

The Risks of Knowledge

*Investigations into the Death of
the Hon. Minister John Robert Ouko
in Kenya, 1990*



David William Cohen and
E. S. Atieno Odhiambo

OHIO UNIVERSITY PRESS
ATHENS

EAST AFRICAN EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHERS LTD
NAIROBI

Contents

Prolegomenon: Robert Ouko, a Life and a Death	ix
Acknowledgments	xiii
<i>Introduction</i>	1
A Death Reported	1
Dead Bodies in Kenya	3
A New Habitus	7
The State	8
The Ouko Dossier	12
Indeterminacies	16
Economies of Knowledge	20
Social Histories	24
States of Loss	32
<i>Chapter 1</i> Investigating a Death in Kenya	33
Locks and Keys	39
Commissions	43
<i>Chapter 2</i> In a Nation of White Cars	46
Kenyans and Their Women	47
Kenyans and Their Man	48
White Cars, Gum Boots, and Multiparty Democracy	50
Hearing Selina Speak	53
The Headlining of Selina	67

<i>Chapter 3</i>	Robert Ouko's Pain	70
	A State of Mind in Kenya	72
	"These are the things that are killing me"	73
	Last Days	78
	Prayers for the Oukos	82
	Mandela's Release	88
<i>Chapter 4</i>	The Note	90
	An Inventory of Mbajah's Statements	92
	Troon and Mbajah	94
	A Marriage Game	95
	Mbahaj: Reader and Author	99
	Papers Seen and Unseen	107
	The Dramaturgy of Incarceration	115
<i>Chapter 5</i>	Readers of the Found Remains	117
	Remains of the Dead	118
	The Force of Difference	123
	The Temporal Work of a First Observation	125
	The Shifting Stage	130
<i>Chapter 6</i>	"Why, Mr. President?"	134
	"J'accuse!"	136
	Husband and Wife	137
	The Author Anguka	139
	Two Governmental Systems	140
	Indispensability and Dispensability	143
	A Terrifying Triangle	146
	The Presence of Anguka	149
<i>Chapter 7</i>	No Stone Unturned	158
<i>Chapter 8</i>	Ouko: A Biography of African Nationalism	172
	Triumphal Beginnings and False Starts	173
	Lions in Winter	177
	The Sticky Thing Called Development	181
	Molasses	183
	The Second International Sphere	188

<i>Chapter 9</i> Contradictions of Development	193
Revival	195
Roman Holidays	199
Molasses Narratives	204
Death by Molasses	211
“Cleaned his slate”	218
<i>Chapter 10</i> The Negotiation of a State of Mind	220
Dramaturgical Moments	222
A Sister’s Brief	225
Last Conversations	231
A Church in Kenya	234
The Possibility of Ouko	242
<i>Chapter 11</i> “A White Car” Becomes a Truth	246
Authentic Voices	250
Work of Truth, Truth of Work	254
<i>Conclusion</i> The Risks of Knowledge	258
Epistemologies	259
Producing Knowledge	261
The Pain of Others	267
The Excision of Ouko	270
Notes	273
Bibliography	317
Index	333