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**Abstract**

This paper explores the experiences of Kenyan students in the Soviet Union, Bulgaria and other communist states between 1958 and 1969. Existing studies of student mobility from Kenya in this period have concentrated the experiences of students in the U.S., a theme familiar to many readers because of Barack Obama's family history. By contrast, and by using recently released sources from the British archives and material from Tom Mboya's papers at the Hoover Institute Archives, the paper analyses the political debates that centred upon this much larger group of students who travelled East. The paper demonstrates how newfound freedoms of movement were tempered by racism, colonial obstruction and domestic political considerations. The global opportunities that seemed to be presented by decolonisation proved to be a chimera. The paper locates the experiences of the students in a broader context of debates around decolonisation and globalization, but emphasises the importance of the students' experiences at home and abroad to the process of state building undertaken in Kenya at this time.

**Keywords**

**Kenya, decolonisation, Cold War, higher education, students.**

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The biographical note is as follows:

Daniel Branch is a professor in African history and chair of the Department of History at the University of Warwick. He is the author of *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating*

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3 *Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization and Kenya: Between Hope*  
4 *and Despair, 1963-2012.*  
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6 For the acknowledgements:  
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8 For their assistance with this article, the author thanks: David Anderson, George  
9 Roberts and the anonymous referees for their comments; and the research support  
10 provided by the University of Warwick. He is grateful to the archivists at the Hoover  
11 Institution Archives for allowing access to the papers of Tom Mboya and William X.  
12 Schienman and their assistance during his work there.  
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### Political Traffic: Kenyan Students in Eastern and Central Europe, 1958-1969

Shortly after midday on 5 July 1969 in central Nairobi, Nahashon Isaac Njenga Njoroge assassinated Tom Mboya, Kenya's minister for economic planning and development. Mboya's death was an event of global significance. The founder of a scholarship programme that took hundreds of Kenyan students to the United States, Mboya moved in international networks of Panafricanism, development and trade unions. By contrast, Njenga's own background seemed to be mere detail to observers at the time. Of greatest importance was his role as the front man for a deeper plot involving Mboya's rivals for the presidency, which in turn led to Njenga's swift execution. Those behind the shooting continued their factional battles until the elderly President Jomo Kenyatta finally died in 1978.

Despite the relative disinterest in his background at the time, Njenga was just as engaged with the global politics of the age as Mboya. He had participated in a very different scholarship programme to the one established by Mboya. He was one of 88 Kenyan students sent to Bulgaria by Mboya's great rival and then minister for home affairs, Oginga Odinga, just a month before Kenyan independence in December 1963. Njenga spent four years in Bulgaria, where he underwent military training.<sup>1</sup> Odinga's scholarship agreement with Bulgaria was part of a wider programme of such scholarships spread across Eastern and Central Europe that exceeded even Mboya's in scale.

Njenga did not kill Mboya because of that training or his ties to Odinga. Instead, Njenga's role in the murder likely emerged from his disaffected existence on his return to

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<sup>1</sup> Hoover Institute Archive (HIA) Tom Mboya papers (TM) 4/5, Lumumba Institute, 'List of Kenya Cadets Undergoing Three Year Military Training in Bulgaria (1963-1966),' 29 January 1965; J. Kamau, 'Nahashon Njenga: the Story of the Bulgaria-Trained Mboya Killer,' *Daily Nation* (10 July 2016) (<http://www.nation.co.ke/news/The-story-of-Bulgaria-trained-Mboya-killer/1056-3287848-ylx18y/index.html>) - accessed 7 January 2017); *The Times*, 'Mboya Case Man Said to Have Been in Bulgaria,' 14 August 1969.

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3 Kenya in 1967. Many of the 1500 Kenyan students who studied in Eastern and Central  
4  
5 Europe in this period returned home to be greeted with suspicion as the course of  
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7 domestic politics and the influence of the Cold War turned against them. Rather than  
8  
9 taking up the key roles they expected to occupy in the new state, the returning graduates  
10  
11 were forced to take work wherever they could find it. Although he enjoyed relative  
12  
13 prosperity through his work as a second-hand car salesman, Njenga was unfulfilled and  
14  
15 he spent much of his time drinking. His vulnerability was ruthlessly exploited by Mboya's  
16  
17 rivals.<sup>2</sup>  
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20 This paper explores the intersection of the Cold War and decolonisation in  
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22 Kenya by examining the experiences of students like Njenga who travelled to Eastern  
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24 and Central Europe for their university education. For the ever-growing numbers of  
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26 young Kenyans – the country was part of ‘the most sudden and rapid population growth  
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28 the world is ever likely to see’<sup>3</sup> – the simultaneous demise of British imperialism and the  
29  
30 emergence of the Cold War meant there were unprecedented opportunities for such  
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32 journeys. The superpowers and their satellites offered such scholarships as part of their  
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34 efforts to find allies among the leaders and populations of the soon-to-be independent  
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36 African states. Nationalist leaders in Kenya were, in turn, keen to encourage such offers.  
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38 Without sufficient existing provision of higher education in Kenya and Eastern Africa,  
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40 overseas scholarships were vital, in the words of Oginga Odinga, if the country were to  
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42 ‘have people who will work to build up Kenya when we attain independence.’<sup>4</sup> Kenyans  
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44 enthusiastically seized the new opportunities. Just 110 Kenyan Africans were studying  
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46 outside of Eastern Africa in 1955.<sup>5</sup> Many were in independent India, to the chagrin of  
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51 <sup>2</sup> Kamau, ‘Nahashon Njenga.’

52 <sup>3</sup> J. Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent* (Cambridge 2007), 253.

53 <sup>4</sup> U.K. National Archives (TNA: PRO) FCO 141/7140, Wadeley to Permanent Secretary  
54 for Defence, 13 August 1962.

55 <sup>5</sup> J.E. Goldthorpe, *An African Elite: Makerere College Students 1922-1960* (Nairobi 1965), 16-  
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3 colonial officials who feared the effects of their exposure to nationalist politics.<sup>6</sup> A  
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5 decade later, at least 2500 students were overseas and spread across the globe. As in  
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7 other African states, higher education became a site of intense political debate.<sup>7</sup>  
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9 The stories of the 800 or so Kenyan students who studied in the U.S. in the late  
10  
11 1950s and early 1960s have become well known since the emergence of Barack Obama.<sup>8</sup>  
12  
13 Less familiar are the experiences of Njenga and the approximately 1500 other Kenyan  
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15 students who travelled to various Eastern and Central Europe at the same time.<sup>9</sup> There  
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17 is, however, a growing body of literature that narrates the experience of the wider body  
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19 of African students in Eastern Europe.<sup>10</sup> This paper extends the subject of this work to  
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21 one of the former British colonies of East Africa and to the most eager African  
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23 participants in student mobility. By January 1962, with more than 280 students spread  
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25 across the region, the British authorities stated that the number of Kenyans studying in  
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27 communist countries 'much exceeds the number of students from either Ghana or  
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42 <sup>9</sup> B. Badejo, *Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics* (Nairobi 2006), 29-42; D. Leonard,  
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47 <sup>10</sup> J. Hessler, 'Death of an African Student in Moscow,' *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 47, 1-2  
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56 *Étudier à l'Est* (Paris, 2015).  
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3 Nigeria who were studying in *bloc* institutions on the eve of Ghanaian and Nigerian  
4 independence, and certainly surpasses the number of *bloc* students from any other East or  
5 Central African territory.<sup>11</sup> Kenyan students were by 1970 more deeply integrated into  
6 networks of global student exchange programmes than those from any other sub-  
7 Saharan African country.<sup>12</sup>  
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13 This paper has more substantial contributions to the existing historiography  
14 beyond its inclusion of Kenya. In much of the recent work on African students, the  
15 emphasis is on the contradictions between the rhetorical commitments of communist  
16 states to support for African liberation and the students' experiences of racism. Such an  
17 argument provides further evidence of Frederick Cooper's arguments about the hidden  
18 constraints to African liberation in the post-colonial world.<sup>13</sup> Collectively this literature  
19 therefore forms an important part of the new historiography on the global Cold War.  
20 However, in such studies the students themselves can simply appear and disappear.  
21 Little consideration is given to the circumstances by which they found their way to  
22 Europe or the consequences of their studies for their lives and broader society back  
23 home after graduation. Indeed, the political context of their home countries is given so  
24 little attention that some studies simply consider the students as Africans or foreigners.  
25 Although such categorisations may make analytical sense when one's primary focus is on  
26 the reception given to, for example, non-Soviet students by Soviet society, it does little to  
27 advance our broader understanding of the historical significance of student mobility to  
28 both host countries and the countries of origin.  
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47 This paper considers the relationships of Kenyan students with their hosts,  
48 particularly in the U.S.S.R. and Bulgaria. It too finds that the everyday racism they  
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52 <sup>11</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7124, Swann to Armitage-Smith, 18 January 1962.

53 <sup>12</sup> G. Barnett & R.Y. Wu, 'The International Student Exchange Network: 1970 & 1989,'  
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55 <sup>13</sup> F. Cooper, 'Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective',  
56 *Journal of African History*, 49, 2 (2008), 167-96.  
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3 experienced revealed the limits of the commitments of the host countries to the liberty  
4 and equality of the new decolonised nation-states. Kenyan students were not shy to make  
5 this point. They proved no more willing to accept the political authority of the  
6 Bulgarian, East German or Soviet state than they had been in Kenya itself. However,  
7 this paper's wider arguments it has more in common with Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn  
8 McGregor's work on Zimbabwean military trainees in the U.S.S.R. Alexander and  
9 McGregor convincingly argue for the need to pay more careful attention to the domestic  
10 political context and the agency of African participants in mobility around the Cold War  
11 world if we are to better understand the historical significance of this subject.<sup>14</sup>  
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22 This paper shows how the students and their mobility represented one way by  
23 which nationalist leaders could 'unmake' the colonial state.<sup>15</sup> Overseas education  
24 provided Kenyans with the opportunities to evade the paradox of modernity used by  
25 European rulers to justify the subjugation of their colonies. As long as access to higher  
26 education had been strictly controlled and limited, colonial rulers who used modernity to  
27 set the boundaries of citizenship in colonies could do so without fear of the significant  
28 inclusion of Africans in the category of citizen.<sup>16</sup> Empowered by their education,  
29 Kenyan students and graduates disputed the settlers' monopoly on citizenship, modernity  
30 and political power. But the potential of the students to unmake a state did not end with  
31 the demise of colonial rule.  
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43 In Kenya, the mobile students who had been so important to efforts to  
44 dismantling colonial rule proved even more troublesome to the country's new rulers'  
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48 <sup>14</sup> J. Alexander & J. McGregor, 'African Soldiers in the USSR: Oral Histories of ZAPU  
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51 <sup>15</sup> P. Gupta, 'Decolonization and (Dis)Possession in Lusophone Africa,' in D.  
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54 <sup>16</sup> J. Comaroff, 'Governmentality, Materiality, Legality, Modernity: On the Colonial State  
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56 *in Current Debate* (Oxford 2002), 119.  
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3 conceptions of independence and sovereignty. The students' mobility provoked other  
4 restrictions to be placed on their possible transformative effects on Kenyan political life,  
5 hence indirectly exerting a considerable influence on the process of state building in the  
6 new nation-state.  
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13 Kenyans were keen participants in what in 1958 Count de Liedekerke, the Belgian  
14 attaché in Nairobi, called 'political traffic.'<sup>17</sup> By this, he meant the dramatic and rapid  
15 expansion in global mobility by individuals from across Africa connected to the anti-  
16 colonial movement. This traffic was possible because of the weakening grip of  
17 European colonial rule on its African subjects. Although frequently subverted, control  
18 over their mobility had been a hallmark of modern European imperialism: 'empire was a  
19 self-consciously spatializing project.'<sup>18</sup> In Kenya, this took the form of reserved districts  
20 for European settlements, the use of passes to control labour migration and a variety of  
21 other methods to limit the mobility that the territory's population had long practiced.  
22 The imperial spatializing project reached an apogee during the final decade of colonial  
23 rule. Forced displacement, curfew, detention, imprisonment, and other measures were  
24 imposed by the British between 1952 and 1960 as part of a state of emergency intended  
25 to defeat the Mau Mau insurgency. The mobility of many Kenyans and their engagement  
26 with global political debates were therefore curtailed; 'we have ceased to be movable  
27 creatures,' wrote Kariuki Njiri, a former student in the U.S., in 1959 after his return  
28 home.<sup>19</sup>  
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51 <sup>17</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/6733, Assistant Secretary I, 'Note for File', 28 October 1958.

52 <sup>18</sup> T. Ballantyne & A. Burton, 'Introduction: The Politics of Intimacy in an Age of  
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55 <sup>19</sup> HIA William Scheinman papers (WS), box 9, folder 16 (9/16), Njiri to Scheinman, 27  
56 June 1959.  
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3 In truth, colonial restrictions on African mobility in Kenya had already begun to  
4 be relaxed by the time Njiiri wrote those words. Prohibitions on organised African  
5 political activity were partially lifted in 1957 and the state of emergency was abandoned  
6 in 1960. The new freedoms to move and communicate with external parties were  
7 enthusiastically taken up by a wide range of political actors. Spatial control of Kenya  
8 weakened even earlier. The ability of the colonial regime to police its own borders was  
9 weakened as soon as its neighbouring states, such as Sudan in 1956, became  
10 independent. British officials in Nairobi recognised in 1958 that 'it was fairly easy to leave  
11 it [Kenya] without being stopped at the border.'<sup>20</sup>

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13 African civil servants, cooperative leaders, army officers, spies and trade unionists  
14 all travelled the world to gain the expertise needed for independent rule. For those that  
15 could not leave Kenya, the world came to them. On their shortwave radios Kenyans  
16 could listen to nationalist Swahili broadcasts from Moscow, Accra and Cairo.<sup>21</sup>  
17 Pamphlets and newsletters from Egypt and the U.S.S.R. were carried across Kenya's  
18 borders with increasing regularity. The colonial authorities intercepted nearly 2500  
19 separate such publications in 1962, the vast majority originating from the U.S.S.R. The  
20 volume of this form of political traffic had increased fivefold over just four years.<sup>22</sup> To  
21 Kenyan exiles in Egypt this dramatic spike in the globalization of Kenyan politics meant  
22 that the soon-to-be nation-state was recalibrating its position in hierarchies of global  
23 power, particularly in relation to Britain. The officials of the Kenya Office in Cairo,  
24 students themselves, pronounced that 'history has passed its sentence on colonialism,

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<sup>20</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/6733, Assistant Secretary I, 'Note for File', 28 October 1958.

<sup>21</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7140, Ruck to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence, 15 December 1962.

<sup>22</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7140, Director of Intelligence to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence, 17 January 1962.

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3 imperialism and settlerism...' 'We the African people of Kenya – nay Africa – are now  
4  
5 the executors of the sentence passed by history now!<sup>23</sup>  
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7 Kenyans living under colonial rule were fully aware of the need to study abroad.  
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9 Colonialism, Odinga wrote, left a legacy of 'retarded educational facilities.'<sup>24</sup> Efforts by  
10  
11 the British to redress such concerns were too little, too late. Although Kenyans joined  
12  
13 their counterparts from across Eastern Africa at Makerere from 1935, there were still just  
14  
15 325 Kenyan students at the region's elite university in 1959.<sup>25</sup> In Kenya itself, the Royal  
16  
17 Technical College in Nairobi was founded in 1956 and only began offering degrees as the  
18  
19 University College in 1961. No wonder thousands of young Kenyans shared with  
20  
21 Monica Mbotela, the daughter of the historian James Juma Mbotela, 'that great dream of  
22  
23 her life – education Overseas.'<sup>26</sup>  
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26 The likes of Mbotela had earlier examples to follow. Throughout the colonial  
27  
28 period, a small number of Kenyan African students were successful in applications for  
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30 places and scholarships at universities in South Africa, India, the U.K. and the U.S.  
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32 Various luminaries of the nationalist movement studied abroad between the 1920s and  
33  
34 1950s, including Kenyatta, Mboya, Mbiyu Koinange, Eliud Mathu, Julius Kiano, Njoroge  
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36 Mungai and Mwai Kibaki. Kenyatta spent a short and unhappy time in Russia in 1933 in  
37  
38 the midst of a long exile in Europe.<sup>27</sup> But they were among the lucky few that received  
39  
40 such an education in spite of colonial policies. There was no great expansion of  
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42 opportunities in the U.K. even once decolonization began; just 42 Kenyans were  
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49 <sup>23</sup> HIA TM/5/1, Okello et al, Kenya Office Cairo to the editor, *Nation*, 9 August 1960, 3.

50 <sup>24</sup> O. Odinga, *Not Yet Uburu* (Nairobi 2001), 187.

51 <sup>25</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/6703, Lennox-Boyd to Colonial Attaché, British Embassy,  
52 Washington, 28 August 1959.

53 <sup>26</sup> HIA TM/43/5, Mbotela to Mboya, 15 July 1965.

54 <sup>27</sup> I. Filatova, 'Indoctrination or Scholarship? Education of Africans at the Communist  
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56 35, 1 (1999), 41-66.  
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3 students there in 1959.<sup>28</sup> Nor necessarily was there any great desire among Kenyans to  
4 travel to Britain for their studies. Although a degree from Oxford, Cambridge or London  
5 carried great weight for graduates in decolonizing Kenya, some of the students that  
6 travelled there found their experience blighted by racism.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, Britain's  
7 reputation as a technological pioneer, industrial giant and centre for innovation had  
8 diminished long before its political power began to retreat.<sup>30</sup> Musa Amalemba, a visiting  
9 politician, was struck by the 'extent of disaffection' he encountered among the students  
10 he met during a visit to the U.K. in 1959.<sup>31</sup> George Onyuna and Henry Ouma Olwa  
11 were among the students in Britain at the time. They left in secret shortly afterwards in  
12 order to take up places at Leipzig University.<sup>32</sup>

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24 As more Kenyans looked to follow in the footsteps of Onyuna and Olwa, they  
25 became embroiled in the fierce domestic and global politics of decolonization. The Mau  
26 Mau rebellion was the best-known expression of the ferocious nature of late-colonial  
27 politics in Kenya. In the cities of Nairobi and Mombasa, unemployment, low wages,  
28 inflation and a regressive approach to labour relations sparked the growth of a powerful  
29 trade union movement. In the countryside, efforts by the colonial government to change  
30 land tenure and agricultural practices caused protests and resentment. Population  
31 growth, urbanisation, increased religiosity, generational struggles and growing inequality  
32 combined to exacerbate a pronounced sense of crisis and fuel anti-colonial protest. And  
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45 <sup>28</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/6703, Lennox-Boyd to Colonial Attaché, British Embassy,  
46 Washington, 28 August 1959.

47 <sup>29</sup> D. Dean, 'Coping with Colonial Immigration, the Cold War and Colonial Policy: The  
48 Labour Government and Black Communities in Great Britain 1945-51', *Immigrants and*  
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51 <sup>30</sup> David Arnold, *Everyday Technology: Machines and the Making of India's Modernity* (Chicago  
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53 <sup>31</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/6703, Griffith-Jones to Webber, 22 August 1959.

54 <sup>32</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/6296, Director of Intelligence & Security, 'Kenya Connections  
55 with Anti-Colonial Organisations in the United Kingdom: Review of the Period 1.7.59-  
56 31.12.59', 23 January 1960, 2.

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3 as thoughts turned to a future after colonial rule, no great consensus about the size and  
4 shape of a successor state emerged. Ethnic federalists proclaimed the need for  
5 devolution in direct competition with centralisers advocating for stronger national  
6 government. Somali irredentists and Coastal separatists hoped that they would not even  
7 be part of Kenya. Other Kenyans harboured ambitions of joining an independent East  
8 African Federation comprising Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika.  
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15           Until 1960, these various strands of debate were only able to find expression in  
16 individual political leaders, of which Oginga Odinga and Tom Mboya were among the  
17 most notable, or a complex network of highly localised informal political organisations.  
18 Colony-wide political parties were banned and labour unions and other vehicles for  
19 African involvement in public political action were heavily restricted. Without recourse  
20 to such strong institutions, African politics was intensely personalised. This remained  
21 true even after the first countrywide political parties, the Kenya African Democratic  
22 Union (KADU) and the Kenya African National Union (KANU), were formed in 1960.  
23 KANU's leaders were nearly as divided among themselves as they were unified in their  
24 opposition to both British rule and the competition from KADU. The contest for  
25 influence over KANU between Mboya, Odinga and Kenyatta regularly threatened to  
26 derail the nationalist movement before independence.  
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41           KANU stayed together long enough to take power at independence in December  
42 1963; Odinga and his supporters were forced out in 1965 and formed the Kenya People's  
43 Union. KANU's ability to win popular support across Kenya despite its factionalism was  
44 testament to the broad appeal of its campaign. First, the likes of Mboya and Odinga  
45 championed a cosmopolitan, worldliness in Kenya's expanding town and cities that  
46 better captured the imagination of voters than the fearful, ethnocentrism of KADU.  
47 KANU's political success was, Mboya thought, a triumph of an agenda for 'local,]  
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3 International and Pan-African affairs' over 'tribalism' and 'mudslinging'.<sup>33</sup> Mboya and  
4  
5 Odinga similarly tapped into a popular demand for modernisation and, particularly,  
6  
7 education.<sup>34</sup>  
8

9 For many Kenyans, better education sat alongside the desire for land  
10  
11 redistribution as a primary goal of independence. As Kariuki Kamau, a self-styled  
12  
13 KANU elder in the Rift Valley wrote in May 1963, 'It would really mean a great joy if the  
14  
15 coming new Government of Kenya would try to overcome our troubles of missing land  
16  
17 and Education...'<sup>35</sup> KANU's leaders recognised the need to meet such demands. They  
18  
19 were also conscious of the dearth of graduates, which presented a real threat to the  
20  
21 party's ambitious development goals. 'The needs are staggering,' Mboya wrote shortly  
22  
23 after independence. 'Like other African counties, Kenya will strive to build up its  
24  
25 educational facilities as rapidly as possible. But this will take time, and the need for using  
26  
27 overseas facilities in addition will be pressingly acute for a number of years.'<sup>36</sup>  
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30 As is now well documented by historians and others, Mboya worked closely with  
31  
32 his allies in the U.S. to try to address the development needs of Kenya and to advance his  
33  
34 own political career.<sup>37</sup> Mboya's scholarship programme, known as the "air-lift", served  
35  
36 both parties well in this regard. By 1965, 774 Kenyans were studying in American  
37  
38 universities and Mboya enjoyed global fame.<sup>38</sup> Odinga's engagement with global politics  
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40 was, however, as deep as Mboya's. He enjoyed a close relationship with with Apa Pant,  
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45 <sup>33</sup> HIA TM/2/2, Mboya to Houser, 3 March 1961.

46 <sup>34</sup> D. Speich, 'The Kenyan Style of "African Socialism": Developmental Knowledge  
47  
48 Claims and the Explanatory Limits of the Cold War', *Diplomatic History*, 33, 3 (2009), 449-  
49 66.

50 <sup>35</sup> HIA TM/49/1, Kamau to Kenyatta & Koinange, 28 May 1963.

51 <sup>36</sup> HIA TM/49/4, Mboya to Holland, 5 February 1964.

52 <sup>37</sup> M. Dudziak, *American Dreams: Thurgood Marshall's African Journey* (2nd. edition,  
53  
54 Princeton, NJ 2011); Goldsworthy, *Tom Mboya*; G. Horne, *Mau Mau in Harlem? The U.S.  
55  
56 and the Liberation of Kenya* (Basingstoke 2009); Shachtman, *Airlift*.

57 <sup>38</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Africa, Committee on Foreign  
58  
59 Affairs, *African Students and Study Programs in the United States* (H. Rpt. 809-89),  
60  
61 (Washington 1965), 25.

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3 India's commissioner in East and Central Africa, and toured India in 1953. His itinerary  
4 around the country took him to factories, universities, government offices and the towns  
5 and cities of the new nation. It was, he wrote on his return, an 'important education'  
6 and 'something I shall never forget.'<sup>39</sup> But Indian inspiration and encouragement did not  
7 translate into the scale of financial support Odinga needed to compete with Mboya. So  
8 in the late 1950s Odinga approached his rival's American funders. Mboya jealously  
9 protected his position, persuading his American friends that Odinga was a communist  
10 sympathiser.<sup>40</sup> Odinga found a more receptive audience among the communist  
11 governments of Eastern and Central Europe.

12  
13 As Mukiria Muturi, a Kenyan student leader in Poland between 1962 and 1968  
14 wrote, various political figures in Eastern and Central Europe thought 'Kenya was a  
15 "high potential" to communists before and immediately after independence. This was  
16 not accidental. Kenya's struggle for independence was bitter and bitter circumstances are  
17 favourable for and vulnerable to communism.'<sup>41</sup> Odinga was happy to be the recipient  
18 of the support that followed. After constitutional talks in London in February 1960,  
19 Odinga travelled to East Germany, his first trip to any Eastern European country.  
20 During his stay in Berlin he reached an agreement with the East German government for  
21 the funding of scholarships. With his reputation bolstered, Odinga met with Chinese  
22 and Soviet diplomats in Cairo during a stopover on his return to Kenya. Further  
23 scholarship agreements were struck.<sup>42</sup>

24  
25 Odinga was unapologetic about his foreign ties, describing them as bonds of  
26 friendship based on 'mutual understanding' that meant 'my friend in Russia, China or

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<sup>39</sup> O. Odinga, *Two Months in India* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Nairobi 1965), 50.

<sup>40</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7140, Special Branch, 'The Communist Offensive Against Kenya: A Review of the Period December 1957-October 1962', 29 November 1962, 4.

<sup>41</sup> HIA TM/43/4, Muturi, untitled paper, July 1968, 3; enclosed with Muturi to Mboya, 5 July 1968.

<sup>42</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7140, Special Branch, 'The Communist Offensive Against Kenya: A Review of the Period December 1957-October 1962', 29 November 1962, 4-8.

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3 America may accept gifts from me and likewise I can accept gifts and other assistance  
4 from him.<sup>43</sup> By August 1963, Odinga was thought by the British to have received  
5 'several hundred thousand pounds' from Communist governments. But the British also  
6 recognised that he was no communist: 'Odinga and his group neither understand nor  
7 have any particular sympathy for Marxist-Leninist ideology,' one official wrote.<sup>44</sup>  
8  
9 Philemon Otieno, a student in Budapest, accurately characterised Odinga in 1967: 'Well,  
10 a trader is a trader. He can only go where his things can find [an] easy market.'<sup>45</sup>  
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18 As Odinga set about establishing the scholarship programmes, the need for the  
19 establishment of outposts along the route from Nairobi to Europe was essential. There  
20 were no direct flights connecting Kenya to any communist state and travel to such  
21 countries was banned for Kenyan Africans. The first and most important of these  
22 outposts was established in Cairo. Already strong after the 1952 revolution, Egyptian  
23 support for Kenyan nationalism strengthened after the Suez crisis. The Kenya Office, a  
24 base for Kenyan political exiles in Cairo, was founded in 1958. Its founders, Odhiambo  
25 Okello and Wera Ambitho, had been awarded scholarships at Italian universities but  
26 were refused permission to travel by the colonial government. With Abdulla Karungo  
27 Kinyariro, a former Mau Mau fighter, they instead made the long journey overland from  
28 Kenya to Cairo, where they began their studies and set up the office to look after those  
29 that followed their path.<sup>46</sup> Within just a few months of its opening, the Kenya Office  
30 had helped eight students travel to communist countries as Okello, in particular, built up  
31 links with universities in Leningrad and Leipzig.<sup>47</sup>  
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50 <sup>43</sup> O. Odinga, 'Let the People of Kenya, Africa and the World Know,' June 1962, 10.

51 <sup>44</sup> TNA: PRO FO 1110/1704, 'Indication of an Early Swing to Left in Kenya,' 12 August  
52 1963, 4.

53 <sup>45</sup> HIA TM/43/9, Otieno to Mboya, 21 April 1967.

54 <sup>46</sup> Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru*, 186-7.

55 <sup>47</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7140, Special Branch, 'The Communist Offensive Against  
56 Kenya: A Review of the Period December 1957-October 1962', 29 November 1962, 4-8.  
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3 The second staging post for Kenyan students on their way to Eastern Europe  
4 was, briefly, the imperial metropole. Odinga's supporters among the Kenyan student  
5 body in Britain, most notably Barudi Nabwera and Stanley Ngombu Njururi, gained  
6 control of the Kenya Students' Association (KSA) in London for a year from mid-1960.<sup>48</sup>  
7  
8 The KSA had close ties to the Committee of African Organisations (CAO), which was in  
9 turn linked to the British Communist Party and hence provided KSA with its  
10 connections to the universities in Eastern Europe to which Kenyan students were to be  
11 sent.<sup>49</sup> The Odinga faction lost control of the KSA in London, but to no great  
12 consequence for the scholarship programme. After Tanganyikan independence in  
13 December 1961, Dar es Salaam became another important entrepôt. Vicky Gillan  
14 Wachira, a leader of the radical Kenya Trade Union Congress and supporter of Odinga,  
15 arranged more than thirty scholarships from the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and  
16 Poland during visits to the city.<sup>50</sup>  
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30 By 1961, the network connecting Kenya to Eastern and Central Europe through  
31 Cairo and London or Dar es Salaam was vital to the success of Odinga's scholarship  
32 programme. It allowed Kenyans to escape British efforts to stop 'students where  
33 possible from going behind the curtain.'<sup>51</sup> The colonial authorities' efforts meant that  
34 passport applications by students wishing to travel to Eastern and Central Europe were  
35 refused until November 1962.<sup>52</sup> Students suspected of providing false explanations for  
36 needing travel documents had their passports seized. Three such students were, for  
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46 <sup>48</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7140, Special Branch, 'The Communist Offensive Against  
47 Kenya: A Review of the Period December 1957-October 1962', 29 November 1962, 8.

48 <sup>49</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/6296, Director of Intelligence & Security, 'Kenya Connections  
49 with Anti-Colonial Organisations in the United Kingdom: Review of the Period 1.7.59-  
50 31.12.59', 23 January 1960, 1 & 'Review of the Period 1.1.59-30.6.59', 30 July 1959.

51 <sup>50</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/6950, Wadeley to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence, 13  
52 May 1963, 1-2.

53 <sup>51</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7124, Macleod to Renison, 4 January 1961.

54 <sup>52</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7141, Renison to Macleod, 7 December 1960; CO 822/2650,  
55 'Extract from Minutes of 54<sup>th</sup> (Routine) Meeting of Kenyan Council of Ministers,' 14  
56 November 1962.  
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3 example, stopped at Nairobi's airport as they were about to board a flight to Zurich on  
4  
5 12 December 1960.<sup>53</sup>  
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7         Despite these barriers, by late 1962 there were at least 280 Kenyan students  
8  
9 spread across Eastern and Central Europe, with 82 in the U.S.S.R. alone.<sup>54</sup> They made  
10  
11 remarkable journeys in their efforts to escape British restrictions. Departures had to be  
12  
13 abrupt; Edward Kamau simply 'disappeared' in September 1963. He resurfaced nine  
14  
15 months later, having travelled to Poland in the meantime.<sup>55</sup> In order to preserve the  
16  
17 secrecy of the operation, often not even the students were told before leaving their  
18  
19 homes in Kenya where their final destination was.<sup>56</sup> Stephen Macharia's experience was  
20  
21 typical. He was promised a scholarship at an unspecified European university, given a  
22  
23 letter from introduction signed by Odinga and instructed to travel overland to Cairo via  
24  
25 Kampala and Khartoum. Once in Cairo, the Kenya Office issued Macharia with a plane  
26  
27 ticket and Czechoslovakian visa. He flew to Prague and then on to Holesow in Southern  
28  
29 Moravia on 18 September 1961. The whole journey took three weeks.<sup>57</sup> Somali and  
30  
31 Tanganyikan independence in 1960 and 1961 respectively further widened the range of  
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33 possible departure points.<sup>58</sup> Others took a ship from Ethiopia to Yugoslavia.<sup>59</sup> Some  
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35 students even first travelled by ship to India before an onward journey by plane to  
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37 Eastern Europe.  
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44 <sup>53</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7141, Renison to Macleod, 13 December 1960.

45 <sup>54</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7140, Special Branch, 'The Communist Offensive Against  
46 Kenya: A Review of the Period December 1957-October 1962', 29 November 1962, 10  
47 & Appendix C.

48 <sup>55</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7141, Cumber to Director of Intelligence, 17 April 1963.

49 <sup>56</sup> TNA: PRO CO 822/2650, 'Extract from Minutes 41<sup>st</sup> Meeting Kenya Council of  
50 Ministers,' 19 September 1962, 1.

51 <sup>57</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7124, Chancery, British Embassy, Prague to Northern  
52 Department, Foreign Office, 6 December 1961.

53 <sup>58</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7124, Swann to Armitage-Smith, 18 January 1962.

54 <sup>59</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7090, Manby, 'Chinese Influence on Africa and in Particular on  
55 Kenya', undated enclosure to Manby to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence, 6  
56 August 1960.  
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3 A year before independence, Odinga successfully persuaded the colonial  
4 government to abandon its opposition to offers of scholarships from Eastern and  
5 Central Europe.<sup>60</sup> His victory appeared to mark a new era of student mobility that  
6  
7 matched KANU's declared stance of non-alignment. Within months of independence,  
8  
9 the new government accepted scholarships offered from Romania and Yugoslavia and  
10  
11 authorised a student exchange programme between the University College in Nairobi  
12  
13 (later University of Nairobi) and the U.S.S.R.'s Students' Union.<sup>61</sup> 200 students left  
14  
15 Kenya for the U.S.S.R. in 1964 on scheduled flights and with the knowledge of  
16  
17 government ministers.<sup>62</sup> However, the mobility of Kenya's students remained highly  
18  
19 politicized.  
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26 Once the management of scholarships could be conducted in the open, the selection  
27  
28 processes used to award scholarships provoked much controversy among the rival  
29  
30 factions in KANU. Supporters of Mboya and Odinga accused one another of using  
31  
32 scholarships to reward allies and to construct patronage networks. George Sedda,  
33  
34 Odinga's close ally, told British intelligence sources, that Odinga intended to use the  
35  
36 scholarships to 'build around himself a group of well-trained professional politicians  
37  
38 whom he could use after Kenya became independent.'<sup>63</sup> His efforts to do so were  
39  
40 thwarted to some degree by committees within KANU and, later, the cabinet, which  
41  
42 exerted central control of the offer of all scholarships by both Mboya and Odinga.<sup>64</sup>  
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48 <sup>60</sup> TNA: PRO CO 822/2650, 'Extract from Minutes of 54<sup>th</sup> (Routine) Meeting of Kenyan  
49 Council of Ministers,' 14 November 1962.

50 <sup>61</sup> HIA TM/41/6; Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet Committee, 4 August 1964.

51 <sup>62</sup> HIA TM/41/6; Comments by the Minister for Education on Cabinet Paper No. CAB  
52 (65) 302, June 1965.

53 <sup>63</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7124, Stierer to anonymous, 29 August 1962.

54 <sup>64</sup> Minutes of the pre-independence Kenya Overseas Scholarship Advisory Committee  
55 are in TNA: PRO CO 822/2650 and HIA TM/42/1; minutes of the post-independence  
56 Cabinet Committee on Scholarships can be found in HIA TM/41/6.  
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3 Ministers and civil servants took decisions on such funding largely on the basis of the  
4 academic quality of the applicant. But prior political connections to KANU's leaders  
5 certainly did not harm the chances of certain applicants being successful. Mukiria Muturi  
6 won funding to study in Warsaw from 1962. Raised in the heartland of the Mau Mau  
7 rebellion in Karatina, Nyeri, he had been involved in nationalist politics since his  
8 schooldays. Expelled from school and placed under police surveillance, his local MP,  
9 Joseph Mathenge, found him a place to complete his schooling in Mombasa. On leaving  
10 school, Muturi joined KANU and became an active member of the party's Youth Wing.  
11 This connection, coupled with his strong academic record, led to him securing his Polish  
12 scholarship through the Kenya Office in Cairo.<sup>65</sup>  
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24 For the most part, applicants to the scholarship programmes were not much  
25 concerned about the political orientation of their future homes. James Karani from Thika  
26 was 'highly interested in education and would be very much like [sic] to further it at least  
27 in America, Europe, Canada, Ethiopia, West Germany, Cairo and Moscow etc.'<sup>66</sup> The  
28 primary motivation for travel was to gain a degree, not to make a statement of political  
29 sympathies. Joseph Kinyanjui at Sofia State University wrote, 'I am only here for my  
30 studies.'<sup>67</sup> Students therefore travelled to wherever funding seemed available, which  
31 made the generous stipends offered in Eastern and Central Europe particularly attractive.  
32 In 1961, Alfred Ngata abandoned his studies in engineering at the City of London  
33 College, where he worked part-time in order to make ends meet, to take up a scholarship  
34 at Łodz University.<sup>68</sup> Patrick Morage and Rahab Wambui had both declined American  
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52 <sup>65</sup> HIA TM/43/4, Muturi to Mboya, 27 January 1968.

53 <sup>66</sup> HIA TM/48/4; Karani to Mboya, 13 November 1962.

54 <sup>67</sup> HIA TM/43/2, Joseph Kinyanjui to Tom Mboya, 5 May 1965.

55 <sup>68</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7124, Consular Section, British Embassy, Warsaw to Consular  
56 Department, Foreign Office, 15 December 1961.  
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3 scholarships because they had insufficient funds to meet living costs in the U.S. before  
4 winning scholarships in 1962 to study at Sofia State University.<sup>69</sup>  
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7 Many of the students were transformed by their experiences overseas, particularly  
8 the few women involved. In Kenya, the colonial state's modernisation project in the  
9 1950s had encouraged their domesticity.<sup>70</sup> Winifred Mshingo was, therefore, delighted by  
10 the opportunities presented to her as a science student at Moscow State University.  
11 During a meeting with a delegation of visiting Kenyan politicians led by Odinga in  
12 August 1962, Mshingo 'condemned the western education of women based on domestic  
13 sciences and crafts which she said could not be of any use in Kenya at the present time.'<sup>71</sup>  
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16 For other students, events back home continued to dominate political debate.  
17 Of particular importance was the personal struggle for influence between Mboya and  
18 Odinga, but also between the wider and differing approaches to development and  
19 foreign policy adopted by the two leaders. In Moscow in 1966, for example, the sons of  
20 Odinga and his ally Achieng' Oneko led 'campaigning against students from South  
21 Nyanza [Mboya's ancestral home] because we have refused to support their policies.'<sup>72</sup>  
22 In his role as the general secretary of the Federation of Kenya Students in Europe in  
23 1968, Muturi, the former Youth Wing member we met above, proved to be both an  
24 active participant and well placed observer of the political divisions among his  
25 compatriots in Eastern and Central Europe. Although Odinga's supporters were largely  
26 successful in dominating Kenyan student organisations, Muturi found that many ordinary  
27 members of these organisations 'were disgusted' by the machinations of their more  
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49 <sup>69</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7124, untitled file note, British Legation, Sofia, 25 October  
50 1962.

51 <sup>70</sup> A. Wipper, 'The Maendeleo ya Wanwake Movement in the Colonial Period: The  
52 Canadian Connection, Mau Mau, Embroidery and Agriculture', *Rural Africana*, 29 (1975-  
53 6), 195-214.

54 <sup>71</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7140, Wadeley to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence, 3  
55 August 1962, 2.

56 <sup>72</sup> HIA TM/43/2, Kokeyo to Mboya, 28 October 1966.  
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3 radical compatriots. Others still remained silent, rather than ‘risking the confidence of  
4 their colleagues and their communist masters.’ ‘There was,’ Muturi noted, ‘much more  
5 to be learnt by remaining “loyal.”’<sup>73</sup>  
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9 Many Kenyan students were no doubt unwilling to risk their places at university  
10 and scholarships by becoming involved in political debates of the sort that preoccupied  
11 Mukuri. After all, Kenyan students were generally satisfied with their new lives in  
12 Eastern and Central Europe. They found their hosts to be welcoming and their stipends  
13 generous.<sup>74</sup> Although gleefully reported by both the Western press and diplomats, most  
14 attempts at indoctrination by their hosts were low-key.<sup>75</sup> There were, however, some  
15 recurring complaints from the students. Some were unavoidable problems to do with  
16 money, family, homesickness, and love.<sup>76</sup> Compulsory instruction in languages Kenyans  
17 thought would be useless to them when they returned home after graduation was a  
18 persistent source of discontent among the students.<sup>77</sup> Those studying for professional  
19 qualifications were also frequently concerned about the recognition their degrees, such as  
20 in law, would receive on their return home. As two law students at Sofia State  
21 University, John Njiru and Joseph Osero, put it, ‘We cannot afford 5 long years here at  
22 the end of which [we] would bring home ideas corruptible to our young nation.’<sup>78</sup> Such  
23 relatively petty concerns were escalated when more substantial problems arose, such as in  
24 Sofia in February 1963.  
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45 <sup>73</sup> HIA TM/43/4, Muturi, untitled paper, July 1968, 2; enclosed with Muturi to Mboya, 5  
46 July 1968.

47 <sup>74</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7124, Stierer to anonymous, 29 August 1962;  
48 FO 1110/2001, D. Beattie, ‘The Patrice Lumumba People’s Friendship University,’ 11  
49 January 1965, p.3.; M. Matusevich, ‘Probing the Limits of Internationalism: African  
50 Students Confront Soviet Ritual’, *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 27, 2 (2009), 20-1.

51 <sup>75</sup> TNA: PRO FO 1110/1735, Z. Korentchevksy, ‘Indoctrination of African Students in  
52 the USSR,’ 21 December 1962.

53 <sup>76</sup> For such correspondence with students, including a significant number studying in  
54 Eastern and Central Europe, see the various folders in HIA TM/42 & 43.

55 <sup>77</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7124, Maudling to Renison, 16 December 1961.

56 <sup>78</sup> HIA TM/43/8, Njiru & Osero to Minister for Education, 21 January 1964.  
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3 Sixty Kenyan students travelled to Bulgaria in the autumn of 1962 to take up  
4  
5 scholarships arranged by Kenyatta prior to his rejection of non-alignment as the basis for  
6  
7 Kenya's foreign policy.<sup>79</sup> Many of the students were dismayed to discover that Sofia was  
8  
9 their final destination. As some members of the group later told British diplomats, 'they  
10  
11 had simply been offered [a] chance of studying "in Europe."' The students were further  
12  
13 perturbed when they spent the first five months of their time in the country learning  
14  
15 Bulgarian.<sup>80</sup> Others were distressed when forced to undergo compulsory military  
16  
17 training.<sup>81</sup> The Kenyan students were therefore already discontented when a much  
18  
19 bigger crisis emerged.  
20

21  
22 Over several days in early February, a significant dispute built up between  
23  
24 African students seeking formal representation and the university authorities and  
25  
26 government. Around 200 students took to the streets on 12 February to protest against  
27  
28 the authorities' stubborn refusal to allow them to select their own representative. The  
29  
30 protestors, including 14 Kenyans, were attacked by the police and non-uniformed  
31  
32 members of the security forces. Forty students were arrested, but swiftly released.  
33  
34 Following the intervention of the Ghanaian ambassador, the Bulgarian government  
35  
36 agreed to let all students who wished to leave the country to do so.<sup>82</sup> Forty-nine of the  
37  
38 Kenyans decided to do so.<sup>83</sup> Most went to West Germany, where the Kenyan  
39  
40 government in the final weeks of colonial rule arranged scholarships for some. A  
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45 <sup>79</sup> U.S. National Archives II College Park (NACP), CIA Records Search Tool (CREST),  
46 Central Intelligence Agency, 'Independent Kenya's Prospects Under Jomo Kenyatta,' 3  
47 December 1963, 8.

48 <sup>80</sup> TNA: PRO FO 1110/1735, Noble to Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 6 March  
49 1963.

50 <sup>81</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7124, Wadeley to A.2 & Minister of Defence, 4 March 1963;  
51 TNA: PRO FCO 141/7141, Wadeley to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence, 10  
52 April 1963; 1-4.

53 <sup>82</sup> TNA: PRO FO 1110/1735, Lincoln to Home, 19 February 1963.

54 <sup>83</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7141, Wadeley to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence, 10  
55 April 1963; 1-4; *The Times*, 'African Students Leave Sofia over Discrimination' (15  
56 February 1963), 7.  
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3 handful of Kenyans were admitted to American colleges.<sup>84</sup> Njenga, Mboya's assassin,  
4  
5 was one of the students sent later in 1963 to replace this first cohort in Bulgaria.  
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7 A similar episode occurred in Azerbaijan over eight days in early April 1965,  
8  
9 when 29 Kenyan students mounted a protest at the main railway station of Baku,  
10  
11 Azerbaijan. The city was home to more than 80 Kenyan students, one of the largest  
12  
13 such concentrations in the U.S.S.R. at the time. They expected to stay in Baku for six  
14  
15 years, but after just six months the protestors wanted to go home. The Kenyans were  
16  
17 denied service in restaurants and 'if we tried to dance with a Russian girl in a club we  
18  
19 were beaten off.' According to one of the students, Nicholas Nyangira, 'the Russian  
20  
21 people in Baku showed open hatred of the Africans and waylaid some of them with  
22  
23 sticks and clubs.' The students were also disgruntled with the year-long, compulsory  
24  
25 preparatory classes in Russian language and Soviet history and culture. According to  
26  
27 Nyangira, these classes resembled 'more of [an] indoctrination camp than a university.  
28  
29 Most of our studies were taken up with brainwashing and learning the Communist  
30  
31 doctrine.'<sup>85</sup>  
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34 The tipping point in Baku came in April 1965 with the accidental death of a  
35  
36 Ghanaian student, not the first such incident in the U.S.S.R. Near-identical  
37  
38 circumstances provoked a major protest in Moscow in 1963.<sup>86</sup> The Kenyan students in  
39  
40 Baku in 1965 believed the university authorities were responsible for the death of their  
41  
42 Ghanaian colleague. The 29 protestors packed their belongings, made their way to the  
43  
44 railway station and waited until the authorities would let them leave. They ignored pleas  
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46 from the Kenyan ambassador to the U.S.S.R. and the Soviet authorities. After more than  
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52 <sup>84</sup> HIA TM/43/5, Mbori & Muriuki to Minister for Justice, 21 April 1964.

53 <sup>85</sup> NACP, Record Group (RG) 59, Records of Bureau of African Affairs (RBAA) 1958-  
54 66, POL 2 Kenya Political Affairs & Relations, Kenya-USSR, Hogan to State  
55 Department, 7 April 1965.

56 <sup>86</sup> Hessler, 'Death of an African Student.'  
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3 a week, they were allowed to depart.<sup>87</sup> As with their compatriots who left Sofia two years  
4 earlier, the publicity surrounding the Kenyan students who fled from Baku led to the  
5 award of scholarships to other universities in the West. Nyangira later completed his  
6  
7 PhD at Syracuse before becoming one of Kenya's leading political scientists.  
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11 As events in Sofia and Baku illustrate, Kenyan students were as restless, agitated  
12 and distrustful of authority abroad as they had been in decolonizing Kenya. As the  
13 Soviet ambassador to Kenya noted of those involved in the Baku incident, 'this group of  
14 the Kenya students have misbehaved since the very first day of their arrival in Baku...'<sup>88</sup>  
15  
16 The pluralism of political views among the Kenyan students frustrated other hosts. The  
17 East German authorities cancelled a planned congress of Kenyan students from across  
18 Europe to be held in East Berlin in July 1968. The congress' organisers - including  
19 Mukiria Muturi (see above) and Odinga's son and future political leader, Raila - were  
20 summoned to Berlin to be admonished. The East German authorities were angered at  
21 the fact that supporters of the 'reactionary and neo-colonialist KANU' were invited and  
22 'the inclusion of a pro-Chinese theme to the congress main papers, "cultural revolution  
23 in Kenya."' As Muturi wrote, Kenyan students across the communist states of Europe  
24 'seemed to have baffled if not completely confused many' of the figures in authority that  
25 they encountered.<sup>89</sup>  
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41 The creative, disruptive political energy exhibited by the students overseas had  
42 been an important part of the anti-colonial movement that toppled British rule in Kenya  
43 in December 1963. It gave the likes of Mboya and Odinga confidence that Kenyans  
44 could remake relations with the wider world in this period. Writing in early 1963, Mboya  
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51 <sup>87</sup> HIA TM 41/6; untitled statement by U.S.S.R. Embassy to Kenya, June 1965; NACP  
52 RG 59 RBAA POL 2 Kenya Political Affairs and Relations, Kenya-USSR, Hogan to  
53 State Department, 7 April 1965.

54 <sup>88</sup> HIA TM 41/6; untitled statement by U.S.S.R. Embassy to Kenya, June 1965.

55 <sup>89</sup> HIA TM 43/4, Muturi, untitled paper, July 1968, 2; enclosed with Muturi to Mboya, 5  
56 July 1968.  
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3 thought Kenya was 'on the threshold of a wide-open future which we will determine in  
4 full ourselves.'<sup>90</sup> But the Kenyan students in Baku, Sofia and other cities around the  
5 world discovered that the apparently limitless range of opportunities described by Mboya  
6 was more constrained than they initially appreciated. Most obviously, their mobility  
7 exposed Kenyans abroad to new forms of racism besides that of their former colonial  
8 rulers. However, the students would have been more surprised to discover on their  
9 return home that their new rulers felt just as threatened by their mobility as the colonial  
10 regime had been. The students' capacity for dissent irritated their Soviet and Bulgarian  
11 hosts, but scared their own national government.  
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24 The students educated in Eastern and Central Europe could hardly have had a more  
25 different experience of their return home from that of their compatriots educated in the  
26 U.S. On their return, the American graduates dominated public life in the post-colonial  
27 era with the graduates of British universities and those of Makerere. As MPs, cabinet  
28 ministers, senior civil servants, newspaper editors, business leaders and cultural figures,  
29 they benefitted most from the fruits of independence. The students in Eastern and  
30 Central Europe expected to emulate them.  
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39 Writing in February 1966 from his dormitory in Sofia, R.W.D. Kiggathi, foresaw  
40 a future for himself 'in which I will be helping to build the Nation.'<sup>91</sup> A few individuals  
41 educated in Eastern and Central Europe did so: Mukiria Muturi, for instance, later  
42 became chief economist in the office of the vice-president. But such examples were  
43 isolated. Instead, this group of graduates were almost entirely absent from elite national  
44 politics, the civil service, the media and the boardrooms of large domestic and  
45 multinational companies. By 1972, the reality was revealed by the regularly updated  
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55 <sup>90</sup> T. Mboya, *Freedom and After* (London 1963), 255.

56 <sup>91</sup> HIA TM/43/2, Kiggathi to Mboya, 9 February 1966.  
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3 biographies of leading personalities maintained by the British High Commission. Among  
4 the more than 150 lawyers, MPs, ministers, military officers, businessmen and other  
5 figures who dominated public life under Kenyatta, just one – Matthew Ogutu, who  
6 studied journalism in Czechoslovakia and became a MP in 1969 – had been educated in  
7 Eastern or Central Europe.<sup>92</sup>

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13 The failure of the likes of Kiggathi to reap the rewards of their education was  
14 partly a reflection of the legacies of colonial attitudes towards the education given to  
15 African students in Eastern and Central Europe; one British official believed it was ‘of  
16 no academic standard.’<sup>93</sup> But such concerns about the quality of the education received in  
17 Europe were, at least in part, misplaced. As the University of Nairobi’s registrar,  
18 Solomon Karanja, acknowledged to British diplomats, degrees in the sciences ‘were  
19 certainly the equal of any in the West.’ The quality of arts degrees awarded in Eastern  
20 and Central Europe, however, ‘were little higher than “A” levels in Britain.’<sup>94</sup> Far more  
21 significant to any effort to understand the exclusion from public life of the graduates  
22 from Europe was the course of Kenyan politics that occurred while they were overseas.

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34 The political significance of the students in Eastern and Central Europe was  
35 transformed between 1963 and 1965, largely because of their association with military  
36 training. The spectre of the Congo loomed large in KANU’s planning for independence.  
37 A particular fear of the political effects of British influence upon the military was widely  
38 shared by many Kenyans. Indeed, as late as December 1964, in its coverage of Kenyan  
39 military cadets in Bulgaria, the main Swahili-language daily newspaper *Taija Leo* remarked

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54 <sup>92</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 31/1192, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, ‘Leading Personalities  
55 in Kenya, 1972’.

56 <sup>93</sup> TNA: PRO FO 1110/2123; Doherty to Deputy High Commissioner, 28 June 1966.

57 <sup>94</sup> TNA: PRO FO 1110/2123, Harney to Doherty, 5 September 1966.

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3 that such training was necessary to 'guard our country on their return against the sort of  
4  
5 military aggression which there has been in the Congo.'<sup>95</sup>  
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7         Such rhetoric was part of mainstream African nationalist politics in the early  
8  
9 1960s, and for good reason. Kenyatta shared these concerns while British officials  
10  
11 remained implacably opposed to his leadership of an independent Kenya. He therefore  
12  
13 sanctioned Odinga to use his connections in Eastern and Central Europe to establish  
14  
15 training programmes for military cadets.<sup>96</sup> Approximately 400 students were sent abroad  
16  
17 for this training.<sup>97</sup> As Odinga later explained, he and Kenyatta had agreed to the policy  
18  
19 'because, before Independence, Britain would not agree to grant facilities for the training  
20  
21 of African officers.'<sup>98</sup> Those in the academies understood well the reasons for their  
22  
23 training. As one Kenyan airman training in Egypt put it, the British military officers who  
24  
25 remained in post after independence retained 'some colonial mentality, and they are  
26  
27 those who believed that an African cannot become a pilot, and that is why they did not  
28  
29 train Africans as pilots.'<sup>99</sup>  
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32         Although clandestine until independence, little effort was made after  
33  
34 independence to hide the fact that Kenyan students were receiving military training  
35  
36 abroad. Not only was this reported in press, as we saw above, but also discussed in  
37  
38 government. In January 1965, Oluande K'Oduol, a key ally of Odinga, wrote to all  
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40 KANU MPs and the Ministry of Defence to remind them of the 88 named Kenyans,  
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50 <sup>95</sup> Untitled article in *Taiifa Leo*, 3 December 1964; clipping attached to TNA PRO: FO  
51 1110/2123, Thomas to Hervey, 6 June 1966.

52 <sup>96</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 141/7140, Special Branch, 'The Communist Offensive Against  
53 Kenya: A Review of the Period December 1957-October 1962', 29 November 1962, 13.

54 <sup>97</sup> TNA: PRO FO 1110/2123, Peck to Scott, 13 May 1966.

55 <sup>98</sup> Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru*, 277.

56 <sup>99</sup> HIA TM/43/8, [Illegible] Nyandega to Mboya, 4 September 1964.  
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3 including Njenga, sent by Odinga to Bulgaria in late 1963 'so as to plan their absorption  
4  
5 into the Kenya Army on return.'<sup>100</sup>  
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7         Such plans did not materialise. British policy in Kenya had a volte face and the  
8  
9 last colonial governor, Malcolm MacDonald, embraced Kenyatta as the only feasible  
10  
11 leader of the new nation. Faced with a mutiny shortly after independence and the  
12  
13 irredentist threat by Somalis living along the north eastern border, Kenyatta embraced  
14  
15 British military support. From being feared in 1960, continued British military  
16  
17 involvement in Kenya's politics was essential to the survival of Kenyatta's government  
18  
19 by 1964.<sup>101</sup> Over the same period, Kenyatta's relationship with Odinga cooled as his  
20  
21 minister for home affairs and then vice president became one of the government's  
22  
23 fiercest critics. Odinga's foreign support became ever more significant to substance of  
24  
25 everyday politics. By 1965, Mboya wrote, 'The biggest issue at the moment seems to be  
26  
27 developing into the ideological and cold war differences...'<sup>102</sup> The divisions between  
28  
29 Mboya, Odinga and Kenyatta had the capacity to turn violent: Pio Gama Pinto, one of  
30  
31 Odinga's closest allies was assassinated in February 1965 and within weeks somewhat  
32  
33 outlandish rumours of a coup led by Odinga were widely reported. Odinga left the  
34  
35 government and ruling party in 1966. The position of the students sent abroad to  
36  
37 receive military training thus shifted accordingly. Once a bulwark against neo-imperial  
38  
39 intervention of the sort seen to such terrible effect in Congo, the students became  
40  
41 considered by the government to be a threat to the relationship with Britain and hence  
42  
43 disowned.  
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49 <sup>100</sup> HIA TM 4/5; Lumumba Institute, 'List of Kenya Cadets Undergoing Three Year  
50 Military Training in Bulgaria (1963-1966),' 29 January 1965.

51 <sup>101</sup> P. Cullen, *Kenya and Britain after Independence: Beyond Neo-Colonialism* (Basingstoke 2017);  
52 W. Maloba, *Kenyatta and Britain: An Account of Political Transformation, 1929-1963*  
53 (Basingstoke 2018) 223-72; T. Parsons, 'The Lanet Incident, 2-25 January 1964: Military  
54 Unrest and National Amnesia in Kenya,' *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 40,  
55 1 (2007), 51-70.

56 <sup>102</sup> HIA TM/44/4, Mboya to Okeyo, 22 July 1965.  
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3 As members of this group began to return home from late 1964 onwards, their  
4 movements were reported as part of a broader effort to chronicle Odinga's alleged  
5 subversive activities. Kenyan, British and American intelligence sources carefully  
6 monitored their arrivals and warned Kenyatta that Odinga intended to deploy these  
7 students in a coup against the government.<sup>103</sup> From November 1965, the students  
8 receiving military training in Eastern and Central Europe received letters from the  
9 Kenyan government advising them to transfer on to regular degree courses in their host  
10 country or to make alternative plans to study elsewhere.<sup>104</sup> Finally, the Kenyan  
11 government ordered the Bulgarian authorities to immediately cease any military training  
12 for Kenyan students in May 1966.<sup>105</sup>

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24 The graduates with military training were unsurprisingly immediately barred from  
25 recruitment to the Kenyan armed forces or police. But the government's effort to  
26 marginalise the graduates from Eastern and Central Europe went further to encompass  
27 all, regardless of whether or not they had received military training. As one British  
28 diplomat noted after conversations with Davidson Ngini, the deputy director of  
29 personnel for the Kenyan civil service, 'the government's prejudice against these  
30 students has created a general climate of disapprobation for Bloc qualifications among  
31 officials and employers who are chary of getting their fingers burnt.'<sup>106</sup> Engineers,  
32 medics, chemists, and other graduates fell victim to the fear of the political consequences  
33 that their recruitment to influential roles in the public eye would provoke from the  
34 government.

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<sup>103</sup> TNA: PRO DO 213/159, British Land Forces Kenya to Ministry of Defence, 12 October 1964; D. Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2012* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London 2012), 47-52; P. Cullen, 'Operation Binnacle: British Plans for Military Intervention Against a 1965 Coup in Kenya,' *The International History Review*, 39, 5 (2017), 791-809.

<sup>104</sup> TNA: PRO FO 1110/2123, Thomas to Hervey, 6 June 1966.

<sup>105</sup> TNA: PRO FO 1110/2123, Peck to Scott, 13 May 1966.

<sup>106</sup> TNA: PRO FO 1110/2123, Harney to Doherty, 5 September 1966.

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3 For the graduates, this exclusion from public life was a cause of significant  
4 grievance and their complaints to various government ministries were commonplace.<sup>107</sup>  
5  
6 While Odinga's faction remained part of the KANU government, they had some  
7 champions in power. In June 1965, cabinet ministers 'expressed concern over the way  
8 returning students from Socialist countries are received by employers including  
9 Government and felt that their employment facilities should be similar to those of  
10 students returning from other parts of the world, provided the returning students have  
11 comparable standards of Education.'<sup>108</sup> But Odinga and his supporters were out of  
12 KANU and government in 1966. He instead established the Kenya People's Union  
13 (KPU). But the new party's supporters faced repression, its leaders harassed and  
14 detained and the party was eventually banned in 1969. In Moscow, about 50 Kenyan  
15 students marked the KPU's demise with a protest at the Kenyan embassy. The building  
16 was damaged and the ambassador attacked.<sup>109</sup> It was the last act of Kenya's radical  
17 students abroad. From 1966 onwards, the award of scholarships lay solely in the hands  
18 of the government and Odinga was unable to exert any influence on the process. By the  
19 end of 1969, Kenya's Cold War was in effect over. Kenyatta's pro-British faction was  
20 victorious in its battles with its rivals; Odinga was defeated and Mboya dead. Students  
21 continued to travel overseas after 1969 in significant numbers, but to no great political  
22 effect.  
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43 Many of the graduates who had already returned to Kenya would have  
44 sympathised with the anger of the protestors outside the embassy in Moscow. The  
45 students' experience of exclusion on their return combined with their intellectual  
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51 <sup>107</sup> NACP, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files 1970-1973, Political & Defense, McIlvaine to  
52 State Department, 8 April 1970, 2. See also Leonard, *African Successes*, 62-3 and Sandgren,  
53 *Mau Mau's Children*, 90-1.

54 <sup>108</sup> HIA TM 41/6; Minutes of the Cabinet Committee on Scholarships, 29 June 1965.

55 <sup>109</sup> NACP RG59, box 2257, POL 13, US Embassy Moscow to State Department, 27  
56 October 1969.  
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3 development while studying overseas to create a new strand of leftist dissidence and  
4 opposition within Kenyan politics. The 200 or so students with military training who  
5 had returned by mid-1966 were swiftly recruited into the ranks of Odinga's supporters.<sup>110</sup>  
6  
7 All seven of the Kenyan lecturers recruited by the Lumumba Institute and intended by  
8 Odinga to train KANU activists had attended the Moscow Institute of Social Science.<sup>111</sup>  
9  
10 One of the periodic waves of arrests of KPU activists netted Israel Otieno in early 1969.  
11  
12 Otieno was a close aide to Odinga and had studied in North Korea. The next day, five  
13 further close supporters of Odinga were arrested at Kakamega for carrying banned  
14 literature, which in this case included writings by Mao. All had been students in China.<sup>112</sup>  
15  
16 This tradition of dissidence survived the demise of the KPU. Kipkurui arap Langat, one  
17 of the plotters in another ill-fated conspiracy uncovered in 1971, had studied in both  
18 Czechoslovakia and Moscow and was recruited into the conspiracy due to his close ties  
19 to the Soviet embassy in Nairobi.<sup>113</sup> It was not until the democratization of the 1990s  
20 that the individuals educated in Eastern and Central Europe could play major roles in  
21 public life, most notably Odinga's son, Raila. In their absence, the graduates from the  
22 U.S. worked with those from the U.K., Kenya and Makerere to create the modern  
23 Kenyan state.  
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41 Student mobility was a key part of Kenya's experience of decolonization and the Cold  
42 War. It was through such mechanisms, together with broadcasting and print media, that  
43 the global politics of the day permeated into the everyday politics and informed state-  
44 formation in at least this one part of the decolonizing world. The students brought the  
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52 <sup>110</sup> TNA: PRO FO 1110/2123, Peck to Scott, 13 May 1966.

53 <sup>111</sup> TNA: PRO FO 1110/1967, Information Research Department, Foreign Office to  
54 Chancery et al, 22 April 1965.

55 <sup>112</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 31/352, Edis to Peaston, 10 February 1969.

56 <sup>113</sup> TNA: PRO FCO 31/856, Clay to Joy, 10 June 1971; Clay to Foot, 6 June 1971.  
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3 politics of the Cold War back to the towns and villages of Kenya. No less importantly,  
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5 their mobility helped shape the institutions of the new nation-state.  
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7         Martin Thomas and Andrew Thompson have demonstrated how globalization in  
8  
9 the Cold War world disrupted relationships between colonial rulers and subjects in  
10  
11 profound ways.<sup>114</sup> Enterprising intermediaries such as Mboya and Odinga were able to  
12  
13 take advantage of the competing forms of international politics to create unprecedented  
14  
15 opportunities for mobility by Kenyan students in order to further the nationalist cause.  
16  
17 Participation in the political traffic of the age took Kenyans beyond the limits of colonial  
18  
19 control. Their mobility provided them with the agency to shape events in Kenya in ways  
20  
21 that disrupted British authority in the final years of the colonial era. Their experiences  
22  
23 overseas empowered them and showed British power to be anachronistic. Nor were  
24  
25 they any more obedient to the newly ascendant forms of authority they encountered  
26  
27 around the world. Their restlessness, dissent and scepticism of authority forged in the  
28  
29 anti-colonial politics of the 1950s returned home with them.  
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32         Their mobility therefore presented significant challenges to both host countries  
33  
34 and the post-colonial state at home. For one thing, their mobility demonstrated the  
35  
36 limits of freedom in the Cold War world. Following Mboya and Odinga, Kenyan  
37  
38 students thought that they would be the authors of their own history in the future. But  
39  
40 in Sofia, Baku and Moscow - or similar cities in the United States for that matter - their  
41  
42 experiences of racism and petty forms of authoritarianism demonstrated how little had  
43  
44 changed with the onset of decolonization. Their mobility was even more challenging  
45  
46 back home.  
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49         As Joel Quirk and Darshan Vigneswaran write, 'mobility makes states.' They  
50  
51 continue to argue 'that states have been strongly shaped by their efforts to "channel"  
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55 <sup>114</sup> M. Thomas & A. Thompson, 'Empire and Globalization: From 'High Imperialism' to  
56  
57 Decolonisation,' *The International History Review*, 36, 1 (2014), 142-70.  
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3 human mobility: preventing some forms of movement while simultaneously promoting  
4 others.<sup>115</sup> A bigger argument could be made for the validity of this point for post-  
5 colonial Kenya that also included forced displacement in north eastern Kenya as a  
6 counterinsurgency strategy in the 1960s, the resettlement of thousands of African  
7 farmers on land sold by European settlers, the migration of a large proportion of the  
8 country's South Asian population, and the relentless flow of citizens to the towns and  
9 cities. The post-colonial state in Kenya was forged through the mobility of its citizens.  
10  
11 But no form of mobility was as politically charged as that of the 1500 or so students who  
12 travelled to Eastern and Central Europe at this time. They expected to be the nation-  
13 builders, the economic planners and technocrats at the heart of the process of state-  
14 formation. But they found themselves excluded from the vital early stages of this  
15 process, marginalised in favour of their contemporaries who studied in Kenya itself,  
16 neighbouring Uganda, the U.K. and, particularly, the U.S. It was this group that built a  
17 state on the interlocked foundations of private land tenure, foreign investment, a pro-  
18 Western foreign policy, and limited state intervention in society and the economy. It was  
19 exactly these foundations that seemed to Kenya's rulers to be at risk once the students  
20 from Eastern and Central Europe returned home. Their subsequent marginalisation  
21 occurred because the leaders of the new state recognised the potential of their mobility  
22 to 'unmake' as well as make a state.<sup>116</sup>  
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54 <sup>115</sup> J. Quirk & D. Vigneswaran, 'Mobility Makes States,' in Vigneswaran & Quirk (eds),  
55 *Mobility*, 2-3.

56 <sup>116</sup> Gupta, 'Decolonization,' 169-70.  
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