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Specters of Mau Mau:

Hauntology and the Ghosts of Dedan Kimathi

in Kenyan History: 1952 - 2024

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Master of Arts in

African Studies

by

Dylan James Ashton

2024

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Specters of Mau Mau:  
Hauntology and the Ghosts of Dedan Kimathi  
in Kenyan History: 1952 – 2024

by

Dylan James Ashton  
Master of Arts in African Studies  
University of California, Los Angeles, 2024  
Professor Stephanie Bosch Santana, Chair

This thesis utilizes a theoretical framework rooted in Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology to explore why the unknown whereabouts of Dedan Kimathi's body commands so much force over political imaginations in 21<sup>st</sup> century Kenya, and the historical processes which have imbued his corporeal absence with such symbolic and political power. This thesis argues that in life and death the lack of access to Kimathi's interior identity and physical body has caused perceptions of Kimathi to be defined by his absent presence, turning him into a specter. What makes Kimathi's spectrality important however, is the presupposed understanding of him as a self-identical symbol of the Mau Mau rebellion's emancipatory promise, which has caused invocations of his ghost to threaten power-relations from the Rebellion to the present day. Kimathi's ghost, however, is neither univocal nor self-contained, as multiple versions of it have been conjured into Kenyan society through a diverse range of mythmaking practices spanning

colonial psychiatric discourse, theatre, colonial and postcolonial memoirs. Though the features attributed to these versions of Kimathi's ghosts differ, their heterogeneity is determined by the demands of specific social contexts, and opposed class interests concerning whether the radical injunction of Kimathi's ghost should be silenced or embraced. This thesis thus highlights a series of contestations between conjurations of Kimathi's ghost in state-political discourse at the national -political level vs personal-political conjurations of Kimathi's ghost amongst the local Kikuyu community. More specifically, it argues that attempts to depoliticize the Rebellion through sanitized or pathological constructions of Kimathi's ghost in governmental discourse have been circumvented in the postcolonial situation through creative acts of mourning, as embodied by the theatre of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. This thesis thus uses his play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* to negotiate how theatrical re-enactments of Kimathi's final days combined with affective engagements with Dedan Kimathi's loss amongst the working-class Kikuyu people can allow the connotations attributed to his injunction to be refigured to imagine new futures beyond the capitalist fundamentalist logics and values enshrined within Kenyan class-society.

The thesis of Dylan James Ashton is approved.

Hollian Frederick (Wint)

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University of California, Los Angeles

2024

From the river to the sea

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

After the British colonial regime hung Dedan Kimathi, the freedom fighter and infamous leader of the Mau Mau movement, to death at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison in 1957, his body remained interred in an unmarked grave underneath the Kamiti prison complex (*KNA* 24 Feb. 2024). Since independence in 1963, the lack of a proper burial site for Kimathi's body has remained a contentious narrative in Kenyan governmental political discourse, shrouded in ambiguity and paradoxes (Macarthur 2017, 4). This is precisely because successive Kenyan governments and state actors have espoused contradictory claims regarding their knowledge of the whereabouts of Kimathi's body (Kamau 14 May. 2023). In 1968, the Jomo Kenyatta government's Minister of State, Mbiyu Koinange, confessed for the first time that the Kenyan state knew the location of Dedan Kimathi's body, and were planning a proper place for his burial (Kamau 14 May. 2023). However, the same government later refuted this admission on the basis that the British government had hidden the location of Kimathi's corpse (Kamau 14 May. 2023). For the next forty years, this admission by the Kenyan state seemingly vanished from public knowledge. This was as both the Kenyatta and Moi regime with varying levels of success and contradiction, suppressed discussion of the Movement's lingering and divisive significance in postcolonial society on the principle of maintaining 'national unity' (Atieno-Odhiambo, Lonsdale 2003, 256; Clough 1998, 43).

The blanket of silence hiding Kimathi's corpse from public attention was finally pulled off his body upon Nelson Mandela's visit to Kenya on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1990, shortly following his release from incarceration (Branch 2010, 311; Macarthur 2017, 2). During a speech at Kasarani

stadium in Nairobi, Mandela celebrated “our indebtedness to General Dedan Kimathi, the man who led the armed struggle in this country against the British very excellently” and criticized the failure of the postcolonial state to acknowledge the importance of his legacy with a proper burial site, declaring that “it is an honor for any freedom fighter to pay respect to such heroes” (Mandela 1990; Macarthur 2017, 2). The formation of grassroots campaigns like the Dedan Kimathi Foundation shortly after Mandela’s speech by the families of ex-Mau Mau veterans and their sympathizers emblemized the increased public fixation in the exhumation of Kimathi’s body, as the organization pressured Moi’s government to give the revolutionary hero a befitting burial (Branch 2010, 311). Despite the nominal democratization of the country catalyzed by its transition to a multi-party democracy in 1992, the Moi regime remained uncompromising on the issue of Kimathi’s corpse (Branch 2010, 311). His government downplayed the likelihood of successfully recovering Kimathi’s corpse due to the alleged fact that Kimathi’s corpse had been dumped in a mass grave underneath the prison (Kamau 14 May 2023). However, this conclusion was rejected by aspiring presidential candidates like Raila Odinga and Koigi Wamwere in the run up to Kenya’s second multi-party elections in 1997, who both attested that the government *did* know the location of his body and, that if they were elected, they would make sure to exhume Kimathi’s body and afford him the ceremonial burial owed to him (Branch 2010, 312).

The grassroots campaign to locate Dedan Kimathi’s corpse finally received state-backing after the election of President Mwai Kibaki in 2002 (*East African Standard* 26 Feb 2003; 12 June. 2003). His stated dedication to being the first Kenyan government to officially acknowledge the contribution of Mau Mau freedom fighters to Kenya’s independence was accompanied by an intensive combing of the Kamiti Prison grounds with former prisoners and guards, and a search of the records of the Department of Prisons for relevant information (*East*

*African Standard* 26 Feb 2003; 12 June. 2003). The Government called the searches off in 2004 after they proved to be fruitless and unveiled a 7-foot bronze statue depicting Dedan Kimathi in 2007 on the same day of his 1957 execution to honor his memory instead (Kanina, 9 Aug. 2007). In 2019, the Dedan Kimathi Foundation announced that it had found Kimathi's exact resting place of Kimathi's body, only for The Ministry of Interior Coordination of National Government to repudiate this discovery as farcical (Kejitan, 2019). Four years later Kenya's current leader President William Ruto, during the funeral of Mau Mau freedom fighter and wife of Dedan Kimathi Mukami Kimathi, once again repeated the government's ambition to find Kimathi's body with the support of Mau Mau elders to give him a national burial (Muia 13 May. 2023). This gesture would be accompanied by the construction of a museum in the Nyandarua County region to commemorate Kenya's freedom fighters throughout history, and a refurbishment of the Uhuru Gardens National Monument and Museum to include the contributions of Mau Mau freedom fighters (Muia 13 May. 2023). Considering the unsuccessfulness of previous attempts though, it appears unlikely that the resumption of this investigation will yield any notable results, and Kimathi's body will remain in the shadows underground.

The beginning of this introduction has briefly outlined how in the last twenty-five years the promise to put Kimathi's body to rest has become a central trope in Kenyan political discourse instrumentalized by successive Kenyan leaders and aspirants to gain public favor, despite the contradictions and inconsistencies that have underscored the repetition of this narrative at every turn. Whether Kenya's government secretly knows the location of his body or not doesn't change the fact that it appears unlikely that Kimathi's body will ever be publicly recovered, especially as the number of sources alive from the Emergency period (1952-60) that could support grassroots campaigns dedicated to this purpose continues to decline (*KNA* 18

February. 2024). The repeated gestures to exhume Kimathi's body by the state suggest that the memory of Dedan Kimathi has been rehabilitated by state-actors in a manner which starkly contrasts the silencing of Mau Mau history which typically characterized the Kenyan state's relationship to its anticolonial past during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Branch 2010; Mwangi 2010). These circumstances beg two questions which this thesis will examine. Why does Kimathi's corporeal absence command such a force over political imaginations in postcolonial Kenya? And what historical processes led Kimathi's corporeal absence to be imbued with such political and symbolic power?

To answer these two questions, this thesis will incorporate colonial psychiatric discourse, print culture, memoirs and theatre to approach Kimathi's corporeal absence through a theoretical framework based upon the concept of "hauntology". This will be to claim that as Kimathi's body in life and death has always remained hidden, his being has only been experienced as a haunting, turning him into a specter. Hauntology is a portmanteau of haunting and ontology conceived by Jacques Derrida which is designed to reframe our understanding of the latter's traditional logics. That is, the notion that being = self-identical presence and belonging to a fixed temporal period (Derrida 1994, 21). Hauntology introduces the concept of specters to unsettle our presupposed notions of ontology and temporality by defining them as that which acts within the present without (physically) existing in the present (Fisher 2014. 18; Derrida 1994, 123). In place of a self-identical presence, the specter's existence is marked by a relation to time, specifically to either *what is no longer* or *what is yet to come* (Derrida 1994, 193; Hägglund 2008, 82). The 'spectrality' of the specter is thus derived from the fissures it opens within our modal experiences of time (i.e. as separated past, present and future) and the collapse of the distinction between being and non-being. This means that the specter's coming is always experienced as a *coming-*

*back*, or a repetition, whether via the dead coming back to life or a foreboding force who is expected to return in the future (Derrida 1994, 10). But when the specter returns, or *arrives*, it always delivers an injunction that is received in the present by individuals and collectivities via an act of inheritance.

As this thesis will demonstrate regarding Kimathi's ghost, the specter's injunction is never self-contained, and univocal. Rather, through acts of inheritance, state-actors, *mwananchi* (common citizens), playwrights and social movements must synthesize the heterogeneous possibilities of his injunction into a coherent legacy for their own purposes (Derrida 1994, 18). A plurality of Kimathi's ghosts has thus emerged in Kenya's present via active choice to read his legacy in different manners that assign contemporary sets of demands for his spirit to speak to (Derrida 1994, 19). This thesis will outline how the multiple versions of Kimathi's ghosts have been conjured and inherited into Kenyan society via a diverse range of mythmaking practices generated by state-actors, individuals, collectivities and social movements. However, it will also convey how the organizing logic behind the different features attributed to his ghosts has always been structured around opposed material interests and attitudes regarding how to respond to the radical connotations of the Rebellion's occurrence. That is, whether or not the radical symbolism of the Rebellion should be welcomed or silenced.

Much scholarship already exists concerning how the production of Mau Mau history has served as the "conjuncture around which Kenya's past and Kenya's possible futures have been debated, contested and fought over" (Atieno-Odhiambo 1991, 300). However, as Rose Miyonga, highlights, "in Mau Mau scholarship, studies on memory have tended to [overly] focus on national amnesia and the contestation of public memories" (Miyonga 2023, 98). Academic debates regarding the public memories of the Mau Mau are usually divided into a moderate vs

radical binary (Atieno-Odhiambo 1991, 302; Ochieng 1992). Moderate historians have accused the radicals of sacrificing the integrity of their historical methodology to present versions of the Rebellion that suit their political agendas (Atieno-Odhiambo 1991, 305). While popular radical historians/writers like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o have accused the moderates of collaborating with the neocolonial apparatus of the postcolonial state by presenting accounts of Mau Mau history which undermine the contributions of the forest fighters to Kenya’s independence (Kimathi ed. Kinyatti 1987, xv). Miyonga positions these academic debates in the spectrum of the national-political struggle over the Rebellion’s memory as she argues that they ignore “the agency of ordinary people in the production and maintenance of Mau Mau history” (Miyonga 2023, 98). However, this thesis will utilize a hauntological framework to challenge Miyonga’s conclusion and intervene in the debate on the side of the radicals. Thus, this thesis will argue that the legitimacy of the reinventions of the Mau Mau in Ngũgĩ’s work was derived precisely from the emotional and personal ties ordinary working-class Kikuyu people still felt towards the radical symbolism Kimathi’s ghost. This has therefore allowed Kimathi’s ghost to return and deliver a political injunction that speaks to issues concerning their contemporary socio-political context. Moreover, the intimacy of their relationship to his memory has allowed exchanges with his ghost that open Kimathi up to contemporary resignifications of his figure and the Movement’s meanings.

To answer the two questions regarding the power of Kimathi’s corporeal absence and the historical processes which imbued it with this power, this thesis will on one hand argue that since the Mau Mau Revolution, the threat its radical symbolism poses to Kenyan power-relations has caused successive Kenyan states to conjure different ghosts of Kimathi unto the national-political level that attempted to neutralize the political threat of Mau Mau symbology. The national-political specters of Kimathi have therefore attempted to silence the radical connotations of the

Mau Mau completely. But they have also attempted to co-opt the resonance of the Rebellion's memory amongst working-class Kikuyu people to shore up the legitimacy of the State and absorb it into the reproduction of Kenyan capitalism. However, this thesis will then contend that these reactionary efforts by the State have been countered in the postcolonial period through the personal-political versions of Kimathi's ghost conjured by productive acts of mourning the Rebellion's unfulfilled emancipatory promise. More specifically, through affective engagements with Kimathi's radical ghost which convey the claim his ghost continues to hold over working-class Kikuyu political identities. As a foil to national-political attempts to silence Kimathi's ghost, this thesis will argue that the personal-political Kimathi is generated by his sustained ability to speak to the socio-economic and political issues working-class Kikuyu face. Furthermore, by the ability of Kimathi's emancipatory promise to help them imagine new futures beyond Kenya's status quo.

To address the first question, chapter two will provide a genealogy of how the radical symbolism of the Rebellion has shaped the Kenyan state's strategic appropriation of Kimathi's memory to uphold its political authority, from independence to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the process, this chapter will treat the popularity of the KPU in the 1960s and the *Mungiki* movement of the 90s/2000s and 21<sup>st</sup> century consumer capitalism in Kenya's neoliberal period as conjunctures; conjunctures of which, allow us to see the social issues and moments which have imbued the anti-establishment symbolism of the Rebellion with a new vigor amongst working-class Kikuyu people and have thereby required the state to manage and contain this symbolism in different ways. By tracing the development of the state's attempts to assimilate the counter-hegemonic implications of the Rebellion's memory into its conservative nationalist imaginary, this section will demonstrate how consumer capitalism and performative gestures to honor the Rebellion's

memory attempted to trap the radical ghost of Kimathi embodied by insurgent political movements in the form of frozen artifacts. The aim of such being, to conjure into existence a sanitized, hollow version of Kimathi's ghost which appealed to the public nostalgia for the Rebellion's memory, while extracting the radical injunction which usually accompanied the ghost's return from Kikuyu political consciousnesses

Chapter three will argue that the Kenyan state's efforts to detach the radical-political injunction from Kimathi's national-political specter follows a pattern of silencing which originated during Kenya's Emergency period. This chapter will do so by tracing the strategy's origins to the pathologization of the Mau Mau and Kimathi's figure in colonial psychiatric discourse and memoirs written during the Emergency period. Through assessing how these discourses conflated Kimathi as a self-identical symbol of the Rebellion, on one level this chapter will illustrate the colonial state's attempts to depoliticize the Rebellion by psychologizing its eruption as a mere extension of Kimathi's schizophrenic egotism and tyrannical thirst for power. But on another level, this chapter will argue that these discourses constructed Kimathi as a specter even while he was alive. Considering the allegations of his primitive mentation and incongruity with his Kikuyu peers within these discourses, this thesis will demonstrate how painting Kimathi as an invading revenant derived from the Kikuyu people's prehistoric past delegitimized the politicalness of the Mau Mau rebellion.

Chapter four will initially remain focused on the Emergency period by utilizing colonial print culture to argue that Kimathi's repeated evasion of the colonial state's efforts to capture him first elevated his ghost to national-political proportions. Though Kimathi was still viewed as a primitive revenant by the colonial state, this chapter will contend that the cat and mouse relationship between Kimathi and his colonial adversaries augmented his specter with new



features. This thereby required his ghost to be silenced and exorcized from Kenyan society to reinforce colonial authority over the boundaries of Kenyan political imaginations. By analyzing sensational accounts of Kimathi before his capture, the first half will demonstrate how Kimathi willfully portrayed himself as a ghost to exploit his hiddenness to haunt the colonial state. Particularly, by orchestrating a series of elaborate maneuvers against colonial authorities, which were designed to feed the myth that he possessed supernatural and spectral powers.

The second half of chapter four will begin by demonstrating how upon Kimathi's capture, the colonial state utilized the legal system and his execution in their endeavors to condemn his figure to a state of social death. This chapter will argue that their strategy was designed to extract his radical specter from the social world of Kenya completely. However, this chapter will then outline how the transition to independence from 1963 onwards has allowed Kimathi's specter to rise from his social death and be refigured with characteristics conditioned by the demands of their contemporary social contexts through productive acts of mourning. This chapter will demonstrate such by analyzing creative forms of Mau Mau historical productions performed by sympathizers to the Rebellion like in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo's 1976 play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (Thiong'o, Mugo; 1976). Through an analysis of the positive reception of the play's Marxist-messianic reinvention of Dedan Kimathi - amongst a predominantly working-class Kikuyu audience - this chapter will finally argue that mourning Kimathi's ghost is a generative process that subverts both the colonial and postcolonial state's attempts to silence Kimathi's radical injunction. On one level, by demonstrating how the inheritance of Kimathi's radical injunction cannot be destroyed without re-organizing the power-relations of Kenyan society which give it currency. But also, because the changing assemblage of properties attributed to his ghost reflects how the openness of his injunction allows working-

class Kikuyu people to imagine new futures and new forms of modernity by repurposing it. The purposes of combining an assessment of both Kimathi's instrumentalization of his perceived spectrality and the theatricalized mourning of his loss will be to demonstrate that the myth of Kimathi's omnipotence was birthed from the supernatural characteristics attributed to his ghost in colonial discourse and propaganda. However, Kimathi's appropriation of his spectrality and the Marxist-Messianic specter embodied in *The Trial* demonstrate how the counter-hegemonic activity of individuals at a local level can use voice and fiction to refigure the connotations of his ghostly omnipotence to challenge the ability of successive Kenyan states to hegemonize the meanings of the Rebellion and its memory.

## **Chapter 2: Haunting and Hegemony in Kenyan History: 1963 – 2024**

The 21st century rehabilitation of Dedan Kimathi's memory by state-actors starkly contrasts the state-sanctioned silencing and repression of the memory of the Mau Mau revolution that has typically characterized the Kenyan state's relationship to its anticolonial past during the 20th century (Branch 2010; Mwangi 2010). This may appear to suggest that the relationship between his memory and the state has significantly altered, i.e. the ghost of the Mau Mau revolution does not threaten the character of Kenyan capitalism anymore allowing it to be seamlessly absorbed into the national imaginary. However, this is not the case.

Therefore, chapter two will demonstrate how, whether welcomed or rejected, the anti-establishmentarian symbolism of the Revolution's memory has haunted every permutation in the structure of hegemony enforced by the State, from independence to the present day. This has necessitated a pattern within successive postcolonial Kenyan governments, where they contain the Revolution's memory without forgetting it completely in different ways. This has been motivated by the necessity to neutralize its political threat, while co-opting the memory's resonance amongst the Kikuyu to shore up the legitimacy of the State for political support. This section will thus outline the genealogy of the Kenyan state's appropriation of the Mau Mau's memory at the national-political level from the 20th century – 21<sup>st</sup> century. This will pay attention to how the practices of bourgeois Kikuyu populism, consumer capitalism, and the construction of monuments have been incorporated into various strategies to assimilate the counter-hegemonic connotations of Kimathi and the Rebellion's memory into the State's conservative-nationalist imaginary. Specifically, by attempting to strip his radical injunction from

the connotations of his memory and freeze it in the form of frozen artifacts and performative gestures.

After the KANU became Kenya's first independent government, Kenyatta introduced a policy of "orderly amnesia" that blocked the construction of memorials and suppressed celebrations of the Mau Mau revolution in the 1960s and 70s (Atieno-Odhiambo, Lonsdale 2003, 4). This was legitimated under the aegis of the Kenyatta regime's mantras "We all fought for freedom" and "forgive and forget" (*New York Times*, 13 Aug. 1963; Hughes 2017, 346). This mantra was projected onto a policy of peace and reconciliation which on the surface suggested that to single out any specific group's contribution - i.e. the Kikuyu-majority led Mau Mau movement - to Kenya's independence over others would be antithetical to the project of developing a unified national identity out of a multiethnic state. This mantra was rationalized in consideration of the divisions within the Central Rift Valley which caused by the ideological cleavages that the Emergency period cemented between loyalists to the British colonial state and Mau Mau freedom fighters and their sympathizers. (Maughan-Brown 1985, 57-58; Berman 1991, 201). However, it has been argued that Kenyatta's "forgive and forget" policy was initially motivated by the necessity to circumvent the claims of ex-Mau Mau veterans as the rightful heirs to power over the postcolonial state (Mazrui 1963, 24). Moreover, to delegitimize the collectivistic social and economic policies which the Mau Mau's veterans and sympathizers still hoped to see enacted after independence (Mazrui 1963, 24). The most significant and contested of these policies was the distribution of free land to the landless and ex-Mau Mau veterans (Clough 1998, 48; Mazrui 1963, 24; Hughes 2017, 346). On one level Kenyatta's rejection of these social democratic reforms could be interpreted as simply an effort to appease the anxieties of investors and international lenders concerning the sanctity of their private property rights. But

underlying the Regime's repudiation of the authority of ex-Mau Mau fighters and their adherents was the recognition of the danger that the untamed inhabitation of the Mau Mau revolution's memory within the postcolonial state could pose to the stratification of class relations. This threat required the State to establish a regime of truth that would position the KANU party's transition to power and political program as an embodiment of the *true* revolution, while Kenyatta decried the Mau Mau as "extremists who meant to dominate Kenya through terror" (Stevenson, 3 June. 1963). This would delimit the horizon of political aims imaginable within civic society to preserve this authority and protect the State's capitalist economic base and social relations.

The socialist party "Kenya People's Union" was created in 1966 out of revered national populist left-wing politicians in the KANU party like Oginga Odinga and J.M. Kariuki and 27 others who had either left or been kicked out (Kariuki 2008, 142; Clough 1998, 52). The party's formation demonstrated that these early attempts to completely exorcize the ghost of the Mau Mau revolution from postcolonial Kenya's political imaginary were nigh impossible. This was because the demands of the KPU conjured the revolutionary spirit of the Mau Mau struggle and re-figured it along the lines of socialist ideals. These ideals spoke to the anxieties of radical students, urban workers, trade unions, students, former forest fighters, ex-detainees and a hard core of embittered landless people that made up their support base (Kariuki 2008, 142). The language of class-politics pervaded the 1966 Manifesto, which also called for free education, cooperative farming, official recognition of the sacrifices of freedom fighters and democratic land consolidation (Clough 1998, 227). The manifesto also mimicked many of the same tropes and rhetoric espoused by the Mau Mau, asserting a lineage between the colonial and the postcolonial state that hinted at the incompleteness of the Mau Mau revolution. The perceived continuity between the two programs was most evident in the Manifesto's attitude towards the

Agrarian Question, which attacked the “*new* class of big landlords” who had monopolized the big estates and asserted that “A radical change in land policy is obviously necessary. The *wananchi* (ordinary people) shed their blood to secure it” (Clough 1998, 227). The rhetoric within the Manifesto’s demands concretized the thematic of Kenyan left-wing political imaginations that we see consistently reproduced in further iterations of left-wing/ anti-government political-ideology and action throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. That is to say, it demonstrated how the epistemological and ethical system that frames conceptualizations of social justice, and egalitarian politics in Kenya is almost always founded upon an assumed inheritance of the Mau Mau revolution’s mission. This thereby characterizes radical left-wing ideology and action not only as a *continuation* of the war the Mau Mau fought but the *return* of the Mau Mau’s radical spirit to the postcolonial context, whose spectral voice delivers a political injunction that past and present activists and social movements lay claims over.

The KANU party had to acknowledge the fact that popularity of the KPU at the time emblemized the power of this Mau Mau based left-wing political thematic. This inspired a subtle pivot in the Kenyatta regime’s attitude toward the Revolt from 1966-78, as it struggled to repurpose and claim authority over the contested memory of the Revolution (Clough 1998, 250). The Regime’s inheritance of the Mau Mau revolution, and re-figuring of its radical thematic, was constituted through a quiet passive revolution enabled in the form of Kenyatta’s ethnic populism. Kenyatta’s populism sought to ape certain Mau Mau aesthetics and imagery to mobilize the popular consciousnesses of the impoverished Kikuyu citizenry, for whom the memory of the Mau Mau revolution resonated most strongly. This move aimed to sublimate the memory of the Mau Mau into the wider project of the bourgeoisie Kikuyu political elite to portray Kenya’s anticolonial struggle as purely a Kikuyu struggle, allowing them to shut out other social groups

in Kenya from state-power in the process (Mwangi 2010, 91; Atieno-Odhiambo 1991, 306).

While at the same time, Kenyatta's regime intended to block this mass participation from making egalitarian political demands that would challenge the capitalist fundamentalist logic inscribed within the state's socioeconomic organization of society (Atieno-Odhiambo, Lonsdale 2003, 10-11).

The Kenyatta regime engaged in an ambivalent strategy of symbolic propaganda and selective rapprochement with specific Mau Mau veterans and organizations that could serve its purposes (Clough 1998, 250; Angelo 2017, 450). This strategy depended on Kenyatta's ability to be pro and anti-Mau Mau simultaneously by exploiting his ambiguous connections to the Movement during the Emergency period (Clough 1998, 250; Angelo 2017, 450). In secret, the calls of ex-Mau Mau veterans and central authorities for land redistribution and funds to support living freedom fighters and the families of their veteran fell on deaf ears, and the Regime banned or blocked the registration of political ex-Mau Mau veteran associations including the Kenya Freedom Fighters' Union and the Kenya War Council (Angelo 2017, 445). But in public, Kenyatta selectively surrounded himself with a range of ex-Mau Mau bodyguards, received pledges of loyalty from prominent Mau Mau generals like General Kimbo and Field Marshall Mwariama; and rewarded explicitly 'nonpolitical' Mau Mau associations in the Rift Valley like the NDEFFO with land and material support for cooperative farming (Angelo 2017, 445; Nyangira 1985, 30). The Kenyatta regime's performance of the Mau Mau memory atomized the national significance of the Mau Mau into Kikuyu-centric terms. In doing so, the Kenyatta regime's public utilization of aesthetic signifiers and measured performative gestures paid lip service to the Mau Mau in a manner that enervated the radical political injunction from its symbolism. They attempted to conjure away the danger the Mau Mau embodied in the form of

the KPU, by configuring its ghost into an appendage of Kikuyu ethnic dominance over Kenyan class society, and an accessory of Kenyatta's own personality cult.

The Daniel Arap Moi regime (1978-2002) that followed Kenyatta's death oversaw a process of "de-Kikuyuization", which othered the Mau Mau revolution's memory from affiliation with the state (N'Diaye 2002, 629). This period thus saw further repression of pro-Mau Mau agitation and organizations, like the 1980s underground socialist *Mwakenya* movement, and the censorship and arrest of pro-Mau Mau writers and historians, like Maina wa Kinyatti and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o himself (Thiong'o *Detained* 1981; Kinyatti 1987, 23). However, when the populist Mwai Kibaki rose to power after the 2002 democratic elections, his government ushered in an unprecedented state-led rehabilitation of the Mau Mau Revolution's memory within the public domain. As this thesis has already stated in the introduction, it is during Kibaki's government where the furor concerning the exhumation of Kimathi's body took hold of Kenyan political discourse. The absence of which, however, was compensated through the construction of a statue of Dedan Kimathi, the 2007 creation of the "Kimathi University College of Technology (KUCT)" in his honor, and the ratification of the new 2010 constitution, which officially codified the honoring of Kenya's national heroes (Kipkemoi 5 May. 2023). This 21<sup>st</sup> century thaw in the Government's attitude towards the Mau Mau revolution, and its public consecration as a nationalist symbol, has been accompanied in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with an increased transethnic, and even transnational, appeal of his legacy. This is expressed by the fact it has become an emblem of resistance seamlessly absorbed into 21<sup>st</sup> century popular and consumer culture. Graffiti and murals depicting the infamous picture of Kimathi's face, up close as he sat on the defendant chair before his colonial trial, adorn the sides of Nairobi's buildings and its streets; while similar artistic homages to the figure can be found as far away as New Orleans



(Macarthur 2017, 1; Grafikale Msale 29. Aug 2021; Robinson Feb. 2024). Moreover, T-shirts depicting the same iconic pose can be found in most markets in Nairobi, and they have even become fixtures within the global fashion industry (Macarthur 2017,1). For instance, the Kenyan fashion brand “Jamhuri Wear”, emblazons their T-shirts with the same image of Dedan Kimathi, and they have been publicly worn by world famous musicians like Jay Z and Akon (Kelley, 21 February. 2009; *Diaspora Messenger* 13 December. 2023).

The symbiosis between these monuments and aesthetic significations of the Mau Mau memory appears to suggest for the first time an organic confluence between state and public opinion on the Mau Mau. However, a sense of unease tinges the appearance of this harmony. This is because these ‘homages’ to the memory of the Mau Mau point to the ambivalent effects of Kenya’s mid-1990s market reforms upon memorializations of the Rebellion. Specially, the effects of these reforms upon the sociopolitical connotations of the Revolution’s memory in Kenyan society, and its damaging implications for progressive politics underneath. Ostensibly, odes to Kimathi’s memory in emergent subcultural styles and fashions in Kenya could be interpreted as embodying the heterogenous possibilities regarding public inheritances of the Revolution’s symbolism in the wake of the democratic gains afforded by the transition to a multiparty democracy. But it is also arguable that the consumerization of the Mau Mau’s revolutionary memory points to how the expansion of Kenyan capitalist culture has seen the radical connotations of the Revolution’s symbolism domesticated by it, transforming its memory into what Mark Fisher terms a “frozen aesthetic style” (Fisher 2009, 7). Fisher’s term denotes the tendency of capitalism to flatten subversive practices, materials, and symbols into aesthetic products, which are then decontextualized and re-packaged for harmless consumption (Fisher 2009, 7). During Kibaki’s rule s political liberalization was accompanied by market

liberalization, which saw interest rates and the cost of credit were lowered, allowing Kenya's entrepreneurial class to explode accordingly (Barkan 26 March. 2007; Iraki 23 April. 2022). The expansion of this capitalist culture has thus welcomed the return of Kimathi's to contemporary public Kenyan society. But not as an active call for change. Rather, Kimathi's ghost has been accessorized in the form of harmless commodities and fashion styles who *gesture* towards this same call. But in the process of gesturing, they have subsumed the transgressive potential of his memory into the social reproduction of the same Kenyan class society his ghost once so animatedly challenged throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Admittedly, this appears to be a cynical assessment of the implications of Kimathi's and the Mau Mau's 21<sup>st</sup> century acceptance at Kenya's national-political level. However, the contiguity between the consumerization of the Mau Mau Revolution and the form that the State-led rehabilitation of its legacy has taken suggests there exists a systematic attempt to sanitize the collective memory of the Revolution on a national level for conservative interests. The Kibaki Government framed the erection of monuments, the renaming of buildings in an ode of Kimathi, and the ratification of a new constitution as signifiers of the country's "rebirth", after four decades of repressive one-party rule under the KANU Regime. (*The New Humanitarian*, 21 Jan. 2003; Mwangi 2010, 93). However, Daniel Branch argues that these gestures were encoded with reactionary undertones, as the symbolic power of these monuments aimed to deflect and cover over criticisms of the significant inadequacies within the Government's rule made by the public (Branch 2017, 317). These included the corruption scandals that consistently dogged his rule, especially regarding the gluttonous spending of bribes which were calculated to have amounted to 8% of Kenya's GDP in the first two years of his presidency (*BBC News*, 14 July. 2004). But most importantly, it is likely he aimed to deflect criticisms concerning his government's lack of

control over the insurrectionary activity of the notorious Kikuyu youth gang/movement called “*Mungiki*”.

The “*Mungiki*” Movement, which means “multitude” in Kikuyu formed in the 1980s and rose to national significance in the 1990s as a Kikuyu quasi-religious political-militant youth movement that claimed to be the inheritors of the Mau Mau mantle (Ramussen 2010, 302). In the neo-traditionalist vein of the Mau Mau, they donned dreadlocks, practiced oathing rituals and espoused values rooted in Kikuyu cosmology (Ramussen 2010, 302). However, further than just mimicking the aesthetics of the Mau Mau Movement, the “*Mungiki*” also declared themselves to be completers of the Revolution’s political mission in response to the “re-colonization” of Kenya by forces of international capital (Kagwanja 2003, 30). The Movement thus positioned themselves as defenders of the urban Kikuyu dispossessed, women, migrants and landless youth (Barkan 2004, 95; Kagwanja 2003, 30). Aka, the most downtrodden members of Kenya who had been left behind by cuts to social services, mass unemployment, escalating poverty, and inter-ethnic competition in the wake of IMF/World Bank ordained market reforms during the 1990s that cut government and public sector expenditure significantly (Branch 2010, 316).

When the Movement first migrated into urban areas from the countryside during the 1990s, they were welcomed by the inhabitants as it took root in the slums of towns like Nairobi, Nakuru and Nyahururu (Kagwanja 2003, 35; *Human Rights Watch* 2002, 6). These towns were largely comprised of insecure, poor, landless, Kikuyu squatters, who in the thousands had been displaced in the wake of state-sponsored/condoned ethnic violence around both the 1992 and 1997 election periods (Kagwanja 2003, 35; *Human Rights Watch* 2002, 6). The *Mungiki* movement thus popularized itself as a necessary protection service for the most downtrodden of Kikuyu society, policing shantytowns and ensuring water delivery and safe transport in the

absence of state-authority (*Human Rights Watch* 2002, 6). However, once they began exacting bribes, committing extra-judicial killings, and extorting businesses for protection, their image as a legitimate political movement for the dispossessed soon transformed into a criminal organization/cult. This image was particularly heightened by their role in perpetuating the 2007/8 election bloodshed that claimed the lives of 1,300 people, after Kibaki's government stole the 2007 election (Ndago 64, 2020). Though public approval of *Mungiki* had swiftly declined by the late 2000s, the rapidity of its growth (estimated to have reached up to 100,000 in the early 2000s) within the slums highlighted the decline in state-control of urban areas caused by cuts to the public sector (Atieno 2007, 529). Furthermore, it expressed the lack of faith in state-leadership to provide security and protection accordingly in the eyes of the Kikuyu youth (Atieno 2007, 529).

The popularity of *Mungiki* amongst the most impoverished and dispossessed sectors of Kikuyu society clearly underscored the fact that its support was derived from class-based grievances felt by the Kikuyu people. Therefore, if we are to treat the *Mungiki* movement as, for at least a moment, an embodiment of the collective will of Kenya's subaltern Kikuyu populations, the explosion of the *Mungiki* naturally draws similarities between itself and the Mau Mau revolt. Parallels of which, that the leaders of the *Mungiki* movement repeatedly emphasized when explaining the political rationale behind their movement (Atieno 2007, 529). The popularity of the *Mungiki* among the Kikuyu poor, and the identification of the Movement with the Mau Mau's radical political injunction, exposed the fallaciousness of the Kibaki's declared "rebirth" of the nation. In addition, the Movement's growth to prominence called into question the congruence of the Kibaki Government's attempts to subsume the Revolution into its conservative national imaginary.

Rather than attend to how the structural faults within the capitalist socio-economic organization of Kenyan society gave currency to the *Mungiki* movement, Kibaki's government attempted to annex the meaning of the Revolution's radical ghost from its basis within the contradictions of Kenyan class society and place it in the form of a frozen artifact. Thus, in the leadup to the 2007 election, the Kibaki government metonymized the affective relationship to the memory of the Revolution shared by working-class Kikuyu people by appealing to it in the construction of a monument of Dedan Kimathi unveiled in December 2006 (Coombes 2011, 210). Akin to the consumerization of Kimathi's symbol, this gesture created a fetish that stripped the conjuring of Kimathi's ghost in the present from his meaningful connotations to the poverty, exclusion, and political marginalization that motivated the *Mungiki* movement. Instead, the Kibaki government conjured Kimathi's ghost and froze it in a hollow statue, using it as an opportunistic tool to re-assert obedience to state rule. By appealing towards the image of the dead, this allowed Kibaki's government to disacknowledge the importance of this memory to the material struggles of the living in Kenya (Coombes 2011, 210).

### **Chapter 3: Shamans and Specters: The Creation of Dedan Kimathi's Ghost(s) during the *Mau Mau* Revolution.**

As the second chapter has demonstrated, amongst the Kikuyu community, the whispers of the Mau Mau revolution persistently question Kenya's present socio-political context through invocations of its leader Dedan Kimathi: the quasi-paternal figure and great specter brooding over Kenya's past, present and future. But as have seen, on the national-political level, multiple versions of Kimathi's specter have been conjured into Kenyan society over the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. These include, but aren't limited to, his construction as a totem for the socialist cause by the KPU during the 1960s, his aestheticization on t-shirts in the fashion world, to the defanged state-sanctioned incarnation of his ghost in the body of his bronze statue looking over Central Nairobi in the present day. The clashing of these plural incarnations of Kimathi's spirit at the national-political level displays how contesting inheritances of the Rebellion's memory have differentiated the configuration of features attributed to invocations of Kimathi's ghost. However, it must be emphasized that the terms underlying all conjurations of Kimathi's ghost, whether implicitly or explicitly pronounced, popular or national-political, are founded upon the presupposed conflation of Kimathi's symbol with the radical injunction embodied by the Rebellion. Due to opposed political interests, conjurations of Kimathi's ghost in Kikuyu popular memorialization practices often embrace the radical connotations of his symbol. While reactionary/state-sanctioned conjurations on the other hand, have attempted to silence or separate these connotations from Kimathi's figure to uphold the legitimacy of their political rule.

However, these conjurations also lend one to reflect on the unique nature of Kimathi's life and death that has allowed the copresence of so many versions of Kimathi's ghost to inhabit

Kenyan society. The heterogeneous nature of Kimathi's many ghosts are symptomatic of the elusive nature of his material existence in general (Macarthur 2017, 4). From his time hemmed in the thick bamboo forests of the Aberdare mountains, to his burial underneath the Kamiti prison grounds, Kimathi's writings, ideas, and location have continuously remained shrouded in mystery and secrecy (Macarthur 2017, 4). The epistemic limitations blocking direct access to Kimathi's subjective experiences have caused external acts of signification in celebratory and condemnatory mythmaking practices to monopolize conceptions of his identity from the colonial period to the present day. Kimathi's spectrality is thus derived from the notion that his existence has only been experienced as a haunting, registered in traces discovered by those who searched for, missed, or feared him. To understand the genealogy of the national-political appropriation of Kimathi's figure in the postcolonial period, this chapter will claim that its roots were derived from attempts to depoliticize the Rebellion in colonial psychiatric discourse and print culture. Therefore, chapter three will treat these two forms of discourses as mythmaking practices, to examine the methodology and rationale behind the spectralization of Kimathi's figure during the Emergency period (1952-56). More specifically, this chapter will demonstrate the origination of Kimathi's national-political ghosts from the ethno-psychological diagnosis of Kimathi as an insane, primitive shaman, in consideration of the counter-revolutionary implications encoded in this diagnosis.

Two weeks after the violent assassination of the pro-European Chief Waruhiu wa Kung'u of the Kiambu district, Sir Evelyn Baring, the British Colonial Governor, declared a state-of-emergency in Kenya on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1952 (*The Irish Times*, 21 Oct. 1952; Osborne 2015, 80). In both the lead up and aftershock of this declaration, anxious reports of terrorist attacks on settlers' farms in the White Highlands, murders of African policemen, and the

performance of mass oathing ceremonies by an anti-European secret society flooded Kenya's press (Hall, Oct 18. 1952). Lurid descriptions of the practices which sealed the seven oaths of allegiance to the secret society within the oathing rituals particularly elicited terror and self-disgusted fascination from settler society (Luongo 2006, 453). Such customs *allegedly* included the digging up and consumption of rotting human corpses, traditional cocktails mixed with semen and menstrual blood, and even acts of bestiality (*Time*, 13 June. 1960; Lonsdale 1990, 399). British colonial battalions, European volunteers, and police detachments immediately cracked down on the White Highland districts where the Society were most active (Hall, 18 Oct. 1952). But alongside these counterinsurgency campaigns, perplexed colonial anthropologists and psychiatrists ruminated on the potential causes behind this eruption of 'atavistic' savagery (Leakey 1954; Carothers 1954; Kennedy 1992, 252; Luongo 2006, 453). The most alarming implications of this 'eruption' pertained to the fact that it smashed the innocent picture of the natives and the logics behind the linear model of progress upheld by the colonial enterprise as a justification for their presence in East Africa (Lonsdale 1990, 404). In other words, a logic which assumed that the imposition of education, religion and capitalist development in the Central Valley would smoothly subsume the Kikuyu into the colonial civilizational project (Lonsdale 1990, 404). The "myth of Mau Mau" would be born from these studies, and the specters of Kimathi emerged through the fissure that the Rebellion had opened (Rosberg, Nottingham 1966).

The interpretation of the Mau Mau, officialized within colonial and national-political discourse during the 1950s and 60s stemmed from the psychological interpretation of the rebellion proposed in ethnopsychiatric studies, primarily in that of Dr. J.C. Carothers' 1954 colonial government commissioned report labeled *The Psychology of Mau Mau* (Carothers 1954; Kennedy 1992, 254; McCulloch 1993, 45). The discipline of 'Ethnopsychiatry' originated in the



early 20<sup>th</sup> century and occupied an unstable position between psychology and anthropology as it ostensibly sought to understand the ‘primitive’ psyches of populations in the colonial world (McCulloch 1993, 35). The discipline’s popularity in the post-war period rode on the coattails of an increased concern felt within European settler communities towards the rise of African nationalist movements, such as in Algeria, Southern Rhodesia and Kenya (McCulloch 1995, 35, 13,58) Subsequently, settler practitioners dominated the field and attempted to graft a veneer of pathological symptoms unto brewing anti-colonial sentiments. This was to depoliticize and delegitimize emergent nationalistic movements by enclosing their radical-political connotations within the rhetoric of health and medicine (Antic 2021, 365; Buoli, Giannuli 2021,114).

Carothers’ study of the Mau Mau rebellion encapsulated the settler interests and colonial logic that defined this medical practice. He posited that the Rebellion was a symptom of the failure to regulate the pressures colonial modernization had enacted upon Kikuyu communities, stating that it “arose from the development of an anxious conflictual situation in people who, from contact with the alien culture, had lost the supportive and constraining influences of their own culture” (Carothers 1955, 14). However, his study still disregarded any notion that the Movement represented a calculated understanding of the external social, economic, and political issues facing impoverished Kikuyu people in the White Highlands (Carothers 1954, 12).

Carothers proposed an internalist diagnosis of the Rebellion which framed it as a psychosomatic expression of cultural difference among the Kikuyu. Though shaped by their social environment, in Carothers’ eyes the Rebellion revealed a neurotic predisposition within the Kikuyu psyche exacerbated by the cultural deficiencies that determined their subject-positions in times of insecurity. As such, the metaphysical conceptualizations of evil derived from their “mental structures” combined within their “magic modes of thinking”, rendered the Kikuyu unable to

synthesize anxieties and depression internally and individually (Carothers 1954, 12-15). Instead, the Kikuyu were predisposed to externalize the source of misfortune as the work of “evil wills”, which now due to European dominance in Kenya, saw the Kikuyu irrationally misrepresent Europeans as the “sole authors of all evil” in their lives (Carothers 1954, 12).

The view of *Mau Mau* as a sociocultural-inflected pathological reaction to European influence was integral to the insane characteristics that distinguished the specter of Dedan Kimathi memorialized in colonial Kenya’s national-political discourse. This was because dominant colonial discourse did not interpret the Movement as a confluence Kikuyu anxieties and cultural customs collectively embodied in militant form. Instead, it posited that the Movement’s violent nature reflected the machinations of a contingent of Kikuyu community leaders – characterized by Carothers as ‘relatively sophisticated egotists’ – who had distorted Kikuyu tradition and manipulated their irrational anxieties for the purposes of self-aggrandizement (Carothers 1954, 15; Luongo 2014, 456). Carothers’ report conveyed both notions in his delineation of the predatory nature of the oathing rituals and their violation of traditional Kikuyu cultural modes (Carothers 1954, 16). Particularly, in his description of the “Fourth Oath” that irreversibly bound inductees to the purposes of the Movement and its leaders (Carothers 1954, 17).

For Carothers, the Fourth Oath constituted the most flagrant distortion of traditional Kikuyu custom due to its insistence upon “the need to kill one’s brother or one’s father if called upon to do so” by one’s leader (Carothers 1954, 17). This practice appeared particularly aberrative because the family group (*mbari* or *nyomba*) is the most important unit of social organization within the Kikuyu community’s patrilineal kinship system (Kenyatta 1938, 2). Within each homestead of a *mbari*, the father is respected and obeyed as the head of the family

and the custodian of all its land and property by all members of the family group (Kenya 1938, 8-9). Moreover, a father bearing no male children would cause the much-feared extinction of a family group, a worry which constituted the principal rationale behind the Kikuyu's polygamous systems of marriage (Kenya 1938, 13). The pledge to kill one's father or brother if ordered to do so violated the patrifocal basis of Kikuyu family units, and as a corollary, the codes of conduct/ behavioral patterns within these family units that were deemed necessary to reproduce the social organization of the Kikuyu community. In Carothers' eyes, the administration of this oath was intended to atomize Kikuyu inductees from their tribal roots, ensuring on pain of death their absolute submission to whims of the Movement's leaders (Carothers 1954, 17). Colonial discourse perceived the rationale behind joining the Mau Mau to be a pathological reaction to European domination. But this same discourse proclaimed that the loyalty of its fighters to a Movement that so clearly perverted traditional Kikuyu religion and social custom suggested that its members had been brainwashed under the spell of powerful leaders who employed witchcraft, hypnosis, and other forms of black magic to dictate their fealty (Carothers 1954, 14; Macarthur 2017, 21).

The perceived linkages of the Mau Mau to supernatural practices and mental instability framed the Movement as a symbol of pagan retrogression, and psychotic atavism (Leakey 1954). Regarding Mau Mau's rank and file, colonial psychiatric discourse painted them as what Fanon terms "lobotomized Europeans", guided by superstition and instinctive behavior, which in times of stress made them easily manipulable by impressionable leaders (Fanon 1961, 302). However, the image of Dedan Kimathi in colonial discourse slightly differed. This because his position as the mastermind behind the collective delusion sweeping over the White Highlands differentiated him from his followers as a bloodthirsty, insane, primitive, genius. In doing so, colonial

discourse indirectly characterized Kimathi as a corrupted shaman in a manner that shared some attributes with barbaric conceptions of the shaman's role in primitive societies in Western discourse. But it also deviated from this conception in crucial ways to exceptionalize Kimathi's evilness and spectralize his evilness in the process.

Western cross-cultural psychiatry and anthropology historically maintained an association between primitive religion, irrationality, and mental illness (Lucas, Barrett 1995, 310). The connotations of this trinity, however, were traditionally split into the barbaric and arcadian perspectives that divided colonial conceptions of 'primitive' societies (Lucas, Barret 1995, 287-310). The barbaric perspective of 'primitive' societies, which is most relevant to this chapter, in ethnopsychiatric discourse constructed them as degenerate and therefore prone to insanity and superstition (Devereux 1980, 7; Lucas, Barrett 1995, 299). Barbaric images of the shaman epitomized the imbrication of social pathology and psychopathology which was believed to explain the 'abnormal' group values internalized by primitive societies (Devereux 1980, 15). Though colonial discourse believed them to be adjusted to their societies, barbaric perspectives pathologized the shaman as 'severely neurotic' individuals, or paranoid schizophrenics, who experienced the psychic conflicts of their communities most intensely (Devereux 1980, 15; Lucas, Barrett 1995, 310). Except, shamans differentiated themselves from Western neurotic individuals as they channeled their psychotic impulses into rituals and acts of witchcraft which were subsumed within the sociocultural practices of their society, as opposed to inexplicable, spontaneous behavior that may marginalize them from their peers (Lucas, Barrett 1995, 310). As such, shamans were often treated as the quintessential embodiments of their society's psychopathology, representing both the society's collective ill health and the mystical signifying

practices they used to mediate its ill health to maintain cohesion amongst their people (Devereux 1980, 17; Lévi-Strauss 1967, 177).

The shamanic construction of Kimathi was popularized in the most comprehensive account of Dedan Kimathi's life released during the 1950s, captured by the colonial police officer Ian Henderson. Henderson was the man who led the hunt for Kimathi and wrote of his experiences in his 1958 published nonfiction book: *Man Hunt in Kenya* (Henderson 2016). Henderson's account of Kimathi's shamanism differed from traditional conceptions of primitive shamanism because he aimed to delegitimize the notion that Kimathi's political injunction embodied the organic will of the Kikuyu people. To do so, Henderson hinted that Kimathi's relationship to the Kikuyu was not homologous with that of witchdoctors and their communities in other primitive societies, who were believed to serve as agents of unity and cohesion despite their mental illnesses. Henderson's delineation of Kimathi's origin story did demonstrate that Kikuyu sociocultural practices and religion were somewhat mutually implicated in the production of Kimathi's insanity. However, he differed from dominant perceptions of witchcraft within ethnopsychiatry by affirming that Kimathi's manipulation of witchcraft did not complement traditional Kikuyu customs and values but *warped* them to satisfy his egotistical whims, echoing Carothers' verdict on the Movement. Thus, Henderson affirmed the spectrality of Kimathi's madness and shamanism to convey Kimathi's incongruity with his Kikuyu peers. Henderson did so by portraying the Movement as a symbolic struggle within the Kikuyu community between the "ancient," solely represented by Kimathi "and the modern," which was represented by the rest of the Kikuyu people in the White Highlands (Henderson 2016, 9). In this conflict, the spectrality of Kimathi's designs distinguished Kimathi's insanity as not simply a product of his regression to archaic forms of mentation, which was the typical belief pronounced

within the allusion of shamans with schizophrenia in ethnopsychiatric discourse (Silverman 1967, 28). Rather, for Henderson, the nature of Kimathi's insanity expressed his ontological existence as a revenant of a prehistoric consciousness, whose return in postwar Kenya opened a rift within the living present that threatened to halt the evolution of the Kikuyu people through their steady integration into Kenya's colonial modernization project.

Henderson's story emphasized the anachronistic relationship between Kimathi and the Kikuyu community by first highlighting the unique modernity of their social consciousnesses in contrast to other Kenyan ethnic groups during the postwar period. This for Henderson was caused by the fact that "the Kikuyu has had closer contact with European civilization than any other tribe in Kenya," which meant they disproportionately provided "numerous clerks in government offices," "the "most experienced hands on the European farms, and the bulk of workers in Nairobi, the colony's capital" (Henderson 2016, 10). The identity of causes which explained this phenomenon for Henderson furthered the notion that the Kikuyu were predisposed to smoothly assimilate into western paradigms of modernity. This was clear as Henderson did not describe the Kikuyu's integration into the colonial economy and bureaucracy as a product of a paternalistic relationship between the colonial state and the Kikuyu. Rather, he posited that this situation was organically generated by the natural affinity between Kikuyu and Western value-systems, as the Kikuyu were similarly known for "its devotion to education, its ability to work hard, and its intelligence" (Henderson 2016, 10). The Kikuyu thus neatly inserted themselves into the body politic of the colonial state in Henderson's eyes, serving as if not the "colony's economic backbone", then at least at its "economic pelvis" (Henderson 2016, 10). Henderson still believed the Kikuyu possessed a "tribal mentality" as demonstrated by their penchants for "magic oaths" and "tribal rituals" (Henderson 2016, 10-32). But one could infer from

Henderson's ostensible respect for the Kikuyu that he shared the liberal imperial belief that such manifestations of backwardness would be inevitable subsumed under the colonial modernizing mission via what John Lonsdale has termed "a linear, compensating process of loss and gain" (Lonsdale 1990, 404).

In contrast, Henderson's origin story of Kimathi furthered this image of him as an outlier. This was clear as he portrayed the abnormality of Kimathi's personality development as evidence of Kimathi's fundamentally unsyncopated relationship with the Kikuyu community. Henderson did so by using psychoanalysis to root the causation of this condition in Kimathi's process of individuation from childhood, and the interrelation of such with mental illness. The picture Henderson painted of Kimathi's psychological development suggested that from his childhood, Kimathi's mentation had collapsed into the primitive defense mechanisms associated with paranoid schizophrenia in psychoanalytic discourse (Levin 1930, 951; Rizzolo 2017, 946). Henderson's allusions to schizophrenia were apparent as he claimed that the traumatic event of Kimathi's grandmother's death at age 11 triggered him to experience intense delusions and magical hallucinations. Henderson claims that Kimathi experienced apocalyptic visions of "death being like a gate which opened and shut", dreamt of the Kikuyu's supreme God "Ngai speaking to him in his sleep," and from these conversations, became convinced that "Ngai, the traditional god of the Kikuyu tribe, had guided his grandmother's hand and had chosen him to be the head of the whole tribe" (Henderson 2016, 15-16). Kimathi's communication with Kikuyu deities in his dreams pointed to what Silverman termed the "flood of archaic imagery," that sweeps over the schizophrenic patient's mind during an episode, causing the primitive thought patterns of their ancestors to resurface and ideas to seemingly emerge from a supernatural realm (Silverman 1967, 28; Rizzolo 2017, 946). While Henderson's depiction of Kimathi's subsequent self-

deification, as caused by these delusions, signals towards the omnipotent quality associated with schizophrenic/animistic thinking in 20<sup>th</sup> century psychoanalysis, where patients narcissistically imagine that the order of the world around them is subordinated to the godlike power of their thoughts (Freud 1912-1913, 84; Levin 1930, 961).

Kimathi's neurotic faculties *could* hypothetically have been absorbed into the cultural patterns of the Kikuyu. For instance, by channeling his superstitious temperament into a position serving as a soothsayer or a *mundu mugo* (medicine man) (Beecher 1935, 516). However, Henderson's account expressed the anomalous quality of Kimathi's mental illness by outlining how though Kimathi derived his magical thinking from the paradigm of Kikuyu cosmology, his superstitious tendencies were not based upon an actual respect for the tenets of Kikuyu spirituality and religion. From Henderson's perspective, Kimathi's mental illness was contoured by his "reputation for delinquency" (Henderson 2016, 16). This meant that Kimathi either discarded the sanctity of Kikuyu moral codes and customs completely or mastered his knowledge of their laws to change and repurpose to satiate his primitive egotism (Henderson 2016, 16). Hence, as a child Kimathi was ostracized from his playmates due to his "rough and treacherous" behavior (Henderson 2016, 16). But at the same time, he "loved traditional ceremonies" and did "everything possible to learn the tribal rituals," but with the willingness to "change the ceremony to suit himself" if necessary (Henderson 2016, 17). As was clear, in Henderson's eyes the leitmotif that defined Kimathi's inchoate personhood development comprised of insanity, self-absorption, and illegitimacy: the three tropes which would demarcate the nature of his rise to infamy and alleged descent into atavism later in life during the Mau Mau.

The spectral connotations of Kimathi's outsider, shamanic disposition fully crystallized in Henderson's text when he narrated the events that followed the declaration of the Emergency in



October 1952 - when the Movement was forced to migrate its headquarters into the undergrowth of the Aberdare forests. Before this stage, Henderson admitted in his account that the Rebellion's initial motivations before the Emergency somewhat rode on the "spirit of African nationalism and trade union agitation growing in the towns" (Henderson 2016, 9). However, upon their entrance into the jungle, Henderson identified "witchcraft, or the *fear* of witchcraft" as its central lifeforce (Henderson 2016, 9). By discounting its politicalness, Henderson constructed Kimathi's superstitious psychopathology as a self-identical symbol of the entire Rebellion, in which the Rebellion's character and demise was homologized with Kimathi's escalating divorcement from social reality. Henderson's psychologization of the Rebellion's disposition in the jungle was clear as when Kimathi "formed two main councils...to formulate policy....and prepare the rank and file for the life of violence that now lay before him," there is no mention of a coherent set of stakes or wider political objectives to be achieved at this juncture of the Rebellion (Henderson 2016, 21). Rather, Henderson reduced the rationale behind the migration of the Rebellion to a product of the navel-gazing, schizophrenic desire to accomplish the fusion of one's ego with the objective world (Levin 1930, 951). Thus, Kimathi "welcomed the steady destruction of all links with civilization" as only if his men "forgot their past" in modern society could he actualize his primitive self-image as the "invincible ruler of the mountains...worshiped [by his followers] with increased fervor" (Henderson 2016, 21).

The ghostly undertones of Kimathi's schizophrenia became evident through Henderson's stylization of Kimathi's psychic disintegration in the jungle. In this isolative context, Henderson portrayed Kimathi's mental imbalance as a medium for a primordial stage of man to return into the forest, disarticulating the boundaries between past and present. For Henderson, this stage was defined by animalism and animism. Regarding the former, Henderson illustrated Kimathi's

“reversion to an animal existence” through the mutation of his body’s physiology (Henderson 2016, 24). The brutal nature of jungle life thus caused his “power of sight, hearing and smell” to grow “abnormally acute,” and as civilization faded into memory, “he chewed skins and bones like a hyena” and “his eyes flicked about like those of a nervous monkey” (Henderson 2016, 24). The savage debasement of his surface features, however, was offset in the eyes of his followers by the heightening of his alleged supernatural abilities. As Kimathi “learnt more about the forest”, his locus of ideation further entrenched itself into the realm of animism (Henderson 2016, 24). His “reputed connection with Ngai”, thus granted Kimathi the clairvoyant power to conjure “the still voices of his men who had died” to “listen to reports” from deceased leaders of “defunct Mau Mau “armies” (Henderson 2016,151). The combination of his feral exterior and primordial-spiritual interior in the Aberdare Forest affirmed the devolution of his cognitive faculties to an animistic stage, a form of mentation often attributed to paranoid schizophrenia (Moriarty 1961, 159). As determined by his increased kinship with nature and the world of the dead, in the forest Kimathi’s sense of personhood was diffused into an assemblage of properties derived from the non-human world.

Kimathi’s travails in the jungle thus metaphorized the unwarranted return of a primordial stage of man, for which Kimathi served as its sole avatar. What is crucial regarding Kimathi’s role as this metaphor, however, is that Kimathi was not depicted primarily as a subject haunted by a prehistoric past, but as a *haunting* subject derived *from* the prehistoric past. This is important due to how it differentiated the relationship of Kimathi’s insanity to the African jungle from dominant portrayals of this relationship in Western literature. In psychiatric discourse, African forestry has historically been identified as stimulants of madness, where the connotations of ‘going bush’ are either positively associated with embracing the mysterious and primitive

passions that traditionally languish beneath the floorboards of the civilized Western man's superego (Littlewood 1985, 195). Or it is negatively associated with frenzied periods of depression and paranoia (Littlewood 1985, 195; Cawte 1974). When such discourses are transposed into Western literature, the underlying assumptions behind the exhibition of savage traits, whether positive or negative, signal the return of a primal force from *inside* man. But a return, that is often couched within the parameters of an inward facing political critique directed towards the flaws of Western civilization which stimulated this regression.

In *Heart of Darkness* for instance, the portrayal of Kurtz's atavistic descent is framed as a reaction, and thereby a critique, of the cultural imaginary espoused by Western colonial projects (Conrad 1899). Conrad did so by posing Colonel Kurtz's greed and brutality as a dark reflection of the barbaric values embodied within the logics of primitive accumulation that guided the socioeconomic practices of the Belgian colonial enterprise. This explains the horror Marlow feels when he observes forced labor, torture, mutilation and other brutal practices imposed upon the natives in Congo. Thus, Conrad counterpoised Kurtz's savageness against the supposed modernist idea of the 'civilizing mission', to highlight the falseness of this rubric taped over the retrogressive intentions of the colonial project. Kurtz is haunted in the jungle, but more so by the repressed reality of the colonial enterprise revealing its bloodied face to him in the Congo's undergrowth as opposed to by malign forces embedded in the African landscape. The portrayal of Kimathi's insanity differed from this angle as the condition of his madness in the story was not conceived as symptomatic of any flaws within the British colonial project - which may have created anxieties amongst the Kikuyu that they attempted to reconcile by appealing to their 'archaic' cultural foundations. Rather, by conflating the Rebellion with Kimathi's insanity, Henderson represented him as the fissure *itself*, whose return from the past had turned Kenya's

colonial present 'out of joint'. For Henderson, the reasoning behind Kimathi's invasion of the present was entirely sustained by his autonomous will, which desynchronized him from his Kikuyu peers and left his portrayal of the British's colonial practices in Kenya completely untouched from critique.

The individualization of the Rebellion as a product of Kimathi's spectral invasion of colonial thereby implied that the Mau Mau represented nothing of the organic will of the Kikuyu people, including those who followed him into the forest. The spectro-psychologization of Kimathi as an insane revenant thus allowed the colonial state to depoliticize his radical symbolism by isolating it from the Kikuyu people's sociopolitical context. Instead, colonial psychiatric discourse trapped the eruption of the Rebellion within an internalist diagnosis of Kimathi's peculiar and unstable mental activity, and the anomalous relationship of such with his Kikuyu sociocultural context. By framing the Rebellion as a psychosomatic expression of cultural difference, the politicalness of the Rebellion was delegitimized. Moreover, this allowed the colonial state to prescribe an immediate cure for this mental disease through the installation of concentration camps, forced labor practices, the villagization of settlements and more. The imposition of these repressive practices upon the Kikuyu people could thus be justified to prevent the Mau Mau plague from spreading. The national-political specter of Kimathi created by colonial psychiatric discourse was thus defined by insanity, temporal and social incongruity, and illegitimacy.



## **Chapter 4: Visors, Exorcisms and Mourning the Specter of Kimathi: 1956-92**

Kimathi's colonial specter was defined by illegitimacy, incongruity, insanity and his isolation in the Aberdare Forest. These conditions beg the question as to what features of Kimathi's (un)life during the Emergency Period allowed his ghost to leave the forest and grow into a phantasm of such terrifying proportions in the eyes of British colonial state and settlers? Past his role as the Rebellion's leader, the British's obsessive hunt for Kimathi was fueled by myth of his omnipotence that had also emerged from the Aberdare Forest. A myth of which, that was encoded with spectral connotations as it was born precisely from the colonial state's inability to physically access Kimathi's corporeality coupled with the supernatural attributes associated with his figure in their discourse. In the Central Rift Valley and Nairobi, Kimathi's frustration of multiple campaigns to capture his body during the first four years of the Emergency period placed his concealment at the epicenter of settler anxieties (*New Journal and Guide* 14 Nov. 1953). This fueled the popularity of the myth, which Kimathi himself welcomed to increase political support and raise the morale of the Rebellion's fighters and sympathizers (Henderson 2016, 154 (Barnett, Njama 1970, 129; Henderson 2016, 29).

Though the omnipotence of Kimathi's ghost was first attributed to him by external colonial mythmaking practices, the beginning of this chapter will use colonial print culture and Derrida's concept of the "visor effect" to analyze how Kimathi instrumentalized his perception as a ghost to outwit colonial authorities. Then after an assessment of the colonial state's failed attempts to exorcize Kimathi's ghost by condemning him to a state of social death, the second half of this chapter will utilize Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae's 1976 play *The Trial of*

*Dedan Kimathi*, to demonstrate how the inheritance of Kimathi's radical ghost through political acts of mourning circumvented the efforts to silence Kimathi's radical injunction on the national-political level by portraying him as a Marxist-Messiah. The rationale behind incorporating both Kimathi's instrumentalization of his spectrality and the play's exaggerated reinvention of Kimathi's figure will be to highlight how the supernatural connotations attributed to Kimathi's national-political specter – particularly his myth of omnipotence – were autonomously repurposed through voice and fiction at the local level in different ways to unsettle state-led attempts to confine the horizon of interpretation available in perceptions of the Mau Mau rebellion and its memory. Though the national-political specter of Kimathi projected itself with a hegemonic *appearance*, this chapter will illustrate that this appearance was not accepted passively amongst Kikuyu people on a local level, who selectively inherited certain characteristics from it and refigured them for their own counter-hegemonic purposes.

Kimathi's ability to evade bodily identification sustained the myth of his omnipotence as it created a spectral asymmetry between Kimathi and colonial authorities which is best understood in reference to Derrida's theorization of the "visor effect" (Derrida 1994, 6). The "visor effect" refers to the "supreme insignia of power," which for Derrida is based upon the "power to see without being seen" (Derrida 1994, 8). The hierarchy of this phenomenological exchange recalls one to anachrony as we feel ourselves being perceived prior to or beyond any attempt to cross this look (Derrida 1994, 7). As we cannot return its gaze, we are imprisoned by it. The ghost's intangibility becomes a coat of armor, and the gaze that emanates through its slits haunts the subject's every move, fixing them in a position of subordination. In the words of a policeman quoted in Henderson's text, "Kimathi was as elusive as a butterfly," and it was

precisely the supernatural connotations appendaged to his evasion of capture which constituted this effect (Henderson 2016, 25).

The inaccessibility of Kimathi's corporeality created the fear that Kimathi's eyes and ears were practically omnipresent. This perception characterized the opinion of Kimathi's slipperiness at the beginning of the Emergency period, especially regarding the perceived effectiveness of the Mau Mau's intelligence systems, which were solely attributed to Kimathi's own machinations (*The Hindustan Times* 10 April. 1953). Newspapers sounded the warning that "his agents are everywhere" among the "African staffs of public utilities" the "telephone systems," "Nairobi hotels", and even the "African Home Guards" themselves (*The Hindustan Times* 10 April. 1953). Akin to how ghosts incarnate themselves in a prosthetic body, Kimathi's specter appeared to autonomize itself within the bodies of thousands of faceless urban dwelling Kikuyu people, who embedded themselves in the walls of the provincial administration behind enemy lines. Thus, Kimathi's usage of possession granted him the clairvoyant power "to anticipate by hours" the "sweeps of Kikuyuland" "again and again [by] the police and army," despite the 100-mile distance between Nairobi and the Aberdare Forest (*The Hindustan Times* 10 April. 1953).

The image of Kimathi as an all-seeing amorphous being, capable of possession, sublimation and deposition behind enemy lines when he saw fit, was co-constructed by his own writing and stunts as well. Kimathi was known to be a prolific writer and a magnetic orator who mobilized rhetoric to establish a discursive regime that reinforced the self-image he projected to his followers as a prophet blessed with powers from Ngai (Barnett, Njama 1970, 200; Henderson 2016, 20-21; Gikandi 2017, 333). This aimed to consecrate the legitimacy of the Rebellion's secular political goals within the terms of Kikuyu religious custom by ensuring his Kikuyu support base that the Rebellion was a product of Ngai's will (Barnett, Njama 1970, 201). The



mobilization of rhetoric to affirm his prophetic status also contained further spectral implications pertaining to the visor effect. This is because the hierarchical relationship the visor effect engenders is not solely born from an asymmetry of vision, but an asymmetry of *voice* as well (Derrida 1994, 7). Since one cannot see the specter, we are coerced into identifying with its acousmatic voice (Derrida 1994, 7; Dolar 2006, 61). As Mledan Dolar emphasizes, this structurally produces “divine effects” as without a comprehensible locus, it appears like an effect without a cause that could emanate from anywhere and everywhere (Dolar 2006, 62). Therefore, the reception of a placeless voice on one hand always carries the authority of omniscience and omnipresence (Dolar 2006, 62). But the fact we cannot see the specter further unsettles our senses as the apprehension of its voice is underpinned with fiction (Dolar 2006, 136). As we cannot see the specter speak, we must *imagine* it doing so. This means that the image of the omnipotent entity carried by its voice is both generated by our subjectivities and occupies our subjectivities at the same time.

Kimathi’s spectral weaponization of voice and fiction became apparent in sensational newspaper articles that recorded the series of stunts Kimathi pulled - or was believed to have pulled - against colonial authorities in mockery of their inability to locate his body. The first explicit example of Kimathi’s instrumentalization of the visor effect arrived in August 1953 regarding the sound of a “ghost voice,” which reportedly broke through secret messages between security bases and jungle outposts declaring, “I am Dedan Kimathi and I hear all you say and know what you are planning” (*The Hindustan Times* 02 Aug. 1953). At first, intelligence officers perceived the voice to emerge from a European hoaxer imitating an African accent (*The Hindustan Times* 02 Aug. 1953). But then they feared it might really have been Kimathi as the Mau Mau were known to possess radio sets and it had become increasingly obvious that the Mau

Mau were frequently aware of the details of the security forces operations before they occurred (*The Hindustan Times* 02 Aug. 1953). Despite the unknowability of the voice's origins, the attribution of its source to Kimathi underscored the notion that his corporeal absence had caused the phenomenology of Kimathi's being to become inseparable from his ontology (or *hauntology*) in the eyes of colonial authorities. In these circumstances, the anxieties of Kimathi's adversaries conjured his figure into existence and retroactively inserted Kimathi into settings he may not have originally occupied. The collective hyper-fixation on Kimathi's missing whereabouts among settlers and colonial authorities thus granted him the divine power of omnipresence as they summoned Kimathi's presence wherever he was feared to have frequented.

Even if the "ghost voice" was a hoax, it was clear that Kimathi recognized the advantageousness of sublating his hiddenness into an image of omnipotence and omnipresence as he built up a legend of appearances in unexpected places through the frequent letters he wrote to the press and to government authorities (Latimer 11 March. 1954). A letter to a colonial district commissioner for example, thanked him for unexpectedly "giving him a lift in his car on such and such date" (Latimer 11 March. 1954). While other letters wrote of his alleged travels to "Russia, Romania, China and Wales," and his shock at witnessing the deterioration of conditions in Kenya upon his return (Latimer 11 March. 1954). Despite the nigh impossibility of these endeavors, the lack of empirical evidence of his corporal limitations allowed Kimathi to curate a self-image which magnified his ontological capabilities with ghostly proportions. By endowing himself with the power to pass through colonial borders and executive office walls at will, not only did Kimathi paint a picture of his impalpable form. But this picture remained for a while the only image of Kimathi that colonial authorities could hold onto. Until Kimathi decided to change this situation in 1955.

From the breakout of the Emergency period, the Kenya Government had placed a £500 prize on Kimathi's head in reward for his capture, and from 1954, they circulated thousands of flyers in Gikuyu across the Central Rift Valley which asked the Kikuyu public, "Have you seen Dedan Kimathi lately," to gather their support (*The Manchester Guardian* 15 Sep. 1954; Barnett, Njama 1970, 129; Macarthur 2017, 16). The advertising campaign only enhanced the perception of Kimathi's legendary status amongst his sympathizers as it indirectly paid testament to his flair, courage, and elusiveness, and literalized the desperation of colonial authorities as a product of these qualities in the same breath (Osborne 2015, 88; Macarthur 2017, 2). Seeing that these leaflets were missing his face, Kimathi in February 1955 allegedly visited a police outpost at the dead of night and pinned a notice on its door announcing that he himself would award £1000 to his future captor (*The Times of India News Service* 11 Feb. 1955). The notice wished the police luck, but most importantly, it included a photograph of his portrait (*The Times of India News Service* 11 Feb. 1955). The photograph provided a blurry black and white portrait of his visage, which included his inchoate dreadlocks, a pen inside his right hand, and a shadow that streamed down his left cheek, covering his neck and dotting the left side of his body (Anderson 2005, 21).

This gesture could have appeared to unravel the nebulous question mark hovering in place of Kimathi's body by providing corporeal coordinates that may have led British forces one step closer to proving Kimathi's mortality. More specifically, one may assume that access to Kimathi's face would bring one closer to accessing his body, and thereby one step closer to unmasking his visor. However, this was not the case because, as Deleuze and Guattari proclaim, the face is not a body part that brings one closer to accessing their individuality (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 115). Rather, the face as signifier negates the body signified by it through its monopolization of the substance imparted through acts of signification (Deleuze, Guattari 1987,

175). For example, when in conversation with someone, we use their facial expressions to determine the connotations of their speech, which means that whatever is being signified in the contents of their voice i.e. their body, etc. are all reterritorialized unto their face. Acts of signification are thus almost always “facialized” (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 115). How “faciality” reinforced the spectral asymmetry of Kimathi’s visor is because the portrait did not open a window into the individual self behind it. Instead, the portrait of Kimathi’s visage functioned as an autocratic machine that forced whichever subjects that faced it to conform to the mental reality advanced upon its surface. This act would have delimited the horizon of interpretation available in the exchange to remove any perceptions irreconcilable with Kimathi’s signifying purposes. Thus, the aura of his supposed “Goering-like vanity” emanating from his posture, supported the idea that Kimathi had incorporated this portrait into a performance of spectral-political power that operated through his face (*Times of India News Service* 11 Feb. 1955).

As we have already stated, the supernatural power of Kimathi’s colonial specter was socially produced by the mystification of his physical form, and the fear this elicited from settlers and colonial authorities. The portrait thus facialized this production of power by reterritorializing his hiddenness unto the blurriness of his visage in the portrait. This meant that releasing his portrait did not compromise the impregnability of Kimathi’s visor. Rather, it reinforced his visor with visual imagery by placing a set of eyes upon his omnipresent glare, a mouth upon his ghostly voice, and grounded the imagination of Kimathi’s brutality that haunted settler nightmares in an ambiguous illustration of his face. Deleuze and Guattari assert that, “the mask does not hide the face, it is the face” (Deleuze Guattari, 115). Likewise, in this context Kimathi did not uncover his face from beneath his visor, his face *became* the visor, adding another wall in front of the inaccessible landscape of his interior self, and the unknown whereabouts of his body.

Kimathi's intangibility and evasion of capture meant that his being was never fully present or self-contained. Rather, the mind games he played with colonial authorities mediated his existence to them in the relational terms of his absent presence. The fear of Kimathi's clairvoyance, the perception of his intangibility, the uncanny glare of his portraited visage, all combined to place him everywhere and nowhere, registered by his hunters only in the footprints and conjectures he left behind to be scrambled over. The production of Kimathi's national-political specter during the Emergency period was thus transformed by the cat and mouse relationship he shared with colonial authorities that placed him in the interstitial position specters occupy between what is *no longer* or *not yet*. In their eyes, he was still revenant from Kenya's prehistoric past. But a revenant, who somehow always stood two steps ahead of them in the future. At least, until Kimathi was shot and arrested by tribal policemen on the edge of the Nyandarua forest range on 21 October 1956 (*The Manchester Guardian* 22 Oct. 1956).

Upon Kimathi's capture, the Royal Air Force disseminated over 100,000 leaflets throughout the forests and towns to lower the morale of the remaining soldiers and sympathizers, which featured the infamous photograph of Kimathi lying supine with his hands chained on his chest (Edgerton 1989, 104). However, British forces soon halted this practice likely due to the realization which Dedan Kimathi's Chief Secretary, Karari Njama, recounted that these leaflets only fueled Kimathi's stardom across the Central Rift Valley: "the two persons (Kimathi and Stanley Mathenge) became famous all over the country through the press and broadcasting information which aimed at spoiling their names" (Barnett, Njama 1970, 129). Colonial authorities had finally fastened Kimathi's specter to a manacled body in a cell of the Kamiti Maximum Security Complex, and after a trial at the Supreme Court of Kenya in November, he

was sentenced to be hanged on February 18, 1957, on the charge of possessing a firearm under Emergency regulations (*Tribune Report*, 11 Jan. 1957; Osborne 2015, 93).

The primary objective of the media campaign and Kimathi's trial in the wake of Kimathi's capture was to reassert colonial authority over Kikuyu political imaginations, which the radical political injunction carried by Kimathi's specter into Kenya had immensely jeopardized. The need for colonial authorities to expel his 'evil' spirit from Kenyan society thus reshaped the media campaign, his trial and execution the following year to mirror the ritual of an exorcism. Derrida claims that exorcisms are a matter of dogmatically neutralizing the hegemony of a malignant force to prevent them coming back to virtual life postmortem (Derrida 1994, 59). However, the evil force can only be put to death in a performative fashion as it relies on repeating a mode of incantation which declares the spirit to be dead *already* (Derrida 1994, 59). The performative certification of Kimathi's death was embodied by the state of social death colonial authorities used the media and the trial to commit him prior to his execution.

Social death refers to a condition of people who are treated as if they are non-existent in wider society. Jana Králová defines this condition as consisting of three aspects: "a loss of social identity, a loss of social connectedness and losses associated with disintegration of the body" (Králová 2015, 235). In Kimathi's case, since gaining the military upper hand in 1955, The Department of Information had attempted to break his connectedness to Kenyan society by banning much media coverage of Kimathi and the Mau Mau in general (Osborne 2015, 78). This move sought to prioritize narratives concerning British developmental projects which upheld an image of the British's 'responsible trusteeship' in Kenya, to detach all socio-political relevance from the Mau Mau in Kenyan society as possible (Osborne 2015, 93). This condition continued even during his trial as his case was declared to be "*sub judice*", meaning its details were

prohibited from public discussion (Soper 22 Feb. 1957). Thus, while British left-wing and African American newspapers internationally condemned the Kenyan Supreme Court's rejection of Kimathi's petition to appeal against his sentence – as firearm possession was not punishable by death in the UK – public discussions of the internal dynamics of the trial were muted in Kenyan civic society (*News & Letters* 25 Dec. 1956; *Soper* 22 Feb. 1957 Clough 1998, 2).

Within Kimathi's trial itself, the procedure of the court was organized to avoid at all costs giving Kimathi a political platform to martyr himself upon (Anderson 2017, 234). The proceedings in court avoided all discussion of the Rebellion's objectives and requested no explanation of the motives behind Kimathi's participation in the Rebellion, even regarding why he possessed a firearm in the first place (Anderson 2017, 234). The effects of the trial's format further relegated Kimathi to a status of non-personhood through desocialization and depersonalization. as the court isolated their judgment of his 'crimes' from the social and personal context which produced them. This atomized Kimathi from the social world he once inhabited. But it also further depoliticized the Rebellion to protect the hegemony of the British Government's interpretation of the Movement in public discourse: as an atavistic episode of senseless savagery and irrational brutality.

The exorcism of Kimathi's ghost was seemingly completed on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1957, when the hangman's noose drew taut and from it dangled Kimathi's body, exuding the same air of calmness he had displayed on his walk to the gallows (*The Manchester Guardian* 15 Feb. 1957). However, while this act may have condemned Kimathi's body to death, this did not correspond with the death of the specter who inhabited it, as colonial authorities would have hoped. As this chapter has stated, the certification of the spirit's death in the exorcism is inherently tautological as it seeks to reassure one that the spirit is dead by assuring that it is dead (Derrida 1994, 59). But

encoded within the paradox of this performative act, is the tacit acceptance that the death of a spirit can never truly be known, only *declared* to be so. This itself doesn't require a genuine belief in the declaration. Even after Kimathi was buried, recent testimonies from prison warders who served at Kamiti Maximum Prison during the Emergency have revealed that they were ordered to man the unmarked gravesite for three months as they feared he might resurrect himself somehow (Tendu 2020).

Though Kimathi did not return in his physical body, the execution symbolically unmoored his specter from its colonial locus: i.e. its origins on the interface between racist colonial psychiatric discourse; settler pearl-clutching regarding the violence sweeping over the White Highland reserves; and the mythos generated by his Robin Hood-esque stunts and consistent evasion of capture from the colonial state. Now this version of his ghost had been laid to rest, the transition to independence, from December 12, 1963, onwards, opened space for a new specter of Kimathi to be conjured back into Kenyan public discourse. This would be conjured through a new set of relations to his symbol founded upon acts of mourning, which were contoured by the frustrations the Kikuyu public felt towards the socioeconomic issues and inequalities of Kenya's postcolonial period.

Kimathi's new specter took shape in the memoirs and other history-based forms of cultural production on the Rebellion produced by ex-Mau Mau veterans and sympathizers towards the Movement. These writings aimed to overturn the dominant British line on the Movement parroted by the KANU government with a narrative that pictured the Rebellion as a rational and political response to the settler-colonial exploitation of the Kikuyu peasantry. Thus, in memoirs like that of J.M. Karuiki's "*Mau Mau*" *Detainee* (1963) the Mau Mau Movement was transformed from a primitive cult into a "fight for Freedom and Independence," and its



fighters were transformed from wayward bandits and terrorists into Kenya's "true nationalists" (Kariuki 1963, 36-67). As I demonstrated in the second chapter, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> postcolonial period, clashing interpretations of the Mau Mau struggle in state-sanctioned vs Kikuyu popular memory often signified struggles to appropriate the symbolism of the Revolution in support of contesting political imaginaries. Though conceptions of Kimathi's role in the Revolution were not always at the center of these clashes, they came to dominate Kenyan academic circles in the 1980s and 90s after Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo first performed the play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* in 1976 (Thiong'o, Mugo; 1976; Ochieng 1992).

The play imaginatively re-enacted Kimathi's "farical" trial at the Nyeri High Court to figuratively liberate his specter from the prison house of colonial discourse and reject the Kenyan state's inheritance of this discourse's interpretation of the Revolution (Thiong'o, Mugo 1976, iv). The invocation of Kimathi's specter in this instance shared many characteristics with that of his colonial specter. Namely, Kimathi's character was imbued with omniscience and presented as a self-identical symbol of the Revolution. However, this dramaturgical choice did not associate Kimathi with animism or primitivism. Rather than a schizophrenic tyrant, the ghost of Kimathi that stood trial in the play was a heroic freedom fighter, a socialist and a patriot imbued with messianic powers.

Mugo and Ngũgĩ embellished Kimathi's specter with messianic capabilities to reinsert him into the Kikuyu community's symbolic order, which colonial discourse had attempted to separate him from. His prophetic stature in the play, thus provided his voice with the authority to deconstruct the illegitimate foundations of the colonial enterprise. Thus, when asked if was "Guilty or not guilty?", Kimathi refuses to give legitimacy to the logics of colonial discourse that had attempted to demonize him by answering "To a criminal judge, in a criminal court, set up by

criminal law: the law of oppression. I have no words” (Thiong’o, Mugo 1976, 25). His reinsertion into this order also allowed Kimathi’s to utilize his supernatural powers in his dialogue to presciently highlight the inheritance of colonial systemic injustices within the neocolonial apparatus of Kenya’s future 1970s socio-political context. Therefore, when discussing independence to an aspiring Kenyan politician in the court, Kimathi states, “The blood of us workers and peasants. Yes, those are our people. And you, New Farmers, New Settlers: Black skins, colonial settlers’ hearts. Thousands of acres of wheat, tea, coffee...while workers and peasants live in hovels...I now understand...loans...token shares in banks, companies.... Grab, Grab, Grab. Partnership in Progress. Towards what end” (Thiong’o, Mugo 1976, 46). By allowing Kimathi to speak to the socio-economic inequalities future Kenyans would face, he was constructed as an embodiment of the collective will of all Kenyan masses, past and present, in their twin struggles for liberation from the forces of capitalism and international imperialism.

The messianic configuration of Kimathi drew heavy criticism from conservative historians in Kenya, most notably William Ochieng (Ochieng 1992). Ochieng accused Ngũgĩ’s political-aesthetic project of distorting “characterization and historical facts to further his political and ideological passions”, which inaccurately “elevated Kimathi to the ranks of Mao, Lenin and Guevara” (Ochieng 1992, 339-341). Though Ochieng’s critique of Ngũgĩ had a credible basis, his stance was undermined by his tendency, as Peter Simatei highlights, “to privilege the historical method despite the fact that invention also plays a part in the historian’s operations” (Simatei 1999, 156). The play’s invocation of Kimathi’s ghost certainly endowed the Mau Mau and him with invented ideological attributes. Especially, by portraying the Rebellion as a unified class-based nationalist movement and Kimathi as its socialist messiah, devoid of all

blemishes and worshiped by all Kenyan peasants and workers no matter their ethnicity. But the notion that the play solely represented an opportunistic perversion of the Movement's memory to complement Ngũgĩ and Mugo's predetermined political-ideological objectives ignored the contemporary socio-political implications of the play's re-vision of this historical moment. Specifically, the implications regarding the reception of its eight-night showing at the Kenyan National Theatre in 1976 (Thiong'o 1997, 18).

The play received immense enthusiasm from a working-class Kikuyu audience, who even joined the actors outside the Theatre after the first showing to perform songs and dances that celebrated the heroes of Kenya's resistance (Thiong'o 1997, 19). Considering this context, it must be emphasized that the impetus for invention within theatrical re-enactments specifically, is driven by the necessity to syncopate its rendition of the past with the emotions of its present audience (Schneider 2011, 65). This can involve *mistelling* history to suture the wounds inherited from it, touching the past to soothe the scars it has imprinted upon a community's collective memory (Schneider 2011, 61). In the case of the play, its unabashed and inflated celebration of Kenya's revolutionary history incited such a positive response from its audience because it theatricalized the collective restitution of the historical injustices of the colonial period – the farcicality of Kimathi's trial, and the illegitimate colonial system which authenticated it. But the catharsis evoked by the play upon the audience, watching it nineteen years after the Rebellion's end, suggested that the memory still resonated with them as the crimes of this past moment still occupied their social consciousness of the present – both in terms of the somber affection working-class Kikuyu people still felt towards the Rebellion's emancipatory promise; and the perception that the injustices of the colonial past and postcolonial present belonged to the same continuum, making the two indistinguishable from one another.

The tone of Kimathi's portrayal in *The Trial* was jubilant, affirmative, and void of all tropes associated with the tragedy genre. However, the act of ontologizing his remains in a romanticized form, allowing him to directly address Kenya's 1970s context, as if he never left it, draws parallels between the play's dramaturgy and the persistence of the present past that haunts the mourning subject in the wake of a traumatic episode. Mourning is more than just grief. It is a spectral form of production with social, political and personal implications intertwined within the process. By iterating the memory of the cadaver in our heads, this motion imbues its ghost with a virtual life (Derrida 1994, 122). But then it turns back and asks questions of us, and it is this exchange which determines what the mourner should think about and what they should do considering this loss. As demonstrated by the enthusiasm received by the play, mourning can furnish a sense of political community as the experience of communal loss crystallizes relations among people on top of the holes that now bring them together (Butler 2002, 12). Scenes of mourning therefore reveal the spectral sociality of embodied life because it highlights the fact that we live constantly in thrall of our relations to the Other who, in the event of their death, implicates itself upon our modes of personhood, sometimes irreversibly (Butler 2002, 13). This phenomenon, however, encourages us to question what conditions determine our inability to let go of the ghost, or for the ghost to let go of us? What allows one to finish mourning a human being? (Freud 1917, 2).

As Marx affirmed in the *German Ideology*, one cannot destroy the "fantastic and spectral form assumed by the idea of "Fatherland"" while the "actual relations" that constitute this idea still exist (Marx 1998, 139). Likewise, the success of the play demonstrated that both the colonial and postcolonial state's efforts to co-opt, silence, or erase the radical political injunction from Kimathi's ghost were always bound to fail. The primary reason being, that the mourning of

Kimathi's radical ghost was not simply based on an *idea* of his figure alone, which can be subject to distortion or perversion. Rather, the mourning of Kimathi demonstrated that his radical ghost was invigorated by the social relations of Kenyan class society. This means Kimathi's spectral presence will persist in the minds of working-class Kikuyu people as long as the inequalities engendered by the socio-economic organization of postcolonial Kenya are perceived as indistinguishable from the inequalities and social relations that drove the originary Rebellion. So long as cash-crop agricultural exports remain the backbone of the economy; so long as the rural peasantry still face displacement via state-backed/corporate land grabs; so long as access to social services and public services remains heavily restricted to poor urban and rural populations; and authoritarian control over the state apparatus continues to serve as the central instrument for maintaining political and economic power in the hands of a small fraction of political elites (Akoth 2011, 36; *Food and Agriculture Organization* 2024; Minoia 2020, 1; Ajulu 2021, 21). Kimathi's radical ghost will still speak to working-class Kikuyu people's aspirations if the emancipatory promise of his injunction still relates to their contemporary social conditions and thus remains from their perspectives incomplete.

The mourning of Kimathi performed by the play therefore metaphorized the time-lag of modernity that trapped the post-colonial Kikuyu subject in the past due to the non-contemporaneity of their experience of the living present. According to Homi Bhabha, the "time-lag" is born from a caesura which confuses how the movement of time is perceived in the postcolonial situation (Bhabha 1991, 205). Time is fragmented in this context as postcolonial subjects experience it through two opposing lenses. The logics of colonial discourse imposed unto to the postcolonial subject cause them to view time through one lens in the same terms espoused by Western modernity and its 'myth of progress' as a transhistorical ideal for history.

But though this progression is what they aspire for, the ‘myth of progress’ also stands for the despotic time experienced by the Orient whose memory of the exploitation, and brutalization they faced during the colonial period inherently call this ‘myth’ into question (Bhabha 1991, 205). The ‘time-lag’ actualizes in the postcolonial situation because in attempting to seize the value-coding of modernity and join the progression of modernity, the postcolonial subject is haunted by the crimes and trauma of this period. More specifically, through the manifestation of colonial crimes in the social violence they experience, which are usually caused by their postcolonial state’s inheritance of the colonial state apparatus. In the context of the play, the time-lag is portrayed by the play’s re-enactment of Kimathi’s death sentence at the end of the final act when the Judge states: “Kimathi s/o Wachiuri, you are sentenced to die, by hanging. You will be hanged by the rope until you are dead’ (Thiong’o, Mugo 1976, 84). Through repeating the act of Kimathi’s unlawful sentence, the trauma and crimes justified against the Kikuyu people during the Mau Mau period under the colonial rubric of ‘progress’ returns to haunt 1970s Kenya on stage. The re-enactment thus theatricalizes the inheritance of colonial violence within the postcolonial state as the injury felt in reliving Kimathi’s unfair internment in the colonial period 20 years later transforms the play into a contemporary scene of oppression which the audience suffers by witnessing its re-dramatization.

But as the play’s Marxist reinvention of Kimathi highlighted, the notion that mourning inexorably chains working-class Kikuyu people to their revolutionary past does not constrain the possibility of imaginations of the future. Rather, it is the changing visions and *re-visions* of Kenya’s revolutionary past materialized through acts of mourning that allows the possibility for difference, stopping the experience of time as a broken repetition. It must be reiterated again that the specter not only marks a relation to what is *no longer* but also to *what is yet to come*. Thus,

though in his death, and the formal end of the Rebellion, the Mau Mau's portrayal in the play represents *what is no longer*, it is the aspirations of the radical injunction embodied by the Rebellion which positively mark *what is yet to come*. Kimathi's injunction in the play thus calls for a future where Kenya's working-classes seize the value-coding of modernity from its colonial origins, which had "Implanted in our minds by centuries of oppression" an "inferiority complex" (Thiong'o, Mugo 1976, 68). To replace this, his injunction re-inscribes the sign of modernity through a transformation of the site of enunciation, allowing his injunction to voice a contra-modernity which refuses to mimic the despotic values encoded within Western modernity (Bhabha 1991, 212). As such, Kimathi demands Kenya's peasants and workers to reject "A share in their motor companies, A share in their Tourist hotels, A share in their stolen wealth...in the pay of Imperialists?" (Thiong'o, Mugo 1976, 65). This is because pursuits of self-betterment through these channels reified a bourgeoisie value system which was not only inherited from the colonial state by Kenya's capitalist-neocolonial system, but also legitimized the socio-economic inequalities which many of the play's audience would have faced in 1970s Kenya (Thiong'o, Mugo 1976, 65). Instead, Kimathi called on Kenya's peasants and workers to reject the logics of Western modernity and follow a new egalitarian value system rooted in the socialist ideals of class-consciousness, internationalism and anti-imperialism. Kimathi thus calls on them to, "Rise, Rise workers and peasants of Kenya Our victory is the victory of the working people. The victory of all those in the world Who to-day fight and struggle for total liberation" (Thiong'o, Mugo 1976, 68).

Therefore, through an active *choice* to read his legacy in a particular manner, by allowing Kimathi's ghost to occupy one's consciousness, by communicating with him and ruminating on what the meanings of his loss signify in relation to one's contemporary social context; the

inheritance of Kimathi's ghost will continue to speak to contemporary sets of demands. But demands that call for a *new* future consequently. Whether that be calls for socialist revolution in the 1960s and 70s, or the present-day calls to honor those who shed their blood for *Uhuru* by giving the enigmatic figure the burial he deserves.

## Conclusion

This thesis has utilized a hauntological framework to understand the production of Dedan Kimathi's spectrality in the colonial period, and the haunting influence Dedan Kimathi's ghost has held over political formations in colonial and postcolonial Kenya. This has paid attention to the different ways colonial discourse, state-actors, political parties, social movements, and playwrights have conjured Kimathi's specter into Kenyan society, and attempted to silence or reformulate the radical injunction embodied by his ghost's presence for conservative-nationalist or progressive-socialist causes. Acts of which have all been conditioned by a horizon of demands in their contemporary social contexts and differentiated by opposing class interests.

As has been demonstrated, contestations over the appropriation or silencing of Kimathi's radical ghost have largely been divided into struggles between the national-political conjurations of Kimathi's specter by the colonial and postcolonial state vs personal-political conjurations of Kimathi performed by individual sympathizers towards the Rebellion amongst the Kikuyu community. The national-political conjurations of Kimathi's specters both during and after the colonial period, have been linked by the attempts of the Kenyan state to suppress the radical symbolism of Kimathi's ghost to counteract the threat his political injunction poses to existing



power-relations. This has been performed by either psychologizing him as an insane shaman, or by sanitizing his memory in the form of performative gestures embodied by the construction of hollow monuments in his memory. While personal-political conjurations of Kimathi's ghost, have challenged the state's attempts to hegemonize the memory of the Rebellion through productive acts of mourning embodied by Kimathi's representation in creative forms of historical production like theatre. Ngũgĩ and Mugo's play thus fictionally repurposed Kimathi's memory to allow his fictional ghost to voice a contra-modernity which rejected the inherited logics of colonial discourse by the postcolonial state in their attempts to enervate Kimathi's ghost of its radical injunction.

The theatricalization of Kimathi as a Marxist-Messiah in *The Trial* demonstrated the emotional connection working-class Kikuyu people still share with the radical symbolism of Kimathi's memory. This connection has on one level conveyed how the currency of Kimathi's radical injunction stems from issues derived from the unequal social relations of production in Kenya, which has thwarted the ability of successive Kenyan states to silence or sanitize Kimathi's ghost to legitimize the reproduction of these relations. But this connection has also demonstrated how intimate exchanges with Kimathi's ghost open space for resignifications of his radical injunction that have allowed working-class Kikuyu people to seize the value-coding of modernity, re-inscribe its site of enunciation, and imagine new futures beyond Kenya's present status quo. Only when his injunction has materialized, when justice has been realized, can the experience of broken time be fixed. Once this fissure in time has closed, Kimathi's ghost may finally be laid to rest.

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