Dear Reader,

First and foremost, I want to thank you for taking the time to read and respond to this chapter. It remains a work in progress and is undoubtedly the piece of my present book manuscript (*"The Storm in Kenya": Mau Mau and the End of Empire*) that remains most frustrating to me. The reason for this, I think, is that while it needs to serve a specific function in the arc of that book, researching and writing it also launched my second major research project. Tentatively titled *"Everywhere, In These Occasions, Danger Grows": Conspiracism and the Foundations of Empire*, this research challenges existing paradigms in the study of conspiracy theories by situating it as an elemental, rather than aberrant, narratological force during the centuries of formal Western imperialism and the postcolonial orders they conditioned. In it, I argue that many of the algorithm-boosted conspiracy theories that flourish on social media platforms today are iterations of a much longer (and specifically *colonial*) history of speculative logic and cultural production.

I sense that this chapter is torn between telling a specific story about Mau Mau in the context of *The Storm in Kenya* and pullings toward themes, rabbit-holes, and lines of inquiry that are the preoccupation of this second project. As a part of the book, it is both a foundational aspect of how I approach speculative readings of Mau Mau and a key explanatory framework mechanism in subsequent chapters. At the same time, each chapter of *The Storm in Kenya* does aim to gesture outward, beyond the specific story that it appears to tell and into unexpected territory. I don't want to lose that ethos here, but I may want to tame it. I am currently in the process of final revisions to the manuscript for circulation in peer review and am hoping to clean this up further over the next few months (when it is slated to go out).

This is the second chapter of six in *The Storm in Kenya*, rooted in the first and establishing a key piece of the argument that drives the remaining arc. **Chapter 1 ('The Raw Material': Mau Maus in a Modern Africa)** explores how Mau Mau was understood in relation to the category and structural position of "detribalized Africans"; or, put another way, how ideas about the conditions of possibility that produced Mau Mau were inextricable from their rootedness in ideas about "Africans in transition." **Chapter 3 (Mau Mau as Racism and the Crafting of Multiracial Futures)** explores how Mau Mau came to be agreed upon as a "racist" threat by an array of colonial powers not often grouped together in governing structure or imperial ideology in order to delegitimize a range of political demands outside of the thinkable realm of mainstream global politics. **Chapter 4 (Colonial Terror, Sovereign Capacity, and the Unthinkable)** examines Mau Mau' s relationship to discourses of terrorism in the post-WWII and decolonization era. This not only came to refer to groups and practices of resistance that challenged the foundations of colonial sovereignty and civil society, but was a deeply racialized discursive phenomenon that relied on distinctions between "political" and "mere" violence. **Chapter 5 ('Cheers for the Mau Mau?': the Emergency in Kenya and pan-African Politics)** explores the relationship between Mau Mau and pan-African on the continent thought during the decolonization era, examining its rhetorical lives within this tradition and function as a political barometer within different circles. **Chapter 6 ('We Have All Heard Him, Marcus Garvey': Mau Mau and the Latter Days of the Universal Negro Improvement Association)** explores the shifting politics of Garveyism and the UNIA during the mid-20th century in relation to its positions toward both Mau Mau and Kenyan politics. Together, these chapters trace the circulation of Mau Mau as an archetype of revolutionary African anticolonialism across continents and time periods in order to explore the processes of meaning-making that have shaped global views on decolonization and political violence since the end of the Second World War.

Thank you in advance for your time in examining this piece of work, I'm excited to hear your thoughts.

Looking forward,
Christian

CHAPTER II

"THE SAME FRAME OF MIND, BUT A DIFFERENT VILLAIN"
CONSPIRACIST NARRATOLOGY AND THE DECOLONIZATION OF AFRICA

"One meets here again the same frame of mind, but a different villain." - Richard Hofstadter[1]

On 27 August, 1953, residents of the city of Luton in the south-east of England who picked up their daily newspaper encountered the following headline on its front page: "Africans as Easy Prey: Mau Mau and Communism."[2] Set alongside advertisements for industrial-grade overalls, reportage on local model train enthusiasts, and details on an investigation into the mysterious death of a local woman whose body was found in a water tank, the day's *Luton News* detailed nothing short of an impending doomsday scenario unfolding in the faraway British colony of Kenya. The article recounts the visit of Reverend H.G. Rolls to the local Rotary Club three days prior, during which he addressed its membership regarding the anticolonial uprising in the colony that would come to be known simply as "Mau Mau." In contemporary colonial discourse, this phrase indexed a complex of military, labor, and political movements during the period of the Kenya Emergency — which spanned the years 1952 to 1960 — though most acutely the armed insurgency known as *Kĩama Gĩa Ithaka na Wĩyathi* ("The Land and Freedom Army") that waged war against the British regime and those allied with it. Alongside the intensity of the struggle itself, the government's ruthless suppression of the movement through the indiscriminate mass detention of hundreds of thousands of Africans and brutal methods for extracting confessions produced a global interest in Mau Mau, giving rise to a wide range of explanations about its origin, ambitions, and relationship to global geopolitics.

---

[1] Hofstadter, Richard. "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine*, November 1964.
[2] "Africans as Easy Prey: Mau Mau and Communism," *The Luton News*, 27 August 1953.

Interest in such explanations extended to places in England like Luton, although the realities of what was happening on the ground during the Emergency (not to mention the actual issues and dynamics that gave rise to the anticolonial movement) were obscured by the sensationalism that shaped international reportage on the movement. Rolls' visit to the Rotary Club bears the hallmarks of this: as evidence for his case that Africans in Kenya were "easy prey" to the manipulation of foreign influences, he relied on an explanatory mechanism widespread at the time — that the very essences of modernity and Africanness were fundamentally incompatible and had resulted in something like a mass psychotic break, and only thus the anticolonial movement. In his words: "After years in which tribal customs had remained unchanged the advent of the European had brought a new way of life, a way of life which could not live side by side with the old." This alleged instability of African subjects confronted with this "advent of the European" on the continent served as a central pillar in the construction of colonial propaganda about the nature of Mau Mau and the anti-white genocidal violence that was its purported aim.[3]

According to Rolls, this detribalized African population presented a situation in which: "Easily exploited, the native was prey to those who advocated nationalism of the wrong kind such as Mau Mau, and Communism." These dual, ambiguous threats ("nationalism of the wrong kind" and "Communism") were key elements in a genre of reading Mau Mau that worked from a characteristically conspiratorial ethos. Whereas the former delineated forms of nationalist consciousness untethered from the specific form of constitutional change acceptable to the

---

[3] In his foundational work on these "myths," John Lonsdale describes the symbolic construction of Mau Mau as tethered to "a pathological image of the right social group relations which ought to order colonial life." It should be emphasized that this reading represents only one side of the coin, and that *romantic* myths of Mau Mau took shape in relation to different conceptions of "right social group relations."; Lonsdale, John. "Mau Maus of the Mind: Making Mau Mau and Remaking Kenya," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (1990).

British during the 1950s, the latter served as a vague shorthand for marking Cold War-era preoccupations with the nefarious designs of "the East." To the extent it was imagined as possible, nationalism of the "right kind" entailed a decolonization process whose contours were shaped by colonial powers and would leave the basic extractive infrastructures of imperial rule intact, albeit under the putative authority of an independent government. Central to realizing such a nationalism was the project of embedding a specific form of missionary-controlled Christianity as a moral and social anchor in Africa: "The Christian church, added Mr. Rolls, offered a new way of life which was full of meaning. Not only did the church tell the native how to live but also how to farm his land and to build houses." Only with proper tutelage could Africans in the colonies be guided into right-thinking modes of being and prevented from engaging in nationalisms of the wrong kind.

The three elements present over the arc of this article in the *Luton News* — the premise of African instability, the murky delineation of external forces at work, and the righteous aim that so happens to reify Western interests on the continent — echo across countless contemporary narratives regarding Mau Mau and the appropriate manner of suppressing it. They are as foundational to contemporary academic work on the nature and causes of the uprising as they are feverish settler polemics presaging the onset of a global race war. The central contention of this chapter is that such narratives attest to the embeddedness of discourses about Mau Mau within conspiracist worldviews across textual genres and (at least to some degree) normative political divisions, both during its heyday and after. I take this tradition of reading Mau Mau as something that both serves as evidence of *and* reproduced contemporarily a globally-attuned reactionary tradition of framing dissent among what Stanley Fish identifies as an "interpretive community." For Fish, interpretive communities simultaneously surface, make felt, and reify shared cultural

frameworks by establishing objects of knowledge and defining the range of interpretations possible for thinking them. While he primarily works out this concept as a way of diagnosing the forms of disciplinary authority that emerge in academic fields like literary criticism, I position it here as a way of understanding how a global hodgepodge of reactionary conspiracists produced a remarkably consistent (and *disciplined*) narrative about Mau Mau as a movement whose strings were being pulled by shadowy actors with insidious agendas. As Fish puts it: "the fact of agreement, rather than being a proof of the stability of objects, is a testimony of the power of an interpretive community to constitute the objects upon which its members (also and simultaneously constituted) can then agree."[4] This co-constitution of stable objects of discourse, reader, and collective is foundational to how conspiracist traditions of reading the world have been sustained over time and become embedded across diffuse populations and geographies.

<p style="text-align:center">* * * * *</p>

Articles like the one in the *Luton News* were effective in reproducing conspiracist thinking about Mau Mau because they were able to rely on a shared cultural framework that agreed upon it as a specific kind of stable object attached to a set of moral claims. Among the elements such framings rely upon is the existence of Mau Mau as an iteration of what V.Y. Mudimbe calls "the idea of Africa" and the certitude that the uprising had been fomented by forces positioned as "external."[5] The ethics of this revolved around the moral necessity of denying one's own implication in unjust colonial systems (even if from metropolitan space) and assuming the impossibility of African political agency in order to justify the continued existence

---

[4] Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980). 338.

[5] For Mudimbe, the "idea of Africa" operates as an ideological construction that designates a form of dialectical alterity with regard to its correspondents of the "West," "Europe," of the "Christian universe." It is both generic (with "the Orient" as a kind of parallel) and specific in its relationship to a historically-situated Eurocentric genealogy of Africanisms.; Mudimbe, V.Y. *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

of the imperial project.[6] In most scholarly examinations of myths of Mau Mau, the historical role

played by these kinds of conspiracy theories in shaping the processes of African decolonization

has been treated as marginal because of the absurdity of their claims. In distinction to this

orthodox approach, this chapter centers such readings in order to demonstrate two entwined

phenomena. First, the ways in which Mau Mau — and, indeed, African decolonization writ-large

— served as a watershed moment in the history of reactionary conspiracist thought in the West;

and second, that this was a form of discourse not solely confined to the "fringes of society"

(where conspiracist thinking is usually imagined to reside, at least until it is imagined to creep

into mainstream politics and discourse). In the framings I analyze in this chapter, I treat

conspiracism about Mau Mau as the product of an interpretive community that is eclectic in

political orientation and relationship to the African continent but which shares a common

narratological substrate of European antisemitism, Christian nationalism, and Western

conception of civilizational hierarchy.

The genre of conspiracist readings of Mau Mau with which this chapter deals emerged

among different parts of an interpretive schema that regarded African liberation movements and

the issues that they raised within the metastructure of the Global Cold War.[7] Here, Mau Mau was

less important for the questions it forced into the open about British rule in Kenya than it was for

---

[6] Siba Grovogui's framing of the civilizational hierarchy of Western thought as the relationship between "sovereigns," "quasi-sovereigns," and "Africans" is illustrative here. For Grovogui, these categories — made manifest in international law — serve as a saturating cultural framework that conditions discourses about self-determination and the recoding of older discourses about the inherent (in)capacities of racial and religious groups. ; Grovogui, Siba. *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self-Determination in International Law* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[7] In this case, what I am interested in is a specific conspiracist tradition of interpretation fueled by competition between the superpowers that only further entrenched the long Western tradition of carrying out foreign intervention in Africa and elsewhere. As Odd Arne Westad puts it, this way of looking at the postwar order shows "the impact the Cold War had in the Third World and how it fuelled continued resistance against foreign domination." The lived experience of conspiracist-driven foreign policy, I contend, is a key aspect of this.; Westad, Odd Arne. *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005). 7.

the shadowy designs fomenting the nationalisms of the wrong kind that lurked behind the

explicit aims of the anticolonial movement (namely, as the unofficial motto of it made clear,

"Land and Freedom"). Because in this view it represented a pawn on the chessboard of

Communist schemes seeking the collapse of Western Civilization, this chapter is less interested

in the "theories" themselves than the underlying systems of thought they emerge out of — as

well as what they tell us about the acts of imagination that shaped the intellectual, political, and

social landscape of decolonization both in Africa and abroad. My use of the term "conspiracism"

is thus intended to center attention on the discursive practices which give rise to the tendency to

generate conspiracy theories rather than the details of specific instances of them (though

discussions of their specificities are necessary to achieve this). This bears a resemblance, though

not a perfect one, to how Richard Hofstadter famously described "the paranoid style in American

politics." "Style," as he puts it, "has more to do with the way in which ideas are believed and

advocated than with the truth or falsity of their content."[8]

Scholarship on Mau Mau has often, almost by rote, noted that this name itself serves as a

concept onto which projections of all sorts might be made.[9] In such work, allegations of

international communist fomentation, witch doctor brainwashing, and Satanic rituals within the

movement have generally been discarded for the fever dreams that they clearly are. The

overarching historiographical tendency toward "demystifying" Mau Mau and the liberation

movement associated with it has a parallel in the work of major figures in Kenyan anticolonial

---

[8] Hofstadter, Richard. "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine*, November 1964. 77.

[9] As Dane Kennedy puts it: "Mau Mau. The term arose from a linguistic void, its etymology a mystery. A signifier in search of signification, it lay open to whatever meaning anyone wished to attach to it."; Kennedy, Dane. "Constructing the Colonial Myth of Mau Mau," in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1992). 241.

thought as well.[10] In the words of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Mĩcere Mũgo: "The mumbo-jumboish

term Mau Mau was a British creation to obscure the clarity of the aims of the name Land and

Freedom."[11] I have argued elsewhere that this critique inadvertently dismisses the complexities

and radical potential of how "Mau Mau" has historically traveled as an icon of global

anticolonial struggle.[12] But beyond this, the ways it does so also limits our understanding of the

conceptual worlds of decolonization. This chapter proposes that, far from a genre of wacky

narratives believed by clinical paranoids, the logic of conspiracism infuses (to different degrees)

the entire body of discourse preoccupied with the possibility of the "next Mau Mau."[13]

The subsequent section of this chapter examines the articulation of Mau Mau with the

figure of the Educated African in this tradition of conspiracism after the Second World War.

Across textual genres and geopolitical contexts, we see how this figure took shape in relation to

counterparts (most notably the "International Jew" and the concept of "Judeo-Bolshevism")

during the middle of the 20th century. The processes through which this occurs are emblematic

---

[10] This propensity for "demystification" is the product of both the success of contemporary British propaganda (insofar as the content it produced needs to be challenged and debunked) and a more general historiographical approach that takes a narrow view to what is allowed to constitute archives "about" Mau Mau as an object of historical knowledge. I examine this in greater depth here: Alvarado, Christian. "Mau Mau as Method," *History in Africa*, Vol. 49 (2022).

[11] Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa and Mũgo, Mĩcere Gĩthae. "Foreword," in *Dedan Kimathi on Trial: Colonial Justice and Popular Memory in Kenya's Mau Mau Rebellion*, ed. Julie MacArthur (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2017). Xvi.

[12] Alvarado, Christian. "On Reading Mau Mau," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, Vol. 10, Iss. 1 (2023). 9.

[13] Conspiracisms need not hold a negative view toward alleged conspiracies themselves (though they often do). A clear example of this can be seen in the present day United States in the so-called QAnon movement, as well as the dozens of other countries where this phenomenon has had an impact. Its theoretical and narrative apparatus is essentially a battle of Good and Evil being fought by "White Hats" (or "Patriots") in the American government against an insidious global cabal. Strictly speaking, each of these groups is a conspiracy of its own, and their moral drive is what constitutes their foundational difference. QAnon is a manifestation of *conspiracism* precisely because it reads current events within the structured apparatus of this behind-the-scenes struggle. This is why, as a malleable system of thought, it is capable of containing many different (and even contradictory) *conspiracy theories*. Romantic conspiracism that regarded Jomo Kenyatta as a wily mastermind working behind the scenes to overthrow colonialism in all of Africa — a popular contemporary framing in the United States — showcases similar dynamics.

of conspiracism's ability to alter specificities of content while retaining formal elements intact. The following section of the chapter builds upon this by examining the place of such conspiracy theories in a post-1952 Euro-American symbolic landscape saturated with visions of Mau Mau. Examining the grounding of these in the context of deindustrialization and emergent dynamics in immigration from the African continent, it outlines how the recasting of racial scripts in reactionary conspiracism was modified to accommodate new sets of issues. Taken together, these lines of inquiry demonstrate how Mau Mau's embeddedness in conspiracist worldviews underscores the importance of attending to the theological groundings of racial discourse in examining the reactionary cultures produced at the nexus of African decolonization and the circulation of propaganda about the movement. The texts and problematics at play here are a primarily Anglophone manifestation of a wider phenomenon but, as we will see, such things as the Portuguese *Estado Novo*'s framing of colonial dissent in the 1960s and the obsession of today's French far-right with the idea of *islamo-gauchisme* emerge out of this same substrate.[14]

Educated Africans, Antisemitic Tropes, and Transposing Conspiracy

> What form of government would you like to see in Kenya? What do you think about Korea? Is the Kenya African Union connected with any secret society? What is the financial status of your parents? What American Negroes have aided you? What meetings have you attended? What do you know about Jomo Kenyatta? (head of the Kenya African Union)[15]

---

[14] In this chapter, I use the term "far-right" to designate the suturing of groups of competing reactionary political orientations that span the rejection of specific democratic institutions to the rejection of democracy as a concept in itself. The widely accepted political taxonomy of "extreme right" and "radical right" are useful here as well, with the former designating reactionary tendencies that adhere to a nominal democratic impulse and the latter the politics of neo-fascism, white nationalism, and unflinching forms of traditionalism.

[15] "Kenya, including deportation of Kenyan students, NAACP protest of British Kenyan policies, Reuel Mugo Gatheru deportation case, anticommunism, and protest of John Wayne film on Mau Mau." Papers of the NAACP, Part 14: Race Relations in the International Arena, 1940-1955. Library of Congress. Copyright, 2012 NAACP. https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001439-002-0851&accountid=14523. 16.

Leveled at a Kenyan medical student named Reuel Mugo Gatheru in the fall of 1952, the threads that form this line of questioning serve as an apt starting point for understanding how contemporary conspiracism was foundational to international readings of Mau Mau. The first raises the ever-present question of African nationalism, and what kind of future Gatheru is sympathetic toward. The second (on "Korea") invokes the Holy War against Communism, an attempt to gauge the sympathies of the respondent. The third addresses his relationship to secret societies, the ranks of which we come to learn later include the nascent Mau Mau movement. The financial status of Gatheru's parents serves to position him within the class landscape of colonial Kenya. The attempt to ferret out American supporters of Kenyan anticolonialism (or, in other words, to identify networks of international Black solidarity) forms the next. And lastly, we see the invocation of Jomo Kenyatta as a figure of agitation *par excellence*. Officially, the aim of this line of questioning was to gain clarity about Gatheru's immigration status as an international student covered by a temporary visa. It conveys, however, not so much a concern with this issue or the legality of his presence in the United States, but an obvious and overriding sense of paranoia regarding his political activities. Over the course of the interview, it is clear that the investigator is less curious about the specifics of his views than the possibility of his connection to subversive forces seeking to foment agitation in the United States and/or Kenya. Though prior to the formal declaration of the State of Emergency in the colony, the preoccupation with his relationship to "secret societies," Jomo Kenyatta, and unnamed "American Negroes" articulate a conspiratorial set of anxieties regarding both Gatheru's intentions in the United States and the role he could play were he to return to his homeland as a Western-educated African man.

These twin concerns are rooted in the fact that the investigation into his immigration status, though handled by the United States Department of Justice, was conducted at the behest

of the colonial administration in Kenya. It resulted in a seven year legal and public relations

battle between the DOJ and Gatheru's supporters in the United States (most prominently the

NAACP).[16] His own writings and correspondence detail his near-constant struggle to combat the

claim that he was a communist, Mau Mau, or both. In one letter outlining his political rationale

for opposing Mau Mau, he claims emphatically that "I am NOT, nor have I ever been, a

Communist Party member, fellow traveler, or sympathizer. I mention this because I realize how

sensitive people are these days about supporting a person involved in immigration difficulties."[17]

Pushing back against the linkage of Mau Mau and communism (and his alleged sympathies

toward either or both) was the defining feature of the campaign to challenge the deportation

effort. It was also a response to a historically-situated conspiracism of the government of the

United States whose speculation about the connection between these was operated upon as fact.

The campaign to support Gatheru included some of the most high profile figures in the

civil rights movement. The sociologist and anthropologist St. Clair Drake was a personal friend

and public champion, even serving as his "financial guarantor" throughout the latter's time

studying in the United States.[18] And, writing in support of Gatheru, the well-known civil rights

activist and anti-Communist crusader Walter Francis White asserted that "I am assured by a

number of highly reputable persons, as well as by Mr. Gatheru himself, that he is not nor ever

has been a member of the Communist Party, a fellow-traveler or a sympathizer with Communism

or Mau Mauism."[19] Deploying a phrasing that tracks across a broad array of narratives and

genres, we see here not Mau Mau as a specific movement, but as an ideology ("Mau Mauism").

Explored further in the next chapter of this book, what the Portuguese colonial state identified as

---

[16] Gershenhorn, Jerry. "St. Clair Drake, Pan-Africanism, African Studies, and the Politics of Knowledge, 1945-1965," *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 98, No. 3 (Summer 2013). 422.
[17] "Reuel Mugo Gatheru deportation case," *Papers of the NAACP Part 14*, 90.
[18] Gershenhorn, "St. Clair Drake," 432.
[19] "Reuel Mugo Gatheru deportation case," *Papers of the NAACP Part 14*, 93.

eruptions of *mau-mauìsmo* in its own colonies situated the spread of the uprising not in the crossing of borders by members of an insurgency, but as a belief system rooted in racial hatred and fomented by nefarious forces. For now, it is enough to say that this was a key piece of how the possibility of "Mau Maus" emerging outside of Kenya functioned across imperial frameworks and something which the campaign to support Gatheru felt necessary to address.

While he ultimately prevailed in court in 1957, the framing that characterized Gatheru's political persecution is an effect of the interpretive community that linked the figure of the Educated African with not only Mau Mauism, but wider-ranging conspiracies seeking the destabilization of the West and the eclipse of its attendant form of civilization. In an article in the November 29, 1952 issue of *The Nation*, Drake argued "that Reuel's enrollment at Lincoln University was the immediate reason for his government's pressure to have him brought back. 'Gold Coastism' is the term white Africans use when referring to the desire of native groups for political independence. Lincoln University is considered the hotbed of Gold Coastism because Kwami [sic] Nkrumah, the great native leader in that colony, was graduated from there."[20] Gatheru was caught up in a figural tradition that saw in African students' affiliation with Western educational institutions (especially ones perceived as, or actually, housing radicals) them having been converted into subversive actors capable of whipping up anticolonial movements within broader populations.[21] Like Mau Mauism, the widespread charges of "Gold Coastism" that made African students suspect across Euro-American cultural frameworks served as a means of obfuscating widespread demands for independence within African colonies by ascribing their popularity to the ability of a tiny minority of "educated" subjects to manipulate the masses in

---

[20] "Reuel Mugo Gatheru deportation case," *Papers of the NAACP Part 14*, 17.
[21] Indeed, this remains a staple of conspiracist rhetoric today. Educational institutions, and especially universities viewed as left-leaning, continue to be a frequently deployed agitational element in conspiracist attempts to dismiss broader social demands for political and cultural change.

their homeland. The dot-connecting between Gatheru, Gold Coastism, Mau Mau, and

Communism was part of a characteristically conspiracist narrative strategy in which struggles for

political freedom on the African continent could be reduced to the designs of manipulative

leaders, outside agitators, and university agendas.

Conspiracism's narratological malleability, which allows for the incorporation of distinct

phenomena, individuals, and institutions into these kinds of formulaic schemas, is what I refer to

as its formal commitment to transposition. In music, to transpose a composition is to perform it

in a different key. This is precisely what I have in mind when I call it a hallmark of conspiracist

interpretive communities. For instance, much of what is outlined above about the Gatheru/Gold

Coastism/Mau Mau/Communism nexus can be fruitfully applied to present-day configurations:

the rampant conspiracy theories about *islamo-gauchisme* in French politics, for instance. Alleged

as an alliance between university leftists and radical Islamic forces, the *islamo-gauchisme* charge

indexes many of the same ideas about such a coalition corrupting the nation from within as its

predecessors — though the specifics of its relationship to the concept of "radical Islam" are

necessary to examine as well. For over a decade as of this writing, the ideological and political

project that many people in France have colloquially identified as "*maccarthisme française*" has

functioned as a means of rallying nativist politics and scapegoating racialized communities upon

which the adverse outcomes of neoliberal policies have been placed. In 2021, the French

Minister of Higher Education Frédérique Vidal asserted in a well-publicized interview that

"l'islamo-gauchisme gangrène la société dans son ensemble et que l'université n'est pas

imperméable et fait partie de la société."[22] As potential conduits of *islamo-gauchisme*, academics

and university students of Arab descent in particular found themselves the object of suspicion

---

[22] "Islamo-gauchisme corrupts society as a whole and, as part of society, the university is not impervious" [translation mine]; Clavey, Martin. "Frédérique Vidal annonce vouloir demander une enquête au CNRS sur « l'islamogauchisme » à l'université," *Le Son de la Science*, February 15, 2021.

and scapegoating, an always-already threat to the maintenance of colorblind French republicanism. A talking point long embraced by the far-right and a staple of Marine Le Pen's speeches, Vidal's inquiry was launched under the "centrist" regime of Emmanuel Macron and denounced by academic communities the world over. Despite its striking resonance to the trope of Judeo-Bolshevism that conditioned anticommunist rhetoric in Europe and the Americas throughout the 20th century, credit for popularizing the term *islamo-gauchisme* is usually ascribed to Pierre‑Andre Taguieff — a philosopher based at the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* who specializes in the history of antisemitism and sees in the alleged Muslim-Left alliance a resurgent Nazism emerging out of a "New Judeophobia."[23]

The common reactionary conspiracist articulation between leftist politics and a demographic threat to the nation draws from what Natalia Molina calls the "racial scripts" that recast established tropes, stereotypes, and stock characters according to the politics of the day.[24] The symbolic politics of Mau Mau and those positioned as associated with it attest to this. Here, there is perhaps no more instructive instantiation of this kind of figuration than that which took shape around Jomo Kenyatta. As a prominent politician whose education had taken him to both London and Moscow, Kenyatta was the archetype of the Educated African in contemporary conspiracism — a charismatic leader whose situatedness between two worlds and exposure to dangerous ideas in his academic trajectory had surely converted him into a conduit for internationalist plots. Though he had no actual role in facilitating the uprising or involvement in its organization or operation, he nevertheless came to stand in as its embodiment in international

---

[23] Taguieff, Pierre-Andre. *La Nouvelle judéophobie* (Paris: Mille et une Nuits, 2002).

[24] Racial scripts, as Molina puts it, "serve to readily communicate and reinforce which immigrants are and are not worthy of inclusion in the nation" by way of building upon, excising, and/or adapting earlier narrativizations regarding perceived demographic threats.; Molina, Natalia. *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014). 148.

news coverage, primarily because of his conviction as its leader on shaky legal grounds by the British colonial government. At its core, the prosecution's case relied on established conspiracist tropes about the role of secret societies and their manipulative leaders in fomenting antisystemic dissent, though providing an update by way of the Western-educated African politician with "snow on his boots." This was more than just a matter of paranoia about Russian infiltration of European colonies, and what amounts to a kind of theological battle can be seen in many contemporary discussions of Mau Mau. In early 1953, for example, Anthony Somerhaugh (Kenya Colony's Deputy Public Prosecutor) claimed that its adherents were practicing forms of Satanic inversion that, in effect, attested to their alignment with the forces of Evil and antagonism to the ethos of Civilization. This occurred during the same period as the British administration's prosecution of the Kapenguria Six, the collection of alleged Mau Mau leaders who were convicted and imprisoned in Northern Kenya, and among whom was Jomo Kenyatta. Somerhaugh himself led the prosecution. During Kenyatta's portion of the trial, Somerhaugh claimed that "songs in a so-called 'hymnal' of the Mau Mau resembled Christian hymns except that 'Jomo' was substituted for 'Jesus,' 'Europeans' for 'Satan,' and 'K.A.U.' (Kenya African Union) for 'God.'"[25]

While Somerhaugh produced textual accounts of these in court, the reality of their origin and chain of custody is nebulous and no meaningful testimony was given on behalf of the accused with regard to knowledge of their existence. No tracable provenance was offered for these so-called "hymns" either, whose existence was only attested to anonymously under conditions of torture in Kenyan detention camps and which also happened to produce confessions about the clandestine involvement of communist agents in the anticolonial movement. For the purposes of our line of inquiry, they are less important for their status as legal

---

[25] "'Hymns' of Praise to Kenyatta: Mr. Pritt's Protest," in *The Manchester Guardian*, February 7, 1953. 5.

evidence than for what they reveal about Mau Mau's ability to manifest in a Manichean, theological worldview in a government courtroom. In context, their function was to cast Mau Mau as a movement antithetical to the very essence of (Christian) Civilization, achieved by linking it to the kinds of symbolic inversion practiced by those aligned with the antichrist.[26] Put otherwise, what we see here is how the allegation of a *literal* conspiracy amongst the Kapenguria Six to foment dissent and unleash Mau Mau was made through the rhetorical alignment of them with the constitutive elements of Christian conceptions of Evil. Coupled with the disorderly ethnicity of the "bastardized Kikuyu oaths," the Satanic inversion read into the Kenyatta hymns represented the transgression of both religious and colonial-anthropological conceptions of order. The underlying mechanics ascribed as causality for Mau Mau were rooted in a conspiracy that relied on both upending the existing moral economy of the Western world as a whole, and the colonial taxonomy of ethnicity in particular. This kind of reasoning could only be accepted by an interpretive community with a shared attitude toward the nature of Mau Mau as an object of knowledge and, equally importantly, the material and political incentives to accept it.

As an icon, Kenyatta's iteration of the generic figure of the Educated African is helpful for understanding how conspiracist tropes anchored in European cultural contexts could be retrofitted to discredit widespread anticolonial sentiment in Africa. Like Gatheru, this aspect of his characterization springs from rhetorical wells that drew in important ways from pre-existing anti-semitic and anti-Masonic conspiracy theories circulating in Europe and beyond. Revolutionary movements in European countries have a long history of being framed as the work of secret societies of Jews or Masons (and often viewed as Satanic forces), as these "outsiders

---

[26] According to Bernard McGinn, the figure of Antichrist raises the question of "the relation between human agency and evil … based on the conviction that total evil can be realized in an individual human and even in a human collectivity."; McGinn, Bernard. *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2000). 2-3.

within" are imagined to harbor loyalty only to their own nefarious designs. In the framings

applied to Gatheru and Kenyatta, the figure of the Educated African also occupies the function of

a manipulative agitator, often even taking on an element of foreignness with regard to having

spent significant time living outside of their country of origin. Bearing a family resemblance to

the International Jew, the Educated African is often figured as a character whose interests depart

from the community of which they are a part (say, the "Kenyan people") in a way that implies

not their often very real personal interests and aspirations, but rather schemes for achieving

conspiratorial designs of an internationalist character.[27]

This is not to say that there is a direct equivalence between conspiracisms engaging with

Mau Mau and those directly engaged with antisemitic tropology. Nor am I interested in

determining whether one formed the other or vice-versa. In fact, it seems to me that they are,

essentially, different generic formations of the same process of (dis)identification. The figure of

the Educated African is one who bears a partial resemblance to the International Jew, but whose

constitutive Africanness makes a full transposition of these figures impossible. This feature

brings it in line with the broader constellation of ways in which antisemitic tropes have been

re-coded both intentionally and unintentionally in conspiracist thinking of all sorts. They sit as

firmly behind the denial of the Holocaust as they do theories about the control over the course of

human events exercised by extraterrestrials. The string-pulling machinations of a class of beings

seeking global domination are foundational to each of these narratives, as is the essential

---

[27] More generally, myths of Mau Mau also share with antisemitism the trope of "beastilization," or the tendency to analogize Jewish people to wild animals or apes. And, if we look hard enough, we can even see echoes of the notorious "blood libel" in the specific brand of primitivity ascribed to Mau Mau. While we don't encounter anything analogous to the ritual sacrifice of Christian children in order to consume their blood in the form of unleavened bread, many of the most fantastical myths of Mau Mau rely on figuring it as a movement combining anti-Christian persecution (especially of European women and children), blood sacrifice, and the consumption of human flesh. While Western figurations of Africans have their own history of invoking cannibalism, the sharing of this taboo designates each as antithetical to Western civilization — albeit in different ways.

alienness of these groups. What I am interested in when considering figures like the Educated African and the International Jew alongside one another is how the fact that we can see partial transposition of one for the other in many readings of Mau Mau surfaces the contours of broader structures within conspiracist narratives.

The malleability granted by conspiracist transposition can manifest as absurdisms. A particularly clear example of this can be seen in the work of the progenitor of the notorious and oft-mocked "reptilian overlord theory": David Icke. Throughout his many books and manifestos, Icke makes a habit of quoting the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* extensively (a widely-acknowledged hoax document alleging to be the minutes of a secret meeting of internationalist Jews seeking global domination) but renames them to suit his own designs as the "Illuminati Protocols." Because of the public outrage his doing so has generated over the years, Icke has gone on record a number of times to address this decision. An example from Icke's 1995 book *...and the truth shall set you free*: "This is not a plot by Jewish people. I renamed them the Illuminati Protocols for the specific reason of getting away from their association with Jewish people; as these Protocols, which came to light in the late 1800s, contain details of the very plan of manipulation which has provably unfolded through the twentieth century."[28] While Icke has often acknowledged the original *Protocols* as an antisemitic hoax, he maintains that the broader theory of power and history it contains is essentially accurate. This allows Icke to retain the formal narrative structure of the *Protocols* intact by simply swapping out "Jewish" bloodlines for "reptilian" ones. The explanatory mechanism — that a cabal of constitutively alien entities seeking domination over Humanity have orchestrated the course of world history — remains unaltered. Given that this kind of narratological malleability in conspiracism can include reptilian extraterrestrials, it should perhaps not be surprising that Educated Africans and Mau

---

[28] Icke, David. *...and the truth shall set you free* (Self-published, 1995). 415.

Mauism came to be figured in ways that echoed these broader thematics, especially due to their existence within geographical and cultural contexts saturated with antisemitic conspiracies in the twentieth century. To quote Richard Hofstadter on the eternal return of the same in paranoiac discourse: "One meets here again the same frame of mind, but a different villain."[29]

There are limits to this kind of comparativity. Reptilian overlords, the International Jew, and the Educated African bear partial resemblances to each other, but each is bound to a historical and narratological situatedness which troubles them as direct synonyms. For example, in the case of the Educated African the attainment of political power at the expense of the West is the aim whereas, in the usual tenor of antisemitic conspiracism, Jews are alleged to already be in covert control of it. While it might appear to undermine claims of narratological similitude, however, this partiality of transposition strengthens our understanding of how there comes to exist a broad constellation of ways in which long-existing conspiracist tropes have been re-coded (both intentionally and unintentionally) over time. As a conspiracist racial script, the ability to alter specifics according to historical situatedness has long served to bolster colonialist political projects. We encounter examples of this dynamic in the figural politics of people like Jomo Kenyatta within contemporary cultural production. A particularly compelling example can be seen in the 1957 film *Something of Value*, shot on site in Kenya during the period of the Emergency.

Standing apart from similar films from this period portraying the uprising like *Simba* and *Safari*, David Anderson describes it as "an American take on a British war" in which "its anti-colonial overtones were apparent."[30] *Something of Value* does indeed seem to want to lead viewers to the conclusion that an independent Kenya must be realized, albeit one which would

---

[29] Hofstadter, Richard. "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine*, November 1964.
[30] Anderson, David. "Mau Mau at the Movies: Contemporary Representations of an Anti-Colonial War," in *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2003). 79.

remain tethered to contemporary neocolonialist conceptions of "multiracialism."[31] The core

thread of *Something of Value* traces the intertwined stories of two men: Kimani (emblematic of

the detribalized African) and Peter (the liberal son of an established white settler), friends since

childhood positioned on opposite sides of the Emergency. Over the course of the film, the bond

between them is strained ever further as Kimani becomes increasingly committed to the aims of

Mau Mau. At its end, the two men engage in a final confrontation which concludes in Kimani's

death after he charges at Peter and falls into a booby trap, in essence causing his own demise.

Despite this melodrama being its ostensible focus, the plot provides an account of Mau Mau that

relies heavily on the idea that Educated Africans had organized the insurgency to achieve

nefarious ends. This part of the plot revolves around the character of Njogu, a Mau Mau leader

who conscripts Kimani into the ranks of the movement. Njogu, however, is little more than a

pawn subjected to the machinations of the shadowy figures who ultimately pull the strings of the

movement. As David Anderson points out in a wonderfully-worded passage about the film:

> The mastermind of the movement took the sinister form of William Marshall, portraying
> a westernised Kikuyu, ruthlessly manipulating the Mau Mau forces led by Njogu to his
> own benefit. His was the dangerous, malignant, baleful and self-seeking influence of
> 'half-made modernity' upon the innocence of traditional Africa. In contrast, the film
> portrays Njogu as essentially a well-meaning man, despite his ruthless actions, trapped
> only by his fears and superstitions, which the wily character played by Marshall skilfully
> exploits.

Whereas Njogu's characterization revolves around his sincere belief in Kikuyu religion

and the old ways, the "Intellectual in Suit" (as he is listed in one version of the film's credits)

played by Marshall is a one-dimensional figure overdetermined by his scheming nature. In him,

we see nothing of Njogu's sincerity — only a ceaseless drive to rile up peaceful, if maltreated,

colonized Africans to achieve his insidious ends. It is important, if nonsensical, that Marshall's

---

[31] Explored in-depth in the next chapter of this book, this euphemistic phrase served as a way to advocate
for a postcolonial state wherein the basic structure of the colonial political economy and the outsized
influence of white minorities would remain intact after independence.

character is portrayed as an ambiguous intellectual/businessman while also being positioned as a communist agitator. His status as such is shored up in the rhetoric he uses during the oathing meeting, during which he speaks of being "beggars and slaves in our own lands" ruled over by a tiny minority, deploying classic elements in the language of anticolonial marxism. "The whole colored world burns with the fever of revolt," he continues, "with the fire for freedom" that only an armed revolution can resolve. Yet these sorts of statements must be read alongside his portrayal as interested in economic domination and gain, a feature of his characterization which holds a resemblance to the ways in which the International Jew is imagined to orchestrate global control. The Kikuyuness of Marshall's character also hearkens to a different iteration of Mau Mau conspiracism: its existence as a plot for this specific ethnic group's domination of Kenya in the wake of bloody revolution. In tandem, all of these threads coalesce to produce an account of Mau Mau wherein a vaguely communistic but certainly Kenyatta-esque Educated African manipulates otherwise docile Africans into waging an insurgency through the cynical invocation of custom and "the old ways." The contention that Mau Mau was the product of communist meddling, or of the manipulations of educated Kikuyu with devious designs, rests on the idea that the "manipulable African" was a key factor in the battle between Good and Evil that coded visions of the Cold War in the Western world. In many contemporary myths of Mau Mau, the condition of Africanness produced in the figure of the Educated African a distorted version (or sometimes the subservient agent of) International Jew, a figure whose importance becomes increasingly prominent the closer one looks.

"Mosley, Not Mau Mau": Conspiracism, Race, and Decolonization

On April 13, 1961, a large crowd gathered outside of the Bow Street Magistrates' Court, where 22 people stood facing charges related to their actions at an anti-apartheid demonstration in Trafalgar Square the month before.[32] Both in the courtroom and on the streets outside, banners and posters bearing the slogan "Mosley, Not Mau Mau" were displayed by far-right supporters of the accused. Also displayed are the phrases "White Africa Betrayed" and "Defend the Whites" — slogans that spoke as much to nativist resistance to immigration to the British Isles from former colonies as they did to events on a continent thousands of kilometers away. The 22 individuals (all of whom plead not guilty) faced charges including "obstructing the police" and "the possession of offensive weapons." At the anti-apartheid rally, they had sought to generate a violent clash with the vastly larger contingent of activists in London demonstrating against the regime in South Africa. Lead Prosecutor J. Leonard recounted to the court that: "while the Anti-Apartheid meeting was in progress a lorry stopped at the junction of the Strand and Trafalgar Square. It was covered in placards and had a red flag with the emblem of the British Union of Fascists on it." Those inside the vehicle began shouting insults and racial slurs at anti-apartheid demonstrators in what was clearly an attempt to provoke a violent confrontation. Indeed, it came very close to doing exactly this, though the situation was brought to an end when police began arresting the contingent of fascist

---

[32] "'Mosley, Not Mau Mau' Banner Displayed In Court," *The Liverpool Echo and Evening Express*, April 13, 1961, pp. 13.

counter-protestors, their cache of weapons ultimately unused. Ranging in age from 15 to 32 and with biographical descriptors including "schoolboy," "van driver," and "laboratory technician," this group briefly became a *cause celebre* of the global far-right during the heyday of decolonization. The "Mosley, Not Mau Mau" banners flown by them were as much a historical appeal to the politics of the British fascist icon Sir Oswald Mosley as they were a direct reference to his son Max, who was among those facing charges on Bow Street.

The slogan had also appeared on the banners flown by the group at the March 19 anti-apartheid rally, where over two thousand people had gathered at Trafalgar Square to protest the Sharpeville massacre approximately one year prior. "Mosley, Not Mau Mau" expresses a complex of ideological operations in these settings. To start, it is worth underscoring that — in context — it's nonsense. While there was indeed a "Mosley" present in the circumstances as a possible referent, there were certainly no "Mau Mau." Instead, the process of abstraction to which Mau Mau is subjected here is intelligible only when considered as an iteration of the idea of Africa, wherein the dialectical referent of "Mosley" occupies the place of "the West" in a constitutively-racist rhetorical situation. The process of abstraction to which Mau Mau is subject here is intelligible only when considered as an iteration of the idea of Africa. In the context of the pro-apartheid and anti-immigration positions that characterized the neo-fascist protesters' politics, the phrase could simply be written as "White, Not Black" or "Western, Not African" and retain its message largely intact.

This is indicative of the ways in which conceptions of race structured historical consciousnesses of decolonization in relation to the past, present, and future trajectories of both the African continent and Britain itself. For the conspiracist far-right in the UK, the core of this were visions of a vast plot seeking to dislodge European populations from their place as masters

of the universe and rightful occupiers of the pinnacle of the civilizational hierarchy. Ending

non-white immigration to Great Britain from former colonies (and expelling those migrants who

had already made their way into the country) was cast as a Holy War against the forces of

globalism, racial dilution, and communist enslavement. This is why a direct line was drawn from

the so-called betrayal of White Africa (and indeed, the colonial project in general) to non-white

immigration to the British Isles. This binding together of the "here at home" and the "over there"

of the colonized world has iterated in a variety of ways in the decades since the rallies in

Trafalgar Square. Today, we call it by another name: "The Great Replacement," a conspiracy

theory embraced by many of the most powerful political and economic actors in the West that

sees in migration from the Global South the hidden hand of a cabal of actors including the likes

of George Soros or the World Economic Forum — a cabal whose ultimate aim is the destruction

of Western nations by interfering in the "natural course" of electoral politics through fostering

demographic change.[33]

In mid-20th century Britain, many of the ideas that now cohere in the Great Replacement

conspiracy theory were cast in relation to the changes wrought by decolonization in Africa.[34]

Imagined as an anti-white genocidal force, Mau Mau signified the hell that would be unleashed if

democratic rule was extended to those not high enough on the civilizational ladder to engage

with it responsibly — both on the African continent and wherever immigration from it was

---

[33] For a primer on the more general dynamics of Replacement theory, see: Ekman, Mattias. "The Great Replacement: Strategic mainstreaming of far-right conspiracy claims," *Convergence*, Special Issue: Conspiracy Theories in Digital Environments, Vol. 28, No. 4 (2022). 1129-1131.

[34] It is worth noting an important shift in this narrative transposition: from its earlier focus on African/Caribbean immigration (the "Windrush generation") to that from the countries belonging to the ideological construction of the "Muslim world." While this is not a minor shift by any stretch — most notably due to the rise of the post-9/11 security regime — core elements of this remain stable. Recent scandals in the British press surrounding so-called "Pakistani grooming gangs" and the sexual violence (both real and imagined) ascribed to them have clear parallels in moral panics around "Jamaican pimps" and polygamous African men that occupied this space in the 1960s. So too can we see echoes of the thematics of economic displacement, though situated differently in the "de-industrialization" and "post-industrialization" eras commonly deployed as temporal markers.

permitted. The "Mosley Not Mau Mau Banners" flown at anti-apartheid rallies in 1961 and 1962 were only one consequence of this. On July 15, 1964, two members of the neo-Nazi British National Party attacked then-Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta on a trip to London as he was leaving his hotel. In an ambush that provoked international outrage, Martin Webster and John Tyndall worked together in order to maneuver past the Prime Minister's security detail and assault him. As the police officer who eventually brought the attack to an end recalled: "He attempted to strike Mr. Kenyatta and shouted. I pulled him away and forced him to the ground. Just after this I heard the man with a loud hailer, Tyndall. He was shouting through the loud hailer: 'This is the man who murdered our white brethren in Africa.'"[35] Webster would later go on the record to state that he had "'sent' Kenyatta 'to where he belongs—the gutter' because the 'national press' was 'white-washing' his record 'to create an image as a genial, worldly-wise, moderate elder statesman.'"[36] Taken together, these two statements throw into relief a worldview containing some of the most prominent hallmarks of white supremacist conspiracism in the 20th (and, for that matter, 21st) century, and in which Mau Mau serves as the foundational referent. Kenyatta's "murdering of our white brethren" speaks not only to speculation about his masterminding of the movement itself, but the all-encompassing fear of racial dilution that sits at the heart of far-right Euro-American conspiracism and emerges in all kinds of different forms. Webster's description of his rationale also invokes other classic conspiracist tropes in these kinds of political formations, especially the idea of the press as an enemy of the people, whose function is to deny or marginalize crimes against white populations. Situated thus, the attack on Kenyatta in 1964 is part of a long history of a genre of reactionary, conspiracism-driven violence against prominent figures that continues today.

---

[35] "2 charged after rush at Kenyatta" *Belfast Telegraph*, July 15, 1964.
[36] Shaffer, Ryan. *Music, Youth and International Links in Post-War British Fascism: The Transformation of Extremism* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). 51.

Prior to its combination with the League of Empire Loyalists that would result in the formation of the National Front in 1967, the British National Party was part of a broader landscape of reactionary political organizations operating in the United Kingdom. Both Martin and Tyndall had deep ties to partner organizations headed by Oswald Mosley himself and his frequent collaborator Arthur K. Chesterton (though the British far-right at this time was famously factional and prone to sectarian squabbling). The conspiracist groundings of the likes of Tyndall and Martin had their intellectual roots in the thought of Mosley and Chesterton, who had been part of the first generation of the organized modern far-right in the UK under the banner of the British Union of Fascists. Mosley frequently trafficked in conspiracy theories and is widely acknowledged as one of the most formative influences in shaping Holocaust denial after the Second World War. Despite being vehement in his disavowal of conspiracist thinking, Mosley's brand of antisemitism played a profound role in cementing conspiracism in the heart of a range of conservative movements in Britain. In his autobiography, he mocks "the people who believe in a world conspiracy run by the Jews, which always seems to me the most complete nonsense" while only a few pages later going on to state that "when you are in a fight with the Jews for any reason, they will give you a lot of trouble" through their internationalist networks.[37] During his tenure as head of the Union Movement in the late 1950s, Oswald and his followers "dismissed Jewish suffering [during the Holocaust] as 'concentration camp fairy tales,' whilst alleging that photographic evidence to the contrary was 'faked.'"[38] The explicit Holocaust denial seen here is accompanied by the implicit appeal to the trope of the "false flag," insofar as the photographic evidence of the dead required either actual corpses produced by a deceitful power or the use of

---

[37] Mosley, Oswald. *My Life* (London, UK: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1968). 342, 343.
[38] Macklin, Graham. *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism after 1945* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2007). 118.

"crisis actors" (allegations of which have seen something of a renaissance in recent decades).[39]

Moreover, for Oswald the international tendrils of Jewish influence had helped foment the spread

of communism in Africa, though it had thus far been less successful in the West as it was

"controlled and directed from abroad, and subject to influences which in some respects are

Asiatic rather than European."[40]

These conspiracist threads were paralleled in writings and propaganda produced by A.K.

Chesterton who, where it hadn't been done already, left little to the imagination in saying the

"quiet part" as loudly as possible. And given his birth in South Africa in 1899 and connections

with white supremacist movements across the continent, events on the African continent held a

far more prominent place in his thought than it did Mosley's. With the possible exception of the

"loss" of the Suez canal and the affront to Great Britain's reputation that it represented, few

events drew his ire like Mau Mau. Chesterton viewed both of these events as beneficial to what

he frequently referred to as the "New York cabal," by which he meant international Jewish

financiers seeking to dominate the world through manipulating capitalism and communism alike

("two sides of the same coin," according to him).[41] He asserted unabashedly that Mau Mau had

been the result of string-pulling Jewish internationalists. "If the British were to be kicked out of

Kenya," he writes, "and, as we have seen, the elimination of Great Britain's world power was

one of Wall Street's main post-war objectives — then it was obvious that civilizational values

had to be shattered and Kenya's harmony wrecked by subversion, bitterness, anarchy and

---

[39] In recent years, this has been especially prominent amongst conspiracists seeking to dismiss gun violence and white supremacist mass murderers. For example, in the present-day United States conspiracies about the Sandy Hook shooting often rely heavily on this kind of theory, as have those surrounding racist murders perpetrated by people like Dylann Roof.
[40] Mosley, *My Life*, 310.
[41] Chesterton, A.K. *Facing the Abyss* (Hampshire, UK: Candour Publishing Company, 1976). 83.

chaos."[42] While he begrudgingly acknowledged that no links between the uprising and external funding from so-called Jewish interests had ever been uncovered, he claimed that there was plentiful (but, conveniently, secret) evidence that "'American funds were made abundantly available to enable the African 'nationalists' to carry on the campaign which Mau Mau started."[43] This was done not only to further the investment interests of the Wall Street Cabal, but to bring about the upending of the entire Western order of things. "The Mau Mau conspiracy," he writes, "was the most diabolical rebellion of our times and was conducted in such a way that one would not have been surprised to learn that the Devil himself had managed it. Its actual manager was Jomo Kenyatta, the founder of the Independent Schools."[44] Like Tyndall in his comments about Kenyatta, Chesterton claimed that the evil of Mau Mau had been white-washed by media both foreign and domestic. Despite the derisive and overtly-racist coverage Mau Mau had received in the British press, he argued that the media "were pleased to assert that Mau Mau was a figment of the British settler's imagination" rather than the Satanic death cult that it really was.

Chesterton harbored a vehement hatred of Jomo Kenyatta, whom he described as evil incarnate and a "criminal maniac." A closer look at his views regarding him underscores again the central importance of the figure of the Educated African in conspiracist discourses about Mau Mau. Aside from Kenyatta's educational trajectory — during which Chesterton agonized that "he had been to Moscow and had lived in England, where he married, as one of his several wives, a White woman" — his alleged facilitation of education for other Africans served as an object of intense suspicion.[45] As a "member of the Kikuyu, the largest tribe in Kenya, [Kenyatta] was busily engaged in founding what were called Kenya Independent Schools," which in

---

[42] Chesterton, A.K. *The New Unhappy Lords: An Exposure of Power Politics* (London, UK: The Candour Publishing Company, 1965). 88.
[43] Chesterton, *The New Unhappy Lords*, 90-91.
[44] Chesterton, *The New Unhappy Lords*, 90.
[45] Chesterton, *The New Unhappy Lords*, 88.

Chesterton's views served as catalysts of indoctrination. From here, he claims without evidence, "recruits were enrolled into Mau Mau at obscene nocturnal ceremonies deep in the heart of the forests or in urban hide-outs" where they engaged in "the foulest sexual malpractices, in conjunction with women, sheep and goats."[46] In addition to Kenyatta, Chesterton also alleged that the *Kĩama Gĩa Ithaka na Wĩyathi* leader Waruhiu Itote's (*nom de guerre* "General China") time pursuing "agricultural studies" in Israel constituted proof of his allegations about a Zionist/African global conspiracy. As best we know, "approximately three years prior to Kenya's independence, Itote left Kenya secretly to study and train in Israel" after which "he was appointed assistant general director of the Israeli-trained Kenyan Youth Movement, and in this capacity his contacts with the Israelis were substantial."[47] While it seems clear that Itote was not exactly pursuing schooling in the agricultural sciences, this kind of military collaboration is a far cry from proof of a vast global cabal orchestrating the downfall of Western civilization. Yet for Chesterton it was part of a broader pattern of circumstantial evidence: "Israel has also made grants in aid to African countries, but as her own economy is dependent on grants from America and elsewhere it is perhaps a realistic appraisal of the situation to see Israel, not merely as an ideal with a strong emotional appeal to Jews, but perhaps even more as **an advanced base for the Zionist take-over bid for Africa and eventually the whole world**."[48] [emphasis mine] In Chesterton's view, then, the state of Israel existed primarily as a means for facilitating the global designs of international Jewry and their (Educated) African henchmen. Moreover, Chesterton goes on to claim that the ultimate goal of this was not Israeli influence on the African continent,

---

[46] Chesterton, *The New Unhappy Lords*, 89.
[47] Jacob, Abel. "Israel's Military Aid to Africa, 1960-66," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (August 1971). 170.
[48] Chesterton, *The New Unhappy Lords*, 201.

but rather the launching of a covert invasion of the British Isles by way of boosting immigration

to the United Kingdom from formerly colonized areas of the Commonwealth.

This kind of framing, emblematic of the "totalizing impulse" inherent to conspiracism

detailed above, was not limited to the far-right. While he was certainly conservative when it

came to perspectives on African affairs, the novelist Robert Ruark (who penned the novel

Something of Value, on which the film analyzed above was based) did not sympathize with

fascism by any stretch. Yet, in their structural composition, many of the same elemental features

of his narrative echoed propagandists like Mosley and Chesterton. Indeed, as we have already

seen, they appear in the film as well despite the widespread view in scholarly work on the subject

that *Something of Value* director Richard Brooks softened the message of the book in order to

make the case for a decolonization process (or at least a putative one).[49] It is true, however, that

Ruark's novel deployed more overtly conspiratorial tropes in its narrative than did Brooks' film:

in particular by including two stereotypical characters described in the text as a "socialist Asian"

and a "Russian Agent."[50] While the racialized conspiratorial dimensions of this narrative are thus

present in both film and novel, the appearance of these in the book impresses the idea of a

staunchly bolshevik/Third Worldist conspiracy on the reader. Ruark also situated the narrative

more explicitly within the metanarrative of a battle between Good and Evil. As Shaw notes,

"Ruark alerts the reader that the events in Kenya are 'but a symptomatic ulcer of the evil and

unrest which currently afflict the world.'"[51] She also posits, however, that: "It is not the demise

of Christianity to which Ruark refers, but he echoes the fear of the rise of communism that

afflicted the American political imagination in the mid-1950s."[52] What this analysis of Ruark's

---

[49] Anderson, "Mau Mau at the Movies," 80.
[50] Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*, 161.
[51] Quoted in: Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*, 161.
[52] Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*, 161.

discourse misses is the degree to which these two things were bound up with each other during this period. Indeed, this was precisely the period when anticommunism and anxieties about the collapse of Christian hegemony (often articulated with or coded as "the West") became inextricably linked in the history of American conspiracism.[53]

In the interpretive community under examination in this chapter, the dialectic of the Christian/anti-Christian can be transposed with that of the West/anti-Western with relatively little trouble, and conspiracism in the Euro-American tradition has a long history of making use of this. We have already seen how this kind of substitution has been a common one in the history of Mau Mau as a concept, in large part because of the centrality of its alleged "anti-Christian" ethos to its mythology in many parts of the world. Christianity's inherent linkage to the idea of the "Western world" is not solely a matter of geography; it is also a narratological foundation that gives shape to both of these terms. This is not to say that in this collapse "the West" must be composed solely of Christian populations (though many reactionary conspiracists might wish as much), but rather that something called the "Christian ethos" must govern life in the Western world, in all of what V.Y. Mudimbe identifies as its "historical exceptionality."[54] This is why the "anti-Christian Mau Mau" was propagandized as being as much of a threat to Kenya's Hindus and Muslims during the Emergency as it was to the colony's Christian populations (both European and African). Mau Mau's antithesis is not simply the group of people called Christians

---

[53] One need look no further for examples of this than the ideology of the small but massively influential John Birch Society. In Robert Welch's *The Blue Book* (the closest thing in Bircherism to a sacred text), we read: "This is a world-wide battle, the first in history, between light and darkness; between freedom and slavery; between the spirit of Christianity and the spirit of anti-Christ for the souls and bodies of men." It is the specific conditions brought into existence by the postwar order of things that is being made reference to when Welch alludes to this battle between Good and Evil as being "the first in history" to be truly global in scope. In this view, "theological" and "political" concerns are inextricable from one another; in fact, perhaps it is more precise to say that they are one in the same.

[54] As V.Y. Mudimbe points out: "There is no homology between the Christian universe and this concrete space which is 'Christian Europe.' The Christian universe would rather declare a manner of privilege that is historically exceptional."; Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, 50.

but the values ascribed to Christianity itself in this interpretive community.[55] Thought about this

way, it is clear why Mau Mau and Communism can be so easily linked despite the lack of any

shred of evidence of actual influence — each can be rendered as a suitable antithesis for these

sorts of values.

The predominantly Anglophone conspiracist network that we have explored thus far was

part of a broader interpretive community that traversed assumed linguistic, political, and imperial

borders. Under the regime of Antonio Salazar from 1933 until his death in 1970, the quasi-fascist

Portuguese *Estado Novo* offers a prime example of how this worked in the realm of geopolitics.

As a European semi-pariah state unwavering in its commitment to maintaining formal colonial

rule, the *Estado Novo* was heavily incentivized to identify means to relativize its imperial

vocation during a time when such an orientation was falling out of favor in the international

arena. For Salazar and his associates, tapping into the interpretive community that read Mau Mau

as conspiracy became a matter of foreign policy. The propagandizing conducted by Pedro

Teotónio Pereira, one of the *Estado Novo*'s top diplomatic figures, offers a case in point. The

October 1, 1961 edition of the *New York Herald Tribune*, for example, featured an opinion piece

by him under the subtle headline "Instigated from the Outside." At this time, Pereira was serving

his second appointment in Washington D.C., where he made significant efforts to influence both

political and public opinion on the events of the uprisings in the *Ultramar*. He begins the article

by giving an account of a recent attack that (save for the scale of the event) would have been

firmly at home in the Kenyan settler press at the height of the Mau Mau Emergency:

> Over 1,000 Portuguese, white, black and mixed, mainly women and children, lost their
> lives. They were butchered, tortured and mutilated in the most bestial manner possible.

---

[55] This aspect of discourses about Mau Mau that circulated in colonial Kenya and Europe bears a striking resemblance to what Saree Makdisi identifies as the structure of "affirmation as denial" that produces rhetorics of evasion and occlusion in Israeli discourse.; Makdisi, Saree. *Tolerance is a Wasteland* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2022). 11.

The terrorists would have us believe that this was a spontaneous national uprising. It was clearly nothing of the kind. On the contrary, it was a carefully prepared campaign, organized and instigated from outside Angola, and aiming at terrorising the Portuguese into leaving the country and at destroying the very foundation of Portugal's position in Africa, namely the creation of a multi-racial society. **Racial tension was created where none had existed before.**[56] [emphasis mine]

Pereira thus situates the source of this "racial tension" (his euphemism for the violent uprising produced by brutal systems of colonial exploitation of land and labor) as part of a grander international communist plot to destabilize the West, sowing division in the colonies by manipulating easily-misled Africans. In line with other European frameworks, the premise of African manipulability authorized the extraordinary use of violence and the use of extreme forms of violence to suppress anticolonial movements. While degrees of material and military support for the liberation movements in the *Ultramar* did indeed come from the socialist world (including the endorsement of specific factions within these struggles), Pereira's framing is far closer to a conspiracy theory than any kind of accurate assessment of the development and support of these struggles — such activities and movements were of course conceptualized, organized, carried out, and brought to fruition by the people who lived, labored, and suffered under the regime of the *Estado Novo*.

In Pereira's narrative, communist agitation from the East had unleashed a deep-seated African savagery among certain elements of the populace and forced loyal, multiracial Portuguese communities to defend themselves. This "defense" had garnered international attention for its own deployment of indiscriminate violence and and brutality. Yet again, Pereira's language bears an uncanny resemblance to colonial rhetoric during the Kenya Emergency: "There were, admittedly, some rather heavy-handed reprisals following the first terrorist attacks, but these were committed by armed bands of petrified civilians, many of whom had seen their

---

[56] Pereira, Pedro Theotonio. "'Instigated from Outside': Envoy Gives Portugal's Side of Angola Crisis," *New York Herald Tribune*, 1 October 1961.

wives and children cut down before their eyes. Their action is not condonable, but, in human terms, it is understandable."[57]Lest we miss the obvious resonance with the likes of Mau Mau, Pereira saw fit to make it quite clear: "Those who remember how Moscow radio and some others described Britain's struggle with the Mau Mau might pause for a moment before accepting as gospel the atrocities attributed to the Portuguese in Angola."[58].

Attending to the presence of conspiracism in texts that mobilize Mau Mau in this manner (whether in Great Britain, the United States, Kenya, Portugal, or elsewhere) allows us to see both its influence on world affairs and the ways in which its figural politics were grafted onto other concepts and debates contemporaneously. The degree and ways in which they became as widespread as they did attests to what can be productively thought as a deep-seated theological function bound to racial grammar. In this vein, Brian Bennet points out that conspiracism harbors an important relation to the processes of divination. In an uncanny resemblance to conspiratorial thinking: "Divination purports to go beyond mundane appearances to the hidden structure or significance of events. It entails the discovery and disclosure of spiritual forces or occult realities operative in human affairs."[59] Given its overlay with the recasting of scripts this chapter has explored, what we see above is a part of the story of how "race" as a structuring axis of Western consciousness manifested in the context of this interpretive community. In conspiracist articulations of Mau Mau with such historical phenomena as demographic and economic change, it serves as a means through which this interpretive community reads global events in order to construct and defend racialized notions of belonging. The transposition of specific content within these sorts of processes can be seen broadly over time, but they also held a specific function in

---

[57] Pereira, "Instigated from Outside."
[58] Pereira, "Instigated from Outside."
[59] Bennet, Brian. "Hermetic Histories: Divine Providence and Conspiracy Theory," *Numen*, Vol. 54 (2007). 179.

the postwar British Empire and Commonwealth; namely, eliding questions about the exploitative systems of resource extraction that masqueraded as a project of "multiracialism," how such systems produced new kinds of migration dynamics anchored in the past actions of the Empire, and the fact of arguably having committed a genocide against Africans in central Kenya under the auspices of the Mau Mau Emergency.

* * * * *

Conspiracism is a narratological mediation between the micro and the macro, a way of interrogating the threshold represented by the specifics of a given event. It is notoriously preoccupied with particularisms, the nuance and minor details of a situation or occurrence, but within this one always "recognizes in these discourses a totalizing impulse."[60] It is this impulse that generates the orderliness of conspiratorial thought. Whatever event might be subject to scrutiny is not really valuable in its discreteness, but rather because of its ability to illuminate something much more expansive. This is why Bennet describes conspiracism as a characteristically *historical* mode of narration, insofar as it locates the particular within broader chains of causality and pattern that extend both from the past and into the future (however ungrounded the premises of such reasoning might be). If, as I have contended, "conspiracism" and "conspiracist worldviews" mark a mode of thinking rooted in the reconfiguration of long-standing tropes to attend to anxieties over the current and future world, then they represent not only collections of far-fetched "theories" and speculative ideas about shadowy forces but ways of producing narratives about the world rooted in unorthodox but efficacious understandings of historical movement. In mid-20th century Africa and Europe, these assemblages were shaped by both contemporary consciousness informed by global dynamics and

---

[60] Bennet, "Hermetic Histories," 200.

the political axes that shaped its contours. "The theatre of action [for the paranoid] is now the entire world," noted Hofstadter in 1964.

In closing, I wish to return to the *Luton News*'s presentation of "Africans as Easy Prey" in light of both the arguments of this chapter and with some additional context. In the wake of the Second World War, Luton's proximity to London and relative affordability drew a relatively large influx of African, Caribbean, and South Asian migrants seeking opportunity in the United Kingdom.[61] As speculation about immigration being driven by internationalist plots became a normative part of political discourse across the country, conspiracism appeared as a routine, endemic aspect of daily life. We know this because of the ways in which cities like Luton featured conspiracy theories about Mau Mau alongside advertisements for sandwich spread and coveralls aimed at the historically white working-class population that called it home. Those who made their way to Luton from former British colonies landed in a hostile environment. The harsh realities of postwar global capitalism and the phenomenon of de-industrialization that reshaped the economic landscape of England made it a place ripe for nativist speculation about who, exactly, was responsible for the reduction in standards of living and job losses.[62] In such a context, it became possible for an uprising in Kenya that sought the overthrow of colonial rule and the assertion of the fundamental rights of African people to suddenly feel much closer, with

---

[61] While Luton officially became "majority minority" in 2011, the 1950s and 60s saw the first significant waves of non-white immigration to the city. This was of a piece with broader trends in Great Britain, with 1948 (the arrival of HMT Empire Windrush carrying West Indian migrants) serving as a common marker for the acceleration of such processes.; Jones, P.N. The Distribution and Diffusion of the Coloured Population in England and Wales, 1961-71," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1978). 518-521.

[62] Indeed, three decades after the publication of "Africans as Easy Prey" in its daily, and during a time in which immigration into the city was near record levels, Luton saw the birth of one of the most high profile right-wing conspiracists operating at the global level today: Tommy Robinson (*née* Stephen Yaxley-Lennon). A former football hooligan who founded the anti-immigration and white nationalist English Defence League in 2009, Robinson has made a name for himself by channeling economic discontent in the "British Rust Belt" into nativist politicking and street violence. Drawing from a long tradition of reactionary views on the causes of economic conditions driven by deindustrialization, Robinson and the EDL continue to exist as an operative force in British politics.

great bearing on one's own material situation. Like the parts of the Western world today that echo these socioeconomic dynamics, what might appear to be a somewhat bizarre article about a reverend giving a speech about Mau Mau to the Rotary Club in a local newspaper is, in fact, an attestation to reactionary forms of conspiracism anchored in the tumult of precarious modes of production premised on untenable, exploitative global relationships.

Out of this rhetorical milieu, however fanciful its visions of vast conspiracies working against the Western world, there emerge very real consequences. Conspiracist thinking gains its political salience because it presumes the existence of a means of derailing the designs of the conspiracy in some fashion, without which the construction of the theories themselves would be pointless. The means for doing so vary as widely as the details of the theories themselves, from wearing a tin-foil hat or eschewing certain kinds of food to seizing government buildings, attacking individuals imagined to be agents of the Cabal, and even carrying out ethnic cleansing and genocide. Reckoning with conspiracism as endemic to the colonial and postcolonial world (rather than something "believed in" at the fringes of society) helps us to understand the seemingly unorthodox political, social, and cultural groupings that make up conspiracist interpretive communities. In the cases examined above, the FBI's persecution of Kenyan students in 1950s as outside agitators, the explosion of *islamo-gauchisme* discourse in France, British neo-fascist conspiracies about Mau Mau, and the banalization of the so-called "Great Replacement" theory in Western countries today all share the same kernel of a call to action against the forces identified as their antagonists — antagonists who are being used, in one way or another, to undermine the interests and political agency of the Human subject that should rightfully be in control of the global order of things. This mentality was and is a product of systems of thought that have transposed different content while retaining form, allowing for the

translation and co-construction of conspiracisms within and across Western chauvinist,

imperialist, and antisemitic politics. Tilling fields ripe with incentives to dehumanize those who

raise the fact of being complicit in exploitative and violent systems, the ever-shifting "They"

who function as a conspiratorial opposition has iterated in as many ways as it has been useful for

it to do so. Again, to close, Hofstadter's words: "One meets here again the same frame of mind,

but a different villain."