

Perils and Pragmatics of Critique:
Reading Barack Obama Sr.'s 1965 review of Kenya's development plan (2010)

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Atieno. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Professor E. S. Atieno Odhiambo, dear colleague, friend, and co-author for decades. We lost you in February 2009.

Atieno always pushed me to go back and read key texts again and again, to achieve new discoveries in the re-reading. This reading, this rereading, is inspired by him but he bears no responsibilities for its faults. Atieno developed a unique capacity to identify and interpret critique and debate in unusual places. His many dear colleagues, co-writers, and students long experienced his thoughtful and powerful critique. In a "secret" chamber underneath Nyayo House, Nairobi, Atieno also experienced the risks and perils of critique. Indelibly marked by this dreadful and undeserved treatment by the leaders of the country he loved, Atieno nevertheless sustained a most productive pragmatics throughout his highly productive life as a scholar of Kenya and the world.

Together, we learned to draw lines that were not necessarily straight.

The present text is provisional, uncertain, and itinerant.

It has several beginnings and no end.

What is it about? It is about a reading that a young economist in Kenya, Barack Obama Sr., authored in 1965. His reading reflected a range of critical thought that was then gathering around a significant Kenyan parliamentary paper, the government's "Sessional Paper Number Ten of 1965: African Socialism and its Implications for Planning in Kenya," released in late April of '65. Tom Mboya, Minister for Economic Planning and Development, was broadly acknowledged to be the author of this Sessional Paper. Indeed, it was republished in a posthumous collection of his writings and speeches. Yet, with this, and with other parts of this text, uncertainty is ever-present and haunting, including the very authorship of the Sessional Paper, which some identified with Mboya and which Mboya variously identified with himself¹ and then with others. And stories have traveled with Number Ten of other authors, including Mwai Kibaki, today President of Kenya.

As well, this is a story of the unexpected itineraries of a fragment of text, a sentence composed around 1997-98, as Atieno Odhiambo and I attempted to construct "a biography of development."

The debates pitted the liberal internationalist Mboya against endogenous communitarian socialist Oginga Odinga and radical economists Dharam Ghai and Barack Obama, who critiqued the document for being neither African nor socialist enough.²

With this sentence, our goal was to contextualize the mid-1960s traces of the risky work and cautious practice that would mark, and for us characterize, Robert Ouko's three decades-long career as a public servant. Robert Ouko was the Minister of Economic Development whose disappearance and murder in 1990 would occupy a sequence of significant investigations. It would in turn—more accurately, concurrently--preoccupy Atieno and myself for more than a decade.

Our sentence refers to the roiling debates in Kenya during the first half of 1965, especially from early April through mid-June, regarding the path that the Kenya government should pursue in regard to economic development and the path that Kenya should pursue amidst east-west tensions and alignment pressures affecting newly independent African governments. Indeed, the Sessional Paper Number Ten and the

¹ Tom Mboya, *The Challenge of Nationhood: A Collection of Speeches and Writings* (London: Heineman, 1969). But see references elsewhere in the paper to a different authorship.

² David William Cohen and E. S. Atieno Odhiambo, *The Risks of Knowledge: Investigations into the Death of the Hon. Minister John Robert Ouko in Kenya, 1990* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004).

published Obama essay came into the view of Kenyans at the height of what we could think of as “The 30 Day Cold War in Kenya.”³ Indeed, in many respects, the Sessional Paper was inherently a piece of this war.

As will be laid out below, our sentence traveled to unexpected locations. It was picked up by right-wing bloggers during the 2008 president campaign of Barack Obama Jr., becoming a piece of a vast web-seated literature attempting to de-stool this figure with Kenyan roots and American citizenship.

There is another text, another time-line. In 2008, as Obama’s presidential campaign gained traction and credibility, I began to receive calls from journalists who were developing stories on Obama’s Kenya background. Their inquiries to me were focused on the candidate’s father, as the mysteries and unknowns of *his* life were gaining broader attention. My name had been offered up by several colleagues studying Kenya who thought I could help these reporters. I had done research in the immediate vicinity of the senior Obama’s natal home but I only came to know the younger Obama as a son of the Luo of Siaya some fifteen or twenty years after doing the Siaya field research. And I knew of the father solely as author of that intriguing critique in 1965 published at an important moment in the history of post-independence Kenya.⁴ I can say that not until late 2004 when I read Obama Jr.’s *Dreams of My Father* (an augmented edition of a 1995 book) did I know that the young Kenyan economist of 1965 had left behind a son as well as an American wife in Hawaii. Our *Risks of Knowledge*, with the starkly re-appropriated sentence, was well into print when I picked up *Dreams*.

* * *

³ I have coined this expression as an emphatic intervention into an almost forgotten literature on Kenya’s last years of decolonization and first years of independence. I could have just as well said “seventy day Cold War” with its opening on February 24, 1965—the date of assassination of Pio Pinto and May 5, 1965—the date of publication of the Sessional Paper after a day of debate in Parliament followed by its unanimous affirmation. But I choose the 30 day formulation because I want to give emphasis to the heavy tumult of April, 1965. The conjuring of this formulation is intended to force open discussion of the deep cut of Cold War politics on foundational events in African nationhood.

⁴ One might ask me the “coming to know” question: “What did you know and when did you know it?” This perplexing and not quite settled thread runs through this paper; it is more difficult than it should be. For example, I have found it difficult to say with precision and confidence when I first heard of B. Obama Jr., and whether I immediately recognized him as a “son” of the Kenya Luo. I freely acknowledge that this imprecision is unlikely to be resolved. I am frustrated and so will be close readers of the present text. Likewise, I am comfortable in relating that I did research in the “vicinity” of the Obama Sr.’s natal village, yet I may have actually set foot in that village in searching out the locations and physical remains of *gundni bur*, the fortified settlements discussed in *Siaya*, the first book that Atieno and I did together.

KENYATTA SPURNS SOVIET ARMS GIFT

**Finds Tanks Old and Useless
—'Technicians' Suspect**

By LAWRENCE FELLOWS
Special to The New York Times

NAIROBI, Kenya, April 29—President Jomo Kenyatta rejected a shipment of weapons from the Soviet Union today after the bulk of it had been unloaded at Mombasa.

"The Government has come to the conclusion that all the arms are old, second-hand and would be of no use to the modern army of Kenya," the President announced from the State House.

The trouble, in fact, ran deeper than that. Only 10 minutes before Mr. Kenyatta made his announcement, he met at the State House with the Soviet Ambassador, V. S. Lavrov, in an effort to patch up their differences.

Mr. Kenyatta did not make the arms agreement with the Soviet Union. That was done by Oginga Odinga, the Vice President, who is sympathetic to the Communists. But Mr. Kenyatta accepted the agreement, for he was eager to get armored troop carriers, which were part of the deal.

Dispute Over 'Technicians'

He was less willing to accept a 17-man team of "technicians" who flew into Nairobi a week ago, and his argument with the Soviet Ambassador sprang from the identity of these men and the length of their stay.

The group is reported on good authority to have included high-ranking military men, one a general. If it had been allowed to stay in Kenya indefinitely, the group would have been in effect something like a permanent military mission, and the Kenyans are not ready for this.

In 2008-2009, against reality and probably sobriety, I was being constructed by these journalists as an authority on the life, and also the demise, of the father of the presidential candidate. In these conversations, I learned more than I offered. . .such as that the *Boston Globe* no longer had overseas offices or correspondents. . .these American journalists did their coverage and investigation via internet, e-mail, and telephone from offices in Boston. . .and quite in contrast to the feeling one gets from Junior's *Dreams*, that indeed there were many old friends of Senior who were prepared to recount stories of him to interested reporters. Yet there was hardly a sign or word of recognition of the perilous moment in Kenyan history when Obama Senior decided to submit his critique for publication.

To gird myself for these conversations, I did some additional looking up of things: first, I went back to some work I had done in the 1960s and early 1970s (and that I was thinking a lot about as I became intrigued by the Obama name in American politics). This work, a paper written for the International Congress of Africanists, Addis Ababa, 1973, the venue where Atieno and I first met, posited that in the great Luo migrations through what is today northern and eastern Uganda and western Kenya two entities could be distinguished within the generalized category of "Nilotic Luo": the Jok'Owiny and the Jok'Omolo. What I found, and argued, was that this distinction was remarkable. In the Uganda-Kenya borderland, in the 17th and 18th centuries, wherever a segment of the Jok'Owiny established themselves, they integrated with the local community, intermarried, and even exchanged their Luo speech for the languages among the people where they settled. . .and emerged as the lead or ruling lineage of that new community. This was quite in contrast to the "behavioral routines" of the second Luo-speaking population, the Jok'Omolo, who did not readily intermarry with others and retained their language as well as signal elements of a culture continuous with origins in the southern Sudan. On the one side, the Jok'Omolo transmitted Luo language and culture across a vast zone of eastern Africa from the Sudan to Congo to Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, and across perhaps a millennium. On the other, the Jok'Owiny in a sense traded some of the signs of Luo culture for positions of political leadership across a significant region.⁵ I found this distinction constitutive.

In my most recent return to this work—recognizing Obama in America as part of lineage associated with Luo speakers in Kenya--I found that indeed the Obama Kogelo lineage was a descendant segment of the Jok'Owiny. I offer here an odd reflection that in the history of Luo migrations, the United States of America in the 21st century occupies precisely the same position as the small Luuka polity in precolonial Busoga in the 18th century (and one could name many many other small polities in precolonial eastern Africa, some extant today, that are similarly constituted out of the peculiarly reproduced patterns of Jok'Owiny migration and settlement.) Of course, this "finding" raised horrors in my mind that any revelation of this argument would be (correction: *should be*) read as a resurrection of racist historical explanation à la the Hamitic theory or hypothesis. . .yet I hope that my 1973 Addis paper was read as something other

⁵ This first appeared in a German-based publication; later it was condensed into the *Siaya* book.

than that! Since beginning to think about this, I have not had a clue how to write up this “extension” into America of that 1973 argument. And right here, and now, is this first time I have tried to write it into words, other than in an e-mail or two. A beginning of sorts.⁶

Second, I went to Northwestern University’s Herskovits Library to see what I could discover about the allegations that Obama Sr. claimed, or was said to have claimed, that he was a witness to the Sunday morning assassination (5 July 1969) of Tom Mboya just outside the door of Channia’s, a Nairobi chemist (pharmacist). Moreover, I was intrigued that he was said to have told friends much later that he knew *more* about the Mboya murder than he had originally told the police and the court as the arrest, indictment, and prosecution unfolded of the alleged murderer, Nashonon Isaac Njenga Njoroge. Here I was more comfortably repositioned as an authority on a death in Kenya, again an assassination, not of Ouko but of his Luo *landsman* Mboya. I was in 2008 and 2009 much more confident drawing inferences on witnesses to assassinations than I was with the cultural politics of the Jok’Owiny as they passed from 17th and 18th century eastern Uganda and western Kenya into the politics of the US in the new millennium.

However, in the formidable Herskovits collections *I could find no reference* in the “public record” to a role for Obama Sr. among the 60 some witnesses called to the court to give evidence in the prosecution of Njoroge. Nothing.⁷ Where I had suggested to the writers consulting me that there were parallels to the Ouko situation (e.g., key witnesses withholding information because of risks and fears of the police and of others)—and we discussed these reflections at length—I found myself dumbfounded in trying to figure Obama Sr.’s bold and reluctant witnessing as possibly a doubly dangerous fiction. What I did find that resembled the perverse possibility regarding Obama Sr.’s alleged witnessing were more recent allegations that the convicted assassin Isaac Njenga Njoroge was not actually executed as reported by the government and the press. . .that he had been seen popping up at various times in Bulgaria, Ethiopia, and even Kenya between the date of his reported execution by the Kenyan state in 1969 and 2004. It seems Kenyatta never issued a writ of execution authorizing the state’s killing of this convicted assassin. This new story carried the implication that Njoroge was a piece of a deal to dispose of Mboya and eliminate any links to others of the murder. . .that there were arrangements in place to sustain the story of a lone shooter (as in Oswald) and to retain Njoroge’s fidelity to the program of keeping his masters out of the picture, with no leads to those who may have directed him to gun down Mboya that Sunday morning,

⁶ I do acknowledge that several colleagues with whom I have shared this 17th and 21st century conjuncture have attempted with subtlety and without a biological thesis to explicate the descent of not only a continuous lineage but also a way of acting in the world. But I remain uncomfortable about trying to set out in writing such an argument.

⁷ This is not to say that Obama Senior was not a witness to the killing, that he did not give testimony to the police, that this was all a pack of lies. It is surely possible that he was there, was a witness, and just never made it on to the list of witnesses convened for the criminal proceedings. Maybe his son has better access to the “public record” and can resolve this himself.

though Njoroge did famously blurt out that they should go after “the big man”, not just himself, which would seem to undercut the notion of his fidelity to his masters. I take the Njoroge story as not so much a tangent but as a commentary on the contingencies of truth in the historical record. While all else is in play, it seems, I do remain secure in my knowledge that Mboya was dead. At least there have been many many descriptions of his body and many accounts of his funeral.

The events around Mboya’s death have had a kinetic effect on Kenya politics ever since.

I am puzzled as to what Obama Sr. would have been doing when he placed himself at risk within a possible fabrication of first-hand observations and knowledge of the killing of Mboya.⁸ Of course, this would certainly not be the first time that he seized a risk-filled moment. The 1965 critique was, as the title of this paper asserts, most perilous.

But these first consultations (all unpaid) with journalists culminated in 2009 in a series of phone conversations with the editor of *The New Yorker*, David Remnick (followed up on the phone by his fact-checker). Remnick was the next on the growing list of writers trying to fill in the presumed void about the father Obama. He was writing a book on Obama Jr. A previous interrogator, Sally Jacobs of the *Boston Globe*, told me in a follow-up to her published story on Obama Sr. that she was applying for a sabbatical from the *Globe* to write a book about Obama Sr. Piling on, so to speak.

With Remnick, the consultation got especially interesting (still unpaid, I already had a long-running subscription to his magazine) as Remnick came to recognize the possibility of giving more space to Senior, perhaps a chapter, when he originally was going to write much less. It seemed he was becoming interested in *my* reading of Obama Sr.’s reading of the Mboya development paper as a way of getting into the heady times of Senior’s return to Kenya from the United States. In course, Remnick asked me to lay out in just a few lines—please “just a few,” he asked, professionally wary of the verbiages of academics. Here is what I sent him 15 April 2009, composed that day, restating what I had said on the phone a few hours earlier.

Obama Sr's 1965 critique of Kenya's development plan reads today (April 2009) as remarkably shrewd and prescient--shrewd in its efforts to navigate

⁸ In his memoir *My Footprints on the Sands of Time* (Kisumu: Anyange Press, 2003), 227. Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot presents a detailed account of *his* meeting up with Mboya in the neighborhood of Channia’s that Sunday morning. According to Ogot, around 12:30 pm, Mboya told him that he was on his way to Channia’s to buy some medicine. Ogot was on the pavement outside the New Stanley Hotel boutique of his wife Grace Ogot waiting for Mboya to meet up with him when he was done at the chemist’s. “While I waited for him outside the boutique on Lozi Lane, I suddenly saw Nahashon Isaac Njenga Njoroge, whom I knew as a dangerous person who had trained in communist Bulgaria, and who had been hired by the Special Branch to spy on certain politicians, running very fast towards me. He was surprised to see me and slowed down to tell me that somebody had shot Mboya. He then continued to run.”

the perilous political differences among the major figures and forces of the day including Jomo Kenyatta, Tom Mboya, and Oginga Odinga, as well as the false securities of ideologies, in this case the messy, irresolvable debates over the relative values of African socialism, African tradition, and capitalism. . . prescient in its warnings regarding gratuitous privatization of productive resources and public goods; excessive disparities in wealth; and uneven regional development. Indeed, he makes an almost forgotten case for the African state (and for good governance, progressive taxation, and effective regulation of private investment). The 1965 article is an improbable yet extraordinarily acute rehearsal of the best critiques of structural adjustment (and its privileging of the private sector against the state) in the 1980s and 1990s and of the failures of unregulated capital in our present decade. In a time of spirited animation of big ideas in the first decade of African independence, Obama Sr. offered his readers a lesson in the promise of pragmatics in the address to the difficult challenges of economic and political development, nationally and globally.

As I reread this in the weeks after—it was in the original format fifteen lines, more than “a few”, less than I have written on pretty much anything before-- I found myself thinking about this example of writing, compact, not demanding a great deal of paper or ink, or time to read. I also found it a *complete* paper as I felt at the instant no need to add anything. It presented my reading of Obama Sr.’s paper precisely the way I thought it should be read. More recently, I was intrigued by the idea of letting this stand alone, refusing to provide any further or surrounding elaboration. . . I had the thought of producing several of these, maybe ten, compact pieces of writing and asserting a different model of scholarly work. . . at the same time refusing to engage directly, point-by-point, the half-cocked reading of Obama Sr.’s paper that began circulating in April 2008, a reading buoyed by the authority of our poor itinerant sentence dragged screaming and yelling out of page 182 of our 2004 book on the Ouko investigations (for more, see below). We have heard of rejections of papers too long, but my paper of 15-19 lines, depending on formatting, was rejected as a proposed seminar offering because it was considered too short, setting a terrible example for graduate students. I decided to leave this writing be, finished, and move on to other things.

So, what am I doing here,⁹ beyond making a case for the shrinking of the academic publishing format (a case useless in those worlds where word-counts and page-counts confer resources upon the scholar), beyond proving Remnick quite right that an academic can take thirty pages to lay out something that can be said in fifteen lines?

First of all, I continue to be taken by the possibilities of “looking over the shoulder” of an actor, a scholar, a researcher, a worker, an artist. This “over the shoulder position” is something that I continue to hold onto as a strong and productive motif of “the

⁹ I am grateful to members of the Archives and Public Culture Workshop at the University of Cape Town for their reading and discussion of this paper March 16, 2010, in a slightly earlier draft.

production of history” work,¹⁰ making a point of perspective that allows views of the practices and practitioner of the producer. . .not just trying to situate or contextualize the actor. . .not just trying to locate or contextualize the producer in a moment or space. . .but rather to observe herin the “everyday” practice of her labor. By moving back over the shoulder, I am seeing not just the object or text produced but also the production itself, getting to the “back stage” so to speak as well as not allowing the actor to control the terms of interpolation of the work produced.

Second, I am intrigued by the potential itinerancy of textual fragments. I have for a pretty long time been interested in observing stuff as it has broken out of the contexts of production and immediate circulation. . .what happens to stuff as it “leaves the lab” and moves along in different traffic so to speak. Here, I think right away of the concept of *culture*, so vital to the constitution of fields such as anthropology and history, which escapes from the lab and takes on extraordinary powers and resonances never imagined in the circuits of the academy. Intriguing stuff to study, yes, but I am also horrified by the employment of our fragment of text, our sentence, as conferring authority on a program carrying the goals of destroying the credit of candidate and then president Obama and of eliminating him from the American political field. Of course, had the extractors of our sentence turned one page back (page 181) they would have found reference to Robert Ouko’s fearful concerns regarding the slide toward violence and destruction in the nation’s political order:

“On June 18, 1983 he [Ouko] gave his famous *Siasa ya Kumalizana* (politics of elimination) speech in Parliament. [He was offering an intervention in the debate surrounding an alleged plot by a leading minister against Moi and his government.] . . . ‘We want to tell them today, and we will tell them again tomorrow that this politics of destruction is so dangerous that it may end up consuming its own promoters.’” (*Risks*, 181)

Sadly, Obama Senior, who died in 1982, was gone and buried in Siaya by the time Ouko offered this warning. Yet possibly before and definitely after reading the Sessional Paper, Senior was warned, inferentially, not just by Kenyatta in his foreword to the Sessional Paper, but also by Mboya who in a 20 February 1967 speech at the opening of National Book Week in Nairobi chastised Kenya’s intellectuals for buying into foreign ideas and foreign propaganda.¹¹ But by 1967 Obama Senior had already published his piece. This may be what various commentators have observed, and members of Senior’s

¹⁰ *The Combing of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹¹ Tom Mboya, “Kenya Intellectuals and the KANU Government.” Reprinted in Tom Mboya, *The Challenge of Nationhood: A Collection of Speeches and Writings* (London: Heineman, 1969), 106-114. Speech at the Opening of National Book Week, Nairobi, February 20, 1967. First printed in *East Africa Journal* (March 1967), 10-15.

family reported, that Obama had spoiled his connections with Mboya and with Kenyatta and that a promising career was turned into the experience and narrative of demise.¹²

Beyond this, I was easily drawn into the difficult situation in which Obama Sr. placed himself—“risks of knowledge”-- as he, a tyro, tried to navigate the differences among the three maestri of Kenya politics of the day. . . as he sought to work some possible, some alternative, space for critique of plans and planning in Kenya. And these were not just three political orbits that he had sought to move; he had also chosen to do so at a time when these orbits were on brutal, deadly collision. This was the height of the Cold War in Kenya and the differences Obama was trying to draw among these three “forces” were paradoxically subtle and crude, and in no way would they be easy for anyone to conjugate, then or in retrospect now. Not to say, Obama Sr.’s references were opaque, never mentioning any of these great figures by name.

* * *

It would have been obvious to any reader of the day (certainly more obvious than to a reader today) that Mboya’s “Sessional Paper” was itself a delicately constructed intervention into a conflicted political world marked by the shifting and contending positions of the Kenyatta and Odinga pieces of Kenya’s ruling party, if not also other players, not to speak of the Cold War pressures from the US and Britain and the Kremlin. Moreover, Obama—as Ouko—was keenly aware that Julius Nyerere’s Tanzania was at this precise time laying out its own course for economic development, with first statements of the ideas of *Ujamaa* that would become in 1967 the Arusha Declaration floating in the air, and also in the bars and taxis, across East Africa.¹³ Chou en lai was on the eve of still another visit to Africa, with a first stop in Tanzania, having in early 1965 already announced after a previous visit that “an excellent revolutionary situation exists in Africa.”¹⁴

Obama was faced with powerful binaries yet he also knew that it was not that simple, nor was it of any further use to join up with one position or the other. Obama’s navigation of these layers of contention might be read as an act of courage, or impunity, perhaps of self-destruction. After all, in President Kenyatta’s foreword to the 5 May 1965 print of the “Sessional Paper,” he pronounced that the publication of the paper

¹² Sally Jacobs, “A father’s charm, absence,” *The Boston Globe*, September 21, 2008.

¹³ In June 1965, a Dar es Salaam newspaper published the Sessional Paper verbatim, as well as an anonymous critique of the Paper. *The Nationalist* (Dar es Salaam), June 9-17, 1965, republication of “African Socialism and Its Application to Planning in Kenya: Sessional Paper No. 10; and, Anonymous (“A Critic”), “Kenya’s African Socialism,” *The Nationalist* (Dar es Salaam), June 28, 1965.

¹⁴ In late 1964, I had the special opportunity to visit the American Ambassador to Morocco who had confined himself to bed during the state visit of Chou en lai to that country, a first-hand taste of the Cold War in Africa.

“should bring to an end all the conflicting, theoretical and academic arguments that have been going on.”

Different forms of writing, constituted at different moments, with different intentions and different audiences. Disjoined and distinct texts sometimes find their ways into unexpected relations with one another. Intertextualities, hidden and revealed, can be formative, powerful. Texts are hardly ever pristine. Their work may be conditioned by their predecessor, or alter, texts; while authority or force may lie in their being claimed or imagined as wholly autonomous, fresh, or new.¹⁵ I am intrigued by the intertextual “moments” of these text fragments: a 1965 parliamentary paper, a 1965 critique, a 1997-98 reading of that critique, a 2008 extraction of a single sentence from a book, and the “fifteen” lines of April 2009 for a New York editor and author. What sort of weaving of these threads into a single cloth is possible? How to do it?

I am also, I admit, interested in the ways in which these texts move back and forth between late Kenyan and contemporary US contexts, always announcing these as distinct spaces, never revealing the deep imbrications of the two, yet providing an opportunity to push on this too comfortable distinction. And, what sort of politics is possible, and workable, in this transnational space?



* * *

The single sentence with which this lengthy preface opened was composed within, and then extracted from, a paragraph. Here it is as it appeared in our 2004 book. And with it another preface to this paper:

As a permanent secretary in the Kenya government between 1963 and 1969, [Robert] Ouko was surrounded by the discourses of development and planning. His mentor and the decade’s key minister of economic planning, Tom Mboya, was East Africa’s most effective advocate of a liberal capitalism that allocated a crucial role both to foreign capital as a necessary tool for development and to the African state as an appropriate mediator of resource allocation and manpower enhancement. Ouko was alive to the key debates surrounding Kenya’s blueprint for a mixed economy: the Sessional Paper Number Ten of 1965, entitled “African Socialism and Its Application to Planning in Kenya.” *The debates pitted the liberal internationalist Mboya against endogenous communitarian socialist Oginga Odinga and radical economists Dharam Ghai and Barrack Obama, who critiqued the document for being neither African nor socialist enough.* [italics added for emphasis] Ouko recognized that these were not simply Kenyan debates

¹⁵ Nowhere is this argument more effectively set out than in Carolyn A. Hamilton’s *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

but international ones, situated on the heady playing fields of the Cold War. He understood that the emerging “Kenya model” was in play against other developmental models being advocated or brought into practice elsewhere—especially in Julius Nyerere’s Tanzania. --*Risks*. . .(2004), 182-83

The sentence drew from, and integrated, observations and interests we had separately carried around for more than three decades. One of us, born and raised in Washington, D.C., in a household in which everyday American politics had a seat at the table at morning and evening meals; the other born and raised in Liganua in the heart of Siaya, western Kenya, in a setting in which a communitarian ethic of self-improvement, family, and faith--most powerfully articulated in the writings of Oginga Odinga--offered the best path to a future Kenya free of colonialism and exploitation. In some of his early writings, he, Atieno, would mine local memory and Kenyan archives to draw attention to the deeper layers of social, political, and economic thought of Odinga,¹⁶ layers that undefined the easy and deadly labels cast onto Odinga’s projects by his political adversaries and enemies, and also by agents and representatives of American and British Cold War intrigues.



Tom Mboya and Eleanor Roosevelt, *Life Magazine*, April 1, 1959 Photo: Joseph Scherschel./Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images

¹⁶ For example, see E.S. Atieno Odhiambo, “Economic Mobilization and Political Leadership: Oginga Odinga and the Luo Thrift and Trading Corporation to 1956,” in Aloo Ajuko and William Ochieng’, eds., *Politics and Leadership in Africa* (East African Literature Bureau, 1975), 139-78.

The other one—the present writer--had the opportunity May 9, 1959, to hear Tom Mboya speak to a large dinner gathering of the Americans for Democratic Action, where—after being introduced by Eleanor Roosevelt¹⁷--the young Kenyan dynamo rehearsed arguments for a liberal internationalism that seemed to promise to a fifteen year old American boy something beyond the over-determining narratives of on-going racial oppression, imperialism, and an endless and violent Cold War. I had the chance to shake hands with Mboya that evening and to thank him for a speech that would stay with me—in spirit if not content—for many years. Fifty years later, arguably, there were many fifteen year old Americans, boys and girls, who were hearing the words of another dynamic Luo, Barack Hussein Obama II. They would carry away from his words a similar sense of the possibility of a better future.¹⁸ By the second week of September of 1959, Obama Senior would be in Hawaii pursuing a university degree and a woman. He was one of some 81 young Kenyans traveling for degree study in the US, a first iteration of what would be known as the Kennedy Airlift, for which Mboya himself would be considered responsible. It was during his 1959 tour of the US that Mboya drew American financial support for this airlift--organized remarkably quickly--and for the subsequent airlifts that were associated with the Kennedy name.¹⁹

¹⁷ See ER's report of this event, and of another experience: viewing a film about an African who travels to Johannesburg to look for work. Was this 1959 film "Come Back Africa"? A problem with this guess is that on September 29, 1961, Roosevelt reported in her "My Day" journal that she had just been taken to a Harry Belafonte concert in New York. "[Belafonte] brought to Carnegie Hall 'The World in Song' and a singer I had never heard before, Miriam Makeba. Miss Makeba's country is the Union of South Africa, and I wonder whether she will be allowed to return there." [http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1961&_f=md005009] Of course, Makeba made a prominent appearance in *Come Back, Africa*. On the other hand, Dr. Litheko Modisane (in a recent SMS message) has pointed to a source, Peter Davis, who reported that Eleanor Roosevelt saw *Come Back Africa* in "a private screening."

¹⁸ For a recent review of the excitement in Kenya associated with the ascendance of a Luo son to the American presidency, see Matthew Carotenuto and Katherine Luongo, "Dala or Diaspora? Obama and the Luo Community of Kenya," *African Affairs* 108, 431 (April 2009), 197-219.

¹⁹ During the 2008 campaign in the US, Obama's handlers had to correct mis-statements that Obama's father was on the first "Kennedy Airlift". As he and his chief opponent at the time

Not long ago I saw a movie on African life which I hope will be widely shown in this country. It is a simple story of an African trying to escape famine in his village and to earn a little money for his family and perhaps be reunited with them in Johannesburg—if he can find work in that South African city.

His knowledge of conditions and restrictions are slight, and he finds himself in all kinds of difficulties. He never does succeed, but the story is developed with understanding and sympathy for the African facing the problems of this area at the present time. It is well worth seeing and understanding these problems.

On Saturday I went to Washington, D.C., and had the pleasure of introducing Mr. Tom Mboya of Kenya, who is traveling in this country, to an Americans for Democratic Action dinner audience.-- Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day, May 12, 1959



On both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, black leaders recognized the need for aid to African education. With the encouragement of American civil rights leaders such as A. Philip Randolph, the Kenyan Tom Mboya organized the African-American Students Foundation (AASF), which awarded Kenyan students scholarships for study in the United States. This photograph shows the Kenyan students arriving at Idlewild Airport in New York in September 1959 as participants in the first "African Airlift." *Courtesy Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Jackie Robinson Papers.*

http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/teaching/2008_12/sources/ar2.html

were seeking Kennedy support, this wrong assertion, as slight as it appears, was much remarked upon as something like Obama exaggerating a thin resume. In 2008, Republicans also tried to capitalize on this, still another "nativity lie". But in 1959 and 1960 it was variously referred to as the "African Airlift", "Kennedy Airlift", the "Kennedy-Kenya Airlift" because the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation gave large grants to Mboya to get it going and to continue it for additional years.

KHRC tells Kiplagat to quit

Written By: Metabel Minya/Margaret Kalekye, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation
Posted: Fri, Feb 19, 2010

The Kenya Human Rights Commission has issued a 7 day ultimatum to the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission Chairman Bethuel Kiplagat to quit or face mass action.

KHRC claims that Kiplagat falls short of the qualifications of the chairman of the commission as stipulated in section 10 of the TJRC ACT.

Addressing the press at their offices on Friday, KHRC's Executive Director Prof Makau Mutua accused Kiplagat of involvement in historical land injustices saying that he had illegally acquired land in various parts of the country.

He further said the TJRC chair gave false information during investigations into the murder of Robert Ouko.

"TJRC Act provides that the prospective candidates should be persons of good character and integrity who have never been involved, implicated and linked to human rights violations of any kind" said Mutua.

It took some twelve years of on-and-off collaborative writing for the late Professor E. S. Atieno Odhiambo and me to complete our manuscript on the multiple investigations of the disappearance and murder of Robert Ouko, the distinguished Kenyan Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and to see it into its 2004 publication. On the night of February 12-13, 1990, Ouko disappeared from his farm in western Kenya. The discovery of his mutilated and smoldering corpse was officially announced on February 16, though there were observations of his corpse reported to police authorities in the days before. While the mysteries of his disappearance and death have never been solved, the horror of his death—another murdered leader in a growing list of assassination of prominent Kenyans—generated enormous protest and debate, along with multiple investigations. The failures to answer the questions about his assassination have led to the former Moi government's 1991 acceptance of multi-party elections and to the more recent establishment of an albeit already compromised Kenya truth commission, with denunciations of the chair by the Kenya Human Rights Commission and calls for his resignation by Desmond Tutu and other international dignitaries.

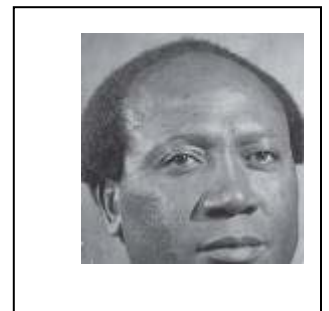
The question of question. Our project of writing--leading to *The Risks of Knowledge*--had several problematic aspects. For more than a decade, many Kenyans—as well as others—who ventured to produce an account of Ouko's death came to be entered

onto growing lists of persons who had mysteriously disappeared or died in the aftermath of asserting claims to knowledge of Ouko's demise. For us, we could not claim any first or second hand knowledge of the crime, nor were we in any way expert in criminal forensics, yet our claims to essential ignorance could be easily misunderstood.

Moreover, even where we had developed what we thought to be an effective control of our prime question--how did the investigations of Ouko's death work?—those who read our drafts wanted to know, above all, who was responsible for Ouko's death, as well as how did he die? “*Who killed Bob?*”

As writers, we were drawn to the ways in which narratives of Ouko's end were constructed. As well, we were interested in how the narratives circulated, narratives that began to circulate from almost the first day that his body was “officially discovered”; and we were interested in how these narratives were interpreted and refigured in light of new “findings” in the months and years after his death. One of these narratives attended to the possibility that important figures in the Kenyan government did not want Robert Ouko to pursue an off-the-books investigation of corruption in the field of *development* in the country.

By 1997, we were exploring the possibilities of drawing into a common text the thick public biography of Ouko's life and death and a biography of development, in Kenya and more broadly. It was not only that through much of his three decades of public service Ouko was a highly respected Kenyan leader in the arena of development planning and practice and it was not only that the idea of development, even in its shifting meanings and employments, found such residence in this same period. It was also that in the last months of his life, indeed in the last hours, Ouko was seen by people close to him to be absorbed in some elaborate critical accounting of failed and corrupted Kenyan development projects. Some would say that he was attempting to develop an authoritative report on kleptocracy at the highest reaches of Kenya's national government while drawing specific attention to the path to failure of his efforts to revive a huge molasses refinery that held the promise of being a major import-substitution industry. This was simultaneously known as “Ouko's pet project” and as Kenya's “white elephant.” Some would interpret his last conversations with friends and family as implying a hazardous pursuit of details of the financial and political corruption blocking the molasses project. . . conversations anticipating his own death. Ouko's sister reported that among his last words to her were, “These are the things that are killing me.”



Molasses. Indeed, we determined to name this double-biography—of Ouko and of development—“A Sticky Thing Called Development.” The challenge for us was to locate Ouko amidst the sometimes dangerous and almost always heady contentions regarding the idea and practice of development. The difficulty here for us as interpreters was that Ouko was close to many experts and authorities who swarmed around this thing called development, yet his own position always seemed to be so carefully considered and independent of the orthodoxies of the day. . . while time and again he found himself in an imperiled position, his career and future on the line, he always seemed just able—at least until February 12-13, 1990—to avoid elimination.²⁰

²⁰ I use this word “elimination” very deliberately. As noted earlier, Robert Ouko's most memorable address to the Kenya Parliament was his “Siasa Ya Kumalizana” (“politics of

Elimination. In our 1997 draft we drew attention to several of these dangerous episodes, one of the earliest being the robust debate that unfolded in Kenya in 1965 around the relative priorities of state and private entities in Kenya's first five year development plan. On April 27, 1965 the government presented to Parliament a "sessional paper"—widely recognized as essentially authored by Tom Mboya, Kenya's first Minister of Economic Planning and Development—under the title "African Socialism and Its Application to Planning in Kenya."²¹ This paper attempted to devise and close²² an argument for a substantially expanded private sector that would underwrite greater opportunities for African private accumulation and more rapid Africanization of the economy. The triple "trick" of Mboya's paper was to lay out a program for privatization within a language of mixed economy; to take a Western course under the guise of non-alignment; and to constitute Kenya's turn to the private as Kenya's logical and authentic version of African Socialism. . .not to say, to close down debates among politicians and intellectuals regarding these choices.²³ Moreover, he was

elimination") presentation, June 18, 1983, in which—amidst the debate attending to the so-called Njonjo plot against Moi's government--he warned, "We want to tell them today, and we will tell them again tomorrow that this politics of destruction is so dangerous that it may end up consuming its own promoters."

²¹ In several comments in public Mboya attempted to qualify or resist the reference that he was "author" of "Sessional Paper No. Ten", rather that it was a government effort or the result of the collective work of specialists of his Ministry. Some critics would assert that it was essentially authored by one or another of the American advisors working within the Ministry. A web-site, which provides a digital version of Obama's piece—presumably an accurate copy—cites Mwai Kibaki, not Mboya, as author of the Sessional Paper [<http://kwani.org/main/problems-facing-our-socialism-barak-h-obama/>]. But, when an extensive collection of Mboya's writings and speeches was published a few months after his assassination, the "Sessional Paper" was included as Mboya's without qualification. Tom Mboya, *The Challenge of Nationhood: A Collection of Speeches and Writings* (London: Heineman, 1969), 73-103. In an introduction, Mboya refers to Sessional Paper Number Ten as a "philosophical" text. This preface note appears to confirm that Mboya was involved in the collation of his speeches and papers for publication in the months before his assassination. In his foreword to *Challenge*, the editor, presumably Professor Ogot, indicates this.

²² In a preface to the published Sessional Paper, President Jomo Kenyatta offered: "The Government has produced this Sessional Paper which discusses in detail both the theory of Democratic African Socialism and its practical application to planning in Kenya. There has been much debate on this subject and the Government's aim is to show very clearly our politics and also explain our programme. This should bring to an end all the conflicting, theoretical and academic arguments that have been going on." "Statement by the President", introducing Sessional Paper 10, *African Socialism and Its Application to Planning in Kenya* (Nairobi: Government of Kenya, 1965).

²³ David Goldsworthy, who has studied Mboya's career as closely as anyone, briefly described the Sessional Paper Number Ten as "[R]eflecting Mboyaist ideas of long standing[:] it advocated growth first and distribution later; foreign investment to boost growth; a limited ambit for state intervention and nationalization; and incentives for enterprise. There was a general stress on

seeking to capture Kenya's left, while isolating his rival Odinga, long leader of Kenya's more left parties and coalitions in and out of Parliament. In this, and in more than this, Tom Mboya was exercising his adherence to his President, Kenyatta, who in these first months of 1965 was moving firmly away from the collectivist radicals associated with Kenya's nationalist struggle. And there is more. Mboya seemed to be hanging on to a President who within these weeks was being moved toward a political capture by the Kikuyu cabal, who were constructing their chief rivals ["enemies" might be a more appropriate expression] as Odinga, Kenya's first Vice President, and his Luo comrades, of whom Mboya might have been one only (but significantly) by ethnic identification. It must be said, however, that others, especially those impressed by Mboya's unique political qualities, would assume the position that Kenyatta was part of Mboya's agenda, not the other way around. Either way, and both were in play as perceptions, this was the difficult moment of Ouko, if not also Obama as he drafted his response to the Sessional Paper, in which the previously set lines of Kenyan politics, and Kenya's development profile, were all being refigured.

But it is important to say that these were also difficult times for Odinga and Mboya. In early 1965, the governing party, KANU, while having an ostensible monopoly of control of Kenya's national political landscape, was coming apart, with Mboya sometimes appearing helpless at the helm. Most particularly, the old KADU coalition that had embraced ideas of "federalism" and fought the idea of a strong centralized state, was resurfacing as the "Corner Bar" group within a very few months after abandoning its cause and dissolving itself into KANU, November 10, 1964. The figures in the Corner Bar had earlier been a thorn in the side of Kenyatta, Mboya, and Odinga who all were advocates of a strong, centralized state in the negotiations toward independence. In its reemergence in 1965, the Corner Bar chose a different tack: to press forward with the cause of anti-communism, which in some ways re-established their credit as "moderates" with the remnants of the old colonial-settler caucus at home and overseas, while also setting themselves into a broader coalition of anti-Odinga interests in Kenya around an issue that the Americans emphatically and the British implicitly were exercising in those first months of 1965. They had, in a sense, traded in old stale crust issues (known familiarly and critically as "majimboism") for the fresh baked agenda of "anti-communism," one that seemed a lively and workable cause in the first months of 1965. The lineage of the Corner Bar, with Moi its sober voice, had its ascendance not in this 1965 time of anti-communist denunciatory politics but rather in 1978 when they could celebrate their man Moi's ascendance to the presidency in the wake of Kenyatta's death.

Some views hold that across the first months of 1965 Kenyatta and his circle drew Mboya away from the ideas associated with his social democratic friends in Europe and

'mutual social responsibility'. As for the distribution of the fruits of growth, it would be equitable but not equal (since differentials provided important incentives). It was declared that such policies represented neither communism nor capitalism, but an African blend which drew also on indigenous traditions. . ." *Tom Mboya: The Man Kenya Wanted to Forget* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 235.

labor union friends in the US, with their Kenyan extensions, and toward a close embrace of free market ideas of the American agencies and their agents, among them well placed contract experts from Cornell University and Rice University within Mboya's Ministry of Economic Planning and Development. While Mboya could have been exercising multiple impulses to weaken his rival Vice President Oginga Odinga, including trying to find a mediate position in the privatization debates circling through the Cabinet and Parliament, the Kikuyu group around Kenyatta had the twin co-resonant goals of eliminating Odinga and securing the principle of privatization of land. All of the critics of Mboya could sound uneasy about Mboya's close ties to trade unions and foundations in the West, some to be exposed as CIA fronts, feeding money into his political work not unlike what Odinga's critics were constantly on to about his being a puppet of the East.

After Mboya's death, various government colleagues and commentators observed that in his writings and speeches in the last year or so before his murder Mboya had taken up the social democratic line anew, providing us a way to see Mboya's views in motion, rather than stuck in one place, in those weeks of April 1965 as the Sessional Paper was being drafted.²⁴ While quite apart from the Obama critique, and the critiques of other writers of the day, the Mboya document could be read, and has been read, as a middle-of-the-road approach, it would be misleading to read the Sessional Paper as simply muddling through. The Paper is a brilliant piece in which Mboya attempted and in large part succeeded in mediating all the complicated situations in which he was at the time located. There was enough in the document to permit its advocates to believe that the Sessional Paper would advance Africanization while and through building a strong managerial state capable of addressing various issues including poverty, landlessness, and unemployment (pieces of the social democratic agenda), yet it also spoke to the anxieties associated with nationalization of private companies held by Europeans and Asians. The paper can also be read as a thinly veiled effort to secure at last the privileged position of an irreversible market in private land (and the end of any case for any sort of collectivization). Further, it seemed written to assure a stepped up interest of foreign donors in making Kenya a showcase for "African capitalism". . .while almost via prestidigitation providing a homespun garment of self-help and self-reliance woven through the idea of "Harambee".

And, there seems to have been a conscious attempt in the document to recruit partisans of the left into support for it—certainly Mboya found ways to use a great number of key words of the discourses of the left of the day. Odinga's reading of the document, in ways rehearsed by Obama, was stridently negative, one might note points where Obama's reading is drawn into the terms of Mboya's exposition.

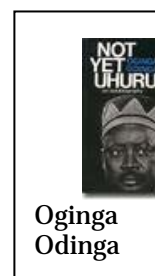
²⁴ In his most valuable treatment of Mboya's career, David Goldsworthy reflects on some of the possible directions that Mboya was taking as his life was cut short. He cites two astute political analysts—Colin Legum and John Hatch—who envisioned Mboya moving away from the positions he took up in the mid-1960s toward, or back toward, a more "democratic socialist" or "radical socialist" position. *Tom Mboya: The Man Kenya Wanted to Forget* (London: Heineman, 1982), 261.

Certainly, Odinga, and more delicately Obama, saw the document as the keystone of the West's anti-communist drive against what was sometimes known at the KANU Parliamentary Group, Odinga's wing of the party. The document was the trigger that would sorely test Odinga's identification with KANU and his role as Vice President. If this were Shakespeare, the Sessional Paper was the dagger in Odinga's back. By March 1966, Odinga resigned from the government and, with his followers, founded the Kenya Peoples Union, an avowedly left-wing outfit the traces of which would during Odinga's lifetime *never* achieve sufficient traction to influence the overall results of Kenya's elections.

And there, was, in early 1965, more. On February 24, Pio Pinto, a close ally of Odinga and director of the Lumumba Institute was gunned down by an assassin just hours after Pinto was reported told by the Kenyatta circle that if he did not leave the country within hours he would be killed. In the aftermath, beyond immediate shock and dismay in Kenya (this was a first assassination of a major figure in *post*-independence Kenya), Pinto was fingered by the anti-communist critics as a pawn of the Chinese or the Soviets, or both, or even as a victim of one or the other. The sparse evidence of such seemed strong enough for many, that the Lumumba Institute in Nairobi, set up to do grass-roots training, had two Russian language lecturers on loan from the Soviet Union.

The anti-communist fervor was gaining ground. In his autobiography, *Not Yet Uhuru* 295-96), Odinga relates that he issued to the press a statement on March 16, 1965, under the title "Western European Countries Take Heed," in which he decried a press report of "a statement by the Secretariat of the Western European Union that a detailed survey of 'Communist' activities had been carried out and that the Western powers should make preparations to 'fight Communism on African soil'." According to a reporter for *The Deseret News*, April 30, 1965, who was presenting a two-part series of ranging feature articles on Kenya in the first year of independence, this was a press conference—which the reporter attended and heard Odinga say that "I am here to warn the Western European countries against their investigation of Communist activities in Africa. . . We shall consider hostile any country which declares to the world that it is determined to fight in a country not involved in the ideological differences."²⁵

And, there was still more. By mid-April 1965, stories were circulating that Soviet weapons, including tanks and armored personnel carriers were arriving in Kenya along with Soviet technicians,²⁶ moreover that their acquisition was negotiated by Vice President Odinga directly and



²⁵ Reported in *The Deseret News*, April 30, 1965. There may be some confusion here whether this was in March or April, though I suspect the Salt Lake City writer was not producing a "real-time" accounting of events in Kenya. Another thing: is this the same report that Morton, in *Moi* (87) associates with "British intelligence chiefs" (see footnote below)?

²⁶ This drama was repeated a month later, when a Soviet shipment of arms to Uganda was redirected through western Kenya as a consequence of bad roads through northwest Tanzania, and again Odinga was accused of hatching a conspiracy against Kenyatta.

would be used in a coup effort to topple Kenyatta. Even though it was Kenyatta who wanted the armored personnel carriers, and even though Kenyatta was directly involved in negotiations with the Soviet Ambassador over the issue of how many and for how long the technicians would be in the country, all this fell onto the head of Odinga who seemed unable to extract himself from an identification with the Soviets. As Mboya was introducing the Sessional Paper into Parliament, Kenyatta was trying to remake the deal with the Soviets. Finally, on the 29th April, Kenyatta cancelled the deal, a cancellation publicly rationalized by saying that the so-called gift offered nothing but antiquated end-of-WW II Soviet armor. There is an indication that throughout these weeks, the Americans were at Kenyatta's door attempting to undo the deal, and perhaps Odinga and his crowd at the same time. Andrew Morton, in his biography of Daniel arap Moi, a long-time adversary of Odinga, has related that information surfaced in the 1990s that "British security chiefs were so concerned [in April 1965] that supporters of Oginga Odinga might try to stage a takeover that they alerted President Kenyatta."²⁷

The last days of April were the vortex of the storm.

As it was being announced that Kenyatta was rejecting the Soviet weapons, some fifty students at the Lumumba Institute on April 29 released a document attacking the Mboya Sessional Paper just presented to Parliament. Within hours, April 30, Parliament passed a motion directing the government to take over the Institute, effectively dissolving it. On May 4, there was a lengthy "debate" of the Sessional Paper, which was subsequently approved unanimously, albeit the robust criticism in Parliament with speeches offered up by some from Odinga's Parliamentary Group.

Our brief remarks, but a few lines, including the sentence fragment that heads this paper, stood as our portrait of one of Robert Ouko's first delicate episodes that found its way into our text in 1997. The 1997 brief was carried without change into the 2004 publication.

* * *

There was in 1997, or 2004, nothing especially remarkable or quoteworthy in this sentence nor in the ones that surrounded it, which attempted an encapsulation of one of the debates that Ouko could not avoid. . . yet, amidst all the turmoils of conflict, Ouko seemed more than able to sustain his own discretion. That was our sense of Ouko in the early years of his government service and that was our point.

However, there was an unexpected American stage for this sentence fragment.²⁸ April 2008. Right wing bloggers in the United States began to draw attention to our

²⁷ *Moi: The Making of an African Statesman* (London: Michael O'Mara, 1998), 87.

²⁸ Of course, there was the earlier American moment, the 1990 Prayer Breakfast in Washington D.C., where Ouko was noted to be in difficult and dangerous relationships with his President, Moi, and with some of his cabinet colleagues. It would be Ouko's last overseas trip. This presidential trip to the United States capital went ahead as an "unofficial" visit after the

association of one Kenyan expert “Barrack Obama”²⁹ with a radical and, by implication, a more socialist agenda reflected in the critique of Sessional Paper No. 10.

* * *

“A bit of research at the library reveals the answers about Barack Obama's father and his father's convictions which Obama withholds from his readers. A first hint comes from authors E. S. Atieno Odhiambo and David William Cohen in their book *The Risks of Knowledge* (Ohio U. Press, 2004). On page 182 of their book they describe how Barack Obama's father, a Harvard trained economist, attacked the economic proposals of pro-Western 'third way' leader Tom Mboya from the socialist left, siding with communist-allied leader Oginga Odinga [father of current Luo leader Raila Odinga, who recently claimed to be Sen. Obama's cousin], in a paper Barack Obama's father for the for the *East Africa Journal*. As Odhiambo and Cohen write:

"The debates [over economic policy] pitted .. Mboya against .. Oginga Odinga and radical economists Dharam Ghai and **Barrack Obama**, who critiqued the document for being neither African nor socialist enough." ³⁰

* * *

Kenyans were told that their “official” visit was not desired. In the aftermath of Ouko’s death, The Washington trip became part of some of the narratives of Ouko’s demise.

²⁹ There is a small but not necessarily unimportant question of nomenclature here. In our book, we spelled the elder Obama’s name “Barrack”, which was an unfortunate and failed effort to correct the spelling of his name where Obama was set out as author of an article published in the July 1965 *East Africa Journal*: “Barak H. Obama”. There was another Barrack (or Barack) who figured prominently in our *Risks of Knowledge* text, and this was “Barack (Barrack) Mbajah,” Robert Ouko’s brother, who presented himself as a well informed witness to the Minister’s political demise. Mbajah’s name was variously spelled, by himself and others—Atieno and I made an erroneous editorial decision to standardize the spelling of the names of both these individuals, Obama and Mbajah, as “Barrack”. It should be noted that my only source of a legal nature giving a spelling of the senior Obama’s name is the Hawaiian birth certificate of the younger Obama. The Hawaii document (see Appendix II), giving the father’s name as “Barack Hussein Obama” (and the new-born son as “Barack Hussein Obama II”—not Jr.), only surfaced in the recent and on-going brouhaha about the President’s country of birth. If there is an alibi for this error of spelling, it might be in that our book had gone to press before this editor had made the association of the Obama in our sentence with the Obama in the American eye.

³⁰ <http://isteve.blogspot.com/2008/04/barack-obama-srs-socialist-advocacy.html> (April 8, 2008). The blog author Steve Sailer attributes this section of his blog to Greg Ransom, whose PrestoPundit site link to this text is broken as of February 2010. Another blog republishes the Ransom piece and dates its publication to April 7, 2008 (http://larryh.newsvine.com/_news/2008/04/17/1437371-presto-pundit-barack-obama-hid-his-fathers-socialist-and-anti-western-convictions-from-his-readers-by-greg-ransom-april-7-2008).

This Obama was of course Obama the Senior who had a few years earlier returned to Kenya from Hawaii and Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he had pursued economics training at the University of Hawaii and Harvard. The somewhat truncated sentence, with citation to Atieno and myself as authors of *The Risks of Knowledge* was passed from conservative and right-wing blogs to additional reactionary blogs throughout the US presidential election, beginning on the eve of Obama emerging as the presumptive nominee of the Democratic Party.

Denunciation. The blog references continue today as components of denunciations of Obama's legislative programs, sometimes in close accompaniment with other "proofs" of Barack Hussein Obama being born in Kenya, being a Muslim, being a socialist. The condemnation of Obama, this time of Junior, as a socialist or communist, by reference to the father's critique of Mboya's liberal economic program, is typically accompanied by reference to our identification of Oginga Odinga as a "socialist," with parallel intimation of Prime Minister Raila Odinga's leftist persuasion via his father's influence. . .and these associations have been amplified since January 20, 2009, by insinuation that the two Luo sons, now leaders of Kenya and the United States, are in each other's pockets.³¹ Occasionally, in some of these blogs the condemnation finds closure in identifying the Obama program for Kenya in the 1965 text and in its parallel universe in the Obama program of the United States in 2009-10 as "Mugabe-ist".

Mortified. At the outset, for me beginning April 7 or 8, 2008, I was astonished to receive notice of these blogging references to our book from so many sources, from the publisher of *Risks* to the "GOOGLE Alerts" to references to and citations of our book that funneled into my e-mail inbox, sometimes several times a day. The hundreds of references and quotes draw on but one or two "original" blogged texts—most clearly the Greg Ransom text cited above--that purport to be careful investigations of the Kenyan socialist backgrounds of the Obamas. As far as I can recall, none of these bloggers has asked me for further detail or clarification or verification. . .the theory of practice here seems to be that less is more, that this almost caption-like denotation of the father Obama in Kenya in 1965 is sufficient to carry an elaborate critique of the politics of the son.

Theoretically, there is nothing that can stop the government from taxing 100 per cent of income so long as the people get benefits from the government commensurate with their income which is taxed. Assuming that development and the achievement of a high per capita income is a benefit to society as a whole I do not see why the government cannot tax those who have more and siphon some of these revenues into savings which can be utilized in investment for future development, thereby reducing our reliance on foreign aid.

[Obama, *East Africa Journal*, July 1965]

³¹ See Appendix I for an example of one of these blog texts.

I have found one critical reading of the right-wing blog in circulation on the web, with its origins within a few days of the appearance of the attack on Obama Senior. This other assessment is a nice little piece of “reading” of the 1965 Obama essay by Ben Smith and Jeffrey Ressler writing in the web-zine *Politico*.³² The intense back-draft from this positive reading of Obama seems a story for another day but a key source for Smith and Ressler’s reading, a scholar of Africa, Raymond Omwami, was denounced for not being affiliated with the universities with which he was identified. A seemingly supportive response drew on Ezekiel that the sins of the father should not be visited upon the son. Whatever the fate of the Smith and Ressler text, I do share its assessment that the Obama Sr. paper was prescient and worth another look.

* * *

What to do with all this stuff? First of all, I have seen no purpose or value in engaging these circulating blogs in debate. . . it seems unlikely that some counter-blog from me would reach the audiences of the Obama detractors.³³ But I have gone back and attempted to reconstruct our path into that sentence—into that “Biography of Development” that attempted to situate Ouko--a sentence which seems of such authorizing value to the detractors of Obama candidate and president. In the first order of things, there is the inclusion of the Obama reference. The piece we had was that 1965 critique of Mboya’s sessional paper authored by the senior Obama³⁴ and published in the July 1965 number of the *East African Journal*. . . authored and submitted by “Barak H. Obama” irrespective the assertion and admonition by President Kenyatta that “This [Mboya’s Sessional Paper] should bring to an end all the conflicting, theoretical and academic arguments that have been going on.”

But, not alone. Obama Sr’s critique was but one of the many essays circulating in mid-1965 around the Kenya government’s effort to devise a coherent and credible program of development that could carry forward signatures of African socialism, anti-colonialism, Africanization, and non-alignment, while securing a place for foreign capital investment and Kenyan African accumulation in a strengthened private sector. Among Kenyans, we could have drawn other names into that sentence, including Ahmed Mohiddin and future president Mwai Kibaki, who himself, like Dharam Ghai and Obama, had been providing expert service to Mboya’s ministry at the time Sessional Paper No. 10 was being drafted. Indeed, when we took up Obama’s name in our 1997-98 draft, the name had no meaning to me whatsoever, though in the early 1980s I had

³² *Politico*, April 15, 2008, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0408/9610.html> See Appendix III below.

³³ May I acknowledge the force of the admonitions of my father, who was almost always caustic and almost always in a fight with someone. He instructed me never to take on a debate, or fight, “with someone in the gutter.” As I can’t let go of the memory of his taking me to the Mboya event in May 1959, I cannot easily let go of this lesson.

³⁴ Only recently did I appreciate that he was about 29 years old when he drafted this essay.

done some research in the neighborhood of his natal village (Nyang'oma Kogelo, Siaya) and I expect that I was only a few months off from being in Siaya at the time of his burial there in October 1982. There was no special reason to include the references to Obama and Dharam Ghai in locating Robert Ouko within the heady development debates in the first years of Kenya's independence. They were only two of those Kenyans, as well as others, publishing interesting interventions. It was really only after our book was in print that I took regard of the possible relationship between the 1965 Obama we had noted, without bibliographical citation, and the local Chicago activist, law lecturer, and up-and-coming Illinois politician who was his son. If anything, we were well aware of the *East Africa Journal*, the venue of Obama's critique, as a most lively site of contemporary debate (that is, in the 1960s) among intellectuals, artists, writers, scholars, and politicians. At least, that was my view in the 1960s as my own research intentions developed alongside the unfolding of the *Journal*.³⁵

The Sessional Paper—the target of Obama's critique—reflected Mboya's allegiance to a broader international sense of a path to Africa's future. It also reflected a broadly shared sense of the irreversible circumstances of Kenya's economic order.³⁶

This order comprised large-scale farming emerging from the colonial settler regime, private industries growing out of the market-oriented entrepreneurial elements of the community, and the claims of the first generation of an embryonic African middle class seeking immediate benefits of independence and africanization, including public employment in a managerial state and access to acquire private titles in farm-land held for decades by Europeans.

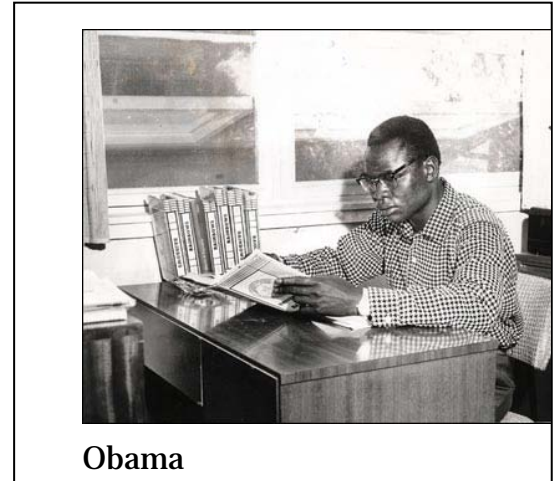
“. . .commits the government against a revolutionary break with the past in its attempt to transform society. The general policy, rather, is to build upon and modify the inherited economic and social systems.” -
-Ghai, 1965

* * *

³⁵ The *East Africa Journal* ran from 1964 through 1973, an organ of the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs, Nairobi. For many of those years published monthly, the *Journal* was edited by Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot, who has provided a valuable and brief account of the high and low points, its founding and demise, of the *Journal*. See Ogot, *My Footsteps on the Sands of Time*, 201-26, 233-37. When I recently had to clean out my office at the University of Michigan, I found several numbers of *EAJ* on some shelves bearing the weight of a number of miscellaneous journals. But I did not have a copy of the July 1965 issue.

³⁶ Dharam Ghai, “African Socialism for Kenyans,” *East Africa Journal*, June 1965,15.

Obama's text was clearly his own but one senses as well that it tapped into intense arguments about the conflicted and contradictory moves of Kenya's leaders in their struggles to devise a program of development. Obama's critique was cautionary. He expressed concern with the displacement of common resources through privatization. He was worried about the effects of excessive dependence on foreign investment. He expressed concern for sufficient and equitable taxation that could provide the government resources to pursue its goals independent of foreign assistance. He saw the potentials for excessive disparities of wealth, which he saw already as a problem. He had an economist's concern for issues like "disguised unemployment" and underemployment. His comments on freedom to choose subjects to study abroad—as contrasted with rationalized government selection models implied in the Sessional Paper—suggest an allegiance to a free labor market, as does his criticism of the government's plans to return urban people to the land as farmers. He saw failures in achieving "growth" without "development", echoing contemporary debates among economists around the world.



"We should not only put all our efforts on growth, but cover a wider subjects (sic) which is development. We can have a high rate of growth economically and yet not develop both economically, politically and socially." (31)

He saw problems exploding via uneven regional development, and he did so in a familiar language of economic analysis of the day.

"...it is surprising that no general mention is made of the dual characteristic of our economy. How can we afford to ignore the pockets of this economy which are underdeveloped without some positive statement about their development? . . .How are these areas going to be monetized and bring development when we do not even have the infrastructure on which development depends unless the government takes a positive stand and does something to correct this lopsided way of development?" (32)

At some points in his essay (note that his *Journal* essay is less than eight pages, the Mboya document fifty-six pages) Obama did share concerns and ideas set out in the Sessional Paper but he seemed to have sensed that its authors were less than authentic in laying out its plans and concerns, as in the Paper's focus on solving urbanization problems by moving people onto the land and into farming. He agreed with Mboya on

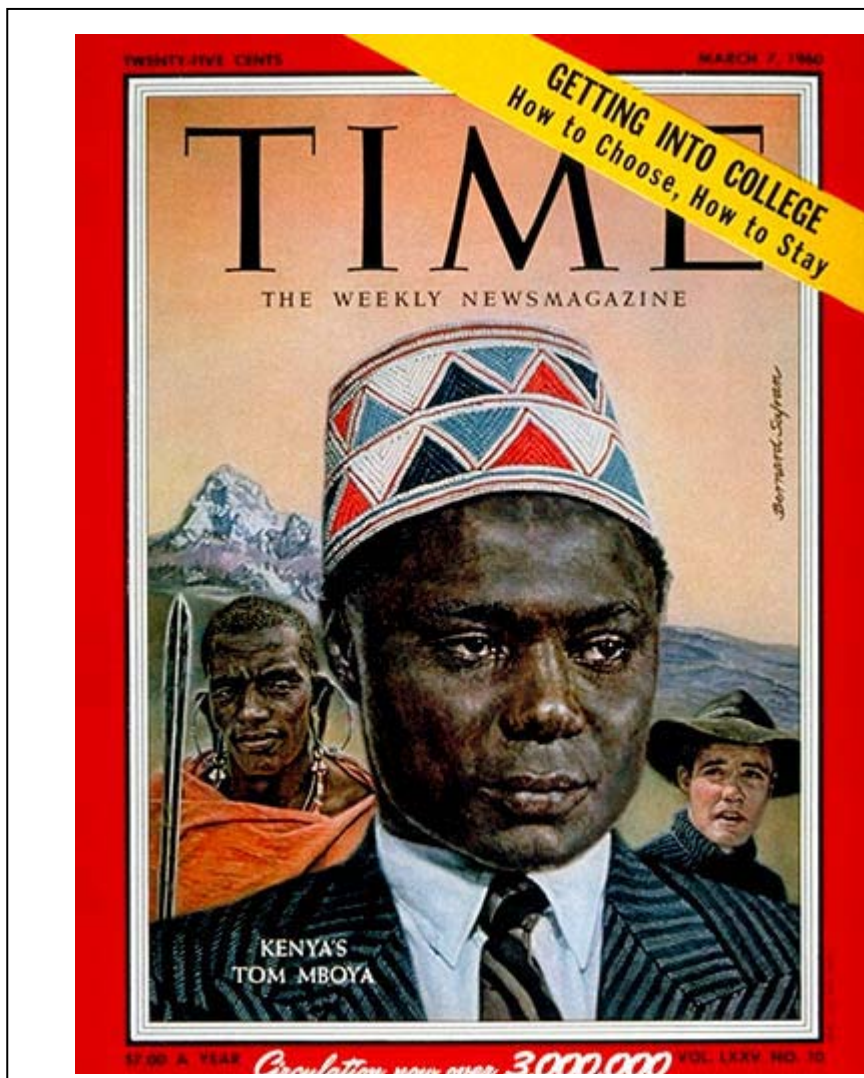
"The government says that people who come into the cities in search of jobs should return to the land and farm it. This would have been more sensible if they had a land worth farming. I wonder whether the government really means that a family can live on an acre of undeveloped land. . .it is because these lands are poor and it is because their marginal productivity is zero." (32)

the program of realizing a strong African state capable of performing its responsibilities. Yet, here, differences are seen in Obama's evident call for a more progressive tax system and in his viewing the state as necessary in the regulation of the money supply, private markets, and foreign investment. By contrast, the Mboya document seems, as one reads over the shoulder of Obama, to be laying the ground for the state as a facilitator of relatively unregulated private and foreign investment. Obama shared with the Mboya document a disquiet with the scale and influence of Asian and European owned companies. While neither makes a case for expropriation, Obama calls for a more strident and definitive approach to active African participation in management and ownership.

* * *

As I study the Obama text over and over I can hear myself in a discussion with Atieno Odhiambo regarding another possible way of reading Obama's text as it was constituted in the difficult space between Odinga and Mboya. Atieno is telling me to "Go try it." The argument begins with a recognition that Odinga and Mboya were, in the 1960s, practicing quite different political crafts. Odinga drew clear lines of difference in constituting an oppositional politics, whereas Mboya tried to find a way of speaking, writing, maneuvering, that encompassed multiple possibilities in which the clear lines of distinguishing lead and oppositional positions were obscured. While Obama Senior, in his critique of Mboya's document, was undoubtedly articulating positions associated with Odinga, he appears to have been simultaneously following the craft of Mboya as he tried to construct a position of dissent and critique within a text that masked the hard edges of irresolvable distinctions. While his *East Africa Journal* article has been reckoned a self-destructive act that destroyed Obama Sr.'s ties with Mboya and the Kenyatta circle, the article can be read as attempting in a pragmatic style to construct an intermediate point of resolution between the antagonist positions of Odinga and Mboya. In a sense, this argument goes, Obama Sr. sought to remake the political craft of Odinga by borrowing from Mboya's political style, while restaging some of the positions familiarly associated with Odinga's leftwards agenda. To reach back into the earlier writings on the Luo, Obama Sr. was, like Mboya, working through the mediating routines of the Jok'Owiny, attempting to gain leverage in an unfolding community of settlement and agreement where to achieve a new and workable community you surrendered some of the essential fabric of your given positional identity.

* * *



Where Obama found his own voice was in his critical engagement with the contemporary theatrics of “African socialism”. Indeed, Obama’s essay of critique began with, and a good third of it extended, a discussion of the disconnect between the powerful employment of the concept of “African Socialism” in the statements and programs of African leaders and an evident lack of coherence and agreement in their references to it. He observed that, indeed, “the actions of these leaders while diverting a little from the capitalistic system have not by any means been directed towards any particularly defined ideology be it scientific socialism—inter alia—communism.” (26) With a sense of the practical, Obama worried about the intersections of an overarching ideological model of African, or Kenyan, socialism, and the “practicability” of plans and planning. He termed this question “the applicability of planning within the embryo of African Socialism” (27).

In offering a critique of the Sessional Paper’s effort to seat Kenya’s development future within—and here deploying that exquisite phrase “the embryo of African Socialism”—Obama was clearly expressing a restless distrust of broad ideology. His 1965 critique was not a call for state organized socialism nor was it, as the anti-Obama bloggers announce, a “cutting attack from the left on Tom Mboya’s historically important policy paper”.³⁷ Rather—and there is more here than the present parsing of difference in words: “critique” and “cutting attack”—Obama was rehearsing the difficulties of exercising development plans within the framework of poorly defined and weakly articulated models of what was “socialist” and what was “African”. He betrayed here an early anxiety about the application of big ideas of the day to the complexities of an African country, Kenya; and he worried about the attempts to deploy certain models based in notions of an unchanging Africa. Prominently, Obama engaged the argument of Africa being essentially classless (and thus the notion that socialism was somehow natural to Africa) by pointing not only to the unsettled ground for this idea of classlessness but also to the changes experienced in the colonial period in which class distinctions were arguably pronounced.

In the essay, Obama did not eschew applying the discriminator “socialistic” and in so doing came to provide grist for critics from the right thirty plus years hence. As Atieno and I stated in *Risks*, this was a critic from the left; only a closer and more dedicated reader of the text would begin to notice that Obama’s reading of the Sessional Paper is replete with worries about the left’s animation of an idea and a program seated in the idea of “African Socialism” and seemed to see no applicable value to some idea of an inborn African affinity with communalist ideology. It may be difficult for present-day readers and Obama detractors to recognize that there were in the 1960s critiques of African socialism “from the left”. I admit to uncertainty regarding what meaning we intended to impart when we left the point hanging out there that some of the critics of the Sessional Paper of the day, naming Ghai and Obama, “critiqued the document for being neither African nor socialist enough.” This was a quick and dirty tag that could

³⁷See exemplar blog text, Appendix I, below.

not stand in for the difficult and strategic arguments that these critics were offering. Surely, in 1997, we understood that the critics had more to say than this.

In the essay, Obama did reveal an affinity with arguments from the left warning of the emergence of serious class distinctions in Africa (or the Third World more generally) but he shifted the critique onto those responsible for the Sessional Paper who tried to evoke a similar concern with class.

One wonders whether the authors of the paper have not noticed that a discernible class structure has emerged in Africa and particularly in Kenya. (29)

Against this already-present (rather than projective) realism, Obama showed a readiness to explore the land question in African societies, arguing that one would have to engage the land issue with a far more detailed understanding of the ways in which land rights are exercised before conceding that the only future for land ownership is individualized registration and ownership as the Sessional Paper left the question. In 1965, one would have been hard-pressed to conjugate convincingly the land question in terms of left and right, or socialist or capitalist, models of individual and collective property, and Obama's essay surely reveals an unreadiness to leap toward individualized or collectivized models before looking more carefully at possible alternatives including what he saw as more cooperative ways (clan or otherwise) in which land was occupied and organized and farmed by most Kenyans outside the old European freehold domains. Here, to echo our remarks in 2004, Obama was certainly aware of the ways in which Tanzania's and Kenya's paths were immediately diverging, with the Kenyatta government moving at breakneck speed to enshrine privatization of land as a hallmark of Kenya's approach to Africanization in the post-colony, and doing this at the very moment that Tanzania was setting forward its *Ujamaa* path. Indeed, Obama suggested that consideration be given to the recognition of "clan co-operatives", an idea that he might have believed was different than what was emerging as the *Ujamaa* model in Tanzania. With a sense of reality and pragmatism, completely at odds with the first generation of idealistic Tanzania proponents of collective models, Obama added that

"One need not talk about state ownership of everything from a small garden to a big farm. One need only look at the problems now encountered in getting lands consolidated in some areas. Will this be through individual action, through co-operatives or through government ownership?"—Obama, 29

"If the government should, however, feel that individual ownership is the best policy to take in order to bring development, then it should restrict the size of farms that can be owned by one individual throughout the country and this should apply to everybody from the President to the ordinary man." (29)

Here was a critique of not just a Parliamentary paper but also of a process of aggrandizement of Kenyatta family private estates already underway. And here he echoed speeches and writings of Oginga Odinga who also was pushing back on privatization. At the same time, Obama may have thought he could tap into the idea

that his mentor Mboya would have seen the grotesqueness of the land estate rush of the senior KANU leadership.

Obama extended his anxieties about the utilities of a concept of African Socialism into a critique of the idea of African Socialism being a buttress against “foreign ideologies,” a prominent theme of the day when for many Africans the experience of empire was only a handful of years behind, while for others European domination still prevailed. . .and, significantly, neocolonialism was becoming a most important issue being attended to by African intellectuals and radical economists in a spate of widely read articles and books.

It says that it [African Socialism] abhors foreign ideology, but what foreign ideology is meant here? (27)

When Obama invoked this argument regarding foreign ideology, he was surely attentive to the powerful and deadly debates regarding Kenya’s relations with the great powers, recited above, that filled the calendar of April 1965. From hindsight one might suggest that Obama was authoring his piece at the very height of the Cold War in Kenya, roughly speaking between April 1, 1965 when the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc might have imagined that they had influence on a still potent yet challenged Kenyan Left and six weeks later when U.S. and British interests could reckon that they had bested their adversaries and placed Kenya securely within the Western orbit. An intense “Thirty Day Cold War” ended, yet he had written his piece directly into the wind of an intense draft of anti-communism emergent in Kenya in those months. It is curious that those in America who seized our sentence as authority for claims of the Obamas, father and son, being of socialist and communist leanings, or more, would occupy the same political position as the “Corner Bar” group in 1965 Kenya, attempting to revive a failed politics through the turn to a politics of destruction. It seems our present conflict is more than a 30 day war.

At this point, I cannot do the math well enough to advance a conclusion but my present take is that in April and May 1965, or when Obama’s *East Africa Journal* article hit the street a month or two later,³⁸ there was no way he (nor anyone else) could

³⁸It would be helpful to have a more precise handle on the time when Obama Sr. submitted his essay to the *East Africa Journal*. It might be that he was reading the Sessional Paper draft from the draft submitted to Parliament on 25 April 1965 and not the final print version released 5 May. Obama’s references are to the numbered paragraphs of the Sessional Paper; clearly, Obama had a text at hand which he worked through pretty much in the order presented. Had he had the final print version at his hand he might have referred to the page numbers, for the final print is clearly paginated with a most useful table of contents. Stylistically, the Obama essay has a drafty feel. It does not appear to have been labored over, editorially; indeed it reads as one of the roughest of pieces accepted by the *Journal* in 1965. I do not know about the editorial and printing procedures and schedules of the *East Africa Journal*, but I sense that in those days the *Journal* was put together quickly and published pretty much on time. See in a previous note that an Mboya speech given February 20, 1967, was published in the March issue of the *Journal*. My impression is that Obama drafted and submitted his essay in the most heated moment at

succeed in negotiating a safe and effective critique among the shifting orbits of these three enormous planets: Kenyatta, Odinga, and Mboya. Obama Sr. had no legions of Luo followers as Odinga had even as Kenya's Left were losing "the argument". Obama Sr. had no way of reversing the Kenyatta circles's privatization ethic which was already, in an important sense, beyond debate. And, in a way, Mboya's project, exemplified in the Sessional Paper, was too complex to critique, if even define, within the scope of a brief and contemporary essay. Futile, and dangerous to mediate those deadly differences. By contrast, when Robert Ouko faced such conflicted geometries he either stepped away or. . .that one time he did not. . .was carried off to his death. Yet, Obama, like Ouko, left his own warning, if anyone cared to listen.

I may have to leave it to others to assess what sort of person, what sort of mind and ego, would set out to do such navigation in the tremendously dangerous spaces emergent in Kenya of those months. Yet the paper, examined in our times, reads—as I have offered to David Remnick-- as "an improbable yet extraordinarily acute rehearsal of the best critiques of structural adjustments (and its privileging of the private section against the state) in the 1980s and 1990s and of the failures of unregulated capital in our present decade. In a time of spirited animation of big ideas in the first decade of African independence, Obama Sr. offered his readers a lesson in the promise of pragmatics in the address to the difficult challenges of economic and political development, nationally and globally." In turn, Obama Sr. may have experienced the lesson that the Cold War struggle imperiled critique and shrunk the space for productive debate.

which the contents of the Paper had just become known. On the first page of the Obama paper, the editor adds: "Another Critique of Sessional Paper No. 10." And, in "The Authors" section at the front of the *Journal*, the editor adds to the brief Obama bio. "His is one of the critiques picked among the many received in the Journal office of the Kenya's Sessional Paper No. 10, on African Socialism." This note implies a different temporicity of publishing of the 1965 essay compared with the 1967 Mboya speech. If Obama submitted the essay close to the time of the Sessional Paper's publication he might have not seen Kenyatta's warning. If this were the case, then the *Journal* editor may have taken his time choosing Obama's piece over the others, yet the essay's form suggests little editorial effort to clean Obama's prose. There is certainly more to know about these practical matters of publication, but I think we can be confident that the essay was at the *Journal* at the height of the Cold War in Kenya, which I take as a point to underscore. The *Journal* published other pieces on Sessional Paper Ten in later years, but these were different times in which the risky debates in Kenya were no longer situated in the immediacy of Cold War struggle, and were to become more the stuff of locatedness, even ethnicity, than political ideas and economic thought.

Appendix I

Blog Example

A bit of research at the library reveals the answers about Barack Obama's father and his father's convictions which Obama withholds from his readers. A first hint comes from authors E. S. Atieno Odhiambo and David William Cohen in their book *The Risks of Knowledge* (Ohio U. Press, 2004). On page 182 of their book they describe how Barack Obama's father, a Harvard trained economist, attacked the economic proposals of pro-Western "third way" leader Tom Mboya from the socialist left, siding with communist-allied leader **Oginga Odinga** [father of current Luo leader Raila Odinga, who recently **claimed** to be Sen. Obama's cousin], in a paper Barack Obama's father for the for the *East Africa Journal*. As Odhiambo and Cohen write:

"The debates [over economic policy] pitted .. Mboya against .. Oginga Odinga and radical economists Dharam Ghai and *Barrack Obama*, who critiqued the document for being neither African nor socialist enough."

Ransom dug up from the stacks at UCLA the 1965 paper "Problems Facing Our Socialism" by Barack H. Obama in the *East Africa Journal*.

... The paper is as describe by Odhiambo and Cohen, a cutting attack from the left on Tom Mboya's **historically important policy paper** "African Socialism and Its Applicability to Planning in Kenya." The author is given as "Barak H. Obama" and his paper is titled "Problems Facing Our Socialism," published July, 1965 in the *East African Journal*, pp. 26-33.

Obama stakes out the following positions in his attacks on the white paper produced by Mboya's Ministry of Economic Planning and Development:

1. Obama advocated the communal ownership of land and the forced confiscation of privately controlled land, as part of a forced "development plan", an important element of his attack on the government's advocacy of private ownership, land titles, and property registration. (p. 29)

2. Obama advocated the nationalization of "European" and "Asian" owned enterprises, including hotels, with the control of these operations handed over to the "indigenous" black population. (pp. 32 -33)

3. Obama advocated dramatically increasing taxation on "the rich" even up to the 100% level, ...

4. Obama contrasts the ill-defined and weak-tea notion of "African Socialism" negatively with the well-defined ideology of "scientific socialism", i.e. communism. Obama views "African Socialism" pioneers like **Nkrumah**, **Nyerere**, and **Toure** as having diverted only "a little" from the capitalist system. (p. 26)

5. Obama advocates an "active" rather than a "passive" program to achieve a classless society through the removal of economic disparities between black Africans and Asian and Europeans. (p. 28) "While we welcome the idea of a prevention [of class problems], we should try to cure what has slipped in .. we .. need to eliminate power structures that have been built through excessive accumulation so that not only a few individuals shall control a vast magnitude of resources as is the case now .. so long as we maintain free enterprise one cannot deny that some will accumulate more than others .." (pp. 29-30) ...

8. Obama strongly supports the governments assertion of a "non-aligned" status in the contest between Western nations and communist nations aligned with the Soviet Union and China. (p. 26)

[More]

In short, the Presidential frontrunner's father's policy views were similar to Robert Mugabe's.

In Obama's memoirs, he plays up his father's failure to achieve the brilliant career seemingly open to him in the mid-1960s as due to ethnic politics (he was a Luo, Kenyatta a Kikuyu), and, later, due to his father's drinking. But the Presidential candidate skips over the more politically relevant ideological clash between his father and Kenyatta. As **Mona Charen** noted, leftism is more assumed than articulated in Obama's slippery autobiography.

Although, Barack Obama Jr. spent only one of his life with his father, when he came to visit Hawaii when his son was a schoolboy at Punahou prep, the young man heard plenty about his father's brilliance and high ideals from his leftist mother, who remained a lifelong defender of her ex-husband, and leftist paternal grandfather.


Obviously, Obama is *not* going to impose his father's Mugabeist ideals on America. He's clearly evolved ideologically. Still, Ransom's important work raises the essential question: How far has he evolved? And has his heart kept up with head? The nominating process is practically over and we're only now beginning to understand just how far to the left Obama started out, and we really don't have a clue what the future trajectory of his personal ideology would look like.

Perhaps one of our thousands of political reporters should ask him?

<http://blog.vdare.com/archives/2008/04/08/barack-obama-srs-mugabeist-plan-for-kenya/>

Appendix II
A Birth Certificate

CERTIFICATION OF LIVE BIRTH

STATE OF HAWAII HONOLULU		DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH HAWAII U.S.A.
		CERTIFICATE NO. [REDACTED]
CHILD'S NAME BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA II		
DATE OF BIRTH August 4, 1961	HOUR OF BIRTH 7:24 PM	SEX MALE
CITY, TOWN OR LOCATION OF BIRTH HONOLULU	ISLAND OF BIRTH OAHU	COUNTY OF BIRTH HONOLULU
MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME STANLEY ANN DUNHAM		
MOTHER'S RACE CAUCASIAN		
FATHER'S NAME BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA		
FATHER'S RACE AFRICAN		
DATE FILED BY REGISTRAR August 8, 1961		

DHSM 1.1 (Rev. 11/01) LASER This copy serves as prima facie evidence of the fact of birth in any court proceeding. [HRS 338-13(b), 338-19]

ANY ALTERATIONS INVALIDATE THIS CERTIFICATE



Long-lost article by Obama's dad surfaces

By: [Ben Smith and Jeffrey Ressler](#)
April 15, 2008 04:43 AM EST

Barack Obama's dad was such an important but absent figure in his life that he devoted his first book, "Dreams From My Father," to the search for details about his father's life and how the quest helped forge a son's identity.

Now, a long-forgotten essay written 43 years ago by Obama's father has surfaced, and its contents reveal much — not only about the senior Obama's grasp of economic theory but also about the iconoclastic politics that, his son would later write, sent him into the spiral of career disappointment that concluded with his death in 1982 in his native Kenya.

Parts of the article, titled "[Problems Facing Our Socialism](#)," have been making the rounds on several small blogs over the past week, but Politico.com is now, for the first time, reproducing the entire piece in its original form.

The scholarly eight-page paper, credited to "Barak H. Obama," is never mentioned in "Dreams From My Father," nor has the candidate discussed it in any of his many public speeches. (Politico brought the article to his campaign's attention late last week, but aides did not respond to a request for comment from Obama.)

The paper's substance, though, offers insight into the mind and the political trajectory of a man described by his son largely through his emotional life, his family and his traditions.

Published in the esoteric East Africa Journal in 1965, the year after Kenyan President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta took power and the country declared independence from British rule, the paper takes a gently mocking tone to the Kenyatta government's key, controversial statement of economic policy, titled "African Socialism and Its Applicability to Planning in Kenya."

Obama senior's journal article repeatedly asks what the Kenyan government means by "African Socialism," as distinct from Soviet-style communism, and concludes that the new phrase doesn't mean much.

Elements of Obama's argument now seem prescient, others deeply dated, but his central aim — particularly in the context of the heady early days of African independence — was moderate and conciliatory.

"The question is how are we going to remove the disparities in our country, such as the concentration of economic power in Asian and European hands, while not destroying what has already been achieved and at the same time assimilating these groups to build one country," Obama senior wrote.

When he wrote the paper, he was in Nairobi and working on a never-completed Harvard doctoral dissertation, according to his brief biography in the journal.

Two years earlier, he had divorced his wife, who was raising his son in Hawaii.

But even back in Nairobi, the elder Obama felt free to mock the Kenyan government.

"Maybe it is better to have something perfunctorily done than none at all!" he concluded.

That's the attitude, his son would later find, that took him from a career in the Kenyan governing class to "a small job at the Water Department" and then to unemployment and alcohol.

Obama senior, who returned to Kenya after his Harvard years, soon became a public critic of Kenyatta's growing favoritism toward the Kikuyu tribe, over Obama's Luos.

"Word got back to Kenyatta that the Old Man was a troublemaker, and he was called in to see the president. According to the stories, Kenyatta said to the Old Man that because he could not keep his mouth shut, he would not work again until he had no shoes on his feet," Obama quoted his half-sister as telling him.

Obama wrote that his father was rehabilitated after Kenyatta's death in 1978 but was by then broken and embittered.

Obama senior's 1965 paper, however, brims with confidence and optimism.

The article, with a loaded term in the title and a casual discussion of socialism, communism and nationalization, has raised the hackles of some anti-Obama conservatives who have been discussing it online.

Greg Ransom, a blogger who unearthed the journal at the University of California, Los Angeles, library, calls the article "[the Rosebud](#)" that provides the missing key to Obama's memoir. Ransom wrote about the article's contents recently in a posting with the provocative headline "Obama Hid His Father's Socialist and Anti-Western Convictions From His Readers."

But Kenya expert Raymond Omwami, an economist and UCLA visiting professor from the University of Helsinki who has also worked at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, said Obama senior could not be considered a socialist himself based solely on the material in his bylined piece.

Omwami points out that the elder Obama's paper was primarily a harsh critique of the controversial 1965 government document known as Sessional Paper No. 10. Sessional Paper No. 10 rejected classic Karl Marx philosophies then embraced by the Soviet Union and some European countries, calling instead for a new type of socialism to be used specifically in Africa.

The government paper rejected materialism (i.e., "conspicuous consumerism"), outlined the nation's goals to eradicate poverty, illiteracy and disease, and also laid out important decrees regarding land use for economic development. Obama senior's response covers these issues, frequently focusing on the distribution of real estate to farmers. Since most Kenyans could not afford farmland in line with market forces established earlier by white British farmers, the elder Obama argued that strong development planning should better define common farming space to maximize productivity and should defer to tribal traditions instead of hastening individual land ownership.

In other words, Obama senior's paper was not a cry for acceptance of radical politics but was instead a critique of a government policy by Kenya's Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, which applied African socialism principles to the country's ongoing political upheaval.

"The critics of this article are making a big mistake," says Omwami, who at Politico's request read the document and the associated Internet debate over the weekend. "They are assuming Obama senior is the one who came up with this concept of African socialism, but that's totally wrong. Based on that, they're imbuing in him the idea that he himself is a socialist, but he is not."

Omwami says he would instead refer to the elder Obama as "a liberal person who believed in market forces but understood its limitations." Sessional Paper No. 10 centered on the new control of Kenya's resources, promoting a form of trickle-down economics in which financial aid would be consolidated in more populated

areas with the hope that positive effects would eventually be felt by smaller villages.

Obama senior argued against this notion, and Omwami suggests history has proven him correct since most, if not all, small communities in Kenya have yet to benefit from monies that poured into larger cities since the nation's independence four decades ago.

The elder Obama also looked ahead to what has become a shaping force across Africa — urbanization — arguing that the government's efforts to lure citizens back to the land were futile.

"If these people come out in search of work, it is because they cannot make a living out of whatever land they have had," he wrote.

In retrospect, it was one of several warnings in the paper that would prove true.

"If you understand the Kenyan context, you can clearly see in that paper that Obama senior was quite a sharp mind," Omwami concluded. "He addresses economic growth and other areas of development, and his critique is that policymakers in Kenya were overemphasizing economic growth.

"We had high economic growth for years but never solved the problems of poverty, unemployment and unequal income distribution. And those problems are still there."

Obama senior's projections and critiques are so spot on, says Omwami, that he plans to assign the paper to his classes in the future.