# AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN KENYAN HISTORY

by

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Perhaps the study of the place of autobiography in literature belongs to the province of clinical psychology. We are not here thinking merely of the awkward questions and personal claims which autobiographies raise, but also about their motives.[1] What makes an individual assume that the story of his life would be of interest to others?[2] Is there a doubt, or problem, in his past which he must explain? Is he simply digging a niche of permanence in history? Is he a megalomaniac? Or is he truly concerned that he is a great man and therefore worthy of emulation? Remember that there are so many who agree with A.N. Whitehead that "moral education is impossible apart from the habitual vision of greatness."[3] Remember also that Carlyle described history as "the biography of great men."[4] What, however, is greatness? How are we to recognize it? Is a man great simply because he thinks he is? Is the sense of greatness a mere immediate intuition? Or is it the conclusion of an argument?

All people dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dark dusty recesses of their minds wake up in the morning to find that it was vanity, but the dreamers of the day are the dangerous ones, "for they may act their dream withopen eyes to make it possible."[5] Are autobiographers dreamers who failed to make possible their daydreams? Roy Pascal, one of the few theorists of autobiography, comments that: "it is with relief, we feel, that many autobiographers write about their achievements, their gifts, their attitudes, solid, comforting realities as compared with themselves."[6] Autobiographers, thus,express themselves principally in self-defence; against outer and inner forces. The autobiographer must guard himself from the world, but also, we may surmise, from his anger at the world. He does not claim, in his statement of intent, to offer any picture at all of his psychic life, yet the account he provides emphasizes the omnipresence of his inner poise as a central truth.

Autobiographies, of course, provide interpretations, not merely records. In all cases they wrestle, specifically, with the truth of personal identity: trying, perhaps, to record that ineluctable sense of self to which some philosophers testify, trying, perhaps, to discover it or to manufacture it. Autobiography assures the author of his existence beyond all possibility of philosophical denial. Through it he comes to terms with his past or exorcises it. The author presents for public contemplation a version of the self that he wants or

needs or chooses to offer, rarely recognizing distinctly the imaginative components of that version. Self-exposure, then, is only a secondary, or even tertiary aim in each autobiographical case, even where the expressed intention is to tell "frankly the story of my life and political activity" - in the case of Oginga Odinga, or "to lay bare one's heart," in the case of Michel Leiris.[7] It seems as if the primary concern of autobiographers is with the formulation of an image of themselves that is not contaminated by subjectivity.

It follows from the above that while some autobiographers are simply historians or artists who use the autobiographical form to portray the themes of human nature, most people who write their autobiographies tend to be those who fear that they have failed, or have not performed up to public expectation and therefore must explain their records. This point is supported by the fact that most autobiographers tend to point fingers at rivals who outwitted them; as if to say; "I was better than that hero of yours." In Kenya, the autobiographies of Bildad Kaggia, Oginga Odinga and James Beauttah all have a grudge against one man: Jomo Kenyatta. The three autobiographers claim that they were more radical, or that they had a better vision of Kenya, than Kenyatta. In Yugoslavia the autobiographies of Milovan Djilas have a grudge against Tito. In the Soviet Union Leon Trotsky's major autobiographical writings are a denunciation of his rival, Joseph Stalin. Remember that autobiography, from its writer's point of view, implies curious expectations. The autobiographer offers himself, his life and his story for illumination and judgement. He assumes, and assumes the reader will assume, that a person can be known through history. He makes every effort to preclude the possibility of final negative judgement. This he does by attempting to control the reader's response partly by demonstrating the inevitability of the happenings that have made him; inviting judgement he at the same time disclaims responsibility. The judgement which the autobiographer invites, in other words, is one that confirms his self-evaluation, and he shapes his story to ensure it. As Stephen Shapiro has put it; "Men who had always felt at peace with themselves and the world around them would have no need to write autobiographies."

The above conclusions pose a problem to the historian. Should he treat autobiographies as authentic sources of history? As fiddled with history? Are autobiographers historians in their own right? It was Herbert Read who complained that no category of literature was so poor in masterpieces as autobiography.[8] He had in mind distortions and calculated omissions in autobiographies, and yet, as John Pilling has demonstrated in his book: Autobiography and Imagination, autobiographies of writers like Vladimir Nabokov, Jean-Paul Sartre, Henry Adams, and Henry James, to mention

only a few, have provided very popular and revealing reading. In Africa the autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana: The Autobiography had continued to be very popular and inspiring reading for many African youths and leaders. Professor Ogot says, and I agree with him, that: "a successful autobiography is the one in which the reader feels empathic to the writer, in which the reader feels he is genuinely making the acquaintance of the author, eventually the reader must feel that he knows the author better than before."[9] It is also believed by prominent historians, like E. Gibbon, R.H. Tawney, R.I. Moore and Sir Isaiah Berlin, that "history is about winners," is mostly about the ideas that succeeded.[10] Since most autobiographers ruminate over ideas that failed how much space should we accord them in our national history books? How much space should we, for example, allot to KADU (Kenya African Democratic Union) or KPU (Kenya People's Union) in modern Kenyan history?

## WE FOUGHT FOR UHURU

There are two types of autobiographies in Kenya. There are those which attempt to evaluate the role of the individual authors in the struggle for Kenya's independence. Among these are the autobiographies of Thuku, Kaggia, Kariuki, Beauttah, Gikoyo and Mboya. Then there are the autobiographies of Oginga Odinga - Not Yet Uhuru, and Ngugi wa Thiongo - Detained, which attempt to clarify the stand taken by these dazzling figures against what they characterize as a "neo-colonial" post-colonial Kenyan state. The purpose of this paper is to assess the contribution of these personalities to Kenyan history against what they claim they did. We will examine their visions of history, their tactics and their ideological commitments. Let us start with Thuku, Beauttah, Kaggia, Kariuki and Mboya - the autobiographers who claim that they fought for Uhuru. What were their visions of Kenya? What was their idea of Uhuru? What kind of society did they wish to create after the departure of the British? When passing judgement on these personalities we should always have in mind the wise words of the historian E.H. Carr:

> "The business of the politician is to consider not merely what is morally or theoretically desirable, but also the forces which exist in the world, and how they can be directed or manipulated to probably partial realization of the ends in view. Our political decisions, taken in the light of our interpretation of history are rooted in this compromise. But our interpretation of history is rooted in the same compromise. Nothing is more radically false than to set up some supposedly abstract standard of the desirable and condemn the past in the light of it."[11]

Harry Thuku's life story is contained in his memoirs; Harry Thuku: An Autobiography. He was born in 1895. His early education was at Kambui Mission under the guidance of Dr. W.P. Knapp of the Gospel Missionary Society. Dr. Knapp had hoped that Thuku would end up as a churchman, but this did not work out. In 1911 he left the Mission to work for the Standard Bank of South Africa in Nairobi. In the same year he was arrested and jailed for two years for attempting to steal money by using a forged cheque.[12]

After coming out of jail Thuku drifted from one job to another. In 1914 he joined The Leader of British East Africa. This newspaper job widened his political horizon and greatly improved his English.

> "It was at the Leader, from about 1915, that I first began to think seriously about some of our troubles as Africans - especially this question of forced labour."[13]

In 1918 Thuku transferred to the Government Treasury as telephone operator. It was during this time that Thuku began to meet a number of leading Indian politicians, including M.A. Desai who was a member of the Indian Association. It was during this period that he also cultivated the friendship of educated African elites in Nairobi - people like Abdulla Tairara Assuman, Mohamed Sheikh, Francis Hamisi, Norman Mboya, Job Muchuchu and Ishmael Mungai. It was with this motley of African elite in Nairobi that Thuku formed on June 7, 1921, the Young Kikuyu Association - later transformed to East African Association.

Thuku's involvement with Indian leaders and his political activities have been chronicled in Transition (No. 27, Volume 6, 1966) and Kenya Historical Biographies and need not detain us here. Briefly, he and his mentioned colleagues organized the young Kikuyu and the Nairobi urban workers to fight against continuing land alienation, the wearing of Kipande, and rising taxation. His political activities reached a climax when on July 13, 1921, he cabled a telex to the British Prime Minister to acquaint him with the problems facing the African in the colony. The following year, following an unruly public rally organized to protest his arrest, Thuku was put in detention until 1930.

The big question which students of Kenyan history face with the Thuku phenomenon is whether he should be regarded as the father of modern Kenyan nationalism. Thuku is reported to have compared himself with Gandhi. He is alleged to have said: "Gandhi is going to be king of India and I am going to be King here."[14] The allegation was made by Handley Hooper who was appealing to the Government to deal firmly with Thuku

who according to Hooper was "misleading" young Kikuyu Christians. But even if we assume that Thuku had ambition to be the "king" of Kenya would that alone qualify him to be regarded as the father of modern Kenyan nationalism? For a wider theoretical discussion of the concept of nationalism as applied to Kenya I would like to refer you to my book: The Second Word (Nairobi, 1977, pages 58-60 and 146-176). For the purpose of this paper we will simply define a nationalist as a member of a political party, or group, advocating independence of strong national government. Is there sufficient evidence to support the claim that Thuku advocated national independence?

Thuku's biographer, Dr. K.J. King, has always lamented the fact that there are very few modern historians of East Africa, or Kenya, who fail to give one or two pages to Harry Thuku when considering the rise of nationalism in these areas, "almost without exception, however, the interest inThuku is restricted to precisely ten months of his life, from his first letter to the East African Standard on June 10, 1921, to his arrest on March 14, 1922."[15] It is not difficult to explain this. Historians appreciate and recognize Thuku as a pioneer politician who organized the educated Nairobi African elites in early 1920s to articulate African grievances against colonialism, but they also know that technically he was not a nationalist. He had no conception of a Kenyan nation, leave alone an independent Kenyan nation. He called for the redress of African grievances and the accommodation of the Africans within the colonial economy and administration, but none of his speeches, writings and letters alluded to the concept of African sovereignty, and even after his return from detention he refused to associate himself with the more nationalistic politics of the Kikuyu Central Association (K.C.A.).

Indeed in 1935 he broke away from K.C.A. and formed a rival party: The Kikuyu Provincial Association. One of the rules of his party stated:

> "Every member of this organization will be pledged to be loyal to His Majesty the King of Great Britain and the established Government and will be bound to do nothing which is not constitutional according to the British traditions or do anything which is calculated to disturb the peace, good order and Government."[16]

Thuku knew that this rule would annoy many Africans, particularly members of K.C.A., but he wrote: "I did not care."[17] But the African politicians did not give him up. Due to his activities in the early 1920s and his detention he was still the most famous African in the 1930s and early 1940s. So when the first nationalist party, Kenya African

Union (KAU), was formed in 1944 the "founding fathers" elected him to be their first president. It was soon discovered that Thuku was a quisling of the British and after only three months he was kicked out and was replaced by James Gichuru.[18] Such humiliation did not deter Thuku from collaboration with theBritish. He diverted his energies to farming and he became a wealthy landowner and an advanced farmer, one of the earliest Africans to be allowed by the British to grow coffee in Kikuyuland. Thuku, according to J.M. Kariuki, "was one of the most prominent of the so-called loyalists and homeguards during the Emergency."[19]

From the above evidence can one seriously regard Thuku as a nationalist? I will give Thuku credit for one thing: he does not claim in his autobiography that he was a Western-style "modernizer," as King claims,[20] or an earth-shaking revolutionary, as Ngugi wa Thiongo and Maina wa Kinyatti claim.[21] In Detained Ngugi writes: "Harry Thuku was the greatest threat to colonial settlerdom in the 1920s...Unlike some labour leaders who, like Mboya, later came to deceive workers that trade unionism could be divorced from politics. Harry Thuku clearly saw that the solution to the workers' problem lay in politics...Thus the East African Association further demanded that Kenya must not be a colony, that elections to the Legislative Council should be on a common roll."[22] Great ideas but, needless to say, they simply emanate from Ngugi's fertile mind. Ngugi's fertile mind is the more surprising since it is common knowledge that it was Tom Mboya who courageously used his trade union, Kenya Federation of Labour, to articulate Kikuyu economic and political grievances during the Emergency when Kikuyu leaders were in detention! The point is that Thuku never entertained the ideas which Ngugi is forcing on him. Nor is it true, as Maina wa Kinyatti has alleged that Thuku's East AFrican Association aimed to "overthrow the dictatorship of the colonialists."[23]

Why then did Harry Thuku find it necessary to write his autobiography? It seems to me that throughout his life, especially since detention, Thuku regarded himself as the leader of the Kikuyu. Indeed from 1930 onwards he regarded Kenyatta as his chief rival. He hated the radical upstarts in the K.C.A., and K.A.U., who answered him back and accused him of conservatism and collaboration. He, for example, lies that he turned down the request by the K.C.A. to send him to represent Kikuyu land grievances before the Joint Select Committee of 1931 on closer union of East Africa. The truth is that after his return from detention members of the K.C.A. did not trust him. Instead Kenyatta was sent back to London to represent the K.C.A. Thuku's troubles with Kenyatta's associates in the K.C.A. led to his breakaway from the party

in 1935, and to his being kicked out of the presidency of K.A.U. in January 1945.

It seems as if Thuku wrote his autobiography to answer back his enemies and critics. As uhuru drew close he must have felt jealous that it was Kenyatta, and not him, who would lead the country to independence. Indeed on independence day, despite official invitation to have him at the Uhuru Stadium, Thuku and his wife spent a quiet day at home. He told his wife: "We have in fact received our political independence whether we actually go to the stadium or not. We shall therefore celebrate our independence by planting our coffee where it si forbidden by the agricultural people."[24] By the time he died his ostracisation by the Kikuyu was complete. At his graveside were a handful of his immediate family, Kenneth King, Taban Lo Liyong, William Ochieng, Ben Kantai and E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo. We never saw any Kikuyu political or intellectual leaders at his burial.

There is a level at which it can be said that both the autobiographies of James Beauttah and Bildad Kaggia are concerned to belittle Thuku and Kenyatta and to uplift the authors as the real radical architects of Kenyan nationalism. Beauttah, in particular, speaks for the first generation of Western-educated Kenyan patriots. "He believes," John Spencer says, "that they have been overlooked, even pushed aside."[25] Of all his generation, apart from Kenyatta, he had the most developed national outlook, having worked in almost all parts of Kenya and East Africa. He was the first link between the East African Association and members of the Young Kavirondo Association. He was actually there from the beginning - during the founding of the East African Association, at the creation of the Kikuyu Central Association and during its growth, decline, revival and eventual banning by the colonial government, at the formation of KAU and during the organization of Mau Mau.

There is nothing new that Beauttah's autobiography adds to our knowledge of Kenyan politics up to independence. He gives the impression that he was the spiritual leader of the K.C.A. and that the party always gave him first preference over Kenyatta and Thuku. Several times in his autobiography he refers to Thuku as a liar.[26] On the whole he remained throughout his life a Kikuyu politician, concerning himself mainly with the K.C.A. affairs. To Beauttah KAU was simply a continuation of the K.C.A. Nowhere does he indicate in his book a conceptual, or ideological outline of an independent Kenyan nation, which would mean that he never developed politically beyond Thuku. He was finally imprisoned on February 12, 1952, for inciting the people of Muranga to riot against a Government vaccination programme to contain an outbreak of rinderpest. He was not to come out until 1960.

By then a younger group of politicians had taken over who, according to Beauttah, had little time and respect for the preceding generation of the K.C.A. - K.A.U. veterans. "We had done more than they ever had, fought and gone to jail while they were studying in U.K. and America. And they pushed us out, we who put them where they were."[27]

Bildad Kaggia's Roots of Freedom is famous for one major reason, it told the world for the first time who the organizers of Mau Mau were, and the relationship between KAU and the movement. Mau Mau was organized by the Central Committee, whose seat was at ex-Senior Chief Koinange's home, at Banana Hill. "Fred Kubai and myself were members of the Committee, but it was decided that no KAU official should be an official of the Committee. Although Kubai and I took leading parts in the deliberations, we held no office. The Chairman was Eliud Mutonyi, and the Secretary: Isaac Gathanju."[28]

Throughout the book the impression created is that Kaggia belonged to the radical wing of KAU, that he believed in violence, if necessary, to gain uhuru for the Africans. He was impatient with reactionaries like Jomo Kenyatta, J.D. Otiende, Tom Mbotela and Joseph Katithi, who preferred constitutionalism and sweet reasonableness to violence. To Kaggia it was clear that the colonial government would not give way without struggle, and that is why the militants resorted to Mau Mau. The impression we get from Kaggia is that although Kenyatta was later charged with masterminding and organizing Mau Mau, Kenyatta was in fact quite ignorant about its origins and activities. And when late in 1952 Kenyatta foolishly agreed to go along with government request to denounce Mau Mau he was summoned to meet the Mau Mau Central Committee. "He was surprised to see Kubai and myself there. And he noticed to his further surprise that other leaders, whom he did not know, were running the meeting ... After discussion he accepted the request and undertook to get his remaining meetings cancelled."[29]

Kaggia and Kenyatta never got along, not even during their long stay in detention. And even as a junior minister in Kenyatta's government Kaggia got along better with the radical Oginga Odinga than with the conservative party stalwarts like T.J. Mboya, James Gichuru and Jomo Kenyatta. Kaggia's autobiography attempts to explain this incompatibility with Kenyatta and is a pointer to why he was eventually dropped from the government and why he later crossed the floor together with Odinga to join the opposition. Again, Kaggia, like Beauttah, seems to have continued up to independence with the K.C.A. type of politics which militated for "land and employment for the people." The book is a poor guide to how Kaggia and his generation intended to organize

and run an independent Kenya. Radicalism, after all, is neither a program of action nor a blueprint for revolutionary change. Kaggia's last reminiscences in the book are on the place of Mau Mau in Kenyan history. He writes: "The Mau Mau struggle, whether one likes it or not, will stand in history as one of the greatest liberation struggles in Africa," but earlier in the book he had failed to inform us about Mau Mau's national or pan-African ideals and program and why the Mau Mau leaders had not made an effort to involve other Kenyan communities in the struggle. Will Mau Mau stand in history as one of the greatest liberation struggles simply because Kaggia says so?

A spector is haunting Kenya - the spector of Mau Mau. In the University corridors young students who were born after the Emergency are asking what Mau Mau was all about. They claim, and I think they are right, that they cannot resolve the claims and contradictions in Mau Mau literature by themselves.

What was Mau Mau? Oginga Odinga described it as a glorious peasant revolt against British imperialism. Officially the revolt lasted between 1952 and 1957. The revolt's major and last commander, "Field Marshall" Dedan Kimathi, was captured on October 20, 1956, in the southern Nyandarua Mountain. What were the motives of Mau Mau? Those who actually participated in the rebellion - and they were mainly Kikuyu - today claim that their aim was to get rid of the British from the country and therefore to attain independence for Kenya. That, at least, is the message contained in the autobiographies of Gucu Kikoyo: We Fought For Freedom, J.M. Kariuki: Mau Mau Detainee, H.K. Wachanga: The Swords of Kirinyaga, Warihiu Itote: Mau Mau General, Karari Njama: Mau Mau From Within and Ngugi Kabiro: Man In the Middle. The opponents of the Kikuyu disagree. To them Mau Mau was primarily a Kikuyu affair whose aim was restricted to alleviating British colonial economic and political pressure on the Kikuyu and the reclaiming of the land which the Kikuyu had lost to the European settlers, at least this is what is contained in F.D. Corfield: Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau, J.C. Carotha: The Psychology of Mau Mau, L.S.B. Leakey: Mau Mau and the Kikuyu, and Dame Margery Perham in the foreword to J.M. Kariuki's Mau Mau Detainee.

It is very painful to discuss Mau Mau in Kenya, because the movement has been over politicised by Kikuyu politicians and scholars who have not even bothered to carry out minimal research on the movement. Cowards who hid, or collaborated with the British, during the Emergency would prefer to have the discussion about Mau Mau closed. They argue that it does not do anybody any good to open up old wounds. Those who

fought in the forest, like Gucu Kikoyo, and have not eaten the "fruits for independence" are rather bitter. They charge that in fact it is those who collaborated with the British during the Emergency who are enjoying the benefits of uhuru. "While enjoying this freedom they should realize that had it not been for Mau Mau and the sacrifice of many whose children suffer today for want of a breadwinner, this country would still be in bondage of the white man."[30]

Perhaps the worst lot of Kenyans are those who use Mau Mau as an ideology of domination and exploitation. They use the fact of Mau Mau to slander their opponents who they identify with either cowardice or collaboration with the enemy during the struggle. This lot goes beyond mere blackmail. They argue that only those who shed their blood are entitled to priority treatment and leadership in independent Kenya. These chauvinists are not doing the Mau Mau movement and those who participated in it any good. To start with, about sixty percent of Kenyans today were born after the Emergency. You cannot possibly deny them equal opportunities with others for having failed to shed blood in a war which was fought before they were born. The second point is that most adult Kenyans outside Central Province during the Emergency argue that they were not told that the Kikuyu were about to fight the British. In any case the secrecy, tribal oath and language of Mau Mau made the movement impenetrable to non-Kikuyu.

The truth, however, is that most non-Kikuyu sympathised with Mau Mau and many in urban areas helped the movement materially and morally. Indeed during the Emergency it was mainly non-Kikuyu politicians - people like Tom Mboya and Arqwings Kodhek - who championed Kikuyu political rights and took their grievances to colonial courts. There is ample evidence today that individual Maasai, Luyia, Kamba and Luo tribesmen fought along side the Kikuyu in the forests. In Western Kenya Chief Mukudi of Samia was detained by the British for administering a Mau Mau oath among his peole. Among the "Hard-core" Mau Mau detainees at Manyani were people like Stephen Aloo and David Oluoch Okello (Luo) and John O'Washika (Luyia). As J.M. Kariuki puts it:

> "It is another false impression that has been spread abroad that there were no tribes other than Kikuyu represented in these (detention) camps. While the vast majority were Kikuyu there were also many from such tribes as Luo, Abaluyia, Akamba and Maasai, who provided some of the strongest resistance of all."[31]

The ambivalence of Kenyans about Mau Mau has been attacked on many occasions by outsiders. Kenyans have been accused of avoiding to assess the impact of Mau Mau on their

present system. It is alleged that most Kenyans appear to have taken the uhuru celebration words of the late Jomo Kenyatta literally when he said "forget the past."[32] These accusations are unfair judging by the number of already published autobiographies that are based on Mau Mau, including those by Kariuki, Wachanga, Itote, Kabiro, Gikoyo, Njama and Gicheru. But do these autobiographies help us to understand the authors and Mau Mau better? The answer is no, as I will demonstrate below.

Of the already mentioned autobiographies the most recent contribution is that by Gucu Gikoyo: We Fought For Uhuru. Gikoyo was one of the many young and uneducated Kikuyu who were forced into the forests due to unemployment, landlessness and colonial police brutality. He does not pretend in the autobiography to have been a "general" or even an influential man in the movement. He was simply a camp-follower and a fighter who participated in many raids and battles and survived. He fought under several "generals," including Matenjagwo and Kago. He was captured and jailed several times, and several times he escaped to continue with the struggle. The picture which emerges from Gikoyo's book is the fragmented and disorganized nature of the movement. People ganged together in independent camps because they either came from the same location or district. Despite Kimathi's attempt to federate the various fighting forces under the "Kenya Parliament" every other influential man put up a camp and became a "general." Most "generals," including Matenjagwo and Mathenge, could neither read nor write. Both Kariuki and Gikoyo repeat and lament the fact that most educated Kikuyu refused to go to the forest. Dedan Kimathi's education ended in standard four.

It is no wonder, then, that the movement lacked ideology and direction. Most raids were aimed at Kikuyu rural areas. When firearms were captured from police stations it was in order to enable the warriors to raid the rural areas for food or revenge. Few white settlers were attacked and no electric or telephone installations were disrupted. There is no evidence that the rail line to Nanyuki that helped to transport and feed British troops was attacked. Most disappointing of all is that no territory was liberated like MPLA, SWAPO or FRELIMO were to do in subsequent decades elsewhere - in Africa. Towards the end the struggle broke down into banditry. The last point I want to raise has got to do with the reliability of Gikoyo's book. The author confesses that he is illiterate, he never went to school and therefore he never kept a diary. Is it possible that all the massive details, including precisely reported dialogues in this book could be remembered by the author thirty years later? I seriously doubt the factual authenticity of this book. Even obvious facts which he should have checked from

books are wrong. He says, for example, that the K.C.A. was formed "under the leadership of Harry Thuku." He alleges that when the Kikuyu heard of the death of Waiyaki wa Hinga at Kibwezi they dispatched their warriors who went, "exhumed him and buried him with traditional honour befitting a great chief."[33] He also alleges that when Kenyatta returned to Kikuyuland in 1946 "God the Almighty dropped a flaming star that fell with a great crash, with the aim no doubt of showing all and sundry that the hero of the black man- the Burning Spear - had returned with thunderous courage..." One wonders what else in the book is not a lie.

But the problem of reliability is not confined to Gikoyo. Dame Margery Perham returns to it again and again in connection with Kariuki's book: Mau Mau Detainee where Kariuki remembers every detail and conversation in his seven years of detention in fourteen of Kenya's detention camps. She writes:

> "The effect of Mr. Kariuki's book must depend upon the extent to which it commands belief. For myself I believe that he has given a substantially true account of his own experiences...In judging the question of credibility I have had the advantage of meeting him. I had no predisposition to like a hard-core ex-Mau Mau detainee, yet I quickly developed a liking for him. This was because he made an impression not only as could be expected, of resolution, but also of modesty, friendliness, balance and humour."[34]

Needless to say, historians do not determine factual credibility through subjective feelings and characteristics like "modesty, friendliness, balance and humour." J.M. Kariuki's experiences are confined to the hard life that was imposed on Mau Mau detainees. He presents himself as the champion of the "convicts" - he was always elected camp leader, he was continuously smuggling letters out to Colonial Office, British Members of Parliament and Kenya's Commissioner of Prisons. Absurdly lacking in this book, and in those of Waruhiu Itote - like Mau Mau General and Mau Mau In Action - is a discussion among the inmates of the type of society that they hoped to build after the departure of the British.

In shot the Mau Mau autobiogrphies are a poor guide as to what the Mau Mau movement was all about. Of Kariuki, Perham says: "he could not be expected to take a panoramic view of the total situation in which, beginning as little more than a schoolboy, he occupied one small and inevitably isolated part." The heart of the revolt was centred in the peasantry. The majority of the people in the forest and detention camps, including the autobiographers, were drawn from uneducated

country folk. As we said earlier the freedom fighters were fighting to restore their traditional, tribal way of life. In the words of Robert Whittier: "They wanted to return to a past uncumbered by hut tax, poll tax, bench terracing, crop restrictions and alien chief system...Although the political leaders were clever and devious by necessity, their followers in the militant wing were simple men...They did not understand the dynamics of the political arena and their naive belief in the efficacy of their actions persisted even when experience told them otherwise."[35]

The last autobiography that I wish to examine in connection with the struggle for independence is that of T.J. Mboya: Freedom and After. It is not without significance that the autobiography opens with the "proudest day" of his life - December 6, 1958 - in Accra, Ghana. On that day he was unanimously chosen as chairman of the first All-African Peoples Conference. "To be chosen, at the age of twenty-eight, as chairman of a conference which represented the passionate hopes of 200 million people made me both proud and humble."[36]

By the time Mboya entered Kenya's Legislative Council in 1957 he already saw himself as a nationalist. The Accra conference simply legitimised him as a worldly pan-Africanist and international celebrity. But Accra was also the seat of the government of Ghana, led by Kwame Nkrumah - Mboya's pan-African hero and the man after whose party Mboya modeled his Nairobi Peoples Convention Party. It is possible that the writing of Freedom and After was inspiried by Nkrumah's autobiography, Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah. Again it is not without significance that the dress which Mboya wore for the jacket of his autobiography is a Ghanaian national dress. That, however, is but a small part of a long story.

By the time Mboya wrote his autobiography he was the most articulate and visible of Kenya's politicians. He represented the so-called new Africans - cosmopolitan, urbane, articulate and self-assured. "He used to appear, it seemed, every other month on British television: cool, very confident, speaking his pieces in measured yet emphatic tone, acting his interrogators and adversaries off the screen."[37] Mboya was an important point of contact between Africa and the developed countries of the West, and it is fitting that the finalchapter of his autobiography should be called 'Africa and the World.' David Goldsworthy sums him up as a leader of intellectual brilliance, vast practical competence, fine judgement, great drive, courage and dedication. Certain episodes stand out in his remarkable career, all of them a testimony of his verbal and organizational skills. The successful handling of the Mombasa strike in 1955 confirmed his youthful brilliance in

trade union leadership. Accra in 1958 sealed his reputation in the pan-African cause and anti-colonial struggle. Because of all this success many powerful Politicians regarded him so much with fear and jealousy. He was accused of being an agent of the West.

Unlike most of his opponents and rivals, who only had vague ideas about what to do with independence, Mboya, by 1960, already had a very clear conception of the shape of an independent Kenya that he wished to see. "There were always two Mboyas in tandem: the militant nationalist and the orthodox developmentalist."[38]

He became the leading theoretician of Kenyan nationalism. He was the architect of KANU's manifesto. He was the ideologue of the development strategy in the critical years of transition from the colonial to the post colonial order. Although he toyed for a while with socialist ideas, during the period of his study at Ruskin College, he eventually rejected scientific socialism and chose a pro-Western capitalist path for Kenya. As one moves from the period of Freedom and After to the period of The Challenge of Nationhood one is struck by the change in tone and perspective as the fiery nationalist troubleshooter gradually mellowed into a sober pragmatic statesman, "a transition one hardly finds in first-generation African leaders. Too many of them tend to be Peter Pans and are unable to come to terms with the challenge of leadership and the onerous responsibilities which independence brings.

In the last three chapters of his autobiography we see Mboya grappling with the major ideas and concepts that had caused him a lot of trouble with his critics and enemies - African socialism, neo-colonialism, and the place and role of an independent Kenya in Africa and the world. He writes: "Because I have helped many students to go to the United States, and because I have many American friends, people in the West interpret this as hope for the success of American foreign policy in Kenya and think we will run to the United States for help against the East. They do not seem to realize that, like any African leader, I want to establish friendly relations with the East when Kenya is independent. Perhaps I have been called pro-West because I have not yet visited the Eastern countries. Such a conclusion is, of course, very superficial."[40]

Freedom and After, then, is Mboya's answer to his critics and enemies and a statement of his belief system and a projection about what he wished to see in independent Kenya. Later these beliefs and projections were concretized in the Sessional Paper Number Ten of 1965. To those who took objection to the sessional paper Mboya was very pointed: "We reject the suggestion that scientific socialism is the proper

system for our country...We also reject blanket state ownership...We are aware of the danger of giving foreign capitalists licence to do as they please, and we have outlined certain policies on taxation, Africanization, nationalisation and public participation to prevent it."[41] Lastly, it must be pointed out that Mboya was a scholar and writer in his own right. Freedom and After was not his first book. He had already written The Kenya Question: An African Answer, Conflict and nationhood: THe Essentials of Freedom in Africa, Kenya Faces the Future and, of course, many articles in learned international journals and magazines. He often saw himself as a contributor to African political thought just like any other scholar.

Politics is a game, and like in every game the player's ultimate aim is to win. To win in a game one must observe and learn the skills of his opponents, he must master the right moves, and know when to strike. It seems to me that Oginga Odinga was never cut for the game of politics, because in politics it is not enough simply to have faith and bravado - I mean faith in the people and faith in one's cause. In politics one must also master the art of the political chess, in order to arrive at the desired and properly defined political destination. The business of the politician, as we said earlier, is to consider not merely what is morally or theoretically desirable, but also the forces which exist in the world, and how they can be directed or manipulated to a probable or partial realization of the ends in view. Odinga's political destination may have been incorporated in the KPU manifesto, but its outline, until 1966, is not clear in Not Yet Uhuru, Odinga's autobiography, nor is the art of achieving it demonstrated in the book. Remember that the last chapter of the book - entitled 'Obstacles of Uhuru' - in which K.P.U.'s socialist ideas are discussed was originally not part of the book. In response to Dr. J.J. Okumu's review of his autobiography, in October 1967, Odinga confessed: "I started writing Not Yet Uhuru soon after independence in 1963...Owing to the delay in its publication, the events leading to the Limuru conference found the book not out of the press. It was then necessary to bring the book up to date by discussing briefly the events immediately before and after the Limuru Conference."[42] Odinga's explanation above forces us to raise a fundamental question. Did Odinga convert to socialism after or before the Limuru Conference? if before, why was Odinga, a "socialist", wooing reactionary KADU Members of Parliament whom he regarded as "instruments of external, settler and colonial forces" to join him in government in 1964?[43]

In So Rough A Wind Sir Michael Blundell, observed the difference between Mboya and Odinga. Mboya, according to Blundell, was intent on creating a modern country in which the citizens are demonstrably competent and at home in the values

and gadgetry of the modern world, he was a twentieth century African in a sense that the West readily appreciated. Oginga Odinga, on the other hand, was a "false Africanist." According to Blundell: "Odinga, in his heart of hearts is drawn towards the past without the sergent major-like presence of the white technician, industrialist or scientist. odinga seems to me to represent that emotional slightly bewildered resentful section of the African people who have been precipitated protestingly into the twentieth century. The support for Mboya, both moral and financial from American sources, forced Odinga to seek similar aids, and at the Lancaster House Conference in 1960 he slipped quietly away to East Germany. Since then he has not troubled to deny that he has received financial help from communist countries, and he has admitted that his contacts with China have been close."[44]

Such bravado, and many others, cost Odinga a lot of trouble with the British who called him a communist and excluded him from government until after independence. Odinga has always believed in, and preached, honesty in politics. In Not Yet Uhuru he tells us "I have told you frankly the story of my life and political activity." And because he was honest he trusted that others were (or should be) honest. That raises a fundamental problem for the historian. Is a believer, or truster, a good, or reliable, judge of personalities and events? Did Odinga ever know, or understand, Kenyatta? Did Odinga understand Mboya and Gichuru? We are raising these questions because after 1965 Odinga is going to accuse them of betraying the people, but had they? When Oginga Odinga on June 27, 1952, proclaimed himself Jomo Kenyatta's "disciple in nationalism" what did he know of Kenyatta? When from 1958 to 1961 Odinga campaigned for the release of Kenyatta and said Kenyatta was the true leader of the African people did Odinga know Kenyatta's ideological beliefs, or did he simply see Kenyatta as the only Kenyan nationalist who could stop his irrepressible rival, Tom Mboya, from being kenya's first prime minister? After all Odinga did believe that "British and United States strategy seemed to converge on grooming Mboya for leadeship in the place of Kenyatta."[45] Did Odinga know the ideology of Mau Mau? Finally, if Odinga was a socialist what brand of socialism did he intend to apply in Kenya and why are not these socialist ideas articulated in his career until 1966?

We have already said that the last chapter of Odinga's book was an afterthought and that it was not originally part of the book, but even with it one does not clearly see the evolution in Odinga's mind of the kind of society he wished to create at independence. We do not find in the book clear elucidation on pan-Africanism, foreign relations, economic and social philosophy, education and culture before 1965. Instead we are treated to unfruitful discussion of the campaign to

release Kenyatta, internal intrigues in KANU and the struggle between KANU and KADU. We therefore agree with John Okumu when he says that "Odinga's book is, in part, a lament of his own failure, while he had the chance to shape the development of African nationalism, to create a modus operandi for the synchronic and diachronic transformation of our society."[46] We also wish to conclude that this political failure derived from his poor sense of political realism and history. He admits, for example, that he miscalculated when he successfully persuaded KADU to join KANU in 1964. Without knowing he had merely strengthened the conservative wing of KANU and this made it easier for Kenyatta and Mboya to expel the radical wing - Odinga included - from KANU. Besides, "instead of KANU's policies triumphing over KADU, Ngala and his lieutenants began to work changes on KANU."[47]

There is a level, then, at which it can be said that Mboya matured much earlier than Odinga as a statesman. As we have already said, by the time he wrote Freedom and After Mboya's ideas about the independent Kenya he wanted had already matured. And when people like Odinga and Kaggia were continuing after independence with the politics of emancipation Mboya had already settled down in the Ministry of Economic Planning to lay down the foundation of independent Kenya's economy, and culture.

Odinga, then, belonged to that group of nationalists whom Lennard Okola has called Peter Pans who "are unable to come to terms with the challenge of leadership and onerous responsibilities which independence brings." These Peter Pans hoped to learn and think on the job, and this has been very costly for Africa. Frantz Fanon was right when he said that one of the pitfalls of nationalist struggles is the "intellectual laziness" of the vanguard, the middle class. He wrote: "The objective of nationalist parties as from a certain given period is strictly national. They mobilize the people with slogans of independence, and for the rest leave it to future events. When such parties are questioned on the economic programme of the state that they are clamouring for or of the nature of the regime which they propose to install they are incapable of replying, because, precisely, they are completely ignorant of the economy of their own country. This economy has always developed outside the limits of their knowledge. They have nothing more than an approximate, bookish acquaintance with the actual and potential resources of their country's soil and mineral deposits, and therefore they can only speak of the resources on a general and abstract plane."[48]

Ngugi wa Thiongo was detained from December 31, 1977 to December 12, 1978, for engaging in activities and utterances which were deemed "dangerous to the good Government of Kenya

and its institutions." Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary is Ngugi's autobiographical account covering that period in detention. It is an autobiography with a difference. While most autobiographies dwell on what the authors did for their people and country, Ngugi dwells on what those bad guys in power did to him. He adopts the attitude of that proverbial man who is more sinned against that sinning.

Detained is more than simply Ngugi's complaint against his restriction. It is a radical critique of Kenya's political economy from the onset of colonialism to the present. He describes the purposeful degradation and humiliation of political detainees and the neglect and casual cruelty that undermined their health. In between these descriptions Ngugi artfully weaves a series of historical and political reflection about Kenya and her future. Although he poses as a marxist in the book Ngugi actually emerges as a Kikuyu patriot in the proto-nationalist tradition of Beauttah and Kaggia. According to him the heroic struggle for Kenya's independence started with Waiyaki wa Hinga, runs through the exploits of Harry Thuku, the Kikuyu Central Association, Kenyatta, Mau Mau and J.M. Kariuki. Waiyaki wa Hinga, a collaborator who entered into blood brotherhood with Lord Lugard and donated land on which the Church of Torch stands today at Thogoto is said to have been "the leading figure in the people's patriotic resistence against the British invasion and occupation of southern Gikuyuland."[49]

Indeed to Ngugi history is simply a propaganda instrument in the service of a chosen ideology. Detained is characterized by unbelievable historical distortions and calculated historical omissions. Harry Thuku is presented to us as a great nationalist who had more foresight than Tom Mboya. Mau Mau is said to have been a "war for national independence" and Dedan Kimathi "attempted a grand political alliance of Kenyan peoples to oust the imperialist enemy."[50] It is surprising that a book which attempts to highlight anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist tradition does not at all discuss Oginga Odinga's Kenya People's Union - the first legal socialist political party in Kenya. Instead it laments that Kenyatta betrayed the spirit of K.C.A. and K.A.U. According to Ngugi: "Kenyatta was a twentieth century tragic figure: he could have been a Lenin, a Mao Tse-Tung or a Ho Chi Minh, but he ended being a Chiang Kai-Shek, a Park Chung Hee, or a Pinochet. He chose the Lilliputian approval of the Blundells and Macdonalds of the colonial world, warming himself in the reactionary gratitude of Euro-American exploiters and oppressors rather than in the eternal titanic applause of the Kenyan people, sunning himself in the revolutionary gratitude of all the oppressed and exploited."[51] Is Ngugi here saying that Kenyatta should have built a Marxist Kenyan state?

By the time Ngugi was thrown into detention he had taken sides in Kenya's class struggle. "To write for, speak for and work for the lives of peasants and workers was the highest call of patriotic duty. My only regret was that for many years I had wandered in the bourgeois jungle and wilderness of foreign cultures and languages. Kamirithu was my homecoming."[52] What is it that Ngugi discovered so late at Kamirithu, ethnic warmth? An incipient Marxist society? A market for his novels and Plays? In Detained Ngugi is very articulate about what he hates, but he does not take us into his confidence as to what should be done.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of the autobiographer is to influence history in his favour. This sometimes leads to distortion of facts and conclusions, omission of facts and ideas which do not favour the writer, and also to afterthoughts. There is nothing wrong with afterthoughts except that they situate ideas in wrong epochs. Our nationalists must be encouraged to write their memoirs. These add a lot of facts and insights to our historical knowledge. Autobiographies help historians to capture the moods of the past and to inspect the minds of the actors. But historians must be careful about three common weaknesses of autobiography: namely, distortion, omission and afterthought. Autobiography also raises the fundamental question of the role of the individual in history. Who cares what an individual says he did? Was he not simply part of the whirlwind of objective conditions of his age? Does not the study of the individual simply help to mystify or obstruct historical comprehension? Have the deaths of most of our founding fathers altered the momentum and direction of our history? Finally, the aim of this paper was not to pass an ultimate historical judgement on the personalities discussed here. That would require a more comprehensive study that includes material and observations outside the autobiography. It is, however, legitimate to hang a fellow on his own evidence. The debate continues.

## FOOTNOTES

[1]I wish to thank B.A. Ogot, Isaac SIndiga and Dan Sifuna who gave me invaluable criticism of the first draft of this paper, any shortcomings are entirely my responsibility.

[2]Ochieng', W.R., The Third World, Nairobi, 1983. See the chapter entitled: "The Story of My Life."

[3]Whitehead, A.N., Aims of Education, William and Norgate, p. 106.

[4]Lucas, E., What is Greatness, Nairobi, 1967, p. vii.

[5]Eliot, T.S. quoted in American Dreams, by Terke, S., New York, 1960.

[6]See Design And Truth in Autobiography, Harvard University Press, 1960, p. 148.

[7]See Oginga Odinga, Not Yet Uhuru, Nairobi, 1967, p. xii and Pilling, J., Autobiography and Imagination, London, 1981, p. 3.

[8]Shapiro, S., The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography, Vol. 5, 1968, p. 448. Also see Pilling, J., op. cit., p. 117.

[9]Pilling, J., Ibid., p. 1.

[10]Personal communication with Ogot, at Kenyatta University College, on June 5, 1984, at 11:00 a.m., in Prof. Ogot's office.

[11]See Carr, E.H., What is History? Penguin, 1961, pp. 125-130, and Moore, R.I., The Newnes Historical Atlas, Edward Arnold, 1983, p. 10.

[12]Carr, E.H., What is History?, op. cit., p. 128.

[13]See Harry Thuku: An Autobiography, Nairobi, 1970, pp. 12-14.

[14]Thuku, H., ibid., p. 16.

[15]Transition No. 27, 1966, p. 20.

[16]Thuku, H., op. cit., p. xi.

[17]Thuku, H., ibid., p. 60.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Beauttah, J. Freedom Fighter, Nairobi, 1983, p. 48.

[20]Kariuki, J.M., Mau Mau Detainee, Nairobi, 1963, p. 18.

[21]King, K. and Salim, A., Kenya Historical Biographies, Nairobi, 1971, p. 155.

[22]Ngugi wa Thiongo in Detained, Nairobi, 1981, p. 81. Also see Maina wa Kinyatti, in Kenya Historical Review, Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 289.

[23]Ngugi, op. cit., p. 81.

[24]Maina wa Kinyatti, op. cit., p. 289.

[25]Thuku, H., op. cit., p. 75.

[26]Beauttah, J., op. cit., p. 3.

[27]Beauttah, J., ibid., pages 20 and 48.

[28]Beauttah, J., ibid., p. 110.

[29]Kaggia, B., Roots of Freedom, Nairobi, 1975, p. 108.

[30]Kaggia, B., ibid., p. 114.

[31]Gikoyo, G.G., We Fought for Freedom, Nairobi, 1979, p. 322.

[32]Kariuki, J.M., op. cit., p. 88.

[33]Wachanga, H.K., The Swords of Kirinyaga, Nairobi, 1978, pp. xv-xx.

[34]Gikoyo, G.G., op. cit., p. 319.

[35]Kariuki, J.M., op. cit., pp. ix-x.

[36], H.K., op. cit., pp. xv-xvi.

[37]Mboya, T.J., Freedom and After, London, 1963, p. 15.

[38]Goldsworthy, D., Tom Mboya: The Man Kenya Wanted to Forget, London, 1982, p. x.

[39]Goldsworthy, D., ibid., p. 293.

[40]Okola, L., in East Africa Journal, Vol. 8, no. 12, December, 1971.

[41]Mboya, T., op. cit., p. 241.

[42]Mboya, T., in East Africa Journal, October 1965, p. 35.

[43]Oginga, O., in East Africa Journal, November, 1967, p. 3.

[44]Oginga, O., Not Yet Uhuru, Nairobi, 1968, pp. 283-284.

[45]Blundell, Sir M., So Rough A Wind, Lonson, 1964, p. 232.

[46]Odinga, O., op. cit., p. 200.

[47]Olumu, J., in East Africa Journal, October 1967, p. 14.

[48]Odinga, O., op. cit., p. 284.

[49]Fanon, F., The Wretched of the Earth, Penguin Books, 1963, p. 121.

[50]Ngugi, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Ibid., pp. 162-163.

[53]Ibid., p. 105.