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EXPLORING NEW VISTAS OF RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE ON THE MAU MAU MOVEMENT

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I am delighted to be a speaker at this important and timely conference on Mau Mau and the post-Colonial State in Kenya. My sincere thanks to my brothers and friends Dr. Kenneth Ombongi Associate Dean and Dr George Gona the Chairman of the Department of History and Archeology for inviting me.

I am proud to be associated with the University of Nairobi as Adjunct Professor at the Department of Diplomacy and International Studies (DDIS)

where I have been teaching and supervising Masters and Ph.D students since 2013. I am also delighted that the Africa Policy Institute (API), where I serve President and Chief Executive, has an MoU with the University to conduct joint research, training, resource mobilization for common projects, and knowledge sharing through publications and convening forums for discussions and dialogue. Our newest and most promising partnership with the University

is on presidential studies, a joint initiative with the Department of History and Archaeology. In this regard, we have established the Center for Presidential Studies (CPS) at the API and the Presidential Resources Center (PRC) at the University to support research on lessons and practices from Kenyan presidencies. The initiative consists of two post-Doctoral Students, two Doctoral candidates and two Masters students among other staff. Under the project, we are working on a book on "the Moi Transition" to be published by April 2026. Two weeks ago, API and the Department held their first joint seminar on the preliminary work on the book project titled: "Ethnic Aristocracies: Intra-Kalenjin Elite Alliances and the Moi Presidency, 1978-2002."

Back to the Mau Mau. I consider this conference a fitting scholarly way to celebrate Mashujaa Day on October 20, 2024! It is also an auspicious moment to recognize and celebrate all Mau Mau heroes. I wish to harness my intervention in this conference around three quick points.

First, the Mau Mau movement, which burst into the public limelight over 75 years ago, shares the main attributes of other revolutionary movements such as the French Revolution, the American Revolution, the Russian Revolution and the Chinese Revolution. At the core of the Mau Mau was a shared quest for justice, equality and for an orderly, people-centered governance of free men and women. The America "Declaration of Independence" speaks not only to the spirit of Western liberal revolutions, but also to the universal quest by all human civilizations for justice, equality and freedom from all chains and distresses: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." As its real name, The Kenya Land and Freedom Army, suggests Mau Mau was justice and equality in access to land and freedom.

Second, there is no consensus or the proverbial last word about revolutionary movements. They are subjects of continuing research and reflections, and continue to elicit new debates, perspectives and even controversies across generations. As we convene here, new vistas of research and scholarship on the Mau Mau movement are opening right before our eyes. One of these vistas are the emerging anecdotal evidence of connections between the Mau Mau movement and Kenya's neighbours, mainly Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. In 2018, a Mogadishu-based friend and scholar shared a newspaper cutting on Mau Mau fugitives in Somalia in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the same vein, in October 2024, the ambassador of Somalia, Jibril Abdulle drew our attention to a video conversation between the departing British colonial officials and the incoming Government in Somalia over the future and continued protection of a large number of Kikuyu refugees and Mau Mau exiles who Mogadishu had been hosting since the 1950s.

Similarly, anecdotal evidence of the Ugandan connection to the Mau Mau is also emerging. I come from a family that was divided through the middle by the Mau Mau in Rwathia location in Kangema, Muranga county, one of the epicenters of the clash between Mau Mau fighters and British counter-insurgency forces. One of my uncles was a colonial sub-chief, the other was a Mau Mau leader, better known by his nom de guerre, General Ihuura (Kareri wa Kagwanja). In mid-August 2024, I had a reflective conversation with the former member of Parliament for Kangema, Muturi Kigano, a renowned lawyer and lover of history. The legislator reminded me that the soldier who hunted down and shot my uncle and many other Mau Mau fighters was Tito Okello Lutwa, who having joined the Kings African Rifles (KAR), the regional colonial army, in 1940 led the British Counter-insurgency operations in Kangema from his base in Muguru. General Lutwa

later became the eighth President of Uganda in the final years of the country's deadly civil war (1985-1986). At the same time, Idi Amin Dada was leading anti-Mau Mau operations along the fringes of Aberdares Forests based in Tuthu area in Murang'a. General Amin later became the third, and the most brutal, President of Uganda (1971-1979). The Chairman of Equity Bank, Peter Munga, effusively narrates his traumatic encounters with General Amin on his way from school during the dark emergency days. On evening, Amin arrested young Munga, whose both parents were away in detention, while scouring for food in the dustbins of the British military camp near Tuthu. As he struggled to free himself from Amin's massive grip, Munga took a big bite into his shoulder. "This left a big scar on his shoulder", says Munga. Both Ugandan KAR soldiers exported extreme violence into Uganda.

Finally, revolutionary movements are subjects of continuing controversies. This is also true of the Mau Mau movement which has had its passionate defenders and virulent discontents. Manifestly, past forums on Mau Mau held at the University of Nairobi in the 1970s and 1980s sparked fierce intellectual battles, which shaped the future of scholarship on the subject.

The Mau Mau movement is contested. The colonial state and Whitehall wanted Kenyans to forget the movement—and the Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Moi states maintained its colonial label as a "terrorist group". While the Mwai Kibaki

state lifted the terrorist tag, opened the door for the return of Mau Mau exiles and symbolically unchained Dedan Kimathi, it dithered on locating his gravesite in Kamiti Maximum Prison and to accord him a decent burrial. Like all ideological movements, the identity and knowledge about the Mau Mau movement has been weaponized and instrumentalized in the continuing battle for the postcolonial state in Kenya. in the intra-elite elbowing for state power.

As I conclude, I am reminded of a beautiful line by Captain Georg Von Trapp to his nun-turn-wife, Maria von Trapp, from the 1965 American musical film, *The Sound of Music*: "You brought music back into the house". By the same token, the Department of History and Archaeology at the University of Nairobi has brought debates on the Mau Mau movement back into the Kenya academy. We are grateful.

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