

Never Be Silent: Publishing and Imperialism in Kenya, 1884–1963.

By Shiraz Durrani. London: Vita Books, 2006. Pp. xi, 258. £20 paper.

This is an interesting and useful, but often frustrating, book. Durrani wishes to resurrect the history of publishing during colonial Kenya, which he understands as “a history of struggles” between, on the one hand, peasants, workers, and progressive African and South Asian intellectuals and professionals, and, on the other, the administration, settlers, missionaries, and the African and South Asian petite bourgeoisie (p. 17). His chapters generally follow his periodization of publishing: Chapter 2, “1884–1922: Resistance of Nationalities”; Chapter 3, “1922–1948: Consolidation of Working Class”; Chapter 5 (which constitutes one-half of the text), “1948–1963: Mau Mau Revolutionary Struggle”; along with shorter chapters on publishing at the coast, overseas support for Mau Mau, and independence. For most readers, Durrani’s main contribution will be in the facts about the many papers that came and went during the colonial period and their general ideological tenor (helpfully listed in an appendix), and the importance attached to publishing by individuals like Bildad Kaggia and other Mau Mau leaders (although in his effusive praise of Mau Mau, Durrani might seem to overstate their publishing successes).

Despite his access to dozens of papers—including thirty-four held at the British Library—Durrani rarely engages with them in detail. Rather, he tends more often to identify a source, explain when it was published, where and by whom, and give a general description of how it advanced the cause of anticolonialism. Yet surely there was more going on in the pages of these papers. If a paper was predominantly concerned with anticolonialism, in what terms did it make its arguments? Human rights? Indigenous land rights? Liberal democracy? Durrani at times makes reference to these issues, but not at a sustained level; using newspapers to unpack ideological debates is (as Jonathon Glassman has shown us) possible and revealing.¹ Moreover, we know that local newspapers in Kenya carried on intense debates over contemporary intra-African issues: literate Gikuyu, for example, used the pages of *Muigwithania* as part of impassioned struggles over gender and generational relationships (as Lonsdale and Peterson have shown).² Durrani’s work would have been much richer had he examined in more detail the contents of his sources, the contours of debate, the languages and idioms used. Greater attention should also have been paid to the vast historiography on colonial Kenya. There are other questions Durrani might have posed: for example, could all missionaries and their publications be lumped in the colonialist camp? (One thinks of Archdeacon Owen, nicknamed “Archdemon” by colonial officials tired of his critiques, in both the *East African Standard* and the *Manchester Guardian*, of “native policy.”)

¹ Jonathon Glassman, “Sorting Out the Tribes: The Creation of Racial Identities in Colonial Zanzibar’s Newspaper Wars,” *Journal of African History* 41 (1999), 395–428.

² John Lonsdale, “The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,” in John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, *Unhappy Valley* (London, 1992); Derek R. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth, N.H., 2004).

