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# Feminism in the Mau Mau Resurgence

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## ***Abstract:***

*We argue that there is a resurgence of Mau Mau in Kenya and that at its forefront are the demands and actions of landless women. The Mau Mau war against colonialism inspired millions in their struggles during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The continuation of the anti-imperial struggle on the African continent in the 1980s and 1990s expanded into the anti-corporate globalization movement of the 2000s. The gendered demands for communal land and autonomous production during the 1952-1960 Mau Mau war were suppressed by compromises or 'male deals.' The subsistence voices of land poor women and dispossessed men were silenced in the 1950s and again in the 1980s by the elite clamour for commodified land and crops. Widespread landlessness has produced a new Mau Mau which asserts a feminist life economy.*

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## **Introduction:**

A new series of battles is being fought at the Jubilee of the anti-colonial Mau Mau war in Kenya. In the period 2000 to 2003, a new social movement has been involved in over 50 land occupations and instances of armed and unarmed defences of land from enclosure. The struggle for land and freedom now involves the same social forces and some of the same individuals who were engaged in the war which brought Kenya's national independence in 1963.<sup>1</sup> At the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mau Mau, the 'jubilation'<sup>2</sup> participates in the worldwide groundswell which is affirming a life-centred political economy against a profit-centred death economy. The front line protagonists of the new Mau Mau are peasant

and landless women. They demand communal land titles; universal, free education and producer control of trade.

The Mau Mau of the 1950s was a composite of social forces including peasants, the landless, squatters, waged labourers, prostitutes, rural and urban women, hawkers, *ahoi* (tenants with customary land rights), those exiled from the Rift Valley, ex-WWII soldiers and some ex-chiefs (Odhiambo and Lonsdale 2003; Robertson 1997; Rosberg and Nottingham 1966; wa Kinyatti 1986; wa Wanjau 1983, 1988: 213). The multi-class features of the 1950s Mau Mau along with regional distinctions in oaths and organization, indicate that there were in fact 'many Mau Maus' with many origins and class aspirations. Similarly, there are many new Mau Maus. The new Mau

Mau includes peasants, the landless, squatters, touts, *jua kali* (informal sector) artisans, waged labourers, prostitutes, rural and urban women, traders, refugees from the 1990s land clearances, students, re-trenched workers, street children, hawkers, ex-Mau Mau elders, the unemployed, forest dwellers, pastoralists, revolutionary intellectuals, exiles, prisoners, settlement scheme tenants, professionals, human rights and faith-based activists and members of non-governmental organizations. This study focusses especially on the actions of landless women.

We examine resistance to enclosure in Africa using a theoretical framework called 'gendered class analysis,' which includes seven concepts: commodification, subsistence, globalization from above, globalization from below, fight for fertility, male deal, and gendered class alliance (Turner 1994).

This theory expands the definition of the working class to embrace both the *waged* and the *unwaged*. Capital encloses and commodifies nature, unwaged work, social services and built space (Turner and Benjamin 1995). Women and other unwaged people rely for their daily production and reproduction upon these same 'goods.' In their struggle with capital, the social power of the unwaged is precisely that they possess and stand on the very ground of subsistence which capital seeks to enclose, commodify and destroy.

The life-centred or 'subsistence' political economy is defined by Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies (1999:19) as "freedom, happiness, self-determination within the limits of necessity - not in some other world but here; furthermore persistence, stamina, willingness to resist, the view from below, a world of plenty. The concept of self-provisioning is, in our opinion, far too limiting because it refers only to the economical dimension. 'Subsistence' encompasses concepts like 'moral economy,' a new way of life in all its dimensions: economy, culture, society, politics, language *etcetera*, dimensions which can no longer be separated from each other."

In the commodified or "death economy" of the "corporate male gang" (McMurtry 2001) profit is central and "life is, so to speak, only a coincidental side-effect. It is typical of the capitalist industrial system that it declares everything that it wants to exploit free of charge to be part of nature, a natural resource. To this belongs the housework of women as well as the work of peasants in the Third World,

but also the productivity of all of nature" (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999:20-21)

'Globalization from below' is the process by which the capacities of local 'civil commons'<sup>3</sup> are strengthened and linked to their counterparts elsewhere in the world. As corporate 'globalization from above' proceeded in the 1990s, popular social forces united to resist. Marx tied the centralization of capital in ever fewer global corporations to the expansion and revolt of the global exploited class, members of which are "disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself" (Marx (1887) 1967: 763).

One way to conceptualize capital's attempt to assert a 'new world order' and popular resistance to it is as a 'fight for fertility.' Fertility is the capacity to reproduce and sustain life in all its forms, principally people, their labour power and their food. Land and labour, as well as the knowledge, bodies and time of women, are major sources of fertility. Women therefore have a special stake in exercising control over their own fertility. They contend for control with their own menfolk and with capital, foreign and local. In the fight for control over fertility, capitalists make 'male deals' with many men, and in particular kinsmen, who elicit, coerce, supervise and regulate the exploitation of women's labour. 'Male dealers' serve as intermediaries to channel resources and women's paid and unpaid labour into the commodified realm to make profits for capital and minor earnings for themselves. In contrast, some men break with the male deals and join women in 'gendered class alliances' for the defense and elaboration of the subsistence political economy, against the incursion of capitalist commodified relations (Turner 1994:20-21).

Three 'moments' in the analysis of gendered class struggle are (1) subsistence: the insurgents' program to foster a life-centred society for the well-being of all; (2) enclosure: the commodifying impacts on communities of neo-colonial 'development;' of corporate globalization through structural adjustment programs; and in the 2000s, of Empire and (3) resistance: through a fight for fertility.

The study is presented in three parts. Part one examines precursors to the emergence a new Mau Mau from the 1940s to the 1990s. Part two analyses the resurgence of Mau Mau in the period 2000 to

2003. Part three addresses counterinsurgency against the new Mau Mau and concludes with a consideration of feminism in the movement.

## **Part One: Subsistence, enclosure and resistance: the 1940s to the 1990s**

Squatter women in the Rift Valley and small farming women in the reserves extended and defended the subsistence political economy during the 1940s (Brownhill 1994). The British responded with restrictions on the numbers of animals squatters could keep and the number of acres squatters could cultivate on the white settler farms (Throup 1987). In the Central Province reserves, the British demanded that women provide unwaged labour for 'soil conservation' campaigns, which were designed to concentrate African settlement and 'free' land for European appropriation (MacKenzie 1990, 1998).

The British were able to enforce the eviction of over 100,000 squatters from the Rift Valley and impose the privatization of clan land in the reserves during the 1950s. What African resistance had prevented the colonists from doing in the 1940s, they did at the point of a gun during the state of emergency from October 1952 to January 1960. They virtually obliterated women's customary entitlements to land by giving European title deeds to their African male 'loyalist' allies (Tamarkin 1978). The British strengthened capitalist relations in the reserves while creating a largely female landless population that could provide cheap labour on the new African export-oriented farms and on the white settler plantations.

In the 1960s the majority of women were landless because they were married to men who got no land or because they were widows, single mothers, abandoned wives, unmarried or orphans. These women became plantation workers or moved to the forests, crown holdings or cities to squat on public land. Some were able to join together with other women, pool resources and buy ex-white settler land in the Rift Valley. Tens of thousands of families collectively purchased land in the highlands. By the 1970s squatter women, 'coffee wives'<sup>4</sup> and Rift Valley collective land owners channelled much of their time and resources into strengthening the subsis-

tence political economy in ways reminiscent of the 1940s. Coffee wives re-established women's work groups to expand their collective well-being. Some 23,000 women's groups raised money to put tin roofs on houses, bring piped water to villages, build schools and clinics and send children abroad to university. Coffee wives established autonomous trade with urban and Rift Valley women. Squatter women innovated by planting thousands of gardens in urban areas to feed their families, build trade networks and sustain life through marketing their produce and prepared foods.

In the 1980s the World Bank imposed structural adjustment, a new set of enclosures (Palast 2001). KANU politicians grabbed urban public land and women who had squatted on public space found their gardens destroyed. The markets, kiosks and residential sites of the landless were increasingly under attack as corrupt politicians sold off public spaces. In response the landless organized to defend themselves. At the same time, rural coffee wives rejected the failing commodified economy, took back the resources that their husbands sought to direct into coffee and focussed on subsistence production of crops such as bananas, maize and tomatoes (Brownhill, Kaara and Turner 1997).

The World Bank policies of privatization, increased export crop production and 'user fees' were weapons against Africans' subsistence alternatives to low waged labour (Federici 2001). The 1990s featured an intensification of the conflict between privatizers and the landless. In May 1990 Nairobi's Muruoto slum was the site of a pitched battle between landless residents and demolition crews sent to clear the land in preparation for its sale. Old Mau Mau women were crucial to the successful defence. The brutality of the state's armed forces in Muruoto engendered widespread resistance, which erupted on July 7, 1990 in the Saba Saba (Kiswahili = Seven Seven) general strike. Traders, subsistence farmers and transport workers organized the strike by stopping traffic and closing markets throughout the country for three days. They demanded an end to police brutality, evictions and slum demolitions. Structural adjustment policies had created conditions within which the dispossessed joined forces to resist the dictatorship and defend subsistence entitlements. The actions of coffee wives and landless urban slum dwellers threatened debt repayment and the profits of investors in Kenya (Turner, Kaara and Brownhill 1997). Their spokesmen in the Paris Club

of Euro-American governments held up aid to pressure the Moi government to moderate dictatorship by re-introducing multi-party politics in 1991.

In the 1990s state functionaries were increasingly violent in their attempts to enclose public land and to grab private land from rural subsistence producers and opponents of the dictatorship. By this time a low-intensity land war had emerged which directly pitted subsistence women against 'male dealers' in league with government land grabbers. Elderly Mau Mau women were at the forefront of the direct action politics which broke the land grabbers' single party hold on the Kenyan state.

At Freedom Corner in February 1992 a hunger strike by mothers of political prisoners provided a platform for a cross section of Kenyans to speak out against the draconian policies of the Moi regime. Many of the mothers had fought in the Mau Mau war. A brutal police attack on the old women and thousands of supporters in March 1992 set the stage for a much wider, more militant coming together of disparate popular forces. One elderly Mau Mau fighter, Ruth Wangari wa Thungu threw off her clothes (Gikuyu = *kutura nguo*), thereby exercising a customary form of women's power to drive off police who were aiming to shoot at the protestors. In the pitched battle she stripped naked and cursed the police and the head of state by exposing her vagina.<sup>5</sup> The power of women over fertility was recalled in the most remote peasant households as major newspapers gave this deep customary curse frontpage coverage. After the police attack the women occupied a nearby cathedral to carry on their hunger strike and vigil. The protestors remained there for one year and secured the release of 51 men from jail (First Woman 16 July 1994; 24 April 1997).

The actions of the Freedom Corner women crystallized into a new movement for the defence of the commons. Thousands joined Mungiki (Gikuyu = the Multitudes), Muungano wa Wanavijiji (Kiswahili = Organization of Villagers) and other organizations to resist rural and urban land clearances.<sup>6</sup> The rest of the 1990s was characterized by the explosion of popular forces who were increasingly bold in their confrontations with police and armed forces. The KANU regime was on the defensive but it continued massive landgrabbing and violent enclosures which it mislabeled as 'ethnic clashes.' By the end of the 1990s, KANU landgrabs were challenged by militant

resistance from Muungano wa Wanavijiji, Mungiki and a host of autonomous organizations of the dispossessed. Land defences of the 1990s escalated into outright land occupations in 2000.

The new Mau Mau in Kenya has emerged in four organizational stages. The first underground period, 1975 to 1984, was characterized by the coalescence and dispersion of underground political organizing (MwaKenya 1987). This was followed by the democracy struggle of 1985 to 1992. By 1992, Mau Mau women elders and their allies had re-established open politics. This created the preconditions for stage three, 1993 to 1999, in which a proliferation of new organizations arose to both challenge corporate globalization and to institute a subsistence life economy. The land occupation movement of stage four, 2000 to 2003, ousted KANU from power, challenged corporate rule, expanded 'commoning' and integrated Kenyan activists more closely into the global movement against capitalism and imperial war.

## **Part Two: The Mau Mau resurgence, 2000 to 2003**

The land occupation movement reversed enclosures, stopped land grabbing, seized and repossessed land, changed the government, re-instituted free universal primary education and curtailed export production which in effect repudiated the debt. Transnational groups within the movement pursued reparations from the British for three types of alleged criminality: death and injury due to army land mines, soldiers' rapes of pastoralist women in the vicinity of Dol Dol in the 1980s (Walter 2003:23) and atrocities during the 1950s Mau Mau war (McGhie 2003:8).

As the numbers of activist organizations grew, so too did the range of actions they undertook. Organizations began to relate to one another in what became, by 2000, a multi-centred movement. It extended abroad through a network of refugees, exiles and immigrants, such as Njoki Njoroge Njehu who headed the international 50 Years is Enough campaign in Washington D.C. (Osoro 2001). Massive demonstrations against corporate globalization in the Americas, Europe and worldwide signalled to social movements in Kenya that they were not alone in their dispossession or in their resistance (Basse 2002). Kenyans joined demonstrations in Seattle in

1999 against the World Trade Organization, in Genoa in 2001 against the Group of Eight and in South Africa at the United Nations anti-racism and sustainability conferences in 2001 and 2002. 'Land for the landless' was the theme that brought Kenyans together with international activists in these fora.

By 2000 it was apparent that the new Mau Mau was both national and international. This decentralized and global network of organizations pursued a new strategy as of January 2000. It moved from defence to re-appropriation of land. This shift accompanied a sharp increase in hunger and desperation between 2000 and 2003.<sup>7</sup>

Muungano wa Wanavijiji and Mungiki had been important to the shaping of these direct action strategies. In 2000, a diverse array of organizations occupied private land, defended public land from enclosure and re-appropriated enclosed land in rural and urban areas. A few examples follow from the two years up to the December 2002 election (Turner and Brownhill 2001b:1064-1066). The movement began with pastoralists' successful occupation of private ranches in October 1999, when drought threatened their herds. By February 2000, when the Zimbabwe government initiated occupations of white settler farms, the anti-state Kenyan movement had already erupted (Brown 2000). In April 2000 workers and squatters autonomously organized themselves into the Taveta Welfare Society. They occupied a Greek-owned plantation seized from them by force during the colonial era. The Society's chairperson, Ruth Lelewu said land theft was "a matter of life and death. Depriving thousands of people of their birth-right is not something to play with ... The solution to the matter is for the government to buy the land and settle thousands of Taveta squatters. The community will not allow any other individual to buy the land" (Mutonya 8 June 2001). The British high commissioner in Nairobi, Jeffrey James, warned in May 2000 that foreign investors were being scared off by the calls to take over white owned land (*Daily Nation*, hereafter D.N., 17 May 2000).

Tenants of the state-run Mwea irrigated rice settlement scheme asserted control and succeeded in ousting one set of corrupt officials. In May 2000 Marakwet squatters occupied the 14,500-acre Cherangany state agricultural experiment station on learning that it had been grabbed by a senior government official. Ogiek traditional forest dwellers went to court to protect their forest land from en-

closure and destruction. Squatters repeatedly attacked ex-Cabinet Minister Nicholas Biwott's farm and burned his crops after he "hived off" 1,000 acres of clan land from the Kaptagat Forest. In the fourth attack, in June 2003, nine people, including two elderly women, were arrested for pulling down a fence moments after it had been erected around the disputed land (D.N. 21 June 2003).

By the December 2002 general election the organizations involved in these actions had gained enough strength to remove the corrupt KANU government from power. In the new coalition government were champions of the resurgent Mau Mau, including Wangari Maathai as assistant minister for the environment. She had since 1977 been organizing with rural women to assert women's customary claim to land through tree planting. Her participation in the 1992 Freedom Corner hunger strike was a lightning rod for the international media. Kiraitu Murungi was a lawyer for the political prisoners freed by the Freedom Corner Mau Mau women. He became minister of justice. The National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) of a dozen political parties won the 2002 election by promising justice, punishment of corruption and the return of free, universal primary education. Land invasions escalated even more after NARC's leader Mwai Kibaki took office in 2003.

Kibaki's election was a major victory for the many organizations that had for decades challenged KANU and its policies. The landless had high expectations. It was a double victory for women who had fought for the re-institution of free universal primary education. In January 2003, on the first day of the new school year, thousands of mothers and grandmothers accompanied their children to primary schools and demanded that they too be enrolled. Access to schools was won by a gendered class alliance between women, who have demanded education for girls since the 1930s, and those men who worked to achieve this goal. Second, the school fees imposed by the World Bank were the equivalent of the colonial hut and poll taxes. School fees were women's largest cash expense and the major mechanism forcing them into the commodified market. The demand for free education was analogous to an anti-tax struggle. Women's double repudiation of coffee and school fees was a tremendous victory over the World Bank's subversion of subsistence.

The first six months of 2003 were dominated by labour rebellion, land take overs and opposition to

foreign corporate-military intervention. In the mobilization of the multitudes, all exploitations were excoriated. Land take-backs took precedence.

2003 opened with an explicitly feminist uprising against sexual and economic exploitation. On 20 January 10,000 women workers in the Athi River Export Processing Zone destroyed 16 textile factories, raided Kitengela shopping centre, looted shops and battled contingents of anti-riot police. Teargas prevented them from trashing a second shopping centre. The women strikers "broke gates and smashed windows at Alltex EPZ, Nodor and Tri Star EPZ to flush out the workers who had not joined the strike and moved from factory to factory in the expansive garments manufacturing zone to ensure all the [24 factories'] operations were paralysed" (Mulaa and Githaiga 21 January 2003). The strikers demanded an end to sexual exploitation and harassment, a medical scheme, transport at night, compensation for over-work, remittance of their statutory deductions to the National Social Security Fund and the National Hospital Insurance Fund, sick leave and no termination for illness (Mulaa and Githaiga 21 January 2003).

All sectors experienced labour insurgency in the first six weeks of 2003. Trade union bureaucrats had lost control over waged workers and an incipient revolutionary situation was on hand.<sup>8</sup>

On 3 February in the Mungiki stronghold of Thika, 2,000 oil workers staged a sit-in at Bidco, a refinery owned by ex-president Moi and his cabinet minister Nicholas Biwott. The strikers demanded permanent status after working for ten years as casual labourers in the strategic oil industry. They demanded an end to 13 hour shifts at US\$2.60 a day with no overtime pay and no medical coverage (D.N. 4 February 2003).

The land occupation movement of 2003 was different from the pre-election movement in two ways. First, the scale of occupations increased dramatically in 2003. While dozens of cases were recorded in the *Daily Nation* in the two years prior to the December 2002 election, in the post-election period there was a virtual 'jubilation' of land reappropriations. There were vastly more territories, incidents and people involved. Second, the new Mau Mau moved from defence to offense. There was a qualitative shift on the part of the movement to outright occupation of new terrain. This shift had two facets. From 2000 to 2002 some resisted evic-

tion by land grabbers while others converted from export to subsistence crops. After 2003 the landless began a massive move to expand onto new ground. Complimenting this facet was a deeper transformation. The 2000 to 2002 period involved women and their allies defending subsistence social relations in gardening, transport, marketing, collective work and collective savings. The 2003 expansion of the movement impelled the parallel expansion of subsistence relations into larger territories, collectivities and networks.

The quantitative and qualitative expansion of the land occupation movement was made possible by the increased control that workers and traders extended over transport and marketing between 2000 and 2003 (East African Standard 18 November 2001). The capacity to move produce from farm to market called for an increase in land under subsistence production. Urban and regional demand for low-priced, indigenous foods grew stronger as foreign corporate imports monopolized commodified markets which were inaccessible to the half of the population that survived on less than one US dollar a day (Inter-Church Coalition on Africa 2000).

By ousting KANU, militants put the police on hold. They now moved forward in large numbers with great speed to refashion property relations. Some examples follow. On 21 January 2003, demonstrators invaded and repossessed a state-owned Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) farm in Kiambu said to have been grabbed by private developers in 1993, only to be foiled by police. Another KARI farm in Kitale was invaded on 25 January, when 13 houses were burnt and property destroyed on the public land which had been allocated to individuals (D.N. 22, 27 January 2003). On 27 January, 1,700 students from Nakuru's Kenyatta Secondary School destroyed 60 mud-walled rental houses and a church under construction on land belonging to their school (Agutu 28 January 2003). On 7 February 300 squatters invaded 322 acres in Kilifi and sub-divided it amongst themselves. Police drove them away (Oketch 9 February 2003). A month later, 5,000 squatters returned and occupied some 2,700 acres. A spokesperson said the take-over was autonomous, with "no politician behind it." The squatters denied having leaders. They "had a committee since July 2002 to coordinate the land occupation" (Kithi and Mwandoto 18 March 2003).

On 10 February 500 traders stormed the Soko-Huru market in Nyeri and reconstructed their stalls on the spot where two people were shot dead in 2002 during a forced eviction. "The traders sub-divided the plots amongst themselves and prepared to start selling their wares" (Ogutu 11 February 2003). On the same day, the government repossessed the Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC) from KANU and de-privatized the Kenya Cooperative Creameries.

Between 21 January and 2 July 2003, Kenya's *Daily Nation* reported some 30 instances of land occupation and repossession of property from land-grabbers.<sup>9</sup> Occupiers were from many ethnic groups and were concerned with access to many different kinds of land. Seventeen of the 30 cases were organized by school children, parents and teachers, herders, squatters, neighbourhood watch committees, traders, community groups, landless farmers, women and men, young and old. The remaining 13 cases involved the government revoking title deeds to irregularly allocated land, buildings and houses.

The reported cases encompassed more than 50,000 acres of land. In a single action the government reclaimed 300 irregularly allocated plots. The cases have occurred throughout the country, from the coast to the borders with Uganda, Tanzania, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan. By June 2003 the land occupation movement had re-appropriated the following types of property: playgrounds, settlement schemes, forests, stadiums, urban neighbourhood land, a cemetery, public farm research centres, public utility plots, markets, private ranches, game reserves, dump grounds, bus terminals and road reserves. Under re-appropriation were: school grounds, the National Cereals and Produce Board property, hospital compounds, parking areas, fire stations, council clinics, weather stations, loading zones, open air markets, public gardens, social halls, public toilets, housing estates, open spaces, parks, alms houses for the old and the poor, rivers, lakes, the grounds of courthouses and government houses. The scope of the 'liberation' was all-encompassing. The new Mau Mau was taking back the whole of the society, environment and polity.

In March 2003 the lands and settlement minister Amos Kimunya announced that all land owners were to be issued with new title deeds. He was reported to have stated that "second-generation title deeds would be introduced to weed out those which

were issued fraudulently. The move is aimed at undoing the damage of fake title deeds which have been blamed for double registration of land. ... Well-connected people in the former government, assisted by professionals in the ministry, had also used the fake titles to grab public utility land. The current titles in use were misused by the former government to obtain land fraudulently and can no longer be considered sacrosanct" (Muriuki 14 March 2003).

In Kenya, multiple competing land tenure systems are in force (Okoth-Ogendo 1989). The land occupation movement justified take-overs with reference to at least three potentially contradictory and overlapping 'bundles of land entitlements': British legal, customary and moral claims (Turner and Brownhill 2001b; *Africa* 1989). A *Daily Nation* editorialist conceded a 'fact' that landless Kenyans had long asserted: that the British colonial legal system was an inadequate tool for the resolution of conflict over land. "What about the helter-skelter which our land ownership system has become? It is extraordinary that, legally, the colonial land tenure situation is what still obtains. The post-independence governments have merely misused an already unjust law to allocate land to suit their narrowest political interests. *Almost all public land and property have been grabbed* by undeserving individuals. The web is widespread and intricate. With a myriad of social, political, economic, legal and even cultural strands, how can it be undone by an approach as legalistic as the Njonjo team took?" (D.N. 2 July 2003, emphasis added)<sup>10</sup>

In July 2003 after six months in power, the new government made the remarkable revelation that "[a]lmost all public land and property have been grabbed by undeserving individuals." This grabbing of public property was life-threatening to landless women. By 1985, a hundred thousand people constituted an army of urban gardeners in Nairobi. Two thirds of them were women. Almost all occupied public, open spaces of the city (Freeman 1991: xiii, 82). This autonomous 'army' cultivated thousands of gardens which fed families, supplied markets and contributed to Nairobi's reputation as the 'green city in the sun.' When politicians and developers grabbed "almost all public land," they evicted the occupants and destroyed their subsistence livelihoods. The Nairobi pattern prevailed nationwide. This explains much of why women initiated and are the majority in the new Mau Mau.

The activism of a resurgent Mau Mau forced the government to disband corrupt land boards and land tribunals which for over twenty years had been instrumental in the misappropriation of land (Otieno 5 July 2003). Kibaki set up an official land theft inquiry on 30 June 2003 to ascertain "exactly who has what and where, how he/she acquired it, and whether it can be reclaimed justly" (D.N. 2 July 2003). This inquiry cannot possibly resolve millions of individual counter-claims especially because it is limited to the British legal system, the very tool used by thieves to steal the commons. Nor is state ownership a solution. The new Mau Mau land occupiers have claimed state land and sought collective titles. Elderly Mau Mau women in Muungano wa Wanavijiji have long fought for specifically communal title deeds for residential and market sites, with equal access and tenure rights for women and men. In 1998 they asserted that any just resolution of the land crisis must take into account the principle that everyone has a right to land (First Woman 25 July 1998). The Lands Ministry countered the call for collective title deeds with a promise to develop a comprehensive slum land tenure policy (D.N. 14 June 2003). Will the new policy build on Muungano members' initiatives at collectivity or will it entrench individualized private property relations?<sup>11</sup>

## Part Three: Counterinsurgency

Corporate globalizers, the imperial U.S. regime and elements within the Kenyan state responded to the multitudes with counterinsurgency. A good cop bad cop routine was played out in Kenya through the velvet glove of 'poverty alleviation reforms' and the mailed fist of 'anti-terrorist' repression. Factions of the coalition government and civil service in conjunction with corporate rulers scrambled to throw some palliative reforms at the insurgents and to coopt the compliant.<sup>12</sup> In the meantime, they attempted to retool the relations of global commodification.

Forty years of KANU rule had come to an end, but many 'homeguard-loyalists' were still in office. They and their class allies continued to own huge farms, plantations, ranches and city properties. Class factionalism appeared early in the coalition government as male dealers worked to protect their ill-gotten wealth. While some members of parliament

such as Murungi and Maathai sought social and environmental justice, others courted the World Bank and IMF as had KANU. These others introduced counter-insurgent strategies in the arenas of property rights, agricultural production, mining and militarism.

As political space opened elderly Mau Mau veterans called for substantive not symbolic recognition and justice. A faction in the government claimed that the demands of the Mau Mau had been met. Presidential aid Dzoro announced that no land will go to the 1950s freedom fighters (D.N. 26 March 2003). Within three months of taking office members of parliament and police warned the landless to halt invasions and allow the government to repossess public land.

Kibaki reinstated subsidies and price supports for export agriculture. Export crops had been destroyed by most farmers and especially by women. The agriculture ministry's official emphasis on reviving exports was part of a reinstatement of the male deal in agriculture (Ronald 2003). The refusal by coffee wives to grow the crop was met by a new effort to reimpose commodified agricultural relations.

Despite opposition Kibaki approved 'foreign aid,' titanium exploitation and oil exploration (Makokha 2003). On 15 February 2003 Kenyans took part in the 50 million strong global demonstrations against the US war on Iraq (Museka 2003). In mid 2003 the *Daily Nation* reported "rising public protests at what is seen as Washington's bullying tactics against Kenya" (Gatheru 23 June 2003).

On an international level in the 2000 to 2003 period, dominant capital shifted its strategy from corporate globalization to imperialism. US oil and military corporations funded a neo-conservative 'coup' in Washington D.C. and the Bush regime launched a 'world war without end' (White House 2002). Unipolar imperial militarism trumped multipolar corporate globalization. US military interventions are a response to failure and factionalism within the World Trade Organization and to the growing international coordination of popular struggles against corporate rule (Nitzan and Bichler 2003; Laxer 2003; Klein 2003:7).

US capital responded to challenges to its rule in Kenya with policies that reduce the country to the status of a province in the empire. First, a made-in-

the-USA anti-terrorism bill allows United States police full access to information, persons and physical space in Kenya.<sup>13</sup> American agents can enter Kenya and arrest anyone at any time for actions as innocuous as using the internet.<sup>14</sup> The anti-terrorism bill is an attempt to close the openings for direct action and was hotly contested.<sup>15</sup> Second, the US government pressured its Kenyan counterpart to pledge never to seek prosecution of United States military personnel before the International Criminal Court. Third, the United States announced plans to build at least seven military bases in Africa, including a 'forward base' in Kenya.<sup>16</sup> In June 2003 one opponent commented in the *Nation* that "As the official corporate voice, the US government will try to twist our Cabinet's arm by tying the military pressure to "aid" resumption by the IMF and the World Bank" (Ochieng 22 June 2003). US militarization and a version of the US Patriot Act are direct threats to the implementation of collective land entitlements. The objective of imperial repression is to undermine and break up the Kenyan subsistence components of a world move towards commoning.

## **Conclusion: Feminism in the Mau Mau resurgence**

Each of the cycles of struggle in Kenya between 1940 and 2003 contain three approximately decade-long phases: (1) subsistence, (2) enclosure and (3) resistance. The initial cycle examined here extended from the 1940s to the 1960s. First, in the 1940s women elaborated their subsistence activities and relations. Second, when the 1950s Mau Mau war is considered from the point of view of women's land rights, it can be seen as a period of enclosure (Kershaw 1997:335). Third, during the 1960s women began a period of resistance expressed in at least three modes. Landless women squatted all kinds of public land; those landless women who could, joined women's groups or 'buying companies' to purchase farms and finally, coffee wives channelled resources into the community and the domestic economy.

By the 1970s a subsequent cycle of struggle had begun, first with women's elaboration of an integrated subsistence political economy. Markets and transport systems united them and forged a closer union with pastoralists still established on the commons. Second, in the 1980s, with structural adjustment, the landless lost access to public space which

was enclosed by corrupt politicians. Coffee wives found their food crops sacrificed by husbands who wanted to increase cash crop production. Third, in the 1990s landless women's resistance erupted in the Muruoto, Saba Saba and Freedom Corner insurgencies and continued in a multiplying array of community organizations and political associations.

In 2000 the multitudes moved to occupy land and defend public space from land grabbers. This third cycle began with their assertion of subsistence over the death economy of commodification.

In 2003 the Kenyan land occupation movement was nascent, especially compared to, for example, the landless workers' movement in Brazil (Veltmeyer and Petras 2002:86-87). Thousands of organizations involving millions of Kenyans demonstrated their intention to re-establish a producer-controlled life-centred society. They wanted an end to corporate theft of Kenya's fertile farmland. They did not want to be exploited on plantations or in factories. They wanted their own land for their own production. Their direct actions to take land constituted a radical step that went far beyond declarations and demonstrations with demands written on banners. Kenyans voted with their feet in a march back onto the land.

The commodification of Kenya's economy led to impoverishment, starvation and environmental ruin. Millions of Kenyans made it known, through direct action, that their solution was the defence and revitalization of the commons. More commodified production and unfair 'free trade' could not solve the crisis caused by those very capitalist relations. This applied equally to land redistribution. A refurbished private land tenure regime could not resolve the inequities caused by the expansion of the private tenure system imposed by the British. Kenyans were not driven to defying death because their subsistence political economy was incapable of sustaining them. They were defiant because the global corporate regime had for more than a century been parasitic upon the subsistence political economy. Solutions to Kenya's social, economic and environmental crises were prefigured in the direct actions taken by the new, feminist Mau Mau in Nairobi, Dol Dol and Kilifi. There, respectively, the multitudes realised in practice collective title deeds to common land, reparations for rape and autonomous organization of the commons by villagers.

Feminism can be defined as the recognition that women are exploited and the fight against that ex-

ploitation. In this sense, the Mau Mau resurgence is feminist in at least five ways. First, since the 1940s and before, women have fought for control over fertility. The fight for fertility continued in the 2000 to 2003 period in an expanded set of struggles. Women and men in gendered class alliances counterattacked against those who had dispossessed them of almost all means of survival. Women's struggle in the new Mau Mau was a life and death struggle between, on the one hand; starvation, HIV AIDS and illiteracy and on the other hand; good nutrition and health, literacy and community well-being. Second, women never surrendered in the Mau Mau war nor subsequently (Turner and Brownhill 2001a). Their demand for land has not yet been met (Africa Watch 1991; Walsh in Human Rights Watch 2003). They were dispossessed of customary land rights in the 1950s. In the 1980s, their subsistence commoning on family land and in public spaces was curtailed by the new enclosures of structural adjustment. The new Mau Mau has arisen in particular to challenge these second enclosures.

Third, landless women's demands for land for all, education and autonomous trade were taken up by the movement as a whole. The momentum of the land occupation movement has forced a recognition that any land redistribution must go beyond the narrow legalistic framework of British law. A fundamental resolution of the struggle for 'land and freedom' must take into account the moral and customary claims asserted by the subsistence forces within the new Mau Mau. Fourth, the Mau Mau resurgence actively engaged in repossessing 'values' which especially women produce and on which they

depend. These include the common life goods of nature, social services, built space and time itself. Fifth, women resisted rape, beating and genital mutilation not as individuals but in common and in alliance with men. This resistance was inextricable from the struggle for land. Maasai women were able to collectively prosecute rape by British soldiers because their communities were strengthened by the transnational organizing which won them compensation for the devastation caused by land mines. Women textile workers struck and rioted against sexual exploitation. Their capacity to confront their exploiters was enhanced by land occupations which opened alternatives to waged work.

The 'fight for fertility' was earlier defined as a struggle in which women contend with their own menfolk and with foreign and local capital for control over land, labour, knowledge, time and the use of their bodies. In this fight, capitalists make 'male deals' with those men who regulate the exploitation of female labour necessary to realize all other aspects of fertility. The new Mau Mau is feminist in the degree to which these relations of exploitation were negated. Women's strike against cash crop production was the negation most costly to capital and its local allies. This, taken together with the five initiatives listed above, constitutes an immense gain for women in the three-way gendered class struggle to control fertility. The women and men of the Mau Mau resurgence broke male deals. Together in gendered class alliances, they began to re-invent the commons and re-assert their autonomy from capital. This is the feminist content in the resurgence of Mau Mau.

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- Mau kin," 26 March 2003; "Slum dwellers merit titles," 14 June 2003; "Nine seized in row over Biwott farm," 21 June 2003; "Yes, probe land allocations," 2 July 2003; "Anti-Terrorism Bill," Reprinted in full, online in PDF, 3 July 2003, [www.nationaudio.com/News/DailyNation](http://www.nationaudio.com/News/DailyNation).
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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Padmore (1953:254) described the Mau Mau war as "a full-scale military operation - the biggest colonial war in Africa since the Boer war. Over thirty thousand British troops have been assembled to assist the local police force, the Kenya Regiment recruited exclusively from among the European male population, the Kikuyu Home Guards, and the King's African Rifles are in open warfare against what the Africans call the Kenya Land Liberation Army."
- <sup>2</sup>The biblical concept of jubilee contains six elements: "First, jubilee happened every fifty years. Second it restored land to its original owners. Third, it canceled debt. Fourth, it freed slaves and bond servants. Fifth, it was a year of fallow. Sixth, it was a year of no work" (Linebaugh and Redicker 2000:290).
- <sup>3</sup>McMurtry defines civil commons as any social construct which enables universal access of members of a community to a life good (2001). For a critique of globalization from below, see Laxer (2003).
- <sup>4</sup>We use the term 'coffee wives' elsewhere to refer to all export crop producing women.
- <sup>5</sup>Wangari Maathai explained the women's action: "They were showing disgust and contempt for sons who had the nerve to come and beat their own mothers. In Kikuyu tradition, they were cursing the men, saying, 'I have no respect for you. I wish I had never given birth to you'" (Zwartz 23 May 1992). See also Miring'uh (1992). See Turner (1994:140-141) and Turner et al (2001) for analyses of West African women's use of this curse to confer 'social death' on personnel of foreign oil companies.
- <sup>6</sup>For a gendered critique and comparison of Mungiki and Muungano wa Wanavijiji, see Turner and Brownhill 2001. See also CESNUR 2001; Harris 2000; Wamue 2001 and World History Archive 2000.
- <sup>7</sup>The economy was in a slump and the European Union banned agricultural imports from Kenya because they were toxic (Tomlinson 2003; Njeru 2003). Food and cash crop production fell significantly while child labour increased (Kimenyi 2002:11,22). Poor performance in tourism in 2000 worsened after the November 2002 attack on an Israeli hotel in Mombasa. When the new government refused to join the 'coalition of the willing' in its war on Iraq and pursued anti-terrorism with less than the requisite fervour, Britain and the United States announced travel bans in May and June 2003 (Nyagah 2000; Onyango-Obbo 2003).
- <sup>8</sup>One editorialist observed that the economy was "more and more vulnerable to wildcat stoppages and a climate of chaos and uncertainty in the industrial sector. ... In this climate of high expectation, the impoverished classes start demanding radical changes. ... And, sooner or later, the narrow economic grievances by the protesting workers will transform into broad political demands" (Kisero 19 February 2003).
- <sup>9</sup>In the two year period 2000 to 2002, the *Daily Nation* reported some 20 land occupations and defences. We estimated that the *Daily Nation* documented, in the first six months of 2003, only from 1% to 25% of the total number of strikes, uprisings, land defences and invasions. There was a six-fold increase in reported cases from approximately one to six per month.
- <sup>10</sup>The Njonjo Commission on Land Law was set up in November 1999 by the Moi government to address matters related to land: registration, documentation, tenure and legislation. "How," the editorialist asked, "could that inquiry be trusted when it was beholden to a Government which had been the primary cause of the problem, one whose other commissions of inquiry have been but a cynical way of avoiding a solution?" (D.N. 2 July 2003)
- <sup>11</sup>See Table, "Difference between World Bank corporate 'land reform' and popular redistributive land reform" in Turner and Brownhill (2001b:1044). See also Rosset (2001).
- <sup>12</sup>The cooptation of sections of Mungiki began in 2000. Some 'leaders' were reaping private profits from Mungiki's control over *matatu* (minibus) routes. Divisions between 'leaders' and ordinary members signified the move of some men into male deals with local capitalists. The involvement in 2001 of several Mungiki in the killing of rivals on *matatu* routes and in the slum community of Kariobangi caused a further division in the organization. When in 2002 Mungiki founders ran for political office on a KANU ticket, many members decamped. Part of the fall out of the cooptation of sections of Mungiki is the growing strength of other organizations to which people turned as an alternative to the discredited Mungiki.
- <sup>13</sup>The full text of the draft anti-terrorism bill introduced to Kenya's Parliament was reprinted in the *Daily Nation* on 3 July 2003 and is available in the *Nation's* on-line edition.
- <sup>14</sup>The Bill creates a general climate of fear and suspicion in which the State is invested with coercive, intrusive, and intimidating powers. No area of private activity is spared. The Bill makes it criminal, for example, to surf the Internet and collect or transmit by email information that is likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism" (Mutua 2 July 2003).
- <sup>15</sup>In August 1998 there were attacks on the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. In November 2002 there were two further incidents. One commentator opposed US presence in Kenya on the grounds that it attracted terrorists and subjected Kenyans to US pressure to curtail Kenyans' civil liberties and national sovereignty (Mutua 2 July 2003).
- <sup>16</sup>US military bases are planned for Kenya, Mali, Ghana, Senegal, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria (Mugonyi and Kelly 17 June 2003; *The Economist* 22 May 2003).