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3 "In the Spirit of Harambee!" Kenyan Student Unions in the German Democratic Republic and Yugoslavia, 1964-68'

"We Beg to Remain in the Name of Harambee!"2

Situated above the signatures of the newly-minted executive committee, this phrase concludes the first official record of correspondence of the Kenya Students Union (KSU) in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). At the core of this phrase was a request: to retain, and in some ways expand, the nature of their status as Kenyan students studying abroad while also articulating a more robust and charged vision of the significance of their education to the nation-building program at home. Dated October 1, 1964, the letter was addressed to none other than Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta himself. In naming *harambee* (a Kiswahili term typically translated as "pull[ing] together") the authors invoked the official rhetoric of the nascent Kenyatta regime, which had the year prior began using the term as "an appeal not only for self-help but for national unity as well." The purpose of the KSU's letter was to notify the independent Kenyan government, only a year and some months old at this point, of the formation of a new students' union whose membership was open to all Kenyans studying in the GDR.

The KSU was not the first students' union to service Kenyans studying in East Germany. It is unclear in the historical record exactly when and how the Kenyan students whose lives this chapter explores had arrived in their respective

¹ I am extremely grateful to Immanuel R. Harisch and Dr. Eric Burton, whose generous insight has played a central role in shaping this chapter. Their own research, tireless and careful reviews of drafts of this piece, and recommendation of wonderful literature on the topic has benefited my work enormously. Any errors that might present are, of course, the responsibility of none other than myself. I would also like to thank The Humanities Institute at UC Santa Cruz for their generous support of this research, without which it would have been impossible.

^{2 &}quot;Announcement of the Kenya Students Union in the GDR," October 1, 1964, XJ/12/24, Kenya Students Union in East Germany, Kenya National Archives, Nairobi, Kenya (henceforth "KNA").

³ Robert Maxon, "Social & Cultural Changes," in *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya*, ed. B.A. Ogot and W.R. Ochieng (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1995), 137.

Eastern European host countries, but their arrival likely followed established routes taken by African students embarking for Europe during this period. To this end, Eric Burton has shown that, in general: "In the 1950s and early 1960s, South-East travels were shaped to a large extent by individual agency as a variety of trade unions, political parties, and other non-state organisations were involved in sending and receiving students and some even came on their own accord."4 It may well be that, like their Tanzanian counterparts, these students arrived via the so-called "Nile route," "which East Africans used to get from Uganda to Sudan and Cairo, and from there to the Eastern bloc." What can be said with certainty is that in East Germany a group called the Kenya Students Association (henceforth: KSA-GDR) had been founded as early as 1960 to organize and serve such students, and was chaired by a student of political economy named Owilla Olwa.6 This organization was relatively short-lived, and by 1964 found itself marginalized within the student union landscape in the GDR. In fact, the KSU was to be a consolidation of sorts, the product of political pressure exerted by the government of the GDR who had pushed for the older union "to dissolve and join the KSU, preserving a 'united front'." The dissolution of the KSA-GDR and the establishment of the KSU was also tied to domestic politics in Kenya, "By this point," writes Sara Pugach, the Kenya African National Union (KANU) "was also fracturing internally, as leading figures Jomo Kenyatta, the country's president, and Oginga Odinga, its vice president, were increasingly at odds with each other."8

That Kenyatta and Odinga were at odds with each other during this period puts it mildly, and the ramifications of political tensions in Nairobi extended far beyond the borders of Kenya. Contemporary observers cited the ethnic composition of both the KSU and the KSA-GDR as an extension of political strife at home, with the latter's leadership having been dominated by Luo students, the ethnic group with which Odinga was also affiliated. The creation of the KSU was thus a project responsive to the political landscapes of both the GDR and Kenya, each of which viewed student exchange programs as an aspect of diplomatic and

⁴ Eric Burton, "Navigating Global Socialism: Tanzanian Students in and beyond East Germany," *Cold War History* 19 (2019): 67.

⁵ Eric Burton, "Decolonization, the Cold War, and Africans' Routes to Higher Education Overseas, 1957–65," *The Journal of Global History* 15 (2020): 175.

⁶ Sara Pugach, "Agents of Dissent: African Student Organizations in the German Democratic Republic," *Africa* 89 (2019): 98–99.

⁷ Pugach, "Agents of Dissent," 101.

⁸ Pugach, "Agents of Dissent," 99.

foreign policy. Moreover, it is worth noting that Kenyan students now studying in Eastern Europe were profoundly shaped by their earlier lives, particularly childhoods lived during the Mau Mau era and the waning days of British colonialism. Thus, these students found themselves situated between not only the distinct racialized landscapes of the late British Empire and the GDR, but also the domestic political and social dynamics of the country they planned to return to.

The archival materials upon which this chapter is based are guite limited, consisting largely of partial records of correspondence and internal government documents, a number of which have no clear authorship. 10 As one can imagine, the limitations of such an archive leave a great many questions unaddressed. Moreover, the inclusion of a chapter about Kenyan students in a volume focused on the history of exchanges between African societies and the GDR raises certain questions of its own. Despite the Kenyatta regime aligning itself explicitly with an ideal of "democratic African socialism" after independence, the Kenyan state consistently managed to cultivate the reputation of being both pro-Western and friendly to capitalist interests, be they Kenyan or foreign. "Despite the rhetoric of non-alignment and African Socialism," writes Branch, "Kenyatta's government was generally pro-West and pro-capitalism." The period of study encompasses a time when Kenyatta and his allies successfully suppressed political opposition from the left. Indeed, by the early days of 1966 Kenyatta had effectively ousted Odinga (who harbored socialist and Maoist sympathies) from structural political influence. Thus, a chapter examining Kenyan students studying in Eastern Europe (particularly one based on rather sparse materials) appears odd on multiple fronts. I will argue, however, that it is precisely this position of these students, existing in a liminal space both in their host country and the one they called home, which makes their story particularly valuable for historians of decolonization and developmentalism.

Among other important threads, examining the experiences of these students troubles the orthodox historical ontologies about the relationship of African states and professional networks to the global Cold War, and ultimately allows for a better understanding of the contingencies of African lives during this period. This historiographical bias is nowhere clearer than in the relatively exten-

⁹ For more on the role of these programs in the realm of foreign policy, see Paul Kibiwott Kurgat, "Education as a Foreign Policy Tool: Kenyan Students' Airlifts to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Eastern Europe, 1954-1991" (PhD Diss., Moi University, 2013).

¹⁰ As much as possible, I have identified documents which reflect these absences and partialities in their corresponding footnotes, including the maximum amount of information available. 11 Daniel Branch, Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963 - 2011 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 38.

sive amount of literature focusing on the "student airlift" coordinated by Tom Mboya and the John F. Kennedy administration, a program which shepherded hundreds of Kenyan students (including Barack Obama Sr.) to universities in the United States. Rather than reproduce such dualistic historiographical alignments, this chapter follows to an extent Marcia Schenck's articulation of "the term 'Black East' to denote the lived reality of a Black diasporic network in East Germany (German Democratic Republic, GDR) and beyond. This African diaspora owed its existence to socialist entanglements."12 The trajectories of the students in this chapter highlight the importance of questioning the ways in which broad, national "ideological alignments" can overdetermine the manner in which we approach African intellectual history, and also show how ambiguous Kenyan futurity was felt to be during the early days of an independent Kenya. Moreover, by examining students' experiences in both the GDR and non-aligned Yugoslavia, this chapter demonstrates that a shared set of concerns and ideas existed for Kenyans completing their studies outside of more favored universities in Europe and the United States. 13 These were, broadly-speaking, the ability to play a meaningful role in Kenyan society after returning home and a sharp awareness of the significance of the cultural dimensions of national consciousness. In order to explore the significance of this dual desire, this chapter situates the KSU in the GDR in relation to both the domestic project of Kenyan nationalism and the student unions' distinct Eastern European contexts. It also examines a sister organization (a different "Kenyan Students Association," henceforth KSA-Y) which operated during roughly the same period in Yugoslavia, with the analytical aim of exploring how similar concerns were expressed in different contexts across socialist Europe.

The KSU, its Activities, and the Project of Kenyan **Nationalism**

The KSU in the GDR operated from 1964 to late-1967, primarily as an organization attempting to provide a bridge between Kenyan students studying in their host

¹² Marcia C. Schenck, "Constructing and Deconstructing the 'Black East' - A Helpful Research Agenda?", Stichproben. Vienna Journal of African Studies 34 (2018): 136.

¹³ For more on the hierarchy imposed upon degrees according to geography see Eric Burton, "African Manpower Development during the Cold War: The Case of Tanzanian Students in the Two German States," in Africa Research in Austria: Approaches and Perspectives, ed. Andreas Exenberger and Ulrich Pallua (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2016): 111-113.

country and the government at home. Its activities were most robust during the first two years of its existence, when it worked to gather information on its members in an effort to provide the Kenyan Ministry of Education with details that might allow them to facilitate employment after students completed their studies. Yet the KSU was also viewed by its members as a cultural institution, hosting Independence Day celebrations and attempting to gain access to media produced in Kenya to showcase in the GDR. It is these socio-cultural dimensions of the union that are the primary focus of this chapter, as they not only expand our understanding of the visions Kenyans studying abroad had for their country, but also highlight how these students challenged dual processes of objectification: on the one hand as commodified workers by their home government, and on the other as racialized subjects in European locales.14

One year after Kenya's national independence in 1963, both fluid imaginaries of what the postcolonial state could be and the nascent status of postcolonial Kenyan state ideology played pivotal roles in shaping the KSU as a political and educational formation. The tensions that existed between Kenyatta and his allies in relation to Odinga and his necessitated the careful and strategic crafting of union rhetoric about its function and operations.¹⁵ The KSU's displacement of the earlier KSA-GDR (not to mention political strife at home) contributed to a deep and protracted emphasis on rhetoric of unity on the part of the organization, in the service of which terms in both Kiswahili and English were deployed. "Under stable Government," wrote the KSU in an early communiqué, "we feel then that we should mobilize and employ the energies of all sections of such Unity, as we took it as a noble cause everyone to consider it a privilege and duty to unite on a national basis." Here, the organization positioned itself relative to the Kenyatta administration through its articulation of the "privilege" and "duties" which came with being an aspiring member of the Kenyan intelligentsia. It also suggests that, despite the fact of their studying in the GDR, it was their loyalty to Kenya that held central importance, rather than any international

¹⁴ The racialized experience of African students studying in the GDR has been explored in depth by (among others) Sara Pugach. For more, see Sara Pugach, "African Students and the Politics of Race and Gender in the German Democratic Republic," in Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

¹⁵ For readers interested in exploring these tensions more thoroughly, see Oginga Odinga, Not Yet Uhuru: The Autobiography of Oginga Odinga (London: Heineman, 1968); Tom Mboya, Freedom and After (London: Andre Deutsch, 1963); Poppy Cullen, "'Playing Cold War Politics': the Cold War in Anglo-Kenyan relations in the 1960s," in Cold War History 18 (2018).

^{16 &}quot;Announcement of the Kenya Students Union in the GDR," October 1, 1964, XJ/12/24, KNA. No individual author listed.

allegiance. This was, however, no simple act of pandering to the administration or a demonstration of blind and uncritical loyalty. It was tempered by laying claim to a more robust role within the project of Kenyan nation-building than had previously been offered to students in the KSU. In the same letter from October 1, 1964 mentioned above, union leadership wrote:

the Kenya Students Union, a body consisting of both the students and the apprentices [in the GDR], so as to find out the solutions in which to implement to our constituted task in a sense of strengthening our Unity and at the same time promote our Studentship-talents in order to reflect Kenya in a lively way to the rest of the Students from different Nations as well as to the friendly country which are our hosts while abroad.¹⁷

While the letter goes on to outline a variety of more concrete and administrative functions of the KSU, the rhetorical emphasis on the notion of national unity is maintained throughout. So too is the idea that these students were to play a part in both the "strengthening of our Unity" and the effort to reflect Kenya "in a lively way" – this latter phrase targeting not only East Germans, but also students hailing from other European, Asian, and African nations. This sentiment was also expressed in other terms which explicitly underscored the importance of presenting Kenya as a nation among nations, rather than the mythologized entity which was the product of coverage of Mau Mau in international media. "The Kenya students in the GDR," wrote Secretary Mbianu in May of 1965, "are now about or more than 100 as the list of the Kenya Students Union shows, and we would like to participate in any Kenya National day so as to reflect Kenya as the other students from other nations do, but the arrangement of such celebrations or meetings come late and of course inadequate furthermore from too much toil." This critique of the Kenyan government's unwillingness to provide support for such activities will be returned to later. For now, I wish to highlight the emphasis on national identity and unity manifested primarily through its deployment of three terms: uhuru, harambee, and "unity" itself. The first two of these, both Kiswahili, were often used in a largely symbolic manner. While they did appear within prose penned by the KSU and its members, they manifest far more frequently in signing phrases, letterhead, stamps, and to articulate particular ideas or claims to the official rhetoric of Kenyan nation-building.

"The Uhuru of Kenya," writes the KSU, "is no more than a prelude to the mobilization of our energies and resources aimed at freeing ourselves from hunger,

^{17 &}quot;Announcement of the Kenya Students Union in the GDR," October 1, 1964, XJ/12/24, KNA. No individual author listed.

¹⁸ Miano, Mburu, "General/5/65," May 1965, KNA.

sickness, ignorance and divisionism, etc." Here, the usage of uhuru seems to refer specifically to formal independence as an epoch-making stage (thus its ability to serve as a "prelude"). It is used in exactly such a way elsewhere in both KSU correspondence and contemporary Kenyan political discourse more generally. Yet it is noteworthy that this understanding of the concept would make other appearances within the KSU's own time, perhaps most notably in the very title of Odinga's 1968 autobiography and critique of the Kenyan postcolonial order: Not Yet Uhuru. 20 Indeed, the very title of this work can be thought of in contrast to Tom Mboya's proximate work Freedom and After. Daniel Speich suggests that in terms of the competing political visions which dominated contemporary Kenyan thought, "the two positions are reflected in the titles of the autobiographies of the two leading politicians."21 In other words, whether or not the country had achieved a state of uhuru at all remained the subject of debate throughout the 1960s (and, indeed, long afterward). While both of these usages are clearly situated within the register of national unity, they require us to think about whether a given group of Kenyans would have understood uhuru as having been attained with formal independence (as argued by the likes of Kenyatta and Mboya) or as something remaining to be actually realized through the destruction of what we might now identify as the neocolonial order (the perspective held by Odinga). In sum, such usages imply that the definitional status of even the most core of the organizing concepts of postcolonial Kenya were fundamentally dynamic and political, a crucial point for considering the rhetoric and experiences of Kenyan students in Eastern Europe.

Though less explicitly reliant on the stagist underpinnings of the KSU's deployment of *uhuru*, *harambee* functions in much the same politically-dynamic manner within the union's rhetoric and was also articulated to the ideal of national unity. Like uhuru, it is often positioned ambiguously, possibly to the end of allowing readers at the Ministry of Education to interpret it in whatever way might be most favorable to union interests (a wise maneuver in a time of tumultuous domestic politics). Typically translated as "pulling together", harambee held a high currency within the KSU's correspondence. This is most notable in the phrase "In the Spirit of Harambee," which official KSU correspondence often concluded with. On September 21, 1963, the eve of Kenyatta's departure for London to negotiate the formal process of Kenyan independence, he spoke these words: "The new era that Kenya will enter as an Independent nation—in

¹⁹ Miano, Mburu, "General/5/65," May 1965, KNA.

²⁰ Odinga, Not Yet Uhuru.

²¹ Daniel Speich, "The Kenyan Style of 'African Socialism': Developmental Knowledge Claims and the Explanatory Limits of the Cold War," Diplomatic History 33 (2009): 454.

the spirit of 'harambee'—in December, is one which will call for dedication, hard work and unity."²² From here, "the spirit of harambee" came to be a foundational concept upon which the Kenyan postcolonial order was constructed. "Pulling together" meant an attempt to manufacture a national whole from diverse and often contentious ethnic, racial, religious, and class identities. Yet even Jomo Kenyatta himself employed a notoriously slippery and vague usage of the term. In the fall of 1964, for example, he expounded on the concept at a rally by stating: "Unless the country can help itself, then it cannot develop. We must make systematic efforts to harness the spirit of self-help, and of national unity."23 At the level of quotidian political discourse, this vagueness left open the possibility for Kenyans to articulate this concept as they saw fit. It is worth noting here that, from the earliest days of KANU, harambee had been connected to another phrase ("Freedom and Work" or *Uhuru na Kazi*) and conveyed a strong overtone of capitalist-oriented economic achievement.²⁴ Still, through the persistent invocation of the term it is reasonable to suggest that the KSU attempted to position itself as responding to the call to "harness the spirit of selfhelp" through serving as embodiments of Kenya abroad, rather than serving flatly as an economic resource for "the nation" as understood by the top officials of the Kenvan state.

Most frequently deployed in the actual prose of KSU communications, however, is the word "unity" itself. It often reads as almost interchangeable with harambee, signaling many of the same semiotic dimensions as its Kiswahili counterpart. "The future of us and of Kenya is for Kenyans to plan," wrote the KSU in October 1964, "and our judgement shall be our destiny. The Union will take a colossal measure against individualists and sectionalists, who may, in any way attempt to curtail such Unity."²⁵ Here, the deployment of "unity" harbors a sharp political edge. And, yet again, we see an appeal to national cohesion by Luo students during a time when tensions were flaring between Kenyatta and Odinga, and indeed between Kikuyu and Luo communities. Like harambee, "unity" was a core ideological concept in the service of which the KSU imagined itself as playing a crucial role. In the context of the power struggle between Kenyatta and Odinga at home, as well as the "divisionism" that had characterized the brief life of the KSA-GDR, the salience of such an emphasis on rhetoric of

²² Jomo Kenyatta. Harambee!: The Prime Minister of Kenya's Speeches 1963 - 1964, ed. Anthony Cullen (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 12.

²³ Kenyatta, Harambee!, 12.

²⁴ Branch, Between Hope and Despair, 248.

^{25 &}quot;Announcement of the Kenya Students Union in the GDR," October 1, 1964, KNA. No individual author listed.

unity is clear. The KSU sought to position itself as an organization whose aim was to represent Kenya as a united nation as much as, if not more than, it was concerned with the individual academic achievements of its members.

Together, the KSU's deployment of uhuru, harambee, and the rhetorics of unity more generally suggests that the union considered itself to be facilitating not only the economic advancement of the home country but also the articulation of the broader, markedly cultural dimensions of a Kenyan national identity. Also noteworthy in this regard is the characterization of the intellectual composition of the KSU; both "students" at universities and "apprentices" at technical and vocational schools were eligible for membership and were considered equal members, at least in formal terms. This voicing of solidarity across the lines of class and status appealed to different rhetorical registers. Explored further below, one such example is the organization's positioning of itself under the banner of "African Democratic Socialism," 26 though it is not further clarified in the archived correspondence what this orientation entailed for the KSU membership. Yet the union did far more than situate itself rhetorically as an integral component of the Kenyan postcolonial project; it necessarily pressed beyond this as it found its way through serving as the primary facilitator of relations between students studying abroad and their home government.

In organizational terms, the KSU positioned itself to play a significant role both in serving as an intermediary for communication between students studying in the GDR and the Ministry of Education in Kenya as well as in providing practical services to its members. This entailed a variety of distinct activities, including but not limited to: petitioning for increased levels of student funding from their home government, keeping track of the courses of study its members were pursuing, updating the Ministry in Kenya on conditions of life in the GDR, working to secure employment following the completion of students' degrees, and a host of miscellaneous administrative practicalities.²⁷ The KSU thus simultaneously served a reporting function and advocated, though often in vain, for remedies that would address particular problems faced by Kenyan students in the GDR. Perhaps the most emblematic examples of such a function were the efforts at tracking the experiences and courses of study for the 125-odd students present in the country during 1965. These efforts simultaneously highlight both

²⁶ On Kenya's African socialism see, more generally, Speich, "The Kenyan Style of 'African Socialism".

²⁷ While allusions to forms of documentation such as those listed here are frequent in the papers of the KSU and KSA-Y, I have thus far been unable to locate many of them in archival collections.

the urgency of the KSU's requests and the immense difficulties involved in information gathering faced by the organization.

Throughout 1965, Mburu Miano, as the General Secretary of the KSU, made numerous appeals to the Ministry of Education in Kenya for both higher levels of pecuniary assistance and more robust efforts toward securing positions of employment in Kenya following the completion of students' studies. J.R. Sheffield, a prominent figure in the Ministry in Kenya, eventually responded to Miano's requests: "I am also enclosing under separate cover 150 record forms which you requested. We will be very grateful for your assistance in this important exercise since an accurate registry will help government planners and will help you and your colleagues find suitable employment upon completion of your studies."28 While it appears that Miano did indeed undertake extensive attempts to gather the information requested (which included courses of study, institutional affiliation, and expected year of completion), his efforts ultimately bore little fruit. "I, the Secretary of the Union," Miano replied to Sheffield, "wrote to all students and supplied all copies (each to everyone) to them, but sorry to say that only 15 copies have been successfully filed and we hope to see many filled and dispatched to you soon."29 This level of student response, no doubt at least in part a product of both the dispersion of students throughout the GDR and unsystematic paths taken by students to reach the country, is typical of such efforts conducted by the KSU during its existence.

Like student unions in the present, these types of activities (and the accompanying drudgeries of bureaucracy) were no small part of the KSU's activities, and in fact constituted the bulk of the labor performed by union leadership. Yet these administrative functions would have played a relatively limited role in shaping understandings of the KSU for the union rank-and-file. For them, interacting with the KSU primarily meant two things. First, filling out forms and paperwork (such as that lamented by Miano above) that provided insight for the government as to the courses of study of Kenyan students abroad. Another function seemed equally prominent, and indeed appears even more frequently than the information gathering efforts undertaken by the KSU: making requests for and receiving news and cultural materials from home by way of the Kenyan government. These types of resources were typically extremely limited. For example, after receiving a KSU request for 125 copies of a periodical titled Kenya Calling, the Ministry of Education responded: "We will only send you 50 copies of this publication which we think would be sufficient if students living together

^{28 &}quot;Letter to Mburu Miano from J. R. Sheffield," December 9, 1965, XJ/12/24, KNA.

^{29 &}quot;Letter to J. R. Sheffield from Mburu Miano," February 26, 1966, XJ/12/24, KNA.

shared the copies."30 This was a solution proposed by the Ministry in Kenya without knowing even such basic information as whether it was the case that Kenyan students actually did live together, as housing arrangements varied by locale and student background.

Responses such as this suggest that, in large part, non-board members of the KSU would likely have interfaced in a very limited way with their home government, and on the occasions when they did (such as receiving copies of Kenyan periodicals or gathering personal information) faced an ambivalent ministry interested only in the nature of their studies and the occasional dissemination of extremely sparse resources. In the union's own phrasing: "Kenya Students take their different courses in different institutions of learning, but it seems to them, that, the Ministry of Education in Kenya never establish [sic] contacts with them."31 The overarching sentiment was, then, that the home government seemed to have little interest in interacting with Kenyan students abroad and even less in assisting with the coordination of events not deemed to be properly "educational." For example, in response to the KSU's letter announcing the foundation of the organization and requests for pecuniary support of an upcoming national independence celebration, an administrator named D.K. Ngini wrote in an internal Ministry of Education circular: "I do feel that if the students want to qualify as well and as widely as they can as a stepping stone towards contributing to the Kenya Nation building, the best course is for them to concentrate primarily on their studies."32

Kenyan students in the GDR had other aims, even if the project of nationbuilding remained the ultimate guiding star. Taking seriously the intervention that the organization understood itself to be making by "reflecting Kenya in a lively way" allows for a reading of the KSU as consciously serving a pedagogical function. By describing it as an organization seeking to project a lively vision of Kenya to other students and comrades in the GDR more generally, union leadership explicitly positioned the organization as disruptive of what, by extension, must have been felt to be a static and problematic conception of life in Kenya. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the temporal proximity of the KSU to the events of the Mau Mau Emergency, during which a great deal of European media coverage had presented Kenya as a place rife with tribal antagonisms and "primitive" traditions.33 And, while the narratives about the rebellion that

^{30 &}quot;Correspondence from J. H. Wanyoike to Mburu Miano," December 15, 1965, XJ/12/24, KNA.

^{31 &}quot;Correspondence from KSU to Ministry of Education," May 1965, XJ/12/24, KNA.

^{32 &}quot;Circular written by D. K. Ngini," October 28, 1964, XJ/12/24, KNA.

³³ See, for example, Melissa Tully, "All's Well in the Colony: Newspaper Coverage of the Mau Mau Movement, 1952-56," in Narrating War and Peace in Africa, ed. Toyin Falola and Hetty ter

circulated in the socialist world were certainly different than those in the West, abstractions about Africa and Africanness fundamentally informed each. We might think about the KSU, then, as having understood themselves to be making a crucial correction to the narratives about Kenya that circulated in the Eastern Bloc, and perhaps Europe more generally. Moreover, the KSU's consistent appeals to national unity implies a connection between the ideological construction of Kenya as a cultural and national entity and the unique position that Kenyans studying abroad considered themselves as inhabiting; ambassadors of a certain sort.

In this light, requests for Kenyan-produced ephemera and cultural materials (and in particular films, as will be explored further later) were viewed as a means of disrupting residual mythologies attached to Kenyanness. And while I am unaware of any existing scholarship examining media representations of Mau Mau specifically in the GDR, the fact that Kenyans expressed similar sentiments in other European spaces (coupled with Pugach's work on racialization in East Germany) lends credibility to the idea that these students viewed themselves as doing a certain type of ideological work. The pedagogical core here, then, was an attempt to intervene in the channels through which information about Kenyan society in the wake of independence travelled. Moreover, this was an intervention that would present Kenya as a united and "modern" nation with the right to control its own destiny, an understandably common sentiment in the rhetoric of many African people and states in the 1960s. When the KSU positioned itself "against individualists and sectionalists, who may, in any way attempt to curtail such Unity," it did so as a means of positioning itself squarely within this national destiny.³⁴ Again, the idea that the Union could be a force for remedying the divisionism that had plagued both the student community in the GDR and the political landscape at home is made manifest. The KSU was thus ultimately an organization with a membership that conceived of itself as a group of politically-conscious students who sought to influence both the articulation of national identity and, in addition, the future role of Kenvans who accessed higher education in socialist Europe.

Haar (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010); A.S. Cleary, "The Myth of Mau Mau in its International Context," in African Affairs 89 (1990).

^{34 &}quot;Announcement of the Kenya Students Union in the GDR," October 1, 1964, KNA. No individual author listed.

Competing Visions: The Idea of Education in the **KSU**

In recent years, educational trajectories of Africans sojourning in the socialist world—like the GDR—have been the subject of much interest, as the compilation of this volume itself attests to.35 With regard to the GDR's own articulation of these programs, Tanja R. Müller's recent monograph Legacies of Socialist Solidarity traces the contours of the complex ways in which the hegemonic ideological ethos of the GDR drew from the rhetorical registers of socialist internationalism in its construction of policies targeting relations with African states.36 Recent work such as Müller's underscores the centrality of discourses of "development" within contemporary socialist thought. The concept has also been explored deeply within Africanist postcolonial theory, and importantly by V.Y. Mudimbe. Mudimbe has written extensively about the teleological nature of the notion of development in postcolonial Africa, calling particular attention to its ubiquity within political rhetoric across the continent. In The Invention of Africa, he goes so far as to agree with B. Vergaegan's characterization of this line of thinking as a "theology of development." The GDR's emphasis on development should thus also be understood in relation to the concept's even greater salience for postcolonial Kenya, for whom the stakes of implementing any notion of development were felt to be far higher and operated at exactly such a quasi-theological level. The Kenyan Ministry of Education's emphasis on development, and its relation to the very idea of "education," was predicated on an understanding of education as the production of skilled "manpower." Here, it is worth draw-

³⁵ See, for example, Eric Burton, "Journeys of Education and Struggle: African Mobility in Times of Decolonization and the Cold War," Stichproben. Vienna Journal of African Studies 34 (2018): 1-17; Marcia C. Schenck. "Negotiating the German Democratic Republic: Angolan Student Migration during the Cold War, 1976-90," Africa 89 (2019); for more on African students in Yugoslavia see Nedžad Kuč, "Southern African Students in Southeast Europe: Education and Experiences in 1960s Yugoslavia," in Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War 'East': Transnational Activism 1960-1990, ed. Lena Dallywater, Chris Saunders, and Helder Adegar Fonseca (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019).

³⁶ Tanja Müller, Legacies of Socialist Solidarity: East Germany in Mozambique (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014).

³⁷ V. Y. Mudimbe, The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 179.

³⁸ Elsewhere, Eric Burton has explored Tanzanian discourses of "manpower" and their relationship to both the creation of an elite and positioning of education as a consumable good. For more on this, see Burton, "African Manpower Development".

ing upon the KSU's peers studying in Yugoslavia during the same period. In a 1967 exchange with the KSA-Y, for example, I.R. Sheffield wrote that: "As part of the government's programme of manpower planning and Kenyanization of both the public and private sectors, it is extremely important for us to know the supply of high-level manpower which will be returning from study overseas."³⁹ As we will see, the members of the KSA-Y were not particularly fond of such a one-dimensional understanding of what, exactly, their "education" was to be. Moreover, each organization rejected (sometimes explicitly, but more frequently tacitly) the purpose of an education abroad being articulated within the relatively narrow project of "Kenyanizing" the national economy.⁴⁰

In broad strokes, during the years the KSU was active—from 1964 to 1968 the Kenyan government thus pursued an educational policy primarily concerned with increasing its intellectual manpower while students such as those involved in the union conceived their studies abroad as both this and the work of consciousness-raising. The emphasis on political consciousness was stated often and clearly by the organization. In fact, the emphasis on "consciousness" as an organizing concept more generally played an important role in the KSU's intellectual framing. In their foundational letter to Kenyatta referenced above we read that: "The Union has brought Students to the consciousness that the stage is now set for us to embark upon the next phase in our struggle for advancement."⁴¹ Here, the relationship of students to "consciousness" functions within a somewhat stagist vision of historical development. As seen above, formal uhuru had served as a "prelude" which had allowed for the emergence of such a consciousness. KSU leadership insinuates that, once attained by themselves, it was the task of intellectuals such as those in the union (regardless of their field of study) to assist in proliferating political consciousness throughout the Kenyan social fabric. When considered in relation to their outline of the functions of the KSU, it is evident that the notion of "advancement" held by union members exceeded the instrumentalizing, flatly economic one being pur-

^{39 &}quot;Letter to the President, Kenya Students Association in Yugoslavia from J.R. Sheffield," May 25, 1967, XJ/12/28, Kenya Students Association in Yugoslavia, KNA.

⁴⁰ Of course, the critique that the simple replacement of white colonial administrators with Africans did little to disrupt the political economy of colonialism was common in socialist thought of the era. Indeed, few political leaders in Kenya expressed this concern more frequently than Odinga. This perspective could also suggest the possibility that students in socialist Europe had perhaps taken some of their "ideological training" more seriously than has typically been thought to be the case, as such ideas certainly would have circulated in classrooms discussing Marxist theory and left politics.

^{41 &}quot;Announcement of the Kenya Students Union in the GDR," October 1, 1964, KNA. No individual author listed.

sued by the Kenyan state. It included the role of the intelligentsia as a cultural vanguard. However, this type of function implied activities which the Ministry in Kenya was skeptical of students abroad pursuing. Moreover, the expression of this idea was also rather subtle, perhaps due to the possibility that any perceived affiliation with communist politics would have jeopardized the position of students who returned to an increasingly pro-capitalist Kenvan state.

The differences between visions of the role of the educated Kenvan was a constant site of contestation along with allegations of underfunding, poor communication, and general mismanagement.⁴² What underwrote all of these tensions were two different (if deeply-entangled) conceptions of the idea of "education," what such a concept entailed and the role the foreign-educated Kenyan would play after returning home. In other words, this represented a continuous and extensive debate about the relationship between contested ideas of education within the Kenyatta regime's project of harambee. These contestations found themselves expressed in a variety of ways, but few were felt as acutely by KSU students as that of entering a status of commodified intellectual-laborers, toward which the state took an attitude at once ambivalent and instrumentalizing in ethos. This was not a sentiment restricted to students in the GDR, and indeed Kenyans in other European locales articulated it far more explicitly than through the "consciousness-raising" rhetoric of the KSU.

From a comparative standpoint, the KSA-Y alleged in a similar manner of their primary Ministry of Education contact that "he considers us as just 'mere trading instruments."43 This was a perspective that understood the instrumentalization of students in two ways: as both pawns in international diplomacy as well as fungible workers crafted solely for the smooth operation of the postcolonial order in Kenya. The expression of such a sentiment across two different Eastern European contexts, each explicitly socialist in orientation, is intriguing. Whether couched in the affirmative terms of political unity or articulated through direct critique, it seems evident that both the KSU and the KSA-Y hoped for a far more robust vision of the role to be played by Kenyans educated in socialist Eu-

⁴² Employment following the completion of one's course of study was a particularly robust point of concern. A general lack of communication and mismanagement in this regard produced sentiments such as the following, merely one of dozens of such inquiries: "We would like to know our positions towards our communal aim in Kenya, that is relationship between qualified manpower and Ministry of Education, at the same time Ministries which offer employment and other institutions." ("Letter to Mr. G. R. M'Mwirichia from Mburu Miano," November 5, 1965, XJ/

^{43 &}quot;Letter to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education from George S. Owuor and Arthur K. Owuor," February 3, 1966, XJ/12/28, KNA.

rope than was held by the Ministry of Education in Kenya. More preferable for these students was a position as harbingers of an improvement in economic circumstances, the disruptors of European mythologies about Kenya, and the articulation of an African socialist politics (however imprecisely it was defined) all at once.

Aside from direct statements—such as Ngini's insistence that "the best course is for them to concentrate primarily on their studies"44—the Kenyan government's aversion to student activities not considered to be part of their education-proper was expressed through the consistent rejection or inadequate fulfillment of requests for the financial support of cultural events. In a letter from November of 1965, the KSU made an appeal to the Ministry of Education in Kenya for pecuniary and material support to fund a string of events celebrating the second anniversary of Kenyan national independence. They made their case on the grounds that: "The matter of facts [sic] is that, KSU represents an image of Kenya in the front line in celebrations, advertisements, speeches and in newspapers during such national occasions."45 This, they argued, meant that their home government had both a responsibility and a vested interest to support their activities. The response the KSU received from the Ministry was disheartening (to put it mildly) and summarized in one line: "Unfortunately, our budget does not permit our support of groups such as yours."46 While this position loosened over time and small requests were granted on occasion, the government's assertion that they bore no real responsibility for supporting student groups focused on cultural activities and consciousness-raising remained a site of contention throughout the history of KSU-governmental relations. Thus, while the Ministry of Education in Kenya consistently displayed a preoccupation with tracking and managing the production of "manpower," they showed far less in taking seriously the political and ideological dimensions of the KSU's activities.

While visions of corrective approaches to this problem are rarely explicit, the KSU's emphasis on unity and the positioning of their organization as a cultural vanguard is telling. By articulating themselves as central to the cultural dimensions of Kenyan nationalism, it is clear that they envisioned a position relative to the Kenyan nation-building project that exceeded a status as commodified (if educated and well-paid) labor. Exacerbating this was a perception that their colleagues studying in other locales did not experience such frustrations as acutely. Daniel Branch argues that:

^{44 &}quot;Circular by D. K. Ngini," KNA.

^{45 &}quot;Correspondence from Mburu Miano to G.R. M'Mwirichia," November 5, 1965, XJ/12/24, KNA.

^{46 &}quot;Letter to J.R. Sheffield from Mburu Miano," KNA.

[Students who studied in socialist Europe] expected to be the nation-builders, the economic planners and technocrats at the heart of the process of state-formation. But they found themselves excluded from the vital early stages of this process, marginalized in favour of their contemporaries who studied in Kenya itself, neighbouring Uganda, the UK and, particularly, the USA.⁴⁷

Kenyan students in the GDR and Yugoslavia were no exception. They each had a record of communicating this precise frustration to their home government. In the KSU's phrasing: "It is to the benefit of Kenya as a Nation to see to it that, those students qualifying themselves in various fields of studies receive equal eligibility as those others in other parts of the globe." The KSU's rhetoric thus suggests something of a dual-mandate for their home government: they hoped to be involved in the cultural and political dimensions of nation-building while simultaneously expressing their right to the same economic positions as Kenyan students studying in other foreign countries. Given that degrees from the "Second World" were often perceived by African governments as "second class" degrees, the KSU's request clearly demanded a position of equality in this regard. 49

The understanding of education held by the Kenyan state thus existed in a state of deep tension with that of an organization such as the KSU, which was tacitly expressed in its foundational mission and conceptual ethos. The government's mission of creating a class of educated clerks and administrators who would serve as so many parts in the machinery of the Kenyan economic structure was a far cry from the understanding of education articulated within the cultural dimensions of KSU rhetoric, which did not shy away from fiery language. This rhetorical style was, however, tempered in order to reaffirm the organization's commitment to supporting KANU:

We are in the mind that Party is the rallying-point of our political activities and such, we support every measure to lead to a stability of Kenya African National Union, in order to maintain African personality of every-man-Jack in both politics and economics which facilitate the building of an integrated Nation with a social structure of an African Democratic Socialism.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Daniel Branch, "Political Traffic: Kenyan Students in Eastern and Central Europe, 1958–1969," *Journal of Contemporary History* 53 (2018): 831.

⁴⁸ Mburu Miano. "General/5/65," May 1965, KNA.

⁴⁹ Burton, "African Manpower Development," 111-113.

⁵⁰ "Announcement of the Kenya Students Union in the GDR," October 1, 1964, KNA. No individual author listed.

Through simultaneously expressing their support for KANU and the nebulous project of "African Democratic Socialism," the KSU walked a fine line that both acknowledged the authority of the Kenyatta regime and challenged it to take seriously some of its own positions. It should be no surprise, then, that the sense on the part of students that they were being commodified through educational programs in the interest of a state that relegated them to an apolitical space was difficult to accept.

Through a comparative perspective, we can see that the experiences of organizations similar to the KSU in other areas of socialist Europe suggest that this perception of apathy toward (and fungibility of) students was not confined to the GDR alone. The KSA-Y also found itself perpetually frustrated by the lack of material support and the poor quality of communication between the Kenyan Ministry of Education and students abroad. In the records of the KSA-Y this manifests not only as inadequate material assistance, but also as an utter lack of knowledge on the part of the Kenyan authorities about the educational institutions they were supposedly "partnering" with. In response to a KSA-Y request for information on securing employment after completing their studies, Deputy Secretary of Education G.R. M'Mwerichia wrote: "I am writing direct to Belgrade to get a full description of the type of school you are attending and the final award you expect."51 It should be no surprise that this statement, which constituted an open acknowledgement that the Ministry of Education lacked even such basic information as the types of schools students were attending and the degrees they could expect to be awarded, was not well received. It is worth noting that such an idea would have been completely out of line with the attention paid to those participating in the Mboya-Kennedy airlift. In a scathing retort, the KSA wrote back: "Your inquiry now into the type and system of education in Yugoslavia is a direct proof that you never cared to know why and how we were sent here."52 In another point of consonance with the frustrations experienced by those in the KSU, the letter also argued that: "You cannot wait for a student to finish his studies and then when he comes back to Kenya you start saying you do not recognize his degree in spite of the fact that you are the one who sent him here."53

Contemporaries of the KSU in the GDR, the frustrations of KSA-Y members speak to the broad and deeply-rooted discontent of young Kenyan scholars studying in Eastern Europe. Namely, these shared frustrations (voiced almost

^{51 &}quot;Correspondence from G.R. M'Mwirichia to KSA leadership," February 23, 1965, XJ/12/28,

^{52 &}quot;Correspondence from KSA to G. R. M'Mwirichia," March 8, 1965, XJ/12/28, KNA.

^{53 &}quot;Correspondence from KSA to G. R. M'Mwirichia," March 8, 1965, XJ/12/28, KNA.

contemporaneously a thousand kilometers apart) underscore the experiences of cohorts of scholars who felt marginalized by the national government that they hoped so dearly to play a significant role in. It should, of course, be mentioned that the level of opacity encountered by the Kenyan Ministry of Education was due in part to the absence of embassies in the GDR during this period and an ambivalent relationship to the Yugoslavian state. That the particular channels through which Kenyan students arrived in Europe were not standardized, but varied widely and occasionally even operated without the knowledge of the Kenvan state should also be understood as a source of confusion. The fact that this was apparently a widely-shared experience, however, did little to console the memberships of the KSU and KSA-Y. They perceived the Kenyan Ministry of Education as being (at best) inept, though this word understates the strong sense of exploitation and fungibility felt by the students it was allegedly responsible for supporting. These feelings toward their own government are, however, only one part of a larger picture. Equally prevalent, if even more cautiously and tacitly expressed, was the strong sense of alienation felt by African students as they navigated the landscapes of Eastern Europe.

Film and the Idea of Self-Representation

In the years following national independence, existing in European space as a Kenyan student was a lived experience fraught with tension, which laid bare the contradictions of the contemporary contours of socialist internationalism.⁵⁴ I argue that the emphasis which the KSU placed on film represented an attempt to disrupt residual forms of mythologies about Kenyans, and Africans more generally, that continued to circulate even under self-proclaimed anti-racist regimes of state socialism. To be clear, frank and explicit accusations of experiencing racial prejudice are few and far between in the limited records of these organizations to which I have access. Nonetheless, it is telling that both the KSU and KSA-Y embarked on sustained campaigns to gain access to materials that would allow for a degree of self-representation within the cultural frameworks in which they found themselves. From their home government they requested magazines, pho-

⁵⁴ A particularly illustrative example of this is Sara Pugach's exploration of gender dynamics in the GDR and the relation African students had to them. The antiracist posturing of the state, Pugach argues, unravels when one considers the manner in which African students were marginalized within the social body and the low-esteem in which East Germans who had sexual relations with them were held. Again, see Pugach, "African Students and the Politics of Race and Gender".

tographs, newspapers, and cultural products of all sorts with an urgency not extended even to securing employment after completing their studies. Requests for cultural materials are numerous, clear, and (this cannot be emphasized enough) expressed more emphatically even than petitions for financial support.

The final part of this chapter explores students' interest in, and perhaps even affinity for, the medium of film through extremely close analyses of the demands they made for access to these materials. This section is consciously speculative, a product of both the archival collections from which it is derived (as well as the Kenya National Archive itself) and the informational voids that existed even for those who actually participated in the experiences it examines.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to highlight what is an undeniable feature of the records that do exist, and to gesture toward the cultural and intellectual implications present within them. It is noteworthy that a preoccupation with the medium of film was by no means unique to the members of the KSU. Sarah Pugach has argued elsewhere that in 1965 the Union der Afrikanischen Studenten und Arbeiter in der DDR (Union of African Students and Workers in the GDR) had advocated for the relevance of film to challenge the static mythologies of Africa that circulated in East Germany.⁵⁶ In a letter from that year, the UASA argued for "compelling the Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (German Film Corporation or DEFA) to produce movies on contemporary Africa, since most of what they were currently making reflected only 'colonial barbarism.'"57 As we shall see, both the KSU and the KSA-Y experienced similar debates that underscored the pedagogical utility of film.

The first mention of film in KSU correspondence dates from May of 1965, only a few months after the UASA's letter mentioned above and the second year of the Union's existence.⁵⁸ Broadly, the document in which it appears voiced frustrations felt by members of the organization which tacks between specific complaints and arguments for the importance of the work being done by the KSU. The main grievance articulated in the text, which we have already encountered, questions the equity with which students in the GDR were being treated relative

⁵⁵ It should be re-emphasized here that the materials examined are located at the Kenya National Archives. This institution, and the records which it houses, has been subject to colonial and neocolonial power dynamics, dynamics pertinent to contextualizing its existence and composition. I mean this not only in terms of the presence or absence of materials (the "silences" produced by what is deemed "worthy" of cataloguing in all archival bodies, and what a given Kenyan regime has believed should be made available in this institution), but also in terms of its chronic underfunding and limited (though heroic and dedicated) staff.

⁵⁶ Pugach, "Agents of Dissent," 93.

⁵⁷ Pugach, "Agents of Dissent," 103.

^{58 &}quot;Correspondence from KSU to Ministry of Education," May 1965, XJ/12/24, KNA.

to Kenyan students studying in Western European and American institutions. Eric Burton has observed that African countries "sent young citizens wherever possibilities for academic training opened up, no matter if 'East', 'West', or 'South' – although Western degrees continued to enjoy the greatest prestige."⁵⁹ In their letter, the KSU claimed that in other European contexts where Kenyans studied, the impending completion of a course of study was accompanied by dialogue between would-be-graduates and the Kenyan government in order to place them in employment. This practice was rumored to be orthodox in the U.K., for example. "We remember very well," wrote KSU leadership in a circular addressed to the Ministry of Education in Kenya, "that [the] City Council of Nairobi sent its delegation to England to interview those students who were about to finish their courses (studies) so that, when they finished, they could go straight to their employment. But nothing has been done so far regarding those students in the GDR."60 That the City Council of Nairobi would have taken a direct interest in recruiting students who had been educated in the capitalist West is striking, especially considering the Kenyatta regime's contemporary amenable positioning toward the capitalist powers of the West.

The aim of securing employment after completing one's course of study was, however, only one aspect of a much broader set of concerns for Kenyan students expressed in this letter. A special level of emphasis was reserved for underscoring the dire need for cultural materials from home. In the organization's own phrasing, the request made in their May 1965 letter was for "Financial-assistance + material assistance such as FILM in order that Kenya Students may show other people how Kenya is." What exactly is meant by the phrase "how Kenya is" is not clear. Like other Kenyans studying abroad, many amongst the KSU membership would likely have hailed from privileged backgrounds. Yet it is reasonable to suggest that the trope of a "backward," violent, and "tribal" Kenya was what was being challenged here. To this end, it is worth mentioning once again that the bulk of the KSU's activities occurred scarcely a decade after the height of the Mau Mau insurgency, an event which captured the imaginations of people across the globe (both out of fear or in solidarity) and placed Kenya in a position of international notoriety. What is certain in the passage above is the high degree of

⁵⁹ Burton, "Navigating global socialism," 64.

⁶⁰ Mburu Miano, "Circular, General/5/65," May 1965, KNA.

⁶¹ Mburu Miano, "Circular, General/5/65," May 1965, KNA.

⁶² The international legacy of Mau Mau is a phenomenon that has garnered a great deal of interest in recent years. For example, Gerald Horne has explored the legacy of the insurgency within the context of the United States. For more on this see Gerald Horne, *Mau Mau in Harlem? The U.S. and the Liberation of Kenya* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

emphasis placed on the word "FILM," a feature found elsewhere in the requests put forth by the KSU. In this document the word is located on the edge of the right margin, and the actual shape and place of the word itself is striking. While its specific location on the page was incidental, its impact on the reader is indicative of the importance it held for its authors. It appears as a solid block in a sea of small letters, impossible to avoid and disruptive of the measured tone and flow of the larger document. That this degree of emphasis was deemed appropriate even when requests for such basic necessities as financial sustenance were also present is particularly striking.

A second, even more explicit appeal for government-produced films to be shown at independence celebrations would find its way to the Ministry of Education in Kenya several months later. By then, the emphasis on this particular demand had grown. In November of 1965 the KSU sent the following message:

The KSU in the GDR wish to demonstrate our standpoint and ours is for the Kenya as a whole, and therefore we would expect from you papers, photographs, maps, magazines, and even a F I L M about Kenya. Any material despatch [sic] from you, which may need preservation, the Kenya Students Union may take responsibility, such as FILM etc. 63

Here, the high degree of emphasis experimented with in the first document comes to full fruition. Not only does the word occur twice in all capital letters, but one of these sees the insertion of a space between each letter. The effect of creating a solid visual block, absolutely impossible to ignore for the reader, cannot be overlooked as incidental or unimportant. It is, after all, not the only material requested. It is not even the only visual material on the list. Yet photographs and maps seem to hold a relatively limited importance for the KSU. Exactly why this might be the case is not, however, stated explicitly within the Union's records.

Here, it is perhaps useful to recall very briefly the history and role of the medium of film in mid-twentieth century Germany. Under the Nazis, cinema had been a staple of propaganda efforts. Racist imagery was ubiquitous, and the importance of visual contrast maintained a currency well after the fall of the regime. In his famous 1947 text From Caligari to Hitler, the film historian Siegfried Kracauer wrote that a primary feature of the Nazi film was: "The exploitation of physiognomical qualities by contrasting, for instance, close-ups of brute Negroes with German soldier faces."64 The deployment of the visual dichotomies of dark

^{63 &}quot;Correspondence from Mburu Miano to G. R. M'Mwirichia," KNA.

⁶⁴ Sigfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 279.

and light continued well into the period of KSU activities, and the practice and idea of contrast continued to hold a currency for film critics and audiences. As Pugach has noted, the notion that a dichotomy existed between Germans and "brute Negroes" was not erased with the establishment of an "anti-racist" regime committed to socialist internationalism. Nor was the idea that the nature of film, as a medium, held a unique ability to intervene in popular narratives of the nation. In Germany and elsewhere during the postwar era, this rested on the figural creation of outsiders, and race was a common modality deployed in their assembly. In line with this, Pugach has shown that an educative impulse extended beyond the walls of the universities that hosted African students. "The students were subject to a 'moral' education in the GDR," she writes. "This education was based on supposedly 'primal' characteristics that had been assigned to Africans much earlier, in the colonial era. It contradicted state claims that race did not matter, as well as state efforts to include blacks in the body politic,"65 More generally, these students' experiences in Germany would have been informed by what George Steinmetz has called the "devil's handwriting," or how "the inherited archives of precolonial ethnographic representations provided the ideological raw materials for almost everything that was done to colonized peoples in the modern era."66 Such a line of analysis can easily be extended to think about how continuities in racist mythologies manifested in different areas of life in the GDR, film being only one embedded within a broader cultural landscape.

In tracking the maneuverings of the KSU and its membership, it is evident that the disruption of these mythologies was of great concern for Kenyan students in the GDR. Requests for films were made "in order that Kenya Students may show other people how Kenya is."67 They were also made in a context wherein multiple students had been either expelled from school or jailed under questionable circumstances.⁶⁸ The attempt to resist these processes of overdetermination was at the core of requests for films depicting life in Kenya. Deploying the rhetoric of national unity, and targeted at those primarily respon-

⁶⁵ Pugach, "The Politics of Race and Gender," 148.

⁶⁶ Steinmetz, George, The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qungdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), xiv. 67 Mburu Miano, "General 5/65," KNA.

⁶⁸ Over the course of the KSU's existence, it saw one student expelled from school due to a minor alcohol infraction and two others tried and imprisoned on charges of rape. Allegations of police brutality were also made by the Union against the East German authorities. For details about this see "Correspondence from E.N. Gicuchi to The Rector of Dresden Technical University," January 25, 1966, XJ/12/24, KNA; "Correspondence from J. Mwema to Ministry of Foreign Affairs," February 9, 1966, XJ/12/24, KNA; "Correspondence from J. N. Muimi to Ministry of Education," February 24, 1966, XJ/12/24, KNA.

sible for fostering such a sentiment within the nascent Kenyan republic, the desire to disrupt the existing pedagogical channels through which information about the homeland travelled found an affinity with the medium of film. It follows that the KSU may have understood it as a technology through which Europeans and Africans in the audience would receive the voice of Kenya (at least as it was portrayed by the government) without the distortions of a European lens or gaze. A Eurocentric vision of Africa would have at least some chance of being "pushed against" or "corrected." To be clear, this is not to suggest that such a representation was unproblematic, "authentic," or even an accurate analysis of the pedagogical dynamics of film. Nor was the project of Kenyan nationalism organic or untethered from colonial legacies and massive disparities in ethnic and class representation within government. Instead, the aim here is to suggest that the KSU harbored a powerful understanding of the possibilities held by the medium of film and its value for them as they navigated life in the GDR and their relations to the government at home.

While (in line with their political rhetoric more generally) the KSU signaled the importance of the medium film in a carefully coded manner, Kenyan students in Yugoslavia were less reserved. Their debates on the subject depart from the KSU's in important ways, but bear striking similarities with regard to at the level of conceptualizing the medium of film itself, and especially its ability to shape perception. As in the GDR, I suggest that it was the pedagogical power of the medium of film that served as the defining feature of these debates, although the contours of the specific circumstances are notably different. In January 1967, a bitter dispute emerged between two groups of Kenyan students within the KSA-Y over a series of films that had been screened for the previous year's independence celebrations. On January 26, Gonzaga Opundo (a rank-and-file member of the KSA) wrote to the Kenyan Ministry of Education alleging that "three foreign Embassies have engaged themselves in what seems to us a joint-work for corrupting Kenya students in Yugoslavia."69 The three foreign powers mentioned were Britain, the United States, and West Germany, and Opundo alleged that they had targeted KSA-Y leadership, "The British and the American Embassies," wrote Opundo, "do invite 'selected' number of Kenya students to their respective Consulates or sometimes in their private homes to talk over a cup of tea. After the talks the students are shown some propaganda films and they are also provided with free newspapers." Opundo went on to claim that

^{69 &}quot;Correspondence from Gonzaga Opundo to Ministry of education: Re – Corruption by foreign embassies over Kenya students in Yugoslavia," January 26, 1967, XJ/12/28, KNA.

^{70 &}quot;Correspondence from Gonzaga Opundo to Ministry of education: Re – Corruption by foreign embassies over Kenya students in Yugoslavia," January 26, 1967, XJ/12/28, KNA.

this was essentially a recruitment operation on the part of these foreign powers, which offered promises of work and financial support in exchange for information on Kenyan students studying in Yugoslavia. He also argued that these operations were based on students' political orientations, as their talks and information-gathering efforts included "Kenya politics and the parties which individuals prefer."⁷¹ Such an attention to party affiliation must be contextualized in relation to the Kenyan political landscape, where the year prior Odinga had formally split from KANU and played a formative role in the organization of the Kenya People's Union. That Britain, the United States, and West Germany would have been interested in securing such information is to be expected. More surprising is that the particular items mentioned (films and newspapers) are the same ones petitioned for by the KSU in the GDR, is key, and underscores the widespread existence of concerns around sets of cultural materials that were understood to be "accurate" or not.

Opundo's allegations did not go unchallenged. Less than a month later, a response arrived at the Kenyan Ministry of Education from the leadership of the KSA-Y. Fadhili Lugano (the organization's Chairman) and John Omudanga (Secretary) excoriated Opundo's letter, calling his claims "baseless" and "extremely serious."⁷² Opundo was, apparently, not fond of Lugano or Omudanga either, adding the phrase "whom they use as a tool" in brackets next to each of their names when listing out the students he believed had been corrupted.⁷³ Nevertheless, the KSA's leadership responded in-depth to his "baseless" claims. "The truth is," they wrote, "the Kenya Students Association decided to have as part of the Kenya Independence Celebration, 1966 a Kenya film, photographs and the National Anthem. We wrote to the Kenya High Commissioner in London to help us acquire some of these things."⁷⁴ They received a total of four different films for their celebration, and "nearly all Kenya students in Zagreb including Mr. Opundo saw these films."⁷⁵ Along with their rebuttal to Opundo, Lugano and Omudanga sent the titles of the films screened, writing that "It is for the Gov-

^{71 &}quot;Correspondence from Gonzaga Opundo to Ministry of education: Re – Corruption by foreign embassies over Kenya students in Yugoslavia," January 26, 1967, XJ/12/28, KNA.

^{72 &}quot;Letter to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs from Fadhili B. Lugano and John Omudanga," XJ/12/28, KNA.

^{73 &}quot;Correspondence from Gonzaga Opundo to Ministry of education: Re – Corruption by foreign embassies over Kenya students in Yugoslavia," January 26, 1967, KNA.

^{74 &}quot;Letter to the Permanent Secretary from Fadhili B. Lugano and John Omudanga," February 14, 1967, XJ/12/28, KNA.

^{75 &}quot;Letter to the Permanent Secretary from Fadhili B. Lugano and John Omudanga," February 14, 1967, XJ/12/28, KNA.

ernment of Kenya to judge whether the above four films are propaganda films."⁷⁶ At the heart of these debates was, in essence, the question of what constituted propaganda within the medium of film. It is not the aim of this chapter to serve as arbiter to whether or not such films did indeed serve such a function. Rather, I wish only to underscore that competing understandings of Kenyanness within the medium of film clashed not only in the GDR and the Eastern Bloc, but in places such as non-aligned, socialist Yugoslavia as well. Moreover, these contestations were not simply a question of "European" representations versus "African" ones, but were suspended within a political space in which one's alignment to domestic politics in Kenya was considered to be an equally (if not more) important factor.

Conclusion

In their relatively brief periods of tenure, both the KSU and the KSA-Y established themselves as intermediaries between their members in relation to both the Kenvan government and the authorities of their host states. In a number of different ways, they sought to carve out a more expansive role for its membership in relation to each. However, with the exception of a brief influx of nursing students in late 1966 which it helped organize, the KSU witnessed a significant decline in membership after its first two years. By the beginning of 1967 the union had merged with the Kenya Students Association (a similar, smaller organization) to create the Kenya Students Organization (KSO), which at its foundation comprised only 96 members. This figure is striking when considered in relation to the fact that at its height the KSU alone had boasted a membership of over 150 students. Moreover, the activities of that organization appear to have been short-lived, and in large part consisted of collecting data about the students and (more importantly for the KSO) advocating on students' behalf for transfers to educational institutions in West Germany. The explicit rationale is only provided for two of these students, both studying agriculture, who requested to continue their education in West Germany "to develop their both theoretical and practical knowledge" at a level not offered in the GDR.⁷⁷

The medium of film occupied a prominent space in the intellectual and political imaginaries of Kenyan students studying in both the GDR as well as other

^{76 &}quot;Letter to the Permanent Secretary from Fadhili B. Lugano and John Omudanga," February 14, 1967, XJ/12/28, KNA.

^{77 &}quot;Correspondence from Kariuki K. Njiiri to Lother [Lothar] Metw [?],"May 9, 1968, XJ/12/24, KNA.

areas of socialist Europe like Yugoslavia. The KSU's objective to "show other people how Kenya is" accounts for this in part, but their petitions for access to film produced in Kenya must also be considered alongside the manner in which they articulated their organizational politics. In treading carefully between displaying loyalty to KANU and advocating for a more robust vision within a Kenyan version of "African Democratic Socialism," the Union worked to carve out both a political and economic place for students educated in the GDR within the postcolonial order at home. So too did their comrades in Yugoslavia. The experiences of students in the KSU and the KSA-Y are thus only two episodes embedded within a much broader landscape wherein African students simultaneously pushed against both an alienated existence in Eastern Europe and the constraints and demands of their government at home. This ethos was at the heart of their project to both "represent Kenya in a lively way" and jockey for position within the Kenyan economic landscape. Following experiences abroad defined by both hope and frustration, members of these organizations would eventually return home to a Kenyan state increasingly critiqued as deeply neocolonial in practice and inattentive to its people in the wake of formal "Uhuru." Through their activities and rhetoric, the leaders of the KSU (out a sense of both historical destiny and necessity) had attempted to chart a different path through the postcolonial order as they struggled in the spirit of harambee. More broadly, the careful analysis of groups such as the KSU and KSA-Y pursued here offers a largely unexplored avenue through which we might examine the complexities of African postcolonialisms, socialist imaginaries in the Global South, and the experiences and expressions of intellectual communities of color in white spaces during the global 1960s.

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