 in Guinea, and the Biafran Secession from Nigeria of 1967-1970 had – not unreasonably given the euphoria of the era – raised in his mind for more libertarian socialist outcomes.

His one flawed hope was to overzealously apply libertarian socialist intentions and even programmes to the actors in these insurgent dramas. This is least excusable in terms of the Mau Mau Uprising because it was sufficiently far in the past for Halbrook to have gotten a better grasp of its nature – although to be fair, the full extent of the brutality of the British colonial regime and of the Mau Mau resistance itself has only recently been adequately documented. [1] Nevertheless, for Halbrook to hail the Mau Mau as "the expression of centuries of anarchism" was both ahistorical and a misinterpretation of the true mobilising intent of the historicising of the likes of Mau Mau leader Jomo Kenyatta and PAIGC leader Amílcar Cabral. The mere fact that the Mau Mau slogan "Land and Freedom" echoed that of the Mexican, Ukrainian, Spanish and other anarchists, or that a PAIGC leader extolled the virtues of the peasantry electing their own removable, non-hereditary leaders is insufficient proof of their libertarian socialism.

There is in addition – and this is remarkable for a writer supposedly hailing from

Notes to the Main Text

1. Cf. Parmenas Githendu Mockerie, *An African Speaks for His People*, in WilfredCartey and Martin Kilson (eds.), *The Africa Reader* (N.Y, Random House, 1970), Vol. II, p. 102.
2. From Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya*, in Cartey and Kilson, pp. 19-28.
3. (NY and London: Monthly Review Press, 1966).
4. Ibid., pp. 42-51.
5. Ibid., p. 51.
6. Ibid., pp. 302-03.
7. Davidson, *A History of West Africa* (Garden City, N.Y.), pp. 94-6. Thanks are due to Joseph Peden, publisher of *The Libertarian Forum*, for calling my attention to the libertarian tradition of the Ibo.
8. Margery Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (Oxford Univ. Press. 1937), p. 231.
9. Ibid., p. 28.
10. Ibid., p. 234.
11. Forsyth, *The Biafra Story* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), pp. 15-7.
12. From a paper read in Uganda in 1968. Cartey and Kilson, p.,169.
13. Forsyth, p. 97.
14. Quoted in Ibid., p. 217.
15. Cf. Ibid., pp. 157 and 195-96.
16. Amilcar Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts* (N.Y. and London: Monthly Review Press, 1969), pp. 56-7.
17. Basil Davidson, *The Liberation of Guine* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), pp. 47-49.
18. Ibid., p. 66.
19. Ibid., pp. 60-63.
20. Cabral, pp. 60-61.
21. Gerard Chaliand, *Armed Struggle in Africa* (N.Y. MR Press, 1969), pp. 45-46.
22. Ibid., p. 84.
23. Cabral, p. 80.
24. Chaliand, p. 68.
25. Davidson, p. 137.
26. The words of a typical guerrilla: "My father was a *capitao mor* [a, village lineage head in a society without centralised political institutions]. He became a secret member of FRELIM0 when we were still working underground in Delgado. I myself decided to join the struggle because every man should be free, or if he has to, should fight to be free." Eduardo Mondlane, *The Struggle for Mozambique* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), p. 133. Cf. also pp. 146-54 and 164-66.

Notes to the Zabalaza Introduction

1. More than 1-million suspected rebel sympathisers were put in concentration camps, a bestial strategy the British had perfected during the South African War of 1899-1902. Starvation and disease killed thousands, while 1,090 were hanged by the colonial regime. Despite the common use of summary execution and torture by white British and black Kings African Rifles proxy forces, no official was ever prosecuted for any atrocity. The Mau Mau on their side killed only 32 whites – but some 1,800 fellow Kenyans. See *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* by David Anderson (Weidenfeld & Nicholson) 2005 / *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* by Caroline Elkins (Jonathan Cape), 2005.
2. The AWSM was founded in 1998 by Choongo, an anarchist librarian at the University of Zambia (UNZA), and young members of the youth of the *UNZA – Cuba Friendship Association* and of the *Socialist Caucus*. The anarcho-syndicalist *Workers' Solidarity Federation* of South Africa was instrumental in establishing the AWSM, but it appears to have collapsed the following year with Choongo's death by meningitis. His obituary is at: http://libcom.org/history/choongo-wilstar-1964-1999
3. *African Anarchism: The History of a Movement* by Sam Mbah & I. E. Igariwey (See Sharp Press), 1997. The authors have allowed an identical version, *African Anarchism: Prospects for the Future* to be published online by the ZACF, and it is available at: http://www.zabalaza.net/theory/african_anarchism/contents.htm
4. A mini-biography of Mbah by the Institute for Anarchist Studies in 1999 said he was born in 1963 in Enugu, Nigeria, and "embraced anarchism shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union while studying at the University of Lagos. Like many radicals, he entered a period of deep political reflection after the breakdown of the Eastern Block, one that prompted him to re-examine his previous Marxist commitments and ultimately led him to the anti-statist, anti-capitalist politics that is anarchism. North American publications such as *The Torch* and *Love and Rage* were especially important to this process. Mbah currently makes his living as the Lagos correspondent for Enugu's *Daily Star* newspaper. He is also very active in the Awareness League, an anarchist organisation committed to the libertarian transformation of Nigeria. The Awareness League is active in political education, various social campaigns, and environmental protection. It presently has 600 members and eleven branches throughout the country [down from a high of about 1,000 members in 15 states during the dictatorship, but including its own radio station]... Mbah cited two Nigerians when asked to recommend other African authors he finds particularly sympathetic to anarchism: Ikenna Nzimiro and the late Mokwugo Okoye."
5. *The IWW, Revolutionary Syndicalism and Working Class Struggle in SA, 1910 – 1920*, by Lucien van der Walt (Bikisha Media Collective), online at the Zabalaza Books site.
6. For an account of the Sekhukhuneland Revolt, read *A Lion Amongst the Cattle: Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal,* by Peter Delius (Ravan Press) 1970 / (Heinenmann), 1997.
7. See the BBC report at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6938032.stm
8. A far better critique than Halbrook's will shortly also be made available in this series: *Africa, Nationalism and the State*, by Sam Dolgoff (1982?). Dolgoff demonstrates the demagogic attitudes of African "liberators" like the neo-fascist Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt and the megalomaniac Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana.

the anti-statist tradition – no understanding of the imperialist interest and role played by the suppliers of arms and other support to the rebels: the USSR, Cuba and China supplied the PAIGC, while Biafra was clandestinely supplied by France, Portugal, white Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa (against an unusual Cold War triumvirate of British, American and Russian backing for Nigeria). She who pays the piper calls the tune, so the Stalinist funders of the PAIGC determined in it an authoritarian tendency to the same extent as the ethnic separatist funders of Biafra determined in parts its narrow ethno-nationalist outlook. It begs the question of in what way these *realpolitik* positions could be considered genuinely liberatory by Halbrook.

Halbrook's other, closely linked, flawed hope was to assume that an ill-defined "anarchism" was fundamental to many traditional African cultures – stating wrongly, given that anarchism only arose as a modern, internationalist, mass-based practice in the First International in 1868, that "Black Africa has a centuries old anarchist tradition," and uncritically echoing Kenyatta's statements about the historic libertarian practices of his own tribe, the Kikuyu (against whose ethnocentric, patrimonial rule, in part, the 2008 Kenyan Uprising was tellingly aimed). Whether the Kikuyu indeed once in the distant past had a system that could be equatable to a libertarian social order as anarchists understand it – democratic decision-making power decentralised through horizontal federations of councils of recallable delegates – is debatable (and the same goes for whether the Balantes of Guinea or the Ibos of Nigeria can make a same claim).

Despite the apparently remarkable and worthy communitarian nature of Kikuyu society as spelled out by Barnett and Njama, the other experts cited by Halbrook, they and he do not appear to critique the inescapable, non-free-associative basis of this tribal system, nor of its ageist hierarchy, so common to African traditional cultures, or its enthnocentrism, and do not appear (in Halbrook at least) to discuss ownership of land, livestock, goods and services, landlordism and other aspects of what was still a feudal economy however one may appreciate some progressive aspects of its social organisation.

Lastly, as with much sentimental outsider support for nationalist politicians like Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma today, or Nelson Mandela of South Africa in the past, there is a marked shyness to engage in any substantial critique of either the leadership cult that is so assiduously cultivated by their supporters, or of the exact form of economy and class society envisaged by the "liberators" after their despised enemy is supplanted. These errors-by-omission are commonly committed by the statist Left, but also recall the rose-tinted view of national liberation struggles by, for example, a faction of the Love & Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation's pro-national liberation stance on the Zapatistas in the 1990s (which contributed to the RAF's dissolution) and by much of the International of Anarchist Federations regarding Cuba in the 1960s (against the legitimate protests of the Cuban Libertarian Movement in Exile).

The cellular structure adopted by the Mau Mau rebels, the "bottom-up" decision-making process of the PAIGC, and the voluntaristic "people's army" form of Biafran resistance were in my view less related to libertarian tradition than to the obvious

demands of clandestinity – and the loyalty given by their irregular fighters to individual charismatic leaders is not in itself indicative of libertarianism; for fascist militancy makes similar claims. Similarly, it is a stretch of the imagination to claim for Biafran leader Chukwuemeka Ojukwu the right to assume the mantle of the great Ukrainian anarchist revolutionary Nestor Makhno on the basis that Ojukwu consulted with an assembly of "all the professions" – including no doubt, the businesses and the parasitic classes (Makhno's RIAU was by contrast *controlled* policy-wise by mass Congresses of Peasants, Workers and Insurgents and it is out of this directly-democratic experience that the "platformist" political line is derived).

Yet on these slender bases, the evidence of the nationalists Kenyatta, Cabral, Ojukwu and a few other admirers, Halbrook believed traditional culture could provide a communalist model for political action in the era of decolonialisation, centralising national liberation struggles and import-substitution-industrialisation modernisation. He is far from alone among anarchists in this rather romantic view of the relationship between African national liberation struggles and tribal societies – and I'm not even considering the so-called primitivists here, whose anti-modernist tendency is at complete odds with the progressive, industrial origins of the anarchist movement. In Zambia in 1998, the late Wilstar Choongo of the Zambian Anarchist and Workers' Solidarity Movement (AWSM) related to me in some detail the anti-authoritarian tendencies of his own tribe, suggesting this could advance the anarchist cause. [2]

Similarly, Sam Mbah and I. E. Igariwey, of the anarcho-syndicalist Awareness League in Nigeria, in their ground-breaking *African Anarchism* (1998) [3] argued for anarchic tendencies in the "stateless" (in the modern sense) societies of the Ibo, Niger Delta people and the Tallensi, stating: *"To a greater or lesser extent, all of [...] traditional African societies manifested 'anarchic elements' which, upon close examination, lend credence to the historical truism that governments have not always existed. They are but a recent phenomenon and are, therefore, not inevitable in human society. While some 'anarchic' features of traditional African societies existed largely in past stages of development, some of them persist and remain pronounced to this day."*

Despite these societies being decentralised, having communal production systems, participatory decision-making and a relatively flat social hierarchy, they cannot in any real sense be called anarchist. Rather it is best to describe them as communalist with some marked libertarian practices. It appears likely that Mbah and Igariwey were forced to fall back on communalist examples to legitimise the Awareness League trade union [4] simply because, though they were aware of early 1990s anarchist organisations in South Africa, they were unaware of the significant syndicalist trade unions in southern Africa and north Africa in the 1910s/1920s. [5]

The resistance of, for instance, the Zulus during the Bambaata Rebellion of 1906 against the imposition of hut-taxes by the British was indeed among the last of a long series of anti-colonial actions aimed at preserving traditional culture, and at preventing the enclosure and outright theft of tribal lands and the impression into bonded servitude of the black majority – but they were also last-gasp reflex actions of a peasantry that was rapidly being eclipsed by modernisation (in South Africa at least,

Organisation from the bottom up is doubly an effective means of defeating the imperialists; as the military commander for the northern region described the strategy they carried out just after the armed struggle began in 1963: "We set up new base camps, to decentralise as much as possible. This gave us greater mobility and let us harass the enemy a bit everywhere at once. Moreover, we were obviously less vulnerable ourselves." [22] This was an old Balante tactic, as was seen earlier.

The goal of the PAIGC is to restore to the people on the local level the right to determine their own destiny. Cabral, who must be considered one of the great libertarians of our age, makes clear that "we do not want any exploitation in our countries, not even by black people." [23] He has stated that the PAIGC "is not a system of chieftainship," [24] and reveals their ultimate objects to be strictly in the Balante tradition of a social order constructed from the bottom up:

> "The general approach that we have is that all structural decisions are to be based on the needs and condition of the peasantry, who are the vast majority of our people. That being so, this new administration will be strictly without those chains of command familiar in colonial times - governors of provinces and so on. We do not want to copy any structures of that kind."
>
> "Above all, we want to decentralise as much as may be possible. In fact, we are against the whole idea of a capital. Why should we saddle ourselves with the paraphernalia of a presidential palace, a concentration of ministries, the clear signs of an emergent elite which can soon become a privileged group?" [25]

The foregoing three case studies by no means exhaust the history of anarchist societies in black Africa or the extent to which this tradition is reasserting itself. Mozambique is inhabited by some stateless tribes, and it is no accident that FRELIMO, the liberation front there, emphasizes that decentralisation of power is a most important goal. [26] There are other examples. But the point is that Africa is on the verge of exploding, and that it will probably explode in a very anarchistic way.

Tallensi in Ghana, the Lugbara in Uganda, the Ndembu in Zambia, and many others. [17] Once the conquest had been completed, the Portuguese found it easy to rule the Fulas because the ruling structure was already there and the habit of obedience was cultivated. It was not so easy to subject the Balantes:

> "Having no chiefs or kings, their system of authority could not be beheaded by the killing or deportation of a leading man or little group of leading men. Quashed in one corner, revolt burst forth in another. Delayed primary resistance went on for a long time. Not until the 1920s did it flicker into silence." [18]

The Portuguese imperialists formed an alliance with the Fula elite, which imposed their uneasy rule on the Balantes. The power of the Fula chiefs was closely integrated with Portuguese domination, and it is hardly surprising that since the liberation movement began, the chiefs, fearing that they would lose their privileges as well as having an aversion to social change, exerted their influence against the revolution. Under chiefly influence, 3,000 African mercenaries had joined the imperialists by 1968. [19] Cabral points out in the essay noted above that "the Fula peasants have a strong tendency to follow their chiefs. Thorough and intensive work was therefore needed to mobilise them." Cabral contrasts them with "the Balantes and the groups without any defined form of state organisation": they "put up much more resistance against the Portuguese than the others, and they have maintained intact their tradition of resistance to colonial penetration. This is the group that we found most ready to accept the idea of national liberation." [20]

The Balante organisational principles have been reasserted in the PAIGC. In a film on Guinea shot and narrated by Basil Davidson, Cabral points out that the liberation fighters are unpaid volunteers and that the army is not structured (reflected in the fact that the handshake is used and not the salute) - in short, "we are not military people, we are armed militants." Most of the land area of Guinea has been liberated, and in those places taxation has been completely abolished; the PAIGC depends on voluntary contributions, not on the theft known as taxation. In the villages all power is in the hands of the people themselves; they are armed, and the self-administering village committees have the right to criticize the mobile units and to engage in free-for-all discussion. They are not forced to do anything, they are only asked; the PAIGC is very anti-elitist and anti-bureaucratic. A political commissar describes the election of the village PAIGC committees:

> "Committee officers are elected by the villagers. In principle, the peasants' choice is respected. If, in our opinion, they have chosen badly, we leave the candidate in office. We wait for the peasants to realise their mistake by themselves. We don't want a new chieftainship system." [21]

where they have been reduced to a minority unlike the rest of Africa). And much as one might dislike it, anarchism with few exceptions arose in industrial (*not* craft or peasant) environments – such as the Witwatersrand during the emergence of organised black labour in the late 1910s and early 1920s, *not* among the Sekhukhuneland or Pondoland peasantry, regardless how communitarian or insurgent their traditions.[6]

While anarchists can and should indeed build on any traditional libertarian conventions within the society in which they live – ably demonstrated by the successful anarchist penetration of the indigenous population in Bolivia, or of agricultural labourers in Bulgaria, from the 1920s to 1940s – tribal societies also tend to have strongly sexist attitudes, ethnic chauvinist practices and demagogic power-structures enforced by fearful superstition and brute force. These reactionary tendencies are at least as strong as the communalist tradition and we find similar contestations between vertical and horizontal power in traditional tribal structures in Asia, the Americas and Europe. Also, the communalism of many African tribal societies is not at all ruled by the anarchist concept of free association: one is forced by one's ethnic origin, tribal loyalties, locality and family ties into the communalist mode, with no choice in the matter other than self-imposed exile (which then renders one vulnerable as an unacceptable outside in another tightly-knit communalist, or even hierarchical, exclusivist enclave). Let us also not forget that slavery among African tribes was (and remains somewhat) widespread, the institution only being formally outlawed in Mauritania in 2007. [7]

None of this, however, detracts from the clear existence of a real and unalloyed historical anarchist and syndicalist movement in Africa, so present in organisations such as *People's Free University* and the *International League of Cigarette Workers and Millers of Cairo* (Egypt) and the *Revolutionary League* (Mozambique) in the early 1900s, the *Industrial Workers of Africa* and *Indian Workers' Industrial Union* (South Africa) in the late 1910s/early1920s, and the Algerian section of the *General Confederation of Labour – Revolutionary Syndicalist* in the 1930s. And let's not forget the fact that the former Durruti Columnists who seized the honour to be the first to liberate Paris in 1944 came together in exile in Chad, nor the old post-war anarchist strongholds of Tunis and Oran, nor the anarchist cells in the Canaries, Egypt or Morocco.

None of this makes it into Halbrook's analysis (but then there was precious little study of such movements at the time he wrote, and he could not have been aware that within a decade of his paper, new anarchist and syndicalist organisations would rise in Africa: in Senegal (*Anarchist Party for Individual Freedoms in the Republic*, 1981), Sierra Leone (*Industrial Workers of the World*, 1996), Nigeria (*Awareness League*, anarcho-syndicalist from 1991), South Africa (*Anarchist Revolutionary Movement*, 1992, *Workers' Solidarity Federation*, 1995, the *ZACF*, 2003, and others), Zambia (*Anarchist Workers' Solidarity Movement*, 1998), and Swaziland (*ZACF*, 2003).

Materials from and about these movements are available to a greater or lesser extent on the Internet so I will not detain the reader with an analysis of them. Suffice to say that Halbrook's flawed work raises more questions – including the red herring

of “libertarian” nationalism – than he answers, but as these debates are still somewhat skewed by wishful thinking, especially among the African anarchist Diaspora, it is worth reading with a critical eye. [8]

***Michael Schmidt*,**
Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federaton, *March 2008*

III

One of the most significant liberation struggles going on in the world today is in “Portuguese” Guinea. The largest tribe there is the Balantes, who still preserve their stateless form of social organisation; the other major group is the Fulas, a statist-feudal society. Amilcar Cabral, the leader of the liberation front (the PAIGC), analysed the two groups in his “Brief analysis of the social structure in Guinea” (May 1964):

> “In the rural areas we have found it necessary to distinguish between two distinct groups: on the one hand, the group which we consider semi-feudal, represented by the Fulas, and, on the other hand, the group we consider, so to speak, without any defined form of state organisation, represented by the Balantes.”
>
> “[Among the Fulas], although certain traditions concerning collective ownership of the land have been preserved, the chiefs and their entourages have retained considerable privileges as regards ownership of land and the utilization of other people’s labour. In general, the peasants have no rights and they are the really exploited group in Fula society.”
>
> “Among the Balantes, which are at the opposite extreme, we find a society without any social stratification: there is just a council of elders in each village or group of villages who decide on the day-to-day problems. In the Balante group, property and land are considered to belong to the village but each family receives the amount of land needed to ensure subsistence for itself, and the means of production, or rather the instruments of production, are not collective but are owned by families or individuals. Among the Balantes, women participate in production but they own what they produce and this gives Balante women a position which we consider privileged, as they are fairly free.” [16]

The Fulas have a tradition of slavery and centralisation, while the Balantes have a form of council society organised from the bottom up, like the Ibo , the Kikuyu, the

which we have suffered in an association with Europe. Britain knows this and is using Nigeria to destroy Biafra." [12]

In the face of mass murders by the henchmen of the corrupt politicians, the Biafran people seceded from the North. In May 1967 they issued a Declaration of Independence, which asserted in libertarian fashion that "you are born free and have certain inalienable rights which can best be preserved by yourselves" and that they were "unwilling to be un-free partners in any association of a political or economic nature." [13] Unlike the dictatorship in the North headed by Gowon, the Biafrans were led by Ojukwu, a man of the people and not a man of the State. Somewhat like the role of Makhno in the Ukraine in 1918-21, Ojukwu carried out the instructions of a Consultative Assembly composed of representatives from all the professions (no matter how "lowly") and all the localities. Ojukwu gave up a fortune and high political positions in the North by siding with the Biafran people, and it is little wonder that the popular masses gave him complete support. This is exemplified by the fact that the Biafran Army he led was completely voluntary, and that the Biafran people resisted invasion for years at very inferior technological levels.

The Biafrans won all the initial battles, and the Gowon dictatorship agreed to continue its invasion of the South only by pressure from British and US imperialists, both of whom began giving Nigeria extensive military aid. It is no paradox that the struggling Biafran people were suppressed by a dictatorship propped up by three of the most statist societies of all time, the US, Britain, and the USSR, all of whom supplied Gowon with jets, recoilless rifles, advisers, and armoured cars. The strategy of Nigeria was best expressed by one of its leaders: "Starvation is a legitimate weapon of war, and we have every intention of using it against the rebels." [14] The imperialists agreed with this strategy; thus the British were directly responsible for the blockade of Biafra which led to mass famine, and the British government and the American State Department exerted massive pressure on the International Red Cross in Geneva to prevent them from sending aid to starving Biafran children. [15]

Fighting for their traditional freedom and against genocide stood the Biafran people. The masses willingly contributed everything they had to the army, from food and money to blunderbusses and shoes. It was a people's war in the true sense of the word. The people's army held out for years with virtually no weapons beyond rifles; ammunition was so low that the rule of thumb was to attack with five bullets and defend with two. Unlike in the North, there was not a riot or a mutiny of any kind. All these facts demonstrate that the spirit of a people with the will to freedom is almost invincible. While the Ibo were crushed by 1970, their anarchist traditions will never die and the day will come when they will again rise.

Introduction

Black Africa has a centuries old anarchist tradition. After years of imperialist aggression which led to the complete carving up of the continent at the hands of the white "master race", this tradition was temporarily harnessed. The ancient liberties of Africans under the rule of the "free world" were smashed, while the attempt was made to impose upon them white dictatorships in the Western tradition. But the spirit of rebellion is irrepressible, and frequently "the natives get restless." Three of the most significant recent occasions of this restlessness are: the Mau Mau Revolution, the Biafran Revolution, and the current liberation movement in "Portuguese" Guinea.

I

The Mau Mau Revolution was one of the greatest upheavals in African history. It was the expression of centuries of anarchism and resistance to authoritarianism among the Kikuyu people, the native inhabitants of Kenya. Except for parts of Uganda, which had a system of rule by hereditary despotic chiefs, all of the East African tribes lived in radically democratic societies prior to the coming of the white man. [1] Originally governed by a king, centuries ago, the Kikuyu, through popular rebellion, literally abolished the State, substituting a voluntary society. According to Jomo Kenyatta, a founder of Mau Mau, the new system had such rules as: "Socially and politically all circumcised men and women should be equally full members of the tribe, and thereby the status of a king or nobleman should be abolished." It consisted of a federation of councils, beginning with the members of the family (the basic economic unit of land ownership), extending to the village, then to the district, and ending on a national level. The right to recall representatives from the different councils was absolute; "...in fact, it was the voice of the people or public opinion that ruled the country." The Kikuyu stateless society "continued to function favourably until it was smashed by the British government, which introduced a system of government very similar to the autocratic government which the Kikuyu people had discarded many centuries ago." The British imperialists appointed chiefs to overlord the people and set up a tyranny resting on centralisation. Kenyatta helped form Mau Mau to destroy this, for: "In the eyes of the Kikuyu people, the submission to a despotic rule of any particular man or a group, white or black, is the greatest humiliation to mankind." [2]

The Kikuyu anarchist tradition which culminated in the Mau Mau Revolution has been best described in the book by Donald L. Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau from Within: An Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt*, [3] the latter author being a major participant; virtually all other works on the subject were written by white racist sycophants of British imperialism. Early in the work Darnett queries:

> "Were there, it might now be asked, any peculiar features of traditional Kikuyu society which help explain this people's independent response and, ultimately, revolutionary reaction to colonial rule and white dominance? The answer, I believe, is in the affirmative. It cen-

tration, this means that among these four or five million people the points of effective contact between officers and people are to be counted not in tens, nor in hundreds, but in thousands." [10]

British imperialism attempted to impose upon all the peoples of Nigeria an untrammelled bureaucracy and an autocratic constitution. This worked in the North among the Emirs, who unlike the Ibo had a state at the time of conquest; the British merely seized this state and were easily able to consolidate their authority. This system of indirect rule was bound to fail among the Ibo , who constituted the eastem half of the south. As Frederick Forsyth explains in his excellent work on Biafra:

> "The British were so concerned with the idea of regional chiefs that where there were not any they tried to impose them. The Aba Riots of 1929 [Aba is in the heartland of the Ibo] were partly caused by resentment against the 'warrant chiefs,' men imposed as chiefs by the British but whom the people refused to accept. It was not difficult to impose measures on the Northerners, accustomed to implicit obedience, but it did not work in the East. The whole traditional structure of the East makes it virtually immune to dictatorship, one of the reasons for the present war. Easterners insist on being consulted in everything that concerns them. This assertiveness was hardly likely to endear itself to the colonial administrators and is one of the reasons why the Easterners came to be referred to as 'uppity.' By contrast the English loved the North... [with] the people obedient and un-demanding." [11]

With the highest population density in Africa of over 440 per square mile, the modern Ibo , at least until Biafra was crushed, were the most enterprising in Africa; Biafra was the most developed country in Africa, with the highest per capita income and the best education. This is in sharp contrast with the state societies, which consist of servile peoples willing to go on subsisting under feudalism. Over the years the British had seen to it by gerrymandering and favouritism that these feudal chieftains and emirs of the backward North would rule all the peoples within the arbitrarily established boundaries of Nigeria. It was a very unnatural union, to say the least, to combine such diverse peoples.

The Biafran Revolution began in early 1966 when a popular revolt deposed numerous corrupt politicians. Yet the parasitic classes of the state - its bureaucrats, police, hangers-on, party hirelings, and contractors - continued to exist, and soon rallied under the banner of the politicians who, though not in power, had not been placed in detention. The old state, no longer shaken, was able to strike back, and began slaughtering Ibos living in the North. While initially it thought of secession, the Northern government later decided to take over the whole country. This was in response not only to the desire of the North to dominate the Ibo but was also in response to pressure from British diplomats, who knew that a free Biafra would frustrate British neo-colonialism. As Chinua Achebe put it, "Biafra stands for true independence in Africa, for an end to the four hundred years of shame and humiliation

tres around two closely related aspects of Kikuyu society which were fundamentally incompatible with the imposed colonial system and conditioned an independent response to it. The first of these, a decentralised and democratic political system, fostered among the Kikuyu a deep-seated suspicion of the highly centralised, authoritarian system imposed by the British and a tendency to reject the legitimacy and resist the dictates of the latter. The second, an age-grade system wherein leadership emerged on the basis of demonstrated personal qualities such as skill, wisdom and ability, underlay the Kikuyu rejection of British-appointed 'chiefs' and their tendency to by-pass the latter and organise independent associations under popular leaders when the occasion arose to seek a redress of grievances."

Barnett goes on to explain in detail the Kikuyu stateless society. There was no "unitary or centralised political structure," and "within the Kikuyu sub-tribes political power was held by a number of fairly small and semi-autonomous geopolitical groupings." Disputes were settled and common affairs deliberated on by spontaneously formed councils. Each council elected a muthamaki, who had no personal power, unlike the life-term, salaried chiefs the British later imposed. "As the spokesman of a ridge councillor ad hoc bururi council, a muthamaki was not a 'chief' in either the conventional or anthropological sense. He was the chairman and representative of a body which reached decisions through discussion and consensus and owed its authority to lower-level councils." Barnett continues:

> "In brief, we have seen that the traditional Kikuyu political structure was decentralised and inherently democratic, with effective decision-making and enforcement powers resting for the most part in numerous local hierarchies of councils within each sub-tribe. We have noted, with respect to this kiama or council system, that: (1) councils were convened as the occasion demanded and reached decisions on the principle of discussion until unanimity was achieved; (2) the particular council convened (sub-clan, village, neighbourhood, etc.) was determined in each case by the scope and nature of the question or dispute at issue; (3) composition was based on the principle of 'lower-level representation on higher-level councils,' with the latter owing their authority to the former; (4) the spokesman or muthamaki of a given council, whether that of the village or the ridge - which represented the largest fixed administrative unit - was responsible to and acted in the name and with the approval of the entire body; and (5) positions of leadership were achieved, within a system of age-grades or ranks, rather than ascribed and were limited in duration by the periodic accession to political authority of junior generation-sets." [4]

II

An almost identical situation occurred in the Biafran Revolution, so recently drowned in the blood of over two million dead Ibo tribesmen. The Ibo are the inhabitants of southern Nigeria, and like the Kikuyu traditionally lived in stateless societies. Basil Davidson explains their general situation thus:

> "The political systems of Africa, as we have already noted, did not always develop into forms of centralised and bureaucratic rule. Quite a number of peoples found it possible to do without any regular apparatus of government. They continued to live peacefully together, to defend themselves and enlarge their wealth, with the help of very little central authority. Among these peoples were the Ibo who live now, as they have lived since time beyond memory, in the fertile lands to the east of the lower reaches of the Niger river."
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> "Does this mean that the Ibo and other peoples without chiefs or kings were any less successful than the peoples who elected chiefs and formed themselves into states with central governments? Far from it. Some of these peoples without chiefs repeatedly showed themselves, on the contrary, to be among the most go-ahead of all the peoples of Africa; very active in trade, very skilful in politics, very shrewd in dealing with their neighbours." [7]

The Ibo experience indicates that anarchism is possible in very densely populated areas. "To us, with our logic and our standards of size, it must seem that these thousands of little groups living, not dispersed, but very densely, upon the soil, must have spelt anarchy. But... Ibo constitutions catered with remarkable success to the basic needs of men in society." [8] The Ibo experience also shows that not having a state is a great defence from foreign aggression. "The reduction of this country was a struggle with a hydra. Almost every small group of this large population, sheltered by forest and river, had to be subjected individually." [9] When the Ibo finally succumbed to British aggression, the stateless tradition made it almost impossible to dominate this people, "who had been accustomed to settling most of their affairs within the family or kindred, and, more rarely, within slightly wider groups. Put into terms of adminis-

The British imperialists, great "civilisers" that they were, imposed upon the Kikuyu the opposite extreme of totalitarian statism and economic and political slavery. Centralised, dictatorial rule was instated, and such basic freedom as speech, press, assembly, and the like were suppressed. Economic freedom was a luxury for whites only. The Kikuyu's land was seized for the use of white settlers and the blacks forced to work as wage slaves; compulsory labour and taxation supplemented this, as the colonial administrators openly admitted, and provided as well, free construction and education funds for the privileged whites. Huge unused forest reserves were held out of production, from which the black masses were not even allowed to gather firewood. In 1936 the British ruled that squatters could have only one acre per wife, fifteen sheep or goats and no cattle, and there were all kinds of restrictions on the types of crops blacks could grow - all of this because the inefficient whites could not bear the competition of the efficient blacks. Government restrictions of every kind were enforced against blacks, from license fees to severe restrictions on freedom of movement. Blacks could not enforce contracts against whites, and were not allowed the right of inheritance or enforceable land titles, the better to keep them subjected to the white exploiters.

To a people so accustomed to complete freedom, such slavery was intolerable. Opposition was sporadic until the great peasant revolution of 1953-56, which set in motion the political forces that led to the lowering of that filthy Union Jack in Kenya in 1963. The anarchist heritage of the Kikuyu expressed itself not only in their willingness to bid for liberty or death, but also in the methods by which they carried out their tasks. As Barnett points out, there was "a considerable measure of continuity, at least as regards certain major patterns, between the traditional Kikuyu social system and the structure and organisation of the underground movement and guerrilla forces which emerged within the colonial context." [5] The basic cells of Mau Mau were the local villages, in which everyone co-operated in common tasks. The old council system, organised from the bottom up through consensual election of representatives, was reinstated. Local cell councils pressured the lingering to join, mainly by the threat of ostracism. Popular support of Mau Mau is revealed in that up to 90 percent of the Kikuyu population took the Oath of Unity.

While there was a Central Committee at the top, it mainly co-ordinated action and expressed the policies the masses desired. In practice, action was initiated by the local cells. In the first months there was no clear-cut division of labour, hierarchy of roles, or differential privileges, and leaders (who had no formal ranks) were selected by informal consensus. Later the Ituma Trinity Council was formed to give central direction to the movement; but just as the power of the local leaders depended on the loyalty their warriors were willing to give them voluntarily, compliance with its recommendations depended on the decisions of the local groups. A similar institution was the Kenya Defence Council, which was comprised of the leaders of the forest guerrilla groups. Enforcement of this council's decisions, which were unanimously decided, depended on its members' individual persuasive abilities, and expressed a decentralisation of power and authority.

> "These features of decentralisation reflected the voluntary nature of both membership in and recognition of the Kenya Defence Council, as well as the prior distribution of effective power among groups whose members were bound together by strong leader-followers locality ties and loyalties ... [The relatively weak Council] was advantageous since without significantly altering the existing distributions of power amongst the various leaders, it allowed for a considerable degree of co-operation among the latter in the planning and co-ordination of policies, rules and tactics. Another advantage of this decentralisation lay in its allowing for a very high degree of flexibility of manoeuvre and individual initiative among the many forest sections."[6]

Needless to say, the goal of Mau Mau was a return to the free economic and political institutions which characterised the Kikuyu before the coming of the imperialists, and it was fitting that their slogan was simply "Land and Freedom!" True, the complete stateless society of former years has not yet been completely reinstated, but one must not expect miracles. Kenya has done away with the worst iniquities of the State, those imposed by the British; while continuing to head in the direction of the old libertarian traditions, Kenya's progress is impeded by the fact that several of the "educated" Kenyans were brainwashed by statist ideologies of the British and that neo-colonialism continues. The liberation of the whole African continent is an indispensable condition for the complete liberation of the masses from black elites and neo-colonialism.