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Possibility and peril: Trade unionism, African Cold War and the global strands of Kenyan decolonization[1]

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On 18 April 1959, Kenya's suave nationalist leader, Tom Mboya, addressed a civil rights rally in Washington D.C., the warm up act for Martin Luther King Jr. At the invitation of senior African-American trade union and civil rights activist, A. Philip Randolph, Mboya delivered an eloquent and measured speech to a rapturous reception from the 20,000 strong crowd at this 'Youth March for Integrated Schools'. His address embodied the deep entanglement of African and global battles for rights, 'the struggle for political freedom, for economic opportunity and for human dignity' as he declared from the podium.[1] A decade later, on 5 July 1969, Mboya was dead, gunned down in broad daylight in a pharmacy on Government Road, one of the capital Nairobi's busiest avenues, in the most sensational of Kenya's infamous postcolonial assassinations. He was just 38 years old.

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Mboya's stellar and tragic political career – mastermind of Kenyan independence, pan-African visionary and African anti-colonial celebrity in America – began in trade unionism. It was an activity with a deep genealogy in Kenya's struggle for liberation. Two decades before, in 1950, at a joint meeting between the East African Indian National Congress and Kenya African Union (KAU) in Nairobi, Makhan Singh, the founder of East Africa's trade unions, took to the stage. Intense and impassioned, Singh demanded in Kiswahili '*Uhuru Sasa!*' ('Freedom Now!), the first public call for full-blooded Kenyan independence from Britain.[2] Decades later, James Beauttah, former leader of KAU, progenitor to independent Kenya's first ruling party, Kenya African National Union (KANU), reminisced that 'these were shocking words at the time to many of the KAU leaders, even though they would not admit it now.'[3] After 11 years in detention – longer than any other freedom fighter under Kenya's 'Mau Mau' Emergency – Singh was shunned by the independent Africanizing state for which he had so indefatigably toiled.

Trade unionism was at the leading edge of African freedom struggle in the 1940s and 1950s. Kenya's historians traditionally fold labor activism into local narratives of urban militancy that culminated in the lodestone of the nation's historiography, Mau Mau.[4] During the confinement of Singh and his radical Kikuyu comrades, up stepped the talented Mboya into the maelstrom of anti-colonial labor politics. This was Mboya's apprenticeship in rapid rise from sanitation inspector to intellectual architect of KANU and its singular capitalistic form of 'African socialism'. What follows in the Kenyanist canon addresses the dark side of the country's post-colonialism. Mboya's threat to an infirm and paranoid President Jomo Kenyatta and the dramatic assassination became a parable for Kenya's introverted, authoritarian statehood. Singh's biographers into the era of democratization in the 1990s and 2000s fillip his life – one that began in India – onto highly local hagiographies of anti-imperial

patriotism and pluralism to claim African autochthony for 'East African Asians' in racially tense post-colonies.[5] Such inward looking Kenyan stories of 'political tribalism' or the 'Asian Question' suppress something more worldly in the nation's journey to post-colonial liberty. The trade unionism that defined the early careers of Singh and Mboya was an arena in which, for a fleeting period, Kenya's future looked to be more globally cosmopolitan and internationalist than would come to pass as Mboya lay dead on a Nairobi shop floor. From the 1940s to 1960s, Kenya had its own peculiar global moment when multiple, and often competing, modes of anti-colonial internationalism nourished freedom movements.[6]

The stranglehold of national and nationalist perspectives loosens as Kenya's civil society activists and historians belatedly round the bend of the global turn. Sana Aiyar and Dan Ojwang unpack the political and cultural spheres of the western Indian Ocean that made Singh and wider Indo-African solidarities, links on which the great Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o reflected positively in later life in a departure from more negative characterizations of 'Asians' in his early novels.[7] David Goldsworthy, Gerald Horne and Daniel Branch expose Kenya's linkages to the United States[8], connections underemphasized in most biographies and the permanent Mboya exhibition in the Kenyan National Archives.[9] The Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective excavate African participation in, and creation of, networks of affinity across the decolonizing world in the 1950s.[10] East Africans need to be even more assiduously centered in world histories of decolonization to shatter encased national accounts and to contemplate the waxing and waning of globalism from one of its subsequently peripheral regions, Kenya. The intersection of trade unionism and nationalism sits at this historiographical frontier.

This article considers international labor networks and anti-colonial trade union activism in Kenya from 1930s to 1960s to explore the entanglement of decolonization

and global Cold War from Africa out.[11] Singh and Mboya were unswervingly committed nationalists in their contrasting styles. But their contributions to, and understandings of, African nationalism were shaped by intense globalisms of political outlook during a time of energetic transnational anti-colonial connection. This story is told in two distinct phases. Through Singh, the paper first charts the importance of Indo-African connectivity and the international left in shaping the first avatar of Kenya's unions up to the early 1950s. From there, a volte-face of orientation saw Kenya align with the social democratic, anti-communist International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), based in Brussels, and affiliated American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), Mboya's key international allies over his early political career. Through such collaboration, Mboya trod the Cold War and pan-African stages to construct a double helix of internationalized trade union and nationalist agitation as Kenya thrust closer to liberation in the late 1950s.

This piece is not principally concerned with the didactic anxieties of these international organizations – the outsider perspectives – over the hearts and minds of workers in the decolonizing world, concerns colored by the bubbling paranoias of the early Cold War. It thinks instead about how mobile African labour leaders themselves co-produced, domesticated and molded such relationships to navigate Cold War networks and institutions to seed possible paths to independence. Singh and Mboya were interlocutors in pluripotent global conversations marshaled for African decolonization. It was a globalist future spectacularly unrealized after Kenyan independence in 1963 as this paper demonstrates in conclusion.

What follows claims two intertwined historiographical contributions. Firstly, and more modestly, it advocates more multivalent, globalist readings of Kenyan labor and decolonization than apparent in the dense scholarship on workers and Mau Mau from the 1980s, and stellar interventions on the intersections of colonial development

and labor politics since the 1990s. It is inspired by Fred Cooper's arguments that dramatic shifts in labor relations in the 1940s forced colonial states to accept the realities of African working-class agitation; that African protest shaped the late-colonial state in the same process as colonialism transformed African labor. In particular, African leaders imbibed universalistic postwar notions of 'development' as they 'engaged substantively with the labor specialists of the colonial state, and subtlety turned the assertion of authority into a claim to rights.' This created a 'changing definition of the possible'. [12]

For Kenya, this article suggests a wider vista of the possible as its trade union leaders, and by some association their wider constituencies, engaged and transformed not just colonial milieu, but also global institutions and networks of affinity from the 1940s onwards. Makhan Singh was a product of the interwar Indian Ocean diasporic world but also an international Marxist one. As Paul Zeleza noted, Mboya and his American suitors shared philosophies on anti-radical politics and modernization.[13] The very appeal of this wider world beyond relations with former colonial masters lay in the possibility of discovering alternative paths to those dictated by economic and political structures inherited from colonial rule. This article moves to a wider global frame from the contingencies of Euro-African contact that underpin groundbreaking work on globalist African decolonization of the last decade.[14]

Secondly, and more ambitiously, what follows addresses the nature of African Cold War; both the interactions of African trade unionists with international organizations and, more importantly, debates between African activists themselves about the nature of these world connections for the independent future. Trade unions were experimental engine rooms for African nationalist possibility, soldering mass grassroots movements to grand African nationalist and pan-African ideology, ideas inextricably entangled with broader geopolitical conflict from the 1940s to 1960s. The

question of affiliation to world trade union federations played out in every decolonizing region, and most theatrically and acrimoniously in Africa, as international labor organizations split down Cold War lines defined in the first and second worlds.

But the orthodox picture drawn of top-down superpower Cold War belligerence pervading labor-nationalist networks in the decolonizing world misses the point in this arena. International labor movements may have been global 'battlegrounds' as conceived from Brussels or Baltimore, but in Cairo or Calcutta they were, for a brief window, also arenas of opportunity for anti-colonial ambitions. Scholarship in the last few years illuminates how postwar African leaders 'used Cold War rhetoric and rivalries to bargain to their advantage' exploiting new political and material possibilities unthinkable during the colonial restrictions of the previous two decades.[15] This challenges work of the 1970 and 1980s, produced during the depths of crisis for post-colonial African statehood, that argued for extremely limited African room for manoeuvre within Cold War environments.[16] Into the 1950s, Africans and Asians, alongside their liberal and socialist suitors from Europe and North America, helped delineate the terms of dialogue at a moment of neo-imperialist peril *and* decolonizing opportunity. This relied on a network of interpersonal connections – face to face contacts, sustained through print and correspondence – across place, race and belief. These intimacies, what Rachel Leow terms 'subaltern internationalisms' in this issue, provide important correctives to the unidirectional geopolitical logics redolent of much Cold War scholarship.[17] Mobility was key, necessitating the clever navigation of expanding late-colonial controls on movement on the part of African activists under colonialism. This personalized access to world networks enabled them to 'breathe in an atmosphere of experimentation and institutional creativity' within the decolonizing world and play on Cold War anxieties to secure support for liberation struggles from allies in Europe, Asia and the Americas.[18]

As Leow also notes in this issue, the term 'non-alignment' then serves us poorly for this period, implying a rearguard attempt to evade the constraints of geopolitical conflict created by superpowers and colonial powers, and their overlap. This article utilizes Richard Saull's more holistic theorization of the Cold War as a 'globalised social conflict' in which the superpowers were defined by 'specific socioeconomic properties and contradictions, reflecting forms of politics not confined to themselves alone.' [19] The period here comprised a long global moment during which the decolonizing joined the dominant in co-producing the nature of the base philosophical debate that, more than military conflict, was the Cold War. Memberships of international organizations and transnational networks of affinity were not simply about non-alignment. They represented partial alignments of opportunity within 'tight corners' of asymmetrical global agency in the early Cold War to press forward anti-colonial causes.[20] Such openings were not unfettered by the material realities of imbalanced global power structures. Nevertheless, significant opportunities were graspable and meaningful for African actors throughout the turbulent and heady 1940s to 1960s. This opens up questions of greater African possibility within more multipolar global structures in the early Cold War than the constraint so apparent through the latter twentieth century.[21] This agency for African and Asian activists, as this issue shows in abundance, tangibly fed back into the 'first' and 'second' worlds as the rapidity of decolonization shaped the activities and worldviews of cold warriors in west and east struggling to comprehend the pace and gravity of change in the 'third world' in the 1950s. This played out vividly in, and from, Mboya's Kenya.

More importantly, the early Cold War exposed fundamental African debates about how to order the post-colonial future. The most vituperative conflicts within the pan-African movement in the early 1960s raged in the realm of labor internationalism. Unlike Opoko Agyeman, who lamented Euro-American power to force the dissolution

of pan-African trade union cooperation[22], this article contends that such fracture was a much more African affair. Kenya and Ghana emerged at loggerheads over interpretations of 'non-alignment', 'neutralism' and the very nature of post-colonial freedom. An iteration of such fundamental philosophical debate raged in early independent Kenya. This was African Cold War: the layered ensnarement of geopolitics, continental community and deeply local, abstract debates about how to order peoples so soon out of empire as the realities of independent nationhood, neocolonial threat and Cold War stricture throttled the latitude for cosmopolitanism into the 1960s and 1970s.

With speed and potency, the independent Kenya state turned inwards down the road of ethnic politics, authoritarianism and sclerotic international relations. Mboya was himself complicit in this statist introversion. Over the 1960s, he oversaw the emasculation of Kenya's trade unions and girded the hegemonic bureaucratic-executive state, a feature across much of the decolonizing world. For this era, Dipesh Chakrabarty sequences a type of 'dialogical' decolonization indebted to the conversations between peoples 'beyond the boundaries of the nation-state' and a top-down 'pedagogical' language of development defined by those emerging independent states. Such processes reinforced old, and created new, hierarchies between post-colonial elites and their populations.[23] This paper ultimately traces the comprehensive transition in Kenya from former to latter, away from Singh's and Mboya's 'subaltern internationalisms' of the 1930s to 1950s. That Mboya, who personified this trend, was likely murdered by the strong executive he helped create is a tragic irony of Kenya's dark decolonization and a dramatic marker of the exorcism of Kenya's erstwhile globalist spirit.

Kenya's radical global interlocutor: Makhan the Marxist

The cacophonous transnational public spheres of the interwar Indian Ocean provided a fertile arena for that first phase of 'dialogical' decolonization.[24] Within this world, the international left was a critical and, given the anti-leftist direction of the Kenyattan post-colonial state, subsequently expunged stimulus in the foundation of Kenya's labor movement and early anti-colonial radicalism. Plantation workers on the Swahili coast and South Asian railway communities staged labor protests in the 1910s and 1920s. The first formal trade unions emerged, however, in the mid-1930s among East Africa's immigrant Punjabi artisans as the global depression decimated wage labor.[25] The dynamo was Makhan Singh, a Ramgarhia Sikh who migrated to Kenya at 14 years of age in 1927 to follow his father, Sudh Singh, a railway artisan and later printer in Nairobi. Under the influence of Indian nationalism (having allegedly witnessed the Jallianwala Bagh massacre as a child), Punjabi poetry and soon European Marxism, Makhan applied himself to the bureaucratic helm of East African labor organization, the pragmatic application of his acute anti-colonial philosophy.

In April and May 1937, the first mass strike in East Africa lasted 62 days and secured an eight-hour working day and greatly improved wages for Indian carpenters in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika. Singh built on this momentum to grow his Labour Trade Union of Kenya, founded in 1935, into the Labour Trade Union of East Africa (LTUEA). Almost exclusively Punjabi in membership, the product of South Asian artisanal migration to East Africa during and following the construction of the Uganda railway (1896-1901), Singh succeeded in codifying membership on strictly non-racial terms against internal opposition.[26] As African industrial disaffection spread to a 6,000-person strike in Mombasa in 1939, the LTUEA expressed sympathy and cooperation such that Singh could write to Jomo Kenyatta with news that the LTUEA comprised over 3,000 Indian and African members.[27]

The colonial authorities judged the strikes derivative of agitation in America and Europe.[28] In reality, Singh's trade unionism was not rooted in liaison with the British Trades Union Congress (TUC), who often worked with the colonial state to foster non-political, industrial and 'responsible' trade unionism as necessary to Britain's morally re-armed developmental colonialism.[29] Singh did correspond with the TUC and imbibed western tactics of labor organization. The content of his activism was, however, the product of a much more radical and promiscuous Afro-Asian embrace. This dictated a wide repertoire of protest methods, experiments and strategies.[30] Singh took the pulse of diasporic Indian nationalism and African political organization in the 1940s to push the EAINC into more hospitable relationships with KAU. He was elected vice-president of the Kenya Youth League in December 1947 and undertook a Gandhian hunger strike in June 1948 to protest post-Partition communalism in Nairobi.[31] Singh was a product of overlaid Asian, African and global conversations, rendering the struggles of the Indian National Congress and language of the new UN Charter into East African translation through a dexterous Indo-African anti-colonial code-switching.[32]

But Singh's major influence was not Gandhism or Nehruvian internationalism, as for most diasporic South Asian protesters throughout eastern and southern Africa from the 1920s to 1950s.[33] Singh weaponized a broad interpretation of Marxism as applied to colonialism, crossfertilized with Indian nationalist imaginary and more partial comprehension of nascent African political energy. He meticulously copied by hand long passages of Marx, Lenin and J.A. Hobson into his dense red notebooks.[34] The first resolution of the 1937 LTUEA conference was condolence on the death of Maxim Gorky.[35] Over the next decade, Singh equated the foundation of new African political and religious organizations questioning the justice of British colonialism, such as the Luyha *Dini ya Mswamba* in western Kenya, proscribed in 1948, with 'socialistic'

calls for improved land rights and working conditions.[36] Socialism was a portable and malleable set of propositions; domesticated by Singh, then refracted through South Asian and, increasingly, Kenyan nationalist prisms towards local action.

Singh tapped the diasporic world of radical Punjab, the networks which sustained the *Ghadr* party in the Pacific United States and Southeast Asia around WWI.[37] From 1936, he and Mota Singh, a fellow Punjabi Kenyan activist linked to the Communist Party of India, published the leftist newspapers *Kenya Worker* (in English) and *East African Kirti* (in Gurmukhi), modeled on the Punjabi *Kirti*, as tools to bind East African labor into international solidarity.[38] The extent of Singh's own formal attachment to international communist institutions is unclear, although he openly and consistently defined himself as a Marxist. The colonial state was, by contrast, quite convinced of his institutionalized extremism, quickly suppressing *East African Kirti* and believing Singh to be 'a forwarding and receiving agent for Sikh students undergoing revolutionary training in Moscow.'[39]

Such was the pan-imperial fear that Singh was arrested in Ahmedabad and restricted without trial for five years during a trip to India in 1940 to study working class politics after he addressed a rally of 30,000 workers in Bombay. This did nothing to diminish his zeal. He attended Indian National Congress sessions and became a sub-editor of *Jang-i-Azad*, a Punjabi organ of the Communist Party of India (CPI).[40] He participated in communist communities of affinity around the world. In the late 1940s, Yusuf Dadoo and Monty Naicker, Indian trade union members of the South African Communist Party, stopped off in Nairobi en route to London to participate in the 'Marxist Study Group' that Singh hosted for the radical anti-colonial Kenyan newspaper *The Daily Chronicle*.[41] In May 1965, the prominent Indian scientist and Marxist, Gangadhar Adhikari, of the CPI fondly recalled his personal solidarity with Singh 'both underground in Bombay and Ahmedabad 1939-48 and later open in

Lahore'. [42] Adhikari carried a letter to London from Singh asking the British communist politician Willie Gallagher, founding member of the Community Party of Great Britain, to lobby the Colonial Office to allow Singh to return to his family in Kenya.[43] On his authorized re-entry into Kenya in 1947, Singh was branded an 'able, shrewd, inveterate and life-long fanatical Communist agitator' and placed on Kenya's first Special Branch list.[44]

In postwar Kenya, Singh more feverishly applied the leftist internationalisms that nourished him as a thinker and organizer to the politics of Nairobi, the environment in which he lived unequivocally as a Kenyan. He 'consciously spared workers the stark choice between class and ethnic allegiance', which alarmed a colonial state obsessed with creating a stable, quiescent urban working class amidst the pressures of urbanization, 'detribalization' and rapidly growing labor discontent. [45] The authorities, keenly aware of their long-standing limitations in containing Nairobi's disaffected Kikuyu workers and youth gangs over the late 1940s, panicked and judged that 'the genii of African labor unrest had to be put back in the tribal bottle'.[46] Singh was prime threat.

Trade unions were at their most militant and surveilled in Nairobi as African protest boiled with declining urban living standards and energetic grassroots political organization. Rumors spread that Singh gave classes to radical Kikuyu union leaders such as Fred Kubai, leader of the Kenya Transport Workers' Union, and Bildad Kaggia, founder of the Clerks and Commercial Workers' Union, on how communism described the Kikuyu people and provided the blueprint for anti-colonial labor struggle.[47] Such formal lessons were likely fictitious. Still, the radical Kaggia, purged from parliament by Kenyatta in 1969 over his continued left-wing beliefs, recalled that 'only Makhan agreed with my ideas. He had the fire I admired and was a real revolutionary.'[48] Marxism – as translated, interpreted and applied to East Africa – generated this zeal.

On May Day 1949, Singh created a revitalized union, the East African Trade Union Congress (EATUC) by merging the Indo-African LTUEA with a number of African unions emboldened by the successes of 1947 Mombasa strike led by the huge African Workers' Federation under Chege Kibachia to whom Singh proffered significant organizational and bureaucratic help.[49] The EATUC openly refused the registration required under the hastily contrived 1949 Trade Union Bill. Singh 'eschewed the possibility of any genuine separation of politics and labour in a colonial situation', a now unrealistic doctrine of colonial trade union policy.[50] Trade unionism emerged as the radical apex of freedom struggle such that Singh stood shoulder to shoulder with KAU, where Kaggia and Kubai were increasingly active, to first declare '*Uhuru Sasa'*!

Things came to a head at the 6,000-worker Nairobi General Strike in 1950, called to coincide with the celebrations of Nairobi's new city status.[51] Fears of violent Kikuyu insurrection provoked heavy-handed police action, including some 300 arrests. Colonial officials feared the geographical expansion of the new city might unleash yet more poor, uncontrollable Kikuyu youths into Nairobi's new extended environs.[52] Febrile and topical early Cold War fears raised the temperature. John Mungai, a Nairobi taxi driver who claimed to have chauffeured Mau Mau fighters, stated under interrogation that Singh's global communist links radicalized Kikuyu militants through (imagined) relations with the World Federation of Trade Unions, a body increasingly sympathetic to the Soviets after its recent 1949 schism (see below).[53] Such internationalism threatened the very heart of colonial Kenya in the incendiary run-up to Mau Mau. Disturbances followed the EATUC's mass celebration of May Day 1950 with the result that the government detained Singh and Kubai for 'unregistered trade unionism' on 15 May 1950. Such legalistic politesse euphemized deeper geocolonial anxiety. In the Kenyan Supreme Court, British judge Ransley Thacker branded Singh

a communist 'protagonist of class hatred' and violence against the British, an 'unscrupulous and clever self-seeker who has obtained an increasing influence over many ignorant and easily persuaded Africans.'[54]

For the Kenyan government, Singh was the bogeyman: an international agent provocateur tearing apart the fabric of urban East Africa. And indeed, colonial hyperbole aside, Singh's global connections had partially galvanized this protest through dialogical connections made possible by his position at the crossroads of diasporic Indian politics, transnational left-wing radicalism and emerging African urban discontent. Singh was by no stretch of the imagination a Soviet agent as portrayed by the British. But his fate in Mau Mau's carceral pipeline was tied to the paranoid mood music of Kenya's early Cold War. For John Lonsdale, the failed 1950 Nairobi strike demonstrated that 'the state's ability to crush and divide worker action… [was] plain for all to see through the clouds of tear gas… suspicion between African and Asian workers, lack of organization and no income' undid the young EATUC.[55] Nebulous Cold War shadows also loomed over the crushing of the Nairobi strike and the incarceration of Singh and his Kikuyu allies. Their suppression created conditions for a very different globalized trade unionism that would drive forward Kenya's nationalist movement on the Cold War playing field-cum-battleground.

Tom Mboya, international man and the pacing of decolonization

The next phase of Kenyan trade unionism could not have been more divergent ideologically from Singh's first and yet more similar in its scales of internationalism. It coalesced around an alternative brand of Kenyan cold warrior: Tom Mboya. He was born in 1930 in Thika, just to the east of Nairobi, to sisal farmers of the western Kenyan Luo labor diaspora. The attachment to ethnic homelands that defined the patrimonialism of Kenya's more senior leadership, such as the Kikuyu Kenyatta and

his Luo rival Oginga Odinga, was absent. Mboya grew up in the metropolis, Nairobi, a generation younger, trained in white-collar professionalism. His political career rested on multiethnic urban constituency, although Mboya was ever aware of the need to 'accommodate ethnic sensitivities'.[56] An energetic student activist, Mboya qualified as a Nairobi sanitary inspector, became chairman of the African Staff Association and headed the Kenya Local Government Workers' Union by just 23 years of age.

He ascended at a propitious moment. In the wake of the prohibition of the EATUC under the cloud of Mau Mau, Aggrey Minya, recently elected to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) general council, founded the Kenya Federation of Registered Trade Unions (KFRTU) with ICFTU aid on a promise to the Labour Department that it would work apolitically. The gifted and ambitious Mboya replaced Minya as General Secretary of the KFRTU over the course of 1953 following angry accusations from an anti-Minya faction about the mismanagement of ICFTU funds. Fresh to the KFRTU council and untainted by its rivalries, Mboya assumed control, rebranded the organization the Kenya Federation of Labour (KFL) and became the gatekeeper to Kenya for the ICFTU.[57] He proved initially troublesome to the government, flagging harsh emergency policies and the genuine socio-economic grievances underlying Kikuyu rebellion.[58] But his general stance soon relieved officials after his cooperation against a violent strike of Kikuyu bus workers in Nairobi, an act reflecting the gulf between relatively highly paid public sector workers represented by Mboya and poorer laborers of the EATUC.[59] Mboya seemed the epitome of the moderate African nationalist in the eyes of the developmental colonial state, whose universalist discourses Mboya would seize and turn back on Britain in the cause of liberation.[60]

He was 'without question an outstandingly modern man' according to his biographer David Goldsworthy, an individual of prodigious intellect and charm. He

was also an outstandingly international man – 'cosmopolitan Nairobi and the great cities of the Western world were his milieu'.[61] International trade unionism was the vehicle to propel Kenya's nationalism and his own swift rise to national leadership (as one of the first African members of Legislative Council from 1957) and the pan-African firmament (as Chairman of Nkrumah's landmark All-Africa People's Conference in 1958). In 1959, Mboya conducted his celebrated tour of America to share that stage with Martin Luther King. He befriended civil rights celebrities Harry Belafonte, Jackie Robinson and Sidney Poitier, made the cover of *Time Magazine* and met Senator John. F. Kennedy, who incorporated Mboya's cause into his 1960 presidential campaign.[62] The resultant 'African Airlift' would bring 800 students to US colleges to arm Kenya with the technocratic skills denied by the colonial state and necessary for post-colonial nation-building, an initiative made famous in recent years by the participation of Barack Obama Sr.[63] This star-studded internationalism began in the 'free' international labor movement and specifically Mboya's close relationship with the ICFTU.

The ICFTU emerged in 1949 following am acrimonious split in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), which had been formed amidst post-war euphoria in 1945 as the premier organization to link labor unions in Europe, America and colonial dependent territories.[64] Under mounting geopolitical tension and ideological divergences on relationship between industrial trade unionism and emancipatory anti-colonial politics, an urgent jockeying of position in Asia and Africa commenced between the competing WFTU, primarily made up of unions sympathetic to communism, and breakaway anti-communist ICFTU. Following successful diplomacy in North Africa, the ICFTU turned in earnest to sub-Saharan Africa where it cooperated with its affiliated British TUC to secure a foothold. More than half of African unions linked to the ICFTU were in British territories.[65]

The KFL, desperately short of money, affiliated in 1952 and in the process demonstrated to the colonial state that it shared no sympathy for the militancy and purported communism of the EATUC.[66] After an exploratory tour of East Africa in 1951, the ICFTU sent a permanent representative – an energetic, friendly and progressive Canadian, Jim Bury – to Nairobi in December 1953, a year after the first ICFTU center in Africa opened in Accra, Gold Coast.[67] News of WFTU expansion in Africa and lingering anxiety about communist unrest during the emergency placed Kenya, a relatively developed African industrial economy, at the head of ICFTU ambitions as a springboard for wider regional work. The seemingly moderate and cooperative KFL leader Mboya became the most prized asset in Africa for 'free' trade union organizers in Europe and America. On KFL affiliation, the ICFTU immediately earmarked start-up capital of $250,000 for Kenya, matched by equivalent sums from its affiliated TUC and AFL-CIO, to improve technocratic facilities and education for Kenyans now 'ready' for 'healthy' industrial trade unionism.[68] Seven years later, in 1959, the ICFTU gave the KFL £750 a month.[69] For Charles Hornsby, Mboya was 'determined to use the trade unions – which had hard fought Western credentials as a legitimate expression of political protest and economic power – to push for political change under the protection of western liberalism'.[70] It was not so much protection as opportunity that animated Mboya's dexterous Euro-American diplomacy to accelerate the pace of African decolonization and labor reform.

The ICFTU did not fundamentally disagree with the British TUC, and indeed Kenyan Labour Department, in stressing the industrial and technocratic nature of trade unionism outlined in official Kenyan 1952 Trade Union Ordinance. Its leadership did, however, criticize the anachronism of so-called 'British model' of favoring strong sectoral unions over central federations. Moreover, the ICFTU did more openly, if begrudgingly, acknowledge a certain inevitability of blurred political and labor

activism in Africa as nationalist movements gathered strength.[71] This was the organizational latitude and financial patronage Mboya needed to centralize and bureaucratize the KFL, and simultaneously fund his own international travel to publicize Kenya's wider anti-colonial struggle.

In October 1954, Mboya attended an ICFTU Asian regional seminar in Calcutta. En route, in Delhi, he gave talks in Kiswahili and English on All-India Radio arguing that the issue of worker education should be taken to the UN.[72] In 1955, he went up to Ruskin College, Oxford, to study industrial management. During his time in Britain, he travelled widely at ICFTU expense, to its headquarters in Brussels and throughout Europe, as its chief African point man and rapporteur. In 1955, he brought a resolution to the fourth ICFTU Congress in Vienna calling for the International Labor Organization to investigate forced labor in Kenya's Mau Mau detention camps.[73] Like Singh, who applied the language of the new UN Charter to Kenyan self-determination on his return from India in 1947, Mboya proved adept at rhetorically repurposing the idioms and structures of postwar international institutions to local East African anti-colonial ends.

Mboya developed a notably close working relationship with the adventurous and convivial Jim Bury, ICFTU East African representative from 1953 to 1956, to the extent that Jay Krane, ICFTU assistant director of organization, urged Bury to be less partisan towards Mboya in internal KFL quarrels.[74] 'From the beginning, Mboya and Bury operated virtually as one', Mboya using Bury's 'whiteness' as 'entrée to European circles in which African unionists were normally seen as half-educated, semi-communist agitators'.[75] Bury purposefully refuted such accusations that the KFL harbored Soviet sympathies in public interviews that openly criticized the Kenyan government's approach to Mau Mau and Kenyan labor. Over his Nairobi sojourn, he was notably outspoken in the press and at KFL meetings on his disgust at Kenya's

'color bar'. For example, shortly after his arrival in Nairobi, Bury angrily left his residence at the elite Norfolk Hotel 'owing to unpleasantness between himself and the management because of his habit of entertaining Africans in his room'.[76] Mboya and Bury travelled together to Calcutta, London and Brussels on ICTFU business.

Behind closed doors, Bury confessed that IFCTU accomplishments in Kenya relied largely on Mboya's skill and cooperation. On Mboya's acceptance into Oxford, Bury communicated frustration that the only skilled Kenyan trade union leader had changed his mind to go to Britain rather than focus on the primary task of improving poor bureaucracy and industrial education at the coalface in Nairobi.[77] In 1958, Mboya himself admitted to a 'scarcity of leadership' in the KFL as he moved into national politics off the back of his trade union success.[78] ICFTU leaders secretly grumbled amongst themselves that the spendthrift Mboya opportunistically and extravagantly spent their money for purposes beyond core ICFTU priorities. In 1960, IFCTU accountants opined to Krane that Mboya 'always lived on the gift of the gab to wheedle money out of others.'[79] Even Jim Bury became mildly cynical that Kenyan demands were often not about genuine need but the KFL trying its luck to maximize financial return.[80] Nonetheless, he continued to bankroll Mboya's work given his criticality to ICFTU policy in Kenya and Africa more broadly.

In March 1955, the enormous scale of the wildcat Mombasa dock strike surprised Bury, who relied on Mboya to ascertain its cause and significance as they travelled together to the coast. Mboya personally bargained with the government on behalf of the Mombasa workers to win a 30% pay rise, defusing more radical and violent protest on the coast in the process.[81] ICFTU headquarters deemed Mboya's 1956 tour of Uganda vital to stimulate the shoots of institutionalized trade unionism in Kampala. Most importantly, Mboya provided legitimacy to the ICFTU in a difficult operational environment as the government threated union deregistration under

continued emergency conditions and African workers viewed with suspicion a European organization meddling in their lives. In 1956, the ICFTU's new representative in East Africa, David Newman, admitted the ICFTU was not popular amongst the rank-and-file of 40,000 workers theoretically affiliated in Kenya.[82] Even Bury was unpopular with the grassroots KFL membership according to Kenyan intelligence, to the extent that he was refused entry to a dance in the African Social Hall in Eldoret in April 1955.[83] Mboya was the key to bind Kenya's workers to the ICFTU cause of 'free labor' and translate their condition to Brussels, which was desperate to comprehend the contours of ground-level African labour conditions and organization.[84] Mboya was, in short, the conduit for European labor leaders to understand Kenyan (and indeed wider African) workers and conceive policy in the context of their deepening Cold War anxieties, a fact of which Mboya was all too aware as he requested his travel funds.

This is not to say that Mboya merely exploited the ignorance of naïve Europeans and North Americans. He believed passionately in the power of rationalization and modernization, reinforced by his training at Ruskin, participation in ICFTU seminars and leadership of the white-collar unions of Nairobi.[85] He bonded with Jim Bury in Nairobi, and on their ICFTU/KFL junkets around East Africa, Asia and Europe, specifically because he appreciated Bury's 'no-nonsense' approach to rapid technocratic and bureaucratic improvement.[86] This would inform Mboya's bureaucratic manipulation of KANU in the early 1960s and jumped off the pages of his famous blueprint for Kenya's African socialism – 'Sessional Paper no. 10 of 1965'.[87] Like late-colonial administrators, he prized technical knowledge and utilized the 'Airlift' and ICFTU to tool up Kenya for the practicalities of independence. He had little time for Singh's Marxism whose internationalisms did not address his faith in capital as a force for progress and Kenyan self-determination. His thinking chimed with a more global

postwar moment, described by Leslie James in this issue, that proselytized administrative efficiency and technical expertise as a means to urgently transform nationalist beings and processes of development.[88]

Mboya's bone of contention with the ICFTU regarded the pace of political change through such modernization. He was adamant on the inseparability of nationalism, labor reform and technocracy, moving far more quickly and boldly than his western industrial relations allies working on Africa. A year after the establishment of the ICFTU Africa Regional Organization (AFRO) in Accra on the eve of Ghanaian independence in 1957, Mboya assumed chairmanship of the East, Central and Southern African ICFTU Area Committee.[89] In this forum, he continued to insist that unions did not 'exist in a vacuum' and 'must work closely with nationalist movements'. Political freedom was a pre-requisite for the 'human dignity' of African workers, the thrust of his April 1959 Washington speech alongside Martin Luther King.[90] Mboya chaired the second AFRO conference in Lagos in 1959, where forthright pan-African condemnations on the injustices of Algeria and apartheid sat alongside more prosaic speeches on technical training by TUC, ILO and ICFTU participants from Europe and Asia. At the third AFRO gathering in Tunis in 1960, Mboya underlined how youthful and internationalized African unions were vital to help African citizens 'strengthen their ability to project their ideal of African personality in the world forum'.[91] African unionism must, for Mboya, be inextricably linked to wider global networks and institutions of self-determination to succeed in quick time.

The ICFTU was correct that their sponsorship of Mboya funded activities that partially undermined its more cautious East African program of worker education. Still, the ICFTU helped open the door to America for Mboya in the knowledge that his liaison with African-American labor and civil rights activists would raise overt questions of political rights over ICFTU priorities in organizational and administrative

improvement. Mboya was simply too important to the ICFTU in Africa to be reined in. He conducted his first tour of the US in 1956 from which he returned with a £35,000 gift directly from the AFL-CIO, officially affiliated to the ICFTU, as African-American AFL-CIO leaders became increasingly irritated by continued European ICFTU paternalism and lethargy at a time of such momentous African nationalist potential.[92] The ICFTU/AFL-CIO alliance would become increasingly tense on African affairs over the coming years as the pace of decolonization quickened.

Yevette Richards has related in remarkably impressive and intimate detail how African-American union leaders in particular took a passionate interest in African labor agitation, making numerous trips across the continent over the 1950s. For the AFL-CIO, this became a vital way to both contain communism and press forward pan-African community-building. George McCray, Chair of the Pan-African Labor Council of the CIO, was notably active on both fronts, frequently lamenting the weakness of the ICFTU on African liberation and anti-communism.[93] As in Asia, peripatetic African-American unionists worked across complex Cold War, anti-colonial and specialist sectoral lines.[94] However, direct overtones of racial solidarity more obviously pervaded their journeys to, and advocacy for, African comrades. With some measure of their own paternalism, prominent African-American union leaders acted as 'interpreters of the aspirations of Africans and ardent activists on their behalf [and] were factors in drawing African labor closer to the AFL-CIO'.[95]

The most important African-American organizer in East Africa was Maida Springer of the International Ladies' Garments Workers' Union (and, like Mboya, Ruskin graduate), who served as the only female observer of the inaugural ICFTU AFRO conference in Accra. By 1959, she became the AFL-CIO Department of International Affairs representative for Africa, established a scheme for Africans to study at Harvard and set up the 'Maida Fund' to promote agricultural education in East

Africa.[96] She worked closely on Africa policy with her mentor and grandee of African-American labor and civil rights campaigning, A. Philip Randolph, who hosted Mboya at the April 1959 civil rights rally in Washington. Their connection with African leaders functioned outwith the 'white world chauvinism' Randolph noted in labor internationals during his earlier travels to Burma and Japan, described by Su Lin Lewis in this issue.

Mboya exploited the Cold War fault lines between ostensibly allied international labor organizations. Publicly supportive of the ICFTU, in 1958 he wrote in private to Randolph and McCray to stress the 'unfulfilled promises' and deplorably self-interested behavior of the ICFTU, which had become less dynamic with Mboya and his lieutenants after the departure of Jim Bury in 1956.[97] The nature of ICFTU expansion in East Africa exacerbated such tensions. In 1958, the IFCTU Labour College opened in Kampala, Uganda, six years after the establishment of the first ICFTU college in Calcutta, with tutors recruited primarily from the ICFTU and British TUC.[98] The focus on technocratic administrivia, collective bargaining and labor economics contrasted sharply with the unabashedly political curricula of new WFTU schools in Conakry and Brazzaville. Such competition animated the virulently anti-communist AFL-CIO, which repeatedly lamented ICFTU and TUC caution in the Kampala syllabus given what was at stake with the quickfire communist expansionism in West Africa.

Randolph toured Kenya and, in 1958, emphasized to the ICFTU the seminal importance of Africa now that Asia was lost to 'communist domination and neutralism'. He even conjectured that the WFTU now seduced Africans through the new Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) founded in Gamel Abdul Nasser's Cairo in 1957.[99] Randolph called for a bespoke and committed political education program between the ICFTU and AFL-CIO for African trade union leadership. He appointed

Springer as AFL representative for the project in East Africa in recognition of her rich regional experience. Springer had met Kenyatta during the war through leading pan-African and socialist organizer, journalist and author, the Trinidadian George Padmore. She also hosted Mboya – 'my second son… I fell in love immediately with him' – on the first night of his initial US tour in 1956.[100] On her new educational mission in East Africa, Springer irked her TUC and ICFTU partners, who continued to dig in their heels that this American-led political offensive (pioneered by a woman) would detract effort from the real business of teaching the technicalities of industrial relations.[101] The ICFTU continued to complain in private that Mboya also spent too much time on overseas political publicity trips and not enough on worker pedagogy.[102]

Randolph concluded that his African contacts had 'little, if any, faith in the ICFTU and that they feel strongly that the ICFTU has no faith in them.'[103] He and other civil rights activists, notably the entertainer Harry Belafonte, supported Mboya's pacier vision of the intersection of labor and politics as a dynamo for nationalist achievement and provided the material support for Mboya's 'Airlift'. Randolph and Belafonte's understandings of African nationalism were profoundly influenced by their personal association with Mboya, as well as their wider civil rights and Cold War contexts. In 1955, Mboya accused the British of 'living in the Tolpuddle Age' (a reference to the 'Friendly Society of Agricultural Laborers' in 1830s England, often considered a forerunner of modern trade unionism) by encouraging slow union development to retain cheap labor.[104] By the late 1950s, the ICFTU too stood accused of such lethargy, guardedly by Mboya and explicitly by his American friends.[105] Mboya shared a 'remarkable ideological compatibility' with Randolph about deradicalization, rationalization and muscular anti-colonialism.[106] Mboya's political skill was to exploit the ICFTU and its fractures with African-American labor as a bridge to the wider global public sphere. For Randolph, Africa was a pressing Cold War problem to stem the rising

tide of communism. For Mboya, internationalist trade union connection was also the conduit to the world of rights struggle that would see him photographed alongside King and Kennedy in 1959, chief African spokesperson in the United States for decolonization across the African continent and recipient of generous funds for Kenya's specific nationalist future.

AATUF, non-alignment and pan-African cleavage

Mboya's most significant challenges occurred not, however, in this realm of Euro-American diplomacy under the pall of the superpower Cold War, but in the crucible of pan-Africanism as a direct result of his work in the western world. As visions of continental pan-African community crystalized in the late 1950s, labor internationalism wrought irreconcilable fissures in Africa's own regional Cold War. As the ICFTU expanded its pan-African endeavors through AFRO from 1957, more radical West African union leaders began to posit international trade union affiliation as a potential form of neocolonialism in the fledgling states of the region, independent several years in advance of East African nations. In 1956 and 1957, Sekou Touré of Guinea founded the *Union General des Travailleurs d'Afrique Noire* (UGTAN), the first pan-African labor organization. The emphasis on neutralism from global labor federations, and the paramount association of unions with nationalist political parties, chimed with Kwame Nkrumah's thought, such that Ghanaian unions joined UGTAN on the creation the short-lived Ghana-Guinea Union in 1958.

Relations between ideologically divergent pan-African labor leaders were initially amicable, such that UGTAN and ICFTU affiliates met cordially at the 1958 All-Africa People's Conference in Accra, which was chaired by Mboya. In Accra, Mboya saw significant opportunity to tie workers both into nationalist and continental ambitions though some sort of pan-African labor federation without losing the

advantages of diverse internationalist confraternity. With the help of McCray and Springer, he headed off rumblings of West African radicalism by defeating a motion proposing disaffiliation from labor federations based in Europe and US.[107] The Ghana TUC, which chaired the first ICFTU AFRO conference (having briefly disaffiliated in 1953 and then rejoined[108]), had been vocal about the lack of African representation in ICFTU bodies. Nevertheless, it acquiesced to Mboya's insistence that pan-African unionism was fundamentally compatible with international affiliation. In 1960, Mboya himself came down on the ICFTU like a 'ton of bricks' for 'dragging its feet' on AFRO and thus fueling more ardent secessionist feeling in West Africa.[109] Still, he consistently maintained the utility of such linkage and vociferously defended the right for individual national unions to define the terms of their own international relations within any pan-African organization. He noted that India was fiercely neutralist and non-aligned as a leading post-colonial nation and yet its unions were affiliated to the ICFTU.[110] A joint declaration between the KFL and Ghana TUC in November 1960 suggested that the possibility of a consensual pan-African trade union institution was alive.[111]

The South African journalist Colin Legum soon observed that divisions over international labor affiliation became the 'source of the angriest of all divisions on pan-African front', especially between once close friends Kenya and Ghana.[112] The temperature rose when the WFTU opened an African trade union training center in Budapest in September 1959. This troubled AFL-CIO onlookers in particular, who again bemoaned toothless ICFTU action amid fears that the Soviet Union backed the Ghanaians through AAPSO and WFTU to fracture pan-African unity.[113] Things came to a head at the second All-Africa Peoples' Conference in Tunis in 1960. The divisions that emerged did not, however, connote the machinations of superpower Cold War, as interpreted by most observers outside Africa at the time. The fission between Kenya and Ghana was framed by the contours of such geopolitics but went, more importantly,

to the heart of divergent African interpretations of non-alignment and indeed pan-Africanism that characterized African regional Cold War.

At Tunis, the Ghana TUC now forcefully asserted the impossibility of truly independent pan-African unionism and liaison with the ICFTU, having unilaterally disaffiliated in 1959. The ICFTU was, in turn, sharply critical of Nkrumah's dictatorial legislation restricting trade union autonomy and the right to strike. UGTAN followed Ghana, as did the Nigerian ANTUF, a splinter group from the ICFTU-affiliated Nigerian TUC. Mboya continued to defend the right of national unions to choose their productive affiliations, not least with the ICFTU and AFL-CIO, as relations soured. ANTUF leader Gogo Nzeribe, who had been expelled from the Nigerian TUC over mismanagement of funds for a scholarship in the Soviet Union, published *Great Conspiracy of Africa* under an imprint of the 'All-Africa Trade Union Federation' (AATUF), a new body funded from Accra. The pamphlet reproduced a (forged) British Cabinet paper that attested Mboya's conspiracy with the CIA to overthrow African leaders. The Ghana TUC, bound to Nkrumah's ruling Convention Peoples' Party, denied any complicity of the tract's production but pointed out a new $56,000 grant from the AFL-CIO, fixed by Springer, to build the KFL's new 'Solidarity House' in Nairobi. This tainted Mboya in many eyes at home and abroad.[114]

Mboya confessed that ICFTU affiliation proved trickier in the face of constant attacks over his American links. But he remained committed to pan-African trade unionism to the extent that the AATUF Chairman, Ben Seddi of Morocco, visited Nairobi in August 1961 to discuss the first AATUF constitution. Seddi assured Mboya that AATUF did not share the 'total war' rhetoric of the popular Ghanaian press and that all pan-African labor leaders believed in freedom of choice. In return, Mboya agreed to sit on the AATUF observer mission to the 1961 non-aligned summit in Belgrade. He publicly denied that the AATUF was a 'communist front' despite ICFTU

reports that East German unions bankrolled Ghana's TUC and UGTAN, and of burgeoning WFTU influence in Congo.[115] Mboya stressed that ICFTU affiliation was not a route to western subordination. International liaisons would, in fact, accelerate the cause of independence according to the specific circumstances of each nation's desires for decolonization, both in material support and access to world networks advocating African self-determination.

Such fragile accommodation evaporated at the 1961 Casablanca Group conference, hosted by the radical independent states of Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Libya, Mali and Morocco to discuss the future of pan-African cooperation. In Morocco, battle lines were drawn on the issue of international labor affiliation during the construction of the AATUF charter.[116] Sensationalist reports proliferated in the Kenyan press that the WFTU was behind the event, having spared no expense to welcome delegates from colonial countries to its 1961 Moscow conference. Ghanaian newspapers publicized Soviet radio broadcasts calling for AATUF to resist the 'neocolonialist invasion' of the ICFTU.[117] And yet, for all the Cold War grandstanding, it was more prosaic bureaucratic railroading that silenced pro-ICFTU voices in Casablanca. The Kenyans staged an angry public walk out, accusing the Ghanaians of rigging the vote on affiliation through a series of undemocratic procedural abnormalities and an atmosphere of 'carefully organized confusion'.[118] ICFTU affiliates organized a counter conference in Dakar, Senegal, in January 1962 to establish the African Trade Union Conference (ATUC), the new focus for 'free' pan-African labor, 'an act of mutual protection in the face of this declaration of war' as Mboya recollected in 1963.[119]

Mboya lauded ATUC's 'mature' approach to fight all forms of imperialism, including global communism and home-grown dictatorship. He accepted a position as ATUC regional vice-president, with the faint hope of accommodation with AATUF.

He reiterated ad nauseum national autonomy to define affiliation policy and asked provocatively if Ghana's membership of the Commonwealth compromised its neutralism.[120] An angry war of words replayed on loop, with the pro-ICFTU Kenyans, Tunisians and Nigerians tarnished as 'western agents' by Ghana and United Arab Republic who were, in turn, accused of suppressing legitimate trade unionism as pawns of the WFTU.[121]

Mboya complained bitterly that a libelous press campaign against him falsely shrouded with Cold War cloak and dagger what was fundamentally an African issue. Something far more meaningful than superpower conflict was at stake for the continent in these pan-African divisions.[122] He was right. Both Nkrumah and Mboya interpreted trade unionism as a microcosm of wider debates about the nature of post-colonial African community and the dangers of neocolonialism. The question was an ideological one about the precise nature of pan-Africanism, internationalism and post-colonial liberty. Nkrumah saw non-alignment as a theoretical political doctrine: protest against, and rejection of, Cold War power blocs to support a grand unifying pan-African vision.[123] It was matter of peril for new African states in a predatory neocolonial world. For Mboya, 'positive neutralism' allowed freedom for Africans to dexterously choose their economic or international liaisons to their own pragmatic advantage.[124] Non-alignment did not have to mean disaffiliation from the world outside Africa. In a speech in Oxford in 1961, Mboya warned the British:

'Stop being paternalistic. We need a continuing flow of technical, specialist, financial, and other types of aid. We will take it from you and from any other nations ready to offer aid with no strings attached... Remember, we are also capable of gauging the ulterior motives of all those who offer to help us.'[125]

All too aware of the pedagogical dangers of friendship within Cold War institutions, Mboya demonstrated faith in the ability to control alignment without compromising the content of the independent future.

Mboya, chastened by the vitriol of the clashes with West Africans at Tunis and Casablanca, took a more local line on the notion of national sovereignty and internationalism once Kenya won its independence in 1963. He fortified the national state within the looser East African regionalism of the Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa (PAFMECA) and, from 1967, the East African Community. This was in stark contrast to the more diffusely pooled sovereignty of Nkrumah's grander pan-African project, which had first recruited and then castigated the globetrotting Mboya.[126] East African regionalism came to provide a smaller, more local and more useable register of internationalism to better centralize power and reify the nation in Kenya by the mid-1960s.[127]

Pan-African trade unionism waned as an animator of labor organization and politics in independent East Africa. In 1964, an attempted rapprochement between ATUC and AATUF failed. The second AATUF conference in Bamako, Mali, displayed more 'emotional appeal' than policy.[128] With Nkrumah's overthrow in 1966, the 'new' Ghana TUC withdrew from AATUF, blaming Nkrumah's megalomania for pan-African labor disunity.[129] In 1965, the ICFTU, under continued criticism from the AFL-CIO over its reluctance to fully commit to Africa, moved its East African office from Kenya to Somalia. [130] The KFL formally disaffiliated in 1964. In power, Mboya himself displayed some of the dictatorial proclivities in labour policy for which he and his Euro-American allies had lambasted the Ghana TUC and AATUF in Tunis and Casablanca over 1960 and 1961, but which remained consistent with his repeated calls during the pan-African rows for national autonomy and sovereignty.[131] In power, he stated that 'we are in such a state of crisis that authoritarian rule is justified. It is said that

opposition is a luxury we cannot afford, since it will divert us from the progress whose general direction is widely agreed within the nation.'[132] Kenya turned inward.

Uhuru, introversion and the emasculation of Kenya's unions

Trade unionism was Mboya's ticket to national politics and passport to the world. The ICFTU acknowledged that Mboya used the KFL, international trade union affiliation and pan-African institutions to build mass popularity, cliental relationships and political legitimacy to undergird his own position atop the independent Kenyan state. In 1955, Kenya's Intelligence Committee warned how Mboya's skill in ousting of Aggrey Minya from the helm of the KFRTU showed 'the flair he has for turning situations to his political advantage', much as he strategically played his role in the 1955 Mombasa dock strike to 'considerably enhance his personal prestige.'[133] His access to the world was a double-edged sword. The controversies of the pan-African spat with Ghana followed him home. The Kenya Trade Union Congress (KTUC) formed in 1959 in opposition to Mboya's KFL. Allegedly financed by the Ghana TUC, it repeatedly judged Mboya a 'stooge' of America.[134]

Mboya retreated from union organization as Minister of Labor from 1962. Makhan Singh's name had been mooted as a potential choice of minister in recognition of his historic experiences, sacrifice in detention and fine-grained work with the KFL in negotiations with individual sectoral unions and the government Disputes Commission in the early 1960s.[135] But this appointment was never a realistic proposition given the imperatives of Africanization and President Kenyatta's profound suspicion of communism. On his rejection from public life, a demoralized Singh retired to writing histories of Kenya's labor movement, having failed, as Deputy General-Secretary of the Printing and Kindred Trades Workers' Union of Kenya, to convince Mboya to deliver industrial legislation in line with the promises of *Uhuru* for Kenya's

workers.[136]

Mboya took office during a period of significant industrial unrest that tainted independence negotiations and addressed the very real fears about the true meaning of freedom for the laboring masses. The huge 1959 East African Railway Strike triggered a tidal wave of protest about wages, working conditions and, implicitly, the distributive fruits of imminent liberation. Some 285 strikes were recorded in Kenya in 1962 alone.[137] Threats to economic development and the flow of transnational capital, Kenyatta emasculated the unions with the establishment of the Central Organization of Trade Unions (COTU) in 1965.[138] Significant powers of regulation sat with the Minister of Labour. The President himself appointed the COTU General Secretary. Kenya's trade unions were 'strapped into the newly erected corporatist structures based upon the strict conciliation procedures and compulsory arbitration that precluded the right to strike that had been codified in the labor laws of late colonialism'.[139] On a tour of West Africa in 1962, Marxist Humanist, Raja Dunayevskaya, noted unions were 'out of colonization and into the fire' as new state repression augured the growing gulf between leaders and workers.[140] Mboya was central to this transition in Kenya, poacher turned gamekeeper.

This emasculation of the unions and the broader path to executive authoritarianism marked Kenya's own base ideological conflicts. Daniel Branch argues that the famous battle between Kenyatta and Vice-President Oginga Odinga over the soul of the new Kenyan state, one often refracted through Cold War prisms given their putative internationalist preferences, was in fact largely a coeval local philosophical debate on how best order society. It was in greater part a conflict over individual accumulation verses societal distribution, rooted in the deep past of Kikuyu central and Luo western Kenya.[141] Mboya worked busily on one side of this divide in both politically Machiavellian and more genuinely ideological ways. Mboya believed in the

importance of modernization, supported by his Oxford and ICFTU days. He had faith in capitalism and private property as means to achieve meaningful sovereignty.[142] His version of African socialism revealed zeal for open markets and industrialization alongside a rhetorical commitment to older African forms of production and community building. He 'accepted and encouraged Kenya's integration into the world capitalist system.'[143] This was manna for Kenyatta, anathema for Odinga. Mboya's stance was no mere product of a top-down Cold War, but more part of a Kenyan conceptual world that drew from, and indeed pollinated, global communities of ideological affinity through Mboya's conviviality with European labor and American labor activists in the 1950s. Orthodox interpretations of the Cold War cannot contain Mboya, the supposed puppet of the US, who shaped the worldview of American activists in Africa and warned these allies in 1961 to 'put into practice those ideals you have always professed, to act on, not talk about, the teaching of the American Revolution.'[144]

Mboya's tendencies towards deradicalization, apparent in his work at the 1955 Mombasa strike, germinated this AFL-CIO and ICFTU diplomacy. They also conditioned his support of COTU's dictatorialism a decade later. Under Kenyatta's eye, he skillfully neutralized the radical wing of KANU, whose leaders supported the new Kenya African Workers Congress, a product of the anti-Mboya KTUC. The 1966 Preventative Detention Act jailed several trade union leaders who supported Odinga's breakaway Kenya People's Union, established after Mboya's bureaucratic manipulations had expelled Odinga from the ruling party, KANU.[145] Mboya's well-documented conflict with Odinga was personal rivalry, but also about something more fundamental about the nature of the state. As Daniel Speich argues, for Odinga, author of the 1967 autobiography *Not Yet Uhuru*, freedom was 'was still a future promise'. The state must intervene to distribute and create the social stability necessary to realize

that promise. For Mboya, freedom 'was a fact', to be developed through state-guided markets and private accumulation: growth before social justice. Inequality was the acknowledged start-up cost of progress.[146] This was Kenyan Cold War, reinforced by the promiscuous globalism of conversations in the 1940s-50s and kettled by the localism in the increasingly disconnected 1960s.

Conclusion

Trade unionism was an incubator where alternative visions of decolonized futures vied for experimental ascendency after WWII. Unions in colonial territories co-opted the techniques of European industrial relations. In so doing, they appropriated, and soon contested, late-colonial notions of development and worker organization. As demonstrated throughout this issue, however, the globalism of trade union connection beyond Europe was intense from the 1930s to 1960s. This promiscuous linkage provided a wide repertoire of resources to conceive the relationship between labor rights and national freedoms. Such quotidian dialogue cut across race, region and colonial frame, a cosmopolitanism squeezed hard by the realities of independent statehood.

Makhan Singh advocated a multiracial comradeship of the left, translating Marxism and radical Indian nationalism into African urban idiom. His detention opened up space for the globetrotting Mboya who struck up friendships with activists across Europe, Asia and especially the US to work the hothouses of labour politics, civil rights struggle and decolonization. The dominant picture of Kenya in the 1950s was Singh's home for a decade, the Mau Mau prison camp, the very definition of disconnection and oppression. But, in other regards, Kenya's was a global 1950s, more so than a decade into independence. Singh and Mboya were men of the world at the interpersonal coalface of overlapping and competing communities of political affinity across Africa,

Asia, Europe and North America. The oppositional internationalisms of Singh and Mboya were but two tracks in Kenya's global moment. Other Kenyan activists, such as the nation's second vice-president Joseph Murumbi, traversed the routes of the socialist world through the Asian Socialist Conference, Movement for Colonial Freedom or International Union of Socialist Youth over the 1950s. 'African nationalists expediently phased in and out of such competing institutions as they probed internationalist opportunity for specific, local ends… This latitude afforded experimental space and precedent to imagine freedom at an abstract level and, in the same thought, plan the Africanist specificities of its content.'[147] They made useable a pulsing global moment of cultural and political change to debate and create independence within a fledging postcolonial communion of nations. Visions of East Africa's future until the mid-1960s were not neatly bounded by race, nation or region. "The post-colonial state in Kenya was forged through the mobility of its citizens… their experiences overseas empowered them and showed British power to be anachronistic.'[148]

This calls on historians to define alternative chronologies of possibility masked by the hollowing out of African post-colonial states from the 1970s. Politically charged scholarship on African 'dependency', mythic articulations of pan-African solidarity and inward-looking narratives of the nation obscure the diversity of internationalist networks in the avenues of Kenyan anti-colonialism over the 1940s and 1950s. Singh translated the Indian Ocean and communist worlds for Nairobi's workers. Mboya plugged into a shared global developmental moment in his relations with European and American labor internationalists to modernize Kenya's unions and, ultimately, the nation.[149] This chimed with a wider '"fetish of organization" apparent in development discourses [which] did not derive solely from ideology but, rather, a blend of ideological principles, colonial experiences, and transnational conversation'.[150]

Such shared beliefs created opportunities to exploit the ICFTU or AFL-CIO, sidelining their pedagogical condescension and indeed shaping the thinking of European and American leaders – such as Jim Bury or A. Philip Randolph – struggling to comprehend the rapidity of change in the decolonizing world. Labor internationalists across Africa and Asia deployed and molded complex nexuses within, across and beyond the Cold War to map potential paths out of colonialism. Equally, first and second world actors attempted to understand the third world, as well as recruit and teach its leaders, through these very same networks. The conduits of early global Cold War labor movements ran both ways within a multidirectional 'global social conflict' during an era of rapid decolonization and increasingly bellicose geopolitical posturing.[151] 'This changes our understanding of the nature of global society itself. The claims to globalism of internationalist organizations based in New York, London, Brussels, or Moscow were wholly dependent on interactions with multilingual actors in Asia and Africa who contested Western frameworks and channeled their own forms of internationalism through these expanding networks'.[152] Recognition of this feedback from third world to first emerges forcefully as historians assess the interplay of decolonization and Cold War from the global south.

This is certainly not to dismiss the coercive, militant and tragic global Cold War that martyred Patrice Lumumba in Congo and destroyed Lusophone Africa into the 1960s and 1970s.[153] In the 1940s and 1950s discussed here, African opportunities within Cold War contexts were bounded by global power imbalances, the material realities of colonial rule and colonial inheritance. These strictures throttled more intensively over the mid-to-late twentieth century to the detriment of most African citizens, and to the benefit of certain 'extraverted' authoritarian leaders.[154] However, Singh's and Mboya's connections do demonstrate that the dominant picture of the early Cold War 'battlefield' is partial. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Cold War also provided

alignments of opportunity – playing fields of sorts – for international cooperation to expedite East African freedoms beyond the ken of former colonial masters. Such liaisons with international labor organizations may not have had enormous influence on the day-to-day experience of ordinary African workers.[155] They do open up questions of the wiggle room for mobile African activists within those 'tight corners' of agency in the early Cold War. The answers are to be found in intensive (and collaborative) investigation of the subaltern internationalisms of the era from multiple archives, languages and perspectives.[156]

Moreover, the excavation of vectors of unity and division in Africa's labour internationalism, via methods that de-center the superpower Cold War, uncovers entangled global, regional and local layers in Africa's own Cold Wars. In Kenya, the communist threat personified in Singh enabled Mboya, who soon clashed with West African pan-Africanists on the very nature of non-alignment and independent African statehood. Such debate about the possibilities and perils of the international shaped Kenya's early post-colonialism, ideas coeval with highly local conceptions of social being and the ordering of peoples so soon out of empire. This was a palimpsest of conflicts rooted simultaneously in the global geopolitics, pan-African community and the Kenyan past. Such interlocked scales of contestation were African Cold War.

The international connections of this article were brittle. The global moment was conspicuously short in Kenya, bookended by astringent pre-war colonial restrictions on mobility and the authoritarian statehood of the post-colony, which saw hazard not opportunity in the wider world. In power, Mboya turned inward to the fortification the state. 'The ideology of nationalism was being used to put the workers' struggle in its place, subordinate to party and state.[157] Mboya, an architect of the strong, dirigiste Kenyan state was complicit in this distancing from the everyday dialogical, subaltern internationalist connection that elevated him towards the top-down

authoritarian style of Kenya's post-colonialism. His assassination in 1969 amidst the turbulence of presidential succession by that strong executive state is a cruel reminder of Kenya's turn away from its global moment.

Endnotes

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[18] McCann, "Where was the *Afro* in Afro-Asian solidarity?"; Ismay Milford, "More than a Cold War Scholarship: East-Central African Anticolonial Activists, the International Union of Socialist Youth, and the Evasion of the Colonial State (1955-65)," *Stichproben: The Vienna Journal of African Studies,* 34 (2018).

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[120] Mboya, *Freedom and After*: 251.

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