Mau Mau Remembered: How Narratives Transform and Reflect Power and Identity in Kenya

by

Teresa Paterson
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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. 3

Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 4
  The Roots of Mau Mau .............................................................................................................. 5
  The Evolution of Mau Mau Scholarship .................................................................................. 10
  Methodology and Sources ....................................................................................................... 16
  Overall Structure ...................................................................................................................... 19

Chapter 1: Mau Mau Politics: Competing Claims to Kenya’s “Nationalist” Movement ................................................................. 22
  A Kenyan and Kikuyu Movement ............................................................................................. 25
  The Either-Or Fallacy .............................................................................................................. 31
  The Election Violence of 2007 ............................................................................................... 33
  The Three Counter-narratives ................................................................................................. 40
    “We All Fought for Freedom” ................................................................................................ 40
    “Rational Negotiators” ........................................................................................................... 43
    “One of Many” ..................................................................................................................... 45
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 47

Chapter 2: Mau Mau and the Power of Victimhood ..................................................................... 50
  Settler Victims, A Mau Mau Menace ...................................................................................... 52
  Mau Mau Captives, British Sadists ........................................................................................ 57
  The White Authorial Voice ...................................................................................................... 61
  Those Left Behind ..................................................................................................................... 69

Chapter 3: Mau Mau’s Landscape: Placating, Educating and Healing
  Kenya Through Public Space ................................................................................................. 72
    Mau Mau Street Signs .......................................................................................................... 75
    The Statue of Dedan Kimathi ................................................................................................. 78
    Mau Mau and British Reconciliation .................................................................................. 82
    Nairobi National Museum ..................................................................................................... 87
    Lari Memorial Peace Museum ............................................................................................... 90
    Mau Mau Graves .................................................................................................................... 97

Chapter 4: Mau Mau in Popular Culture: Good Kenyans and White
  Entertainment ............................................................................................................................. 102
    The Loyalist Protectors ......................................................................................................... 104
    Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Synonymy with Mau Mau ................................................................. 108
    Mau Mau Revolutionaries .................................................................................................... 118
    Western Self-Reflection and Entertainment .......................................................................... 121
    Post-Independence Continuities of Western Appropriation ................................................ 128
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 130

Conclusion: ................................................................................................................................ 134

Works Cited ................................................................................................................................ 140
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Introduction

“We are determined to have independence in peace, and we shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya. We must have no hatred towards one another. Mau Mau was a disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again.”\(^1\) With these words Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, dismissed, criminalized, and eventually legally banned the very movement to which many Kenyans credit independence. Kenyatta himself was seen as the leader of Mau Mau, a belief that persists in Kenya to this day despite evidence to the contrary. How is it that a movement celebrated as a fight for freedom remained banned until 2003? Although Mau Mau veterans today are celebrated as heroes, the rebellion itself has remained at the center of debates both internationally and within Kenya.

The name itself, “Mau Mau,” has been a matter of debate. The British used the term to refer to the anti-colonial rebellion during the Emergency (1952-1960). The origins of the name are unknown, though many theories exist. In conversations I had with Kenyans during my research I was told that Mau Mau originated from a British misunderstanding of the Kikuyu call Uma Uma (Get out) which was shouted to warn fighters of the approach of British police forces.\(^2\) Another Kenyan informed me that it was an acronym of the saying, Mzungu aende ulaya Mwafrika apate uhuru, which means “let the white man return to Europe so the African can receive freedom.”\(^3\) Neither these, nor the other existing explanations of the name have been proven, lending the movement an air of mystery. The British used “Mau Mau” to

\(^2\) Interview by author with Martin Ngugi in Nairobi, July 18, 2016.
\(^3\) Interview by author with Mercy Adhiambo in Nairobi, June 22, 2015.
refer to the rebellion, despite its official name, translated as the Land and Freedom Army. Although the British used term pejoratively during the Emergency, Kenyans have since reclaimed “Mau Mau.” I refer to the movement as Mau Mau, as it is the most common way Kenyans refer to the rebellion today. As the Kenyan mythical patriotic origins of the name demonstrate, Mau Mau has come to represent something positive to Kenyans.

The Roots of Mau Mau

To understand the legacy of Mau Mau, it is important to understand its history, beginning with colonization in Kenya. Kenya’s path to independence was influenced by its identity as a settler colony. Unlike colonies with little to no settler population, settler colonies generally gained independence through violent struggle rather than through a peaceful negotiations process.\(^4\) Regardless of the imperial power, decolonization transpired similarly in settler colonies across African: Kenya, Algeria, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Angola all experienced years of fighting between the African populations and the colonial forces. The imperial powers had to grapple with what an independent future would look like for the small white minority. These settlers did not wish to lose their political and economic power to the African majority. This determination to maintain their authority made settlers were far less willing to make concessions that would lead to an egalitarian, multi-racial society.

Most of these British colonists settled in the center of Kenya, in what would become known as the White Highlands, where the soil was extremely fertile. This

monopoly on productive land allowed the settlers to increase their wealth in Kenya through the production of cash crops, like coffee, thereby establishing their economic influence on top of their existing political authority. As a result, many Kenyans were displaced and forced onto small land reserves, which contained lower quality land. By the 1940s, settlers, who made up less than a quarter of the Kenyan population, controlled almost one third of the most productive agricultural land, while Africans were overcrowded in the reserves on land that was overworked. Because British settlement was largely limited to Central Kenya, Kenyans living there experienced colonialism differently from others more removed from the administrative center in Nairobi, as they had less contact with settlers and the colonial bureaucracy.

The Kikuyu—Kenya’s largest ethnic group—were among those most affected by the influx of settlers, as much of their land was incorporated into the White Highlands. Many of those who chose not to go to the overcrowded reserves became squatters to cope with the new situation. Yet even these Kenyans, of which the Kikuyu were almost two thirds, were gradually required to leave the Highlands, New laws began targeting squatters, who were seen as threatening the settler community agricultural lands through their cattle. These squatters were expelled either back to the reserves or else to urban centers, like Nairobi, which were unprepared to welcome the vast numbers. These large migrations led to the growing establishment of slums. By 1952, “78.6 percent of the male population lived in

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5 Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: the past of the present* (Cape Town: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 23.
8 Throup, 52.
households which were either land poor or landless.”⁹ However, what made this landlessness a more serious problem for the Kikuyu was the population growth that occurred in the early 20th century. Restricted to the reserves, the Kikuyu could not compensate for the increasing population pressure.¹⁰

Not only were the Kikuyu especially affected by British settlement, but their loss of land held greater symbolic meaning as well. Land was, and continues to be, especially valued by the Kikuyu as a key part of their identity. As the Kikuyu expanded their territory prior to colonization, “they came to formulate significant customs and kinship obligations that regulated the occupation, ownership, and utilization of land.”¹¹ As a result of the increasing importance of land, “Being a Kikuyu meant having the right to own a share in Kikuyu land; status and position depended on the degree that one could assume such rights.”¹² Thus, being deprived of their right to own land not only hurt their ability to survive, but it also hurt their status within the Kikuyu community, which led to increasing divisions and tensions. These tensions, along with anger over the color bar and other consequences of colonialism, radicalized the Kikuyu community. More and more Kenyans felt that the peaceful, gradual path to independence supported by moderate African leaders, such as Jomo Kenyatta, was ineffective. Only a violent uprising would force the British to end their rule in Kenya.

As early as the 1940s, stories began circulating about a movement among the Kikuyu that would eventually be called Mau Mau. To gain support, members used

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¹¹ Ibid., 23.
¹² Kershaw, 7.
secret mass oathing ceremonies, which were rumored to include horrifying practices like bestiality and cannibalism. In one of the alleged oaths members had to promise to do whatever it took to expel the whites from Kenya, even kill them, ending the oath with “Mau this oath kill me.”†13 These rumors further sensationalized perceptions of Mau Mau as savage and the epitome of evil. One account claimed that oath takers had to eat an African brain, drink menstrual blood or eat a European brain, depending on the level of the oath.†14 Naturally, these details only served to intensify the fears of the settler community.

As tensions increased in the early 1950s, Mau Mau supporters began murdering white settlers and “loyal” Kenyans, who were perceived as collaborating or aiding British rule. Reports of these attacks were widely circulated and sensationalized, creating a precarious and explosive atmosphere. In response, settlers insisted on a systematic and brutal suppression of the uprising. On October 20, 1952, governor Evelyn Baring declared a State of Emergency. It was Britain, not Mau Mau, who escalated the violence by committing troops to seek out Mau Mau supporters. This all-out warfare forced the guerilla fighters into the forests for security. Mau Mau are thus frequently referred to as “forest fighters,” as an acknowledgment of their commitment to leave their homes and stable livelihoods for the uncertainty of the forest.

Although settlers were the primary targets of violence, the vast majority of casualties during the Emergency would be African. By the end of the fighting, only 32 Europeans had died, compared to the more than 1,800 Africans killed by Mau

†14 Ibid.
Mau—with hundreds more disappeared—and the more than 20,000 Mau Mau rebels killed in combat.\textsuperscript{15} Another 1,090 Kikuyu were tried and hanged for connections with the movement.\textsuperscript{16} Furthermore, as a way to minimize the spread of the rebellion and eliminate support, the British established a detention system for anyone accused of having Mau Mau sympathies. There, many Kenyans suffered inhumane treatment at the hands of the British. By the end of the Emergency, at least 150,000 Kikuyu had been detained at some point.\textsuperscript{17}

The British decision to use Kenyan soldiers against Mau Mau divided the community. The British created Home Guards units made up of Kenyans who aided the British military and police forces in their attacks against Mau Mau and their monitoring of villages. Thus, the Mau Mau rebellion has also been described as a civil war among the Kikuyu, as Mau Mau fighters fought against those who supported the British troops.\textsuperscript{18} The polarization within the Kikuyu community forced Kenyans to take sides, as Mau Mau fighters and Home Guards alike targeted anyone perceived to be a supporter of the enemy. Men, women and children were brutally killed by both sides, though only Mau Mau violence was widely reported by the settler and international press.

By the end of 1956, the systematic detention and policing of the Kikuyu communities had effectively defeated the rebellion, although some enclaves remained. Despite their successful military campaign, the British had lost its colony:

\textsuperscript{15} Anderson, 4.
\textsuperscript{16} For instance, it was a capital crime at this time for an African to possess a gun of any kind. Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{17} These figures are debated. Historian Caroline Elkins has argued that these figures should be much higher, between 160,000 and 320,000. I use Anderson here as Elkins’s methods for calculating these numbers has been widely criticized as inaccurate. Ibid., 5; Caroline Elkins, \textit{Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya}, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), xiii.
the fighting had cost Britain around 60 million pounds and its moral high ground. The few, limited reports of British atrocities against Kenyans that came to light weakened their paternalistic arguments legitimizing colonialism. Thus, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the British began negotiations for the eventual transfer of power to Kenyans. In 1963, Kenya gained its independence and Jomo Kenyatta, the formerly accused leader of Mau Mau, became the first president. However, it would not be until 2003 that the ban on Mau Mau as an organization would be revoked. Until then, Mau Mau remained—and to an extent remains to this day—a controversial subject within Kenya.

The Evolution of Mau Mau Scholarship

Even thirty years after independence, Mau Mau continues to intrigue academics and laymen alike. As historian Wunyarabí Maloba has suggested, [Mau Mau is] one of the more remarkable nationalist peasant revolts against British colonialism in Africa. As a nationalist revolutionary movement, Mau Mau has remained remarkably difficult to comprehend. It has sometimes appeared to be an elusive revolution.¹⁹

This elusive nature of Mau Mau has led to a certain fascination with the movement, leading to a cottage industry of Mau Mau scholarly articles and books. While there have been many various analyses of the movement, the elements that continue to draw the most attention and are most pertinent to this work involve interpretations of nationalism.

Given the British depiction of the rebellion as irrational, atavistic, and savage, it no surprise that the first attempts to understand the movement continue along this line of anti-Mau Mau bias. One of the first comprehensive reports was written by F.D. Corfield in 1960, who was commissioned by the British to research the uprising. In the report he described how Mau Mau “achieved the terrible result of breaking and debasing the dignity of thousands of human souls.” Subsequent, scholarship has focused on rectifying the prejudiced and incorrect interpretations of the movement.

The start of this reconstruction of Mau Mau’s image was The Myth of ”Mau Mau” (1966), in which African political scholar, Carl Rosberg, and former colonial officer, John Nottingham, argued that the movement should be understood as an example of militant nationalism rather than senseless violence:

It is our contention that the history of Kikuyu protests against aspects of the colonial state may be more clearly understood as the history of a developing nationalist movement. In our view, the outbreak of open violence in Kenya in 1952 occurred primarily because of a European failure rather than an African one; it was not so much a failure of the Kikuyu people to adapt to a modern institutional setting as it was a failure of the for significant social and political reform.

Since this work as first published, Mau Mau has been the center of a debate as to whether or not the movement was actually nationalist, and further, how to interpret its goals. Other scholars have elaborated on this European failure and the various grievances that motivated Kenyans to join the movement.

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More recent works have shifted the dialogue to focus on the brutality of the British response to the rebellion in detention. Specifically, David Anderson’s *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (2006) and Caroline Elkins’s *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya* (2006) invert the original depiction of Mau Mau, with the British as the cruel savages and Mau Mau as victims. In 2006, their work drew attention to these historic human rights abuses. Both Anderson and Elkins were also personally involved in an international trial against Great Britain for their crimes against Kenyans during the Emergency. My work examines how historians, like Elkins and Anderson, can directly affect history through their research and interpretations of the past.

Like Mau Mau scholarship, academic studies on memory have also undergone a similar transformation. No serious discussion of the past can ignore the role of collective memory. Most people credit the term collective memory to the works of Maurice Halbwachs, who wrote *La Mémoire Collective* and *La Cadres Sociaux de la Memoire* (1980). In these works he differentiates between individual and collective memory:

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During my life, my national society has been theater for a number of events that I say I "remember," events that I know about only from newspapers or the testimony of those directly involved. These events occupy a place in the memory of the nation, but I myself did not witness them.²⁵

Collective memory involves the memory of experiences of which an individual cannot have knowledge; it revolves around the creation of memories about supposed historical facts and interpretations shared among a group of people.

While not explicitly stated as a theory of collective memory, Ernest Renan had hinted at the importance of collective memory in his discourse *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* (What is a Nation). He suggests that these ideas of a shared past are crucial to the formation of a nation. Renan notes that the founding of a nation relies on the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories. […] The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all the cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I understand genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea.²⁶

For Renan, shared memory is inexorably tied to the existence of nations. More recently, Benedict Anderson, in his famous work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, elaborates on this connection between memory and the nation, which he defines as an “imagined political community.”²⁷

This community is distinguished by its perceived shared culture, values, and history. Thus, history, or memory of the past, is necessary to create a national identity that ties people together. Using Renan and Anderson, I emphasize the importance of

examining different memories of Mau Mau when studying Kenyan national history, as the two are inseparable.

Many scholars have also analyzed the connections between violence and memory. This has resulted in works that address how memory of trauma affects nations, many of which focus on World War II and the Holocaust. How nations address and cope with past violence influences the development of the nation. Memories of violence in particular are especially vulnerable to erasure, sanitization, or, contrastingly, glorification: trauma can be forgotten, dismissed and rationalized, challenged, demonized, or confronted and acknowledged, all of which influences how members of the community may relate to one another.

Narratives and interpretations of the Mau Mau rebellion incorporate all these aspects of memory. The debate over Mau Mau’s nationalism has centralized its role in discussions of the Kenyan nation: while some memories of the movement have united Kenyans across ethnicities, other perceptions of the movement have divided them. Given its violent context, the narrative of the movement has experienced the full spectrum of responses to trauma mentioned above, depending on who had controlled the construction of public memory.

This work attempts to grapple with this fascination with Mau Mau: Why does it continue to receive renewed attention even years after its conclusion? New work on the rebellion has been published every decade since the conclusion of the Emergency. The ignorant scapegoating of the movement by the British has been rectified by now, yet it continues to be the focus of new scholarly texts and the center of ongoing

debates. The amount of scholarship on the rebellion has led to perceptions of the movement as the most important event in Kenyan history. While this work examines the reasons for and consequences of the phenomenal extent of interest in Mau Mau, in writing this, I recognize that I am contributing to this scholarly movement that has elevated Mau Mau to its current status.

When I first began this project, my hope was to contribute to the discussion surrounding the rebellion’s nationalist or ethnic nature. However, after spending the summer (June-July 2016) in Nairobi conducting interviews with Kenyans and research in the national archives, my interest in Mau Mau gradually shifted. In my original attempt to investigate the movement I concentrated on learning and interpreting the actual facts of what had occurred. However, as I continued my research, I became intrigued by the various ways Mau Mau has been remembered within Kenya and internationally over time.

While studies of the history Mau Mau’s origins and its goals have been crucial to understanding the uprising itself, I argue that it has become more important to understand how and why memory of the rebellion has transformed over time instead of merely reinterpreting the facts. Rather than a historical event contained in the past, narratives of the movement reveal that the memory of Mau Mau changes to reflect the current context and issues facing society at a given moment. Thus, Mau Mau’s significance and legacy are transitory, as they shift depending on the era and the individual interpreting the past. Specific interpretations of Mau Mau provide a medium through which Kenyans can voice their critiques of Kenya society. By
analyzing memories of the rebellion, this work provides insight into contemporary Kenya.

Furthermore, memories of Mau Mau can also play an active role in society. The ability to claim ownership of the memory of the rebellion through various portrayals provides distinct advantages, such as moral authority, legitimacy, and political and economic power, depending on how it is used. Kenyans have also used the debates surrounding the rebellion to begin discussions over how to solve present day problems. My work seeks to analyze how people have used the memory of Mau Mau to produce tangible advantages and what the presence of certain narratives reveal about Kenyan and Western societies.

**Methodology and Sources**

In my research I used a multidisciplinary approach that incorporated a variety of sources. The range of sources allowed me to examine how different ways of remembering Mau Mau produce specific narratives; different mediums revealed new interpretations. I use secondary sources not only to contextualize my arguments, but also to demonstrate how academic scholarship can impact society and shape popular discourse of the past. Other sources originate from my research in the Kenya National Archives in Nairobi, which provided colonial bureaucratic papers and propaganda articles among other things from the 1950s. These archival documents portray how the British and loyalist interpreted Mau Mau, which I use in contrast to current Kenyan understandings to understand how completely opposing narratives can function in similar ways.
Similarly, old newspaper and magazine articles from the Emergency reveal how settlers consciously constructed a specific anti-Mau Mau narrative. The Mau Mau veteran memoirs published in reaction to these settler accounts reveal how different interpretations influence and inspire one another. Memory does not exist in a vacuum; it responds as society changes and new narratives appear. The specific context of a narrative is vital to understanding why it appeared. These often-conflicting perspectives allow me to examine why people created certain interpretations. I also use novels, films, music, and Mau Mau paraphernalia to demonstrate the pervasiveness of memories of Mau Mau. Depictions of the rebellion in popular culture suggest that certain mediums are better suited to creating specific narratives over others.

A large portion of my research relies on the interviews I conducted through snowball sampling while in Kenya. I use these conversations to determine how people choose to contextualize Mau Mau and what interpretations of events they wish to convey. I attempt to use the sources as a way to centralize Kenyan voices and experiences: oral history allows researchers to understand “how African [see] their lives, their worlds, their histories,” in a way written sources cannot.29 During my time in Kenya, I chose to stay in Nairobi, the capital, as it provided access to a diverse group of Kenyans. My interview subjects came from different ethnic groups, professions, and generations, which revealed how different people interpreted Mau Mau based on their specific experiences and worldviews. My subjects included market vendors, taxi drivers, a university professor, Mau Mau veterans and their

descendants, a museum volunteer, Peace Corps administrators, and a public health worker among others. This diversity allowed me to examine memory of Mau Mau from a broad spectrum of perspectives.

Furthermore, as Nairobi is only a few hours away from the Central Highlands, where many Kikuyu live and where a majority of the fighting during the Emergency occurred, I was able to make a trip to conduct interviews with individuals who had fought in the rebellion and been detained by the British. By interviewing both people who had lived through the 1950s as well as younger generations, I was able to examine how people across generations remember and interpret Mau Mau. These testimonies reveal how memory has shifted over time and how people have responded to these shifts.

While some scholars continue to question the ability of oral sources to provide accurate information, I argue that these testimonies provide invaluable evidence that I would not find elsewhere. Oral history (or other sources that provide popular opinions) is key to my overall argument, as it reveals how people interpret events, rather than the facts. In this my work is similar to that of Luis White, who demonstrates how rumors or gossip can be used to understand society. In her book, Speaking with Vampires (2000), she argues that “such stories perhaps articulate and contextualize experience with greater accuracy than eyewitness accounts. In each case, evidence derived from vampire stories offered a new set of questions, recast prevailing interpretations, and introduced analyses that allowed for a reworking of secondary materials.”30 To understand the memory of Mau Mau, it is vital to see what

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aspects of the movement are forgotten, misremembered, or emphasized; historical inaccuracies are therefore extremely valuable rather than harmful.

While some may argue that my identity as a white American influenced how Kenyans framed their answers, I would argue that this desire to construct a particular interpretation of Mau Mau validates the overall argument in this work: that Kenyans felt the need to alter narratives of the rebellion suggests that the way Mau Mau is remembered is important. In one interview with Mwai wa Muthi, a member of the Mau Mau War Veterans Association, he explicitly articulated to me his desire that I rectify the memory of Mau Mau in the U.S. after my return.31 His construction of a specific interpretation to tell the “correct” story implies that certain narratives have the power to change more than perceptions; Mwai wa Muthi’s insistence on spreading his account suggests he feels that international knowledge and acceptance of his interpretation may have tangible consequences for Kenya.

Overall Structure

The chapters that follow examine different memories of Mau Mau. The first section focuses on how specific interpretations of the rebellion can provide benefits for those who control the narrative, specifically through narratives of heroism and victimhood. Chapter one addresses how the memory of Mau Mau has changed since the violence in 2007 and 2008, when a contested presidential election resulted in extreme violence among Kenyans. In this chapter I analyze how narratives of Mau Mau reveal existing attitudes towards the political and economic distribution of

31 Interview by author with Mwai wa Muthigi in Nairobi, July 14, 2015.
power within Kenya today. Furthermore, I examine how the debate over Mau Mau’s nationalism has allowed Kenyans to use these narratives to claim some form of power or, conversely, to critique those who use the movement to do so. This pattern of employing the memory of Mau Mau to gain political advantage suggests that its legacy continues to impact Kenyan society.

Chapter two builds on this idea of the tangible consequences of Mau Mau narratives. Here I examine how settlers and Kenyans have used narratives of victimhood in order to demand certain benefits. I contrast settler claims to victimhood from the Emergency to more recent narratives of Mau Mau victimhood during detention. Just as earlier settler narratives allowed them to gain international Western support, Kikuyu detainees have received reparations since their trial against Great Britain in the 2000s for their abuses. I argue that by claiming victim status, people may gain some form of moral authority, political support or economic reparations.

The second section of my work looks at how Mau Mau interpretations have been used to comment on contemporary Kenyan society and suggest changes. In chapter three I examine how narratives of Mau Mau have been constructed in public spaces. Here I argue that specific forms of public space allow Kenyans to use Mau Mau for various purposes. Most recently, the memorialization of the movement in a peace museum and a new monument has allowed Kenyans to use Mau Mau as a way to discuss the present, particularly the need for reconciliation. The unique commemorations of Mau Mau allow Kenyans to shape its memory to apply to the current problems facing Kenya today.
My fourth chapter analyzes how depictions of Mau Mau in popular culture represent a reaction to the given socio-political context at the time. Kenyans and Westerners have appropriated the image of Mau Mau. Though both societies have changed the meaning of the rebellion to suit their own purposes, I differentiate between Western and Kenyan appropriations. Western societies value the movement only for its ability to satisfy their need for entertainment and self-reflection, while Kenyan societies see Mau Mau as important in and of itself, which is why shaping its narrative is so important to them. Because Kenyans recognize the power of Mau Mau narratives on society, they manipulate the interpretation of the movement to portray what a good—ethical and responsible—Kenya should do.

Throughout this work, it is evident that the use of different interpretations of Mau Mau to understand present day society has changed the original meaning and significance of the rebellion. The story of Mau Mau no longer focuses on a tale of Kenyans fighting the British for independence; instead, Mau Mau has come to signify whatever the narrator wishes. However, these different perceptions of Mau Mau raise questions over who has—or should have—the ability to control how Mau Mau is remembered. Because Mau Mau narratives actively influence society, those who have the authority over the narrative may benefit more. In many ways, the battle over the memory of Mau Mau represents the struggle for certain rights or advantages in Kenya.
Chapter 1: Mau Mau Politics: Competing Claims to Kenya’s “Nationalist” Movement

On September 12, 2015, former Prime Minister of Kenya, Raila Odinga, gave a brief speech at the opening of a monument to Mau Mau fighters:

I can feel the pain of the Mau Mau and the other freedom fighters. They must have concluded that life is cruel and worthless and that Kenya has no place for heroes. This little monument erected here today is our little way of saying, we remember the sacrifices made, the pain suffered and the shame bravely borne by patriots who fought for our freedom but could not positively answer the question what have you got to show for it? But this must only be the start and not the end to the journey to seek and honour the men and women who made sacrifices that Kenya may emerge as a nation among nations. It must be followed by a genuine and honest effort to identify Kenya’s heroes, past and present and accord them the honor commensurate with their struggle. […] But the Heroes Acre remains unoccupied at the Uhuru Gardens32 because as a nation, we are too scared of our past to agree on who our heroes are. For far too long, Kenya has been running away from its past and struggling to change it to suit the image of those in power. […] This honour for Mau Mau fighters must therefore mark the beginning of the search for our heroes from other communities. The struggle for Kenya’s freedom was a collective effort of patriots from virtually all parts of Kenya.33

Odinga’s words suggest that the identification of Kenyan heroes is important to the nation. Recognizing those who made major contributions or sacrifices allows a nation to establish a shared history that its citizens can celebrate together; Kenyans can take pride in their ancestors. The fact that Heroes Acre is empty indicates that the nation’s history remains contested by different groups. Odinga states that Kenyans are “scared” of identifying their heroes. Yet why might heroes be a cause for fear?

32 Uhuru Gardens in a public memorial park located in the center of Nairobi. One of the unfinished memorials is Heroes Acre, which is meant to hold the bodies of Kenyans recognized as heroes.
That politicians have previously manipulated interpretations of the past in order to consolidate their power, as Odinga implies, suggests that heroes have a tangible impact on politics. Labeling certain Kenyans as heroes gives these citizens a prestige not bestowed upon everyone; they appear to have a larger claim on the nation, as they, unlike others, sacrificed and fought for it. The honor accorded to heroes excuses and facilitates the unequal allocation of resources in Kenya. The overemphasis of Mau Mau’s significance has led some Kenyans to perceive Mau Mau fighters as having unfairly benefited from their designation as Kenya’s heroes. The fear of heroes represents a fear of raising some citizens over others.

Perhaps most noteworthy in this speech is Odinga’s final statement. He highlights that Mau Mau was one of many resistance movements; Kenya has a history of freedom fighters from across the nation who opposed British rule, not just the Kikuyu in Central Province. Odinga emphasizes that the stories of these various movements together make up Kenyan history and deserve attention. The central theme throughout this speech focuses on what role Mau Mau should have in Kenya’s national memory and how it fits with other movements; the honor accorded to Mau Mau fighters should also be given to others who resisted British rule.

Odinga’s emphasis on Mau Mau as one of many resistance movements that contributed to the formation of the Kenyan nation comes in response to portrayals of Mau Mau as the most important movement. Because of its connection to independence and its predominantly Kikuyu membership, the rebellion has prompted a steady stream of new scholarship since the 1960s and has remained controversial within Kenya to this day. This cottage industry has diverted attention from other
examples of defiance to British rule. This persistent focus on Mau Mau must be understood in connection to changing public debates over the role the movement should have in Kenyan official history. Mau Mau’s role has become inexorably tied to the question of nationalism: was Mau Mau a nationalist—Kenyan—or an ethnic—Kikuyu—movement?

In this chapter, I question why the nationalist character of Mau Mau matters. Veterans accounts reveal that Mau Mau was both an ethnic movement and a nationalist movement. Rather than acknowledge the complexities of the rebellion, historians have framed the debate as either Kikuyu or Kenyan. In their debate over what should qualify as nationalist, historians have elevated nationalist movements above other resistance movements. Portraying Mau Mau as nationalist suggests that it has greater significance in Kenyan history than other earlier examples of opposition to European authority. As a result, those whose ancestors did not participate specifically in Mau Mau—as opposed to another uprising—are unable to claim they helped bring about Kenyan independence. This disregard of other resistance movements has led to the misconception that Mau Mau supporters were better citizens for having sacrificed more or fought harder for Kenya.

While this theoretical debate may appear inconsequential for Kenyan society, the significant role given to Mau Mau in Kenyan history has allowed those who fought to make substantial claims on the state for benefits like land or political power; there is the belief that Kenyans who sacrificed for independence deserve a reward. Since the post-election violence in 2007 and 2008, which raised tensions over the division of power among ethnic groups in Kenya, the question of whether Mau Mau
was Kikuyu or Kenyan has received greater attention. This renewed focus on
ethnicity and its connections to the political context in Kenya has led to new
interpretations of Mau Mau in popular discourse to allow more people to make a
claim on the state.

A Kenyan and Kikuyu Movement

Perhaps the overwhelming focus on Mau Mau originates from its first
depiction by the British as a savage and brutal movement with no legitimate claims or
goals. The British distanced the movement from its socio-economic justifications,
describing the fighters as “terrorists” committing apparently mindless acts of
violence. In the eyes of the British—and the international world that read British
accounts of the movement—Mau Mau was evil and a threat to the purported colonial
goal to spread civilization in Kenya. In response to this portrayal of Mau Mau, many
of the veterans produced their own histories beginning in the 1960s. Veterans started
publishing memoirs to correct the negative narrative of Mau Mau as a terrorist
organization. Instead, they emphasized the nationalist character of their fight as a way
to legitimize the movement and reconstruct their image. The titles of these works—
Mau Mau Detainee (1963), ‘Mau Mau’ General (1967), Life Histories from the

“Fort Hall Terrorist Gang Decimated,” October 8 1953.
35 Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, ‘Mau Mau’ Detainee, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1963); Waruhiu
Story of Karigo Muchai,” in Life Histories from the Revolution Kenya: Mau Mau, (Canada: LSM
Information Center, 1973); Ngugi Kabiro, “Man in the Middle,” in Life Histories from the Revolution
Kenya: Mau Mau, (Canada: LSM Information Center, 1973); Mohamed Mathu, “The Urban Guerilla,”
in Life Histories from the Revolution Kenya: Mau Mau, (Canada: LSM Information Center, 1973);
Gakaara wa Wanjau, Mau Mau Author in Detention, trans. Paul Ngigi Njoroge, (Nairobi: Heinemann,
1988).
demonstrate how veterans reframed the public interpretation of Mau Mau by emphasizing their unjust treatment and heroic struggle.

In the foreword to *Kenya’s Freedom Struggle: The Dedan Kimathi Papers* (1987), a compilation of Mau Mau documents from the 1950s, Kenyan author, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, writes in the foreword that Mau Mau veterans “died fighting for the liberation of the homeland”36 and that “theirs was a national struggle.”37 By prefacing the documents with this specific interpretation of the rebellion, Ngugi suggests that the documents are meant to support the narrative that Mau Mau was nationalist; they should be read as evidence of a Kenyan independence struggle.

However, the documents themselves reveal that confusion over the national character existed within the movement. During one recounted meeting, a Mau Mau fighter emphasized:

> As freedom fighters, we must realize that we are fighting for the whole of Kenya. There are some of our comrades who place their location or district above our country; there are others who naively think that we are only fighting for the freedom of Central Province.38

While this speech portrays Mau Mau as having nationalist goals, the fact that a leader felt it was necessary to clarify the purpose of the mission demonstrates that not everyone in the movement perceived the rebellion as fighting for all of Kenya; there remained discrepancies in how members perceived its purpose. This raises the question of how many truly understood Mau Mau as a Kenyan movement rather than

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37 Ibid., xv.
as a Kikuyu movement. It is perfectly natural that there could be different subgroups within Mau Mau who differed in their goals.  

This distinction between how followers and leaders understood their goals is also visible in the followers’ perceptions of Mau Mau leaders. In a letter to Dedan Kimathi, one of the most famous generals, a fighter states, “we will inform the newspaper men that your new title is ‘Field Marshal Sir Dedan Kimathi, Matemo, KCGE.’ KCGE means ‘Knight Commander of the Gikuyu Empire.” While Kimathi changed the title to “‘Knight Commander of the African Empire,’” suggesting that Mau Mau represented a broader fight for African independence, the original title reveals that some fighters saw Mau Mau as fighting specifically for the Kikuyu.  

If the leaders of the movement preached a message of Kenyan unity but the masses did not necessarily share the beliefs, should Mau Mau be seen as a nationalist movement incorporating all of Kenya or an ethnic movement of the Kikuyu? Whether Mau Mau should be considered nationalist depends entirely on how historians define nationalism and weigh the different contingents in the movement.

Part of the confusion over the nature of Mau Mau may come from its name, the Land and Freedom Army. John Lonsdale unpacks its significance when he retranslates the name:

They [Mau Mau fighters] called their movement ‘ithaka na wiathi’, which is better rendered as ‘land and moral responsibility’ or ‘freedom through land’, the highest civic virtue of Kikuyu elderhood, rather than the more common ‘land and freedom’ which invites the retrospective connotation of ‘land and national independence’. The ‘power of self-determination’ by which wiathi is

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40 Kinyatti, 95.
rather well translated in this police report was essentially moral and individual.\textsuperscript{41}

The original translation of Land and Freedom in English implies that Mau Mau had two purposes: regaining land and achieving national sovereignty. However, Lonsdale’s translation removes this opportunity for misinterpretation and highlights instead the specifically Kikuyu nature of the title by emphasizing the theme that land brings agency.

Land, while important to many ethnicities in Kenya, was—and remains to be—particularly significant in Kikuyu culture, as land ownership is understood as necessary to achieve full adulthood; self-mastery was inseparable from land.\textsuperscript{42} Thus, Mau Mau can be understood as a fight for the land that would allow Kikuyus to be full members of their community. The fact that land was already central to Kikuyu identity combined with the extreme land alienation and overcrowding of reserves that occurred made land a particularly Kikuyu issue. Furthermore, the decision to use Kikuyu for the official name of the movement, rather than a supra-ethnic language like Swahili, also suggests that Mau Mau was intrinsically tied to the Kikuyu.

Despite the mistranslation, the phrase “land and freedom” is still used colloquially to refer to Mau Mau in English.\textsuperscript{43} This common translation reinforces the understanding that Mau Mau was nationalist without acknowledging its complexities. Rather than an actual explanation of the goals of the movement, the “Land and Freedom Army” is more of a mantra, as it is never clear whose land and whose

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item Interview by author with Anonymous in Nairobi, July 13, 2015.
\end{thebibliography}
freedom is in question. This vagueness contributes to the confusion over Mau Mau’s nature, as Kenyans can interpret the phrase as they see fit based on their preexisting understandings of the movement.

Mau Mau’s oathing process used to unite followers further complicated its relationship with Kikuyu identity. In his memoir, ‘Mau Mau’ Detainee, Josiah Mwangi Kariuki describes the effects of one of the oaths: “This second oath was much stronger than the first and left my mind full of strange and excited feelings. My initiation was now complete and I had become a true Kikuyu with no doubts where I stood in the revolt of my tribe.”44 While attempting to ensure loyalty to the movement, the oathing process simultaneously cemented ethnic identity. Kariuki’s description bares similarities to a coming of age ceremony, such as those accompanying circumcision, in this case implying that to be an adult Kikuyu, one had to take the oath. Like circumcision, which was “a deciding factor in giving a boy or a girl the status of manhood or womanhood in the Gikuyu community”, Kariuki suggests that taking the oath allowed Kikuyus to become fully contributing members in society.45

Furthermore, by describing Mau Mau as “the revolt of [his] tribe,” Kariuki in effect suggests that the nation imagined by Mau Mau was the Kikuyu nation. Because the oathing ceremony was so closely tied to Kikuyu culture, one could argue it limited the spread of the movement to other ethnicities, who, as Kariuki himself notes, “might not give their oath in the same way.”46 Kariuki implies that the Mau Mau oath still managed to unite Kenyans despite different oathing practices because

46 Kariuki, 31
oathing was common across different groups. However, he disregards the exclusionary effects a specifically Kikuyu ceremony would have for Kenyans with their own unique oathing practices. These differences would have divided people, as the Kikuyu would not have performed another ethnicity’s ceremony.

Just as the oaths convey how veterans understood the movement as both nationalist and Kikuyu, the hymns associated with the movement demonstrate similar cognitive dissonance. Some hymns focus on national issues such as “higher wages, more schools for Africans, removal of colour-bar, return of alienated lands and political independence.” However, others contain elements that would exclude fighters from other ethnic backgrounds:

I believe in God Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth and I believe in Gikuyu and Mumbi, our parents to whom He assigned this country. […] They were deceived, deprived of their land and sovereignty. They were divided, ruled and turned into pebbles, Their daring generations have realized and are now far-sighted. They have woken from their sleep, and have chaired Gikuyu and Mumbi again. […] And I believe in the holy sacrifices of Gikuyu and Mumbi, in the leadership of Kenyatta and Mbiyu; peaceful politics; the unity of the black people and the eternity of Gikuyu. Glory be to God. Glory…

By emphasizing the role of Gikuyu and Mumbi, from whom all Kikuyu are said to be descended, not all Kenyans would be able to connect to the lyrics, and, thus, some of the values behind Mau Mau. Thus, the hymns both served to unite Kikuyus and alienate other Kenyans from the movement.

48 Ibid., 122.
The memoirs and collected papers written after independence reveal veterans’ cognitive dissonance. As they emphasized Mau Mau’s nationalist and Kenyan goals, they simultaneously noted its specifically Kikuyu characteristics. These accounts suggest that Mau Mau was not a unified movement: although some fighters, especially the leaders, attempted to make Mau Mau as an inclusive movement, others clearly believed they were fighting for the Kikuyu and Central Province. Like many large movements, divisions naturally form, creating sub groups that interpret the purpose of the movement differently from the official goals. Yet despite the dual nature of the movement, scholars have continued to debate whether or not Mau Mau should be considered nationalist.

The Either-Or Fallacy

Like the veterans themselves, historians have attempted to rectify the British portrayal of Mau Mau by examining its origins and demonstrating the legitimate reasons for the movement.50 As discussed earlier, scholarship has gone further to challenge the original depictions of Mau Mau by emphasizing its nationalist nature, beginning with Carl G. Rosberg, Jr. and John Nottingham’s *The Myth of “Mau Mau”: Nationalism in Kenya* (1966). The debates around Mau Mau reflect the concurrent debate surrounding nationalism in general.

Some scholars have defined nationalism generally to include any resistance movements. In his early work, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (1957), Thomas Hodgkins argues that “any organization or group that explicitly asserts the rights

50 See the Introduction for a brief summary or examples of scholarship.
claims and aspirations of a given African society [...] in opposition to European authority, whatever its institutional form and objectives,” is nationalist. In this understanding of nationalism, earlier Kenyan resistance movements that resisted or protested British policies would be considered nationalist, even if they were not fighting specifically for independence. Mau Mau would not be perceived as the only or main nationalist movement in Kenya.

However, most works on nationalism have a narrower understanding of its definition. Based on Benedict Anderson’s definition of a nation—described earlier as an “imagined political community” which is both “inherently limited and sovereign”—sovereignty is a necessary component of nationalism. Furthermore, the limited nature of the nation suggests that there must be a clear understanding of who belongs within the community and who is excluded. These two factors preclude earlier challenges to British rule that had not yet imagined a Kenyan nation and thus could not be fighting for Kenyan sovereignty.

Focusing on Mau Mau as either a nationalist movement or an ethnic movement has obscured its complex nature; by phrasing the question as an “either-or,” historians ignore the fact that Mau Mau was both, as veterans’ often-contradictory portrayals of the movement have demonstrated. Furthermore, through their predominant focus on Mau Mau’s nationalism, historians who portray Mau Mau as nationalist have in effect suggested that the rebellion is the only nationalist movement Kenyans can claim. There appears to be an implied hierarchy where nationalist movements are seen as more developed or advanced, and, therefore more

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important than other resistance movements; by describing Mau Mau as nationalist, the rebellion gains significance as it can be argued that Kenyans owe their independence to those who fought in the uprising.

This elevation of Mau Mau over other movements has made the ability to claim Mau Mau by all Kenyans, as opposed to just the Kikuyu, more important. Because other ethnic communities cannot label their own historic resistance movements as nationalist, they do not have the same power as the Kikuyu to make claims on the state for their struggle; their resistance movements are not perceived as integral to achieving Kenya’s independence. The “Kikuyuness of the rising that is remembered […] makes the memory a nightmare to a multicultural state.”\textsuperscript{53} Because Mau Mau was composed of mostly Kikuyus, it is difficult for other Kenyans to take pride in the movement because their communities did not take part. Thus, there have been recurring debates over whether Mau Mau was truly fighting for all of Kenya or just for the Kikuyu community. Since the election violence that occurred in 2007, this debate in academia over Mau Mau as Kenyan or Kikuyu has become more importance to Kenyans in general; citizens have constructed their own interpretations of Mau Mau’s ethnic or nationalist goals in order to make claims on the government.

\textbf{The Election Violence of 2007}

After independence in 1963, with the future challenges of building a united nation out of many different identities, President Jomo Kenyatta reasonably feared celebrating Mau Mau as the source of Kenya’s freedom. As a result, Kenyatta banned

Mau Mau as an organization and announced that everyone had fought for Kenya. As a country composed of about 42 ethnicities, to have one ethnic group stand out as the main savior of the nation would ostracize and belittle the experiences of others, creating divisions rather than unifying Kenyans. He emphasized a policy of *harambee*, meaning “all pull together,” to express his desire to form one nation. Yet despite Kenyatta’s attempt to create a national story of independence, Mau Mau’s role in Kenyan history continues to be contested; Mau Mau remains the main tale of Kenyan resistance.

There is a known longer history of indigenous people fighting European infringement of Kenyan rights, starting from the very first interactions with the Portuguese in the early 1500s and continuing past the start of colonialism in Kenya in 1895. Kenyan history should not necessarily elevate the struggle of the Kikuyu over others, as many ethnic groups had historically opposed European intrusion and colonialism. It is perhaps the lack of attention given to these other and often earlier narratives that causes Mau Mau to divide Kenyans. Perhaps Kenyatta was too hasty in his assumption that Mau Mau would naturally create strife among Kenyans. Despite downplaying its importance and silencing the movement by banning the organization, Mau Mau remains divisive. Mau Mau has taken on new meanings in the decades following independence. The present tensions within Kenya color how Mau Mau is remembered. This focus on Mau Mau as a nationalist movement is a product of the current political context within Kenya; if the socio-economic and political conditions changed, it is very possible that Mau Mau would become less divisive.

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While over sixty years have passed since Kenya gained independence, the
idea who belongs in the Kenyan nation and what it means to be Kenyan remains in
question. Ethnic identities continue to be a central mode of identification. Although a
national identity is growing, particularly in urban centers, for some, ethnic identity
takes precedence. According to Kepha Ngito, a Luo founder of a youth community
program in Kibera, a slum outside of Nairobi, ethnic identity still takes precedence:
“The Kenyan identity is influenced tribally. It is yet to forge into one nationalist
thinking. It’s yet to happen […] All communities in Kenya galvanize around their
tribes first.”55 Despite politicians’ attempts to create a national history, they have
struggled to create a singular narrative accepted by all Kenyans. Instead, public
history has taken on private meaning. Interpretations of Mau Mau depend on the
individual and how they understand problems in Kenya; context becomes key in
determining which version Kenyans believe.

When seen through the lens of ethnic relations, Mau Mau has come to
represent a longer history of Kikuyu dominance to some Kenyans. Out of the four
presidents since independence in 1963, three have been Kikuyu. Beginning with
Jomo Kenyatta’s presidency, the Kikuyu have been perceived as benefitting from
their ties to power. After independence, the newly independent government still had
to deal with the land alienation that had caused the Mau Mau uprising, especially as
many Kenyans were advocating land seizure from settlers. To prevent further unrest
in this period of transition, they undertook several resettlement schemes to attempt to
alleviate these problems among the Kikuyu, who had already demonstrated their

55 Interview by author with Kepha Ngito in Nairobi, June 19, 2015.
willingness to use violence to claim land. Squatters that had stayed on state purchased land the longest were among the first given land, and the Kikuyu were the main recipients as they had remained on settler land for decades due to displacement.\textsuperscript{56}

By primarily giving land to the Kikuyu under these land distribution policies, the Kenyan government “created a perception that the schemes were meant to satisfy land hunger among Kikuyu rather than any other community.”\textsuperscript{57} Kenyatta’s government appeared to favor the Kikuyu at the expense of other ethnic groups, despite their similar need for land reform. This favoritism antagonized relations between the Kikuyu and other Kenyans, like the Kalenjin, who “were also demanding access to land rights in an area they considered their territory by virtue of having settled in the area before colonial rule.”\textsuperscript{58} Thus, during the 1960s and 1970s, hundreds of thousands of Kikuyu migrated and settled in the Rift Valley, meaning those who had formerly possessed the lands prior to colonization felt they had been doubly colonized: first by the British and then by the Kikuyu.\textsuperscript{59} This connection between ethnicity, land and Mau Mau solidified after the violence in 2007, which influenced the memory of the movement.

The anger directed at this political and economic control by the Kikuyu came to the fore in the electoral violence of 2007, when Kikuyu presidential incumbent, Mwai Kibaki, was declared the winner over his Luo opponent Raila Odinga, despite

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 330.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
claims that the elections were rigged. Kibaki’s supposed victory represented another example of Kikuyu domination at the expense of others, which led to violence against the Kikuyu throughout Kenya, especially in the Rift Valley, where other ethnic groups forced the Kikuyu off the land the Kikuyu had received after independence. As a result, around 600 people died with 250,000 displaced after fleeing the violence. The perceived unfair election results brought old tensions back to the front of Kenyan consciousness. This renewed focus on the connections between ethnicity and power was reflected in how Kenyans discussed Mau Mau.

**Kikuyu Saviors**

Kenyatta’s decision to ban Mau Mau to avoid excluding groups from the national narrative was unsuccessful. His favoritism towards the Kikuyu and the lasting legacy of Kikuyu power politically and economically created the very ethnic divisions he sought to avoid. The context of the 2007 election unrest has caused Kenyans to understand Mau Mau through the lens of the perceived inequitable power dynamics. For some non-Kikuyu in Kenya, the focus on Mau Mau is a result of politics:

[The British] handed over power to Kenyatta and by extensions the Kikuyu, so the Kikuyu were the first major beneficiaries of British presence in Kenya. As much as they suffered they also benefitted heavily because they took over most of the investments of the British system in Kenya. So that placed them ahead of other tribes in Kenya in many ways, economically, socially, even in terms of education.  

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61 Interview by author with Kepha Ngito in Nairobi, June 19, 2015.
Mau Mau can be seen as the start, and perhaps the reason for Kikuyu control of institutions. Kikuyu could argue they deserved more resources or political power because they had liberated Kenya.

In his famous discourse What is a Nation, philosopher and historian Ernest Renan argued that “to have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more—these are the essential conditions for being a people;”62 a shared past is key to forming a nation as it helps unite a people and construct a common identity. Understanding Mau Mau as the nationalist movement to which Kenya owes its independence hinders nation formation; only the Kikuyu can share Kenya’s glorious past envisioned in Mau Mau.

Portraying the Mau Mau struggle as the reason for Kenya’s freedom also depicts Mau Mau fighters as Kenya’s deliverers; it was their sacrifice that freed everyone from British oppression. As some veterans declared after independence, “We, the freedom fighters, as well as the widows left by the guerillas who died, expected a reward—land—for the great sacrifice we made in the struggle.”63 Because the Kikuyu composed the majority of Mau Mau fighters, the movement has been seen as legitimizing Kikuyu power: as they are portrayed as heroes and saviors, they have the right to certain rewards and benefits, like land or political power, that others do not. The idea that the Kikuyu sacrificed and suffered more than other ethnic groups has been used to justify their claim on the state.

63 Maina wa Kinyatti, 120.
It is important to ask to what extent the Kikuyu consciously understand Mau Mau as justifying their political influence. Some Kikuyus feel superior because their people participated in Mau Mau, and thereby brought about independence. As Kimani, a Kikuyu market vendor, stated in an interview with me, other ethnicities did not join the fight because they lacked “guts,” unlike the Kikuyu, who demonstrated bravery.64 Similarly, another Kikuyu informant suggested that Mau Mau should be interpreted as evidence of Kikuyu work ethic, of their willingness to take the effort and sacrifice what was necessary to succeed.65 In this interpretation, Kikuyus used Mau Mau as evidence to draw imaginary distinctions between ethnicities, highlighting traits that set them apart either positively, as in this case, or negatively in others.

Some Kenyans, like Ngito, feel that the Kikuyu (incorrectly) believe they have a right to Kenya. In this understanding, the narrative of Kikuyu nationalists legitimizes the Kikuyu conviction that they “rescued it [Kenya] from the colonialists. They own it. It’s a mentality that they have that. They own it, they fought for it, they died for it. Therefore they have to be rewarded for it. […] They think they are entitled to everything in Kenya because of the Mau Mau.”66 This understanding clearly imagines the roots of current grievances between minorities and the Kikuyu in Mau Mau. No one in Kenya denies that Mau Mau fought against the British and most, if not all, would say the fighters were heroic. However, the issue with Mau Mau is less about the movement itself, as opposed to what certain interpretations may represent in

64 Interview by author with Kimani in Nairobi, July 12, 2015.
65 Interview by author with Anonymous in Karatina, July 22, 2015.
66 Interview by author with Kepha Ngito in Nairobi, June 19, 2015.
Kenya since 2007—in this case a symbol of and justification for the predominant Kikuyu influence in political society.

**The Three Counter-narratives**

“**We All Fought for Freedom**”

Because some minorities feel their experiences have been silenced, they have put forth their own arguments concerning the movement’s role in Kenyan history. These new popular interpretations of the rebellion developed to expand who can make claims on the Kenyan state. I use the interviews I collected in Nairobi in order to construct an image of how Kenyan citizens perceive the connections between Mau Mau and ethnicity, as they reveal the popular beliefs and misconceptions about the movement. The diverse backgrounds of the interviewees allowed me to examine how different groups in Kenya perceive Mau Mau depending on how they fit into Kenya’s political and social structures.

There are three main counter-narratives to the interpretation of Mau Mau as a Kikuyu movement that brought about independence. The first challenges the idea that Mau Mau was predominantly a Kikuyu movement. In this way it is similar to Kenyatta’s earlier attempt to create a story of a truly national struggle for independence—national meaning everyone took part—though it differs in its explicit focus on Mau Mau as the reason for independence. This narrative emphasizes that Mau Mau was a mix of ethnic groups, with representatives from the Kikuyu, Meru,
Embu, Kamba, and Maasai, along with other ethnicities. The key to this understanding of Mau Mau is the argument that it was not just the Kikuyu who fought and suffered; many different people took part. Even when acknowledging that there were more Kikuyu or that it was a Kikuyu led movement, these statements are often followed or prefaced by the supporting claim that “there were many tribes fighting.” This multi-ethnic narrative implies that because everyone fought for freedom, either everyone or no one should be rewarded; therefore the Kikuyu cannot use Mau Mau to support their claim to power.

This narrative also challenges the idea that the Kikuyu suffered more under colonialism—a rationale that has been used to explain their predominant presence in Mau Mau, as they had greater incentives to fight. Whether or not this is true, by rewriting Mau Mau to be multi-ethnic, Kenyans in fact lose complexity and accuracy in their national history. It is certainly true that other ethnicities did participate to an extent, but to claim that all ethnic groups were equally represented or actively fought in the movement is incorrect; the fact remains a majority of participants were Kikuyu and the rebellion was mainly located within Central Province.

67 During the Emergency, the Meru, Embu and Kikuyu were all singled out and forced to use identification cards that limited their movement because they were associated most with Mau Mau. While the Kikuyu are perceived as the main group involved in the movement, the Embu and Meru also participated, but their involvement is often less clearly stated, given the cultural ties between the three groups. Describing these similarities, David Branch wrote, “In truth, the Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru have more in common culturally, linguistically, economically, and historically than markers of difference. For that reason, all three are referred to collectively here as Kikuyu except when explicitly stated otherwise.” While I hesitate to generalize and equate the three groups as Branch does in his text, given the lack of existing scholarship focusing on the specific role of the Meru and Embu, I focus primarily on the Kikuyu role. Branch, 6.

68 Interview by author with Anonymous in Nairobi, July 16, 2015.
69 Interview by author with Chris Masila in Nairobi, July 7, 2015.
70 One British reports the transfer of detainees during the Emergency including 23 Luo, 11 Balukia, 7 Manyala, 5 Mluya, 2 Munyore, 6 Maragoli and 3 Kipsigis among others. KNA AB/1/83 “Nyanza Detainees,” August 30, 1956.
Simplifying the narrative to a general story of shared suffering silences the distinct experiences of not only the Kikuyu, but also of other minorities, who might have had unique interactions with the British under colonialism that deserve to be heard. While all Kenyans experienced forms of oppression under colonialism, different communities faced and reacted to the subjugation according to their specific circumstances. The Kikuyu faced significant land alienation, as the British displaced them when they settled in Central Province. Because the settlers were located in Kikuyu territory, the Kikuyu were in closer contact with the settlers on a regular basis than others farther from the center. This background is vital to understanding why Mau Mau began with the Kikuyu in particular and why others may not have joined, because Kikuyu grievances were not universal to all ethnicities in Kenya.

Yet despite these drawbacks to generalizing Mau Mau as a movement that included all Kenyans, this narrative exists today, which raises an important question: why is it so important to people that Mau Mau should be a universal movement? In a purely theoretical understanding of this narrative, this strategy solves the problem raised earlier in connection to Renan’s theory of a nation: by describing Mau Mau as involving all Kenyans everyone can claim its glorious past, rather than only the Kikuyu. On a political level, it challenges the idea that the Kikuyu deserve some sort of power or recognition more than others, thus alleviating a source of tension between ethnic groups.
“Rational Negotiators”

The second counter-interpretation of Mau Mau attempts to circumvent the Kikuyu narrative by portraying negotiators as responsible for independence rather than Mau Mau fighters. The negotiators in this case include the Kenyans who were crucial in the discussions between the British and Kenyans as they brokered the agreement that led to independence. In the years leading up to independence, both KANU (Kenya African National Union) and KADU (Kenya African Democratic Union) were involved in the deliberations over the terms of independence and the new Kenyan government’s constitution. While KANU mainly represented the Kikuyu and Luo, KADU represented smaller Kenyan ethnic groups, like the Kalenjin, Maasai, Turkana and Samburu, who feared a Kikuyu-Luo dominated Kenyan government.71 Although KANU gained control after independence, the involvement of both political parties in the negotiation process increased the diversity of the negotiators and allowed more ethnic groups to assert their contribution to Kenyan independence.

While conceding that Mau Mau influenced the British decision to end colonization in Kenya, the “negotiators” narrative suggests that independence would not have been achieved without the help of other ethnic groups who served as the negotiators. Although, Mau Mau is predominantly identified as Kikuyu, this narrative compensates for the otherwise exclusive ethnic character of Mau Mau by creating a space for others to contribute to the liberation of Kenya. Thus, it functions similarly

to the first interpretations—“we all fought for Kenya”—by allowing multiple parties to take pride in their ancestors’ role in Kenyan history.

Including negotiators into the Mau Mau narrative allows for different reactions to British rule in Kenya, which creates a more complex and full account of different ethnicities’ experiences. However, Kenyans often use this differentiation between negotiators and Mau Mau to imply a hierarchy of the roles, in which the negotiators are seen as superior to Mau Mau, and thus to the Kikuyu. For instance, in one personal account by David, a Luhya market vendor, he argues that the Luhya are a more reasonable people, and that without this reasoning and their willingness to peacefully negotiate, the British would never have granted Kenya independence. Stating that the British would not have met with Mau Mau leaders implies that Mau Mau were unreasonable in contrast to the more sensible Luhya. This narrative elevates the Luhya’s role in independence while simultaneously denigrating the Kikuyu for not being rational or too extremist. While both the negotiators and the Mau Mau fighters are seen as contributors to independence, the narrative remains divisive by valuing the deliberative process as more important and advanced than the physical struggle.

In my interview with Kepha Ngito, the Luo fill the important role of negotiators with the British. He argues similarly that the British did not grant Kenya independence because of guerilla warfare; rather it was “because there was a front that was willing to sit down to repeal the laws constitutionally. […] the struggle was now not in the forest anymore.” The negotiators were in a peaceful “struggle” with

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72 Interview by author with David in Nairobi, July 16, 2015.
73 Interview by author with Kepha Ngito in Nairobi, June 19, 2015.
the British to achieve independence and it was this nonviolent struggle that was most important to Kenya’s freedom, not Mau Mau. Suggesting that the fighters were unwilling to use constitutional methods of change allows non-Mau Mau to increase the importance of their role in Kenya’s independence.

By depicting the Kikuyu as irrational, Kenyans can explain justify the reasons for not joining Mau Mau in a way that makes their decision appear positive and Mau Mau more negative. This perception of moral or cognitive superiority functions similarly to earlier examples of Kikuyu justifications for rewards. By identifying their ethnic groups as somehow superior and portraying their contributions as crucial to independence, non-Kikuyus can claim that they deserve certain benefits, like land or political influence. Even if their claims fail to lead to tangible results, by emphasizing the importance of non-violence, Kenyans who support the “negotiators” narrative can claim the moral high ground over the rebels.

“One of Many”

Finally, the third counter-narrative argues that Mau Mau was merely another tale of resistance to British rule; it was no more important than other examples of Kenyan resistance. This popular narrative emphasizes a broader historical perspective beginning with the first interactions with the Europeans up to independence. For instance, in 1913-1914, Mekatilili Wa Menza led a rebellion on the coast of Kenya against the British. In fact, at the same time as Mau Mau began to gain attention, another movement called Dini ya Msambwa in western Kenya, which was religious
and anti-white, also garnered the attention of the British as a threat. Mau Mau certainly was not the only resistance movement threatening the British colony in Kenya. This is the most recent form of historical revisionism out of the narratives that is currently debated in Kenya. More Kenyans, like Raila Odinga, wish to incorporate all resistance movements within Kenya into the national narrative,

Yet despite the fact that this narrative trend is more inclusive, it, too, demonstrates how ethnic stereotypes complicate interpretations. By describing Mau Mau as a resistance movement rather than a nationalist movement, some Kenyans, like David, argue that “Kikuyu are self-serving; they help themselves.” This interpretation of Kikuyu motivations during the Emergency weakens their ability to claim benefits because their sacrifices were not made to help all Kenyans, just themselves. However, if Mau Mau, like other resistance movements, supported the goals of one specific ethnic group, why is it only the Kikuyu who are selfish for fighting for themselves? The perception of Mau Mau supporters, and thus the Kikuyu, as self-serving or greedy is clearly tied to the anger that arose in 2007 over the perception that the Kikuyu have an inequitable share of power.

Furthermore, Mau Mau fighters have recently received recognition as a result of the trial against Great Britain, who had to pay reparations for their inhumane treatment of Mau Mau detainees in concentration camps. Because the reparations focus specifically on crimes committed in these camps, the reparations are limited to those who participated in Mau Mau, excluding others who may have suffered. Thus,

75 Interview by author with Godfrey Muriuki in Nairobi, July 3, 2015.
76 Interview by author with David in Nairobi, July 16, 2015.
it is predominantly the Kikuyu who receive money to compensate them for their suffering, which would contribute to existing perceptions of them as lovers of money. The trial has singled out the Kikuyu by focusing on Mau Mau, leading some to argue that

if the British should pay something to show that they are sorry for what they did to Kenyans, they should do it to almost everyone, every family because they had a lot of bad things they did all across the country. They might not have been documented but there is evidence of that.

As suggested by Raila Odinga in his speech unveiling the statue, Kenyans want more recognition of people’s sacrifices and suffering across Kenya, not just Mau Mau fighters. Multiple resistance movements were brutally suppressed and also deserve the recognition and recompense that Mau Mau has gotten. These other movements are just as important as Mau Mau.

Conclusion

Whether or not Mau Mau was nationalist only matters because it allows certain Kenyans to gain advantages for their role in ending colonialism. Although international scholarship may not intend to influence Kenyan society, their overwhelming focus on Mau Mau in contrast to other movements and ongoing debate over nationalism, has contributed to the ability of Kenyans to use Mau Mau make claims on the state. By focusing on the requirements of a nationalist movement, scholarship ignores the larger question of why it matters whether or not Mau Mau was nationalist. Like Kenya today, Mau Mau had both national goals concerning all

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77 Interview by author with Anonymous in Karatina, July 22, 2015.
78 Interview by author with Kepha Ngito in Nairobi, June 19, 2015.
of Kenya, as well as ethnic characteristics particular to the Kikuyu. Since the violence in 2007 stirred underlying tensions and renewed arguments over power dynamics between ethnic groups, popular interpretations of the movement have changed in order to accommodate the desires of different Kenyans to challenge perceived Kikuyu political control.

The current socio-political tensions have also led to the formation of specific stereotypes about other ethnic groups. In their examinations of the past, historians should take the role of stereotypes into account, as current stereotypes can change how the past is remembered. While the present context has clearly shaped Kenyan perceptions of Mau Mau, understandings of history can also be used to explain present conditions. If Kikuyus in the past were supposedly unreasonable and greedy, then their actions today must be a result of similar motivations. Stereotypes represent a way for Kenyans to disregard specific narratives of the past for interpretations that reinforce their existing beliefs.

As the political and social situation in Kenya changes over time, it will be interesting to see how the understanding of Mau Mau’s nationalism continues to shift. Just as the British narrative of Mau Mau’s senseless violence has disappeared, it is possible that one of the narratives discussed in this chapter will disappear from popular discourse to reflect new perceptions of national and ethnic identities in Kenya. As Kenyans attempt to heal from the violence of 2007 and change their institutions, the narrative of Kikuyu saviors that justifies an uneven allocation of resources may fall out of favor. Perhaps the recent trend in scholarship that portrays Mau Mau as one of many resistance movements will become more popular, as
politics in Kenya becomes more inclusive. Mau Mau may gradually receive less attention as other resistance movement are incorporated into official Kenyan memory.
Chapter 2: Mau Mau and the Power of Victimhood

In my village there were chiefs who actually protested the British and there were massacres that happened in some parts of my area in my rural village. It’s not documented but they have interesting names based on what happened there and if you talk to some of the old men who were there at that time they will tell you everything. 79 — Kepha Ngito (Luo)

I even saw a man at compound 2 Mackinnon Road forced to drink a full bucket of water by a white man nicknamed the whip. They beat him until he drank so much water that his stomach swelled and it started coming out of his mouth, nose and ears. Eventually he died. 80 — Shadrak Kang’ee (Kikuyu)

Since their first interactions with Europeans, Kenyans have experienced different forms of violence regardless of ethnicity, age, gender or location. Despite centuries of violence against Kenyans, it is the Mau Mau rebellion that has drawn the most attention to British abuses. The experiences of communities, like Kepha Ngito’s hometown, are not unique in Kenyan history. However, stories of Mau Mau suffering, are publicized more frequently and attract greater publicity. Shadrak Kang’ee’s experiences in detention were featured in the BBC documentary, Kenya: White Terror. The oppression experienced by Mau Mau fighters and their supporters has overwhelmed the other narratives. Though many Kenyans suffered, Mau Mau veterans or Kikuyu detainees are seen as having been the ultimate victims who sacrificed everything for Kenya.

In this chapter, I argue that when narratives portray a specific group as victims, they bestow power on the supposed victim; victim identity provides an opportunity for individuals to claim societal advantages. In my understanding of

79 Interview with Kepha Ngito in Nairobi, June 19, 2015.
power I refer to Pierre Bourdieu’s theory on capital, which argues that power can originate from multiple sources in society: “economic (material and financial assets), cultural (scarce symbolic goods, skills and titles), [...] social (resources accrued by virtue of membership in a group),” and symbolic (prestige and honor). Capital increases a person’s access to resources and their agency in a given society. Thus, although the initial act of victimization may remove a person’s agency over their body or in a given society, they may be able to reclaim their agency afterwards because of their victim status, not despite it. The identity of “victim” allows people to gain moral legitimacy within a society. This moral superiority can confer power on people, particularly through economic capital — monetary compensation — and symbolic capital — respect and attention — for experiencing and surviving horrors.

In the case of Mau Mau, the official British narrative in the 1950s portrayed the white settlers as victims of senseless violence. This gave them a kind of respect internationally for persevering in Kenya in the face of seemingly unwarranted brutality. Representing settlers as unduly persecuted by Kenyans legitimized their property rights in Kenya and their claim on the British state for protection. After independence, however, Mau Mau veterans began to publicize their own experiences of senseless violence, as seen in their memoirs, which demonstrated their own claim to victimhood. As Kenyans replaced white settlers in the role of righteous victims, they were able to claim economic compensation from the British government and receive attention and respect at home.

Although narratives of victimhood can return power to the victims, why the memory surrounding Mau Mau victims shifted demonstrates the limits of such narratives internationally: Mau Mau supporters were only accepted as victims once white scholars shared their stories, thereby “validating” them. African accounts by themselves were not enough prove their experiences to Western societies. White voices have greater authority in shaping international public opinion and producing tangible results, like reparations. Race remains the most important factor in determining whether a group’s victim status will be accepted.

**Settler Victims, A Mau Mau Menace**

In the 1950s, the dominant narrative surrounding Mau Mau—both within Kenya and internationally—focused on Mau Mau savagery and their victims. These accounts did not acknowledge the legitimate reasons Kenyans had for rebelling: the displacement from land, tough conditions on the reserves, the color bar, as well as the other forms of oppression Africans faced on a daily basis under colonialism. Instead, settlers erased the legitimacy of the rebellion by using language that depicted Mau Mau rebels as criminals. Kenyan and international newspapers, newsreels, confidential reports and trial notes all described Mau Mau as “terrorists” and “gangsters,” suggesting that the rebels enjoyed creating fear and violence; they were selfish and just stirring up trouble. One article in the American press portraying the settlers’ understanding of Mau Mau reported:

[Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton stated,] ‘We are not to be turned aside by a band of terrorists.’ […] Across the page of Kanya’s history has fallen the
shadow of witchcraft, savagery and crime—in short, Mau Mau.‘ [...] ‘Mau Mau is the unholy union of dark and ancient superstition with the apparatus of modern gangsterism.’ Littelton said he would display in the house of commons library pictures of ‘haunting horror’ showing Mau Mau atrocities.”

By removing the context surrounding the uprising, these articles spread the image of Mau Mau as an evil and irrational force across the world. While some newspapers did acknowledge the roots of the uprising, most people internationally were shocked by the rebellion and unable to grasp the causes of the violence.

Perhaps most importantly, many articles and reports highlighted the fact the Mau Mau was against whites, emphasizing the danger to British settlers and portraying them as the victims of horrible violence. In articles describing the deaths in detail, Mau Mau was often described as a secret, organization that had “sworn to drive out the whites,” making it clear that it was white people who were threatened by the rebellion. By describing Mau Mau as anti-white, Kenyan settlers were able to garner international support from whites in Europe and North America. The racial motive for Mau Mau, without any other context, suggested that the movement was based purely on the hatred of another race. This fear of black people, particularly

83 For an example of a newspaper that did touch on the existing reasons for the rebellion, see the African American publication, Journal and Guide, which states: “When the white man came, the Kikuyu tried to adapt themselves to the new conditions. It is only when they lost most of their land, were reduced to virtual serfdom and subjected to a system of racial segregation, that they took up arms and used them with the same skill with which they practiced the arts of peace.” Charles Walker, "Africa Today Why Mau Mau?" New Journal and Guide, May 22, 1954, 15, Proquest Historical Newspapers, http://search.proquest.com/docview/568360277?accountid=14963.
84 “Kenya terrorists slay a family of 3; Doctor, Husband and Son, 6, Hacked to Death on a Farm—Servant Also Killed”, New York Times, January 26, 1953, pg 3.
men, who threatened the idyllic lives of whites, would have resonated with other settler populations, as well as white communities in the United States.\footnote{Martha Hodes discusses this image of black men as threats to white families, particularly white women in the United States. Martha Hodes, \textit{White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the 19th-Century South} (Binghamton: Vail-Ballou Pres, 1997).}

As nationalist movements were growing around the world in different colonies, the settlers used their identity as victims to legitimize their continuing presence in Kenya by depicting the Kenyans as the aggressors; they flipped the usual narrative of colonial oppressors and African oppressed to stoke anxieties and maintain minority rule over the African majority. The press described the white settlers as benevolent people who were kind to their Kikuyu workers, making settler deaths all the more shocking and seemingly irrational to audiences.

The international media emphasized this sense of the mercilessness of Mau Mau in contrast to the compassion of the settlers. They described the murders as “senseless since those chosen for mutilation [were] gentle people with long records of kind administration of their own and other blacks.”\footnote{Robert Ruark, “Your guns go with you,” \textit{Life}, February 16, 1953, 127.} For example, in the “horrible mutilation” of Mrs. Miecklejohn, \textit{Life} emphasized her “selfless devotion to the natives”, as well as the “kindly” nature of Richard Bingley and C.H. Ferguson, who were “hacked in their home” because they “couldn’t see harm to their Kikuyus.”\footnote{Author’s emphasis. Ibid.} Settlers portrayed their relationship with their Kikuyus laborers as close, making the laborers’ decision to support Mau Mau seem an even greater injustice.

The depiction of the deaths as without cause denied the systematic, every day forms of oppression Kenyans faced, even at the hands of “kindly” settlers. Through these narratives, settlers took on the identity of innocent victims, targeted merely for
the color of their skin. With these stories spreading internationally, Western
audiences believed that all whites in Kenya could be targeted and were at risk. This
fear mongering validated the settlers’ need for military protection. For whites in
Africa, Mau Mau fighters became ominous, fantastical beings. For example, one
nearby settler in Tanzania told how Mau Mau became “Like a monster to children,
that was sort of a threat. All the time our mother especially would refer if you don’t
drink your milk or if you don’t sleep […] Mau Mau will come and get you! […] Just
the word Mau Mau would make us run.” 88 Mau Mau became a symbol of evil for
whites, disconnected from the context that would have made it understandable and
thus less terrifying.

However, despite the fear of attack whites felt in response to Mau Mau, only
32 Europeans were killed and 26 wounded between 1952 and 1960; in contrast, 1,819
African civilians were killed and 916 wounded. 89 Because far more Africans died than
whites during the rebellion, newspapers ultimately focused on the African victims of
Mau Mau. However, even these articles were related to the narrative of white
victimhood, as the murdered Africans were portrayed as supporters of the settler
population; these deaths deserved attention because they were Kenyans who were
considered loyal to whites. Even when describing the deaths of African loyalists,
newspapers emphasized the anti-white nature of the movement. After one massacre in
Lari, Life reported, “Kenya, where the murderous Mau Mau have sworn to drive all
white men out of the country, last week suffered the most sanguinary of the Mau Mau

88 “Mau Mau,” narrated by Jamie York, Radiolab, July 3, 2015, accessed January 28, 2016,
89 David Anderson, Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire (New
thrusts. Disguised as policemen the terrorists made their way into a settlement of Kikuyu loyal to the whites and the Kenya government. Then, they chopped to pieces 150 men, women and children.\textsuperscript{90} Even as Africans became the main casualties in the rebellion, newspapers implied that the “true” and ongoing threat was to whites.

Not only was the brutality of violence toward victims—both white settlers and African loyalists—emphasized, but the feeling of betrayal was described as well. Settlers attempted to construct a narrative of colonialism as one of friendly relations with Africans. They described an ideal community where they were worked together, or rather where the Kikuyu happily worked for them. In one instance, a \textit{New York Times} article described how settlers felt that “the worst part of it all is the collapse of trust between themselves and so many of their once-respected Kikuyu workers. Of course, the Kikuyu are only one tribe out of many and it’s possible to get men from other tribes not Mau Mau-infested. But Kikuyu are the best and most intelligent workers.”\textsuperscript{91} In the minds of settlers, Mau Mau took away their sense of safety, their sense of trust, and hurt their livelihood.

For those whites who were killed, their deaths were seen as that much more terrifying because workers personally known by the families were often involved:

Mrs. Meiklejohn, a woman doctor […] was slashed about the head and arms with native swords while her husband was murdered in front of her. Their servant let the gangsters in. When two farmers, Ferguson and Bingley, were murdered while they sat at dinner, their servant pinioned the arms of one of them while the gang burst in and cut both men to ribbons. When the 6-year-old Ruck boy was slashed to death in his cot, it was the cook who led the gang to his bedroom.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{90} “Anti-whites: Raiding Mau Mau slaughter 150 loyal to the Kenya government,” \textit{Life}, April 13, 1953, 35.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
With the growing number of African deaths, settlers had another reason to argue for increasingly harsh measures and support against Mau Mau, as they could claim they were protecting the loyal Africans who could be targeted. As Mau Mau destroyed the romanticized dynamics between Kikuyu laborers and white settlers, these loyal Kenyans came to represent this imaginary ideal relationship between settlers and Africans. This fictional friendly relationship had to be protected as it validated British presence in Kenya, depicting settlers as a welcome and necessary part of society.

Thus, these various forms of victimhood gave Kenyan settlers support for their continuing presence and control in Kenya, at least for a time. Settler victim status was vital to obtaining support and approval from Britain for military operations. The few deaths among whites that did occur were used to escalate the situation. They provided the justifications for the state of emergency and the full-scale attack against Mau Mau. It would not be until after independence that Mau Mau voices were given credence, and even then it would still be forty years until the ban Mau Mau to be lifted in Kenya in 2003.

**Mau Mau Captives, British Sadists**

Although officially the organization was banned after independence, this did not prevent veterans from challenging the British narrative of the rebellion. Beginning already in the 1960s, forest fighters began publishing their accounts of the events in the 1950s in an attempt to change public perception of the movement. In his work on Mau Mau memoirs, scholar Marshall Clough argues:
This perspective—of the oath takers rather than their inquisitors, of the guerrillas rather than the pursuers, from within the wire instead of without—represented Mau Mau as heroic, not criminal; nationalist more than tribal; central instead of peripheral; a political success (though militarily defeated) rather than a failure.93

As Clough suggests, veterans used their memoirs as a way to share and validate their experiences and motivations, which the British and post-independence Kenyan government criminalized. However, these accounts represented more than just a way for veterans to reclaim control of their narratives. Through their writing, these fighters portrayed themselves as victims of British cruelty; their inexcusable suffering gave Mau Mau moral superiority over the settler and British forces.

One of the earliest challenges to the dominant anti-Mau Mau narrative came from Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, a Kikuyu who fought in the rebellion and was later detained for years during the Emergency. In his memoir, “Mau Mau” Detainee: The Account of a Kenya African of His Experiences in Detention Camps 1953-1960 (1963), Kariuki attempts to legitimize the movement by emphasizing its goal of independence, in contrast to the irrational and violent depictions of Mau Mau:

We do not regard the soldiers of the forest as “hardcore”, “terrorists” or “murderers”, but as the noblest of our fighters for freedom. May this book and our new state be a small part of their memorial. Their torture and their pain were the hard travail of a nation.94

By describing this book as a “memorial” Kariuki is in effect acknowledging that this memoir is a way to commemorate the fighters; this portrayal of Mau Mau was consciously created to create a new memory of the veterans whose efforts had not yet been recognized. To replace the narrative of gangsters, Kariuki portrays Mau Mau as

explicitly nationalist, a freedom struggle with the fighters as Kenya’s liberators. Kariuki contrasts the language the British used to portray Mau Mau as immoral and violent—“hardcore,” “terrorists,” and “murderers”—with his depiction of the rebellion as noble. In Kariuki’s depiction of the rebellion, the forest fighters should be considered heroes for their sacrifices. He also specifically notes as well that these were sacrifices for the nation, not just one ethnic group, making Mau Mau a national struggle that all Kenyans could claim.

In his memoir, Kariuki describes this torture and pain that he, along with other freedom fighters, suffered during detention, many of which had lasting effects:

Once when I relaxed during a press-up the corporal came and gave me several almighty blows on my ears. To my dismay when he had finished I found I could hear nothing and for two days I remained like this, trying to lip-read what was going on […] I sometimes have severe earaches today and I remain rather deaf in one ear. Those whom Wells particularly dislike he would force to remove their trousers and piggy-back another naked person. This was the most shameful thing of all.95

He recounts how it was British violence that was illogical. Kariuki was heartlessly beaten merely for resting during a forced exercise session. The British not only physically abused Kenyans, but also clearly attempted to dehumanize and shame them. The punishments described are not justified; they are completely dependent on the whims of the British officer in charge at the moment.

In perhaps his most extensive description of the inhumane treatment Kenyans faced in detention, Kariuki describes his punishment for protesting some of abuses in the camps:

They took me to the cells near Headquarters Company. The ‘small cell’ is a corrugated iron structure with a cement floor about six feet by four feet. There

95 Ibid., 89.
were thirty-two in all at Manyani, built in blocks of four. They gave me no food or water but fortunately someone had thrown a bucket of water on to the floor to make it uncomfortable for me to sleep on. So for the first three days until it dried up I was able to lick wetness off the cement and during that time I could think straight and speak out loud to myself. On the fourth and fifth days cold water started coming out of my skin in a sort of sweat. Still no food or water, no one came to look at me, silence and sweat. On the sixth and seventh days my eyes became heavy stones and the nightmares began. […] On the eighth day I no longer realized where I was, nor did my body seem to be part of me. I felt like a human wheel turning round and round and then like a man falling through thousands of feet from a high mountain into a thick forest. My mouth would not open and there was only left the awful business of falling into the deep blue valley which I could see quite clearly. This would be the end.96

In this chilling scene, Kariuki’s near death experience reveals the careless treatment of Kenyans in the concentration camps. The inhumane treatment he experienced—starvation, dehydration, and the threat of death—demonstrates how the British treated detainees worse than animals. The punishment never fit the supposed crime and went far beyond any acceptable ethical boundaries. These accounts of British cruelty suggest that it is the British, not the Mau Mau fighters who performed serious acts of violence for no reason. Where Kenyans may have killed to gain independence, Kariuki depicts the British violence as sadistic.

Another Mau Mau veteran, Joram Wamweya, similarly writes in detail of the mistreatment in the camps in his memoir Freedom Fighter (1971). Wamweya describes his experiences of the screening process through which it would be determined whether a Kenyan was a Mau Mau sympathizer: “A white officer sat close to the sacking and when gakonia [a hooded Kenyan informant] said ‘yes’, hell descended on earth. The unfortunate was kicked about and whipped and conducted to

96 Ibid., 92.
a compound reserved for ‘hard cores.’” Rather than a legal trial with the right to
defense, Wamweya reveals how the British disregarded their normal understandings
of justice in their treatment of Kenyans. Not only were those accused assumed to be
guilty just through words of a person with no evidence, but they were also harshly
beaten.

After one attempt to assert his rights, Wamweya describes how the British
starved him and his fellow detainees:

Shortly afterwards, however, we all decided to boycott work. We were not in
prison, we decided. When our decision was known, we were locked up in the
huts for four days with only water to drink. On the morning of the fifth day,
porridge was cooked by the warders. […] We found we were too weak to
move. Some lay right where they had been sleeping while others staggered
this way and that like drunkards so that the warders had to carry them
physically to where the porridge was.  

Wamweya and Kariuki both reveal how examples of British gross mistreatment and
abuse of detainees were the norm rather than a rare occurrence. Their portrayals of
the injustices perpetrated by the British invert the original depiction of the British as
the defenders of moral authority. In these memoirs, Mau Mau supporters fought for
their rights and for Kenya’s freedom, while the British increased the mistreatment of
Kenyans during the Emergency that had already existed since the start of colonialism.
By emphasizing British violence, Mau Mau fighters could claim moral victory.

The White Authorial Voice

Although these memoirs depicting Mau Mau as victims were published as
early as the 1960s, it would not be until the early 2000s that their account of the

98 Ibid., 190.
Emergency gained attention. Using the narrative of Mau Mau victimhood, in 1999 a group of Mau Mau fighters attempted to file a five million pound lawsuit against Great Britain for the abuses perpetrated by the British during the Emergency. However, nothing came of their endeavor. It was not until 2005 when two Western scholars published works validating Mau Mau experiences that a claim to reparations was taken seriously.

In 2006, Caroline Elkins, a Harvard professor of history, published her book, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya*, describing the complex detention system and abuses used against the Kikuyu during the Emergency in Kenya. That same year, historian David Anderson printed his work, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire*, which examined the brutally repressive system the British used to suppress Mau Mau. With the printing of these books, the Mau Mau narrative of torture seen in the earlier memoirs gained ground and began to receive international attention: it was at the launch of Elkins’s book that Justice Minister Kiraitu Murungi stated that “it was the honourable thing to do to formally apologise for ‘barbaric crimes against humanity.’”

In October 2009, with the additional authority of these Western voices, five detainees officially filed a case against the British government for abuses they suffered during detention in the 1950s. The trial relied on archival documents collected by Elkins for her work as evidence of British torture, placing her in a central role.

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position in the developments of the case. The international recognition of British atrocities in the concentration camps allowed Kikuyus, who were specifically targeted, to gain recompense for their suffering, as well as a formal apology from the British government. Upon the ruling, British Foreign Secretary William Hague announced:

I would like to make clear now, and for the first time, on behalf of Her Majesty's government, that we understand the pain and grievance felt by those who were involved in the events of the emergency in Kenya. "[…] "The British government recognises that Kenyans were subject to torture and other forms of ill-treatment at the hands of the colonial administration. The British government sincerely regrets that these abuses took place and that they marred Kenya's progress towards independence."

By replacing the narrative of white victims during the rebellion with that of Mau Mau victims in detention, 5,228 Kenyans in the suit were able to gain both economic and social capital, receiving a total of 19.9 million pounds and a formal apology.

Elkins’ work proved influential in drawing attention to the Mau Mau victims of torture in detention camps during the 1950s. However, the sudden international acceptance of Kenyans’ experiences despite decades of existing evidence demonstrates the continuing limits to narratives of victimhood based on race. Mau Mau fighters’ narrative of victimhood was only accepted into Western official memory of the rebellion once a white westerner retold their story. It is not coincidence that the trial against the United Kingdom only occurred after the publication of Elkins’ work. Other white scholars, like David Anderson, were also key in collecting evidence for the trial. However, Caroline Elkins’ specific role in

the writing the narrative of British abuses and Mau Mau suffering raises questions over the limits of using victim identity to gain recognition and capital. Race remains a powerful force in how international audiences understand and accept claims of abuse.

In particular, Elkins’s “discovery” of the atrocities committed against Kenyans during the emergency seems reminiscent of colonial “discoveries” of Africa. Her unearthing of the British abuses was not only obviously known by those who suffered them and their communities, but accounts of the systematic brutality had also already been publicize: as the memoirs in this chapter demonstrate, this story was not “untold,” as Elkins titles her book. Some of these stories had already circulated in Kenya, as well as internationally for decades before Elkins even began her research. Furthermore, although Caroline Elkins reported many archival documents to be classified or missing, in fact out of 1,090 cases of Kenyans sentenced to hang during the Emergency over 800 cases remain in the National Archives in Nairobi that describe witness statements, appeals, confessions as well as other details of the trials.104

Yet in reports of the abuses Kenyans suffered, Elkins is credited with uncovering a shocking, never-before heard secret. In the international world, the story of British torture and oppression apparently just “tumbled out, kind of by accident.”105

In a podcast by *Radiolab* on the detention and brutality of the Emergency, the narrator states:

For an example of trial documents on the Lari Massacre see KNA AXMI 8/490 Kerugi s/o Nguguna, 1953.
105 “Mau Mau,” narrated by Jamie York.
Ultimately the British quelled the rebellion; they handled it. Now as for how they handled it. For the longest time people would look back, it was this giant blank spot. No one quite knew what happened. [...] All of which is to say that it was assumed that that blank spot of the Mau Mau Emergency would just stay blank and that the story of the evil Mau Mau would just continue because there were no documents to say otherwise. But then we get to Caroline Elkins…

To describe British policy during the Emergency as a “blank spot” where “no one quite knew what happened” is to deny the knowledge that definitely existed among the Kikuyu if not among much of Kenya. Had people wished to know of Kikuyu experiences, they could have found evidence that contradicted the British account of white victimhood. Only with Elkins’s book did the story of Mau Mau victims gain attention. Rather than a secret, the detention and torture of Kenyans was clearly just an unaccepted truth that was only recognized once white scholars took control of the narrative

*Imperial Reckoning* has also become more popular than any of the memoirs written by those who experienced the Emergency. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 2006 for General Non-Fiction. According to WorldCat, *Imperial Reckoning* is reportedly held in 1,779 libraries worldwide. Only one memoir—*Mau Mau Detainee* held in 1,423 libraries—comes close to matching Elkins’ work in popularity and this is in part because he was a well known political figure in Kenya after independence; most others were in at least 1,000 libraries fewer than *Imperial Reckoning*.107

106 Ibid.
discrepancies between reactions to works published by white scholars and by Africans reveals the racial bias that remains in scholarship on African history.

Beginning in the nineteenth century “Africans were authoring major accounts of their histories, their cultures, and their polities, [yet] experts from Europe, trained outside the continent, would shape and control knowledge of Africa,” a phenomenon that continues today.\(^\text{108}\) Although the field of history has gradually incorporated African voices and the use of oral history into accepted practices among historians, this acceptance seems to be often only at the surface. The need for European and American scholars to validate African accounts of history reveals the continuing perspective that “African accounts of African experience had no authority in and of themselves—African experience would have to be mediated by, represented through, documents, archives, and the practices of Western scientific thought.”\(^\text{109}\) Caroline Elkins has taken on this role as mediator, legitimizing the Mau Mau narrative through her retelling of Kikuyu experiences in detention.

Not only are Western scholars still viewed as necessary to prove Kenyan experiences, but Elkins’s research experiences also came to hold a prominent position in the telling of Mau Mau narratives. The BBC film *Kenya: White Terror* (2002), which features Elkins as instrumental to discovering British abuses, describes her as “one of the youngest history professors at Harvard University.”\(^\text{110}\) It emphasizes her hard work and the personal journey she took to put together all the facts she uncovered in her research. In the film she shares her story that spanned years:

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\(^\text{108}\) Luise White et al., 5.
\(^\text{109}\) Ibid., 9-10.
I spent these two and a half years looking not just at the public record office but looking elsewhere. Looking here in Kenya, looking at private archives, speaking with a variety of different people most importantly the detainees and the villagers in the field itself, former missionaries, colonial officers, European settlers. It was a really quite a bit of a mosaic putting all of this together.\textsuperscript{111}

Elkins’ experiences receive similar attention in a \textit{Radiolab} podcast on Mau Mau:

\textbf{Interviewer}: Once upon a time you were a curious, young, grad student or something?
\textbf{Caroline}: Yeah more or less. In fact we have to go back further you know I’m dating myself at age 45, but we have to go back to my undergraduate years. We’re talking 1990. I was at Princeton and you do senior theses there and Princeton was ahead of its time and I got lots of funding and I went off to London and Kenya.
\textbf{Interviewer}: And how old were you when you were taking this trip?
\textbf{Caroline}: Oh, I’m 20.

\textit{Voice Over}: So Caroline is working in Nairobi

\textbf{Caroline}: And I’m doing research. At the time my senior thesis was looking at the Kikuyu, which is the largest ethnic group in Kenya. And I was looking primarily at the shifting roles of women and the ways they were impacted by colonialism

\textit{Voice Over}: So Caroline would wake up every morning and would walk to this old colonial building in the Nairobi city center

\textbf{Caroline}: Called the National Archives. It’s loud, it’s dusty, sometimes you had to jump under the desk for several hours cause there was a shoot out across the street. […]

\textit{Voice Over}: So one day she was at the archives flipping through some files when

\textbf{Caroline}: I came across some files on a detention camp Kamiti […] and I said gosh, you know, I know nothing about this.

\textit{Voice Over}: So she calls over the archivist

\textbf{Caroline}: This guy named Evanson, and I say, “Evanson, got anything else like this?” He said, “Yeah let me take a look.” And then he starts bringing me some other files, also related to Kamiti. Very bureaucratic files. […] And at that point I thought, “What’s going on?”

\textit{Voice Over}: A short time later she gets back to Princeton

\textbf{Caroline}: And being the good little undergraduate history major that I was, I searched high and low about detention camps in Kenya

\textit{Voice Over}: Nothing Much. No mention of this center anywhere

\textbf{Caroline}: There’s nobody who had done a systematic study of it. And that’s what I was after.

**Voice Over:** So without anything else to go on, Caroline just started driving up country.

**Caroline:** In the middle of nowhere Kenya [...] I mean really, if you wanted to find middle of nowhere on a map I was in it. I would just show up in somebody’s little shamba or farm some day [...] Next thing you know I’m conducting an interview. [...] 

**Voice Over:** She would talk to that person and then the person they referred to, and then person they referred to. And this is what she did for five years.\(^{112}\)

The Elkins’ story of discovery has been elevated to a similar standing as the account of Mau Mau suffering; the narration of her research reads as a kind of mystery with Elkins uncovers the large secret overcoming many obstacles. It is as though her story is needed to add suspense. The personal experiences of Kenyans are not enough to stand alone and tell their story. As the young heroine helping the silenced and the unfortunate, Caroline Elkins has taken on the role of the white savior in which, “a white messianic character saves a lower- or working-class, usually urban or isolated, non-white character from a sad fate.”\(^{113}\) Here Elkins has saved the Mau Mau detainees whose stories were never told; her work is framed as the reason why they have received compensation.

The experiences of Mau Mau have value for international audiences not in their own right, but because “In a climate in which many whites believe they are victimized, feel fatigued by complaints of racial inequality, and hold a latent desire to see evidence of a postracial era of reconciliation, films that demonstrate a messianic white character certainly resonate.”\(^ {114}\) By framing the story around Caroline Elkins, whites gain power from being on the side of the victims; they can be the heroes even as they bash the evil British government and white settlers. Perhaps narratives of

\(^{112}\) “Mau Mau,” narrated by Jamie York.


\(^{114}\) Ibid., 8.
victimhood only provide benefits to the victims when people in power can gain something as well from the tale.

Similarly, the story of the researcher going on a dangerous and exciting adventure to discover something unknown is reminiscent of the old, popular adventure tales of Europeans journeying throughout Africa during the pre-colonial and early colonial era.\textsuperscript{115} Here the dangers of the jungle are replaced by violence in Nairobi, the feeling of a remote and unknown setting remains in the villages of Central Province, the obstacles the heroine must overcome can be seen in the lengthy duration of her research and the struggle to find sources, made all the more impressive by emphasizing her youth, which is emphasized in the podcast.\textsuperscript{116}

\textbf{Those Left Behind}

Although many Mau Mau fighters were able to receive reparations from Great Britain, after the trial, not everyone who suffered was able make such a claim on the British government. In order to receive compensation for the abuses and torture suffered, individuals need to have documentary evidence. While no one denies the need for proof in order to make a ruling in a trial, the privileging of written proof over oral has left behind certain groups unable to find documentary evidence. This emphasis on written sources not only restricts those unable to gain access to the

\textsuperscript{115} See for instance the works of Henry Morton Stanley, such as \textit{How I Found Livinstone in Central Africa} (1904), who wrote of his travels in Africa in the late 1800s.

\textsuperscript{116} Interestingly, this story of the young girl who went on a kind of adventure—doing research all alone in an unknown place—was one of the main messages heard by a friend, who told me that I was just like Caroline Elkins doing research in the Nairobi archives without any help during undergrad, implying I should be proud for being like her.
Nairobi archives due to distance, but it also limits those who can claim reparations from the British mainly to Mau Mau fighters over other Kenyans.

Just as there is perhaps an excess of scholarship on Mau Mau in Kenyan histories, the British also kept more detailed records of the detention system that existed during the Emergency. As a result, other examples of British abuses during colonialism have largely been disregarded in the trial against Great Britain. During one interview, Kepha Ngito expressed his belief that reparations in Kenya are too limited:

It wasn’t their [Mau Mau’s] struggle only. If the British should pay something to show that they are sorry for what they did to Kenyans, they should do it to almost everyone, every family because they had a lot of bad things they did all across the country. They might not have been documented, but there is evidence of that.\(^{117}\)

Even beyond the explicit economic claim for reparations, the focus on this trial has reinforced earlier claims that the Kikuyu suffered more for Kenya than others and are therefore more deserving of economic compensation. Yet many other massacres and resistance movements occurred within Kenya since the start of colonization that have just not gotten as much attention as Mau Mau. For instance, slightly before Mau Mau, among the Pokot there was an anti-colonial movement known as Dini ya Msambwa. Lukas Pketch, one of the leaders, led a group of Pokot who were then massacred by the British on April 24, 1950, in the Kolowa Affray. Pketch and fifty others were killed.\(^{118}\)

While the ability to assert victim status has allowed Kenyans to reclaim control of their narrative through memoirs and economic reparations, this ability has

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\(^{117}\) Interview by author with Kepha Ngito in Nairobi, June 19, 2015.

\(^{118}\) Ogot, “Britain’s Gulag.”
been limited by the continuing perception of certain accounts as more trustworthy than others. Whether this is seen in the reception of the work of Caroline Elkins or in the overemphasis on written sources over oral as evidence for reparations, the influence of Western racial prejudices concerning proof have had far reaching effects within Kenya. As a white scholar, I cannot divorce myself from my whiteness. However, what we as white historians must do is remain aware of the persisting racial biases within the field of history and take note of how our work may contribute to the subjugation of African voices under Western voices. Perhaps the presence of a white Western scholar helped drive the impetus for compensation by drawing attention to what should already have been known. However, the Western prioritization of written sources over oral to prove victim status has silenced other Kenyans who also suffered greatly under colonial rule.
Chapter 3: Mau Mau’s Landscape: Placating, Educating and Healing Kenya Through Public Space

In the center of Nairobi’s bustling business district where many Kenyans walk to work or line up for their matatus (public buses) stands a large yellow columned building. The façade identifies the edifice as the Kenya National Archives in bold lettering. Inside, visitors can find a large open space filled with rare art, woodwork, furniture and photographs from across Africa, as well as information on key Kenyan figures. The gallery draws groups of school children on field trips, as well as tourists looking to learn about Kenyan history and appreciate historic cultural artifacts. Upstairs lies the archives where a brief skimming of the entry log reveals many foreigners, but also a large number of Kenyans doing research. For most people looking to do research, the second floor is the great attraction. However, on the third floor, for those who know, there exists a small area where on any given day one can see a few Kenyans seated waiting for hours to meet with someone in what is referred to as the Mau Mau Office. All these people have a connection to Mau Mau: some fought during the Emergency and suffered through detention, while others come on behalf of a spouse or parent. All come to make their case for reparations from the British government before a member of the Mau Mau War Veteran’s Association.

The Kenyan National Archives, established in 1965 under an act of Parliament, acts as both a public and a private space. On the lower levels, it serves as an educational tool, while the upper level provides a source of hope for people attempting to receive compensation for mistreatment during the Emergency. Speaking

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with people in the third floor alcove, visitors speak with pride about their ties to Mau Mau and their frustration with the lack of recognition for everything they suffered. More than just an avenue for material compensation, the archives provide an opportunity for new generations to understand their families’ history. When compared to the significance the archives have for foreign researchers working on academic projects, research in the archives can be a highly personal and powerful experience for Kenyans. The fact that the Mau Mau Office has a space at all in this public building is a statement in itself, an act of recognition and tacit support by the government for those attempting to have their voices heard.

The Kenyan National Archives plays an interesting role that is both public and private. The archives’ vision to “excel as an archives service in view of all Kenyans, and to serve as the Memory of the Nation,” gives the Mau Mau Office a special meaning. As the repository of official Kenyan memory, housing the office validates the particular understanding of Mau Mau as heroes deserving of recompense. Not only is the location of the office within the building powerful, but the site of the archives is also significant. Its location in the center of Nairobi, Kenya’s capital and political center, suggests its importance. For those who have access to Nairobi, the archives’ position in the business district allows for people outside the center to visit with relative ease due to its proximity to matatu lines; for people already working in the city, the archives remain accessible by foot; and for students nearby at the University of Nairobi the building is less than a 10 minute walk away. The archives’

120 Interview by author with multiple anonymous visitors in Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, July 13, 2015.
location allows for more accessibility, demonstrating the dedication to allow for all Kenyans, as its vision states, to have access to the materials inside.

The Kenyan National Archives and the Mau Mau Office demonstrate the power of public space and how space may serve different functions depending on how it is used. These functions may change over time as the political, economic and social contexts change. This chapter focuses on how the commemoration of Mau Mau in Kenya in public space through street names, monuments, museums and burial grounds can have a larger import beyond merely a gesture of recognition. Though initial gestures to memorialize Mau Mau attempted to appease the public by identifying them as heroes, they masked the Kenyan authorities’ unwillingness to enact real policies that would reward or help veterans.

Since independence, the meanings of Mau Mau monuments have changed as new communities appropriate them and create new interpretations. Monuments and museums have become politicized, as the space they create allows for an arena in which people can gather and voice their demands. Furthermore, newer commemorations of Mau Mau have begun to be interpreted as symbolic of contemporary social and political issues in Kenya, specifically the need for reconciliation. Rather than focusing only on the rifts in communities caused by the rebellion, monuments and museums memorializing Mau Mau have also begun to represent a path forward after the election violence in 2007. The spaces these monuments and museums create allow Kenyans who initially were excluded by the specific portrayals of Mau Mau to reinterpret the memorials’ meaning to apply to their own experiences.
Mau Mau Street Signs

After independence in 1963, Kenya went through the process of reclaiming its history through the repossession of public space. One method in which this was done was through the renaming of streets from British names to ones that celebrated Kenyan figures. For instance, Lord Delamere Avenue—named after the British settler Hugh Cholmondeley, 3rd Baron Delamere, who was an influential figure in the Kenyan settler community controlling thousands of acres of land—was renamed Kenyatta Avenue after first president Jomo Kenyatta.122 This act can be understood as an attempt to create a new narrative of African greatness, replacing the narrative of settlers as the saviors of Kenya with new African heroes.

Laragh Larsen, who wrote her doctoral thesis on Nairobi’s symbolic landscape, argues that the “colonial monumental landscape, and its absences, reflected the relationships of power that existed between Kenya’s different races, and the assigned memories and identities inscribed into the landscape by the European elite.”123 I expand her argument to include street names as part of the symbolic colonial landscape that represents and validates the unequal power dynamics. By renaming the streets, the Kenyan government reasserted their authority to determine who deserves to be remembered and celebrated; it represents a shift in who controls the narratives in public memory.

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Of the Kenyans memorialized in this manner, around five people connected to Mau Mau were commemorated: Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi, perhaps the most famous Mau Mau leader; Stanley Mathenge, one of the generals leading the forest fighters; Argwings-Khodek, known as the “Mau Mau lawyer” for defending many in their trials during the Emergency;124 Dennis Pritt, the British lawyer who defended the Kapenguria Six at their trial;125 and Kung’u Karumba, one of the Kapenguria Six.126

Of those commemorated, though, only Kimathi Street can be found in Nairobi’s central business district; the others remain on the outskirts of the city. The act of placing Kimathi Street in the center of Nairobi in comparison to the others suggests that only he was seen as one of the most important heroes needed to be celebrated in Kenya. Furthermore, it is clear the Kenyan government specifically chose to memorialize these figures in the city landscape because they were “safer” or less controversial options: Dedan Kimathi’s remains were never discovered and he has been portrayed as the main leader of the movement; Stanley Mathenge disappeared during the Emergency and has never been found; Argwings-Khodek Road was only named after he died on that street, potentially by assassination; and Dennis Pritt and Kung’u Karumba were both connected to the Kapenguria Six and thus connected to Jomo Kenyatta.

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124 David Anderson, 156.
125 The Kapenguria Six were six Kenyas who were arrested in 1952 for organizing, encouraging, and leading the Mau Mau rebellion. The six were Jomo Kenyatta, Bildad Kaggia, Kung’u Karumba, Fred Kubai, Achieng’ Oneko, and Paul Ngei. They were tried and convicted for their supposed crimes in Kapenguria and imprisoned in Lodwar.
126 I exclude Jomo Kenyatta from this list of people related to Mau Mau, though he does have a large street named after him in the central business district, as he not only distanced himself from the movement during the Emergency and after independence, but also continued the ban. While some today still make the mistake of connecting Kenyatta with Mau Mau, he was not the leader of the movement and his street today is more a sign of his role as a nationalist and as the first president than a sign of his supposed ties to Mau Mau.
Choosing figures tied to Kenyatta rather than more radical Mau Mau supporters allowed the government to create a more moderate portrayal of Mau Mau that was less likely to inflame tensions in the new multi-racial and –ethnic nation. The fact that other three figures were associated with mysterious deaths implies that their commemoration may have more to do with the controversy surrounding their disappearances and deaths than their specific actions. The decision to include them as opposed to other Mau Mau leaders can be understood as a way to rectify the perceived wrong done to them; politicians could say the figures were chosen for the injustices they suffered at the hands of others rather than because the state supported their actions during the Emergency.

Furthermore, not only were those Mau Mau selected with politics in mind, but they also functioned more as a placating gesture than any real commitment to celebrating Mau Mau veterans as heroes. While renaming the streets was a powerful way to demonstrate the change of power to Kenyans, the gesture would have had more of an impact in the years immediately following independence; it represented the reclamation of space from the British and settlers rather than a lasting and continuing influence. Asserting control of public space was an important step for the Kenyan government, but it did not truly provide an opening for dialogue about Mau Mau or a space for activism. Because the organization was still banned and the streets did not facilitate gatherings, early commemorations of Mau Mau did not result in any tangible results for Kenyans.
The Statue of Dedan Kimathi

Street names continued to be the only example of Mau Mau’s influence on public space in Nairobi until President Kibaki overturned the ban on Mau Mau as an organization in September 2003 that had existed since independence. On February 18, 2007, fifty years after his death, the statue of Dedan Kimathi was unveiled to the public on Kimathi Street. The erection of the monument changed the way public space was used in this street. Rather than a replica of the most famous picture of Kimathi handcuffed, wounded and lying on the ground after his capture by the British, the monument presents him striding forward, a gun in one hand and a knife in the other (Figure 1). The photograph of Mau Mau’s most famous leader in chains and powerless, had allowed the British to suggest their victory over the rebels. Defeating Kimathi was symbolic of the defeat of Mau Mau.

In contrast, the decision to portray Kimathi prepared for battle “arguably reinstates Kimathi’s agency as a fighter.” Rather than representing him as weak—a failure and a victim—the statue depicts Kimathi midstride marching toward the next fight. It is a heroic monument in which Kimathi is literally put on a pedestal towering above the pedestrians, cars, and matatus passing him. Responding to his gaze and powerful body language, one local Kenyan newspaper described him as “symbolically guarding” his street. The monument negates the passive depictions

of Kimathi with the image of a leader in perpetually in action. It represents a way to reassert the Kenyan perception of Kimathi over the older settler portrayals.

Figure 1: Statue of Dedan Kimathi. Photo by Jorge Láscar, March 2009.
The statue contributes to the myth surrounding Kimathi and the Mau Mau, as he represents the heroism of all the fighters with the dreadlocks commonly associated with those who went to the forest to fight. On the statue a gold placard reads: “This statue is dedicated to Dedan Kimathi Wachiuri (October 31st 1920- February 18th 1957) Gallant soldier, Mau Mau freedom fighter and nationalist.” It is followed by a quotation attributed to Kimathi, “It is better to die on our feet than live on our knees for fear of colonial rule.” Strikingly, the monument itself purposefully presents Kimathi on his feet. With this quote, Mau Mau fighters are shown to have been brave, fighting against all odds in the name of freedom and willing to make the ultimate sacrifice.

Rather than focus on the selective manipulation of Mau Mau by politicians, this chapter seeks to understand how the public space surrounding memorials provided new ways for Kenyans to critique Kenyan society and make suggestions for the future. Kimathi’s monument is surrounded by guard rails (see Figure 1), which limit and impede Kenyans’ ability to gather around the statue. However, despite the constraints on space and accessibility, the monument has been a site of public debate concerning the role Mau Mau fighters should be given in Kenyan history. In one case, fliers were attached to the monument stating “DEAR GOD, PLEASE REMOVE SUCH DEFILEMENT.” These fliers protest the statue’s message that Mau Mau fighters were heroes and imply that they were in fact criminals. The protesters suggest that the monument’s presence desecrates Kenyan history and sullies the city landscape.

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While the debate over the role of Mau Mau and the ethnic or nationalist nature of the rebellion has existed for decades among the academic and political community, the erection of Kimathi’s statue created an opportunity for public discourse in which everyday citizens could also participate in the discussion. It is far easier to protest something tangible that occupies physical space, like the monument, rather than a street name. The monument thus created an outlet for dissenting and supporting voices that had not existed when Kimathi was memorialized only by the street name.

If one accepts that the creation of Kimathi’s statue represents the political appropriation of Mau Mau by certain politicians, it is also true that the statue created a space for people to criticize the government, protest policies, and make demands regarding the treatment of veterans. Since its construction, the monument has become more than just a visible celebration of Mau Mau heroism. Mau Mau veterans and their descendants have coopted the statue to suit their purposes. Rather than an honest demonstration of support for the forest fighters, the statue has come to represent the failings of the current government to fulfill their promises to the movement. For example, on the 59th anniversary of Kimathi’s death in 2016, activists demonstrated around his monument as a “call for the government to take care of their social welfare,” because the mere creation of his statue does “not amount to the remembrance of all freedom fighters.”131 By building the monument, the government created a space in which people could gather to protest the very issues for which the government was attempting to make amends. Rather than a symbol of the

government’s recognition of Mau Mau veterans’ efforts, the statue has become a symbol of how much the government has yet to do.

Similarly, in 2014, Dedan Kimathi’s grandson and namesake, chained himself to his grandfather’s statue and refused to come down until his grandmother came. His brother explained:

He is only doing this because of frustration. His grandfather fought for this country, they build a house for our ‘cucu’ (Grandmother) but what about the children, and his mother is at the hospital because she does not have that amount of money to pay so that she can be released from the hospital.132

His brother expressed the grievances of the family stating, “For so many years, for so many years, yeah? Kimathi family we feel like we have been forgotten.”133 Through his protest, Kimathi used his relationship to his grandfather to reveal the limits of the government’s willingness to support Mau Mau. Thus, the statue has become the ultimate symbol of the government’s failure to help veterans, as the family of the most famous and celebrated of Mau Mau continues to struggle today. The plight of the Kimathi family represents the plight of veterans in general.

Mau Mau and British Reconciliation

Since the construction of the Kimathi statue, the Kenyan government erected a new monument commemorating Mau Mau. After the successful trial for reparations against Great Britain, a monument memorializing the victims of detention and torture during the Emergency was unveiled in September 2015. The memorial depicts a


woman handing food in a *kiondo* (a traditional handwoven basket made by the Kikuyu and Kamba) to a man carrying a gun on his back. The man wears the typical dreadlocks associated with Mau Mau, marking him as a forest fighter. Both are turning their faces away so as not to be able to identify each other if arrested by the British or Home Guards. Like the Kimathi memorial, this monument depicts the figures in a moment of action and courage, as opposed to a moment of weakness and abuse at the hands of the British.

However, the differences between this monument and the Kimathi are striking in many ways. Where Kimathi towers over bystanders, these figures are only slightly taller and can be easily touched or looked upon up close. These details make the monument more personal. The figures are at the same level as the onlookers, rather than elevated, implying that these people were just normal Kenyans who did their part. Where Kimathi’s statue represents the heroism of one man seen as a great leader of almost mythological quality, this monument illustrates the heroism of otherwise ordinary people. The followers of the movement were just as important to the freedom struggle as the leaders. The Mau Mau memorial represents a shift in the celebration of Mau Mau from a struggle of specific key heroes to a movement of the masses. By removing the clear identity of the movement, the government can no longer carefully select who should be remembered as a hero; these nameless figures allow for more inclusive interpretations of Mau Mau because they can represent all Mau Mau supporters. It is also notable that this is the first monument to recognize the vital participation of women in the rebellion, who provided the supplies forest

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fighters needed to survive at the risk to their own lives and also joined in the fight themselves.

Perhaps most importantly, while the erection of Kimathi’s statue did create a space around which people could gather, it was limited by its location on a busy street and the handrails surrounding the monument. The cars passing by obstructed the ability to congregate. The Mau Mau memorial on the other hand, is not sectioned off, allowing for the thousands of Mau Mau supporters and veterans who attended the unveiling of the monument, many wearing red shirts saying, *shujaa wa Mau Mau*—heroes of Mau Mau.\(^{135}\) Furthermore, its location in Uhuru Park also gives the space surrounding the monument greater import. As Larsen explains,

> [Uhuru Park] has always been an important space in Nairobi, often used as a site for political rallies and religious gatherings. It has acquired symbolic meaning through its function as an open space in the city centre where large crowds can gather. This symbolic meaning provided an ideal site for the inscription of Nairobi’s monumental landscape.\(^{136}\)

By erecting the Mau Mau memorial in Uhuru Park, the government created a space in which many more can gather to voice their concerns. The choice of this location for the monument may suggest a new openness of the government to listen to the concerns of Mau Mau veterans for support from the Kenyan government, in contrast previous responses by the state to protests in Uhuru Park.\(^{137}\)


It is too soon to tell whether the new monument is yet another example of political maneuvering or evidence of the states’ intent to help Mau Mau veterans and their families. This is question further complicated because it was the U.K. government, not the Kenyan, that funded the memorial. The monument was built first and foremost to recognize the British abuses during the Emergency as part of the 2013 settlement by the British government to pay reparations. The memorial is meant as a “symbol of reconciliation between the British Government, the Mau Mau, and all those who suffered during the Emergency Period.” Historian David Anderson maintains that the memorial “will do far more good than any money you give out,” as it represents for the first time British recognition of their abuses during colonialism. For instance, the U.K. government has refused to apologize for the Amritsar massacre in 1919, where the British killed 379 innocent Indians. While the monument is clearly a important gesture on the part of the British in their recognition of the abuses, for those who continue to suffer the effects of the detention and torture, compensation may continue to be viewed as necessary and more valuable.

Furthermore, whether or not this statue suggests that the Kenyan government is open to receiving and acting upon Mau Mau demands is uncertain. The memorial openly does recognize, though, in writing that the organization “remained a proscribed group in Kenya until the ban was lifted by the government in 2003,”

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138 Smith and Lamba.
implying the failure of the Kenyan government to acknowledge Mau Mau.141 Just recently in 2016, President Uhuru Kenyatta pledged to enact measures so Mau Mau veterans would receive medical services through the National Hospital Insurance Fund.142 Whether this will eventually occur remains to be seen, but it represents a concrete proposal for how the Kenyan government can materially help veterans.

While Kimathi’s statue has gained new meaning, its interpretations were limited in its attempt to immortalize Kimathi as a great hero. Through the more inclusive nature of the Mau Mau memorial and its specific connection to reconciliation, the significance of the memorial may change in ways beyond Mau Mau that affect all of Kenya. Anderson argues that “For Kenya, with a history of violence that includes post-election chaos in 2007-2008, the memorial could help wider reconciliation efforts.”143 By starting the conversation on reconciliation with the divisions created by the rebellion between loyalists and Mau Mau fighters, Kenya may be able to also begin to heal communities that have faced extreme violence in more recent years. At the opening ceremony of the new Mau Mau memorial, as referenced earlier in the first chapter on nationalism, Raila Odinga announced that

This honour for Mau Mau fighters must therefore mark the beginning of the search for our heroes from other communities. The struggle for Kenya’s freedom was a collective effort of patriots from virtually all parts of Kenya. […] We must go beyond Mau Mau. The post independence Kenya too has its heroes and victims. […] Subsequently, a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission was set up to look into all human rights abuses. The TJRC needs to be implemented without further excuses.144

141 Smith and Lamba.
143 “British funded Mau Mau memorial set to open Uhuru Park.”
144 AMAZING: Raila Odinga Speech during the unveiling of Mau Mau monument at Uhuru Park.”
Though the Mau Mau memorial specifically recognizes the inhumane treatment of Mau Mau by the British, the memorial may also come to represent a new willingness to grapple with the past and confront the abuses within Kenya that preceded or followed the Emergency. Odinga suggests that this conversation surrounding Mau Mau must lead to a broader reconciliation among Kenyans and that Kenya has a responsibility to face its past in order to move forward. The application of dialogue surrounding Mau Mau monuments in public spaces to contemporary issues in Kenya has also been seen in the changing use of museums.

**Nairobi National Museum**

For visitors interested in Kenyan history, the Nairobi National Museum, located just a few kilometers from the central business district, contains a long winding hallway, lined on either side with Kenyan artifacts from pre-colonial history to more recent history since independence in 1963. The main exhibit is organized so that visitors walk through time and see a linear progression of history, depicting how and why events unfolded the way they did. In this progression, the Mau Mau rebellion is presented clearly as a product of its time, following a section on World War II and the growth of political organizations. The exhibit portrays Mau Mau as a result of the new expectations of rights Kenyans had upon returning to Kenya after fighting in the war.

It is in this context that Mau Mau is described. The placard titled “Armed Struggle” describes how nationalism in Kenya shifted from more moderate and non-violent to a more radical form. These radicals advocated immediate independence
over a gradual transition and argued that violence was the only way to force the British to end colonization. This section label also briefly mentions the military reaction to Mau Mau and the detention camps that have recently received so much focus with the trial against Great Britain. Concerning the violence that accompanied Mau Mau’s fight for freedom, the placard reads:

In the wave of violence against the white settlers, prominent chiefs such as Waruhiu wa Kung’u and Luka Kahangara, home guards and government institutions, found the colonial Government unprepared to effectively deal with the situation. The lari massacre [sic.] was testimony to this unpreparedness.145

Although this violence is vaguely touched upon, the placard never explicitly states, for instance, that Waruhiu wa Kung’u and Luka Kahangara were brutally murdered by Mau Mau, nor does it explain the events of Lari that contributed to understandings of Mau Mau as merciless and savage and polarized the already divided Kikuyu community; all of this is merely implied and requires external knowledge on the part of the visitor. By largely neglecting the very aspect of the movement that made it so controversial, the museum provides a cleansed version of events, while maintaining plausible deniability through their unclear descriptions of the violence against settlers and Kenyans.

Some may argue that it is difficult to convey all the complexities in history in museum exhibits given the limited space and the controversies that can surround telling particular narratives over others. However, as national museums are also meant to educate visitors on history, to not delve into the controversies does the exhibit an injustice. To reference the deaths of Chief Waruhiu and Luka and the Lari

145 Wall Text, Armed Struggle, Nairobi National Museum, Nairobi, Kenya.
Massacre as signs of “unpreparedness” does not acknowledge the extent of the political divisions within Kenya, nor the polarized and dangerous atmosphere that existed during the Emergency as Kenyans fought with each other. It seems that the museum is unwilling to address or confront the complexities surrounding Mau Mau.

The exhibit vaguely notes some of the divisions within Mau Mau and among Kenyans during the Emergency. Two of the photographs display deaths caused by Mau Mau. One image is of loyalist Chief Waruhiu after he was shot in his car by a Mau Mau fighter; the other shows the dead left at Naivasha police station after a Mau Mau raid. The images are positioned near the floor, rather than at eyelevel, requiring most visitors to crouch to see the evidence. Notably, there were no photos of white settlers who died, which accurately represents the uneven death toll between Kenyans and whites. All these details hint at the violence among Kenyans that went on during this pre-independence period, yet nowhere is it clearly conveyed just how divisive this period was, nor the lasting wounds it continues to have in some communities.

Perhaps the museum’s decision not to interrogate the past can be understood in part by the basic mission of the museum:

The Museum aims to interpret Kenya's rich heritage and offers a one stop for visitors to sample the country's rich heritage both for education and leisure. In addition to the museum, visitors are treated to a variety of shopping and dining facilities, as well as botanical gardens that offer a serene environment.146

Its nearness to the center of Nairobi allows the museum to attract a specific audience given the schools within and just outside the city, as well as the tourists who may be staying nearby on a trip. The museum is meant to be a public attraction: educational,

but also enjoyable in a way that the many children who come on field trips or
foreigners who wish to learn about Kenya can spend a morning or afternoon
exploring and then continue on with the rest of their day.

The museum attempts to provide an uncontroversial and comfortable space,
which is in no way a negative—the museum contains many exciting and informative
features. However, the exhibit does not provide a real acknowledgement of some of
Kenya’s more contentious and difficult past, which might be more than what some
tourists look for in their visit. The exhibit chooses to teach a specific and
straightforward interpretation of the past to create a stress-free experience that allows
visitors to passively learn about history; they do not have to actively answer or think
about questions raised by the exhibit.

**Lari Memorial Peace Museum**

In comparison, the Lari Memorial Peace Museum (LMPM) was built
specifically to address the painful divisions created by Mau Mau in a way that is both
educational and healing. The museum, built in 2001, is located in the community of
Lari about 50 kilometers outside of Nairobi, which suffered two consecutive
massacres on March 26 and 27, 1953: first by Mau Mau fighters against Kenyan
loyalists, then by Home Guards in reprisal. On the night of the 26th, Mau Mau fighters
came into Lari to target collaborators and their families. Some houses were tied shut
and set on fire with occupants still inside. Others were cut down using *pangas*
(machetes) as they attempted to escape. Later that night, the Home Guard and
security arrived and murdered anyone suspected of having Mau Mau sympathies in
revenge. In one estimate, Mau Mau killed 74 in their attack in comparison to the 150 by the Home Guard. This does not include those labeled as missing.\textsuperscript{147} Neither side distinguished between their targets, combatant or civilian and women and children were killed alongside their Home Guard family members.

The site of the massacres was not random. The Emergency revealed and exacerbated the existing tensions. Lari had already been a divided community. As the community had a number of ex-squatters or landless Kikuyu, Mau Mau found many supporters within the community. At the same time, Chief Makimei and ex-Chief Luka Wakahangare, whom the British supported and relied on to control the area, organized Home Guard units to defend against Mau Mau.\textsuperscript{148} It was these chiefs, their supporters, and their families who were first targeted in the initial massacre.

In this atmosphere of animosity between groups, there was no room for neutrality. In an interview with Godfrey Muriuki, Professor of History at the University of Nairobi, he described how he became Mau Mau scout when he was around fifteen during the Emergency:

In that part of the world either you are with Mau Mau or you are not and in that case one was forced—I was forced to take the Mau Mau oath. In fact, I took two of them as a small young man. [...] [I was] happy to do that [take the oath]. That literally secured your life. Either you were with the Mau Mau or you are dead. So that literally liberated you from fear of being killed.”\textsuperscript{149}

While Muriuki never expressed regret for joining Mau Mau, the story of his initiation into the movement demonstrates the dangers civilians faced in communities affected by the rebellion. At this time, the freedom to choose a side in the fight was not truly a

\textsuperscript{147} David Anderson, 132.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 124.
\textsuperscript{149} Interview by author with Godfrey Muriuki in Nairobi, July 3, 2015.
choice, or if it was, it was a choice between joining the fight or dying. Kenyans were forced to support either Mau Mau or Home Guards in order to survive.

This theme of lack of choice was a common narrative during the rebellion. For instance, one song from the Emergency expressed the feeling of helplessness that Kenyans faced as they were systematically threatened by two foes:

Oh dear Oh dear where am I to pass. If I stay at home I will be suspected a spy, If I go to Nairobi I will be taken to Manyani [detention camp]. Oh dear Oh dear where am I to pass. Oh dear oh dear where am I to pass. Here are Security Forces here are Mau Mau terrorists, Again I am called out by thieves. Oh dear oh dear where am I to pass. Special tax I am asked by the Government If I am of Mumbi Mau Mau ask me, Terrorists beat me very much, A terrorist in my house want to steal me.\(^{150}\)

The singer reveals that it was impossible to remain undecided during the Emergency as there were threats from every side. People who did not side with either the Mau Mau or the Home Guard were vulnerable to attacks from both. Allegiance to one group or the other was necessary for survival, although supporting either side could still result in attacks from the other.

Memory of the Home Guard in Kenya since the Emergency has largely denigrated them as villains and traitors. Mau Mau violence against them, which often disregarded the civilian casualties, was rationalized by describing them generally as British supporters.\(^{151}\) However, this is a simplified interpretation of Kenya’s past. In fact, loyalists “did not like colonialism. In taking a stand, these so-called loyalists were in fact motivated by more prosaic and personal concerns: by the interests of their families; by their need to protect their property; by their sense of social status;
and by their own values.” Many also joined as a result of the violence wrought by Mau Mau, as Kenyans who were victims or connected to victims rallied against the movement. The Lari massacres epitomize the horrifying violence experienced by both loyalists and Mau Mau.

To this day, divisions exist within Lari between former loyalists and Mau Mau. While some have moved forward, forgiveness does not come as easily to others. Survivors today recognize that “Today the wounds still remain. Enmity has kept the community. The need for healing has been long overdue.” The Lari Memorial Peace Museum was constructed in 2001 to meet this need. Both Mau Mau veterans and former Home Guards took party in the planning led by Jospeh Kaboro Tumbo—a Mau Mau who took part in the attack on Chief Luka—and Douglas Kariuki Wainana—a Homeguard to participated in the violent reprisals.

The characterization of the peace center as a museum and not just a memorial is “crucial to achieving their aims of being seen to pass on knowledge of history and heritage to the next generation.” While the Nairobi National Museum also uses its space in order to educate people and preserve knowledge, this significance of this education serves a very different function in Lari. The identity of a museum validates the narratives told by the LMPM, allowing them to speak with authority on Kenya’s

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152 Author’s emphasis. David Anderson, 229.
153 Branch, Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya, 19, 100. For more on loyalist experiences and motivations throughout the Emergency see Branch’s work cited here, who challenges portrayals of the Home Guard as a select few who were elite and Christian, acting out of greed, or otherwise manipulated by the British.
156 Ibid., 18.
past. By referring to themselves as a museum, the LMPM suggests that their narrative of Mau Mau is the truth and should be accepted because museums are perceived as presenting an objective and accurate account of history. Rather than memorialize Kenyan heroes and commemorate their struggles, Lari’s peace museum attempts to use its education to focus specifically on wrongs done between Kenyans, where neither side truly has the moral authority.

The museum names the dead regardless of who they supported. In doing so, the LMPM suggests that all the dead deserve recognition and respect and blurs the line between the heroes and villains during the Emergency that has been accepted within Kenya. Their exhibits complicate the original narrative that clearly identified collaborators as traitors to Kenya. Historian Annie Coombes has written about the specific role photography plays in the museum, as the exhibit contains images of mutilated bodies from the massacre. She argues:

The Museum’s promiscuous recycling of British propaganda in order to narrate a tale of violence enacted by both sides of the divide is a reading cemented by the proximity of the wall of names commemorating, as we have seen, victims of both Mau Mau and Loyalist violence who died at Lari […] Thus the photographs taken in the aftermath of the Lari massacres are wrested from their colonial context and returned to the chaotic and bloody scenes of their origins, where protagonist and victim were never going to be so easily differentiated. 157

British photographs were originally used as settler propaganda to support the settler community’s presence in Kenya. The British employed these images to argue that they had a moral duty to fight Mau Mau; they emphasized those killed by Mau Mau and framed the British success at capturing potential Mau Mau “terrorists” as necessary to protecting civilian life. Using these images in the new context of the

157 Ibid., 17.
LMPM in the community of Lari itself, the museum removes and replaces the political context surrounding the photos with a narrative of horrible experiences by everyone involved. The photos are appropriated and given new meaning so as to support a message of reconciliation rather than a tale that portrays one side as moral actors. Neither the Mau Mau fighters nor the Home Guards can claim moral superiority.

Beyond having a different mission from the Nairobi National Museum, the LMPM uses public space in a very different way. Its location is vital to fulfilling its purpose. Had it been constructed anywhere outside of Lari, it is unlikely it would have been as effective. Being located so near to the site of the massacre gives the museum more power. Rather than just an exhibit conveying facts, visitors know that this is where many Kenyans died, a far more emotional experience. Furthermore, for the museum to successfully attempt to bridge the divide within Lari, it needed to be accessible to the community and involve them. Having people who lived through the massacre participate in the planning for the museum is in itself a beginning to overcome the tensions.

The LMPM also holds yearly healing events that foster dialogue among the massacre survivors and their families. They plant peace trees as “monuments of [their] journey towards forgiveness,” while sharing their stories.158 These trees also serve to change the physical landscape of Lari so that the values of reconciliation and forgiveness are literally embedded into the community, replacing a landscape rife with memories of violence.

The significance of the LMPM has broadened since the violence in 2007 and 2008. Rather than focusing on the divisions solely within Lari, the museum has come to represent the need for reconciliation across Kenya. The elders in Lari “insist on remembering the past not as a way of exacerbating old divisions, but because – as one Mau Mau veteran [stated] in 2009 – ‘It is … a warning to [the youth] to avoid violence, and that is all the more relevant because of the recent breakout of post-election violence.’”\(^{159}\) The museum’s proximity the location of the massacre adds power to this idea of reconciliation, which has allowed it to become a facilitator of reconciliation programs beyond the Lari community.

In 2008, following the violence of the previous year, the LMPM was a major organizer of a peace initiative to create the Kenyan Beaded Tree of Peace: each branch was beaded by someone of a different ethnicity as it travelled between communities across Kenya. In 2009, the LMPM hosted the first formal exchange of peace museum employees meant to foster and facilitate inter-ethnic dialogue and understanding on peace and heritage issues, to enable people to visit each others' community museums, to promote networking, and to strengthen the role of these small museums in national peace and reconciliation. Six different ethnic groups were represented at this first event: Gikuyu, Aembu, Maasai, 'Dorobo', Suba and Yaaku.\(^{160}\)

In the next elections in 2013, the museum also facilitated “peace meetings between ethnicities.”\(^{161}\) Rather than merely a monument to the Lari Massacre, the LMPM has


\(^{161}\) “Lari Memorial Peace Museum.”
actively sought to broaden the mission of the museum by including all Kenyans and attempting to heal more recent wounds and prevent future violence.

The central role the LMPM has taken in the inter-ethnic and reconciliation talks suggests that its significance goes beyond its basic mission for reconciliation. I argue that it is the museum’s location and the public space it provides for gatherings that gives it the power and ability to lead these programs given its proximity to the site of two brutal massacres. Its connection to the once very divided Lari community has made the LMPM into a symbol of broader reconciliation that could occur across Kenya.

Mau Mau Graves

Perhaps one of the clearest uses of public space to commemorate Mau Mau that has taken on a broader meaning is through burial sites. Graves can be both a public and a very personal space depending on how and by whom they are interpreted. Burial practices, which used to have uneven importance across Kenyan ethnic groups, have become increasingly important. For instance, for the Kikuyu and other ethnic groups that settled near Mount Kenya in central Kenya, burial was traditionally only for the elite and wealthy. However, with the gradual spread of Christianity, the importance of burials has grown in importance as Kikuyu converts and other local authorities during the colonial period argued for universal burial,

rather than leaving bodies in the forest.  

Furthermore, with the continuing tensions over land possession, burials became a method by which people could use graves as evidence of a claim to land.  

These changes all demonstrate personal use of burial sites. As universal burial became more common, it also became more important to Kenyans to have proper burials. Thus, in communities with graves containing family members who died during the Mau Mau rebellion, these sites have taken on greater significance. When one unmarked mass grave was almost built upon, there were great protests, as “the land itself is inscribed with memories of Mau Mau.” The space takes on a new symbolic meaning and becomes sacred in its connection to those who died.

Graves, however, can also have a public use. Graves can become sites public pilgrimage for Kenyans who wish to pay their respects to heroes, as burial grounds serve as a kind of memorial. Rather than attracting people directly related to those buried, official graves can become an attraction themselves. The graves represent more than a space to remember and honor the specific individuals actually buried. Instead, the burial grounds symbolize how the individuals contributed to society at large and the greater goals for which they stood.

This dual function of graves as both private and public memorials has led to conversations beginning in the 1990s concerning the burial of Kenya’s heroes. This discussion centered mostly around the remains of Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi, who was buried in an unmarked grave at Kamiti prison after his execution. While the

163 Ibid., 377.
165 David Anderson, 343.
government’s support of the search for his body was grounded in political motivations—as in the case of the Kimathi statue, President Kibaki used the search for his body to unify Kikuyu support—the motivation was also to give him a “proper burial” and thereby create a space that recognizes the goals and experiences of Mau Mau fighters; “the lack of commemoration is a kind of punishment, and it is a punishment that has continued long after colonialism’s end.” Kimathi’s remains would have been interred in Heroes’ Acre, meant to hold the bodies of Kenya’s chosen heroes, where Kenyans could pay their respects to Kimathi and the values he has come to symbolize.

While Kimathi’s body remains missing, the state gave Heroes’ Acre a plot of land in Uhuru Gardens. Although both Uhuru Gardens and Uhuru Park, where the Mau Mau memorial is located, have names connected with Kenya’s independence—*uhuru* means freedom—they have different purposes:

> While Uhuru Park is an important site through virtue of it being an open space in the city centre, Uhuru Gardens acquired symbolic value through its role in the independence ceremony. It is located out of the city centre, and as a large space able to accommodate substantial crowds, it was at Uhuru Gardens that, at the moment of independence, the British flag was lowered and replaced by the new Kenyan flag.

Placing Heroes Acre in the same space where Kenyan independence was first demonstrated gives it greater significance; it emphasizes the Kenyan nature of the heroes and their importance and contributions to Kenya.

However, the question of who should be buried in Heroes Acre raises hidden controversies as Kenyans debate who should qualify and who should be excluded from those selected to be Kenyan heroes. In the conclusion of his book, Anderson

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166 Ibid., 342.
raises the question of what to do with the unmarked mass graves of fighters hanged at Kamiti prison, the 475 loyalist skeletons stored at the Nairobi National Museum who were murdered, and the graves containing both Mau Mau fighters and loyalists. Kenya has not yet forgiven the “loyalists” for their perceived disloyalty of the nation or recognized that the narrative of collaboration is more complicated than a simple tale of betrayal. As long as Kenyans ignore the LMPM’s narrative that reveals crimes were perpetrated by both sides, Kenya’s heroes will remain a polarizing topic for people who cannot forgive the past and move forward. Simplistic narratives of history prevent Kenyans from overcoming historic divisions within and among communities. Anderson concludes that “If the loyalist dead were to join the freedom fighters in Heroes’ Acre, then Kenya might really begin to take some steps toward reconciliation.”

When Anderson spoke of reconciliation, he was referring to the lingering divisions between loyalists and Mau Mau fighters. However, with the election violence that occurred after his book was published, this idea of reconciliation could have much broader implications. In grappling with Kenya’s past in such a way that grievances from multiple sides are acknowledged, Kenya may be able to heal from the violence it has experienced. Public space dedicated to memorializing Mau Mau has allowed for the inclusion of groups who previously were unable to participate in political debates by giving them an arena in which they can focalize their demands. More than this, though, by beginning discussions on Mau Mau and the ways in which they have been commemorated, public spaces have also begun a broader discussion

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168 David Anderson, 344.
on how Kenya could deal with past injustices. Memorials can bring Kenyans together rather than further divide them by including people from throughout Kenya into the simplistic narrative of heroes and victims.

Kenya has not had any kind of Truth and Reconciliation Commission, like South Africa’s after Apartheid, regarding the violence committed against Kenyans by Kenyans during the Emergency. However, in 2008 the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission of Kenya was established to grapple with Kenya’s history of violence from the 1980s under President Arap Moi to the election violence of 2007. Paralleling this political decision to address past violence rather than ignore its continuing wounds, discussions of Mau Mau have begun to also concentrate on this issue of forgiveness and healing, allowing old grievances to be addressed. Perhaps the discussions surrounding the violence of the pre-independence era seen around public memorials will also help bridge the divisions seen post-independence.
Chapter 4: Mau Mau in Popular Culture: Good Kenyans and White Entertainment

In the 1990s and 2000s, Kenyans faced increasing violence from a Kikuyu group predominantly located in Nairobi known as Mungiki. The news sources concentrated on the beheadings, vigilantism, extortion of the matatu industry, and forced circumcisions that surrounded the mysterious movement. These reports described Mungiki as “the biggest and most dangerous gang in the world, a thuggish army terrorizing Kenya with extortion rackets and gruesome punishments.” This word choice of “gang,” “terrorize,” “thuggish,” and “gruesome” is oddly reminiscent of international depictions of the Mau Mau rebellion during the Emergency. However, the similarities to the uprising do not end there.

The primarily Kikuyu organization, said to have first arisen in the 1980s, has actively identified itself as the successors of Mau Mau. With all the negative media attention, Mungiki has used its self-representation as the legacy of Mau Mau to portray itself as “the revolutionary element.” Mungiki’s attempt to identify with Mau Mau fighters demonstrates a shift in the image of Mau Mau from the earlier British depictions of Mau Mau as savage and irrational, to revolutionary in their desire to change society.


171 Ibid., 530.
By claiming to be the descendants of Mau Mau, Mungiki followers suggest that they, too, have been overlooked and disregarded: the name Mungiki, “Translated as ‘we are the public,’ […] is an assertion of the rights of a social class that feels acutely deprived and marginalized in a rapidly globalizing world.” Just as Mau Mau challenged British rule, Mungiki’s supporters viewed their actions as a way to assert their voices in opposition to a system they deemed oppressive. Mungiki’s self-made image demonstrates how the ability to claim ownership of Mau Mau’s legacy provides certain authority to those who wield their title.

The transformation of Mau Mau’s image would have been impossible without a shift in depictions of the rebellion in popular culture. In this chapter, I argue that Kenyans have used specific portrayals of Mau Mau to teach proper behavior to members of their community. Mau Mau’s image suggests that a “good” Kenyan lives according to certain values and opposes corruption in Kenyan society. What these ideals and threats are changes depending on the interpretation of Mau Mau. The “good” Kenyan, as represented in popular culture, has changed from one who opposed the menace of Mau Mau during the Emergency to one who opposes the forces of neo-colonialism to this day.

Furthermore, in Western societies, specifically the United Kingdom and the United States, Mau Mau has been a source of fascination. Rather than attempt to understand the origins or implications of the movement, international depictions of the rebellion in popular culture use Mau Mau for its ability to satisfy Western consumption of sensationalized violence and to act as a lens through which people

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can understand their own problems. The experiences of Kenyans are of interest to these international audiences so long as they entertain or to facilitate self-reflection.

The Loyalist Protectors

During the Emergency, Kenyans could only publicly oppose Mau Mau because voicing support for the movement in the media would either lead to death or detention. Thus, articles written by Kenyans at the time focused on the dangers and consequences of Mau Mau, which the British circulated as propaganda to promote resistance to the rebellion. Yet despite the obvious bias in these sources, it is useful to analyze how Kenyans attempted to change people’s perspectives. The arguments specifically chosen to turn Kenyans against Mau Mau reveal how loyalists understood the rebellion through their Kikuyu worldview. The anti-Mau Mau sentiment is rationalized through traditional Kikuyu morals, suggesting that the movement and its fighters were intrinsically at odds with Kikuyu principles.

Many of the articles focused on Mau Mau’s violence against fellow Kenyans, similar to how Westerners and settlers reported the violence. Here, Mau Mau are also described as gangsters, terrorists and thieves. However, these texts on Mau Mau had a broader argument beyond the idea that murder is unjust; instead it they concentrated on framing Mau Mau through the Kikuyu lens of what it means to be a good good Kikuyu. In 1954, an article titled “Mau Mau Wickedness” appeared in the publication *Kayu ka Embu* describing this violence:

If the Mau Mau were truly friends of the Kikuyu—as they pretend to be—they would never lift a hand against them. Then why do they do so? It is because they are jealous of the good people of the tribe. Ever since the world began,
wicked people have been jealous of the good. The Mau Mau have divided the Kikuyu. Before the Mau Mau came the Kikuyu lived together in peace as one tribe." \(^{173}\)

Thus, the idea of infighting within larger Kikuyu society and targeting the Kenyan Home Guard was significant not just because of the loss of life, but because the deaths represented Mau Mau’s betrayal of the Kikuyu community.

Furthermore, describing the fighters as “wicked” also suggests that their morals were skewed; they did not follow the same ethical principles a good Kikuyu should. The author questions the movement’s proclaimed goals to help the Kikuyu community. Instead, he emphasizes that the fighters’ envy of “good” Kenyans harmed the Kikuyu community. That these wicked fighters were “jealous” implies that Mau Mau supporters were less successful than the “good” Kikuyu; their lower status was a result of their immorality. The article blames this immorality for the rift in Kikuyu society.

These arguments clearly articulate who is and is not a good Kikuyu or Kenyan, the main implication being that one cannot be a Mau Mau fighter and a good Kenyan. To persuade people to oppose the movement, Kenyans emphasized Mau Mau’s incompatibility with Kikuyu traditions and culture. In another article titled “Contravention by Mau Mau of the old Kikuyu Customs, Kikuyu David Waruhiu wrote, “Of what tribe are the Mau Mau? they ought not call themselves Kikuyu. They are at variance with the Kikuyu system;” \(^{174}\) those who joined Mau Mau were not useful, productive members of society. Thus, many articles emphasize the laziness of Mau Mau, in contrast to the work ethic of the Kikuyu: “They left the other people


working for the progress of their country and took the Mau Mau oath because of their laziness and selfishness and went to live in the forest like wild animals. Similarly, another article describes the “original Mau Mau” as “too lazy to do anything and so were unable to support themselves.” Rather than depicting fighters as heroic, brave, and willing to sacrifice their lives and livelihood for freedom, these Kenyans argue that Mau Mau was comprised of people unwilling to work. This argument was made stronger because the forest fighters were completely dependent on the goodwill of the Kikuyu villager who supplied them with food they needed to survive. Thus, fighters were seen as no better than “wild animals,” suggesting that they did not follow a moral code as a good Kikuyu should or function on a higher cognitive level.

This idea is also seen in comparison of Mau Mau to children. In his article, “The Disobedience of the Kikuyu Children, Chief Muhaya writes:

I would like to say this to all Kikuyu, Embu, Meru and Akamba. We have allowed our children to disobey. […] Such people were hated because of their evil deeds such as the following: They did not respect their parents or their elders. They used to steal. They were envious of other people good things. They were very unkind, to both people and the animals. And the worst thing is they could not work.

By labeling Mau Mau as children, the author implies that they do not have full rational capabilities; they are not responsible individuals. This belittles the fighters and disregards their justifications for opposing colonialism and fighting the British as unrealistic. Thus, it follows that the adults are loyalists. Once again, the productive members of society—those who are worthy Kikuyu—are people who oppose Mau Mau.

This reversal of who is a “good” Kikuyu seems to focus on the key tenet of Kikuyu culture: land. To be seen as a full adult among the Kikuyu, the possession and working of land is vital. By going into the forest to fight, Mau Mau supporters were deserting their most important possession. Furthermore, the British confiscated land as a punishment for supporting Mau Mau, even if the Kenyan was not involved in the military campaign. This became even more important, and might explain the anger against Mau Mau, when the British began rounding up thousands of Kikuyu, detaining them, and resettling them in small, rigidly structured villages. Despite fighting for land and freedom, the overall results for the Kikuyu during the Emergency were the opposite. As F. N. Kungu describes, “The land we had, has been made smaller for we have ma[n]y camps built for the sake of security. We have had our land confiscated and also declared as special area. Instead of gaining land as [promised] by Mau Mau, we have lost it.”

This collective punishment was perhaps the ultimate betrayal for Kikuyus and Mau Mau was to blame. Given these new circumstances, the only way to be a productive, adult member of Kikuyu society, using the framework of land and self-mastery in Kikuyu culture, was to be a loyalist. Those who aided the British in their fight against Mau Mau were often rewarded with money or land and were less likely to have properties removed. While Mau Mau supporters believed that fighting the British for freedom was the only moral action, these publications at the time reveal that there was a second working ethical code that prioritized work and land over future seemingly unlikely results.

While it is difficult to say how persuasive many Kenyans found these articles circulated by the British, the arguments put forth are crucial to understanding why Kenyans opposed Mau Mau. It is clear that during the Emergency the Kikuyu were experiencing a moral crisis and divide, and these reactions to the rebellion are representative of attempts to contrast good Kikuyus with those who posed a threat to the moral health of society. Identifying specific attitudes as harmful provided loyalists with a way to hopefully unify Kikuyu communities.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Synonymy with Mau Mau

Since independence, depictions of Mau Mau in popular culture still remain part of a larger discussion concerning what it means to be a good Kenyan. However, while Mau Mau fighters were often depicted as immoral and detrimental to Kenyan society during the Emergency, since independence Mau Mau has come to symbolize positive revolutionary behavior. This is not to say that supporters of Mau Mau did not see the movement as revolutionary or moral at the time. However, it was only after the end of colonialism that this idea was widely seen in popular culture. Thus, popular depictions of Mau Mau portray moral Kenyans as people, often the subaltern, who challenge oppressive hegemonic structures.

This new public portrayal of Mau Mau can be seen in and may be credited to the novels and other writings of Ngugi wa Thiong’o, an internationally acclaimed Kenyan author. Not only is he world renowned, but his influence within Kenya is even greater. As Kenya’s most famous and respected author, Ngugi’s works are taught as key seminal texts in schools throughout Kenya, making them common
knowledge and creating a shared cultural background across generations. Ngugi, who lived through the Emergency, was personally affected by his experiences in the 1950s: one of his brothers joined the rebellion, another supported the colonial forces, and a third, who was deaf, was shot and killed when he did not hear the British order him to stop. Many of his works deal with or are connected to the Mau Mau rebellion. By studying Ngugi’s texts, Kenyans learn about history through his portrayals and interpretations of the movement. This exposure has influenced how Kenyans perceive and understand the movement.

For Ngugi wa Thiong’o, past and present are interconnected. An event’s time frame does not prevent history from shaping what follows. The past continues to influence the present. Through his texts, Ngugi reveals his belief that “To understand the present… you must understand the past. To know where you are, you must know where you came from.”179 This perception of history is key to understanding Ngugi’s works, as it reveals the important role Mau Mau has played in shaping Kenya’s present since independence. Mau Mau is more than an isolated period of history; it is key to understanding contemporary Kenyan society.

Ngugi creates a new image of Mau Mau as a force against systems oppression. In his earlier works he reveals the complexities of the movement by highlighting the difficult choices Kenyans faced during the Emergency and the pervasiveness of violence. Overtime, however, his portrayal of Mau Mau has solidified to clearly depict Mau Mau as revolutionary heroes who were willing to sacrifice everything in the face of injustice. One of his earliest works, and perhaps his most famous, A Grain

of Wheat (1978), portrays the violence that surrounded Mau Mau. He conveys how events during the Emergency caused Kenyans to turn on each other and led to brutal acts both by Mau Mau fighters and by loyalists. In this depiction, everyone was morally complicit in what occurred, everyone had blood on their hands. Given that this work was published only four years after independence—a time of nation building—Ngugi consequently emphasized how Kenya should move forward from its violent past to come together and forgive one another; including violence perpetrated by Mau Mau fighters was necessary to accomplish this message.

However, even as Ngugi suggests that everyone carried guilt, he simultaneously portrays the Mau Mau fighters as heroes for their efforts against the British. In a note prefacing the text, Ngugi writes: “Although set in contemporary Kenya, all the characters in this book are fictitious […] But the situation and the problems are real—sometimes too painfully real for the peasants who fought the British yet who now see all that they fought for being put on one side.” By saying that the goals for which Mau Mau fought have been disregarded under the newly independent government, Ngugi suggests that the movement’s motives and objectives were progressive and positive, even if the rebellion led to violence on both sides. Thus, Ngugi depicts the forest fighters as people who fought for independence, in contrast to British depictions of senseless brutality and the Kenyan government’s banning of the movement. Already early on Ngugi cements his depiction of Mau Mau as Kenyans who tried to improve society for everyone. This radical depiction of the movement only strengthens in later works.

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Furthermore, this note also marks the start of Ngugi’s use of Mau Mau to demonstrate continuities between the past and present. By stating that Mau Mau’s goals have been “put on one side,” Ngugi suggests that the problems Kenyans faced under colonialism have not disappeared. He further argues that the betrayals that occur within Kenyan communities throughout the novel represent “the possibility of betrayal of the ideals and goals of the national liberation movement by those who have gained power in the newly independent Kenya, precisely because they are still controlled by self-interest and by conceptions of social and political relations determined by a repressive political structure.”

Written only four years after independence, *A Grain of Wheat* already points to neocolonialism as a serious threat facing the Kenyan nation.

As the years since independence passed without a radical restructuring of Kenyan society, the threat of capitalism and authoritarianism played an increasingly important role in Ngugi’s works. In 1963, Britain handed power over to moderate Africans under Jomo Kenyatta, who appeared less threatening than Kenyans who advocated for radical societal changes. Most Kenyans who took power in the new government had not fought for independence or even necessarily supported Mau Mau, a result of the British unwillingness to negotiate with the leaders of the movement or other alleged extremists. As one veterans stated: “Yes, the people who

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182 Cooper, 73.
are enjoying the benefits of the Mau Mau war are either those who betrayed the movement outright, or those who did not support it in any way."^{183}

Only six years after independence, President Kenyatta made Kenya a one party state under his party KANU (Kenya African National Union), banning the other political party, Kenya’s People Union, and imprisoning its leaders. This system continued under President Moi, who intensified the authoritarian regime with even harsher forms of oppression. Both presidents relied on rigged and fraudulent elections.\(^\text{184}\) This powerlessness was reminiscent of the oppressive white settler state, as citizens had little say in their on government. The newly independent government “sought to take over the interventionist aspect of the colonial state, and indeed intensify it, in the name of the national interest.”\(^\text{185}\) Like the earlier settler regime, the Kenyan state claimed to know what was best for its citizens, legitimizing authoritarian rule with claims of progress. Although Kenyans had ended colonial rule, their rights as Kenyan citizens remained unprotected and their needs unfulfilled; the failure to enact changes represented to many Kenyans a betrayal by their state.

The Kenyan government also used similar or even worse threats to safety and livelihood as those that had existed under colonialism. For instance, before elections, the politicians in power often organized the use of ethnic cleansing to attack potential opponents.\(^\text{186}\) Attempts to protest the regime nonviolently were often met with brutal suppression. In on example, at an anti-Moi demonstration in 1997, the police whipped

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\(^{185}\) Cooper, 88.

\(^{186}\) Ibid., 727.
and clubbed the protesters.\textsuperscript{187} Under the authoritarian regimes, it appeared as though the governments under Kenyatta and Moi had merely replaced the earlier white colonizers.

Once colonialism had ended, Kenyans hoped that their economic opportunities would increase after the unequal distribution of wealth to the white minority. However, despite some improvement, much of the wealth and businesses remained controlled by a small fraction of the population through corruption. As part of their leadership strategy, KANU transferred the “control of critical local resources out of the hands of local politicians into the keeping of the bureaucracy.”\textsuperscript{188} Wealthy Kenyans came to accumulate more wealth. Connections to and obeisance of people in power and were necessary for social mobility. Only a limited group of Kenyans were able to join the white settler community as economic power holders.

It is within this context of parallel systems of oppression that Ngugi wrote \textit{Petals of Blood} (1978). Published over a decade after \textit{A Grain of Wheat}, Ngugi emphasizes these continuities between Kenya under colonialism and Kenya under neocolonialism; his novel depicts the disillusionment that many Kenyans who had lived for over a decade without seeing the expected transformations experienced daily. As these new hegemonic forces entrenched themselves in Kenyan society—with Kenyans acting as the new exploiters—Mau Mau became more important as a symbol of opposition and the complex and divisive nature of the movement was minimized with fighters depicted as heroes.

Mau Mau became a movement of revolution against the forces of oppression, whether in the past or the present. This is visible in the character Abdulla from *Petals of Blood*. He is a Kenyan who was permanently crippled after fighting the British. In one flash back, Ngugi reveals the radical goals for which Mau Mau fought:

> How he had trembled as the vision opened out, embracing new thoughts, new desires, new possibilities! To redeem the land: to fight so that the industries like the shoe-factory which had swallowed his sweat could belong to the people: so that his children could one day have enough to eat and to wear under adequate shelter from the rain: so that they would say in pride, my father died that I might live: this had transformed him from a slave before a boss into a man. That was the day of his true circumcision into a man.\(^{189}\)

Here, Ngugi inverts the argument seen earlier during the Emergency in portrayals of Mau Mau: where loyalists were depicted positively as the adult and productive members of society, Ngugi suggests that, to be an adult, Kenyans had to fight for their rights. It was only by challenging injustice that a Kenyan could become a man.

It is also significant that the struggle’s goals were not necessarily specific to the British rule, as Ngugi demonstrates in the novel: rather than transferring or increasing access to land and industries to the masses, they were given to a select few Kenyans who became wealthy. Thus, the economic and political goals for which many Kenyans fought often remained elusive under the new government run by Kenyans. By depicting Abdulla’s reasons for fighting such that they could be applied to Kenya under presidents Jomo Kenyatta or Daniel arap Moi, Ngugi argues that Kenya had not been truly been liberated under the new Kenyan governments. He suggests that a “good” Kenyan is one who challenges oppression as Mau Mau did regardless of the identity of the perpetrator, be it British or Kenyan. In connecting

\(^{189}\) Thion’o, *Petals of Blood*, 136.
Mau Mau to Kenya after independence, Ngugi distances the movement from its particular context under the British, which presents Mau Mau as a force of change and progress.

This theme of Mau Mau as a revolutionary movement is most clearly seen in his play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1981). In this play, Ngugi imagines the events surrounding the trial of Mau Mau general Dedan Kimathi after his capture by British forces. His fictionalization of the events highlights what he saw as the betrayal of the movement by Kenyans who collaborated or negotiated with the British. Kimathi labels those who follow British demands as “Judas.” In this work, Ngugi portrays Kimathi, who represents the Mau Mau fighters as a whole, as a revolutionary who refused to compromise his principles for personal gain; he is the defender of the Kenyan people. During the trial, Kimathi’s loyalty to the movement is tested by different figures, for example an African business executive, an African politician, and an African priest, all of whom attempt to persuade him to betray Mau Mau and surrender the fight for a stay of execution. The choice of these three figures, who had the potential to greatly improve society through their status in Kenyan society, represents an critique of Kenya’s elite. Ngugi suggests that these esteemed figures are the worst traitors: while they claimed to act in the interests of fellow Kenyans, they sacrifice Kenyans’ future for the benefits that accompanied a good relationship with the British.

Ngugi suggests the new African leaders with political and economic power have merely replaced the British. Though they claim, as Kenyatta did in real life, “We

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191 Ibid., 40.
all fought for Uhuru […] We are all freedom fighters,” it is clear that these supposed fighters are the “new masters” for whom Kenyans will be forced to work. In the play Kimathi criticizes the policy under the new Kenyan government that agreed to buy back land from settlers saying, “Buy back our land from those who stole it from us? Our land? Have we not bought it with streams of blood? Rivers of sweat?” The politicians had sacrificed land, the driving reason behind the uprising for British support. Through this dialogue, Ngugi makes it clear that independence for Kenya was in name only, with the rights for which Mau Mau fought still out of reach for most Kenyans. Although the play is set during the emergency, it is clearly commentary on the new government under Daniel arap Moi, criticizing the lack of reforms.

By drawing these connections between the British and Kenyans, Ngugi portrays Mau Mau as fighting against all forms of oppression. By presenting the new Kenyan authorities as tied to British rule, Ngugi argues that Mau Mau’s fight is not yet over. Mau Mau represents the voices of the masses who remain unrepresented and without power. This becomes clear at the end when the Kenyan characters Boy and Girl, symbolizing Kenya’s future generation, protest Kimathi’s guilty verdict, starting a “thunderous freedom song” among a gathering of workers and peasants. In ending the play with songs of protest by the masses, Ngugi suggests that the fight for Kenya’s true independence will and must continue, even if those who fought in Mau Mau have passed. New generations of Kenyans should take up the mantle of the movement to challenge oppression in its new forms.

192 Ibid., 47.
193 Ibid., 45.
194 Ibid., 84.
While it is difficult to say whether Ngugi single handedly crafted Mau Mau into a symbol of revolution, it is clear he had a large influence on this new perception of Mau Mau. By arguing that moral Kenyans have a responsibility to challenge systems of oppression, Ngugi suggests that Kenyans who remain silent and passive betray the nation, like the colonial collaborators. I argue that his works became even more successful in creating this new symbolic image of the movement due to his own experiences in real life. In 1977, Ngugi wa Thiong’o was arrested and detained in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison without trial for a year for his works criticizing the Kenyan government under Daniel arap Moi. Although released in 1978 when Amnesty International declared him a Prisoner of Conscience, Ngugi was ostracized and prevented from returning to his job at university. When he heard of a plan to assassinate him, Ngugi and his family were forced into exile until the end of the Moi dictatorship in 2002, when President Mwai Kibaki came into office.

Ngugi’s decision to challenge the Kenyan government and the resulting consequences have greater significance when seen in conjunction with his novels, which use Mau Mau to highlight the importance of opposing corruption and oppression. He, like the Mau Mau fighters in his texts, stood up to an unjust regime and made serious sacrifices in the name of progress. He and his works together cement this new image of Mau Mau as a symbol of revolution. Ngugi’s own actions strengthened this portrayal of Mau Mau, as he was seen as following in the footsteps of the movement by challenging the Moi regime; Ngugi became inexorably tied to Mau Mau for Kenyans.
Mau Mau Revolutionaries

Other groups who wish to identify themselves as revolutionaries have since adopted Ngugi’s reimagined Mau Mau in popular culture, often emphasizing their connections to the movement. This trend can be seen in the Kenyan hip-hop group known as Ukoo Flani Mau Mau. The group formed when two different groups—one from Mombasa the other from Nairobi—joined forces in the 1990s. The name Ukoo Flani Mau Mau means a certain clan of the Mau Mau. By taking on the name of the movement, the rappers suggest that they support the movement and its goals and that they are part of the legacy. In fact, their mantra is the famous quotation by Dedan Kimathi: “Better to die on your feet than live on your knees.” By naming themselves after Mau Mau, UFMM implies that they, like the rebels, are fighting a battle against oppression and injustice; their name allows them to claim the status of revolutionary and validates their critiques of Kenyan society.

While during the colonial period loyalists portrayed opposing Mau Mau in popular culture as the ethical choice, the media today suggests that being a part of the power structure is immoral; success can sometimes be equated to betrayal. In the case of hip-hop, scholar Caroline Mose argues, “Constant airplay on radio (and television by extension) […] is equated to commercialization, an assimilation into the mainstream. This is seen in the light of the urban, that is, as corrupt, betraying the tenets of ‘real hip hop’ which include waging a revolution against modern-day

196 Ibid., 4.
(neo)colonialism and state hegemony."\(^{197}\) The similarities to Ngugi’s works are clear, as those who participate in the neocolonial order are seen as betraying masses. In this case commercial success implies selling out. For UFMM, being a revolutionary, like a Mau Mau fighter, means protesting the injustices of the system.

The group Ukoo Flani Mau Mau references Mau Mau in order to call attention to existing injustices by comparing them to the oppression under colonialism. Like Ngugi did in his novels, UFMM also suggest that the problems under colonialism have continued under the independent government. In their song “Angalia Saa,”—“Check the Time”—the group begins by saying, “I dedicate this song to all Kenyan heroes, / everyone who has struggled and has not yet been rewarded for it, / revolutionary comrade.”\(^{198}\) By calling them their “revolutionary comrade,” UFMM portrays themselves as freedom fighters, like Mau Mau, who continue the fight for freedom into the present. They then draw similarities between British oppression that Mau Mau fought and the Kenyan government’s oppression they face. The fact that they begin the first verse with Mau Mau is no coincidence:

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blood, sweat n tears, Mau mau won the war, the spectators stole the trophy some of them dont even have clothing the government wants to strip them off their few belongings the police dont mind killing them its like they dont know who we be,im sure they treating us like the former days when we used to have the white highlands (neo-colonization) what am sure is that we can still fight (neo-colonization) this war is deeper than the colour of our skin all i know is that we only have two tribes: the rich and the poor
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\(^{197}\) Ibid., 6.
so synchronise the time, its 2005
its time to decolonize our minds, n dont give excuses that you got hypnotized
n forgot [sic].

By beginning with a description of the unfair treatment Mau Mau veterans experienced, UFMM draws a connection between the past and the present. The experiences of Mau Mau shape the interpretation of the circumstances people in Kenya face now. The fight and the war change in meaning from what it meant during the Emergency to represent a fight against the new authoritarian government. Just as Mau Mau has been mistreated and not rewarded for their opposition, UFMM also suggests that many Kenyans also suffer unjust treatment. They model themselves as revolutionaries that fight the power like the Mau Mau image created by Ngugi.

This feeling of continuities between the eras can be seen as well in the music video that accompanies the song. UFMM uses images of their acting with documentary footage of Mau Mau fighters from the 1950s in such a way that past and present are no longer clearly distinguishable. The rappers themselves are filmed in black and white from behind barbed wire fences, as though they are also being detained with Mau Mau in concentration camps and mistreated by white policemen. Yet when the film shifts to post-colonial footage in color, the rappers remain behind wires, this time a chain link fence, and Kenyans continue to be abused in footage, this time by black policemen. One of the artists taps his wrist to indicate checking the time, emphasizing the surprising similarities between the 1950s and Kenya after


independence under authoritarian regimes—neocolonialism in Kenya has lasted almost as long as colonial rule itself. “Angalia Saa” acts a critique of the Kenyan government, but also as a wake up call, emphasizing that things should change.

Ngugi’s connection to Mau Mau through his experiences during the Emergency, his texts, and his opposition to Moi has made him a symbol of revolution like the freedom fighters. In another song, “Mashairi,” the artists rap:

If you can understand, relate this pain, this pen, this brain
Similar to Ngugi wa Thiong’o and authors of the era of Jomo (Kenyatta)
I criticize civil society
It has lost direction.
When I come it’s a fight for social justice
I preach, I practice, fight like Saro-Wiwa.201

Ngugi wa Thiong’o is used here as a symbol of political activism. However, by referencing Ngugi the rappers draw upon not only his actions but also on Mau Mau. For instance later on in the song, UFMM refers to A Grain of Wheat. His work is simultaneously a rewriting of Mau Mau as heroes who opposed colonialism as well as a call to challenge oppression in its modern forms. It becomes difficult to isolate Mau Mau from the image of a revolutionary.

Western Self-Reflection and Entertainment

While in Kenyan popular culture, references to Mau Mau have become a way to allow voices of the subaltern to challenge hegemonic structures, this transformation

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of Mau Mau’s has not occurred internationally. Instead, in Western societies Mau Mau has been sensationalized for entertainment or used as a lens through which western powers can understand their own experiences. Mau Mau was not important in and of itself; rather its importance was derived from its ability to provide some function for Western societies.

During the Emergency, the United States and the United Kingdom made films focusing on the Mau Mau rebellion. *Simba* (1954) and *Something of Value* (1957) focus on the experiences of white settlers in Kenya and both attempted to grapple with the rebellion and its significance for international audiences. The goal was not to fully understand the movement itself, but to shed light on problems within the U.K. and the U.S. at the time. Mau Mau acts as a kind of lens that has allowed people to gain insight into problems in Western societies. In her work, *Playing in the Dark* (1993), Toni Morrison asserts that white American fiction has used African American characters and race to provide insight into problems and changes in white society. I argue that Mau Mau similarly served as a “surrogate and enabler” that helped “white writers to think about themselves.”

Having an other to which whites Westerners could compare themselves, allowed them to make discoveries about themselves and their own societies.

The British film, *Simba*, tells the story of Alan Howard, a British man who comes to Kenya after a Mau Mau fighter kills his brother. It follows his experiences as he arrives suspicious of all Kikuyu and gradually learns to trust through his growing relationship with a Kenyan boy. Rather than focusing on understanding the

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203 *Simba*, directed by Brian Desmond Hurst, United Kingdom: The Rank Organization, 1955.
roots of the movement, the film questions what Kenya’s future will be. Simba depicts Kenya’s two futures through the characters of Simba—the “witch-doctor” and leader of a Mau Mau squad—who “stood for racial hatred,” and Karanja—Simba’s son and a Western trained doctor—who “supported a multi-racial future.” Given the antagonism between white settlers and Kenyans, the film attempted to grapple with moving forward from the anger.

Despite eventually winning the fight against Mau Mau, in the 1950s Britain had already begun questioning the future of its colonies. Thus, Mau Mau and their violence was important as it provided a lens through which British could consider what kind of future they wanted given the eventuality of independence. This was especially important in Kenya as the British has settled there, unlike many of its other colonies, so the settlers would be directly affected by the decision. While the film attempted to grapple with how Kenya might deal with the anger between races eventually, it is clear that the movement itself was seen as not worthy of interrogation. Instead the film depicts Mau Mau as evil and irrational. The film disregards the justifications and causes of the rebellion all together.

What mattered to British audiences was how they or their fellow citizens would be affected in the future, not understanding the experiences of Kenyans: would settlers be forced to leave? Would they be compensated for land? If they stayed, would they maintain power? Would they be safe? These questions were at the forefront of British and settler minds. The film presented the situation facing the

British in the 1950s: how to move colonies towards independence, particularly settler colonies. *Simba* did not refute the British policy of paternalism; instead it focused on the “dilemma of the European settler community” without challenging their right to govern over the African majority.205

The American film, *Something of Value*, provided a more complex depiction of the Mau Mau rebellion. It was adapted from Robert Ruark’s book with significant alterations.206 The film follows Peter MacKenzie, the son of a settler, and his relationship with Kimani, the son of the Kikuyu who looks after Peter. While the two begin the film as close friends, Peters uncle ostracizes and belittles Kimani, until Kimani eventually joins Mau Mau against the settlers. Peter in contrast becomes staunchly anti-Mau Mau after his uncle is killed and his aunt is hurt. When Kimani’s wife is killed in an attack, he flees with his baby. Peter follows him in the hopes of persuading him to surrender and have a “fresh—multi-racial—start.”207 However, Kimani falls into a spike pit and dies. The film ends with Peter holding Kimani’s son close in his arms saying, “I’m gonna bring this kid up myself. We’ve just gotta get along together.”208

Unlike *Simba, Something of Value*, acknowledges the Kenyan grievances that led to the rebellion. The film clearly argues that the only way forward in Kenya is a multi-racial solution. This question of how to move forward after a painful history and overcome serious injustices was extremely important to Americans. The timing of the film in the late 1950s was no accident, as it coincided with the civil rights

205 Ibid., 76.
movement that was gaining momentum; race relations was a serious problem facing Americans as segregation and Jim Crow laws faced increasing opposition. Mau Mau provided a lens through which Americans could look at their own problems with race from a distance. Furthermore, because Mau Mau’s violent tactics appealed to some of the more militant African Americans who criticized the moderate leaders of the civil rights movement, white Americans had even more of an incentive to take control of the Mau Mau narrative.\textsuperscript{209} While the film did acknowledge the injustices of colonialism that led to the rebellion, this was important not to understand the movement so much as to further the political message of a multi-racial solution in relation to the tense situation in the United States.

When comparing the two films it is important to take into account the different contexts. Thus “where 	extit{Simba} was a British film, 	extit{Something of Value} was an American film: the alternative perspectives reflect both differing sensitivities to race and to the post-1945 trans-Atlantic divide over the necessity and future of colonial rule.”\textsuperscript{210} However, despite the different interpretations of Mau Mau in the films, both use the movement for their own purposes; Mau Mau had significance only for the insight it provided into either American or British problems. As it has been used in international popular culture, Mau Mau has become “both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, […] and representation, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability.”\textsuperscript{211} Mau Mau films allowed the American and British audiences to reflect on the volatile situations they faced—

\textsuperscript{210} Anderson, “Mau Mau at the Movies: Contemporary Representations of an Anti Colonial War,” 83.
\textsuperscript{211} Morrison, 7.
desegregation and decolonization; through Mau Mau, white audiences could attempt to understand how race and class related to societal power dynamics and how, or whether, these inequalities should be resolved.

In contrast to this usage of Mau Mau in popular culture to help with the issues of Western countries, another American film, *Safari* (1955), demonstrates the other pattern of Mau Mau significance: sensationalism for entertainment. The film begins when a group of Mau Mau fighters attack a settler’s home and kill the son of Ken Duffield. Thus begins a tale of revenge, as Duffield takes a British couple on a safari trip as an excuse to hunt Mau Mau. Here it becomes clear that Mau Mau is not important except as a plot device, a way to create suspense. There is no attempt to understand the origins of the movement or how it might affect Kenya in the future; authenticity and accuracy were not among the goals. While both *Simba* and *Something of Value* depict brutal violence, they do so to try to create the atmosphere that existed in Kenya and to help demonstrate the serious problems existing between settlers and Kenyans. *Safari*, on the other hand, uses the violence to create a shallow jungle adventure. The rebellion only has value in its ability to provide a violent context for the film’s action.

This superficial use of Mau Mau to create suspense serves to make the movement synonymous with violence in general. It held international appeal for people not because of the complex nature of the movement or its implications, but because of people’s fascination with stories of brutality. Mau Mau appeared all the more vicious because of the use of *pangas*—the knives often used by the fighters, which necessarily lead to very personal and bloody deaths. Where guns allow people
to kill from a distance and have a small entry wound, *pangas* often require multiple attempts to fully kill, making the execution seem all the more heartless. Because Mau Mau fighters had limited access to guns, their attacks appeared more violent and were accordingly sensationalized. It was this fetishization of violence off of which films like *Safari* profited by using Mau Mau.

It seems that Mau Mau appeals greatly to the mystery or adventure genre, where it can act a plot device to increase the feeling of suspense and drama. Like *Safari*, British author M.M. Kaye set her mystery novel, *Death in Kenya* (1958), in the context of the rebellion. The novel tells the story of a small settler community towards the end of the Emergency grappling with the murder of one of its members. The context of the rebellion creates an atmosphere of fear where distrust and dread are part of settlers’ daily life. The characters themselves comment on the constant need for vigilance. The murder exacerbates these fears as it was made to look like a Mau Mau attack through the use of a *panga* and its location near a former Mau Mau route.

While the novel does provide some reference to the historical the experiences and emotions of settlers in Kenya during the Emergency, overall, Mau Mau is important as a way to create an exciting environment for the murder mystery to unfold; Kenyan grievances are largely disregarded for the larger plot of settler terror. Kaye’s use of the movement can be seen as part of traditions that depict Africa as exotic and a place of adventure. Scholar Curtis Keim argues that “*exotic* portrays African culture as excitingly different. Usually this is at the expense of African

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culture, which is removed from its everyday context in a way that allows us to believe that the culture is exceptional rather than common like ours.”

Throughout the novel, Kaye emphasizes the wild and beautiful nature of Kenya and the intrepid and determined nature of the settlers who braved its dangers, of which Mau Mau is one.

This portrayal of daring and adventurous settlers can perhaps be best seen in the author’s note, in which she states, “And despite some hair-raising moments, I can truthfully say that I enjoyed practically every minute of my stay in that marvelous and exciting country.” Here Kaye crafts herself in the image of the British settler, who deserves notice for appreciating the wonders of Africa despite its dangers. She is a hero for accompanying her husband to Kenya, as the “act of coming to know the continent of Africa became a heroic experience for Europeans.” Mau Mau, like the location of Kenya itself in Africa, helps create this environment to make the story more thrilling for western audiences. Mau Mau is just another example of Kenya’s wildness that needs to be tamed.

Post-Independence Continuities of Western Appropriation

Whereas depictions of Mau Mau changed in popular culture within Kenya after independence, internationally Mau Mau’s importance continued to center around entertainment or self-reflection for Westerners. This can perhaps best be seen in the Magnum P.I. episode, “Black on White,” that aired in 1982, which encompasses both these traditions of Western appropriation of Mau Mau. This American television series

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214 Kaye, 8.
215 White et al., 5.
is a crime drama that follows the exploits of Magnum in his job as a private investigator. The series, which ran from 1980 to 1988, dealt in part with the effects of violence, given the recent context of the Vietnam War. Many of the main characters were involved in combat—two in the Vietnam War, another in the British Army.

In “Black on White,” Magnum faces the threat against Higgins, their British comrade who had served in the British Army in Kenya during the Emergency. One by one people who had served with Higgins against Mau Mau are killed. Through a series of flashbacks, it becomes clear that Higgins’s squad had taken part in a brutal massacre where men, women, and children were murdered. It is assumed that a Mau Mau supporter is to blame for hunting down the British soldiers. The context of Mau Mau is clearly used as a plot device to increase suspense. The killer hunts his victims, tracking them in darkness and repeatedly stabbing with his spear in his apparent attempt at revenge. The supposed Kenyan killer is exotified and presented generically as “African”: he is depicted as shirtless dressed only in trousers with bare feet, a beaded anklet, and a spear as the weapon of choice. All of this is clearly reminiscent of earlier depictions of Mau Mau in international popular culture that exotified Mau Mau and sensationalized its violence for the purposes of entertainment.

However, the episode also follows the second pattern of international portrayals of Mau Mau to provide insight into Western problems. In this case, the context of Mau Mau allows people to conceive of the psychological consequences of violence. The show ends by revealing that the killer is in fact one of the British soldiers wearing black face who participated in the village massacre in Kenya. He is so haunted by his actions for which he never was never held responsible that the guilt
drives him to kill everyone who shares his guilt. The consequences for those who fought and slaughtered innocents during the Emergency was representative of similar problems facing Americans after the horrible crimes committed against civilians in Vietnam.

By framing the narrative around violence against civilians in Kenya, the show provided insight into how people could understand veterans returning to American society and their experiences, but allowed viewers to maintain distance from the topic given the different context. Rather than American veterans filling the role of the “other”, Mau Mau “was available for meditations on terror—the terror of […] outcasts, their dread of failure, powerlessness, Nature without limits, natal loneliness, internal aggression, evil, sin, greed.”216 The Mau Mau rebellion served as a framework that helped Americans understand and cope with the problems they faced in the years following the Vietnam War. The show exploited the narrative of Mau Mau to facilitate self-interrogation.

**Conclusion**

Popular depictions of Mau Mau both within Kenya and internationally raise the question of who should have the ability to use Mau Mau. The ability to portray the movement in popular culture allows people to shape the image of Mau Mau. Since independence, many people have used the movement in order to provide commentary on existing problems within their societies. In Kenya this is seen in the perceived association between Mau Mau and revolutionary political activism, while

216 Morrison, 37-38.
internationally the movement acts as a kind of allegory that offers insight into problems facing their own societies. Given the many depictions of Mau Mau in popular culture, it is clear that its image has become far removed from its original context. In some ways, it has been used by so many for different purposes that to claim Mau Mau is in effect meaningless. It is the people who provide the movement with meaning.

This is perhaps most evident in the commodification of Mau Mau’s memory. Within Kenya and internationally, one can purchase paraphernalia connected to Mau Mau and its fighters. For example anyone can buy a t-shirt with the image of Dedan Kimathi or the words Mau Mau from Café Press, an American online retailer.217 Interestingly, the models wearing the shirts are all white, with the main international sites being the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and the United States and Worldwide. This suggests that the intended buyers are not expected to be Kenyans. This raises the question of what value Mau Mau has when used by people who by all rationale have no claim to representing the movement. This raises the question as to whether there are certain people who should not be able to use Mau Mau because it would be a betrayal of the movement. Within Kenya, there also exists Mau Mau merchandise. One can even find a Chelsea soccer jersey with the player name Mau Mau on the back.218 Yet this, too, seems perverse, to tie the self-identified freedom fighters to one of Britain’s popular club soccer teams. There appears to absolutely no connection to the movement or its goals.

218 Mwangi, 88-89.
Both Western and Kenyan appropriations of Mau Mau have the potential to portray the movement in ways that the fighters themselves might not approve. Yet there also seems to be an intrinsic difference between the international and Kenyan uses of Mau Mau narratives: where groups like Mungiki claim authority through their perceived marginalized position, in effect proclaiming, “We are like Mau Mau,” white Westerners understand the movement from the position of the challenged hegemonic power; where Kenyans hope to change society through particular representations of Mau Mau, Western audiences use Mau Mau when faced by the threat of change. As Mau Mau has been framed in popular culture, white western audiences are more likely to connect to the plight of the settlers. As a result, Mau Mau represents how to handle a threat to power structures rather than how to oppose power structures.

Kenyan appropriation of Mau Mau arises from their understanding that the movement was important. Kenyans use Mau Mau to formulate their critiques of society because they recognize Mau Mau’s powerful legacy. In contrast, white foreigners need not have an interest in the rebellion itself, only in how it relates to or might affect them. This treatment of Mau Mau is another form of objectification and colonization, where Western powers claim another culture’s narrative for personal gain without recognizing the movement’s significance or the implications of their appropriation.

Allowing everyone to use Mau Mau has seemingly made Mau Mau meaningless and, yet, I argue, even more meaningful given its new interpretations. Regardless of whether Mau Mau represents the goals and values for which Kenyans
fought in the 1950s, depictions of the movement continue to have importance even as the messages they convey transform overtime depending on who controls their image. So long as people accept Mau Mau as a symbol for something larger, Mau Mau will continue to be used by different people for their own purposes.
Conclusion:

In *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (1991) and *Vichy: An Ever-present Past* (1998), historian Henry Rousso argues that Vichy France is a past that never passes. Since World War II, France has had an obsession with the Vichy regime:

As used by its protagonists, the Vichy syndrome is a synecdoche for arguments that depict an agonized postwar France somehow attempting to reconcile itself to its history. Vichy, in the language of the Vichy syndrome, has become a metaphor for French collaboration with Nazi genocide.\(^{219}\)

Rousso demonstrates that certain events can become a symbol, representing whatever larger meaning society has bestowed on them.

Given the ever-present and pervasive nature of Mau Mau both within Kenya and internationally, this work could easily be titled “The Mau Mau Syndrome.” Like Vichy France, there has been a reinterpretation of the events and Kenya has had to grapple with the violence that occurred in the 1950s. The Vichy regime has “come to occupy a place that is disproportionate with respect both to the context of French history and to that of the present international scene, which nevertheless has no lack of tragedies.”\(^ {220}\)

Similarly, although over fifty years have passed since the end of the rebellion and countless articles and books on Mau Mau already exist, the movement continues to attract debate with new discoveries and interpretations arising every decade. This overwhelming focus on Mau Mau has ignored Kenyan history since


independence, as well as the centuries of Kenyan history open to study, which have received far less research than the events surrounding the uprising.

While academic analyses of Mau Mau have attempted to grapple with the controversies surrounding the correct interpretation of the past, popular usage of the movement has focused instead on the present or very recent past. Mau Mau has become a way to speak about problems entirely disconnected from those in the 1950s. Portraying the uprising in a certain way allows people to point out different issues in Kenya: arguments over the national character of Mau Mau reflect tensions over power dynamics in Kenya and the role of the Kikuyu, especially since the election violence of 2007; representations of victims connected to Mau Mau remain part of a broader dialogue of who can claim government support or reparations. Memorialization of Mau Mau has led to discussions of the need for broader reconciliation and portrayals of the movement as revolutionaries allow speakers to claim the moral voice and identity of a political activist.

The existence of this plethora of Mau Mau narratives suggests that the memory of the movement, not just the actual events, has consequences itself. Portraying Mau Mau in a certain light and having the authority to create or use an existing narrative allows people to gain certain advantages. As a result of these different interpretations of the movement, the term “Mau Mau” has come to mean whatever meaning supports the narrator’s cause. The original meaning of Mau Mau—if there ever was one correct interpretation of its significance—has transformed into many. As time has passed, certain narratives have fallen out of favor, like that of the British, and been replaced by others. These transformations reveal similar changes in
society, as memory of Mau Mau shifts to reflect the specific conditions and context at a given time; Mau Mau influences the present and the present in turn influences how Mau Mau is remembered.

A historiography of Mau Mau narratives, both scholarly and popular, reveals that the memory of the movement itself symbolizes a struggle for power in society. In her book, *Griots at War: Conflict, Conciliation and Caste in Mande* (2000), Barbara Hoffman describes how the ceremony where griots—storytellers in Malian society—compete for the best story, “reveals vividly how Mande caste is conceptualized, lived, enacted and debated.”

The competition of narratives represents a larger debate over how society should be structured. Similarly, historians should understand the different and often contradictory Mau Mau narratives as representative of the ongoing debate for how political and economic authority should be distributed. The narratives provide insight into how Kenyans perceive themselves within existing social structures. By retelling Mau Mau, Kenyans can find solutions to present day problems in the past.

While much of this work has focused on popular interpretations of Mau Mau, it is important not to disregard the role of historians themselves. Historical texts do more than explain or interpret the past; they, too, are a product of their times. Historians and their interpretations of history are shaped by their experiences of the world. Historians also play an active role in shaping public memory. These reinterpretations can change how society at large views their past. Caroline Elkins, who was crucial in framing Mau Mau detainees as victims and the British as

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perpetrators, demonstrates the influence academia can have on society. Academic work and popular discourse influence one another, which historians must take into account during their research. By recognizing how certain eras can influence memory, historians may gain new insight into the past. History may be obscured by the legacy of a movement. By examining memory of Mau Mau, historians may question their own interpretations of the movement and find that certain assumptions created by current society might not truly reflect the actual events.

The tangible influence of scholars on the culture and lives of others should not be overlooked, especially when written by outsiders. While there have been many influential texts written by Kenyan historians on Mau Mau, many of which have been cited in this paper, the voice of Western authors has sometimes garnered more respect or popularity. This is not to say that people of other cultures should not examine the history of others. However, as my chapter on victim identity suggests, historians should be aware of the continuing imbalance of authority based on race that exists. Just as the U.S. and the U.K. claimed control of the Mau Mau narrative by commodifying the movement in popular culture, historians can overstep their authorial role in a way that silences the voices of those who experienced the past. Their ability to identify certain narratives as more worthy of analysis or as more trustworthy marginalizes people whose stories deserve attention. These histories of the unacknowledged could have implications on more popular research or provide surprising insight into society that has been otherwise overlooked.

This problem of what role a historian should have troubled me throughout the research and writing process. I questioned my role as a white Westerner and whether
I have the authority to tell the stories of Kenyans. In many ways this work focuses on the experiences of Kenyans today, as understood through their memories of Mau Mau. Using oral history and Kenyan newspapers, memoirs, literature, and music, I have tried to let Kenyans tell their own story. My role here is mainly to connect the different stories together so others can see broader themes and understand how together they provide a glimpse into life in Kenya. I hope I have successfully centralized Kenyan voices in such a way that allows them to speak for themselves; my identity should not be necessary to legitimize their experiences or opinions.

Rather than the original consequences of the movement, Mau Mau’s legacy, perhaps, is its ability to continue to influence society in various, often conflicting ways. This work argues beyond Mau Mau that historians should take into account how the past continues to impact the present not just through continuing consequences, but also through perceived connections, regardless of the validity of these perceptions. History is important today because of how it is remembered; people in the present give meaning to the facts of the past. Thus, it is important to take into account evidence that may even be factually incorrect, as discovering why these misconceptions exist may provide insight into the social, economic, and political dynamics of a society and how people perceive their experiences in relation to others.

Mau Mau’s status as a symbol more than a series of real events means that many people can claim to be the voice of Mau Mau depending on what significance they give the movement. The many narratives of the uprising examined in this work have buried Mau Mau through filters of present experiences. While the movement
may not have intrinsic meaning, this is not to suggest that the narratives are not valuable or do not have an impact. Mau Mau has become an icon. Just as the term “Nazi” or “fascist” has become synonymous with evil to signify anything or anyone perceived as genocidal, authoritarian, or bigoted, regardless of how applicable the ideology of National Socialism is in reality, Mau Mau has come to represent meanings beyond the original intent of the fighters. The narrative has taken on a life of its own. The power of the idea of fascism is enough to weaken a person’s authority or legitimacy, and the idea of Mau Mau can also be used to achieve a specific purpose; the inability to clearly define Mau Mau does not lessen its influence. Given the recent debates surrounding Mau Mau seen in this work, it seems unlikely that it will lose its power as a medium for the discussion of the present any time soon. Mau Mau remains a past that will not pass, a living part of contemporary society.
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