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## PUBLISHING STRATEGIES IN COLONIAL KENYA

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*Never Be Silent: Publishing and Imperialism in Kenya, 1884–1963.* By SHIRAZ DURRANI. London: Vita Books, 2006. Pp. 271. £20 (ISBN 978-1-869886-05-9).

KEY WORDS: Kenya, colonialism, press.

*Never be Silent* aims to examine the publishing strategies of three very broad groups the author has identified; the 'colonial group' comprising the 'colonial administration, missionaries, settlers, and their local allies'; the 'African peasant and working class'; and, lastly, South Asian Kenyans. The organization of the book follows these categorizations within a chronological sweep from 1884 to Kenyan independence, with the most emphasis and ink given, not surprisingly, to the late colonial period and the Mau Mau war.

The book's main aspiration is to see 'the history of Kenyan struggle for liberation from the victim's point of view' (p. 17), a laudable goal although, if the 'victims' in this case are Kenyans under colonial rule, it is fair to say that we do have a strong representation of this point of view from contemporary memoirs and an enduring and vigorous tradition of postcolonial scholarship concerned with Kenyan history and politics. Durrani focuses on the innovations in publishing in Kenya with a strong emphasis on the contributions of South Asian Kenyans. This alone could be an interesting story; however, what is most striking and disappointing about the book is that it offers no real narrative or analysis of its own, relying instead on select secondary sources that are neither critiqued nor woven into the story Durrani wishes to tell. Rather, the author's primary arguments are gleaned from other texts or from websites and are presented as 'interesting facts' before shifting direction to present the next series of facts. As a reader it is difficult to get past this writing style and it is equally difficult to understand how an editor would let this pass. When quoting another source, for instance Pugliese (1995), the author simply records 'Some facts mentioned by Pugliese', followed by a list of bulleted points (p. 33). This approach occurs throughout the book and seriously detracts from what should be its very interesting content.

Chapters in the first half of the book give overviews of the history of publishing; 'Resistance of nationalities, 1884–1922'; the 'consolidation of the working class, 1922–1948'; and a brief chapter on 'Kiswahili resistance publishing'. The latter half of the book is concerned with the Mau Mau struggle, and the various types of mainstream and alternative publications and publishing strategies. There is interesting material here, but Durrani gives very little attention to the most influential or most recent historiography on the war, often relying instead upon recent general pieces from the *Guardian*, or other brief reports, such as repeated material excerpted directly from a website containing a report about a television documentary about the Mau Mau. This material is simply taken from the Internet and recreated in text boxes. Were this a device used once or twice it would be easy to overlook, but employing this method throughout makes for a very choppy read.

For those interested in this particular topic, it is not a bad book to have on the shelf. The Appendices are useful. They are presented as 'Selected lists' and comprise titles and brief descriptions of newspapers published by the colonial government, African publishers and South Asian publishers. The names of 'information activists' are listed, although no descriptive material is given. In the second Appendix, Durrani provides a select list of banned imported material, including newspapers, books, gramophone records and films. The chapters on Mau Mau, in particular, although lacking detailed historical context, do excerpt news stories from the 1950s which may provide a useful starting place for further study.

## Book Review

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