

EMERGENCY

AN EXHIBITION ON THE MAU MAU
CONFLICT AND BRITISH COLONIAL RULE
IN 1950S KENYA

11th and 12th January 2020

Supported by the UCL Centre for
Critical Heritage Studies



EMERGENCY: A BACKGROUND

A state of emergency is a situation in which a government suspends normal constitutional procedures so as to perform actions or impose policies that it would normally not be permitted to undertake.

In 1895 the British Government established indirect rule over Kenya through the East Africa Protectorate. Keen to ensure the development of the region's production for their own gain, the British colonial government launched a campaign to attract British settlers with the promise of fertile land, abundant labour and large profits. Indigenous Kenyans lost tens of thousands of acres. Hemmed into African reserves - or forced to seek wage labour on European farms - they were increasingly dominated by social and political controls imposed by white settlers.

In 1920, the former East African Protectorate was transformed into a British crown colony and 'The Colony and Protectorate of Kenya' was officially established. Anti-British sentiment that had taken root in earlier years grew in the following decades, with many Kenyans calling for African political representation and - most importantly - the return of land stolen by white settlers. In the 1940s, anti-colonial sentiment crystallised in the formation of a militant, nationalist group known as the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), led by Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi. Popularised as the 'Mau Mau', the movement attracted significant grassroots support, with many thousands swearing oaths of allegiance.

'We were governed by a brutal regime. The colonial government was treating the people of Kenya very badly, like inhumans. They had also grabbed all our fertile land. They had also broken all our human rights. And therefore we were angry about that. And then we said, we must liberate ourselves from this kind of regime, a dictatorship regime. Therefore we started the struggle. Initially we started the struggle through talking, through memoranda, but in the end, we engaged them in armed struggle.'

- Gitu wa Kahengeri, President of the Mau Mau War Veterans Association, talking to Susan Kibaara and Mary Njoroge from the MBC team when filming *Operation Legacy*

Within a short time, the Mau Mau had carried out a string of violent attacks, hamstringing cattle, burning crops and murdering white settlers and indigenous Kenyans loyal to colonial rule. Increasingly threatened by the surge in activity, the British colonial administration outlawed the Mau Mau in 1950, banning their activities and declaring them a terrorist organisation.

In October 1952, Mau Mau 'terrorists', undeterred by this new categorisation, assassinated a police chief loyal to the British colonial administration, Chief Waruhiu. As Mau Mau supporters celebrated his assassination with dancing and songs, the British government treated the act as a public outrage that could not be ignored. In response, the government declared a State of Emergency.

Their plan: decapitate the Mau Mau movement and reassert colonial control.

THE PIPELINE

Significantly underestimating the strength, determination, skill and capacity of the Mau Mau, the British colonial government predicted the State of Emergency would be over within three months. In reality, the state of emergency lasted for eight years and became one of the most brutal episodes of British colonial history, characterised by psychological warfare, widespread detention, forced labour, forced resettlement, torture, and arbitrary killings.

At the heart of the operation, the British colonial administration set up and ran a network of detention camps, works camps, and emergency villages. The colonial government used this network of camps - referred to as the 'pipeline' - to detain and torture hundreds of thousands of Kenyans with the aim of extracting confessions of allegiance to the Mau Mau independence movement.

The pipeline system was ostensibly designed to 'cure' individuals of their Mau Mau sympathies through a system of 'rehabilitation' consisting of hard labour, re-education and a restoration of 'British moral values'. The notion of a 'pipeline' represented individuals progressing from initial detention to ultimate release, through the network of sites each designed to test the strength of the individual's allegiance through various modes of interrogation, including torture.

The colonial government categorised suspected Mau Maus as 'Black', 'Grey' or 'White' to signify their level of involvement with the cause. Those in the 'Black' category were deemed the most hardened and dangerous fighters and leaders, while the 'White' category encompassed those largely cleared of involvement during the initial interrogation. As a result of this 'sorting' system, the majority of those detained passed through a range of camps during their detention, with 'Blacks' moved to camps where guards employed more severe 'rehabilitation' tactics and 'Whites' moved along the pipeline towards eventual release.

55 years after independence, knowledge of these camps has been almost entirely - and actively - wiped from national conscience and memory in both Kenya and the UK. And, despite - or perhaps because of - its brutality, the Mau Mau conflict remains one of the least well known and least understood parts of our history in both Kenya and the UK.

EXHIBITION GUIDE

Since MBC's inception in January 2018, we have been working to restore and make visible repressed, destroyed or underrepresented aspects of British colonialism. This exhibition is a presentation of our work documenting the sites and stories of the Mau Mau Emergency in Kenya and the UK since January 2018 and comprises three elements:

- **Emergency Sites:** presenting some of our initial field work on two sites of the Emergency in the Central Region, Aguthi and Mweru
- **Emergency Stories:** presenting three oral histories gathered by members of our team in 2018 and 2019
- **Digital Reconstruction:** presenting some of our initial work on 3D reconstructions of the sites we have visited

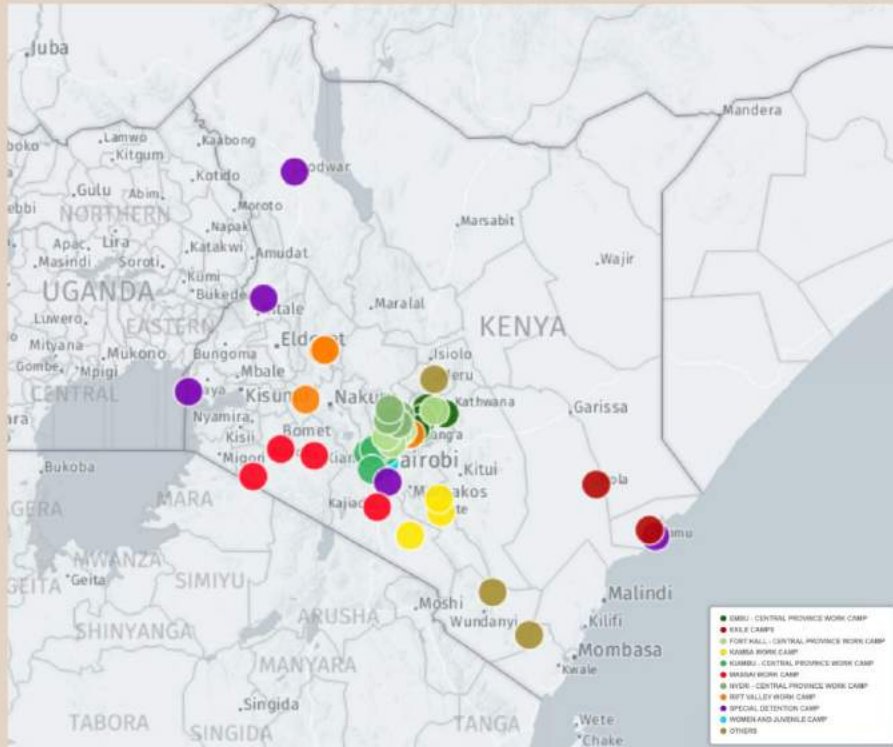
As a grassroots, volunteer-led initiative in the UK and Kenya, we present this work not as experts but as learners, inspired to undertake this work in response to the fact that we found ourselves not knowing the history or the experiences that have shaped us and others as individuals and as nations.

The work on display is therefore not a finished product, but a documentation of the journey we have been on to educate ourselves and, we hope, educate others in the process. It is also an invitation to ask ourselves the question: why do we not know?

We are eager to hear from you, the viewer, with your thoughts, suggestions and/or criticisms of this exhibition. Perhaps you know something about the camps on display here, perhaps you have been present at these sites or had family members who spent time here. Perhaps you or your relatives have photos, documents, mementos or objects relating to the conflict. Perhaps you disagree with us or think something is incorrect. We would like to hear from you about all these things.

Please fill in a form with comments on the exhibition and suggestions for improvement. If you would like to make a contribution to the content of the work, please leave your name and phone number and someone will get in touch with you.

EMERGENCY SITES



The central image of the exhibition is a map of Kenya showing the sites of the 'pipeline', the network of detention centres and work camps set up by the British colonial administration to quell the Mau Mau fight for land and freedom from British colonial rule. We created this image in 2018 using a digital mapping platform (CartoDB) when we found it difficult to visualise the scale and reach of detention camps across the country.



This photo shows museum team member Chao first developing the map in another team member's flat, by analysing material from Caroline Elkins' book *Britain's Gulag* (2005) and overlaying mentioned camp sites onto a digital map of Kenya. The points indicated on the map are not the exact locations of the camps but are representations of the towns in which the camps were located.

The purpose of creating this was to provide a more compelling and digestible representation of the pipeline that would help audiences - and our own team - visualise the nature of the conflict and the scale of the operations.

The image was shared widely by Kenyan, British and international audiences and has now been seen by over 30,000 people.

AGUTHI WORKS CAMP

Aguthi was one of a number of work camps in the Central Region used to detain individuals and families considered to have 'soft' Mau Mau sympathies. Those who were considered 'hardcore' - 'Blacks' - Mau Mau would be taken to far off exile camps in harsh, remote areas of the country such as Lamu island or Tsavo desert.

Once they were considered rehabilitated, detainees would then be transferred to work camps such as Aguthi which were closer to home, and were often the last steps in the pipeline before one would be released back into society.

After independence, detention camps around the country were either dismantled or turned into secondary schools or prisons. Today, the grounds and structures of Aguthi Works Camp have been repurposed into a girls secondary school known as Kangubiri Girls High School.

From local oral history, the word Kangubiri is said to be a Gikuyu corruption of the English phrase "You can go free", rumoured to have been uttered by camp commandants when detainees were considered 'cured' of Mau Mau sympathies and allowed to reintegrate into society. This attests to the fact that Aguthi works camp was indeed one of the last stages of the pipeline.

The main image shows solitary cells found in the grounds of the school today. Solitary cells were small rooms, approx. 11ft by 10 ft.



The structures had no windows, no natural light, and had barbed wire along the roof lining. Doors into the cells had three small eye holes so guards could watch detainees. These eye holes are still visible

today, although the doors have been turned upside down by the school during renovations. While the solitary cells are now used by the school as stores, former cells have been converted into dormitories.





Barbed wire lined the roof linings of cells to prevent detainees from escaping confinement. In many renovated cells at Kangubiri High School, the barbed wire remains in place.



This photograph shows the remnants of a trench that ran around Aguthi to stop detainees escaping. Detainees were often forced to dig these trenches themselves. Some were filled with wooden spikes to increase the threat of injury. This particular trench in Aguthi was approximately 20ft wide.

MWERU WORKS CAMP

Like Aguthi, Mweru was also a works camp in the Central Region that has been turned into a high school - Mweru High School.



The main image shows former cell blocks that today function as classrooms. Oral testimony from the local community drew our attention to the fact that the original cell

structures did not have windows, while the present day structures, which are used as classrooms do (see our digital section for more information).

As in Aguthi, some of the barbed wire from the time of the conflict is still present and visible at the site.



The 'Mau Mau Torture Room' was used to interrogate suspected Mau Mau sympathisers in the hope of extracting confessions. This torture cell still stands in the grounds of Mweru High School.



Our field work videos on YouTube include footage of the cell's interior.



This image shows a crumbling brick kiln in the grounds of Mweru. Detainees used this brick kiln to make the bricks used for the construction of the camp itself. The letters 'MWC' - or Mweru Works Camp - are still visible in a number of the bricks.

A close up of one of the bricks from Mweru Works Camp, stamped with 'MWC'.



WHAT IS DECOLONISATION?

There are so very many remnants of colonial times: from street names and statues that glorify people responsible for massacres and genocide, to objects in museums taken from their original owners, to the human remains of unidentified people held as collection artefacts.

There is so much missing in our museums and cultural institutions: histories, stories and traditions of indigenous people and communities, their knowledge of collections and objects.

Coloniality is in many different ways more present than past.

In past years, a growing number of cultural institutions, archives, museums across Europe, Northern America, Australia, are trying to tackle the challenge of decolonising their institutions. They are aware that the collections and research they present often have a colonial or even racist background.

Initially, decolonisation referred to the process that former colonies underwent to free themselves of the colonial supremacy. Today the term has become much more than that: a

philosophical, moral, social, spiritual, and also activist call that points to the fact that we are still subject to the ideology of colonialism.

Decolonising is about questioning our institutions: how and why are some forms of knowledge given priority and authority over others? How do we organise and categorise knowledge? Who determines the selection and quality criteria of collections? Who decides what is presented and represented? How do we contribute to a renewal of the canon with stories and reference frames that have been systematically erased from it?

In short: how do we change the focus, how do we alter our perspective?

Decolonising is about difficult conversations and reflections on the meaning of cultural institutions and who these institutions are intended to serve. It is about open and true dialogue with all members of communities and society, it is about sharing power and authority.

Decolonising is about cultural institutions becoming learning communities. About the necessity to create room for multiple perspectives showing the different contexts that determine how we look at objects or themes.

This extract was taken from the website of The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property: <https://www.iccrom.org/projects/thematic-discussion-decolonizing-heritage>

EMERGENCY STORIES

Since we first began MBC in January 2018, privileging and centralising the experiences of men, women, and children who lived through the Mau Mau Emergency, and bearing witness to their experiences, has been a central part of our approach. Our team has therefore been visiting veterans of the Mau Mau Emergency and British detention camps to listen to and record their stories.

We believe that by sharing more of these stories, we will contribute to a richer and more rounded history; one that prioritises the accounts and observations of those who have experienced the impacts of colonialism worldwide - not just the accounts of those who have studied it. This form of engagement is more direct, more personal. It is also an act of recognition; recognition of the fact that British colonialism didn't just shape certain countries in a structural, political or abstract way - it shaped every single life it touched. And, in many ways, continues to do so, even today.

As part of this exhibition, we are delighted to share three stories documented by our team and shared with the full consent of the individuals featured: James Njuguna Mwaura, Muthoni wa Kirima, and Wambugu wa Nyingi.

JAMES NJUGUNA MWAURA



James Njuguna Mwaura was twenty years old when the Mau Mau Emergency began. He joined the Mau Mau to fight for Kenya's freedom and took the Mau Mau oath. He was arrested and detained in Karatina Detention Camp for four years, surrounded by barbed wire so high they couldn't reach. He and his fellow detainees were interrogated but not willing to give answers, even if they were mistreated. During the historic court case in 2011, James showed the scars on his back from where he had been beaten.

You can listen to James' account of his experiences and read a transcript of the interview on the iPad.



This image shows James with Beth Rebisz and Caroline Wanjiru, who visited James at his home to conduct this interview.

James took the time to share his story with our team, and before leaving he pulled a beetroot from the ground as a gift to send us on our way.



This image shows the remnants of the trench at Karatina Detention Camp, where James was detained. The camp is now the site of Karatina University.

MUTHONI WA KIRIMA



Muthoni wa Kirima was born in 1932 and became a top-ranking female fighter in the Mau Mau conflict. She fought in the forest for the duration of the Emergency and was the only woman to ascend to the rank of field marshal. Muthoni was never held in detention. She emerged from the forest to celebrate Kenya's independence in 1963.

You can listen to Muthoni's account of her experiences and read a transcript of the interview on the iPad.



The image is a photograph of a newspaper cutting showing Muthoni and Eliud, a fellow Mau Mau fighter, at Nyeri Stadium on the day of Kenyan independence, just after they emerged from the forest. Eliud and Muthoni remain firm

friends, and Eliud continues to carry this photograph with him everywhere.

This image shows Muthoni with some members of MBC, including Susan Wambui Kibaara, Janet Muthoni Kibaara (and their children), Adam Rodgers Johns, and Olivia Windham Stewart, when we went to meet Muthoni in Githurai, just outside Nairobi in



July 2018. Muthoni wa Kirima's sister, Mukami, was married to Janet and Susan's great uncle, Mau Mau fighter General Karangi.



These images show Muthoni at home on two occasions, the first when we went to interview her. Muthoni showed us her dreadlocks, which she has not cut her since she was in the forest. The second image

shows Susan on a recent visit to Muthoni's home to tell her about the exhibition and event.

WAMBUGU WA NYINGI



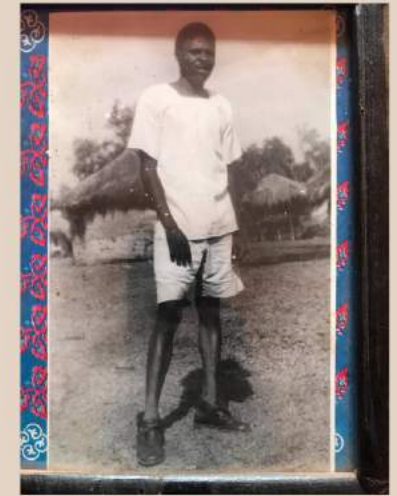
The British colonial administration arrested Wambugu wa Nyingi on December 24th, 1952 on suspicion of taking the Mau Mau oath. Wambugu was held at sixteen colonial detention camps during the Emergency; in this time he experienced beatings, starvation, and squalid living conditions.

During the infamous Hola Massacre, in which eleven detainees were beaten to death, Wambugu was presumed dead for three days until the coroner found him alive.

In the video interview our team conducted with him, Wambugu speaks to the Museum of British Colonialism about his life and experiences during the Emergency. His story moves from his childhood - and memories of the stirrings of rebellion - to his time in detention camps across Kenya and his return to his mother's home in Nyeri after being long presumed dead.

This image (right) shows Wambugu on the day of his release from detention.

You can listen to Wambugu's account of his experiences and read a transcript of the interview on the iPad.



These images (left) show the Museum team visiting Wambugu at his home in Nyeri county. Wambugu shared his story with us, and showed the team photos from the course of his life. He has also kept newspaper clippings from a 2011 *Daily Mail* article naming one of his torturers during detention, Terence Gavaghan.

DIGITAL RECONSTRUCTION

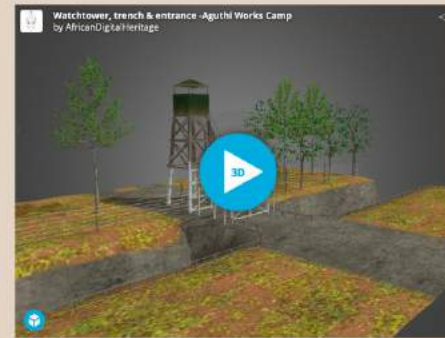
Since MBC's conception, we have privileged digital modes of documentation and presentation of information. One of the primary reasons for this is that we have always been an online-first space, and we see digital tools and media as a way to reach wider audiences in different geographic locations, as well as able to engage audiences at different levels of literacy, expertise and age.

To date, the work presented in this physical space has been viewed online in six continents and over 50 different countries. As a volunteer organisation working across Kenya and the UK, a digital approach has also allowed us to share our work without having to possess physical collections.

So far, we have employed digital tools to present content in two main ways: interactive maps and 3D digital reconstructions. Our primary sources of information include:

- Visits to former campsites to document existing camp structures and remains that still stand today
- Oral history from local community and Mau Mau veterans
- Archival records, including photographs, books, maps, videos, etc.

In this part of the exhibition you can see details of three 3D digital reconstructions created this year from the two different camps we are now familiar with, Aguthi and Mweru.



This image is a still taken from a 3D digital reconstruction of the Aguthi watchtower, trench and entrance. The uniqueness of this model, when compared with the others, is that none of the structures presented remain in tact today; this digital model was created entirely from archival photos and oral interviews.

Indeed, the image to the left shows the exact site as it is found today, with MBC contributor, Moha, standing at the approximate location of the watchtower.

Embedded on our website as an interactive model, visitors and viewers are able to move around this site, zooming in and out to explore the structures and the scale. It is worth noting that very few photographic records exist of this camp, therefore our knowledge and understanding of this period of detention is not exact. By using a range of sources to create this visual record, however, we are able to engage audiences in a more interactive way and present information that was otherwise inaccessible.

The 3D reconstruction approach to visualising camps allows us to explore a single camp in multiple ways.

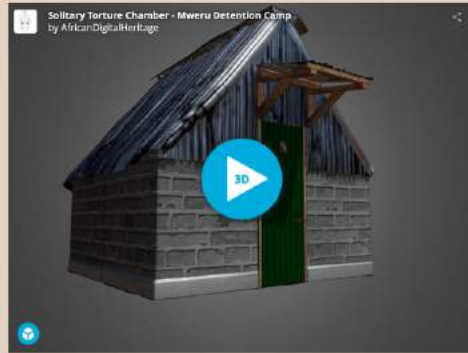


As seen in these images, the Aguthi watchtower and camp entrance is seen first from the ground level, while the second image shows an aerial view of the camp. This incorporates buildings from the former site that still remain today, and combines them with the watchtower.



Our aim is to create visual sources that can be used for different purposes now and in the future, and that can also harness the knowledge of individuals and communities to increase their authenticity.

The second reconstruction is of the torture chamber in Mweru High School, also presented in the Emergency Sites section of the exhibition. This structure is still standing in largely the same condition as it was when the camp was in use.



However, some sites such as Mweru are now secondary schools and are private property, and therefore not freely accessible to the public. This interactive model thus allows us to overcome this challenge in accessibility by allowing viewers to explore the structure in fine detail. This provides a significant advantage over photographs or even video.



These images illustrate two key stages in our reconstruction process. The first image depicts a white untextured model showing the reconstruction in its earlier stages where

the focus is on the structural elements of the building instead of the aesthetics.

This image then shows a more photorealistic reconstruction which attempts to depict the environment, textures, and colours as they would look in real life.



The third model on display is a 3D digital reconstruction of the mass cells at Mweru Works Camp. As can be seen from the photograph - and the other section of the exhibition - the basic structure of these mass cells still exist today.

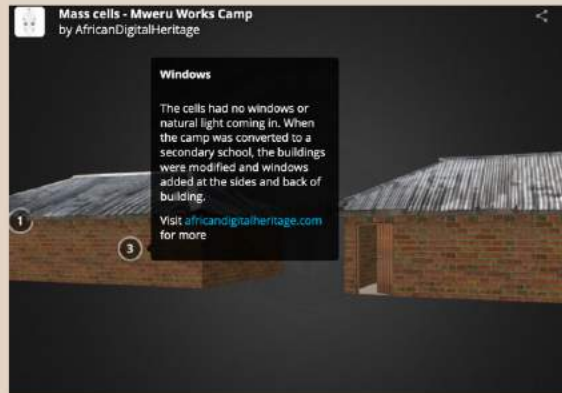


Despite the structures remaining largely intact, oral history interviews alerted our team to the fact that some alterations were made to the cells in order to repurpose them for use in the school. The primary alteration was the addition of windows to let light in, so that the space could be used as a classroom. This contrasts significantly from the windowless space used to house suspected Mau Mau sympathisers.



By embedding these changes in our digital reconstructions, viewers can 'tour' the structures, interrogate these changes, and develop a deeper sense of how the structures looked at the time.

This image shows one of the options viewers can select when interacting with the model. Clicking on this option brings up a text box, explaining the changes made to the structure since the time of the Emergency.



Engaging in this way allows viewers to become more fully aware of the conditions of detainees at the time, and to more fully comprehend the brutality and inhumanity of situation. It allows us all to more truthfully and rigorously document these episodes in our history.

Indeed, digital technologies and digital humanities have huge potential - nowhere more so than in documenting the untold, erased or repressed histories of global, colonial brutality.



The central image in this section shows just one of the many ways we have started to bring all aspects of our work together, overlaying videos and images from our fieldwork and research onto an interactive map of Kenya. We plan to eventually create a mixed media installation that incorporates the 3D reconstructions as well.

MOVING FORWARD WITH DIGITAL

Tackling suppressed, violent, and marginalised histories such as this using digital media is a largely new and experimental approach for us and for our audiences. As such, a number of questions and challenges arise when creating these digital reconstructions. These include but are not limited to:

- **How do we communicate and visualise uncertainty in our visualisations?**
- **How do we make technical aspects such as 3D visualisation and 3D reconstructions open and community friendly?**
- **How can audiences participate and contribute to the reconstruction process?**
- **How do we handle intergenerational differences when dealing with older Mau Mau veterans whose oral history testimony forms the backbone for the digital reconstruction?**
- **How do we incorporate both intangible and tangible histories within the digital media?**

These are just some of the questions we have moving forward. We steer away from a need to present complete digital reconstructions as experts, and we instead embrace the reconstruction process as a way to communicate step by step progress in our research and findings.

Our aim is to approach digital reconstruction as an incremental process, one in which we can be open about the information we have so far and that which we don't. Today we reconstruct one building, tomorrow we reconstruct the next, and step by step we begin to visualise entire campsites.

For more from our team on each of these topics, please visit our blog at: museumofbritishcolonialism.org/journey

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE PANELS

SATURDAY 11TH JANUARY

12:00 - 14:00 ARCHIVES, LIBRARIES AND COLLECTIONS

Archives, libraries and museum collections are places where knowledge is stored, negotiated and contested. This panel will explore the issues around the possession and ordering of archives, libraries and collections in the context of colonialism. **Panellists:** Nicky Sugar, JC Niala, Onyeka Igwe, Paul O'Connor, Abira Hussein, Marion Wallace

14:00 - 16:00 REPARATIONS

The public debate around repatriation has been gaining ground, partly following a report commissioned by the French president Emmanuel Macron which recommended the full restitution of looted objects to Africa. This panel will explore the issues around the repatriation of museum objects acquired during colonialism. **Panellists:** Charlotte Joy, Chao Tayiana, Geoffrey Robertson QC, Princess Eugene Majuru

16:00 - 17:00 OPEN SESSION

An open session for participants, audience members and supporters to share relevant work, research areas or reflections from the event.

17:00 - 19:00 DRINKS RECEPTION

Please join panellists, friends and supporters for an informal drinks reception. Tickets in advance, with a £10 donation. **Speaker:** David Olusoga

SUNDAY 12TH JANUARY

10:00 - 12:00 OPEN SESSION

An open session for participants, audience members and supporters (as above).

12:00 - 14:00 DECOLONISATION

In 1987 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o made a call to 'decolonise the mind'. In recent times, decolonisation has become a buzzword in all things from university curricula to Extinction Rebellion. In this panel, we will introduce what decolonisation means, and explore how legacies of Western dominance have placed limits on our ability to understand the world. **Panellists:** Meera Sabaratnam, Maya Goodfellow, Johanna Zetterstrom-Sharp, Nicola Stylianou

14:00 - 16:00 REPARATIONS

The global movement for reparations condemns colonialism as a crime and demands redress for historic injustices. This panel will explore continued claims for reparations for slavery and colonial exploitation and consider how we can galvanise these movements towards the creation of a radically fairer world. **Panellists:** Paul Chepkwony, Chege Githiora, Tom Wills, Nikita Bernardi

16:00 - 18:00 FOSTERING UK AFRICA COLLABORATIONS

UK-Africa collaborations have the potential to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and mutual understanding. In this panel, we will explore the different methodologies and challenges to collaborations between the UK and Africa, in the areas of diplomacy, arts and culture and movements for social justice. **Panellists:** Nadine Patel, Julius Mbaluto, Olivia Windham Stewart, Chao Tayiana, Pauline Long



Museum of British Colonialism Contributors (L-R):

Mike Wanjala, Beth Rebisz, Camilla Omollo, Grace Sampao
 Diana Ogutu, Susan Wambui Kibaara, Chao Tayiana, Hannah McLean
 Luna Diaz, Mary Njoroge, Maureen Ng'ayu, Olivia Windham Stewart
 Gabe Moshenska, Evans Maingi, Wairimu Nduba, Adam Rodgers Johns

MBC WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE UCL CENTRE FOR CRITICAL HERITAGE STUDIES, WHOSE GENEROUS SUPPORT MADE THIS EVENT POSSIBLE. WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK OUR PARTNER, INFORMER EAST AFRICA, AND OUR HOST, THE AFRICA CENTRE.

We likewise remain extremely grateful for the generous support of many others in the UK, Kenya and further afield for all they have done to support our work along the way. This includes, but is not limited to: the Mau Mau War Veterans' Association and all contributors to Emergency Sites and Stories; the Kenyan Human Rights Commission; the entire team at History Hit and all contributors to the Operation Legacy documentary; Anthony Maina at Museums of Kenya; all contributors and panellists for Changing the Narrative and other events; our generous donors and supporters; and last - but definitely not least - our lively team of tireless volunteers whose commitment seems to know no bounds!

For more information on the Museum of British Colonialism, or information on how to get involved in our work, please visit our website at museumofbritishcolonialism.org, or fill out an exhibition questionnaire leaving your details, and a member of our team will be in touch. Our documentary Operation Legacy is available to watch online via HistoryHit.tv.

If you enjoyed Changing the Narrative, please consider donating to the Museum of British Colonialism via our website or at patreon.com/museumofbritishcolonialism. If you would like to make a donation by cash or cheque, please speak to a member of our team. We are a 100% volunteer-led organisation and work hard to make every penny count!

