

Kenyan struggle shows information truly is power

Durrani, Shiraz. **Never be Silent: publishing and imperialism in Kenya, 1884-1963.** London: Vita Books, 2006. 271 pp. ISBN-13: 978 1 869886 05 9. £20.

This important book is well researched and scholarly, but at the same time written in a popular style and very accessible. It tells the inspiring story of the successful Mau Mau resistance movement against imperialism and colonialism in Kenya. It also tells the story of how central publishing and information were to this struggle for freedom.

The book is organised into three main time frames: the resistance of nationalities, 1884-1922; the consolidation of the working class, 1922-48; and the Mau Mau revolutionary struggle, 1948-63. There are also sections on Kiswahili resistance publishing, overseas support for Kenya liberation, and independence and neo-colonialism.

Each chapter follows a common pattern so that the evolution of publishing can be traced through different historical periods and situations.

The emergence of an African nationalist movement between 1884 and 1922 is illustrated through examples of settler, colonial government, church, South Asian and African publications. The different currents and tensions within these groups are demonstrated via their respective publications – for example, the divergence between settler and colonial interests and the support given to the emerging nationalist movement by South Asian publications.

After 1922 there was growing convergence between nationalist and working-class politics and this was seen in the growth of trade unions and their publications. Militancy on the streets and in the workplace was mirrored by increasingly radical literature which encouraged the African masses to rise up and overthrow both their colonial and class oppressors. What was striking to me, reading this little-recorded episode in the history of British imperialism, was the sovereignty and independence of the liberation struggle. Some historians would have us believe that

all independence movements in Africa were organised and financed by international Communism. The Mau Mau movement needed no such external intervention or interference (although it did receive support from the UK, Canada, USSR, Egypt, Ireland, India, the US and Trinidad).

The core of *Never Be Silent* is the hidden history of the Mau Mau revolutionary struggle: the establishment of liberated territories; the Mau Mau communications strategy; oral communications; revolutionary publishing; preparation for the armed phase; and the establishment of a people's press. The Mau Mau seemed to be everywhere in Kenya, and the authorities became increasingly desperate to control the situation. This led to the declaration of a National Emergency in 1952, after which many publications were closed down, only to re-emerge with a different title or in a different guise.

The work of the Mau Mau was ultimately undone by the post-independence ruling class in Kenya. But reading this

book does not leave you with feelings of disappointment and defeat; far from it, you come away feeling energised and ready to use the valuable lessons of the Mau Mau in today's struggles. The quotes which are liberally scattered throughout this book should be used in library and information schools throughout the world to teach the next generation of library workers that information truly is power.

The other central message in this book is that, in the face of injustice and oppression, library workers should never be silent: they should put their skills in the service of those who are most excluded and who have the greatest needs. As Durrani concludes, 'people struggling to change their society always find ways of establishing their own system of communicating with the people they lead and by whom they are led. Their mission of revolution, of change, of peace, of social and economic justice requires that they should never be silent'.

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