Making Popular Culture from Above. Leisure in Nairobi 1940-60

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Introduction

Nairobi was planned and built as a commercial and administrative centre for the white population of Kenya. The city was the result of the grandiose railway construction between Mombasa and Uganda in the beginning of this century. Nairobi reluctantly adapted itself to the presence of Asians, railway workers and traders, and even more reluctantly to that of an African population: Returned soldiers from the First World War, traders, domestic servants, and assistants to safaris.

As time passed Africans became of great importance as a labour force, and the colonial view of Africans as temporary inhabitants of the city had to be modified. Africans who worked fitted well into colonial perceptions and planning. But Africans who did not work, who had free time or maybe no regular work at all, were thought of as an anomaly. Children and youth were a problem, as were women not living in a permanent relationship with a man. Unemployed adult men were a tricky group, and men who had regular employment did not work for 24 hours - they had free time in which it was desirable that they be suitably occupied.

The growth in diseases, prostitution and crime was a symptom of the problem, and could not be limited to the areas in which the Africans lived. 1941 saw an outbreak of plague in Nairobi. Something had to be done, and the authorities got down to planning and building during and after the war, at a time when the problems were intensified because of the return of the African soldiers who had to be integrated in society.

The City Council began the construction of family housing instead of cells for single men. The new estates such as Ziwani and Kaloleni were equipped with communal facilities in recognition of the fact that Africans of both sexes and of all ages had become permanent city dwellers.

Until the outbreak of the Second World War the central preoccupation of the colonial administration in Nairobi was control of the African urban population. With the lifting of the economic depression in the late 1930s, and the greater social development interest from the metropolitan colonial administration which resulted in the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940, the balance shifted in favour of 'positive action'. Notions of development, education, and recreation come to play an increasing role in the planning of urban space and urban activities for Africans. This trend lasted until the early 1950s when measures of security and control again became paramount and the city was put under closer administration.

The aim of this article is to illuminate notions of African leisure held by the colonial administration, particularly those sections closely involved with welfare, and describe the activites which officials initiated accordingly to fill out free time in what was seen as an appropriate manner. And in a more scattered way to give glimpses of African reactions to the colonial perceptions of leisure and the proposed activities. I wish to suggest that some of the structures created by the colonial administration were taken over and put to use by the emerging African elite and the nationalist movement.[1]

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Construction of Communities

In the view of the Indian scholar Partha Chatterjee the British colonial authorities did not allow their subjects to be citizens, but were keen to see them as members of communities.[2] In Kenya the creation of communities was linked to a fundamental issue of control: How to group and categorise Africans? This question was particularly acute in those urban areas where people were not housed and had not housed themselves according to ethnic criteria.[3] 'Community' was a central concept and tool for the administration. It had to do with the creation of structures for local government - what was to be the basis of representation? And it had to do with European perceptions of Africans.

It was tempting for the colonial administration to think of communities as being tribally based and use tribe as a category for understanding and planning for Africans. The most thorough experience of Africans by Europeans came from the rural areas. Features of the mode of production, language and material culture of a certain locality lent themselves to a categorization in tribes. And knowledge of local languages and customs was the hallmark of a good District Commisioner.[4]

But cities were a different matter. In his book from 1962, *The New Societies in Tropical Africa*, Guy Hunter characterizes the colonial policy towards the urban problems as 'a continuous minor harrying of the urban African by permits and passes, hygienic regulations, licensing, ineffective measures to control room densities, and, as a concession to positive action, the establishment of 'community centres' for communities which did not exist'.[5]

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[2] In a lecture at a PhD Researcher Course at International Development Studies, Roskilde Univerity Centre, 25 January 1991.

[3] At a meeting in the Secretariat on the issue Francis Khamisi, Assistant Community Development Officer, pointed out that in Nairobi 'territorial and tribal divisions did not coincide'. KNA MAA 7/491, 'Policy, Urban Areas, Nairobi'.

[4] For an admirable analysis of 'The exterior architecture of tribe' see Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: conflict in Kenya and Africa* (London, 1992), 'Nation and Tribe', particularly 330.

[5] Quoted in R. A. Obudho (ed.), *Urbanization and Development Planning in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1981), 197.

An early term in the official discourse to describe Africans in towns was 'detribalised'. It is not difficult to visualise officials shuddering at the thought of Africans outside the control of elders and without the guidance and sanctions of local custom. In Nairobi and Mombasa one attempt to fill the gap was Native Urban Courts, manned by people of various ethnic and religious origins, which were active in codifying rules and behavior, suited to urban life. The courts were self-consciously modern - not rooted in customary law.[6] But control and regulation of conflicts did not create communities.

In the early 1940s questions were asked in the British Parliament about the progress made by the Kenya Government in the area of housing and recreational facilities for the African population of Nairobi. It was recommended that estates built for Africans should contain sports fields, community centres and other communal facilities. When the matter was discussed in Nairobi Municipal Council in 1941 the answer was that Nairobi already had a native stadium and a community hall, Pumwani Memorial Hall, built in 1923.[7] Over the next years, however, external political pressure and internal pressure from the urban social problems, led to a concerted effort being made in the area of housing and recreation facilities for Africans in Nairobi. In the beginning, however, with little participation by Africans.[8]

Kenya was a pioneer in Africa in the area of local government. In the late 1940s the Colonial Office arranged for a study on the political and social background for local government. It was carried out by Mary Parker who was quite clear about the desirable social organisation of urban areas. She wanted to establish that the social life of Nairobi was organised in communities which were definitely inter-ethnic, and ought according to her to be inter-racial as well. Which they were not. A large part of her report was devoted to substantiating her modernizing case at various levels. Most impor-

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6 See Arthur Phillips, *Report on Native Tribunals in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1945), 148-9.

7 'Minutes of Proceedings'. Municipal Council of Nairobi. vol. IX, 1940-41.

8 At a conference on social welfare in November 1941 the Director of Education answers the Chief Secretary's query, why no Africans have been invited to the meeting: 'In the subject under discussion the African is the patient, not the doctor'. KNA MAA, 'African Social Welfare. Nairobi', I, 2 January 1945. For background to the change of colonial welfare policies see Janet Seeley, 'Social Welfare in a Kenyan Town', *African Affairs*, vol. 86 (1987), 544-47.

tantly by documenting existing urban institutions many of which were mixed in terms of religion and ethnicity, and had arisen without the meddling of the authorities. She regretted the fact that important cultural organisations such as football clubs were formed and conducted along ethnic lines.

In her report she made a complete survey of African Associations in Mombasa, listing name, membership figures, aims and bases of organisation. Although many were tribal she found that about half stemmed from different social categories: Race, occupation, place of residence in the city, status, and generation.[9]

Her conclusion was that these modern associations 'in a measure replaced tribal institutions, though I do not deny that tribal allegiance is still strong'. She believed that urban Africans were, as she called it, 'being weaned away' from tribe on a residential, occupational, and nationalistic basis.[10]

T. H. Askwith became Municipal African Affairs Officer in 1945 and set out the problem: 'The choice must be made as to whether the development should be along tribal or non-tribal lines'. He recommends 'the more arduous course of developing a non-tribal organisation' as the basis for local government.[11] He came round to this view only after a discussion of the merits of native tribal associations as forces of social cohesion, in which the voice of KAU, briefly at this time known as Kenya African Study Union, was also heard: Organisation along tribal lines 'is an attempt to create a discontented African population in Nairobi ... (an) application of the divide and rule .... Unity has proved the key to progress'.[12]

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[9] Mombasa seems to have had advantages over Nairobi. According to Thomas Askwith Beer Halls were nicely painted and decorated, whereas those of Nairobi were 'like a morgue'. The Deputy Housing and Social Welfare Officer of the Municipality, Matano Harrison, was an active musician, who 'often played accordion and mandolin and sang. (He) used to entertain at weddings with the legendary Paul Mwachupa'. Interview with his widow, *Daily Nation* 20 May 1992.

[10] Mary Parker, Mary, *Political and Social Aspects of the Development of Municipal Government in Kenya with Special Reference to Nairobi* (Nairobi, 1949), 43.

[11] KNA MAA 7/491, 'Administration Policy: Urban Areas, Nairobi, 1945-47', T.G. Askwith's Memorandum, 14 September 1945.

[12] Ibid. Memorandum from Kenya African Study Union, 10 September 1945.

Askwith like Thomas Colchester before him believed in cohesion whether on the basis of tribe or vocation, and like other modernizers envisaged phases of development, furthered by an active policy by which

> Africans are encouraged to group themselves into associations ... The first is the tribal association which concerns itself with the preservation of the best traditions of the tribe. The second is the commercial guild ... the third is political, giving expression to the aspirations and grievances of the African.[13]

For a period at least tribe was not used as a tool for urban planning and control. What informed town planning policies were the contemporary planning considerations growing out of the garden-city movement in Britain which gave rise to big scale housing programmes there after the war. So whereas in the 1920s advice on municipal planning was solicited from the South Africa, experts on separate development,[14] in the 1940s the experience of building up welfare for the working classes in Britain was judged to be more relevant.[15]

When Starehe was planned Thomas Colchester, Askwith's predecessor, consulted tenants and in preparation of the Kaloleni estate he got together an advisory panel which included a doctor, an architect, and the supervisor of locations. According to Colchester they 'knew all the Gospel, including Ebenezer Howard'.[16] They did not, however, have local knowledge enough to realize that cement

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[13] KNA MAA 7/494, 'Policy, Development of Natives, Social Development, Community Centres'. Memorandum to D.C.s Office, 6 October 1945. My emphasis is different from that of David Throup in his *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau 1945-53* (London and Nairobi, 1987), 175 ff.,which constructs Askwith as a firm believer in tribal control, who was misled by the African elite to think in terms of citizenship. Askwith found a tribe as basis for local government 'tricky', and was pleased with having organised joint Luo-Kikuyu pairs of police to disarm crowds at football matches. Interview 16 May 1991.

[14] The town clerk of Johannesburg chaired the 1927 Feetham Commision which strengthened European control of the Municipal Council. See Kenneth McVicar, *Twilight of an East African Slum: Pumwani and the evolution of African settlement in Nairobi*, PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles 1968, 31.

[15] On a parallel development in Zambia see Terence Lilly: 'A research note on the importation of British town planning in the 1930s. A legacy for modern Zambia', *African Urban Studies*, XII (1982), and for a contrast see Preben Kaarsholm, 'Si Te Pambili - Which Way Forward?': Urban Development, Culture and Politics in Bulawayo from the 1960s to the 1990s', Paper for Conference on 'Symbols of Change', Evangelische Akademie, Berlin, January 1993.

[16] Sir Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928), the founder of the garden-city movement in Britain. The physical lay-out of Kaloleni in concentric circles round a community and shopping centre shows the garden city ideal clearly.

floors were a health hazard compared to traditional absorbent dung floors, or that kitchens should be separated from living quarters, because of 'fear of spells', as Colchester thought now.[17]
In a memorandum from 1945 Thomas Askwith, set out the plans.

> The latest (quarters) are all semi-detached cottages, suitable for family life ... The new housing estates have been planned with the object of forming communities of ca 3000 persons, it having been learned that this is the optimum population for a manageable estate. In each settlement the following amenities are to be provided: Social Hall, public house, child welfare clinic, nursery school, shops ... dairy, sports ground, village centre in the form of a small park .... The whole group of estates is served by a central community centre ..., a market, mission churches, maternity home, sports stadium, V.D. clinic, and a Primary School.[18]

If one disregards the V.D. clinics the plan evokes images of English villages and garden cities. At the same time the setting up of a Native Housing Authority was discussed. A vexed Senior Medical Officer, Dr. Drury, reacted with impatience to the many dicussions on the needs of the African population. 'Many Africans do appreciate good houses and keep them spotless. What does an African want in a house?' Dr. Drury suggests that what Africans want is security and privacy. But what they get are 'pokey replicas of a European house at a cost bearing no relation to the earning power of the African and the wealth of the Colony'.[19]

In spite of research and efforts by individuals associated with welfare it seems fairly clear that the European administration had only vague notions of the needs and desires of the urban Africans, but clear notions of its own needs and ideals. Detailed regulations were set out for government housing built for Africans in the middle of the 1950s: 'The occupier shall plant up with grass and flowers the area ajacent to his house and maintain it in good order'. Furthermore, 'The playing of musical instruments and singing is

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[17] Interview 15 May 1991.

[18] KNA MAA 7/494, 'Natives, Social Development. Community Centres', memorandum to the D.C.'s Office, 6 October 1945.

[19] KNA T. P. DEPT 1/24, 'Housing General', memorandum, Labour Department, 24 November 1947.

strictly prohibited after 10 p. m.'.[20] The City Council suggested the creation of a town band which might play in the locations.

However, the build-up of the Mau Mau movement put an effective brake on non-tribal thinking and planning certainly among the administration, and probably increasingly among the African urban population. With screening and segregation of the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru in Nairobi begun in 1953 and culminating with Operation Anvil in April 1954, the princple of tribal housing was back with a vengeance: Locations were 'enclosed in barbed wire', as the Medical Officer of Health notes with satisfaction in his Annual Report.[21] The change of name from 'location' to 'estate' which occurred in 1955 cannot have made a great deal of difference to those behind the wire.

Work and free time

In response to a suggestion of hiring out radio sets to Africans in Nairobi, the Governor of Kenya is reported to have said, 'it is a fact that the great social need of Africans to-day is entertainment'.[22] The statement may mean that the greatest social need for the *European* population at this time is to have Africans entertained in a satisfactory manner. But no matter how the statement is read it is a reflection of real social problems to do with African 'leisure', and shows the administration's preoccupation with solving them.[23]

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[20] KNA ML 1/124, 'Housing-Furniture'.

[21] KNA JW/6/10: 25, Annual Report, 1954.

[22] KNA KBC/33, 'Information and Propaganda, Wireless Broadcasts Nairobi'. Extract of Minute by H. E. the Governor, 9 October 1946.

[23] Mary Parker quotes the Annual Report of the M.A.A.O, 1941, 'The beneficial occupation of leisure, the provision of an interest in life, ther promotion of a sense of community are major social needs in the town as vital as ther maintenance of law and order and protection of public health' (Parker, 1949, 116). For discussions of leisure in an earlier period in South Africa see Tim Couzens, 'Moralising leisure time: the transatlantic connection and black Johannesburg, 1918-1936', in S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African class formation, culture and consciousness* 1870-1930 (London,1982).

'Leisure' is a colonial or modern invention arising out of the European need to regard Africans as workers. If you do not have work you do not have leisure. Work in the form it was needed by Europeans, wage labour, presupposes a certain way of computing time, of dividing a day in one's own and somebody else's time. And a certain view of space, accepting one place for work, and a different one for reproduction and free time. These views of time and space are different from those pertaining in 'traditional' or subsistence based societies.

Consequently in inventing and organising leisure the colonial administration had to start from scratch, as it were, turning themselves not only into social engineers, constructing community halls and football pitches, but also into pedagogues, devising new forms of social interaction and competition - the rules of the game.

There was a broad agreement among the officials of the government on the importance of filling out leisure in a constructive manner, but not everybody thought that entertainment was the answer. Some officials involved with welfare observed that Africans were very unwilling to waste time - it had to be spent profitably. Workers were interested in joining a football club only if it served to further their career, they would rather join evening classes in English than play draughts. Thomas Askwith thought that the preferred leisure activity was politics - reading newspapers, planning, plotting. While recognizing the need of planning activities for Africans not at work Askwith disagreed with the idea of 'entertainment' as something desirable. He suggested that the use of the existing social halls, Pumwani and Kaloleni, be reorganized in such a way that they were used for entertainment only in the evenings, and for education during the day.[24]

Thomas Askwith believed that Africans ought to spend their free time in improving and educating themselves, and his ideas were influential in forming the curriculum of Jeanes School, taken over by the government from the army after the war to train Africans in government work, primarily within the community development area.[25] Jeanes School, Kenya Centre C., trained 813 ex-soldiers who

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[24] KNA MLG 3/2266, 'Social Centres' Letter to the City Council, 25 June 1946.
[25] For the history of Jeanes schools see Kenneth King, *Pan-Africanism and Education* (Oxford,1971).

were to assist with reabsorption in rural areas between 1946 and 1949.[26] A recognition of the importance of recreation was a central feature of the Jeanes educational ideals, preferably forms of recreation which were rooted in the African tradition. Curriculum in this area should include 'some instruction in language, music, drama, sports and games, and inculcation of some proper pride in traditional forms of expression, and of how to develop them into new idioms'.[27] Sports and games to be used in community centres were taught at Jeanes. Later, when a Colony Arts Officer had been appointed, drama and music became part of the curriculum.

According to Shiroya very few community centres were in fact set up, and they offered 'either irrelevant courses or inadequate services'.[28] But Jeanes School became an important centre for the thinking about and training for African social welfare. In the 1950s the School became a thorn in the eye of parts of the administration who thought that the activities going on were a hidden way of preparing Africans for self government.

Quite appropriately from the control point of view another important source of inspiration for dealing with African leisure was army life. In the army during the Second World War the welfare of large numbers of Africans was the responsibility of the British. African soldiers were present not only during work hours, but for 24 hours every day of the week. How to fill out their leisure in an orderly and profitable manner became the concern of the officers and the African NCOs some of whom were later trained at Jeanes School before being sent out into the rural areas.'[29]

So various leisure activities and institutions were invented and instituted in the army. Not so much, perhaps, from scratch, but rather

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[26] Ole B. Shiroya, *Kenya and World War Two. African soldiers in the European war*, (Nairobi, 1985), 80.
[27] KNA Lab 7/16, 'Youth Organisation'.
[28] Shiroya, *Kenya*, 89.
[29] A. I. Richards, who visited Kenya in 1944 to advise on social welfare, reported on the views of the Head of Jeanes School: 'Major Selwood, in command of the Nairobi Jeanes School training centre, estimates that African army education N.C.O.s have already had much experience in running libraries, information rooms, physical training, games etc, and would not require more than a few months additional training to enable them to start on community centre work'. KNA MAA 7/528 'Report of a visit made by Miss A. I. Richards' for the Colonial Social Welfare Advisory Committee.

from experience of the needs and preferences of British soldiers.[30] Indoor activities - film shows, games, talks, radios - were organised around so-called Information Rooms, and that kind of space, devoted to leisure and self-improvement, became a central feature in the community facilities for Africans after the war.

It is difficult to know the reactions of the African soldiers to the benevolent facilities provided by the army. And much easier to get access to European discourse interpreting their reactions. An army chaplain enthuses over the opportunities for the African soldiers.

> None of us who took part in the development of information and recreation rooms in the army will forget the *askaris'* growing enthusiasm for them, the happy centre of life they came to be ... Here is an invaluable instrument that could easily be organised at strategic centres throughout the territory.[31]

What is known from the political history of Kenya is that the government expected the returning African soldiers to present the administration with a social problem of unprecedented dimensions, and that this expectation contributed to a drastic increase in the interest in African welfare, often in the form of planning for community development. In the vocabulary of the administrsation the problem was to *reabsorb* the soldiers, whose social and political expectations had risen because of their exposure to an international milieu, including colonies on the verge of independence. If the army was the *ersatz* family of the African soldiers, they were expected to have become precocious and unruly by the time they left it.

From the point of view of the administration reabsorption meant preferably sending the Africans back to the reserves where, however, they were expected to subsist rather than make progress. It meant the active suppression of attempts to organise the ex-soldiers at a national level. It meant upgrading the communities in which the soldiers were meant to integrate themselves, not in terms of input of capital, new technologies and training, but rather through the

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[30] Graham Hyslop, who became Arts Officer, based at Jeanes, was in charge of entertainment in the Army during the war, and was recruited by Charles Richards of the Church Mission Society. Personal communication from Charles Richard.

[31] Andrew B. Doig, 'The Christian church and demobilisation in Africa', in *The International Review of Missions* XXV, 90, (1946); quoted in Shiroya, *Kenya* 1985, 87.

provision of community facilities along the lines which appeared to have been efficient in army life.

The community centres were deployed strategically, as the army chaplain had suggested. A model was the one built in Pumwani, a mixed location in which Africans were allowed to own land and build their houses. The area was unruly. The 'low standard of public sense amonst the inhabitants of Pumwani' was notorious, and community development personnel had to double their efforts in order to instill their notions of health into 'the backward tribes which are handled. The more so since the women are mentally much more retarded than the men'.[32] Nevertheless, when the V.D. clinic was moved during the Emergency for security reasons, the African Affairs Department took over the premises for spinning and weaving. At the same time the Memorial Hall was temporarily taken over by the District Commissioner and the Police, but in 1956 the hall was again the venue for meetings and dances, shows and amateur talent contests, and Pumwani Memorial Hall had Kenya's first jukebox installed in 1958.[33]
A reading room was part of the facilities, but the books were out of date and never used. It was closed in 1952 and the books were transferred to Kaloleni Social Hall.[34]

Kaloleni was the biggest and most ambitious of all the social halls in Nairobi. It was meant to be the centre for the Kaloleni Estate, built by the Municipal Council in the mid-forties to house African railway workers. In the long run the authorities had difficulties in controlling activities here as elsewhere. Kaloleni became one of the most favoured meeting places of the nationalist resistance in the 1950s. The leading political organisation KAU held meetings here which attracted up to 60.000 participants.[35] To Thomas Askwith

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32 KNA BY/9/97, 'Medical Officer of Health. Monthly Reports 1951-2', and BY/9/98, 'Memorandum to The Royal Commission on East Africa on the Administration of Public Health', Dep. of Health, The City Council, March? 1953.

33 Thomas Askwith thought that the meetings had 'no social value', and the dances usually developed into 'drunken orgies', KNA MLG 3/2266, 'Social Centres'. For more information on the jukebox and talent contest see F. Harrev 'Jambo Records and the production of popular music in East Africa. The story of Otto Larsen and East African Records Ltd. 1952-1963'. *Bayreuth African Studies Series*, (1989) 110-12.

34 KNA MLG 3/2266, 'Social Centres'.

35 Sorobea N. Bogonko, 1980. *Kenya 1945-1963. A study in African national movements* (Nairobi, 1980), 41.

looking back, the community halls with their indoor facilities were a glaring example of British unimaginativeness when it came to devise institutions and space for a different social setting, but they 'became useful for political meetings'.[36]

Neither the military nor the welfare way of thinking sufficed to control and 'develop' Africans in Nairobi. Quite other forces and social energies were instrumental in forming leisure activities, and these forces could not be contained in the evening classes and information rooms of the ideal, European devised 'community'.

Making and breaking popular culture

In his Annual Report from 1957, the Colony Music and Drama Officer, Graham Hyslop, spelled out the Jeanes school way of thinking on cultural transformation: 'It has long been recognized that a constructive and imaginative use of leisure can do much to fill the vacuum left by the abandonment of many traditional forms of entertainment'. Hyslop's emphasis was on 'cultural' initiatives in the modern sense of culture, including, 'seeking to establish a dramatic tradition in this country', reflecting 'the full blooded life of the community'. Hyslop himself like the Director of Information, J.H. Reiss, wrote plays in Swahili one of which was performed at the African Christmas Entertainment at the National Theatre with some Choral singing and 'a little conjuring'.[37]

The European thought up leisure-culture did not become 'full-blooded'. Neither the ceremony of lighting the Mayor's Christmas Tree, nor the bus excursion for Africans who presumably had nothing to do on a Sunday to the newly opened Narrobi Safari Park was popular.

In the mid-1950s, an African member of staff at Jeanes School tried to explain why this was so in a lecture on African Social Welfare. The 50s was a period of great social tension due to the military and political suppression of the Mau Mau movement. Among non-sett-

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[36] Interview 16 May 1991.

[37] KNA Lab 1/736, 'Colony Music and Drama Officer, Annual Report, 1957'.

ler Europeans there was an atmosphere of moral panic, similar to the one just after the war. All efforts towards the improvement and pacification of Africans were welcome, including some political representation, but short of granting land and independence, and spending too much money.

The speaker Mr Dedan Githegi, Assistant African Affairs Officer and advisor to Thomas Askwith, discussed why Africans did not enthusiastically throw themselves into the colonially devised welfare and recreation activities. And he wanted to explain why the proposed activities got a much less enthusiastic response from Africans in the urban areas, particularly in Nairobi, than from those living in the rural areas.

He pointed out that

> many of the welfare activities are new to Africans. In the old days Africans used to spend their leisure time in Dances which include: a) Ability to show skill in the way they danced. b) Ability to decorate oneself, which is an inherited instinct. c) Attraction of young girls. All these combination produced an incentive which is hard to resist. In some tribes Africans spend their time in competitive games which were judged by individual ability. There is a complete change over from African dances and games to Europeans. The change is not bad but when it takes place suddenly, it is very difficult for the new recipient to adjust oneself to the new change, more especially where the Western way of life has not been passed to the African by actual racial contact .... Europeans ought to know for themselves the reactions of Welfare they give to Africans so that necessary changes can be made before big schemes are embarked upon.

Dedan Githegi went on to explain that in the rural areas Africans regarded themselves as owners of property and were happy to spend time and money in establishing schools and community halls. Not so in the cities. 'In Nairobi however, things are different, people feel that they are not in their homes and many of them have not as yet realised that they will live or have lived in Nairobi for many years so as to regard it as their own homes'.[38]

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38 KNA Lab 1/838, 'Community Development' 'Talk to Community at Jeanes School Kabete'. 1956?

The creation of a public

The Second World War and the growing nationalist movement meant that the relative isolation which had been characteristic of both settlers and the African population in Kenya was broken. Interest in international and national politics was higher than ever before. Africans moved away from cultural communities and pushed for citizenry. The war effort needed allegiance from the African population, and the administration had to think of effective ways of disseminating information and propaganda. This implied the use of modern techniques of information, and the constitution of the African population as a public. The basis of the new ability of the urban Africans to become a public was a different experience of time, divided between work and leisure, and of space, divided between work place and living quarters.

In Kenya as elsewhere the social preconditions for the emergence of a public were present in towns to a higher extent than in rural areas. Wage labour and the concomitant division of time and space was present in rural areas also, as were educational opportunities, established by the missions and by the independent school movements. But townspeople were more deeply marked by the modern conditions. The were partly cut off from their home area and were open to new forms of social organisation and cultural practices present in the cities.

As can be seen from the attendance at political meetings Africans were moving away from parochial communities and on the way to becoming a 'mass'. A precondition for the formation of a mass public is size. At the census in 1948 the number of Africans in Nairobi was 65.000, in 1960 almost 160.000.[39] The administration still favoured a view of Africans in cities as belonging to communities, but in fact contributed to forming urban Africans into a public by its welfare, educational and information policies.

Only when a group of people is able and motivated to receive cultural production as communication, does it become a public. Common features which are central for the ability of a modern public to re-

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[39] Finn Barnow et al., *Urban development in Kenya. The growth of Nairobi 1900-1970* (Copenhagen, 1983), 47, 57.

ceive communication are free time, mobility, literacy and money[40]. And features which are needed to create the motivation of a public to receive communication are comparable experience, needs and aspirations. These features were present to an increasing extent with the African population in post-war Nairobi.

So were the preconditions for the production of mass culture. A suitable and attractive supply and means of transmission of cultural products in a particular form was needed. Practices of art and culture in the city were breaking away from the socializing and ritual functions which they had in rural communities. In urban areas mass cultural products were available in the market in the same way as other commodities. Similarly information and propaganda were mass produced and transmitted by the authorities via the new media, newspapers, books, pamphlets, radio, and film.

The outcome was that during and after the war Africans in Nairobi constituted themselves as an audience for cultural products, produced and transmitted in other ways than from mouth to mouth, and under different social conditions.

In spite of their responsibility for this social transformation the colonial administration did not feel comfortable in giving up the idea of grouping Africans in small controllable units.They were reluctant to hand over initiative in the areas of culture and information to Africans and the impersonal market forces. The officials were not sure that it was advisable to encourage Africans to enjoy mass entertainment and information rather than take part in firmly monitored welfare activities. The ambience was one of political oppression, of pass laws, curfews and locations behind barbed wire, especially during the Emergency years.

In the long run, however, it did not matter whether the authorities wished for an African mass public or not. The process was irreversible because control cannot be all encompassing, because the sub-

[40] In the context of her discussion of the wish of Africans to be elected rather than apponted to local government Mary Parker noted that in the 1940s 'there is, in fact, a substantial degree of literacy among Africans. Even in 1942 a surprising number of labourers contrived to 'acquire literacy and a fair knowledge of English at night schools public and private" (Ann. Rep. M.A.A.O. 1942, p. 8). She quotes a 1943 survey of 100 households in Shauri Moyo - 'one of the less attractive locations' - in which 79 % of men stated that they could read and write their own language, 25 % were competent in Swahili, and 12 % in English. Parker, 1949, 195.

jective and the social preconditions were there, and because mass culture was being offered in the city and was regarded as attractive by Africans.

In what follows I shall briefly describe discussions and initiatives in three areas which from the mid-40s made inroads into African leisure: Newspapers and books, radio, and film.

The written media

In his Annual Report from 1945 the M.A.A.O., Thomas Askwith, observed that the 'most popular and almost only form of literature among Africans is the newspapers and these are almost entirely full of politics'. [41] Newspapers, magazines and pamphlets written for Africans were available in Kenya as early as the 1920s. Between forty and fifty newspapers for an African audience came out intermittently in the period up to 1952.[42]

Jomo Kenyatta's monthly newspaper *Mwigwithania*, written in Kikuyu and started in 1928, is the most well known of all African publications. But other nationalist politicians used newspapers in the various Kenyan languages for political propaganda and debate. Achieng' Oneko was involved in *Nyanza Times*, W.W.W Awori ran *Habari za Dunia*, which bacame a platform for Tom Mboya, and Paul Ngei had his own newspaper also in Swahili.[43] The newspapers were seen by the authorities as being one-man platforms, but that did not make them less dangerous: 'In the world of the African Press the Editor *is* the newspaper ... The Editor, who generally possesses low standard of education, publishes what he feels, mixing news with Editorial Matters'.[44]

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[41] In ibid, 124.
[42] Rosalynde Ainslie, *The Press in Africa. Communications past and present* (London, 1966), 109.
[43] On *Habari za Dunia* see David Goldsworthy, *Tom Mboya: The man Kenya wanted to forget* (Nairobi and London, 1982), 20, 40.
[44] KNA A.G. 5/2811, 'A Scheme to improve the African Press of Kenya', 30 January 1951, the Secretariat.

In the early 1950s there was an attempt by the Government to co-opt the African Press by means of the carrot and stick strategy. Editors were alternately offered money and assistance, and prosecuted and threatened with having their printing presses seized. They were generally very sceptical of the Government's motives, but had few options. Victor Wokabi, editor of *Muthamaki*, was brought to court in 1951 for sedition on the basis of passsages like 'In a murder case, if there is insufficient evidence, a man is acquitted, but there is no judge nor lawyer in Mau Mau cases' (*Muthamaki* 21 September 1950). The Press Liason Officer wrote to the Attorney General and told of the new government policy to 'get the African Press more under control by providing them from government funds with a reasonable printing press'.[45] Mokabi and his printer were acquitted after having apologized in Court. On the 12 February 1951 an anti-Mau Mau article apperared in *Muthamaki.*

In 1950 the Kikuyu newspaper *Mumenyereria* debated the harassment of the African press, following a letter to the paper which warned against believing in what was printed in free newspapers, handed out by the govenrment: ' ... whenever you see a European give you anything free, remember that there is something he is trying to get out of you'.

> The fact of the matter is when the African publishes a fact in their Press, the European are never happy about it, therefore they begin speaking evil about it by saying that such a newspaper is not good and that it should be banned. But there is no reason why the African Press should publish articles just to suit Europeans while the Europeans do not publish their's to suit the Africans, simply because our needs are different to their's.

Mumenyereri ended the article by quoting a Kikuyu proverb, 'Chase a man with truth and he will go away for good. But if you chase a man with a stick, he will turn back to you with a stick'.[46]
With the Emergency most African run papers were closed. *Habari za Dunia*, however, came out until 1954, and *Ramogi*, which was based in the Nairobi estate Kaloleni and written in Luo also continued into

[45] KNA A.G. 5/2811, 'Seditious Publications: *Muthamaki*'.

[46] KNA AG 5/2810, 'Seditious Publications: *Mumenyereri*'. Translation by the Office of the Director of Intelligence and Security.

the Emergency.[47] It lived up to the wishes of the administration in concerning itself only with local matters.

The government's information and propaganda activities intensified in the period up to and during the war. It was important to recruit soldiers to the army, and to persuade the remaining African population to work harder both in subsistence production and wage labour in the rural areas and in towns.

In the late 1930s the government decided to support the publication of *Baraza*, a weekly supplement in Swahili for Africans to *East African Standard*, the leading European newspaper in Kenya. The first issue was out on the 16th of September 1939 in 17.000 copies, and was an immediate succes. *Baraza* received more than a hundred Letters to the Editor every week and became an important forum for the exchange of cultural and political information between Africans and the government.

Right from the start, however, the authorities attempted to censor the paper when it brought reports from African political meetings or complaints on the running of local affairs. The Managing Director of *East African Standard* protested in a letter to the Secretariat: '*Baraza*'s success will depend upon the confidence it receives as a medium of expression of the aspirations and grievances of the African'.[48] In 1942 *Baraza* was cut down by half, from eight to four pages, the reason given being lack of paper, and in 1945 the government withdrew its economic support.

East African Literature Bureau was established in 1948 on the basis of recommendations by Elspeth Huxley, to provide reading material for Africans in English, Swahili and indigenous langauges. It was funded by the Colonial Development and Welfare Scheme, and was meant to work for the production as well as distribution of written material in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. It used the sale channels which had already been established by Charles Richards of the Church Mission Society, who became the Director of the Bureau.

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[47] Magaga Alot, *People and Communication in Kenya*, (Nairobi, 1982), 54.

[48] KNA MAA 2/5/4 - II, 'Administration, Propaganda. Native Newspapers'. 21 December 1939.

EALB was put in charge of starting a library service for East Africa - by 1957 it had established 200 Book Box Libraries in East Africa, and a postal library service which had 5000 members.[49] It produced material for literacy campaigns, by 1953 primers in five East African languages were available, and from 1952 it published a popular magazine in Swahili, *Tazama*, which reached a circulation of 23.000. Its aim was to address 'its readers as people, with ordinary interests and problems'. [50] Charles Richards was particularly interested in furthering African writing, and EALB initiated literary competitions, published Swahili Plays written by the Department of Community Development, and published pamphlets for prospective African writers. The Eagle Fiction Library was to help promote an 'indigenous school of literature', and paved the way for future writers, including Ngugi wa Thiong'o.[51]

Distribution rather than production was the problem, although at this point in time it is difficult to assess the real potential for furthering interst in literature on the basis of offerings like for instance a publication on mothercraft, the life of soldiers in Kamba, a series of books on early travellers in English and a collection of poetry in Swahili. Some publications from EALBs list in the 1950's seem to be far removed from the concerns of Africans in that turbulent period, whereas others certainly met a need.

A proposal for an idyllic tale of Kikuyu villages in 1955 was turned down by the Bureau on the recommendation of Askwith, now Commisioner of Community Development, and in charge of Mau Mau rehabilitation camps, who pointed out that 'at the moment the vast majority of the Kikuyu population live in villages for strategic rather than economic and social reasons' - the notorious fortified villages of the Mau Mau period.[52] The Bureau also considered but rejected a manuscript by Henry Kuria, who had written Kikuyu plays for use in the Rehabilitation Centres, on 'Organisation of Recreational Activities in Kikuyu'. The problem was that Kuria's

[49] KNA Lab 1/841, 'Literacy, Libraries, and Book Selling. 'Account of Problems in Distribution of Literature for New Literates', 9 May 1957.
[50] Comments by Charles Richards, 1993, on information by Henry Chakava in Philip Altbach, *Publishing and Development in the Third World*, (Hans Zell, 1992) Chapter 8. Kindly made available to me by Charles Richards.
[51] KNA MCD 5/196 'East Africa Literature Bureau. Publications', and Richards, Comments, 1993.
[52] Ibid., Letter, 11 August 1955.

ideas on recreation were too colonial and not enough rooted in the indigenous activities of the Kikuyu.[53]

In general dissemination of written literature in book form was a problem. The government did not have a clear language policy at the time, and apparently English language material was in greater demand than that in Swahili or other African languages, but the books available were not seen as relevant enough to overcome the problem of cost or availability in the small and scattered shops and libraries. Thomas Askwith like Charles Richards thought that Africans were interested in writing, whereas the emphasis of the colonial government was on reading.[54]

Film

In the late 1920s the administration began to be concerned with Africans as a potential audience for films. Not surprisingly the central issue was supervision and control. The problem was how to make censorship regulations directed only at the African population of the Colony. A 'Committee on Censorship' was set up. Africans were seen as being incapable of understanding finer shades of meaning in European and American films, and might even misconstrue love scenes which to the European eye were innocent, in such a way as to cast a slur on the morals of white people. Africans were nor even as advanced as European children when it came to decoding films, according to the views of the Committee.[55]
The result of the deliberations of the Committee was that film shows for Africans must take place in segregated localities. Pumwami Memorial Hall was the earliest venue for public film shows for Africans. In 1956 258 films were shown in the Hall.[56]

Ernest Vasey, who later became Mayor of Nairobi and Finance Minister, was brought out to look after the cinemas in Nairobi,

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53 Ibid.
54 Interview, 16 May 1991.
55 KNA AG 4/12/6, 'Report of Select Committee on Film Censorship', 29 July 1927.
56 KNA JW/6/11, City Council of Nairobi. 'Annual Report of the African Affairs Department'.

among them Empire Cimema which could house eight hundred persons. Vasey instituted shows for Africans once a week, especially of comic films.[57] In the early 1950s the Director of the African Information Services, J. H. Reiss, grumbled about the taste of urban Africans when it came to films. Africans in the rural areas were happy to watch educational films. 'Who pays for your Education' was reported to be very popular there in spite of its not very promising title.[58] In the towns where 'there are commercial and substandard film shows for Africans it is extremely difficult to get a showing of our educational films as the audiences demand cowboys and more cowboys'.[59]

In the period after 1950 the use of the film medium in propaganda was intensified. Tours of the rural areas were frequent, particularly of Kikuyu country. The film shows were given from a mobile 'cinema unit' and big audiences were reported. numbering between 500 and 3000 people.

Prior to the shows grammophone music was played - 'the Kikuyus seem to prefer rhumba' - attracting the audience to the display of books from the East African Literature Bureau. Then radio programmes from the African Services were listened to, and finally came the showing of for instance 'Who Pays for your Education?', 'Cleanliness Brings Health', which was received with enthusiasm, or 'March to Victory' which was not so popular.[60]
The behavior of the audience was observed and generally given good marks. Askwith thought, however, that people in the rural areas ought to show more respect and take off their hats when 'God Save the Queen' was played.[61]

A multi-racial benevolent organisation, 'Committee on African Advance' in 1953 suggested open air film shows for Africans in the

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57 Interview with Thomas Colchester 15 May 1992. I have not found confirmation of this in Vasey's file in KNA.
58 KNA CD 5/204, DC´s Office, Kiambu. 'Report on Propaganda Tour of the District', 16 August 1951.
59 KNA KBC/33, 'Information and Propaganda. Wireless Broadcasts, Nairobi'. Memorandum by J. H. Reiss, 27 April 1951.

60 KNA CD 5/204, DC´s Office, Kiambu, 'Report on Propaganda Tour of the District', 16 August 1951.
61 KNA CD 5/204, Letter to ? Wilson, Mobile Film Unit, 6 December 1951.

Sports Stadium in Mombasa. The Mombasa African Affairs Officer was piqued.

> Mombasa Africans do not need entertaining *en masse* after dark. Most of them like to be at home by then. Should they be encouraged to go out? Once out, will they not want to 'go on' somewhere after the show? Where will they go if not to bars? ... The films which are likely to have the greatest success are these about the 'Wild West' or 'Cops and Robbers'. Should these films be thrust at the masses?[62]

In line with Thomas Askwith and the general philosophy of improvement he makes it clear that 'playing fields' and 'village halls' have a much higher priority for the municipal authorities in Mombasa.[63] In Nairobi, however, the City Council after some discussion organised open air film shows in the African Stadium from 1955.

Radio

World War II accelerated the establishment of radio programmes and radio reception for Africans. Radio as a medium was well suited to spread propaganda and local news in various languages. Radio sets and studios were put up decentrally, and provincial information officers were given the task of collecting and transmitting local news and cultural items. African broadcasters were employed and were able to find material of great interest to African listeners. The whole operation was run via the Provinces and Districts, and tightly controlled. It was a two way affair, and both ends of the communication process were relevant to intelligence and propaganda.[64]

The participatory approach was characteristic also of some of the European personnel. In a report from one, W. A. Richardson, one can read about a local radio programme 'Happy Hour' sent once a

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62 KNA MAA 7/800, 'Open Air Cinema in Mombasa'. Letter to the Provincial Commisioner, Coast Province, 26 October 1953,

63 Ibid.

64 Interview with J. H. Reiss, 29 February 1993.

week from Muthurwa, an estate built for Africans employed by the railways. Richardson was satisfied:

> 'About twenty of the educated Africans have managed to purchase their own mandolines, violins, banjos, and guitars, assisted by the payments they receive for broadcasting and they have formed an excellent orchestra'.[65]

For the recording sessions around 500 local people would gather to hear the programme. Initially only men would come along, but gradually children and then women would join.

Richardson continues his description of what sounds as an occasion of a happy mingling of vital and sophisticated African music, and an alert effort from the authorities to encourage the dynamism of African culture, and not only its preservation.

> The most appreciated items are undoubtedly the songs of the strolling minstrels we occasionally manage to attract. These men never work and never know where their next meal will come from. They travel all over the country and are artists in the best sense of the word. Their queer home made instruments are museum pieces, and their tales of mighty deeds, and songs of the joys and sorrows of the ancient days are listened to in breathless delight, and a deep sigh at the close of the item denotes the appreciation of the listeners'.[66]

Music choice was an area which was much debated, both internally among programme officers and by listeners who sent in complaints and suggestions. Hymns praising God 'in different languages' were requested, as were records with Paul Robeson. A listener asked for more accordian music instead of the native harp records which are 'allright but they are not for amusement'. From the District Office, Fort Hall, came a complaint.

> I have been asked by a local committee to protest against the type of music used between items in the Kikuyu Broadcasts, it is, they say, of a type which is enjoyed by the "Nairobi-ised" Spiv. I agree. Last Friday's 30 minute programme contained 7 minutes devoted to 'music'. Three of them to South American Samba, with vocal chorus referring to kisses and love making, the rest to an American number

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[65] KNA MAA 10/120, 'Annual Report of the 'Happy Hour' Broadcast in the Railway African Landies', 4 February 1942.

[66] Ibid.

> of an extremely odious nature. The Kikuyu of this reserve does not appreciate such horrific noises.[67]

More Kikuyu music was requested as an alternative.

The discussion reflects the existing tension between seeing Africans as communities, gathering around their own localised culture, or as a public, already made receptive to an international popular mass culture. And it carries overtones of approval of 'separate developmet', a development ideal which was present in the colonial history of Kenya, especially within the area of town planning and educational and cultural policies, without ever becoming programmatic 'apartheid' as in South Africa.

The ideological war which was conducted in Kenya in the 1950s, and thus the importance of effective communication, led to experiments with both form and contents in radio programmes. Dialogic forms like interviews and discussions were seen to be particularly liked by listeners, and quizzes, 'mock parliament', childrens' programmes and radio plays were regular features.

Some plays were Swahili versions of popular foreign narratives, for instance Rip van Winkle. Others were written by officials such as J. H. Reiss. One dealt with a comic misunderstanding between a white Madam and her African house-boy, due to her very rudimentary Swahili - 'Ki-settler'. Another *Anti-Mau Mau*, written by an African broadcaster, John Gitonga, was fairly straight Government propaganda: 'Government forces are there to help you, you have heard that Mau Mau has stopped many development schemes, if there was no Mau Mau in a few years Kikuyu country could have looked like paradise; because God had proposed to do very many things in your country'.[68]

The development of the radio medium was supported from London. BBC sent advisers, and the Colonial Welfare and Development Fund gave much needed financial assistance as the city council 'dragged their feet'. In 1951 £27.000 was granted for

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[67] KNA KBC/53, 'Broadcasting: Listeners' Complaints and Compliments. Letters', 25 September 1941, 22 December 1949, and undated.
[68] KNA KBC/74, 'Broadcast Plays, 'Scripts''.

buying radio sets for community centres, cafés and bars, frequented by Africans in Nairobi.[69] Radio sets were given free of charge to individual Africans thought to be influential, or might be hired at a reasonable price.

Radio reached only a few people, but listeners were key groups within the educated African population. Letters from listeners to Kenya Broadcasting Corporation and in *Habari za Radio*, a Swahili publication sent out regularly by the African Broadcasting Services, show a lively interest in the new medium. Music and langauge choice were the most pressing issues. In the 1950s an African Listener's club was established. It received 4000 applications for membership in 1957, and according to its own estimate between 3000 and 4000 letters a month.[70]

Conclusion

The precondition for the expansion of the new media was that a certain number of people were keen to read, watch and listen. Form and contents must correspond to the needs of the urban population. At the same time the media expansion depended on money which particularly the Government of Kenya but also the City Council in Nairobi was less willing to provide than the Colonial Office in London.

Words were the favoured currency in Nairobi, when it came to answering the needs of the African urban population. Both the elementary needs and those growing out of the education and modernisation processes, greatly influenced by the colonial presence. The discussions of the development of the African population and the fulfilment of their needs occurred within the the framework set by colonial supremacy and suppression of African initiatives, although liberal and progressive voices were heard and initiatives taken acordingly. The leisure activities were first and foremost attempts to divert the political and cultural energies of the African population away from their endeavours to seize the economic, political and

[69] KNA KBC/83, 'Information and Broadcasting'.
[70] Ibid.

cultural power in their own country. It seems fitting that Thomas Askwith, one of the more forward looking of the colonial officials, gets the last word: 'Recreation in the normal sense would be a mere palliative. I don't believe in social policies as a solution to economic problems. The only solution was land'.[71] In the 1950s the real struggle in Kenya moved beyond words, and the voices heard in this article were drowned by the noise of external and internal violence.

[71] Interview, 16 May 1991.