Defeating Mau Mau – Some observations on 'Counter Insurgency Research' in Kenya during the Emergency

by R. Buijtenhuijs

When anthropologists and social scientists discuss counter-insurgency projects, they refer mostly to research done by U.S. scholars. Two examples of American counter-insurgency research are often specially quoted: project Camelot for Latin America and anthropological research in Thailand for Asia. The aim of this paper is to try to enlarge this rather limited approach to the problem, and to determine whether other Western countries have done counter-insurgency research in the non-Western world and if so, in what ways. Several cases could be of interest here. The first one that comes to mind is France. Having fought several colonial wars and even a post-colonial one (Viet-Nam, Madagascar, Cameroon, Algeria and now Chad) French colonial administrators and soldiers presumably have made extensive use of existing anthropological knowledge. It is also quite possible that in some cases new research was done for the sake of colonial warfare.

South Africa might provide another case. The situation of latent war between White and Black in this territory might very well have led to counter-insurgency research on a large scale.

The same, of course, is true for Portugal in its last-ditch stand against African nationalism in Angola, Guiné and Mozambique. However, the present writer is not at all familiar with South African or Portugese social research, and a brief incursion into French anthropology indicated clearly that French social scientists are not yet really aware of all the problems which are involved.[1]

A detailed study of counter-insurgency research in France could be very revealing, but in the absence of any preliminary studies in this field, it would be a time-consuming task which cannot be undertaken at present. Therefore it was decided to limit this article to a case-study of counter-insurgency research by British scholars in Kenya during the Mau Mau revolt and its aftermath (1952—1961). As the author was already familiar with the rather extensive literature on Mau Mau, this seemed the easiest and the most practical way of approaching the problem of counter-insurgency studies from a new viewpoint.

The first period (1952-1954)

Counter-insurgency research in Kenya during the Emergency can be divided into two phases. During the first period (1952 till about 1954) no new research was done that could be classified as counter-insurgency research. What hap-

[1] A shortened version of the *Current Anthropology* debates on Anthropology and Imperialism was published in 'Les Temps Modernes', no. 293-294, décembre-janvier 1970—1971, with the deliberate intention to provoke reactions from French scholars. However, most of the reactions published in a later issue of 'Les Temps Modernes' (no. 299-300 juin-juillet 1971) came from foreigners.

pened, however, was that some scientific studies already done before by social scientists were now adapted and 'rewritten' by their authors in order to be used in the battle against Mau Mau. In at least one case this adaptation of previous research was done at the request of the Kenya Government; in other cases, well-known social scientists volunteered without waiting to be asked.

An example of the first situation is Dr. J. C. Carothers. Dr. Carothers was a Medical Officer in Kenya from 1929 to 1938 (general medical work), and was in charge of psychiatry at Mathari Mental Hospital and H.M. Prison, Nairobi, from 1938 to 1950. In 1953, at the request of the World Health Organisation, Dr. Carothers published a monograph *'The African Mind in Health and Disease'*, which was at the time considered by specialists as a very authoritative study. In February 1954 he visited Kenya, invited by the Kenya colonial administration, in order 'to see how far some experience in Africa and some knowledge of psychology and psychiatry might throw light on the Mau Mau movement in this Colony and might point the way to solutions of this problem, viewed in both its immediate and longterm aspects'.[2] A small booklet *'The Psychology of Mau Mau'* was the result of Dr. Carothers' visit.

There can be no doubt that this study is counter-insurgency research in the pure sense of the term, and that Dr. Carothers kept strictly to his terms of reference when writing his report. It is, of course, rather difficult to evaluate his contribution to the defeat of the Mau Mau insurgency. His most important recommendations, especially those on 'villagization' (the 'strategic hamlets'-method used now in Viet-Nam) and on the 'rehabilitation' of Mau Mau detainees and the Kikuyu people in general, had already been suggested before by Kenya politicians, such as Michael Blundell, and administrators, such as T.G. Askwith. By putting his full scientific 'weight' behind these recommendations, however, Carothers certainly contributed strongly to the subsequent adoption of these policies, which, in the case of the villagization-policy at least, meant that he contributed to the defeat of Mau Mau. His analysis of Kikuyu psychology, although of doubtful scientific value, was an improvement upon then current theories on the Kikuyu 'mentality' and may have influenced official thinking to some extent. This would again mean that he actively worked against Mau Mau and contributed to its defeat.

Dr. L. S. B. Leakey, the world-wide authority on Ancient Man, is a good example of the category of counter-insurgency 'volunteers'.[3] Having been born

[2] J. C. Carothers, p. 1.

[3] Mrs Elspeth Huxley, a staunch and enthusiastic supporter of the Kenya Government and a committed adversary of Mau Mau right from the start, also belongs to this category. There is no doubt that her articles in 'Time and Tide' influenced official thinking on Mau Mau in Colonial Office circles in London, but as she is a novelist and a journalist rather than a real academic scholar, she falls outside the scope of this article.

in Kenya and having lived among the Kikuyu for most of his life, Dr. Leakey, who is one of the few Europeans who speaks the Kikuyu language fluently, decided after the second world war to take two and a half years from his work on Prehistory in order to prepare a detailed anthropological study of the Kikuyu. This resulted in a 1.400 page manuscript which, in 1952, was not yet published. Feeling that more and better knowledge of the Kikuyu could be an important factor in the battle against Mau Mau, Leakey produced two books during the period 1952—1954. The first one *(Mau Mau and the Kikuyu),* Dr. Leakey hoped, might 'help to make the British understand two things: why and how the Mau Mau has come into being, and also how, when it has been suppressed, things can be improved so that such a state of affairs need never again disturb the peace of the land I love so much — Kenya'.[4] In his second book, with the revealing title *Defeating Mau Mau,* Leakey wanted 'to provide material that will help to defeat Mau Mau, heal the mental wounds that have been inflicted upon all races in Kenya, and prevent similar outbreaks in the future'.[5] The great palaeontologist thus quite openly announced his aims and intentions, and does not seem to have felt any need for secrecy.

One of the particular points on which Leakey hoped to contribute to the defeat of Mau Mau was oath-taking. The Mau Mau movement made great use of the fear underlying oath-taking ceremonies and used oaths on a large scale in order to bind its adherents solemnly and strongly to the cause. In order to break the hold of the Mau Mau oath on the Kikuyu, Leakey, in both of his books, went to great pains to prove that 'as the movement grew from its small beginning, it violated more and more the rules of (traditional) oath-taking and so grew into something which was wholly contrary to established native law and custom'.[6]

As I have remarked elsewhere, Dr. Leakey's line of argument here is rather amusing. In fact, one of the things Kenya settlers and administrators found so repulsive in Mau Mau was its 'backwardness', its 'tribal and traditional outlook'. Mau Mau, the Parliamentary Delegation to Kenya said in its official report, 'intentionally and deliberately seeks to lead the Africans of Kenya back to bush and savagery, not forward into progress'.[7] However, when some Mau Mau oath administrators started to innovate and changed some elements in the traditional oath, they were called to order by Dr. Leakey and other Europeans, often the same people who scorned the alleged backwardness of the movement.

[4] L. S. B. Leakey, 1952, p. VII.
[5] L. S. B. Leakey, 1954, p. V.
[6] L. S. B. Leakey, 1954, p. 55.
[7] Report to the Secretary of State, p. 4.
This interpretation of Mau Mau is entirely wrong, as I tried to show in my thesis.

Of course, Dr. Leakey did not defend the traditional oath-taking practices for the sake of tribal custom. His aim clearly was to prove to the Kikuyu peasants that the Mau Mau leaders were false prophets and imposters violating customary law, and that their oath had no binding power. Had people believed this thesis, it would of course have meant the end of Mau Mau. In enumerating meticulously all the points on which the Mau Mau oath differed from traditional oath-taking ceremonies, however, Leakey exaggerated considerably, as I have shown elsewhere[8] and, as far as I know, very few Kikuyu have been influenced by his arguments to the point of leaving Mau Mau.

Dr. Leakey, in his crusade against Mau Mau, did not limit himself only to making available his previous research findings to colonial administrators and the general public. He also went actively on the 'war-path', and again in the field of oath-taking ceremonies. In traditional Kikuyu culture, people who had sworn an oath and had thereby become 'unclean' could, under certain circumstances, be delivered from the hold of the oath by a 'cleansing ceremony'. This idea was picked up by Leakey and some Kikuyu 'Loyalists' and led to a 'counter-oathing campaign', which started in april 1952, *some six months before the declaration of the Emergency* and some ten months before the outbreak of actual fighting in Kenya. F. D. Corfield, the Kenya Government 'historian' of Mau Mau, has some interesting things to say about this campaign: 'Dr. Leakey, who was a guiding influence behind this movement (. . . .) has informed me that although it was hoped thereby to rally the moderates, the main objective was to organize active resistance to thuggery and intimidation. *If this led to open clashes with Mau Mau, it was hoped that the hand of the Central Government would be forced to take more positive steps against the leaders of Mau Mau*'.[9] Here Dr. Leakey carried counter-insurgency research to its ultimate conclusion: If the insurrection does not yet exist, try to provoke it!

For several reasons the counter-oathing campaign was a painful failure, the main cause being the entirely wrong interpretation of the Mau Mau oath and the Mau Mau movement in general that was unanimously held by Europeans in Kenya. As mentioned before, Mau Mau was seen as a regressive phenomenon, an atavistic movement. By its counter-oathing campaign, which, under the personal supervision of Dr. Leakey, respected traditional custom on all points, the Kenya Government hoped to outwit the Mau Mau leaders *by regressing even more* than they were supposed to be doing. We now know that the Mau Mau movement was only a traditional movement in so far as this tradition was a living, renovated and purified one, and in so far as it could be used as a weapon in the struggle for an independent, modern Kenya. Mau

[8] R. Buijtenhuijs, pp. 265-8.
[9] F. D. Corfield, p. 135. My italics.

Mau was a movement of *cultural renewal;* against this cultural renaissance the Kenya Government only used cool, rationally calculated 'techniques', which were already hopelessly out-dated for all but the most traditionally-minded Kikuyu. In a way it can be said that Leakey's counter-oathing campaign failed *because its ceremonies respected traditional custom on al points,* while the Mau Mau oath could bind the Kikuyu together because it contained some innovations.[10]

The second period (1954-1963)

During the second period of counter-insurgency research in Kenya, which began somewhere at the end of 1954 and continued, but in a somewhat modified form, until independence in 1963, new research was done by social scientists with the explicit aim of combatting Mau Mau. Again we can make the distinction between 'voluntary' research and Government-sponsored research. I know of only one definite example of the volunteer category, which is mentioned in passing by Mary Shannon, a missionary doctor in Kenya, who certainly had never heard of 'counter-insurgency research' in her life when she wrote her article 'Rebuilding the social life of the Kikuyu', but who describes a case that fully qualifies. Writing about 'one of the happier aspects of the Emergency', by which she means 'co-operation between Government, Churches and other voluntary agencies, such as the Red Cross, in the work of rehabilitation and rebuilding',[11] Dr. Shannon says: 'The first projects in the villages still had the aim of getting more information. A team of four women, two Europeans and two Africans, lived for two months in an Embu village, where they also undertook medical and evangelistic work. One of the four was a young Dutch girl, Miss. G. Sluiter, a trained anthropologist, who came in response to the appeal for Inter-Church Aid. Later on she settled down alone in a Fort Hall village, sharing in every possible way the village life. She talked, ate, and worked with the women. Whatever communal labour, even punishment work, they had to do, she shared. *The reports she has already prepared for the Ministry of African Affairs are extraordinary interesting and revealing,* both as to the facts of the situation, and the reaction and outlook of the women'.[12]

According to my own information Miss Sluiter, now Mrs. Kershaw, stayed in Kenya for the first time between 1954 and the beginning of 1957, and made, after the stay in Fort Hall mentioned by Dr. Shannon, a study of four Kikuyu villages built under Emergency regulations. In 1960 she deposited in the library of the East African Institute for Social Research a document entit-

[10] R. Buijtenhuijs, pp. 265-270.
[11] M. I. Shannon, p. 279.
[12] Op. cit. p. 281, my italics.

led 'Report on Kikuyu Resettlement'. As most of Miss Sluiter's findings have only been published in the form of confidential reports which I have not been able to consult, I find it difficult to say in how far she has really contributed to the anti-Mau Mau crusade. However, the fact that she was permitted to do research in Kikuyu-land at the height of the Emergency and on a sensitive subject such as resettlement implies that she was on good terms with the colonial administration, and that she was probably considered 'useful' by the Kenya Government. On the basis of these facts, Miss Sluiter has to be considered a volunteer in counter-insurgency research.[13]

New research was also done with financial assistance from the British Department of Technical Cooperation and with the general approval of the Kenya Government. In 1957 the then Governor of Kenya, Sir Evelyn Baring, indicated that the Kenya Government would welcome a series of studies on agrarian reform in Kenya, and asked the East African Institute of Social Research to take responsibility for this project. In the beginning of the 1960s three social scientists were engaged by EAISR in order to carry out research in Kikuyu-land: M. P. K. Sorrenson, K. Sillitoe and again ... Mrs. Greet Kershaw-Sluiter.[14] The agrarian reform in Kenya (i.e., land consolidation) of course, had its own specific economic and agricultural merits, but, especially at the beginning, these aspects were overshadowed by an overall political aim: to create, by the process of land-consolidation, a stable middle class or a stable peasantry, which would have too much to lose to be receptive to any possible endeavours to revive Mau Mau in one form or another. Thus, when Sir Evelyn Baring in 1957 asked for research on agrarian reform in Kenya, he was undoubtedly requesting some kind of counter-insurgency research.

However, such was the pace of political development in Kenya that when Mr. Sorrenson and his fellow social scientists were engaged by EAISR, the agrarian reform had already lost a good deal of its counter-insurgency characteristics. When Sorrenson published his book in 1967, Kenya had been independent for three years and his rather critical analysis of land-consolidation in Kikuyu-land can in no way be considered as counter-insurgency research.

The real counter-insurgency research on matters such as land-consolidation and villagization was done before 1960, and it was done exclusively by members of the Kenya civil service, especially of the provincial administration. Some

[13] In the beginning of February, 1972 I wrote to Mrs. Kershaw inviting her to comment on the above information and particularly on Dr. Shannon's remarks. To this date I have not received any reply, but it is possible that my letter did not reach its destination, as I did not have Mrs. Kershaw's last address. I also should like to state that Miss Sluiter, according to M.P.K. Sorrenson, 1967, p. 222, strongly questioned official government policy on land-consolidation in some of her later reports.

[14] M. P. K. Sorrenson; 1967, p. VII, s.q.

articles published by Central Province District Commissioners in the *Journal of African Administration* are of very good quality, but not being the work of professional social scientists, they are not part of our problem. The same is true of Corfield's *Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau,* an official Colonial Office publication written by an ex-colonial administrator, not by a professional historian.

Conclusions

When we compare counter-insurgency research in Kenya during the Emergency with similar research actually done in Asia and Latin America, we reach the following conclusions:

1 — The contribution of counter-insurgency research in Kenya has been relatively limited, although it cannot be completely discounted in the cases of Leakey and Carothers. Research has never been done on any important scale, and it would be useless and even impossible to try to establish diagrams showing the different research institutions in this field and their connexions, as has been done for counter-insurgency research in the United States.

2 — Counter-insurgency research in Kenya was either voluntary or Government sponsored. However, as far as I know, it has always been a responsibility of the Kenya Government and was never done independently by army institutions or intelligence services as in the U.S.A.

3 — Contrary to what happened in the U.S.A., nobody ever tried to hide the counter-insurgency research that was done in Kenya. For this reason alone counter-insurgency research in Kenya makes a much more 'gentleman-like' and 'civilized' impression than its counterparts in Thailand or Latin America.

Before ending this article on counter-insurgency research in Kenya, I would like to try to explain why these differences exist. First of all, one can suggest that the British tradition of the Government Anthropologist might be a factor here. Only five years before the Emergency, in 1947, Professor Schapera visited Kenya at the invitation of the Colonial Social Science Research Council in order 'to report on the anthropological problems of Kenya Colony, and to indicate which of these problems required early investigation'.[15] At the end of his report Schapera recommended that several studies be carried out, in addition to the work already in progress, which indicates that the tradition of the Government Anthropologist was quite well known in Kenya, long before Mau Mau and the Emergency.[16] The utilization of anthropological research

[15] I. Schapera, 1949, p. 2.

[16] It is interesting to note here that Schapera in his report did not recommend any special research on or investigation of Kikuyu political unrest and how to prevent it. This has to be related to A. Rosentiel's 'An Anthropological Approach to the Mau Mau Problem', where the author argues more or less that nothing would have happened in Kenya if only social scientists would have done their homework, i.e.,

against a revolt, as was done in Kenya, was in a way a natural product of this institution. One of the tasks of the Government Anthropologist had always been to help in trying to maintain the peace. Now that peace was broken in Kenya it was quite normal, in view of this tradition, that social scientists should help to restore it. I suppose that this tradition of civil-service sponsored social research has played some role in preventing the military leaders in Kenya from contemplating taking up research on their own, which automatically would have made it less open and less gentleman-like.

The time factor certainly also played a role in the differences between counter-insurgency research in Kenya and similar projects in the U.S. today. In 1952 anthropological research was done on a rather limited scale and with unsophisticated tools. Anthropology still was in its 'stone age' without computers, or even tape recorders, and it would have been rather difficult under those circumstances to launch large-scale counter-insurgency research projects on a professional basis. It is quite possible that the British Government would have sponsored more research if Mau Mau had occured ten or fifteen years later. Even then, however, the British Government would not have been able to spend the same fantastic amounts of money on research that the U.S. government can in Viet-Nam or elsewhere.

The time factor is also important in another way. Counter-insurgency research in Kenya was done quite openly because in 1952 nobody caused any trouble about it. We are now inclined to condemn counter-insurgency research as immoral and against the professional ethics of the anthropologist, and we consider ourselves 'concerned' scholars because we take sides with the peasant revolutions in Asia and Latin America. We have to bear in mind, however, that people like Carothers and especially Leakey were deeply convinced that Mau Mau was fundamentally bad and wicked, and that it stood for everything that was against human progress and civilization. One only has to read the two small pages in *Defeating Mau Mau* where Leakey comments on the so-called advanced Mau Mau oaths to be convinced of this.[17] Miss Sluiter, who worked for a church-related organization, at least in the beginning of her stay in Kenya, probably held essentially the same convictions. Therefore, these people never thought they were doing anything wrong when they worked

good counter-insurgency research before the Emergency. Rosentiel's statement is based on a totally wrong analysis of the Mau Mau movement, which she compares with the cargo-cults of New Guinea, but her remarks are revealing of the whole British and Common-Wealth tradition of the Government Anthropologist.

[17] The following words are used on those two pages in order to qualify Mau Mau adherents and their acts, some of them occurring several times: 'foul'; 'debased'; 'evil'; 'abnormal'; 'beastly'; 'degraded'; 'unspeakable'; 'mentally deranged'; 'fiendish'; 'horrible'; 'filthy'; 'depraved'; and 'unclean'. Leakey, 1954, pp. 84-85.
Carothers, p. 15, uses similar qualifications for Mau Mau oath-taking.

against Mau Mau. On the contrary, they must have been convinced that they were doing their duty as 'concerned' scholars, which a man such as Leakey indeed very much was.

This brings us to the following question which, I admit, I am unable to answer satisfactorily: if we feel morally free as anthropologists to work for revolutionary movements, can we then deny to other anthropologists the right to work against the Revolution or against a particular revolution they strongly dislike? Answering this question means first of all that we have to distinguish between different categories of counter-insurgency research-workers.

The first category are those that I would call the 'mercenaries', i.e. social scientists who do counter-insurgency research because they have chosen to sell their services to the highest bidder although they know quite well that they are participating in immoral and criminal activities. These people should be condemned without appeal, but I am afraid that this category is rather limited, much more so than some revolutionaries might think.

Much more important, numerically, is the category of research-workers doing counter-insurgency research without knowing exactly what they are doing, because they are not really politically conscious.[18] Before we condemn them, we should make sure that we have done our utmost to convince them that what they are doing is wrong and that it has implications of which they are not aware.

And last we have a third category of counter-insurgency experts which I mentioned already briefly before: those who really believe that what they do is their duty as 'concerned' scholars. I am afraid these scholars do exist, and probably in much larger numbers than is believed by leftist groups, who are easily inclined to see all their adversaries as cynics and/or criminals. What can we do about these people? Is it possible to maintain that they are 'bad' anthropologists and that we, the 'revolutionary' anthropologists, are 'good' anthropologists?

As Mrs Schenk-Sandbergen, as Stavenhagen and Huizer, I feel inclined to work for revolutionary movements, although I am somewhat sceptical about the practical possibilities that are open to us.[19] But I very much doubt the possibility of enforcing a rule obliging all anthropologists over the world to work for 'revolution' or for the 'dispossessed' or the 'wretched of the earth' or whatever the formula may be. As far as I can see, people will never unanimously agree on who are the wretched of the earth and even if they did, they will continue to hold different opinions on what would be the right policy to promote their cause. To return to the practical problem from which I started: Although I disagree with Dr. Leakey's interpretation of the Mau Mau revolt

[18] A lot of these people certainly exist in the related field of industrial sociology.
[19] See my contribution to the debate in 'Les Temps Modernes', no. 299-300.

on scientific grounds, and although I would have fought him in the political arena if I had been in Kenya or in England during the Emergency and old enough to have political opinions, I am still unable to condemn Leakey *as an anthropologist.* As I said before Leakey was very much a 'concerned' scholar and did what he thought was his duty when he volunteered his counter-insurgency information.

I am aware that a very difficult and tricky question can be put to me after taking this stand on counter-insurgency research. This question can be formulated as follows: Would you condemn a convinced Nazi Anthropologist working for the extermination of the Jewish people *as an anthropologist?* If such a person existed, my answer would be: I do not know anymore.

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