

The Incarcerated Self: Narratives of Political Confinement in Kenya

Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation explores the narratives of incarceration that have emerged in the pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras in Kenya. Rather than embark on the almost impossible task of examining all forms of prison narratives, this study concentrates mainly on the fiction and non-fiction writing of prisoners of conscience or political prisoners. Political repression has been a recurrent motif in Kenya since pre-colonial but particularly in the colonial and postcolonial times. Victims of state terror have consistently added to the long list of the literature of prison that invites scholarly investigation. Focusing on memory, truth telling, the I-pronoun, and trauma, the study analyzes the relationship between self-exploration and narration of confinement. I show that oral narratives inaugurated the narrativization of incarceration in Kenya during the pre-colonial era and continued to serve as the oxygen ventilating written prison narratives in succeeding periods. In this regard I argue that there are Kenyan oral texts that exemplify what may be termed oral prison narratives. The study identifies the connection between written and oral tales of incarceration by unearthing the extent to which oral tales are variously appropriated to capture incarceration as individual or collective lived experience whether in a literal or symbolic sense.

The study is based on the assumption that there is a relationship between narrating one's prison experience and the process of self-exploration or self-discovery. Also, the

study assumes that there is a relationship between the prison context and the text; and that the prisoner's individual experience may embody the collective experience of those in same or similar circumstances and may go beyond the prison walls, encompassing the lived experience of those outside prison as well, especially in times of pervasive political intolerance and repression. Although my method is fundamentally literary-critical, the study spans across a wide array of disciplines. Yet it bears clarifying that I adopt an eclectic approach, letting texts themselves determine what theoretical framework is most appropriate.

The study extrapolates upon the relationship between self-exploration and narration of confinement and between the compulsion to give an account of one's experience and to count. It unmask the motives of political prisoners' narration of their experiences; the connection between the prison texts and prison contexts; as well as unraveling issues related to the narrative styles and genres used.

One of the major findings of this study is the understanding of prison literature of prisoners of consciences as constituting an alternative and unauthorized national narrative that runs counter to the national official or authorized national narrative. Both these metanarratives claim legitimacy and fiercely vie for public space and attention, thereby performing what I term the paradox of patriotism.

This investigation of prison narratives is significant because it includes oral tales, constituting a fresh point of departure in understanding the phenomenon of narrating

imprisonment, and also because it brings to the fore critical issues related to human rights, governance, and politics in Kenya, that would interest scholars in a range of disciplines in the Humanities and beyond.

Dedicated to my parents who defied all skeptics to believe in my ability to reach this point but never lived to see their dreams about their son turn into reality.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The story is told of how Tanzanian playwright Ebrahim Hussein, arguably one of the best and brightest minds in the field of dramaturgy in East Africa, was arrested in Kenya in a bizarre drama in the heyday of the Moi regime.¹ Hussein, then a professor at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, had come for a campus interview to fill a faculty position at the University of Nairobi's African Languages and Linguistics Department. The story has it that he had thoroughly impressed the interview committee. The committee intended for him to meet the vice-chancellor pending the formalization of a job offer that looked almost certain. While waiting for his turn to meet the vice-chancellor at the lobby, Hussein's attention was drawn to the portrait of Kenyan second president Daniel arap Moi on the wall. Suddenly and inexplicably, an irate Hussein is said to have addressed the portrait, severely criticizing it for running the country down the drain. Some versions of the tale have it that he actually smashed the president's portrait. Inevitably the playwright was swiftly arrested and detained at Nairobi's Central Police Station. Insulting the portrait of the president, or the person of the president, was then, as now, analogous to playing with fire.

However, Hussein's detention was relatively brief, at the very least lasting a number of hours, thanks to the prompt and desperate intervention of university officials familiar with what turned out to be the playwright's deteriorating mental condition. Consequently, he did not secure the job. The intensity of Hussein's condition became

apparent when he subsequently deserted his job at the University of Dar es Salaam, again in inexplicable circumstances, and chose to become a petty tomato vendor on the streets of Dar es Salaam. If the playwright's arrest epitomizes how swift the Kenyan state apparatuses were in incarcerating real and imagined opponents, the leniency and quickness attendant to his release were atypical. Few Kenyan political opponents of the Moi regime would have any extenuating circumstances or mitigatory factors that could mollify an irate state terror machine hell bent on meting instant justice upon any and all who figuratively "smashed" the president's portrait. The president's portrait then, as now, graced every office and business by decree, perhaps symbolizing the omnipresent and omniscient power of the person occupying the highest seat in the land. The portrait was then as now a symbol of raw power and underlining the risk and danger inherent in Hussein's actions.

In other words the outcome of Hussein's assault on power and the symbols of power could have been worse. Hussein escaped the fate of intellectuals such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Atieno Odhiambo, Edward Oyugi, Alamin Mazrui, Wahome Mutahi, Katama Mkangi and others who were either detained or imprisoned for longer periods of time for figuratively smashing or threatening to smash the symbols of power by questioning or appearing to question Moi's leadership.² For them there were no extenuating circumstances, no mitigatory factors. Some of them such as university student leader Titus Adungosi who was imprisoned after the August 22, 1982 attempted

coup on Moi's rule did not survive to tell the story of their incarceration. Adungosi died in prison only days before his anticipated date of release.

Yet it is important to note that the arrest, imprisonment, detention, and elimination of writers, intellectuals, and other individuals or groups perceived to be critical of the state in postcolonial Kenya had its seed sown and nurtured in colonial times. During the apex of Kenya's struggle to liberate itself from colonial rule in the Mau Mau guerrilla war, thousands, even tens thousands of Kenyans were incarcerated in the infamous colonial detention camps. Some of these victims of colonial state terror, starting with Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, would write their experiences in memoirs written during or after their incarceration. These were tales of torture, trauma, deprivation and dehumanization. But even more importantly they were, as Barbara Harlow would put it, "narratives of contention" in which narrating self and reclaiming selfhood were the centerpieces (xv). Put differently, it would seem that in these narratives the incarcerated selves embarked on individual and collective voyages of self-exploration as a means of making sense of their carceral experience.

One would have hoped that upon independence in 1963, postcolonial Kenya would cease creating an environment of repression and suppression that would produce further tales of incarceration and state terror. But what has transpired in postcolonial Kenya had striking resemblances to the scenario in Gaza during the 1990s. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman in their The Oxford History of the Prison, indicate that in

the early 1990s, there was a record number of Palestinians held in prisons by Israel for political reasons during Israel's occupation of the disputed territory. Yet from 1994 when Gaza began to enjoy autonomy, it became increasingly a case of the Palestinian state imprisoning more and more of its own Palestinians on political grounds (Morris and Rothman 377). Similarly, in post independence Kenya, the Kenyan state chose to silence opposition by holding other Kenyans as political prisoners, unwittingly enabling continuity in the production of narratives of incarceration for which narrating self and reclaiming selfhood were at the front and center. On the whole Kenya has had a long trajectory of despotism and dictatorship during which the colonial and postcolonial potentates ruthlessly detained and silenced critics, to use Achille Mbembe's terms. These victims of state terror have consistently added to the long list of incarceration narratives that invite scholarly investigation. The corpus of the literature of political imprisonment in Kenya, particularly in the postcolonial moment, undercuts the official projection of the country as an oasis of stability, freedom, and democracy in an endless African wasteland of turbulence and tyranny. As Mbembe has argued in On the Postcolony, the European civilizing mission of what it then considered barbaric pre-colonial Africa amounted to little more than an imposition of colonial rule, whose despotic and dehumanizing tendencies, postcolonial African leaders notoriously and unquestioningly inherited.

This study proposes that whenever such incarceration narratives emerge, they tend to at once figuratively smash the official symbols of power and re-paint Kenya's successive regimes in alternative and unsavory strokes. The narratives of incarceration are therefore quintessentially as Susan Egan echoing J.L. Austin, suggests "illocutionary act[s]" (3). They are speech acts poised to deconstruct with the power of words the spurious image of benign power with which Kenyan leaders are constructed or construct themselves in the public media and public appearances. What is also significant is the site of and impetus for their emergence. Unlike Hussein's attack on the president's portrait that happens outside and before incarceration, almost always these narratives are conceived and constructed within, inspite of, or because of incarceration. The locale and conditions of forced physical and ideological confinement and containment become the *raison d'être* for the illocutionary acts. Through these acts political prisoners continue playing with fire after having already being singed by the flames of state terror, doing with words what the incarcerating and torturing regimes see as undesirable and inconceivable. This study confirms the view propounded and advanced by any number of scholars, notably Harlow and Ioan Davies, that imprisonment hardly succeeds in its intent of silencing or much less rehabilitate political prisoners, but instead it often serves to radicalize them and harden their ideological and oppositional stances.

My study selects instances of the prison writing of Kenya's political prisoners. Rather than embark on the almost impossible task of examining all forms of prison narratives, this study concentrates only on the literature of prisoners of conscience or political prisoners. Because narratives that can be classified as narratives of confinement in Kenya in these periods are also numerous, it is almost impossible to deal with all of them in one study. Hence my focus is on narratives dealing with political imprisonment, by or about political prisoners. Moreover, it is imperative to point out that the texts that I analyze are mostly those inspired by or resulting from the actual or lived prison experience of the individual authors.

My research project is guided by the central question: To what extent is narrating incarceration an act of self-exploration? Other pertinent questions are such as: What are the explicit and implicit motivations for narrating incarceration? What is the relationship between the conditions of confinement and the narratives of confinement or put differently, what is the link between the context of confinement and the text narrating confinement? What are the narratological tools that narratives of confinement employ? Is form/genre relevant or irrelevant in narrating and narrativizing confinement? To what extent does the collective become embedded in the individual experience of incarceration? What is the relationship between the narration of confinement and the victim's trauma? What is the relationship between the narration of confinement and memory? Is there a link between memory and trauma? And how does narrating

confinement relate to claims of truth-telling? How do aspects of truth-telling, trauma, memory and the I-pronoun affect the prisoner's conception of self within or without society?

Broadly conceived, "confinement" in this study entails forceful physical detention of the body that comes in the form of capture, captivity, enslavement or imprisonment or detention without trial. For this definition of literature of confinement I draw on W. B. Carnochan in his essay "The Literature of Confinement" in which he states that this kind of literature is characterized by restricting the "free movement of the body and mind" (381). Prison or imprisonment is therefore a particular kind of confinement that is the impetus and site for much of the literature constituting the focus and locus of this study. As a result, for the most part, the terms "prison," "incarceration" and "confinement" will be used interchangeably. Also, in this study the expression "political prisoner" is synonymous with "prisoner of conscience" by which, adapting a fairly broad view, I mean "anyone confined for politically motivated offences, violent or non-violent" (Nier 351).

As Ioan Davies has argued in his Writers in Prison (1990), scholarly interest in confinement as a site or impetus for writing is fairly recent in the academe. Davies points to the late 1980s as the period when more sustained and elaborate scholarly interest in the interplay between confinement and writing emerged (3). Yet some of the most abiding examples of literature in a wide array of fields, ranging from philosophy

to religion, and from politics to creative works, and dating back hundreds of years, have been written in conditions of either confinement, or as a result of the experience of confinement or in exile. For example Plato's treatises on art and philosophy such as Creto, Apology, and Phaedrus were, in part, inspired by his contemplation on his predecessor, Socrates' confinement and subsequent execution. St. John, New Testament writer and apostle, wrote the book of Revelation toward the end of the first century A.D. while languishing in prison on the Isle of Patmos in the Roman era. A number of Pauline letters such as Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and his two letters to Timothy, that form the canon of the Christian Bible were penned, as Paul himself states, according to the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, under "prison bonds" in Roman times (2 Tim 2:9). Another prison writer in Roman times is Boethius, who wrote The Consolation of Philosophy before his execution, a fate that may have befallen Paul as well. Fiction writing on confinement, and particularly prison, also predates thorough theoretical/critical analysis of the genre or "writing about writing," to borrow Anthony Appiah's expression (53). Charles Dickens is exemplary in this regard with works such as A Tale of Two Cities, The Pickwick Papers, and Oliver Twist narrating prison as early as in the 1800s. It is not until recently that Dickens' works would be read as forms of prison writing, as exemplified by Jan Alber's Narrating the Prison: Role and Representation in Charles Dickens' Novels, Twentieth Century Fiction, and Film (2007).

The kind of “writing about writing” that anticipates my own began as late as in the late 1980s with Barbara Harlow’s ground breaking study Resistance Literature (1987). In this study, as in her subsequent Barred: Women, Writing and Political Detention (1992), Harlow focuses on narratives of prisoners of conscience or political prisoners, a focus that resonates with my own. Harlow’s Resistance Literature was followed by Bruce H. Franklin’s Prison Literature in America (1989). In his analysis of written works of hardcore “criminal” writers, Franklin exposes the racist underpinnings of the American criminal justice system and the brutality of its penal system. Davies’s Writers in Prison (1990) is another important pioneer work in this field with an emphasis similar to Harlow’s, namely the explication of the works of political prisoners. Dylan Rodríguez’s Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison (2006) is a more recent text on prison writing at once underscoring the “visions of displacement and disarticulation” that prison engenders and iconoclastically interrogating the appropriateness of using prison writing as a literary genre (1).

Debates on the genres and subgenres of literature are inevitably implicated in the larger debate as to what is literature, and what should be included in or excluded from literature. It is therefore, hardly superfluous to begin a discussion on incarceration narratives by briefly linking these narratives to this debate. The Latin term *litera*, which is the etymological basis for the English word literature at once privileges the written word and excludes oral forms of expression. The neologism “orature,” preferred by

many Africanists such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Micere Mugo, and Ochieng Anyumba is certainly an attempt to counter this exclusionary predilection of the Western idea of literature, its tendency to exclude oral forms. The primacy of the spoken word in Africa is, for the most part, the force behind the call for the celebration and inclusion of oral art forms on the high table of literature. For example, Adetayo Alabi in his book Telling Our Stories (2005), has advanced the argument that Africa abounds in oral autobiographies.

However, most Western critics have defined prison literature as being exclusively written. For example Carnochan observed that "Literature of the prison includes, on the one hand, fictions written about prison experience and, on the other, writings of every sort by prisoners" (384). For Carnochan, prison literature need not be about prison. But even as his notion of prison literature is very broadly defined, it excludes oral forms. Barbara Harlow in her Barred: Women, Writing and Political Detention, defines prison literature as a wide range of types of writing, which is not only composed in or out of prison but is about prison (4). In other words, prison literature is inextricably tied to the "carceral," or concerned with either the facticity or the fiction of the condition of incarceration. Significantly, Harlow has drawn a distinction between what she calls "representation of prison in writing," and "the places of writing in prison" (4). Her distinction helps us to distinguish between literature about prison, which may simply be a creative or imaginative attempt to represent prison on

the one hand, and the kind of literature, which has prison as the site for writing on the other. It bears adding that by “representation of prison in writing,” Harlow does not necessarily mean that one must be in prison at the time of writing or must have experienced imprisonment before to write prison in this sense. In this category of prison literature therefore, we can situate both the prisoners who are experiencing or have experienced actual incarceration and the imaginative writer who is something of a potential prisoner, and endowed with the capacity to imagine prison and to represent his idea of prison with the readers from outside the prison walls.

On the other hand, the latter kind of prison writing, “writing in prison” tends to be predicated on experiential reality, the reality of actual physical incarceration of the body and possibly attempts to imprison the mind as well. Regardless of whether the writer presents a real-life account or a fictionalized one and regardless of whether it is a poem, a memoir, a play, a letter or a diary; whatever the writer writes in prison constitutes prison writing, which as Harlow asserts, bears the mark of prison as the site for writing with its attendant possibilities and limitations. Moreover, the latter category of prison writing emphasizes not only on the prison as the place for writing but on the *act* of writing itself as well. In a slight departure from Harlow and Carnochan, I define prison narratives as verbal compositions and expressions, written or oral, fictional or non-fictional, composed inside or outside prison and for which the carceral experience or imagination is central.

Because the seminal analyses or writings about prison writing, any number of studies with various and varied emphases and on literature of confinement composed in places as diverse as Italy, Spain, Argentina, Nigeria, South Africa, and Germany, have emerged. However, I have noted that there is little or nothing that has been written on Kenya, despite its long tradition of narratives of confinement from pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial times. Another gap that I have identified stems from the exclusion of oral narratives of confinement in previous analyses. Like Harlow, I am interested in the interplay between confinement as a context for composing and narrating, and the content and form of the text. In my study I am guided by Bernth Lindfors astute observation; “the text ... is so completely conditioned by its shaping context that it cannot be adequately grasped and appreciated without some knowledge of its creator and the circumstances that prompted its creation”(1). In sum, I therefore intend to fill the gap occasioned by the paucity of studies of the literature of confinement in Kenya and oral narratives of confinement in general.

I contend that even when scholars have analyzed Kenyan oral tradition their focus has been more on its aesthetics as a cultural artifact and not on confinement as an overriding theme or as a site for narrating and narrativizing one’s experience. For example K. W. Wamitila’s study Archetypal Criticism of Classical Swahili Poetry (2001) focuses on a Fryean reading of Liyongo’s Takhmisa ya Liongo, thereby laying emphasis on homogenizing Liyongo’s poetry with world literature across time and

space. Following Northrop Frye, Wamitila pays remarkable attention to the universal values and ecumenical motifs inherent in Liongo's classical Swahili poetry, but his anachronistic approach elides significant theorization on the full range of the implication of the theme of incarceration and the prison context that shaped and molded the poet's poetical production. Similarly analyses of Kenyan oral tales by scholars such as Ruth Finnigan in her Oral Literature in Africa (1970), Ciarunji Chesaina in her Oral Literature of the Kalenjin (1988), and Okumba Miruka in his Oral Literature of the Luo (2001) have paid scanty or no attention to the degree to which these tales thematize confinement.

In selecting the texts for analysis in this study, I considered a number of criteria. The rationale for selection included the following considerations: (1) texts that narrate confinement or prison, whether they are oral or written, in order to bring to the fore the similarities and differences in their treatment of the experience of confinement; (2) texts exhibiting variety so that I may be able to consider a wide range of prison texts that vary in genre, form, emphasis, and as far as the place and time of composing is concerned; (3) importance of the texts in the collective memory of the Kenyan peoples; (4) uniqueness of the texts and (5) incarceration as an actual lived experience of the written text's author, whether or not that experience was fictionalized or represented as factually as is autobiographically possible.

Additionally, because I am interested in the narratives of confinement in general I incorporate both the written and oral texts that best exemplify narration of confinement. For the oral texts I have selected the narratives from the Swahili on the Kenyan coast and the Bukusu of Western Kenya because of the opportunity for comparative analysis that these narratives from two disparate Kenyan communities provide. The narratives I have selected here are the Swahili epic of Liongo and the Bukusu oral tale of Sela and Mwambu.

In ensuring there is a sense of variety in the range of texts for analysis, I have not only targeted oral and written texts that narrate confinement; I have also included a wide spectrum of genres and forms, representing the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial periods in Kenya. For instance, I have included Gakaara Wanjau's prison diary Mau Mau Author in Detention (1988); Ngugi wa Thiong'o's political manifesto Detained (1981), JM Kariuki's memoir Mau Mau Detainee (1961), Abdilatif Abdalla's prison poetry Sauti ya Dhiki (1973), Wahome Mutahi's novel Three Days on the Cross (1990).

Most of the works I have selected have particular significance to the collective memory of the Kenyan peoples. To be sure, the oral tales from the Swahili and Bukusu peoples may not, properly speaking, be completely representative of the rich and diverse oral tradition of various Kenyan peoples whose filiation with orality is profound. However, these tales provide a glimpse into how oral tales of confinement are

both germane and profitable sites of analysis as are written texts. I must add that my own familiarity with Bukusu and Swahili orature borne from years of engagement with the two cultures is also an important factor in their selection.

As for the written texts, they are, I believe, representative of various critical historical moments in Kenya's history or were penned by key historical figures in the country's collective memory. This is true of the prison works written during or about detention in the colonial period such as Kariuki's Mau Mau Detainee, Wanjau's Mau Mau Author in Detention, Otieno's Mau Mau's Daughter; and those of the postcolonial period such as Abdalla's Sauti ya Dhiki, Ngugi's Detained, Mazrui's Chembe cha Moyo, and Mutahi's Three Days on the Cross. To illustrate the historical importance of the authors, it needs to be noted quite briefly, for instance, that Kariuki's political assassination in 1974 almost brought Kenya to the precipice of collapse in the Jomo Kenyatta era; Ngugi is arguably Kenya's most famous creative writer; the late Mutahi is Kenya's probably the most successful satirist for whom a national literary prize, the Wahome Mutahi Prize for Literature, has been named; and Wambui Otieno's legal fight for the right to bury her husband in 1987 made her spring to tremendous national and international prominence.

Apart from Wambui Otieno's historical importance in the collective memory of the Kenyan nation, I have selected Wambui Otieno's Mau Mau's Daughter, because of its uniqueness as the only female narrative that best captures the quintessence of the

Mau Mau struggle and the consequences of incarceration for women fighters. It is a female narrative of confinement told in a woman's own voice, lending it a uniquely sensitive perspective and an ability to "feminize" the narration of the colonial detention in ways narratives by men do not. To my knowledge, there happens to be no other better female voices that come close to (re) presenting the Mau Mau struggle from an experiential point of view. Even, Charity Waciuma's autobiography Daughter of Mumbi (1969) that, for several decades, was considered a credible Mau Mau memoir, turns out be an account of someone who, unlike Otieno, never fought in the trenches as it were.

A number of studies have investigated the motivations behind narratives of confinement. They include Davies' in Prison Writing, Joanna Summers' Late-Medieval Prison Writing and the Politics of Autobiography and Susan Egan's Mirror Talk. Davies suggests that among other motivations for writing, the prisoner "seeks to preserve himself" (9). Summers asserts that the prison narrator is driven by the desire to "appease and appeal to his opponents and captors in order to win pardon and patronage" (4). Egan opines that crises are seminal in the will to write or narrate one's experience. She claims: "Certainly the crises that generate autobiography may begin with the body; suffering, illness, and death go to work on the body and determine its narrative" (7).

Another important aspect of narratives of confinement that forms my analytic framework is the explicit or implicit presence of the "I" pronoun. Theories that are

preoccupied with the narrating “I” and the motives for writing or narrating are integral in our making sense of the factors at play in the narration of prison experience. It would appear the conceptual emphasis on the autobiographical “I” has shifted from the facile explanation of a narcissistic self, the self-indulgent entity that derives its name from Narcissus, the character from Greek antiquity who killed himself by naively following his reflection in a pool of water. The focus now is less on the simplistic fascination with self as Narcissus had, than on a complex of factors at play in the subjectivity of the entity embodied in the pronoun “I”.

Judith Butler’s work Giving An Account of Oneself (2005) is a useful contribution in the discourse of self-narration, presenting as it does, the “I” as fundamentally relational and contingent on its own sociality. She argues that there is a moral imperative in giving an account of oneself, which is different from simply narrating oneself, and that this giving an account of oneself is impelled by, at the very least, an “allegation,” and at the very worst, an “accusation.” Her argument is that behind every autobiographical account there is an implied allegation or an accusation. At the same time, she remarks that because of self’s opacity to itself, giving an account of oneself can be only partial, not complete.

It seems to me that for the prisoner narrating his life experience in prison, the accusation is often perhaps explicit rather than implicit. Yet there are exceptions. For example, the Kenyan Swahili poet Abdilatif Abdalla was literally and explicitly

“accused” of sedition and was subsequently imprisoned for it. But that was not the case for other political detainees such as Ngugi and Mazrui, who were detained without trial and without any formal charges or accusations being made against them. Therefore, Ngugi’s prison memoir Detained and Mazrui’s prison play Shadows of the Moon, and prison collection of poems Chembe cha Moyo, are in Butler’s formulation, responses to an implied allegation, whereas Abdalla’s collection of poems Sauti ya Dhiki was a response to direct criminal charges, or overt accusations.

Susan Egan is another theorist who has dealt with the “I” pronoun. Following Roland Barthes’s postulate of multiple “Is”, Egan has argued that there is a distinction between the narrating “I” and the narrated “I”. The prison narrator in effect writes “the story of two lives.” The writing becomes a kind of “mirror talk, as if the writer is talking to his image in the mirror. Egan observes: “Writing frequently becomes a matter not only of intense involvement of narrator with subject or of self-recognitions in terms of the imagined perception of others, but also of co-respondence, in which two or more voices encounter one another, or interact” (3).

But beyond the single or multiple identity of the narrating “I,” most current thinking on the “I” conceives of it in metonymic terms. It is not just a plural “I” but it also implies a plural “we.” The individual self has the collective embedded within it as Barbara Foley succinctly explains in a different context in her essay “Generic and Doctrinal Politics in the Proletarian Bildungsroman”(1994). In light of this, in her

controversial testimonio I, Rigoberta Menchu, the narrator begins by declaring that her story is the story of all poor Guatemalans, and therefore consciously and conscientiously attempting to “embed the collective in the individual,” as Foley would put it (60). The narrator’s declaration at the beginning of the narrative speaks to the idea of conflation of self with society. The same thread of argument is developed in Janet Lyon’s Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern (1999) in which she remarks that the “I” includes a partisan “we” that is exclusionary and suggests another category of “them” who are separated from the “we” by a thick and impenetrable wall. Anthony Appiah in his In My Father’s House, Adetayo in his Telling Our Stories and James Olney in his Tell Me Africa, also offer insight into what they perceive as the uniqueness of the African “I”.

The third crucial theoretical arena for my work concerns memory. For the genre of oral narratives of confinement, as in the case of all aspects of the orality, memory is of critical importance in both the composition and the narration. There are quite a number of theorists who have shed light on the nature of both individual and social memory. Walter J. Ong’s Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (1988) offers considerable insight on mnemonics in oral cultures. Equally important in this regard is Ruth Finnigan’s Oral Literature in African (1970) and Isidore Okpewho’s African Oral Literature (1992). However, preoccupation with matters of memory is not confined to the field of orality alone. As philosopher John Sutton has stated, memory

has continued to animate a great deal of debate in the field of philosophy. He explains: “Philosophers have been centrally interested in human personal memory for episodes and experiences in autobiographical past, as manifested in reminiscences, recall, and recognition” (1109). Sutton indicates that among the elements that engage the philosophers is the interplay between memory, self and time. Sutton states:

“Remembering is an instance of a general flexible human capacity to think about the absent, so that mental life isn’t entirely determined by the current environment and the immediate need of the organism” (1111). For Sutton what he calls “memory traces” are the factors that trigger memories and are central to the nature and outworking of memory (1110). But memory is the focus of sociological investigations too. It is therefore imperative to consider next the sociological perspective towards memory.

Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs offers penetrating observations on the outworking of memory. He contends that it is impossible to have individual memory without social memory. He echoes Butler’s theory discussed above in which she argues that it is impossible to give an account of oneself unless there is an interlocutor to whom we must give that account, a society to which we are held accountable. Halbwachs argues that societies form social frameworks of memory that enable and enhance individual memory. Halbwachs claims: “We can remember only on condition of retrieving the position of past events that interest us from the framework of collective memory” (172). Collective memory is, therefore, the framework or common pool from

which individuals draw their individual memories. He makes the interesting observation that “Society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however, convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess” (51). The social compulsion to “touch up” one’s account may explain the apparent disconnect between the reality of an event and its autobiographical depiction. But even more importantly, it shows the potential role of others who share that memory to give their own complementary input. As Halbwachs indicates, memory is not simply an individual’s solitary recall or recollection of past events, but it is also inextricably linked to community.

The fourth important aspect in my analysis is the concept of trauma. Since the 1980s tremendous scholarly attention has turned to trauma. The discovery of what psychologists and psychiatrists term, “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)” became a watershed in trauma theory. Some of these studies were prompted by the uncanny behavioral symptoms of war veterans, but a disproportionately higher percentage of scholarship devoted itself to Nazi German holocaust survivors, an historical event that as Charles Mills argues, has frequently borne the misnomer “*the* holocaust,” a misnomer that turns attention away from other holocausts such as the “slow motion Holocaust of African slavery (99). Equally important across many disciplines concerned with trauma has been the focus on the human body as a contested terrain.

Elaine Scarry's The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World (1985) is one of the important theoretical works on trauma. Scarry's text is particularly illuminating in apprehending the nature and impact of torture on the body and mind of victims at the hands of totalitarian and despotic regimes. She postulates that the aim of such regimes in incarcerating, interrogating and torturing, is to "uncreate" and "unmake" the victim's world and sense of self. During interrogation, Scarry asserts, the interrogator is not interested in extracting answers but in the dissolution of the victim's world. Interrogation in Scarry's view is in itself a form of torture. As far as the infliction of pain is concerned, Scarry argues that there is an intriguing dialectic between the one experiencing pain and the state agent inflicting the pain. She claims the two are on two polar sides of the pain equation encapsulated in the simple and profound principle: "To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear pain is to have *doubt*" (13). In torture as in times of war, Scarry suggests there is something of the Coleridgean "willing suspension," not of disbelief in this case, but of civilization. Scarry observes that on the whole torture is often considered by all to be an absolute immorality, while some consider the war as absolutely immoral. What is most striking about The Body in Pain, a text that draws on fictional and real accounts is the emphasis on the torturer's capacity to so completely disorient the victim so that it is not only the surroundings, the cells, the doorknob, the furniture that are transformed into weapons, for torture but also

effecting the transmogrification of the victim's own body into a weapon against the self as well.

Kate Millet's The Politics of Cruelty is another informative text on the nature of torture. The text traces the genealogy of various forms of state torture and the shift from its use in criminal procedure to dealing principally with political dissent. Millet adopts the definition of torture as defined in the UN Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Torture, 9 December 1975, Article 1 which states:

Torture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted by or at the instigation of a public official on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or confession, punishing him for an act he has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating him or other persons. (qtd. in Millet 13)

Millet posits that since the early 1920s torture has increasingly become a political weapon in the service of the state against what it deems subversive elements. Lenin's Russia, she claims, is credited with reintroducing on a large-scale torture as a veritable tool for silencing political opposition. Millet laments that the "return of torture" short-circuited gains made in "the most fundamental [political] reforms of the last two hundred years" (19). As a result torture in some parts of the world, remains the "ultimate act of state power" characterized by secrecy, "barbarous force," mystery, suspension of constitutional rights, and legal fictions or conveniences (19). Millet states "In arrogating itself the capacity to torture its citizens, the state has assumed absolute power over them" (9). Particularly, important to my study are her remarks on how

victims of state torture represent their experiences. She indicates that most representations of torture in autobiographies, reportage, or narrative fiction almost always constitute what she calls *temoignage*, “the literature of the witness, the one who has been there, sees it, knows” (Millet 15).

Another important text on torture is Harlow’s Barred: Women, Writing, and Political Detention. Harlow unmaskes the technologization of torture in the 20th century and the emphasis on attack on the “person and the social body” (26). She observes that modern torture has therefore significantly departed from and transcended the original purposes at the inception of the practice in ancient Greece, namely simply extracting confessions from victims. She writes

The attack on the personal identity and the body of the victim is calculated now to undermine the social body as well. Torture in political detention is calculated rather to produce propaganda and to intimidate, if not to destroy the human and political constitution that continues to resist. The witnessing of torture by the tortured, however, yields, another kind of information that is, the testimony, often clandestine, of the political prisoner who survives. (26)

Nonetheless, Norval Morris and David J. Rothman in The Oxford History of Prison, tend to still foreground the centrality of the incipient intent of confession in state torture. To them

[c]onfessions may also reflect the need of political oppressors for confirmation, from the mouths of their victims, of the justice of their actions. This is probably one of the factors that has made torture so frequently a concomitant of political imprisonment: by inflicting pain on detainees, the captors obtain the confessions that they seek. In addition of course, torture is a means of extracting from detainees the names of other suspected in conspiracies and it may be used simply as a punitive measure. (370)

Cathy Caruth's edited volume Trauma: Explorations in Memory (1995) contains a number of essays focusing on the complexities of remembering, narrating, listening to and witnessing the horrors of the genocide in Germany under Hitler. She describes holocaust trauma as so severe as to defy and defeat the survivors' capacity to witness. Caruth defines trauma as "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event" (4). Among her contributors is Harold Bloom who explores the apparent *agon* between body and psyche, the inside and outside in the trauma victim, which resonates with Scarry's theory mentioned above about the torturer's ultimate purpose to turn the victim's own body against his mind.

The final aspect of my analysis of the literature of confinement is related to truth-telling. Truth-telling is another subject in which various disciplines stake a claim. It certainly has a direct bearing on the literature of prison. Truth-telling has far-reaching implications in the legal sphere as so-called liars are charged with perjury and punished, quite severely sometimes. But in contemporary times poststructuralists and deconstructivists have complicated and problematized matters by positing the existence of different levels of reality and truth. Implicated in this enigma is the truth of autobiography, which has traditionally been viewed as a verifiable historical truth of someone's life. George Gusdorf is one of the critics who have defended the relative "truth" of autobiographical accounts. In his essay the "Conditions and Limits of

Autobiography” (1992) Gusdorf provides a caveat against the futility of reading autobiography for historical truth. He argues that autobiography is, first and foremost, a work of art in which the narrating self, projects an image of, not what he is or was, but what he wishes he is or was. Roy Pascal in his Design and Truth in Autobiography (1960) asserted that autobiographical acts are driven more by the autobiographer’s impressions and responses than actuality, casting doubt upon the historical veracity of these narratives. Pascal stated: “Even if what they tell us is not factually true, or only partly true, it always is true evidence of their personalities (1). He contends that the act of relating an experience is the centerpiece of autobiography, not facts (16). One of the most salient pitfalls of autobiography therefore, Pascal argues, is that there are limits to its truth and the potential risk of an individual substituting an ideal self for a real one (163).

In more recent years, John Beverly in his Testimonio: Politics of Truth (2004) has come to defend Menchu’s I, Rigoberta’s Menchu against charges of mendacity. Menchu was accused by historian David Stoll of making up parts of her narrative by, for example, claiming someone else’s murder as her brother’s. Beverly makes a compelling argument in her defense and hence in the defense of the truth of autobiography, a kind of truth that tends to be at variance with historical truth. A similar defense is mounted by Leigh Gilmore in “Jurisdictions: *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, *The Kiss*, and Scandalous Self-Representation” in which he also exonerates Menchu

from allegations of lying. In the same essay, Gilmore defends Kathryn Harrison's memoirs The Kiss, not for lying, but for breaking the silence, as Harrison was accused of "saying the unsayable" by recounting her incestuous relation with her father that began when she was twenty and in college. Gilmore's piece demonstrates two dialectical responses to self-representation: one adjudged as lies, and the other as not deserving to be said even if it is true. On the whole, debates on the politics of truth are pertinent to understanding responses to the genre of prison writing, which for its filiation or affiliation with prison is already ghettoized and deemed an "outlaw genre" to use Bruce H. Franklin's expression.

In pursuit of answers to the central question and related questions my study spans across a wide array of disciplines, although, following Harlow, my method is fundamentally literary-critical (5). It draws on fields as diverse as history, psychology, psychoanalysis, narrative theory, life writing, cultural studies, sociology, political science, socio-linguistics, criminology, and neurology. I would like to mention here though, that I adopt an eclectic approach, letting each text determine what theoretical framework is most appropriate for it. Yet it bears mentioning that in general terms I am interested in unraveling how theories emerging from various fields shed light upon narratological tools and concepts that underpin self-narration, particularly the kind of self-narration that relates to incarceration. In sum, the central concepts underpinning this study include, although they are not limited to 1) motivations for narrating; 2) use

of the “I” pronoun; 3) memory; 4) trauma and torture; 5) truth-telling, all of which constantly impinge on the conditions of possibility of the composing and narration of prison literature. Also, on the whole I pay particular attention to the narratological tools that are immanent in the narratives under consideration and the contexts in which these texts emerge.

The fact that this study adopts an interdisciplinary approach may seem to present any number of challenges. These may include different emphases in the different fields. The kind of “conflict” inherent in an interdisciplinary scenario is hinted by philosopher John Sutton apropos the topos of memory: “Because memory is studied in many different disciplines, from neurology to narrative theory, there is no obvious unity to either the objects of enquiry or the methods employed” (Sutton 1112). However, the possibilities, I think, outweigh the challenges. For one thing there is the possibility of a rich and rewarding cumulative knowledge base that accrues from bringing together several epistemological perspectives that one would have otherwise never known.

This investigation of oral and written narratives of incarceration is important for three major reasons; 1) by including oral tales in its conception, it constitutes an important point of departure for understanding the phenomenon of narrating and narrativizing confinement, and provides a novel perspective on the classification and the nature of narratives of confinement; 2) it brings to the fore critical issues related to

human rights and governance; and 3) it is bound to enhance scholars and policy makers' understanding of the deeper socio-political problems affecting Kenya.

Studies investigating prison narratives have almost always been preoccupied with written accounts and elided oral accounts of the prison experience. While I primarily focus on written texts in this study, I have incorporated oral texts, and in the process possibly inaugurated a novel and fresh way of addressing and understanding the phenomenon of narrating confinement. This double-edged approach to confinement would help shed light on the common motifs in both oral and written narratives of confinement as well as highlight inherent narratological differences between and amidst them. Therefore, this study offers an alternative perspective on the taxonomy of narratives of confinement, because it not only moves to the center oral narratives that have hitherto been left on the margins of discussions on prison literature, but it also makes crucial connections between oral and written prison texts.

The study focuses on the works of prisoners of conscience, who for the most part were “wrongfully” detained in debasing and dehumanizing conditions and hence epitomize the anguish of victims of the state violation of individual and collective human rights. By analyzing and listening to their voices of anguish and angst, as they recount their lived experiences as state captives, the study unmask the depth of the deprivation of human dignity and human rights. That these excesses of government continue in some places almost unabated in various historical periods is a reminder of

the need for global and local mechanisms that would protect individuals from government abuses. The study is therefore a vitally important venture for all those interested in human rights.

Lastly, this study provides useful and usable information for scholars and policy makers within and outside Kenya, interested in the socio-political underpinnings of Kenya's conception of itself as a nation. For scholars and policy makers from outside Kenya, this study gives them insight into the trajectory of prison writing engendered by government repression and suppression since pre-colonial to post independences times. This information would be integral in how these scholars and policy makers deal with Kenya's socio-political dispensation. As for the Kenyan scholars and policy makers, this study would be a vital tool for pondering the state of the Kenyan nation and its future in view of its past and present errors, a tool for pondering how these errors can and should be avoided. Indeed, some deeply crucial aspects of the fate of prisoners of consciences remain largely unknown to the Kenyan masses, partly because of attempts by the political elite to sweep them under the carpet. But by studying the narratives of these political prisoners, I hope to unearth these issues and lay them bare, for Kenya to see itself and, hopefully, devise appropriate remedies as it confronts its fate as a nation.

The study is divided into five chapters, each with a number of discreet, distinct and self-contained sections. Chapter 1 outlines the central question and subsidiary questions and assumptions that inform the study. It addresses current theory in the field

of literature of confinement and points out the gap that this study aims to fill in expanding the knowledge base in this field.

In Chapter 2 I engage the orality-literacy debate and make a case for the oral prison narratives. I analyze representative pre-colonial narratives of confinement, namely the Sela and Mwambu tale from the Bukusu people of Western Kenya and the Liyongo Epic of the Swahili people of the Kenyan coast, and argue for their atemporal or trans-historical significance.

Chapter 3 addresses colonial narratives of confinement, examining the contexts and texts of narratives produced during or as a result of the British colonial encounter in Kenya. In this chapter I analyze the detention accounts of Kenyan freedom fighters. These include Kariuki's Mau Mau Detainee, *Otieno's* Mau Mau's Daughter, and Wanjau's Mau Mau Author in Detention.

In Chapter 4 I turn to narratives of confinement of two critical regimes of post independence Kenya. After a brief historical background to the period, I begin my analysis with prison writings that emerged in the era of Kenya's founding father Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, namely Abdalla's Sauti ya Dhiki and Ngugi's Detained. The final part of the chapter is devoted to the analysis of prison literature of the regime of Kenyatta's successor Daniel Toroitich arap Moi. For this section I have selected Mazrui's Chembe cha Moyo and Mutahi's Three Days on the Cross.

In Chapter 5 I make conclusions regarding the central question of self-exploration in prison narratives as well as related questions informing this study. I also reflect upon the extent to which these narratives at once allegorize the collective Kenyan pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial experience and cannibalize the Kenyan nation-state. In other words I examine implications of these narratives of contention to Kenya's heroic authorized national narrative, how they smash or subvert the official symbols of power as it were and what that means for Kenya's conception of itself as a nation. The concluding chapter also sheds lights on the future research possibilities that this study envisions.

Notes

1. The account regarding Ebrahim Hussein's drama at the University of Nairobi is fairly common knowledge in Swahili scholarly circles although to my knowledge nothing has been written about it. It remains largely part and parcel of oral exchanges between individuals in the field of Swahili studies.
2. For a comprehensive list of political detainees and prisoners in post independence Kenya see Njuguna Mutahi and Mugo Theuri's We Lived to Tell. Nairobi: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2003. Print.

Chapter 2: Confinement and Oral Literature

I. Introduction: The Oral-Literate Equation

Eighteenth-century English historian Edward Gibbon in his Decline of the Roman Empire asserted, “The use of letters is the principal circumstance that distinguishes a civilized people from a herd of savages, incapable of knowledge or reflection” (qtd. in Teffeteller 75). That in his view literacy superseded orality, that the written word was the defining characteristic of civilization and enlightenment, sense and sensibility, urbanization and modernity, is beyond all doubt. Yet, as Annette Teffeteller has correctly pointed out, Gibbon’s adulation for literacy and primitivization of orality epitomizes a view that “has dominated approaches to the literacy-orality distinction for the past century” (75). The view that it is the invention of writing, the alphabet, and the printing press that is credited with transforming societies from savage and simple to civilized and complex has been pervasive in the Western academy. Among recent proponents of this position are Eric Havelock and Walter J. Ong.

Havelock claimed that the invention of the Greek alphabet transformed Europe, and by implication, other parts of the world subsequently influenced by Europe, so much that “European culture slowly moved into an ambience of analytic, reflective, interpretive, conceptual prose discourse” (19). Havelock’s views found resonance in the work of Ong, though the latter laid emphasis on cognitive consequences of literacy for modern societies (Teffeteller 77). Ong held that writing in effect transformed

consciousness, claiming provocatively: “Writing is a technology that restructures thought” (78). There is certainly validity in Ong’s claim that writing “restructures thought” in the sense that writing compels us to channel or organize our thoughts in particular way. Yet one does well to acknowledge the fact that the restructuring, operates upon an already existing structure of thought that, although organized and working differently, it has its own grammar of a “reflective, interpretive, and conceptual” frame.

It could, however, be erroneous to suggest that the literacy-centered perspectives on what Havelock calls the “oral-literate equation” have remained unchallenged or uncontested within the Western academy itself. For one thing, the resentment toward orality goes against the grain of the Romanticist impulse in the West that particularly gained currency from the mid-nineteenth century (Teffeteller 79). Yet, it is also true that the bulk of scholarship on this equation tends to favor the written over the oral because of what Teffeteller terms “ideological baggage” (67). Teffeteller’s observation on the preference for the written word and the primitivization of the oral in the western academy is telling, and deserves quoting at length. She writes:

The fact that most researchers concerned with the orality-literacy issue inhabit a highly literate culture and make use of quintessentially configurational syntax has the potential for seriously skewing the results of the enquiry due to markedly prejudicial perspectives brought to the investigation of the syntactic typology associated with a particular oral or literate tradition. (81)

Where does Africa stand in the oral-literate equation? Africa has a vibrant oral tradition spanning from antiquity to modernity. As Abiola Irele has stated cogently in his *The African Imagination* oral literature

stands as the fundamental reference of discourse and of the imaginative mode in Africa. Despite the undoubted impact of print culture on African experience and its role in the determination of new cultural modes, the tradition of orality remains predominant and serves as a central paradigm for various kinds of expression on the continent. In this primary sense, orality functions as the matrix of an African mode of discourse, and where literature is concerned, the griot is its embodiment in every sense of the word. In other words, oral literature represents the basic intertext of the African imagination. (11)

Irele's characterization of the primacy of the oral tradition in Africa is echoed by any number of scholars of continents literary expression. However, in the Western academy, the recognition of the primacy of orality has essentially led to value-laden estimation and an epistemological division between things oral and things literate. The oral-literate divide then becomes more than simply expedient divergences in the analytical and exploratory tools of two disparate modes of expression. Kadiatu Kanneh in his *African Identities* has stated that according to the grid of western thought and imagination, the orality-literacy equation has led to the "political distinction between sociology and anthropology" by which sociology is reserved for the literate Western culture while illiterate Africa is subjected to the interpretative frame of the politically "correct" anthropology (19). Drawing on Christopher Miller, Kanneh concludes that the "diagnosis of 'illiteracy upon another society points directly towards a scriptocentric'

worldview which marks the state of orality as a state of nature” (19). It is perhaps for this reason that V.Y. Mudimbe would claim in his The Invention of Africa, that the marginalization of an Africa without letters is, in the main, attributable to anthropological discourse, a discourse the West has manifestly reserved for its apprehension of the inferior non-western societies (6).

Does the preponderance of the oral tradition in Africa render the African “incapable of reflection and knowledge,” in Gibbon’s terms? The extent to which the African experience and expression are inextricably intertwined with the oral tradition furnishes evidence to the contrary. Abiola’s African Imagination, Harold Scheub’s The African Tales (2005), and Isidore Okpewho’s African Oral Literature (1978) are instances of the analysis of complex African imaginative projections for which the oral is the principal matrix. The oral imaginative projections are products of reflection and knowledge, evidence of cognitive ability. Significantly, Irele defines the term text as “simply an organized series of enunciations that combine to form coherent discourse,” a definition that at once includes oral texts and implies their coherence (33). That texts, including oral ones, are “organized” is proof of rational reflection and order. The idea that orality is analogous to the absence of text in Africa fails to take cognizance of the widespread presence of the oral text and its evidently organized nature. We should, therefore, reject the view that the written tradition is superior to the oral tradition.

This chapter is, in a sense, an affirmation of the supremacy of the oral tradition in Africa, particularly the ability of oral expression to capture or to carry the African experience,” including the experience of incarceration or confinement. Secondly, the chapter claims for oral literature the capacity to remain relevant in spite of or because of the forces of modernity. Micere Mugo in her African Orature and Human Rights ably demonstrates the modern relevance of oral texts conceived in antiquity among the Kikuyu of central Kenya. Mugo interprets these oral tales using the Marxian parlance of “peasants and workers” and frames her argument within the ethos of twentieth century human rights. In the same way, I will presently use oral texts from Kenya, to demonstrate that oral texts, like written ones, can and in fact *do* exhibit aspects of the carceral experience and imagination. Furthermore, following Irele, I recognize the textuality of oral expression based particularly on their internal logic and adherence to certain conventions, thus my insistence on the use of “oral texts” to refer to artistic oral compositions. I stress their textuality or to use Bakhtin’s term, intertextuality, by making comparisons and linkages with other literatures, written and oral, from across any number of temporal and spatial frontiers. In what follows, I analyze the function of expressive compositions in general and African oral expressions in particular.

Isidore Okpewho in his The African Epic asserts that in Africa “the moonlit square has for countless generations been the setting for songs and stories whose primary intent is more to entertain, it would seem, than to edify” (2). Therefore, early

on in his text Okpewho plunges into the age-old debate on the purpose of literature, not only on the question of whether it should teach and entertain but also whether it *really* does one or the other of these functions.¹ Okpewho's characterization of African oral literature as being fundamentally driven by the entertainment impulse tends to downplay the implicit moral, axiological, and philosophical lessons that underpin the oral performances in Africa as determined by the conditions of their form and formation. I argue that the social conditions and contexts within which these songs and stories emerge and are performed point to a more pressing "moral and metaphysical imperative" over and above the entertainment value. For one thing these songs and stories reflect and refract social, economic, ecological, metaphysical, and political realities that underscore their relevance to the specific communities that perform them. Hence, the narratives of the nomadic communities like the Masai have any number of tales about livestock and cattle rustling, while the tales of the Luo of Kenya and the Haya of Tanzania have aquatic settings. The relevance of these narratives is not necessarily predicated upon the entertainment value alone but it is inextricably tied up to other factors in the physical and metaphysical universe, which these oral genres and their performers and audiences inhabit. Not only do these stories edify and moralize, they also raise deep philosophical questions about the human condition.

Clearly, the issues that these oral texts thematize and the situations they narrativize, invite intelligent discussion because they not only quintessentially teach

putative moral lessons but also shed light on the contexts that molded and shaped them as expressions of verbal arts. In particular, I find quite striking the thematization and narrativization of captivity in the oral literature of various peoples of Kenya. I believe the recurrence of the theme of captivity or confinement in these narratives is hardly fortuitous. The preponderance of the theme of confinement justifies moving some of these tales from the margin and placing them in the front and center of the category of literature of confinement. I am keenly aware of the real possibility of permutations in the meaning of these oral genres over time. Following Bakhtin, Peter Seitel in his The Powers of Genre has highlighted the distinction between theme and meaning in literary genres. Meaning, Seitel argues, is dynamic and changes according to temporal and spatial realities and potentialities while theme assumes *statis* as an essential condition.

Seitel further states:

Theme emerges as a result of relationships perceived between constituent parts of a work or utterance; the theme of a repeated utterance or work remains relatively constant. Meaning, in contrast, emerges as the result of relationships perceived between the utterance or work (in part or as whole) and the context in which it is spoken or otherwise performed and received; the meaning of repeated utterance or work changes with its context of performance and/ or reception. (4-5)

Drawing on William F. Hanks, Seitel further distinguishes between the “vivid present of an utterance (the immediate interactional setting in which it is embedded), and the “broader horizon” (the broader social-historical context) (5). Hence, it is both necessary and desirable, according to this paradigm, to dwell upon the themes and the meaning of

oral tales with particular attention to context, as I intend to do in this chapter. However, what is equally, if not more significant in this study, is the inclusion of oral tales in the category of confinement narratives.

It is my contention that the undervaluing of oral literature and the overrating of written literature in the Western academy is implicitly premised upon a paradigm akin to the Gibbonian distinction between savage and civilized; a paradigm that insists on the difference between “them and us,” between the margin and the center. At any rate, even written literature has for decades witnessed the demarcation between the Western canon and the largely ghettoized corpus of the rest of the world, as Kandice Chuh passionately argues in her Imagine Otherwise (2003)). I cannot agree more with Chuh’s proposition that the Western academy has erected a great wall between the literature of the West and the literature of the rest of the world. For example, Harold Bloom’s The Western Canon (1995), lists somewhat arbitrarily written texts that the Western world apotheotizes from Shakespeare to Hemmingway, from Cervantes to Chaucer from Montaigne to Moliere, from Milton to Goethe from Austen to Ibsen from Whitman to Tolstoy, from Kafka to Woolf, in effect pandering to an exclusionary ethos that has defined the Western critical tradition for centuries. It is little wonder that Bloom does say very little or nothing about either written texts from the rest of the world or oral texts from anywhere. One could actually argue that there are indeed critical works that

manifestly act as literary border police forces, of which The Western Canon is a telling instance.

Oral literature's role as the carrier of the African experience entails employing various genres to self narrate. This brings us to the question of the oral autobiography, which is closely allied to the mechanics of narrating the experience of incarceration. In his essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" Georges Gusdorf presents as axiomatic and immutable truth, statements that indicate only the Western world is capable of producing autobiography, and that non-westerners may compose autobiographies only as a consequence of the "Western encounter"(29). Gusdorf states

It is *obvious* that autobiography is not possible in a cultural landscape where consciousness of self does not, properly speaking, exist. Autobiography becomes possible only under certain metaphysical preconditions. To begin with, at least in a cultural revolution humanity must have emerged from the mythic framework of traditional teachings and must have entered into the perilous domain of history. (30)

One can hardly fail to identify the echo of Hegel's voice in Gusdorf's problematic assertion. It is Hegel who is credited with locking Africa out of the privileged house of history or as Jacob Carruthers crudely puts it, Hegel is responsible for Africa's "historicide."² Gusdorf links the ability to compose autobiography with the West and westernization, and therefore modernity. This view seems to echo Gibbon's postulate that non-literate societies are essentially stripped of the ability to reflect, to display possession of gnosis. Gusdorf therefore denies the non-westerners, and the African self included, the capacity to look into their own individual lives, to reflect, and to narrate or

narrativize those lives. The African self, barred from entry into the courtyard of History, is deemed incapable of telling his or her own story. It may be such misleading theorizations that have (usefully) prompted Africanist critics such as Adetayo Alabi to jump into the fray and to imagine other ways of making sense of the black autobiography. Alabi curiously chooses Telling Our Stories: Continuities and Divergences in Black Autobiographies as a title, a title that implies that he does not see as “obvious” what Gusdorf sees as being such.

Alabi disputes Susan Anderson’s both Hegelian and Gusdorfian estimation, of the African capacity to compose autobiography. He quotes her as asserting, like Gusdorf, that autobiography is peculiarly European, with Europeans being the only ones endowed “with the impulse to examine the history of the self, to turn to systematic retrospection into art” (5). But Alabi’s text is not important simply because it is antithetical to Gusdorfian, Gibbonian, or Hegelian thinking; he makes a compelling analysis of autobiographies of people of African descent on the Continent and in the Diaspora, and in the process uncovers critical and theoretical gems about the black self. Also, what Alabi presents as the motives for black autobiography is almost at complete variance with Gusdorf’s. Alabi contends that the relations between the autobiographer and posterity are based more on the need for pedagogy than on the autobiographer’s thirst for posthumous fame. In this regard, his postulate also runs counter to Okpewho’s remarks on the primacy of entertainment over didacticism in African oral performances.

The function of African autobiography as a tool for “teaching young generations,” is undeniable. Alabi’s remarks on the black autobiography may be applied to the African oral performances as well. Hence, it can be argued that African oral literature is not merely for entertainment, as Okpewho would have us believe. What, however, remains problematic about Alabi’s insistence on the teaching function, like Okpewho’s emphasis on the entertainment value, is the implicit impression created that the African literary landscape is monolithic. It seems to me that African oral literature does more than just teach or entertain; it serves multifarious functions, one of which is to make sense and give an account of the substance and conundrum of incarceration. Suffice it to say at this point that for me, the most outstanding aspect of Alabi’s text is how he compellingly makes the case for the oral autobiography. Alabi’s assertion blurs the apparent generic frontier between Okpewho’s oral performance and Alabi’s own oral autobiography since both are oral forms of artistic expression. Autobiography becomes part and parcel of the tradition of oral performance. In what follows, I argue that in fact there is such a thing as oral prison narratives.

Following Alabi’s recognition of oral autobiographies, I propose that the study of prison literature should not start and end with the factual or fictional prison experiences as captured and preserved in written texts only. To elide completely the study of oral prison literature is to suggest that oral genres are of necessity past their sell by date. Yet any examination of the oral tradition of Africans on the continent and in

the diaspora would discover abundant evidence of the resilience, tenacity, and vibrancy of oral literature. African oral literature has often exhibited remarkable adaptability and mutability. I therefore find wanting previous definitions of prison literature. Western critics have often defined prison literature as being exclusively written. For example W. B. Carnochan states “Literature of the prison includes, on the one hand, fictions written about prison experience and, on the other, writings of every sort by prisoners” (384). True to the Western critical tradition, Carnochan consciously or unconsciously excludes oral forms in his conception of oral literature. Barbara Harlow in her Barred: Women, Writing and Political Detention, also commits this “sin” of omission as do any number of Western critics (Harlow 4).

This study finds the exclusion of oral prison narratives regrettable and unwarranted. Hence, I define prison literature as verbal compositions and expressions, written or oral, fictional or non-fictional, composed inside or outside prison about the prison experience or as a result of the carceral imagination or experience.³

II. Oral Prison Narratives: Two Case Studies

In this section I examine the theme of confinement in representative narratives of coastal and mainland peoples in Kenya. Going beyond the somewhat superficial idea of entertainment or the pleasure principle, I investigate the reasons why these communities tell these stories of confinement. What do these stories reveal about the worldview of concerned communities, if there is such thing as a people's worldview? Does the pervasive nature of captivity in these tales tell us something about the human condition? It seems to me that any number of factors that have much to do with material or spiritual realities are at play in the emergence and existence of these stories. Alabi remarks quite correctly that the black autobiography is a record of struggles for survival, and ultimately shapes accounts of African resistance to and views on slavery, colonialism, and sexism (2). In Alabi's view black autobiographies are preoccupied with issues related to the exercise and abuse of power through forces of patriarchy, slavery and the colonial encounter. This implies that these autobiographies are also records of the confinement of individuals or collectivities under the yoke or prison house of patriarchy, slavery or colonialism. In other words, modern African autobiographies are almost always narratives of confinement, attempting to give an account of literal or symbolic imprisonment, curtailment of freedom.

What Alabi does not say however, is that these autobiographies, as records of struggle against "imprisoning" forces, are not confined to the slave or colonial epochs,

but in fact their production persists in the so called-postcolonial era in Africa. So encumbered is individual and collective freedom in the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial Africa, that one is bound to conclude that existence itself is a kind of “imprisonment.” This conclusion, which some might view as nihilistic, seems to be borne out by both history and the leitmotif of confinement in oral tales exemplified by the case studies I investigate in this chapter. The floodgates of European jailers in Africa were opened first by slave trade, which was soon replaced by the consequences of the 1884 Berlin conference. At the conference major European powers namely Britain, Belgium, Germany, Spain, and France, divided Africa amongst themselves like a slice of pizza. Hence, Africa happens to have been one of the locales of imperial lust that eventuated in the literal imprisonment of resisting African masses, and the symbolic imprisonment of countless others culturally, politically, economically, ideologically, and epistemologically.

Before embarking on the analysis of the oral prison narratives, let me briefly clarify my selection criteria. I have selected stories from among the Swahili dwelling along the Kenyan coast and from among the Bukusu living further inland near the Lake Victoria region. The geographical, linguistic, and cultural divide between these two regions opens a window of opportunity for a comparative approach to the study of these tales. I have selected these stories because they exemplify the thematization and narrativization of confinement. Also, it bears stating that the stories are case studies and

that there are perhaps countless other stories or versions of the same stories that deserve attention, but that did not find space in my analysis for the moment. It also has to be borne in mind, that any attempts to strictly periodize the tales, as belonging solely to the pre-colonial era may not be exactly accurate. The tenacity, resilience, and adaptability of the oral tradition in Kenya, as is perhaps in the rest of the African world, imbues the tradition with a level of significance that is timeless.

Yet, it would be disingenuous, as Abiola Irele cautions in a different context in his “In Praise of Alienations,” to underestimate the impact of the colonial encounter. To insist that African oral genres have remained unchanged or untainted by Western influences on the premise that they existed and were composed in pre-colonial times is to miss the point of the full range of the repercussions of the colonial encounter. Peter Seitel’s collections of the tales of the Haya people of Western Tanzania, See So That We Can See (1980), has an oral story, “Kibwana,” in which a local Haya man who lost his penis through treachery, marries the daughter of the Germany Kaiser, and more significantly for our purposes here, drives a motorcycle and an automobile. The motorcycle, the automobile, and formal school in the story are markers of modernity as opposed to antiquity. It is therefore a story that illustrates the adaptability and mutability of the oral tradition in the face of forces of modernity. But it also suggests the erasure of a world, as the Haya people initially knew it. Evidently, the story world of donkeys as beasts of burden is replaced by items as alien as motorcycles. It may well be that

indeed Okpewho's "moonlit square" where songs and stories entertained generations after generations, is not exempt from the forces of modernity and the oral storyteller is compelled to at once compete with and incorporate the internet, radio television, DVDs and movies in his performance.

The Bukusu are part of the larger Luhya ethnic group consisting of over 13 sub-groups that today occupy Western Kenya. F. E. Makila states in his An Outline History of Babukusu of Western Kenya (1978) that the Bukusu migrated from Northern Sudan with other Bantu groups although it was not until later that they assumed the name Bukusu. They initially tried to settle at Sirikwa in present-day Rift Valley province in Kenya. But the Masai subdued them and forced them to move westward to the land of the Pokot where again they were subdued and were forced to settle near Bukusu Hill in present-day Uganda. At Bukusu Hill a man sired two children with different mothers. Their names were Mubukusu and Mumasaba. When these children grew up a quarrel ensued between them leading to Mubukusu moving away from Bukusu Hill. Mubukusu settled at Bwayi. It is at Bwayi that the Bukusu re-instituted their elaborate circumcision rites that had fallen into limbo. According to the Bukusu oral tradition when one valiant Bukusu man called Mango defeated and killed a fierce snake with his sword the Barwa people rewarded him with a wife (Wafula 10). But they insisted he must first be circumcised. Thus, Mango was circumcised and thereby inaugurated or re-inaugurated Bukusu traditional circumcision rites. These rites have continued to

generate a considerable amount of interest particularly among scholars of culture. The changes brought about by modernity notwithstanding, these Bukusu rites of passage, like their oral tales, proverbs, riddles, tongue twisters, and songs, have remained resilient and tenacious even in the twenty first century. What is significant about both the Bukusu orature and culture is its hybrid nature. If the Bukusu borrowed from the Barwa their circumcision practice, it is also evident that they have over time experienced great cultural exchange between them and the entire gamut of their neighbors. Jan J. de Wolf and K.F. de Bois in their Bukusu Stories: Sixty Chingano from Western Kenya (2005) noted striking similarities in the oral tales of the Bukusu, the Iteso, and the Luo.

The oral “intertextuality,” which exists between the Bukusu and their neighbors is also evident between the Swahili and their neighbors. Wamitila in his Archetypal Criticism of Kiswahili Poetry (2001) observes that various versions of the famous Fumo Liyongo epic are found among the Gunya and Pokomo. As such, we are bound to conclude that hybridity seems to be a defining characteristic of both the Bukusu and the Swahili folklore. But just who are the Swahili?

In his Swahili Beyond Boundaries Alamin Mazrui offers a comprehensive and cohesive analysis of the identity of the Swahili people. Following Mathias Manyampala and Shihabudin Chiraghdin in their seminal work Historia ya Kiswahili (1975), Mazrui locates the Swahili among the Bantu peoples of the Kenyan coast. Their cradle is said to

have been a place on the Kenyan coast called Ngozi. They were hence first known as Wangozi and their language Kingozi. They subsequently acquired the name Waswahili (one Mswahili), following what Mazrui conceives of as the Arabic dimension of their “triple heritage,” with the etymology of the term Swahili being traced to the Arabic term *Suahel* meaning “coastal people.” But Mazrui claims that the ethnicity of the Swahili is now shrouded in mystery as they have virtually been divested of their language and literature. There is therefore a kind of paradox in that whereas Kiswahili enjoys pride of place as the bona fide *lingua franca* of the East and Central African region, there are doubts cast upon the existence of the ethnicity of its native Swahili speakers. It is therefore not at all surprising that Senkoro would make the proclamation “a Swahili person means a Tanzanian and there is no doubt that Swahili is the language of Tanzania” (qtd. in Mazrui 6). That Swahili is the language of Tanzania is largely true. But to claim that being Tanzania is synonymous with being Swahili is to say the least presumptuous and erroneous. Senkoro’s assertion tends to blur the distinction between the indigenous Swahili people of the coast and the vast number of Swahili-speakers in Tanzania, and indeed in the rest of the East and Central Africa region. Moreover, the statement demonstrates the propensity of Senkoro’s “strong linguistic nationalism” to fuse Tanzanian nationhood with Swahili language and culture, at once effectively erasing the multiple ethnicities in Tanzania and the Swahili ethnicity itself. Like Chiraghdin and Manyampala, Mazrui aptly argues that despite the transethnic and

transnational pretensions of the Swahili language, it is still pertinent to acknowledge the existence of the ethnicity of the native speakers. However, Mazrui goes one better to underscore the hybridity inherent in Swahili culture, which for the most part, is due to the triple heritage; the Arabic contact, the European encounter, and the indigenous cultural heritage.

Ila. The Sela and Mwambu Tale and Incarceration

The tale of Sela and Mwambu exists in any number of versions among the Bukusu people of Western Kenya. On the whole it is a narrative that pits human society against the tyranny of ogres. Mwambu is the hero of the story. He lived with his sister Sela and clan at a time when man-eating ogres reigned supreme. Human life and human freedom were curtailed and threatened throughout this mythical period.

Mwambu was a fierce hunter whom the ogres would hardly vanquish. But whenever Mwambu went to the forests to hunt game the ogres would come and eat up his relatives. In the long run he was left alone with his sister Sela. He gave Sela instructions not to open the door for any stranger while he is away on his customary hunting adventures. He devised a song with a secret code signaling his arrival, with which he prompted Sela to open the door for him. She faithfully kept her brother's instructions, declining to open the door every time the ogre knocked and pretended to be an innocuous visitor or a stranger in dire need. However, one day the ogre hid in the bush near the homestead and overheard Mwambu's secret song. The ogre determined

to sing the song on another occasion and deceive Sela into opening the door. Initially the ogre's efforts to trick Serah fell flat as he would pass by an anthill and eat termites and that changed his voice. Then when he went to the door and sung, Sela would easily recognize him for the impostor that he was and would laugh her head off without opening the door.

One day the ogre held his appetite for termites in check and went to Sela's door without eating any of them. On this occasion when he sang the song, Sela thought that it was her brother Mwambu. She opened the door and was eaten alive. Later when Mwambu returned home, he sang the song but no body opened the door. He forced his way inside and found the ogre stranded in the house, too full to walk away. Mwambu threatened to slay the ogre with his sword, but the ogre pleaded for his life to be spared. He told Mwambu to cut off his little finger. Then all Mwambu's relatives that had been swallowed up by the ogre began coming out of what remained of the finger, one after another. Mwambu was most delighted to see his beloved sister Sela come out of the ogre finger. The last one to come out was a pipe-smoking old woman. Surprisingly, Mwambu consented to the ogre's request and allowed the ogre to swallow up the old woman again. The ogre then vanished into the woods. In brief the rest of Mwambu's clan, including his dear sister Sela was revived and lived happily ever afterwards.

It is possible to interpret this story merely as a simple human and ogre story. This rather obvious and superfluous taxonomy belies the tacit thematic wave of

captivity and confinement that engulfs this story. The man-eating ogre has the capacity to attack humans and confine them in its belly as it wishes, depriving them of freedom, existence and enjoyment of life. The ogre's belly is the prison to which Mwambu's entire clans including his beloved sister Sela are locked. Their imprisonment in the belly of the mythical beast is analogous to the imprisonment of biblical character Jonah, who was swallowed up by the big fish for refusing to go to Nineveh as instructed by the God. But compared to Jonah's experience, the victims of the ogre's imprisoning force are not only numerous, being a whole clan, but largely guiltless. In fact Mwambu is the only human who escapes the ogre's belly prison. On the whole, he strikes the posture of a messiah, a savior who rescues other humans from the ogre's power and belly politics.

As in most narratives of confinement then, there is in this tale the playing out of power dynamics between the powerful and the powerless, between the oppressor and the oppressed, the perpetrator and the victim. The ogre arrogates powers to himself and wreaks havoc upon Mwambu's clan because he wants to satisfy an inhuman appetite. Ogre tyranny cannibalizes and effectively wipes out the entire clan. At the end of the tale Mwambu demonstrates that his power supersedes the ogre's. It is only by virtue of being mightier than the ogre who cannot match Mwambu's skills with the sword that the reign of terror is brought to an end. The powerful ogre is hence challenged and conquered by a more powerful Mwambu. Mwambu liberates the prisoners by cutting off the ogre's little finger. The ogre concedes to suffer pain to relinquish the detainees,

than to suffer complete annihilation at the hands of angry Mwambu. It is also significant that Mwambu's heroic action is prompted by love for his sister Sela. He could not bear the thought of his dear sister languishing forever dead in the belly prison of the ogre.

Additionally, in enacting power dynamics the narrative can be perceived as a contest between ogre terror and human war on that terror, or between hegemony and counter-hegemonic struggle. On both sides of the divide, violence is a necessary evil, although as Micere Mugo indicates, the extent to which the tales are sympathetic to the victims of terror and domination or the perpetrators largely depends on the milieu in which they were composed; that it is contingent on whether the composition of the narrative serves the interests of feudal justice, capitalist justice or social justice (11).

One could argue that social justice is paramount in the tenor and thrust of the Sela and Mwambu story, meaning that the vanquishing of the ogre terror, tyranny and hegemony, translates into social justice to Mwambu and the human society he fights for. Mwambu's use of violence against the ogre is therefore as justified as the sort of violence that Frantz Fanon advocated for in the decolonization process. In a later chapter we will address the question of the place of violence in the detention narratives of the Mau Mau era. Suffice to say here that if counter-hegemonic violence is rationalized and sanitized, the hegemonic violence epitomized by the ogre's human swallowing antics finds little or no sympathy or empathy in this tale.

Implicated in the story are gender relations. It takes the action of Sela's brother, a man, to rescue her and by extension others swallowed by the ogre before her. Mwambu's action may indicate that according to the Bukusu worldview men are expected to protect women. According to oral tradition, during the colonial encounter, Bukusu men at Mulukoba wa Chetambe, or Chetambe's Fort, were enticed to wage war against the colonists after the women had threatened to take action themselves. The urging by the women led the men into a battle in which they suffered devastating defeat at the hands of the British colonists who had superior weaponry. After the women incited them into fighting a battle against a formidable foe, the men either died or were imprisoned by the colonists.

In the story of Sela and Mwambu, a juxtaposition of gender roles comes into sharp focus. There is Sela as the servile, indefensible domestic worker on the one hand, and her brother Mwambu as the hunter, gatherer, and defender in line with the traditional role ascribed to men, on the other. Whether the story implies that the men and women were terribly enthused by their roles or not, there is an irrevocable projection of a social order whose modus operandi is gendered division of labor. In the same vein there seems to be irrevocable evidence of patriarchy that borders on outright misogyny. When Mwambu allows the ogre to re-swallow an old woman, ageism and sexism seem to conspire against her. To a certain extent she seems to have outlived her usefulness, unlike the younger childless and unmarried Sela whose survival opens a

window of opportunity for her to complete the unfinished business of at the very least bearing other humans. But it is significant that it is an old woman, not an old man that must suffer the fate of eternal incarceration in the belly of the beast. Clearly, ageism and/or gender discrimination are at play in this story. As far as misogyny is concerned, similar anti-women tendencies seem to have existed among other African societies such as the Kikuyu of which Mugo notes

there was also gender discrimination. Male adults had greater freedom than their female counterparts. They were, for instance, socialized to demonstrate prowess and adventurous initiative while females were schooled in domestication, shyness and subservience, especially towards the males, in readiness for marriage. (18)

It is also possible to interpret Sela's domesticity as virtual imprisonment. Vulnerable to danger from the ogre, Sela is compelled to remain under some kind of "house-arrest" with the door securely locked as she carries out domestic chores. This contrasts sharply with her brother's freedom from ogre danger, as he is the one endowed with the capacity and temerity to venture in and out of the house in the ogre-infested world outside. In a sense, then, Sela is already a kind of prisoner, even before the rapacious ogre swallows her up.

It is imperative to note that recourse to an artistic composition, namely the secret song Mwambu her brother sings ensures, at least for some time, Sela's reassurance and survival. I suggest that the song anticipates the artistic works, particularly literature, that have often sustained both political and nonpolitical prisoners, works which often

emanate from outside prison, and almost always arrive in the prison walls by circumventing official prison regulations. In this respect, Mwambu's song differs from artistic works produced by prisoners while in incarceration, such as Liyongo's song that we shall be analyzing shortly. Yet, it bears stressing that whether the artistic production emanates from within or without prison; it almost always plays a pivotal role in rescuing the prisoner's mind from breaking down. Details abound of prisoners who avidly and repeatedly read the Bible and any other form of literature for sustenance and survival. Jack Mapanje in "Of Orality and Memory in Prison and Exile" states that in Mikuyu prison in Malawi the "only book you are allowed to have is the Bible (at first only three Bibles for ninety prisoners)" (34). But one could ask, is the Bible literature? It depends. After pointing out tremendous influence on literature in general, Northrope Frye concludes, "No book could have had its influence on literature without itself having literary qualities, and the Bible is a work of literature as long as it is being examined by a literary critic" (315).

Whether we reckon the Bible as literary art, as Frye does, or as purely as book of spiritual nourishment and instruction, it is plausible to conclude that its presence in prison may serve dialectically opposed purposes for the incarcerator and incarcerated. Generally speaking, the imprisoning institution may want to use the Bible to produce repentance, obedience and subservience in the inmate, while the prisoner may want to gain solace and inner peace from the same text. Two instances of subversion of the state

intentions with regard to the Bible will suffice here. One involves Alamin Mazrui, a political detainee in the Moi regime, who utilized margins and spaces between pages of the Bible to scribble his prison literary works Chembe cha Moyo (which we discuss in chapter 4) and Shadows of the Moon (Waliaula 221). But perhaps the most extreme instance of the subversive use of the Bible is dramatized in Wahome Mutahi's Jail Bugs where the I-narrator witnesses a fellow inmate unashamedly transform pages torn from the holy book into toilet paper (18).

Yet the genre of songs seems to be one of the most striking resemblances between oral tales of incarceration and modern prison tales. There is no gainsaying the centrality of songs as survival and counter-hegemonic tools. In his Detained Ngugi tells of the songs he and other political detainees sung to find solace and form solidarity at the Kamiti Maximum Prison. But precedence for such counter-hegemonic songs had been set in the turbulent Mau Mau era, as previous studies of the Mau Mau memoirs would reveal (see Bethwel A. Ogot's "Politics, Culture and Music in Central Kenya: a Study of Mau Mau Hymns, 1951-1956"(1977) and Maina Kinyatti's Thunderstorm from the Mountains: Mau Mau Patriotic Songs (1990)). In singing songs of protest and bravery the detainees in the colonial detention camps forged strong bonds of solidarity and commitment to the struggle for independence. In turn they too had borrowed a leaf from the power of counter-hegemonic songs from oral tales of incarceration of which the Sela and Mwambu tale and the Liyongo epic are instances.

The siege of Mulukoba wa Chetambe or Chetambe's Fort, inspired the Bukusu to compose and sing a song that memorialises the cataclysmic events that unfolded during the colonial invasion;

*Basoreri mukhabaanga,
Amanani kali lwanyi
Basoreri mukhabaanga,
Amanani kali lwanyi*

You young men always claim you are brave.
See, the ogres are out there right now
Young men you always say you are brave
See, the ogres are out there right now

It is significant that the British soldiers are pictured in the song as *amanani*, the Tachoni equivalent of *kamanani* in Bukusu, meaning ogres. (Tachoni is one of the dozen Luhyia dialects whose use in Bukusu folklore is emblematic of the reality of cultural exchange and hybridity among the Bukusu). The equation of the British to monsters is a fitting symbol of the oppressiveness of the British reign in the imagination of the colonized. This is nothing new in African literature. In his story "Gentlemen of the Jungle" that is fashioned after an ancient Kikuyu tale, Jomo Kenyatta narrates the account of an elephant that was hosted by a man but later usurped ownership of the hospitable man's abode and ejected him from it. The man's appeal in the court presided over by the Elephant class yields no positive results for him. He soon realizes he has to seek other means of reclaiming his property rather than depend on legal institutions skewed in his antagonist's favor. Kenyatta's short story fittingly captures the absurdity of the

European dispossession of Kikuyuland, and by extension Kenyan land, a classic case of the guest responding to the host's hospitality with hostility. Regarding Kenyatta's appropriation of the story, Mugo states, "Needless to say, Kenyatta uses this story as an allegory to satirize the way settler colonialism dispossessed precolonial Kenyan people who had shown the invaders naïve hospitality on their arrival, in keeping with their customary practice"(29).

It is instructive that Mugo herself extends the frame of the story of the bully elephant by applying it to a wider geopolitical spectrum. She writes: "This pre-colonial Orature story is the tragic tale of the workers and peasants all over Africa and in the rest of the so-called third world under imperialist domination/exploitation, facilitated by their neocolonial ruling classes" (29). Clearly, the story also showcases the capacity of orature to embrace and express new realities as a way of ensuring its own relevance and capacity to overlap into the terrain of African written literature. At any rate the trope of tyrannical forces, both internal and external, figured as ogre, snake, or whatever monstrous beast, is a commonplace in Kenyan written literature, something that attests to the tremendous influence of oral literature on written literature. Ngugi wa Thiongo's novels A Grain of Wheat, Devil on the Cross, Matigari and Wizard of the Crow as well as Margaret Ogolla's novel The River and the Source, are instances of this transposition of imagery from oral literature into the written text. While the analysis of what oral narratives gain or lose when they are transformed into written form is a worthwhile

venture that would perhaps be a matter for another day. Suffice it to say here that Kenyatta's conception of Europeans as the ungrateful elephant and the reference to the colonists as ogres in the Chetambe song can help illuminate the meaning of ogre in the story of Sela and Mwambu.

Evidently, the image of the British as ogres reflects the oppression that they visited upon the Bukusu. It is not easy to date oral tales, particularly those "peopled" by ogres. If it is true that the ogre stories predate the colonial encounter, the transcendence of their relevance cannot be gainsaid. Given the atrocities that the Bukusu suffered under colonial rule, it is not all surprising that the Bukusu would apply the metaphor of ogres to colonists. The monstrosity of the colonial machine had attributes as menacing and devastating as the ogres of the oral tales.

To the Bukusu, one could argue, the "imprisoning" forces of colonialism were ogre-like, swallowing up their freedom and existence, as they knew it. It may well be that the Sela and Mwambu tale predates the colonial encounter. Yet it is reasonable to suggest that the Bukusu, like Mugo and Kenyatta's Kikuyu, might have found the ancient tale both relevant to and expressive of their experiential reality in the colonial encounter. In a sense the narration of the famous story can be interpreted as an attempt by the Bukusu to make sense of colonial conquest whose pinnacle was the battle of Chetambe's Fort. The expression "amanani kali ilwanyi"/ [the ogres are out there right

now] in the song memorializing the fall of Chetambe's Fort underscores the immediacy and proximity of the ogres' presence in the here and now of the Bukusu community.

This supports the trans-historic significance of both the Sela and Mwambu story and the ogre motif in the Bukusu thought and imagination. The urgency of the times implied by the message of the song indicated that the ogres were not merely fictive elements of tales from antiquity, but that they were real inhuman human "ogres" inhabiting the tangible Bukusu day-to-day world. Interestingly, according to oral tradition the Bukusu prophet Mutoni wa Nabukelembe had predicted the coming of the Europeans and the impact of the devastating colonial intrusion (Wolf and Blois 174). The centrality of Nabukelembe's accurate predictions in Bukusuphone oral literature is a measure of the importance of the European colonial experience in the collective memory of the Bukusu people. Obviously, Mwambu's messiah-like figure in the narrative is expressive of the people's desire for emancipation from the colonial yoke that held them captive for close to a century. Colonial rule for the Bukusu or other groups in Kenya meant forced labor, expropriation of land, extortion through hut tax, and restrictions on mobility within the country through the *kipande* policy.⁴

When Kenya gained independence in 1963, it is as if the nationalist movement had severed the colonial ogre's little finger and let the Bukusu and other native Kenyans to come out of the belly of the beast that was their colonial detention camps and prisons. Ioan Davies argues in his Writers in Prison that prison writers "write to rescue

themselves and us” (33). One can conclude that if the narrative was created in pre-colonial times, the Bukusu retold it over and over again amongst themselves in colonial times as a coping mechanism, as a way of rescuing themselves. There is therefore no denying the political underpinnings of the story of Sela and Mwambu and its centrality in the collective memory of the Bukusu people of Western Kenya. It narrativizes the symbolic “political imprisonment” of the Bukusu under colonial rule and justifiably belongs in the class of literature of confinement. A case could also be made for likening Mwambu’s failure to deal the ogre a fatal blow to the failure of post independence African states to rid themselves of the ogre-like neocolonial influences. Colonialism, like the ogre, still looms large, albeit invisibly, in the so-called the postcolonial moment.

IIb. The Liyongo Epic as a Prison Narrative

Understanding the story of Fumo Liyongo as an epic is an important point of departure for its analysis, because like the oral autobiography, the recognition of the African epic has been long delayed and denied. Isidore Okpewho has shown how Western scholars of African orature such as Ruth Finnigan dismissed the possibility of the existence of epics in Africa. And yet as Okpewho cogently demonstrated Africa abounds in epics including the epics of Shaka of the Zulu, Sunjata of Mali, and the Mwindo epic from the Congo. In his definition of epic Okpewho states

An epic is fundamentally a tale about the fantastic deeds of a man or men endowed with something more than the normal human might and operating in something larger than the normal human context and it is significant in portraying some stage of the cultural or political developments of a people. (34)

Liyongo's story fits Okpewho's apposite definition. The Fumo Liyongo epic is a narrative about the eponymous poet-hero at the heart of the collective memory of the coastal peoples of East Africa. The epic enjoys pride of place as one of the most outstanding literary productions and cultural artifacts of classical Swahili literature. The other literary productions that share similar prominence include Sayyid Nassir's Al Inkshafi, Abu Bakr bin Mwengo's Utendi wa Tambuka, Mwana Kuponu's Utendi wa Mwana Kuponu and numerous quatrains of Muyaka bin Hajji. As already noted, the influence of the Liyongo epic spans across ethnic frontiers, with for instance, the Pokomo and the Swahili each staking claim on it as a defining feature of their cultural heritage and the epitome of their system of oral expression. Initially a product of the oral tradition, the Liyongo epic has been appropriated, narrated and interpreted in many and varied ways by the communities that lay claim to it. But the potency of the oral narrative is demonstrated by the extent to which it is transformed into the written form in various genres and subgenres, for examples, as a poem in Muhamed Kijumwa's and Sayyid Nassir's renditions and as a play in Bitugi Matundura's Shujaa Liyongo. The epic has generated tremendous scholarly attention with any number of theses and dissertations being devoted to its elucidation and interpretation. These include I.N.

Shariff in “The Liyongo Conundrum: Re-Examining the Historicity of Swahili’s National Poet-Hero”(1991); Fussi Nagy in “The Ethnic Situation in East Africa and the Folklore figure of Liyongo Fumo” (1984); and K.W. Wamitila’s Archetypal Criticism of Kiswahili Poetry (2001).

Wamitila’s study is important in a number of ways 1) he conceives of the epic as at once an oral and written text; 2) he examines various versions of the epic; and 3) and he undertakes a painstaking close reading of the epic with particular attention to stylistic and linguistic features. Following Wamitila, I intend to approach the Liyongo epic as an oral text, which has been preserved in a written form. But I intend to go beyond Wamitila and other critics’ focus upon what is lost or gained by the metamorphosis of the text from its oral to the written form, and to read the Liyongo epic as a quintessential narrative of confinement. In this regard I premise my analysis on the assumption that there is a close connection between Liyongo’s prison narrative and the political or prison context contemporaneous with the experience or the creation of the narrative. I examine how individual experience is an embodiment of collective experience. Equally interesting to me is the centrality of the female relative in the fate and life of the male victim of incarceration. Lastly, I examine what it means for a prisoner to be an artist as Liyongo was.

I will assume my readers’ ignorance of the epic, as in the case of the story of Sela and Mwambu, and provide a summary of the epic before returning to the analysis.

The account takes place when the city of Shanga was at its height of prosperity. The story's hero Liyongo lives outside the city, and is extremely famous for his outstanding musical and supernatural physical prowess. He is the archrival of King Mringwari, who feels threatened by Liyongo's superhuman strength and mounting popularity. Quite early on the narrative suggests the existence of a political problem. But at first things are not as bad. In fact when the neighboring Galla visit Shanga, the King is the first to extol Liyongo's extraordinary physical strength. He tells them that Liyongo was so gigantic if they saw him they would flee or urinate on themselves in fear. He then proceeds to summon Liyongo from the outskirts of Shanga. When the Galla see for themselves the stature and strength of the man, they are absolutely terrified. They are afraid of the Swahili for having such an extraordinarily mighty man on their side. They therefore propose a marriage alliance by providing Liyongo with a Galla wife as a means of forestalling future conflicts with the Swahili. With the Galla wife Liyongo sires a son, who in some versions of the story committed what Wamitila calls "oedipal murder."

If in the beginning King Mringwari appears to use Liyongo's strength and fame to ward off enemy attack, it was only a matter of time before there would be absolute fallout between the Swahili archrivals. The king attempts to use the Sanye or Dahalo neighboring community to kill Liyongo. They trick Liyongo into a *kikoa* feast. Individuals are required to gather palm fruits in turns in the feast. When it is Liyongo's

turn to gather the fruits he is given an unusually tall palm tree. The objective was to shoot him with arrows when he was on the tree. To the chagrin of the would-be killers, Liyongo decides against climbing the tree and instead hit the fruits using arrows as some versions of the tale indicate.⁴ Other versions such as the Pokomo one indicate that he shook the trunk of palm tree until the fruits fell.

The King plots to have Liyongo arrested and detained. The immediate impetus of the King's drastic step is not immediately clear in extant versions of the narrative. The Zanzibar version collected by Edward Steere, however, casts Liyongo in negative light as someone who constantly harassed people:

Naye ana nguvu sana, mtu mkubwa katika mji. Akauthi mno watu, hatta siku hiyo, wakafanya shauri kumwendea nyumbani kwake kumfunga. Wakaenda watu wengi sana wakamingilia nyumbani ghafula, wakamkamata wakamfunga, wakaenda naye hatta gereza, wakamtia.

He had great strength and was a great man in the city. And he oppressed the people exceedingly, till one day they made a plan to go to him in his house and bind him. And a great number of people went and came upon him suddenly into his house, and seized him and bound him, and went with him to prison, and put him in it. (438-39)

In the tale Steere collected there is no mention of the king and the apparent power struggle that existed between him and Liyongo. It is the people's thoughts and actions that are placed front and center in this version, and yet we can implicitly discern the King's influence in the whole scenario as the people use "state apparatus" namely the prison, to contain and to tame Liyongo, something that would otherwise be impossible without the King's consent and coercion.

The next crucial stage in the narrative is the King's attempt to have Liyongo executed. After learning that he was to be executed in three days time, Liyongo makes a request that a *gungu* and *mwao* dance tourney is organized outside his prison so he could bid farewell to people. His request is accepted. Meantime he sends a message in a cryptic poem to his mother through their slave girl, requesting her to bake a loaf of bran and to hide iron files in it. Only his mother and the slave girl could tell the meaning of the poem that appeared superficially to be at once innocuous and silly.

At the farewell dance, he requests for cymbals and *upato*. On this occasion soldiers do not rob the slave girl of the bread she brings for Liyongo, as was their custom. They regard bran as inferior food befitting only slaves and hence hand it over to the prisoner for whom it was intended. Liyongo sung with his melodious voice and played the musical instruments to the delight of all those gathered outside. But he uses the music and the sound of the instruments to muffle the sound of his filing away the chains with which he was bound. Before they knew it, he had broken out of his prison cell and confronted the people assembled outside. He kills several of them by smashing their heads together.

Liyongo retreats to the countryside after breaking out of prison. Having failed to eliminate him through frontal attacks, the King decides to use Liyongo's own son. Liyongo somewhat reluctantly and unwittingly reveals to his son the secret of his invincibility. He reveals to him that the only way to kill him is to insert a copper needle

in the navel. After reporting to the king the outcome of his “espionage” the son returns to his father Liyongo with the copper needle. While the father is fast asleep the son attacks him with the copper needle.

Liyongo then picks up his bow and arrows and goes to the village well where he knells down ready to shoot someone or something. One of the oddities of this tale lies in the fact that as he kneels there at the well, Liyongo dies. Yet, when the villagers came to draw water in the well in the morning they were too scared, thinking he was aiming at them with his bow and arrow. They approach his mother and request her to talk to him to move away so they can draw water. The mother holds him and tries to soothe him with songs, only for him to drop down. So she wept, knowing that indeed her son was dead⁵.

The thematization and narrativization of incarceration is self-evident in the Liyongo epic. There are obvious attempts to arrest Liyongo that ultimately succeed. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman in their Oxford History of the Prison opine that the conventional answer to the question “why prison?” often encompasses one or more of the following reasons; 1) deterrence; 2) retribution/expiation; 3) reform; and 4) incapacitation (ix). Of all these motives for incarceration it would seem reform was furthest in the mind of King Mringwari when he decreed the imprisonment of his nemesis Liyongo. Liyongo is eventually incarcerated pending execution, a move that virtually curtails his freedom or as some versions suggest checks his harassment of the

populace with his superhuman abilities. If there is validity in the claim that Liyongo harassed the people, he was not only imprisoned as a form of retribution for his actions but so that he is incapacitated, essentially becoming an object lesson for others likely to choose the path of harassment.

There is clearly power dynamics at work in the incarceration of Liyongo as was with the case of the victims of the ogre's tyranny in the Sela and Mwambu story. Liyongo's bloody escape from prison resonates with the counter-hegemonic violence that obtains in the case of Mwambu's violent response to ogre hegemony. However, the contending forces in the Liyongo epic are both human, even though one is bound to qualify this reality by noting that Liyongo was a human but imbued with abilities of a superhuman being. And unlike the Bukusu tale that is set in a mythical past, the Liyongo epic is set in a historical past. Beyond the mystery surrounding the life and death of Liyongo, his historicity is not really a matter of doubt in both the oral and written history of the Swahiliphone East African coast. Also, the Kenyan coast has been the terrain of countless power struggles of which, the one enacted in the Fumo Liyongo epic is exemplary (see Mulokozi (1995) and Abdulaziz (1979)). King Mringwari imprisons Liyongo because he views him as a threat to his kingship, in the same way that King Saul of the Jewish nation was irked by the popularity of David, and according to Jewish tradition, on several occasions' attempts to assassinate him. The similarity between David and Liyongo is accentuated by the fact that both are not only

skilled fighters but exceptional musicians, notwithstanding the fact that unlike David, Liyongo was a giant.

In the Zanzibar version of the Liyongo epic the hero is depicted as anti-social and unheroic for his harassment of the people. In contrast in the Bukusu story Sela and other members of Mwambu's clan are imprisoned in the belly of the ogre for no offence at all, unless their being born human was in itself a crime. According to the Zanzibar version, Liyongo is reprehensible and culpable and deserving of the incarceration. Yet, this version tends to downplay the significance of what Joseph Roach would term the "raging paranoia" of the King that might have evidently influenced negation of Liyongo's positive attributes in the public imagination (2). Feeling his power threatened by Liyongo's mounting popularity, the King might have poisoned the people's minds and decidedly perpetrated the image of Liyongo as a pariah and a danger to society.

How though is incarceration linked to Liyongo's heroism? It could be said that even before his incarceration Liyongo was already performing extraordinary feats befitting of heroism. He had exaggerated physical masculinity, exceptional musical talent as well unprecedented ingenuity and intelligence. And according to the Zanzibar version of the story, he had also earned himself the dubious reputation of a bully largely because of the gift of physical strength that superded everyone else's. King Mringwari's raging paranoia ensures that Liyongo is incarcerated despite or because of his extraordinary attributes. In a way, one could argue, Liyongo did not need incarceration to

make him stand apart from his contemporaries. Yet it would be incorrect to claim that incarceration does not augment his heroism. Incarceration makes him a victim of state terror in the form of captivity that attempts to dissolve his world and uncreate his sense of self as Elaine Scarry would put it. The sense of victimhood that arises from the incarceration enhances audience identification with Liyongo's fate. The audience is bound to sympathize or even empathize with him albeit with the awareness that the hero presumably vacillates or oscillates between victimhood and villainy. When he stages a successful escape bid from prison toward the end of the epic with the help of his mother and slave girl, he reaches the apex of his heroism. Prison with its apparent deprivation of agency and freedom therefore becomes the location of Liyongo's most heroic act. Even though he is assisted in his escape, the bid is essentially his brainchild and signifies the highest watermark of his heroic acts, outwitting and outsmarting King Mringwari and his state apparatus. Thus, Liyongo's incarceration is inextricably tied up with counter-hegemonic heroism.

What is also remarkable is the striking similarity between Liyongo's situation and that of prisoners of conscience of the colonial and postcolonial periods in Kenya. For one thing, it would seem, oftentimes whenever the government detained or imprisoned dissenters and dissidents, it made them essentially both victims and heroes in the public imagination. Jomo Kenyatta, JM Kariuki, Raila Odinga, Koigi wa Wamwere, Martin Shikuku, Kenneth Matiba, George Moseti Anyona, and Gitobu

Imanyara are instances of politicians whose incarceration tended to endear them to rather than alienate them from the electorate, enabling them to gain significant capital in certain stages of their political careers. Also, the way Liyongo earns himself a bad name in the purview of the state, leading to being branded an anti-social bully, resonates with the demonization of dissent that has been replicated over and over again in Kenya's more recent political history. For instance, as both JM Kariuki and Wambui Otieno state in their memoirs, the Mau Mau freedom fighters were painted in colonial propaganda as cannibals and killers of children and women (see the analysis of Mau Detainee and Mau Mau's Daughter in the third chapter of this document). In her Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya, historian Carolyn Elkins also alludes to the British official projection of the colonists as civilized and humane and the Mau Mau fighters as barbaric and savage. The result was the emergence in colonial Kenya of what Benedict Anderson would call "the quandary of definition" as both the terms "freedom fighters" and "terrorists" applied to the same people at the same time, depending on which side of the divide one was. Similar scenarios have often been replayed in postcolonial Kenya with, for instance, the Kenyatta regime branding Ngugi wa Thiong'o's involvement with community theatre at Kamiriithu as subversive and detaining him without trial for almost two years.

Almost always the ruling regime felt threatened by the art and activism of the victims of political imprisonment. The long list of political prisoners in the colonial

period was perceived as enemies because of the at once real and imagined fear that they wanted to topple the colonial dispensation. Similarly, the detention and imprisonment of political opponents of the Kenyatta and the Moi administration were predicated on the belief that those individuals and groups were, at the very least, like Liyongo, undermining and undercutting the authority of the regime, and at the very worst, plotting to overthrow it.

Gender issues also emerge in the Liyongo epic. But the women of the Liyongo epic do not have the passivity that we find in the Bukusu story of Sela and Mwambu. To be sure the phallogocentric structures that demean women in society are reflected in the narrative as when the Wagalla in one version want to appease the Swahili by giving Liyongo a wife. This angle of the story resembles the legend of Mango among the Bukusu who was rewarded with a wife by the Barwa for his heroic feat of killing the feared mythical snake. But the passivity of women of Liyongo epic is illusory. Both Liyongo's mother and the slave girl play a central role in the hero's successful escape from custody. Liyongo sends his mother a cryptic message through his slave girl. He states:

Ewe kijakazi nakutuma uwatumika,
Kamwambia mama, ni mwinga siyalimka
Afanye mkate, pale kati tupa kuweka,
Nikeze pingu na minyoo ikinyoka,
Ningie ondoni ninyinyirike ja mana nyoka,
Tatange madari na makutano kuno kimeta,

You slave girl, let me send you to my mother,
Tell my mother, she is a simpleton, unaware of the ways of the world
Let her bake bread, and put files in the middle,
So that I may cut my fetters, and unchain myself,
That I may go to the road, and glide like a snake,
That I may mount the roofs and walls, and look this way and that way. (Steere
442)

The slave girl faithfully delivers the message. Liyongo's mother does as instructed by the son and hides metal files in the prisoner's bread. It is with these files that he saws away the prison chains and breaks free. The actions and reactions of these two women make them central in the drama. Their complicity in the prison escape is a mark of their valor and loyalty to Liyongo, qualities that embolden them to participate in an enterprise fraught with danger and risk. In both the Sela and Mwambu tale and the Liyongo epic, coded messages are passed between the male protagonist and key female characters. But in the former the coded message is decoded by the enemy with disastrous results, while in the latter, the foe remains oblivious and clueless. Another point of contrast is that, rather than being victims of trickery as Sela was, Liyongo's mother and the slave girl are tricksters themselves, not simpletons.

In the Liyongo epic, hence, there is a reversal of roles, with women paving the way for the end of captivity for Liyongo, a male character. Yet, most analyses of the story gloss over the heroic acts of these women that enhance and enable Liyongo's heroism. As Joseph Mbele stipulated in his essay "Women in the African Epic" (2006), the trajectory of folktale scholarship has a predilection toward downplaying or ignoring

the heroic deeds of female characters. Mbele elegantly incriminates students of the Africa folktales when he states; “We have eyes and ears but we are conditioned neither to fully see nor fully hear the female characters” (62). The women are viewed as mere props in the drama with Liyongo, the man, as the center of focus, recalling Achebe’s acerbic critique of the use of Africans as props and a backdrop to the European imagination in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. It is to be noted that at the end of the narrative it is only Liyongo’s mother who the entire village turns to because it believes only she would have the audacity and temerity to confront her son and persuade him to move away from the well so people can draw water. She succeeds where all men have failed by approaching him valiantly in an attempt to persuade him, only to discover he was long dead. She is the first to discover and announce the reality of the demise of this great man. But I suppose, not enough of the femininity of Liyongo’s heroism has been acknowledged.

Without any doubt Liyongo shares some characteristics with mystical Lwanda Magere of the Luo people of Western Kenya and Samson of the Jewish tradition in possessing uncanny power that is inextricably tied to what I may call a certain “somatic mystery.” For Lwanda Magere, his power was in the shadow of his body hence the futile effectual impact of enemy spears and arrows on the body itself. For Samson, the secret of his power lied in the long unshaved hair. For Liyongo the only way of conquering him was to insert a cooper needle in his navel as the son discovered and

consequently executed the action that brings down the otherwise invincible fighter. Hence, on the whole, when the secret is revealed in an act of betrayal each of these heroes is dealt a fatal blow.

It is significant that Liyongo dies after a copper needle is inserted in his navel. The navel is what connects the umbilical cord between mother and child during pregnancy and has deep symbolic significance in most African communities. It speaks to the idea of “mother as supreme” in the life and death of an individual, as Liyongo’s experience amply demonstrates. If then, the secret of Liyongo’s power lies in the navel, his power is feminine; it emanates from his maternal filiation and affiliation. I therefore, argue that the implicit message in the epic is that Liyongo’s heroic masculinity is nothing without femininity.

Liyongo’s epic is also an example of a prisoner whose artistic impulse defies the carceral reality of the prison experience. As a prisoner, Liyongo not only can but does indeed compose poetry and perform music. Unlike Sela of the Bukusu tale, Liyongo is a producer of art not merely a consumer. The resilience of his artistic ability while incarcerated anticipates the artistic productions of jailed writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Devil on the Cross, Alamin Mazrui’s Chembe cha Moyo and Shadows of the Moon, and Abdilatif Abdalla’s Sauti ya Dhiki, and others discussed in subsequent chapters of this study.

In composing a somewhat silly song carrying a secret message to his mother, it may seem as if Liyongo uses prison as an allegoresis or excuse for writing nonsense. But it is within this putatively “artless art” coupled with a display of his musical talent, that he schemes his escape bid. It is a classic example of art as functional rather than “art for art’s sake” since it enables or attempts to enable escape from prison. Secondly, the silly poem is an artistic venture that links the prisoner with the community outside the prison walls, opening dialogue that would otherwise be missing were the prison to choose to resign to fate. These two aspects are inextricably intertwined in the sense that they both impinge on the place and space of aesthetics in the literary production emanating from prison. When Barbara Harlow stated that for most prison writers, questions of style are best left in the schoolbag, she was hinting the primacy of function over aesthetics in the genre of prison writing (73). Put differently, the form tends to be less important for the prison artist than the content.

The tenacity and versatility of the Liyongo epic makes it adaptable and applicable not only to the socio-political context within which it was first conceived, but also the colonial and postcolonial moments. This perhaps explains its widespread popularity and continued relevance to the Swahiliphone East African coast and beyond. Liyongo can thus be easily substituted for any number of political prisoners and revolutionaries of any period while King Mringwari could, like the ogre in the Bukusu tale, symbolize the reactionary despots, dictators, and tyrants who brutalize and

demonize political opposition at all times, and immensely contribute to making life or existence prison-like.

III. Memory, I-pronoun, Truth, and Trauma

In sum, the Sela and Mwambu story and the epic of Liyongo demonstrate how oral expression carries the weight of the experience of incarceration; the capacity of orality to exhibit the carceral experience and imagination. Bound up with these oral incarceration narratives is meditation on issues such as power dynamics, gender, violence and counter-hegemonic violence, and the use of artistic productions from within and without the prison walls. Although these issues are not by any means exclusive to prison narratives, they are pervasive enough to be considered salient features of this genre of literature. It is important to note that these issues also figure prominently in the written prison narratives that we will consider in the subsequent chapters of this study. I would suggest, in addition, that the oral tales that constitute the focus of our analysis in this chapter also implicitly point to an engagement with the ideas of memory, the I-pronoun, truth, and trauma, ideas that find more explicit dramatization in the written texts. In what follows I briefly expound on how each of these variables is implied in both the tale of Sela and Mwambu and the Liyongo epic.

It goes without saying that both tales are principally located within the matrix of oral literature for which memory, both individual and collective, is paramount.

Memory is crucial because of the way it links the present to the past. As John Sutton

has aptly stated, memory is a “set of cognitive capacities by which humans (and other animals) retain information and reconstruct past experiences, usually for present purposes” (Sutton 1109). Whereas the Bukusu relate to the shared memory of the Sela and Mwambu tale and its continued relevance in spite of or because of their changing historical realities, the Waswahili share the memory of Liyongo’s epic as a monument of a historical figure, although embellished with fictive elements. As indicated earlier the Liyongo epic even enjoys a transethnic or transnational appeal with the Pokomo of the Kenyan coast and the Waswahili of Zanzibar staking claim to it and depositing it in their collective memory in various versions. Yet it is imperative to also acknowledge the extent to which these tales themselves thematize or foreground the power of memory. Sela and Mwambu are impelled to commit to memory the word of their secret song upon which Sela’s life depends. Memory is at stake in Sela’s recognition or misrecognition of her brother’s voice. In the Liyongo epic the slave girl depends on memory to recall the silly poem bearing the weight of Liyongo’s escape plot. The songs or poems, like the oral tales themselves, have mnemonic elements that make remembering easier, such as repetition of words or structures, onomatopoeia, and brevity. Ong, who attaches little significance to orality, has also acknowledged the role of mnemonics in the oral tradition tied up to the formulaic nature of oral compositions.

It may look on the surface that African oral tales in general and these two in particular have no place for the individual and the related I-pronoun. Kwame Anthony

Appiah is one of the proponents of a distinction between what he calls the “authorial I” of the printed or published texts and the “we” of oral narration.” Appiah observes:

African writers share, as I have said, both a social-historical situation and a social- historical perspective. One aspect of the situation is the growth of both literacy and of availability of printing. This generates the now familiar problem of transition from fundamentally oral to literary cultures, and in doing so it gives rise to that peculiar privacy that is associated with a new kind of property in texts, a new kind of authorial authority, a new kind of creative persona. It is easy to see now that, in generating the category of the individual in the new world of the public—published—text, in creating the private “metaphysical” interiority of the author, this social-historical perspective; the authorial “I” struggles to displace the “we” of oral narration (83).

Appiah echoes other critics by arguing that the new creative possibilities arising from the print culture and the written text enable the “I” to “escape the persistent and engulfing “we”” (Appiah 83). Appiah’s sentiments seem to be in tandem with the primacy of group or collective identity as expressed by a dictum from the Sonjo people of Tanzania. The dictum, “I am because we are, and since we are so I am” stumbled upon by John Mbiti has often been applied indiscriminately to all African societies (qtd in Olney 69). Both James Olney in his Tell Me Africa and Adetayo Alabi in his Telling Our Stories apply it to the entire continent while Micere Mugo in her African Orature and Human Rights, applies it to the Kikuyu people of Kenya. In a sense the individual is so subsumed in the collective. On the hand, it is tempting to argue that harping on the communal in Africa, perhaps betrays trappings of exaggeration and distortion of reality than has been previously acknowledged, as the Sela and Mwambu tale and the Liyongo

epic tend to suggest. In other words, one could advance the view that the appearance of a totality of the collective belies the reality of the individual, even individualistic, within the contours of African life and imaginative projections. Mwambu confronts the ogre not because the ogre has swallowed up almost everyone in the community, but because this time it is *his* sister who has been swallowed up. Therefore, Mwambu's apparently selfless liberatory act through which all but one are rescued, is driven by a selfish desire to save his sister. There is little evidence in the narrative that attachment to the entire community is the principal impetus for Mwambu's presumably heroic act. The rescue mission principally intended to liberate Sela and that other people are rescued in the process is probably only an incidental, even fortuitous by-product. Mwambu's questionable heroism is compounded by his failure to sympathize or empathize with the old woman who he allows the ogre to swallow up again. Mwambu's actions and attitude perhaps hypothetically invert or subvert the Sonjo dictum to: "You are because I am and because I am so you are."

As in the case of Mwambu, the implied or explicit I-pronoun in the Liyongo epic, does not necessarily translate into a deep sense of community. In a way, Liyongo's tale tends to run counter to the assumption that there is an embedded collective in the "I," an absolute corporate self. For one thing, the hero Liyongo, in life and death, threatens communal well-being. In the Zanzibar version of the epic Liyongo is portrayed as a bully threatening and menacing the populace with his exaggerated

masculinity. In almost all versions Liyongo's extraordinary masculine attributes make the neighboring Wagalla to give him a wife. Whereas the move forestalls war between the Waswahili and the Wagalla communities, Liyongo profits from this arrangement as an individual. Liyongo's individualism is further demonstrated by the prison break plan in which he *uses* his mother and his slave girl in the full sense of the term, for his own selfish ends. One could well argue that Liyongo's escape from incarceration does not translate into any direct benefit for the community. The hero is essentially self-centered. In a sense, his mother and his slave girl may be viewed as mere cogs in the wheels of Liyongo's personal aggrandizement. Moreover, upon his death, he remains a thorn in the community's flesh because his kneeling corpse with a pointed arrow hinders the people from drawing water from the village well. Lastly, Liyongo's heroism, like Mwambu's set him apart from ordinary members of their communities so that his implied singular "I" does not connote the plural "we" associated with the so-called African socialism or togetherness.

If it is true that these oral texts could, in this sense be interpreted, as a tacit critique of individualism, they suggest a keen awareness of individualistic traits in African society in general and the Bukusu and Swahili societies in particular. Should we then conclude that these texts undercut the often romanticized and idealized notion of African community in antiquity and in modernity? It seems to me that the individualistic tendencies and foibles of the heroes in the two tales reinforce rather than

undermine the primacy of collective consciousness. Whenever these or other characters exhibit such weaknesses, they serve as warning examples, examples of how to eschew individualism and to espouse the sense of community and togetherness.

The centrality of truth-telling cannot be overemphasized in these tales of imprisonment. Generally-speaking the stories are implicated in what Achebe in his collection of essays Hopes and Impediments has called “the truth of fiction,” whose governing principle is “let us pretend,” the mutual acceptance between audience and narrator that in the story world both the improbable and the impossible can and will occur (40). In respect of the Sela and Mwambu story, both audience and narrator pretend that it is true that ogre’s exist, that a whole population can be swallowed up into the belly of the ogre and remain alive, and be rescued by cutting off the ogre’s finger. That almost goes without saying. Perhaps what does not go without saying is Liyongo’s narrative because it is based on a real historical personality who lived and died on the Kenyan coast. How true is the Liyongo epic in recording and representing the incarceration and exploits of this historical figure? While a similar question may not be arise with regard to the Sela and Mwambu story, it bears stating that in both narratives emphasis is laid on the fictive element and therefore it would be safer to underscore the “let us pretend” of the truth of fiction, than to insist upon historical veracity or literary verisimilitude. But it seems as if this question does not easily go away since the thin line between fiction and fact inevitably impinges on truth claims.

Further, in both the Sela and Mwambu story and the Liyongo epic, the characters' truth-claims propel the plots. The ogre's inversion and subversion of truth when he imitates Mwambu's voice leads to Sela's misrecognition and ultimately to her being swallowed up. Liyongo's truth claim in his poem that either his mother or he himself is a simpleton, belie the ingenuity through which the two, assisted by the slave girl, execute the escape plan. Both the ogre in the Sela and Mwambu story and Liyongo in the epic subvert the truth, make false truth claims or simply lie. They seem to vindicate Stephen Spenders intriguing statement on self-narrating: "Everyone is a liar about certain things" (121). Do the so-called real-life accounts of incarceration also bear lies? What does it mean that former Mau Mau detainees would write that their so-called confessions were lies to avoid torture or further torture? Are there situations where lying is justified and justifiable? These are some of the questions that this study will attempt to address in subsequent analyses.

Also implicated in these stories is trauma. Freud is one of the earliest scholars credited with establishing connections between traumatic experience and literature. Acknowledging Freud's seminal attempt to marry literature with trauma Cathy Caruth writes: "If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing" (3). One of the literary compositions to which Freud "turns" to describe trauma is the Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata. Freud turns to this romantic epic

in an attempt to extrapolate upon “traumatic neurosis” (Caruth 2). In brief Tancred kills his lover Clorinda unknowingly in a duel while she is disguised as an enemy knight. Later blood comes out of a tall tree he slashes with his sword in the magic forest. He hears Clorinda’s voice, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree complaining that he has wounded her again. Tancrid “hears” Clorinda’s voice, long after he has inflicted the fatal wound on her body. As Caruth remarks, Freud uses the story to underscore the inassimilable nature of trauma, how it is not fully grasped initially or ever but returns to haunt the survivor later on. What is also significant about trauma personified in Clorinda is that it becomes a belated voice, barely heard in the beginning and almost incomprehensible or unrecognizable in its subsequent occurrences. Following Freud, Caruth argues that trauma “is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (5).

Whether we reckon trauma to be a wound to the body, as the Greeks originally conceived of it, or as a wound to the psyche, as trauma scholars have come to embrace it lately, there are elements of trauma in the Sela and Mwambu story and the Liyongo epic that are implicit, although perhaps not articulated enough. Some contend that to ascribe trauma to fictional characters like Sela and Mwambu or Liyongo (as we encounter him in the epic) is to wrongly assume that these are “real living people” (Roland 92). Yet, it is apparent that the imaginative world of both oral and written literature is almost always fashioned after real living people, a *mimesis*—to borrow

Aristotle term—of both how they live and how they die. Hence, beneath and beyond the impulse to pretend that fiction is truth is the awareness that there is close affinity between story characters and real living people. Thus we perceive the fictive world as peopled by people like us or who could be like us, people whose experiences, actions and attitudes are either reflections or refractions of our own. That is why we care about them in the first place. As Elizabeth Wright has cogently argued, although characters are not real living people, there must, bear sufficient resemblance to real humans like us to attract our attention and interest or sympathy and empathy (16).

Therefore, it seems to me that the horrors of the belly politics in the Sela and Mwambu story portend earth-shaking events in human lives that are likely to trigger traumatic responses. Sela and others as prisoners in the ogre's belly are veritable victims of a traumatic experience given the traumatizing reality of their being swallowed up. As Caruth has argued surviving, death itself is a form of trauma that could have long-lasting effects or only becomes known long after the event that caused it. The mock executions of Doestvesky or JM Kariuki are contemporary instances of the trauma of survival. Liyongo too could be regarded as a victim of trauma because of his incarceration, although in his victimhood could be qualified by the fact that he is himself a cause of trauma to others. He causes the Wagalla to urinate on themselves by virtue of just beholding his gigantic frame, and generally causes panic, even trauma to the community by kneeling while dead at the village well. Moreover, one could even

argue that in witnessing the events surrounding her son including his tragic end, Liyongo's mother undergoes a traumatic experience. Indeed, the very idea of incarceration or confinement that these narratives epitomize and thematize points to trauma as a condition of possibility.

In a nutshell, the dramatization of issues of memory, the I-pronoun, truth telling and trauma in the two stories composed and set in pre-colonial times, anticipates the issues that would preoccupy incarceration narratives in both colonial and postcolonial times in Kenya. The analysis of this tales illustrates that oral tales too carry the weight of the carceral experience and imagination as to deserve inclusion in the category of prison or incarceration narratives. The Bukusu story of Sela and Mwambu and the Swahili epic of Liyongo continue to manifest their relevance and usefulness, not only because they have the propensity to entertain but also can interrogate and extrapolate on the meaning of being, by narrativizing and thematizing confinement. Therefore, to overestimate the entertainment value of African oral tales is to overlook the deep moral, gender and metaphysical questions that these tales evoke and invoke. To insist as Okpewho's claims that African tales are there merely or mostly for entertainment rather than edification, is to miss the point. Further, to insist on any version of the Gibbonian notion that orality hinders reflection and gnosis is to completely miss the point of the deeply textured nature and complexity of a mode of literary expression that has at once

characterized and sustained Africa for millennia, fostering the continent's capacity to encode and decode its place in the structure of things.

Notes

1. Over the centuries there has never been a univocal position on the function of mimetic art of which literature is part. Plato is among the earliest known detractors of mimetic art. In his trenchant critique of drama and poetry in the Republic, Plato argues that dramatization as a form of writing (in plays, poems, and epics) is a devious device that was a threat to the existing social order. It is therefore not at all surprising that Plato banishes the poet from his ideal republic. Others who have viewed literature as inimical to the stability and morality of society include puritanical Christians of Medieval Rome such as Tertullian and to a lesser degree St. Augustine. Aristotle is one of the most famous defenders of art. In his various treatises, such as Poetics and Rhetoric, he clearly negates Plato's negation of art. Similarly, in proclaiming, "Poetry is the work of a gifted person," Aristotle recognizes artists as talented people and art as something of positive value in society. But it is English critic Sydney who places the literary artist above all other professions of knowledge.
2. See Jacob Carruther's review essay "Intellectual Neocolonialism and "The Invention of Africa" at www.africawithin.com/carruthers/invention_Africa.html.

3. To be sure, it is nearly a truism that definitions almost always just do not seem to do justice to any concept or anything and yet we cannot do without them. Whereas I am not oblivious to what Benedict Anderson, in a different context, characterizes as the “quandary of definition,” perhaps drawing parallels between prison literature and the slave narrative may further illuminate the matter. Slaves who experienced slavery such as Olaudah Equiano and Frederick Douglass have written slave narratives, but so have people who did not experience slavery directly such as Toni Morrison in Beloved, Bebe Moore Campbell in Your Blues Ain’t Mine, and Octavia Butler in Kindred.
4. The *Kipande* policy is the British colonial decree that required colonial subjects to carry with them a pass whenever and wherever they traveled as a means of controlling their movements and forestalling dissidence and revolt to colonial rule.
5. There are various versions as to fate of the traitor son. The Zanzibar version shows that he was seized by the people and killed him, so that he did not get the Kingdom that he had been promised as a gift for betraying his father. In Muhamed Kijumwa’s Utenzi wa Fumo Liyongo, the son dies of illness, dejected and forlorn after the king’s failure to keep the promise (Wamitila 98-99).

Chapter 3: Narratives of Incarceration in the Colonial Period

I. Introduction

This chapter focuses on three prison memoirs namely JM Kariuki's Mau Mau Detainee, Gakaara wa Wanjau's Mau Mau Author in detention, and Wambui Otieno's Mau Mau's Daughter. A brief background on the general historical contexts in which all three texts emerged precedes the separate analysis of each of them. To be sure previous studies of these memoirs and others from colonial Kenya have been conducted. Marshall S.Clough's Mau Mau Memoirs (1998) is arguably one of the most extensive surveys of the literature of the kind that preoccupies the current study. Other studies include, Marguerite Ylvisaker "Mau Mau" Detainee: The Account by an African of His Experiences in Detention Camps, 1953-1960 by Josiah Mwangi Kariuki" (1976). Clough investigates thirteen Mau Mau memoirs, including Kariuki's Mau Mau Detainee and Wanjau's Mau Mau Author in Detention primarily as historical sources whose validity should not be necessarily doubted or discounted. In this regard, his work establishes the "historical value" of these memoirs, validating their claims as authentic and reliable (7). While acknowledging the significance of previous studies I hasten to state that the current study is not driven by a purely historicist temperament; it hinges on a literary-critical perspective that draws upon many and varied disciplines with the objective of uncovering the interplay between self-narration and incarceration. I

therefore read these texts against the following constant variables: motivation, trauma, memory, truth telling, and the I-pronoun.

Granted the three memoirists cannot be said to be adequately representative of the entire corpus of the literature of incarceration capturing the monumental events in Kenya's history in the period under review. Nevertheless, I have selected their works for a number of reasons: (1) because they offer similar yet divergent insights into what it meant to be incarcerated by the colonial forces; (2) there are differences in the sites for their writing and time of writing or publication; (3) they invite debate about genres of life-writing given their generic diversity and; (4) lastly, their articulation of issues of gender seem to imply that the narrator's gender may be critical in determining levels of articulation, detail, and emphases.

The narratives of incarceration that form the focus and locus of this chapter emerged during and/or because of the colonial encounter in Kenya. At the Berlin conference of 1884 when European powers carved up the map of Africa "like a slab of meat," to use historian David Anderson's expression, Kenya was allotted to the British (15). One of Britain's initial principal investment ventures was to build the Kenya Uganda Railway from Mombasa on the Indian Ocean coast to Kisumu on the shores of Lake Victoria in the period between 1888 and 1901.¹ The intention was to facilitate efficient and effective tapping and transportation of natural resources from inland Kenya and beyond for the European market. Desperate to find a way of paying for the

massive railway project, the then governor Sir Charles Eliot encouraged Europeans to come and settle in Kenya. The first European settlers arrived in Kenya in 1902 with grandiose dreams of creating paradise for themselves in the heart of an African jungle, as it were “building a little piece of England in a foreign field”(Anderson 1). In other words as Caroline Elkins argues in her Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya (2005), there were underpinnings of romantic and hedonistic cravings in the imperial project (11). As it turned out the actualization of such dreams was manifestly contingent upon an ethos of dispossession and denigration and abjection of Africans under the smokescreen of a largely spurious “civilizing mission.” The ethos that the colonists and colonialists espoused and the actions they took were inevitably bound to raise antithetical attitudes, actions, and reactions from the indigenous population.

The *raison d'être* and *modus operandi* of the colonial administration therefore sowed the seed of rebellion that would eventuate into a bloody war in the 1950s. The famous Mau Mau struggle was largely precipitated by systematic expropriation of African lands in the fertile Central Kenya and the Rift Valley highlands. Africans soon found themselves “squatters” or tenant farmers on their own land. The vast majority of those dispossessed of land found themselves acting as sources of cheap labor on European farms or servants for European masters in the city of Nairobi. Others were dispossessed of land and forced to settle in less fertile land such as the thousands who

were forcefully moved from Kiambu in Central Kenya to Olenguruone near Nakuru town in the Rift Valley. This group would soon form the nucleus of the most militant anti-colonial fighters. The land problem was compounded by the colonial legislation that barred Africans from growing cash crops and reducing their farming to subsistence only to the advantage of their white counterparts.

The draconian rules that the colonial dispensation imposed also ensured that the mobility of Kenyans was curtailed. To this end the colonial administration introduced the native reserves, which ensured that individuals were not permitted to go beyond the designated boundary of their community; it was a system premised on the British tactic of divide and rule or, as some have insisted, divide and ruin. Further, after World War I the administration introduced the infamous *kipande*, an identity card and a passbook without which no African could leave his home to look for work. European employers would often tear up the *kipande* of workers perceived to be errant, making it difficult or impossible for such workers to secure employment elsewhere. Hence the continual erosion of African individual rights exacerbated the antipathy between the colonized and the colonizer in a colony characterized by a politics whose complexion was essentially racial and ethnic.

After World War II Kenya entered its most turbulent moment in the colonial period, with the 5 million Africans and 97,000 Asian immigrants virtually under the economic and political domination, and hegemony of 29,000 European settlers. But

even more significantly, the majority Africans were, as Anderson states, reckoned as “bottom of the pile” in the racialized hierarchy, (9). While the Legislative Council (or Legco) existed with some token Asian and African representation, it was far from democratic. Moreover, the African and Asian representatives were not only outnumbered by their white counterparts but had also been handpicked by the colonial officials. Little wonder that, like the African colonial chiefs, these African members of the council were invariably regarded as stooges and yes-men of the colonial dispensation.

Given the suffocating atmosphere of exploitation and oppression under which the majority Africans in colonial Kenya lived, it is hardly fortuitous that dissent and rebellion against British rule ensued colony-wide, culminating in what Elkins has characterized as “one of the bloodiest and most protracted wars of colonization fought in Britain’s twentieth-century empire”(28). The period between 1945 and 1955 saw increased resistance, with Dini ya Maria Ragot among the Luos, Dini ya Musambwa among the Bukusu, Dini ap Mbojet among the Kipsigis being instances of insurrection mobilized on the basis of affective affiliation to some form of politicized religiosity. Other forms of resistance included those of the Masai and Pokot who resisted the infringement of their land rights and grazing rights and the women of Murang’a who revolted against forced labor (Atieno-Odhiambo 25).

It is against the backdrop of the mounting tension between the colonized and the colonized in Kenya, which reached the pinnacle after governor Eric Barring declared a state of Emergency between 1953 and 1960 that the literature of incarceration of the colonial era emerged. Yet, it bears clarifying that whereas the bulk of the literature capturing the events precipitated by the Emergency, including the massacres, torture, rapes, and castrations of Africans, was written during or immediately after the events, some of the accounts were written or published years and sometimes decades after the fact. Also, it almost goes without saying that the Kikuyu of Central Kenya mounted the most enduring revolt and clearly experienced more than any other community the full force of British counter-insurgency. As some scholars maintain, what came to be called the Mau Mau movement was, properly speaking, not a Kenyan affair but primarily Kikuyu. In general the Kikuyu turned to armed struggle when legal avenues of redress failed abysmally. Sometimes armed struggle entailed killing fellow Kikuyus perceived to be traitors and collaborators, making the Mau Mau emergency as Anthony Daniels suggests, “as much a civil war as an anti-colonial one,” (23). The militarization of the struggle for *ithaka na wiyathi*, (Kikuyu for land and freedom) was given impetus by the ex-combatant Kikuyus returning from fighting European wars in India and Burma as well as displaced and dispossessed youths in Nakuru and Olenguruone who “had nothing to lose except their petty-trade which barely gave them a living”(Tamarkin qtd. in Atieno-Odhiambo 29). It is at Olenguruone that the traditional Kikuyu practice of

oathing underwent a transformation to also include women and children (Elkins 25). Also, whereas the banned Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) of Harry Thuku and Johnstone (later Jomo) Kenyatta had used the Bible for oathing, at Olenguruone, the goat replaced the Bible.

The historiography of the Mau Mau period has often been oscillating between blame and glorifying the polar sides of the contest depending on the historian's vantage point. Most Eurocentric historians saw Mau Mau fighters as possessing "impulsive savagery" and glossed over the savagery of Britain's counter-insurgency measures (Robert Ruark qtd in Anderson 1). Counter-arguments have also arisen to defend the Mau Mau movement and sanitize its alleged excesses. But even at the local level Kenyan historians have often disagreed on the approach to adopt in accounting for the Mau Mau history. Radical historian Maina wa Kinyatti for instance has differed bitterly with Bethwel A. Ogot and William Ochieng over nationalistic claims of the Mau Mau movement. One is bound to wonder whether historiographical support for or critique of the Mau Mau in the case of these historians is not contingent on their geopolitical and "geo-ethnic" position. In other words the question to ask is whether Kinyatti is sympathetic to the Mau Mau in his historiography because he is a Kikuyu and whether Ogot and Ochieng are adversarial in their critique of the movement because they are not only non-Kikuyu but also Luo, a polity that shares a long-standing mutual antipathy with the Kikuyu.

Anderson makes the sobering remark that the Mau Mau war “is a story of atrocity and excess on both sides, a dirty war from which no one emerged with pride, and certainly no glory” (2). The exact toll on both sides will perhaps never be known. According to official British records the Mau Mau murdered thirty-two European settlers and 1800 African civilians while the colonial forces killed 12,000 Mau Mau combatants. In his modest estimation Anderson believes the number of Mau Mau killed exceeds 20,000. However, Elkins suggests that tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of Kikuyu might have died at the hands of the British colonial forces (xvi). She further claims that the entire Kikuyu population of 1.5 million during the Emergency were virtually in detention, or, one could say, swallowed up by the colonial ogre, as whole villages were surrounded by barbed wire while homeguards patrolled the land and chiefs ruled with an iron-fist. If there is cogency in insisting on the symbolic incarceration of the Kikuyu, it is certainly important to acknowledge the difference between the virtual incarceration in the villages and the actual incarceration in the detention camps to which tens of thousands languished. It is to accounts of three of the survivors of these camps that we now turn.

II. The Writing Hand and the Body in Pain: Josiah Mwangi Kariuki's Mau Mau Detainee

On the eighth day I no longer realized where I was, nor did my body seem to be part of me-JM Kariuki (121)

Josiah Mwangi Kariuki disappeared from the Hilton Hotel, Nairobi, on March 2, 1975. Several days later, a Masai herdsman, Musaita ole Tunda, found his mutilated body in a thicket at Ngong Hills in the outskirts of Nairobi. Kariuki's fingers were missing. A firebrand leftist backbench Member of Parliament, JM, as he was popularly known in Kenya, had been assassinated to stem the tide of opposition to Kenyatta's despotic rule. Like the assassination of Tom Mboya six-years earlier and Robert Ouko fifteen years later, Kariuki's assassination raised political temperatures to an all-time high and nearly brought the country to the brink of civil war. Kariuki paid the ultimate price for opposing Kenyatta and what Ngugi in his prison memoir Detained terms the "comprador class" around Kenyatta that continually amassed wealth by impoverishing the masses of Kenyans. The tragic irony of Kariuki's demise lies in the fact that he had been inspired by Kenyatta's own activism and charisma to join the struggle for freedom from the tyranny of British colonial rule and had been a close ally of Kenyatta upon

independence in 1963. Kenyatta's political speech in 1946 at Njoro, near Nakuru town, had had a telling effect on young Kariuki. Kariuki writes in his memoir:

I myself was fundamentally changed by his statemanshiplike words and his burning personality. I vowed there and then that I would struggle with him for justice and freedom for our country and I dedicated myself to follow him in his crusade to remove sufferings and humiliations of our people. (38)

Kariuki had heard what he describes as the "great man from London" whose oratorical skills as he mixed Kikuyu and Kiswahili, were peerless, and whose words forever changed Kariuki's life (37). Like Karari Njama who wrote Mau Mau from Within, Kariuki was among countless Kikuyu who were awakened by Kenyatta's oratory (Clough 70). Kariuki was determined to acquire some education that would facilitate his role in the struggle. Commenting on his connection to the illiterate detainees, he wrote: "I personally never considered escaping since I felt my place was with the illiterates in the camps, who were fighting for freedom as strongly as many of those outside" (146). Throughout the memoir he stresses the importance of education and how it behooved the few educated people to assist the illiterate masses. Between his initiation into politics at Njoro in 1946 during Kenyatta's speech and 1952, Kariuki went to Uganda to seek further education at the King's College Budo then run by the Church Missionary Society (CMS). The education he acquired in Uganda particularly spoken and written English skills would later figure prominently in his role as Mau Mau leader in and out

of prison. When Kariuki fought alongside Kenyatta against the “colonial potentate”, he did not anticipate that Kenyatta himself would metamorphose into the “postcolonial potentate” under whose reign Kariuki would be assassinated. In his memoir Mau Mau Detainee, Kariuki apparently used his fingers that would eventually be severed from the body by Kenyatta’s secret agents, to write plaudits about his political mentor:

Kenyatta is greater than any Kikuyu, he is greater than any Luo or Nandi or Masai or Giriama, he is greater than any Kenyan, he is the greatest African of them all. He knows no tribe, no race, he bears no hatred or malice for the past; he is human and yet wiser than any other human I have ever known. (211)

Contemplating Kariuki’s apparent unreserved adoration for Kenyatta and hyperbolic estimation of Kenyatta’s worth as a leader with the benefit of hindsight, accentuates the sense of poignancy and paradox in his assassination. Mau Mau Detainee was penned on the eve of Kenya’s independence and the concomitant euphoria and optimism of the time. Hence, the memoir, not only elides serious consideration of the political scenario in Kenya after Kenyatta, but fails to anticipate the yet to be experienced fallout between the two former freedom fighters, and the transformation of Kenyatta from mentor to nemesis, and from affable leader to assassin.

The discovery of Kariuki’s mutilated body was the culmination of a tale of a body that suffered untold pain in both colonial and postcolonial times, leaving a profound and lasting imprint on the collective memory of the Kenyan peoples. In a sense the assassination may be regarded as a form of “ultimate incarceration,”

extermination in postcolonial Kenya of a firebrand politician who survived the colonial detention camp. If political assassination of the kind Kariuki suffered was in itself the ultimate incarceration from which there is no release, one could argue, the state intentionally or unintentionally thrust the evidence of the mutilated body to the public imagination as an object lesson in the dangers inherent in dissent and dissidence. There is no space in this section to investigate in depth the suffering of Kariuki's body in the Kenyatta regime nor is such a venture probable, given that there is no evidence that Kariuki left any written record of his torture at the hands of state operatives before his body was found at the Ngong Hills. Much of what transpired between his capture at Hilton Hotel and the discovery of his body in the thicket on the outskirts of the Nairobi remains up till now a matter of conjecture and speculation. But his prison memoir recounts in detail his horrific experience as a political detainee in the colonial era and how his body (and the bodies of others like him) was subjected to intense pain and torture time and again for his relentless writing of letters of protest and complaint. Kariuki's memoir, Mau Mau Detainee can thus be seen as a narrative about the writing hand and "body in pain," to borrow Elaine Scarry's phrase.

In his Tell Me Africa, James Olney dismissed Josiah Mwangi Kariuki's memoir Mau Mau Detainee as seriously lacking in literary merit (17). But most Western critics received the text with disdain and disgust, not so much because of its deficiency as a work of art but mainly because of its content. William H. Friedland criticized the

memoir for apparently not revealing enough about the then dreaded Mau Mau movement and simply focusing on the narrator. Friedland stated: “The title of this volume develops expectations which remain largely unfulfilled since this book deals mainly with the author’s experiences as a detainee during the Mau Mau emergency in Kenya and only peripherally with the question of Mau Mau” (626-27). Other critics such as Roger Chance, cast aspersions at the veracity of Kariuki’s account and admonished readers to verify Kariuki’s claims by comparing them with official British colonial archives (76-77). Marjorie Perham’s remark in the introduction of the memoir that the narrative was “substantially true” did not help matters since it also implied that part of the memoir was untrue (11). To be sure, Kariuki’s characterization of Kenyatta as the “greatest African” exemplifies claims that are neither substantially true nor objective. However, the patronizing and paternalistic temperament that suffuses Perham’s ambivalent introduction tends to diminish Kariuki’s credibility and authority (63). But if the life writing elicited unfavorable reviews, it also found favor among other circles of critics. For instance, Marguerite Ylvisaker described Mau Mau Detainee as “an outstanding memoir” which was “a revealing light into the motivations of Mau Mau adherents”(664).

In this chapter I go beyond merely revisiting issues of content and form in Kariuki’s memoir raised by earlier critics. For instance, whereas Olney critiques the memoir for its literary want, I seek not to only investigate the rhetorical strategies that

Kariuki utilizes, but also whether literary merit is necessary or desirable for a text narrativizing confinement and brutality. Also, I discuss the interplay between the timing of the writing, memory, audience, and the motivation for writing, or what Olney appropriately terms the “narrative imperative” (10b). Equally critical to this study is the conflation of the singular “I” and plural first person “we” or in other words, how collective experience is embedded in individual experience, particularly with regard to experiencing confinement, trauma, and torture and resisting through writing. Lastly, I plumb the implications of the memoirist’s truth claims and the detractors’ doubts.

The narrative imperative or motivation behind JM Kariuki’s writing of Mau Mau Detainee should be deduced from considering the context of its emergence in the heart of the imperial center in Britain. Evidently, JM Kariuki’s audience was predominantly European and especially British. It is significant that he wrote his memoir not only in the English language but also while in the metropolis in Britain and not the colony, a year after his release in 1960 from seven years in detention. At the time of his writing, the bulk of the Kenyan population had little or no literacy in English. Clearly, Kariuki intended first and foremost to address the imperial British audience. To be sure his book was later to be translated into Swahili as Mau Mau Kizuizini for the benefit of Swahiliphone Kenya readers. But there is no gainsaying the centrality of the imperial audience, which was eager to glean some information about a member of what they perceived as a “terrorist” group that had fought fiercely to

dislodge Britain's colonial hegemony in Kenya in a lengthy and bloody struggle; to confirm their assumptions of Mau Mau barbarity and atavism. Kariuki mentions that while in England working on the memoir, the British editor Margery Perham, urged him to complete the writing process expeditiously, because "many people in England did not understand what had been happening" in Kenya during the Emergency period between 1953 and 1960 (213). At the same time there was a burning desire on the memoirist's part to affirm his humanity and the humanity of the Mau Mau movement to the imperial audience, which, it seems to me, was little more than a constellation of doubting Thomases. He seems to have been not only keenly aware of his European audience but also the challenge of making himself intelligible to them.

For instance, in describing his reaction to the news of his mother's death while he was still in detention, he states: "It is difficult to explain the quality of my feeling to the Europeans" (171). Throughout his narrative Kariuki goes to great lengths to "explain" the Kikuyu and African cosmology to his European readers, explaining issues that he would have otherwise taken for granted had he solely an African audience in mind. In furnishing evidence of the rationality and humanity of the Kikuyu, Kariuki frequently invokes their folk wisdom by quoting a motley of proverbs and generally presenting largely positive ethnographic insight into the nine Kikuyu clans. But more importantly, he sanitizes the Mau Mau movement by justifying its emergence, absolving it from charges of irreligiosity, profanity, and vindictiveness, and exposing

British colonial brutality, inhumanity and barbarity. Therefore, Kariuki's principal motivation was to offer a counter discourse to the distorted image of the Mau Mau movement in the British imagination. His story goes against the grain of the official colonial history, as most narratives of confinement in the colonial epoch do. In this regard, Kariuki states:

The future historian of these times may well find it difficult to get our side of the story. Many documents vital to his task will be burnt before independence. But in my narrative of the camps and our strange life together inside them he may perhaps see some glimpses of truth and justice of the movement's unity, and he may begin to understand why we do not regard the soldiers of the forest as 'hard-core', 'terrorists', or murderers', but as the noblest of our fighters for freedom. (215)

Put differently, the memoir presents an intriguing encounter and disjuncture between the British audience's "expectations" on the one hand and JM Kariuki's own motivation on the other. When Roger Chance condemns Kariuki for raising "expectations which remain largely unfulfilled," he presumably speaks for the majority of imperial readers. Because the memoir did not say what the British audience, for the most part, wanted to hear about what it perceived as an "unacceptable, backward-looking face of African nationalism," it met with either trenchant vilification or enabled them to move from rejection to at least "partial understanding" of the movement (Clough 63).

Marshall S. Clough claims that the authority of Kariuki as author of a narrative about Mau Mau experience is undermined and undercut by his "limited experience of the war itself" (68). Kariuki himself candidly admits in the memoir: "I was never in the

forest myself but I hope that the true story of the glorious fight of the armies in the Aberdares and Mount Kenya forests will soon be written soon by someone who was”(62). But from the standpoint of experiencing the brutality and ferocity of colonial incarceration, Kariuki’s credibility is beyond all doubt. Kariuki hears about, witnesses, and personally experiences various forms of torture as he was shuttled between the fourteen detention camps from 1953 to 1960, making him something of an authority on torture. As we mentioned above the interplay between resistance and torture is the story that is inscribed on Kariuki’s body from colonial to postcolonial times. In his memoir, Kariuki demonstrates that writing protest letters while in detention was his form of resistance, earning him considerable bodily and psychic harm from the colonial administration. Further, his memoir is in itself a continuation of resistance, an indictment of the British colonial ethos that glossed over its own tyranny and only focused on depicting the Mau Mau as diabolical.

Invoking a collective “we” identity, Kariuki writes in graphic detail about how the detainees were subjected to humiliating body searches: “We were ordered to remove our clothes and all parts of our anatomy thoroughly examined” (92). The act of being stripped and searched may not have had discernible physical pain but the psychic pain that the humiliating act engenders should not be downplayed. Maina Kinyatti, writing about incarceration during the Kenyatta regime in his Kenya: A Prison Notebook, provides even in much more graphic detail about the warders’ seemingly eroticized pleasure in

torturing state captives and searching their naked body cavities, underscoring the depravity and dehumanizing nature of incarceration. In his dairy entry of September 17, 1987, Kinyatti writes:

This morning, before sunrise, three guards opened the door and forced me to strip naked for a body-search. Suddenly, one of the guards grabbed my penis and ruthlessly started pulling it. He stopped pulling it when I screamed in pain. The other two guards thought it was fun, they burst laughing. The pain . . . , I could not control my tears—thin, painful tears. Before they left the cell, the vicious guard tauntingly asked me: “why were you screaming, I thought was giving your penis a massage?” (221)

But beyond this strip search and physical torture, detainees were also subjected to rigorous interrogation, which as Scarry maintains in her The Body in Pain, is itself a form of torture (29). The interrogation was apparently intended to extract from the detainees confessions of taking illegal oaths and involvement in guerilla activities, although as Scarry further argues the real intention is to display power rather than to get information from the victim. Scarry’s claim is borne out by Kariuki’s observation in the memoir that the force of interrogation often resulted in any number of false confessions from himself and other detainees. On several occasions Kariuki himself was stripped completely naked and beaten severely and brutally for writing letters of complaint against the inhuman and inhumane treatment of prisoners, letters that were smuggled out of detention and posted to colonial administrators and liberal British parliamentarians. On the whole whenever confessions were not easily forthcoming the captives’ bodies were subjected to horrendous beatings, deprivation, and abuse. Kariuki

mentions the castrations of detainees at Nyangwethu near Naivasha as one of the most atrocious method of extracting information that the colonists employed. He writes: “Kwa Nyangwethu was, however, particularly bad and was notorious not for mere beatings, but for castration” (68). His claims have been corroborated by historians such as Caroline Elkins in her Imperial Reckonings: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya (2005) and David Henderson in his Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire (2005). Remarking on Imperial Reckoning, Mahmood Mamdani echoes Kariuki’s claims of brutal torture in colonial detention camps:

As one reads through Elkins’ extended description of the regime of torture, one is struck by its predominantly *sexual* nature. Male detainees were often sexually abused through sodomy with foreign objects, animals, insects, cavity searches, the imposition of a filthy bucket-system, or forced penetrative sex. A common practice during the interrogation was to squeeze testicles with pliers. (8)

Kariuki’s experience at Langata detention camp under Camp Commandant Marlow is typical of the torture his body underwent with the occasions for beating ranging from 25 to 60 strokes at one go (96,104). He faced mock execution like Russian dissident writer Dostoevsky). Kariuki writes:

Next morning Marlow (Camp Commandant) took me outside ‘C’ Camp to a place near the Forest and said he would shoot me unless I wrote down on a piece of paper that I would not send any more letters to England, that I would cooperate with the government...Although the thought of death was still not wholly desirable I refused. He then took from his car a piece of three-ply wood about three feet by two and told me to hold it above my head arm’s length. He walked five yards away and said he was going to kill me if I did not agree to write the sentences. Still, not imagining he could be serious, I refused. To my horror he raised his gun and shot at me. I remember a tremendous noise and

knowing that I was now dead and then nothing. He had in fact shot through the wood and I had fallen down with it. (105)

Scarry has propounded the view that mock executions are an instance of an extreme form of torture (30). A mock execution enacts the illusion of death and the reality of survival in a manner that wreaks havoc on the victim's psychic and physical well being. The victim is almost always convinced of his demise until the reality of this severe and crude form of a practical joke that is not a joke dawns on him. Mock executions are a crude play on the victim's body and psyche. Kariuki was brought close to what he truly believed was to be his end, thus his words, "I remember a tremendous noise and knowing I was *now dead...*", only for events to suddenly take a different direction altogether. There is a sense in which survival of death, whether actual or imagined can be traumatic. As Cathy Caruth has argued in her Unclaimed Experience surviving death itself constitutes an abiding form of trauma. The effect on the victim may most certainly be traumatic. We can therefore safely say that Kariuki's mock execution accentuated the sense of shock and trauma that the carceral experience occasioned.

The effect of the torture on the body and by extension the psyche was so intense that sometimes it caused hallucinations and total disorientation. As Scarry maintains, the dissolution and "uncreating" of the victim's world is at the very core of the torturer's mission. Bound up with this uncreating mission is transforming innocuous things such as the furniture, doorknobs, or even the body or parts of one's body into weapons against the victim. That is perhaps the reason why Kariuki sometimes lost his

sense of self and body and was floating in a world of phantasmagoria as the passage below suggestively indicates:

They gave me no food or water but fortunately someone had thrown a bucket of water on the floor to make it uncomfortable for me to sleep on. So for the first three days until it dried up I was able to lick wetness off the cement and during that time I could think straight and speak out aloud to myself. On the fourth and fifth days cold water started coming out of skin in a sort of sweat... On the sixth and seventh days my eyes became heavy like stones and nightmares began. Turbaned Indians passed by all wearing red beards; different coloured stars got in and out of my eyes; old Kikuyu women were dancing and always there were people moving to and fro... On the eighth day I no longer realized where I was, nor did my body seem to be part of me. I felt like a human wheel turning round and round and then like a man falling through thousands of feet from a high mountain in a thick forest. (121)

Deprivation of basic necessities such as water and food heighten the ordeal of incarceration. Kariuki's world was virtually dissolved in successive stages. The floor is turned into an instrument of torture and so is the water that is poured on it to make it wet and thus "uncomfortable" for him to sleep on. That Kariuki is forced to lick the water on the concrete floor to quench his thirst is a measure of the fight for survival under extreme conditions of dehumanization. As the excerpt above indicates there is a progressive descent into "nothingness" that the torture seems to achieve. By the sixth day Kariuki's body was emitting water in unusual ways, while the eyes were heavy like stones, implying that at this stage the body and eyes had become, like the wet floor, weapons used to torment him. But the pinnacle of his ordeal is on the eighth day when the mind becomes disoriented and he is plagued by nightmares and hallucinations.

Kariuki's remark "I no longer realized where I was, nor did my body seem to be part of

me” encapsulates the essence of dissolution of one’s sentence, one’s sense of self, and reality. The British colonial regime would go to such lengths to exhibit its power.

At one point so severe were Kariuki’s beatings that the memoirist claims a fellow detainee who witnessed it committed suicide. He writes:

The evening of my beating-up, a detainee hanged himself in Compound 4. His sleeping companion, Jimmy from Embu, told me that he had seen my treatment and has said he could not stand living in this hell any longer (162).

And yet it was still difficult to break Kariuki’s undefatigable spirit of defiance. He could not resist the itch to write another letter because he believed he was suffering for doing what was right, which could be a defining theme of memoirs of the political incarceration. Contrary to the expectations of the colonists, Kariuki maintains that more often than not the torture only served to radicalize him. He wrote; “When will people realize that such beatings only stiffen the resolve of the victim? Finally the authorities treatment was rapidly building me up as martyr which was contrary to their real objectives” (120).

Kariuki’s incarcerated body in pain is the constant motif in his narrative so that we are bound to conclude that his body is metonymic of the ordeal of others who confronted their fate as detainees in the colonial detention camps. The suicide victim’s choice of “hell” as a metaphor for detention reinforces the trauma and torture resulting from conditions in the colonial detention camps. Indeed, the collective story of the Mau Mau detainees is embedded in Kariuki’s individual narrative, so that Clough could not

have been more correct than when he concluded that Mau Mau Detainee is both an individual and collective narrative. There is a sense in which the boundary between the first person singular and plural is flattened and blurred. Olney's penetrating observation about African individuality that "individual experience is not individualized" is applicable to Kariuki's narrative of the detention experience (76). Yet it bears elaborating that in stating "we" Kariuki opens up various identitarian possibilities with the pronoun "we" implying any number of groups including hardcore Mau Mau as opposed to soft core, the Kikuyu as opposed to other ethnic groups in Kenya, the detainees as opposed to the agents of state, and occasionally Kenyans as a whole. Despite the manifold and sometimes ambiguous connotations of "we," it seems to me that the narrative privileges the "we" of the hardcore Mau Mau and then the Kikuyu. The title, Mau Mau Detainee proclaims and presents Kariuki as a synecdoche of the collective identity of the Mau Mau adherents, both soft and hardcore. But the opening sentence of the memoir, "I am a Kikuyu who was detained in fourteen of Kenya's detention camps between 1953 and 1960" situates him within the Kikuyu-centric "we" that tends to dominate the Mau Mau memoirs. Yet, when he mentions "Like many other Kikuyu families we also had a strain of Masai blood in us, a legacy of the old raiding days" Kariuki overtly undercuts the myth of ethnic purity among the Kikuyu (29).

It should be noted that Wambui Otieno also claims multiple ancestry including Masai and Ndorobo. Also Kenyatta is said to have had Masai blood. My contention

however, is that the dominant “we” of the Mau Mau memoir acknowledges the ethnic impurity but often insists on a certain Kikuyu-ness that is less inclusive than exclusionary in its collectivity. Kariuki’s Mau Mau Detainee is not an exception in this rule.

Nonetheless that is not to say that this is a narrative in which the self evaporates completely into the collective. Following Stein and Volkan, Antoinette Errante has argued that all narratives “are representations of reality in which narrators also communicate how they see themselves and wish others to see them” (16). Therefore, Mau Mau Detainee is as much about the collective experience as it is about how Kariuki saw himself and how he wished others would see him. Like Wambui Otieno in Mau Mau’s Daughter, Kariuki presents himself as a team player in the liberation movement, but nonetheless one imbued with peculiar or intrinsic individual attributes. Kariuki stands tall over other detainees because, as he claims, he is more educated than most, and unlike most educated youths of his time, he chose to suffer with the illiterate masses, struggling alongside them and fighting for them through hazardous letter writing, and being instrumental towards initiating and establishing literacy classes for fellow detainees. Apart from portraying himself as a courageous and selfless leader in a time of extreme crisis, he also mentions that he was good at soccer and composing songs.

Further he projects an image of moral probity for himself and the Mau Mau movement in which homoeroticism and illicit heterosexual liaisons were frowned upon. He is also a teetotaler and helps impose a drinking and sex ban in the camps. In a way he portrays himself as central to the establishment of a parallel legislation to govern the life and death of detainees in the camps. Elsewhere he candidly admits that although he was Catholic, his faith waned over time and sometimes he felt, like Ngugi in his Detained twenty year later, that the colonists used Christianity as a ploy to dissuade resistance to their rule.

How do the British colonists view Kariuki? There is a telling portrait of Kariuki in the purview of the colonists that his memoir implicitly discounts and deconstructs. The officers at the camp parade him before the crowd of fellow detainees after a very severe beating and declare: “This is your leader, Mwangi. He is the most dangerous man and he spends his time writing letters outside the camp, an action that is against the law” (120). Yet, throughout the narrative Kariuki sees himself and would like to be seen as a victim rather than a “dangerous” villain.

Kariuki at once absolves himself from all blame and interrogates the mistreatment that his body undergoes at the hands of the British colonial authorities. Even when he confesses to writing those incriminating letters, he often insisted that there was nothing wrong with that. Like most prisoners of conscience, Kariuki sees the detaining system as reprehensible and culpable while he stands on a high moral ground.

It is tempting to say that, Friedland's critique of Mau Mau Detainee alluded to earlier was premised on what he perceived as the narrator's narcissistic obsession with self. In Friedland's reading, the text is wanting because it is fundamentally a story about a single Mau Mau detainee rather than detainees. Friedland does not take into account the fact that it is inevitable for self to be foregrounded in almost all autobiographical instances from St. Augustine's Confessions to Barack Obama's In the Audacity of Hope; from Nelson Mandela's No Easy Walk to Freedom to Kenyatta's Suffering without Bitterness. Friedland, therefore, ignores one of the salient characteristics of the autobiographical genre by insisting upon the diminution or elimination of the self. It is far more accurate to conclude that in its tempo and thrust Mau Mau Detainee captures the collective experience through individual expression; allowing neither the collective to suffocate the individual nor the individual to supersede the collective.

Scarry has argued that in times of war and torture civilization is deferred. She adds that whereas war is "morally problematic," torture is an "absolute immorality" (Scarry 21). Kariuki's prison memoir captures the context of both the war of liberation and the colonial response; it narrativizes the African insurgency and the British counter insurgency. More importantly, it narrativizes what it meant to be detained by a colonial system that was hell bent on stifling or silencing any and every dissident voice. Scarry stipulates that in torture and war there is a sense in which the suspension of practices and tenets of civilization is legitimized by the participants. It becomes not only lawful

to torture and to maim and to mutilate but also to kill. It is therefore a paradox that Kariuki would still believe in British statutes and the capacity of the British not only to observe their own laws, but also to respect basic laws of human decency. He therefore ceaselessly wrote letters of complaint in an attempt to prick an otherwise seared and dead British conscience. The British sensibilities were then generally at one with the actors in the counter insurgency. The British did not necessarily suspend their own laws; their laws justified their total involvement in what Charles Mills has aptly characterized as “expeditions of conquest” in far flung geopolitical entities of the world much in the same manner as the American and Arabian laws legitimized the capture of millions of Africans to serve as chattel slaves in the Americas and the Arab world. But more significantly, in the case of the Mau Mau, the colonists tortured, mutilated and maimed as a way of converting real pain into the fiction of power, as borne out by their treatment or more correctly mistreatment of Kariuki’s body.

Torture, like Kariuki’s, is then to be viewed as a political construct aimed at not only making the locale, contours, and conditions of incarceration a veritable “hell” or “a cage” as most victims characterize their captive state, but as Scarry postulates, it is also a means of “unmaking,” “uncreating” or dissolving the world of the victim and showcasing the power of the perpetrator or the institution he stands for or purports to represent. The relentless inflicting of pain on Kariuki’ body by the detention officials was, therefore, an attempt to disintegrate his world in a sadistic and savage

exhibitionism involving the fiction of colonial power. His relentless writing of protest letters and the subsequent writing of his prison experience dramatize his attempt to re-create his world, uncreated or unmade by the colonial terror machine. If the British had perceived torture as enactment of absolute power, Kariuki saw literacy and education as liberating tools enabling the Africans to wrest power from colonists.

To understand why Kariuki's letters had little effect on the torturers and hence did little or nothing to change the material reality of both Kariuki and his fellow detainees, we turn again to Scarry's compelling theorization of the body in pain. For one thing, Scarry postulates that the torturer and the tortured are at two polar ends of the pain equation. There is the certainty of pain on the part of the victim and doubt about the reality of pain on the part of the victimizer. "To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear pain is to have *doubt*," Scarry tacitly puts it (3). Kariuki's pain and that of his fellow detainees was known only to themselves but remained for the most part a fiction, an impossible and improbable reality in the imagination of the colonists. The object of torture, Scarry points out, is to make the victim lose his or her world, voice and sense of self, precluding any possibility for empathy and sympathy on the torturer's part (35). Doubt, therefore, is key to the invisibility of Kariuki's pain in the colonists' vision. Also, although doubting the victim's pain, the colonist uses his self-conscious display of agency to convert absolute pain into the fiction of his power to which he intends Kariuki and company to surrender. It is hardly surprising that the initial general imperial

response to Mau Mau Detainee is replete with doubt even from editor Margery Perham who was paradoxically more than eager to see the book roll off the press.

There is no doubt that what we may call “imperial doubt” is the principal reason why Kariuki’s truth claims about torture in the camps and the liberation struggle as a whole have come under intense scrutiny. As we mentioned earlier, Clough alleges that Kariuki’s admission that he was not in the forest undermines the veracity of his claims. The imperial audience also found insufficient Kariuki’s reliance on oral sources for narrating events he never witnessed. Roger Chance’s admonition that readers check the veracity of Kariuki’s claims against official records resonated with the imperial sensibilities of the time. What Roger does not concede is the rather obvious possibility of manipulation of official records and deletion of information found unpalatable to the colonial regime. Kariuki alludes to the apparent imperial predilection towards doubt regarding his version and the possibility of official distortion of history in a passage we quoted earlier in this section (215). To be sure there are certain obvious errors or inconsistencies in Kariuki’s narrative. For example, as Clough points out Kariuki claims that he took the unity oath in December 1953 before his detention, whereas his detention began in October 1953(64). Also, there is an error in Kariuki’s reference to Lake Victoria as the “sea” surrounding Saiyusi island, although one could argue that in this instance, it is the case of Kariuki’s imprecise or inaccurate diction while using the

language of the colonist as a medium of expression which leads to the failure to distinguish between sea and lake (27).

However, it has to be noted that Kariuki wrote the memoir too close to the events recounted to have forgotten significantly what needed to be remembered and to be narrated. So for the most part his account should be presumed reliable or “substantially true,” to borrow Perham’s qualification, but without Perham’s paternalistic baggage. Recent scholarship in trauma studies has intimated that immediacy is in itself a hindrance to remembrance, that when the traumatizing event is too close in temporal terms to the victim, her or his memory of what happened is hampered. In light of this, it could be argued that at the time Kariuki wrote his memoir in 1960, he was too close to the trauma of detention to recall and to comprehend what transpired (see Cathy Caruth’s Unclaimed Experience and also her edited volume Explorations in Trauma and Memory). There is however, no evidence in the narrative that Kariuki was too traumatized or petrified to remember “substantially” through narrative his ordeal and that of others. As Pierre Janet has opined, “Memory is an action: essentially it is the action of telling a story” (qtd. in Kolk and de Hart 175). The action that Kariuki takes in telling the story is in itself the substance with which memory is made and enabled. But this is not to say that Kariuki’s account is absolutely true.

The relativity of autobiographical truth is a matter that has engaged a whole range of disciplines with a stake in the genre of autobiography; from literary criticism to sociology; from history to ethnography, from philosophy to psychology. The position I find tenable in this debate is the one advanced by Gusdorf, Spender, and Olney all of who argue that the propagation of historical veracity or absolute truth is not central to the autobiographical project. Spender concedes that “Everyone is a liar about certain things,” an observation that implies a narrative is not necessarily a fraud simply because it contains certain elements of untruth (121).

Any lingering suspicion that Kariuki’s apparent inaccuracies invalidate his whole account should be settled by considering Olney’s statement: “Inaccuracy is not a serious problem for the autobiographer” (19). In a sense Kariuki’s “truth” is in consonance with the collective memory of the Mau Mau fighters as evidenced by the bulk of the Mau Mau memoirs. Secondly, his candor for example, in exposing the chinks in the Mau Mau hierarchy, highlighting cases of detainees raping fellow detainees, incidences of same sex sensual liaisons in the camp (which his moralistic self frowned upon), African brutality against Africans in and outside the camps, all vouch for his honesty and desire to tell the truth as best as he could. And lastly, we should be attendant to the fact that Kariuki’s writing is at once a political construct and a psychological adventure whose major objective is neither to record history nor to tell the truth. He is fundamentally trying to come to terms with the horrors of the period

whose immediacy itself may be a barrier to both clarity and comprehension both to him and to his audience. This narrative of confinement is more of an affirmation of humanity, a therapeutic exercise or a psychic adventure, than an historical account, and thus those who demand historical veracity of it impose on it a weight it cannot bear. As I have argued throughout, Kariuki's memoir is preoccupied with the fact of his body in pain, the "emphatic presence of the body" to use Susanna Egan's expression, and his body as representative of others in the same or similar circumstances, and not with historical truth.

Further, Kariuki's own candor in stating that he lied while in incarceration opens certain possibilities about the truthfulness of his claims in this memoir. He states:

During the time I was in detention never once did I tell the whole truth as I am setting it down now, although six times screeners laboriously wrote my false confessions which had been forced out of me. There is a Kikuyu proverb, *Njita Murume*, which is to say that when you knock someone about even if you ask him to call you God, he will do so; but the truth is that you are not God. (61)

Kariuki suggests that truth telling is contingent on the circumstances of its being uttered. What Kariuki in effect means is that it during the chronological now of writing his narratives that he tells the truth. The momentous "now" of his writing, the moment of truth telling refers to 1960 soon after his release from detention. In other words the statement tends to imply that it was expedient to lie while one is locked in the colonial detention camp to avoid torture or further torture. One could argue that if Kariuki lied

before, then he could lie again thus casting shadows of doubt over his supposed truth claims in the memoir.

But the other possibility is that the candor associated with admitting having lied and the extenuating circumstances in which he told the lies: project him as an honest person whose account *now* should be presumed to be true. Additionally, Kariuki underlines his honesty when he concedes ignorance regarding some details of the war: “I do not know” (61). Kariuki’s admission of the limits of his knowledge has striking resemblances with Camara Laye’s statements in his *Dark Child* (e.g. “I cannot remember exactly” and “I did not know”) concerning his childhood and some of the esoteric elements of Mande culture, in that in both cases the admission at once functions as a self-effacing and authenticating enterprise (Laye 17, 19). It is in the light of this attempt to establish authenticity through a modest admission of ignorance that Kariuki’s earlier statement: “I was not in the forest” should be taken; that is, he is not trying to say he was where he was not or that he knew what he did not know or that he was what he was not.

Kariuki employs a wide range of stylistic devices without much sophistication. The stylistic and structural simplicity of his life writing is, however, not necessarily a weakness. In the ten chapters of his memoir Kariuki traces in chronological order his sojourn in the various detention camps by employing a wide range of rhetorical strategies including songs, allegory, Gikuyu proverbs with their English translations,

and billingsgate (in which he belittles the oppressors). In what follows, I discuss some of these aspects of style.

Songs seem to have been integral parts of incarceration and tales of incarceration in colonial times in Kenya. In this regard, there is a striking resemblance between oral tales of confinement and the written incarceration narratives in that in both songs play a significant role. In the story of Sela and Mwambu and the Liyongo epic analyzed in the previous chapter, the characters sing songs that propel the plot, songs which the narrator is required to sing in turn during his or her narration to punctuate the ebb and flow of the story. I am also reminded of my own experience growing up in the rural areas of western Kenya where I often listened to my grandmother Sarah Kituyi Nabulyalya narrate tales that were spiced with song, the singing of which entailed enacting the characters' roles. Kariuki mentions how detainees forged bonds of solidarity and solidified their commitment to the struggle by singing. He writes: "we sang together in a hut [in the camp] at evening The Song of Africa and the Song of Kenyatta at Kapenguria" (177). Indeed Kariuki's memoir contains a number of songs, which detainees sung in colonial detention camps. As he indicates while incarcerated at the Lodwar detention camp, he composed "*Rwimbo rwa Africa*" or "The Song of Africa" in collaboration with one Joseph Kirira to celebrate the occasion of Ghana's independence on 3 June 1957 (154). It is a song whose transcendences and racial identification with the rest of black Africa, one could argue, tends to obfuscate the

immediate concern of the Mau Mau movement with the disruption and dissolution of the Kikuyu world.

*Ngai aheire Andu airu
Thi-ino ya Afrika
Gocagai mwenye Nyaga
Tondwa wa wendo wake*

God gave to the black people
This land of Africa
Praise the God who dwells in
The high places
For his blessings

*Thikiririai kiriro
Afrika ya muhuro
Tondwa nimaranyarirwo
Ni mbari ya Nyakaburu*

Listen to the sobbing
Of our brothers in South Africa
Where they are being tormented
By the tribe of the Boers

*Tugakena muno muno
Andu airu twi hamwe
Tuthondeke ngwataniro
Uthamaki wa andu airu*

We shall greatly rejoice
In the unity of all black
people
Let us create in our unity
A United States of All Africa
(154-155).

“The Song of Africa” essentially articulates the desire for a United States of All Africa, echoing the Pan-African dream of Edward Wilmot Blyden, and later Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, and Julius Kabarage Nyerere. The liberation struggle in Kenya was concurrent with the struggle of black Africans to free themselves from the shackles of the apartheid regime in South Africa, with the latter struggle continuing way into the 1990s. It is therefore easy to see Kariuki’s eagerness to draw parallels between the repercussions of colonial counter-insurgency in Kenya in the 1950s and “*Kiriro Afirika ya muhuro*”/ [the sobbing of our brothers in South/Africa/ Where they are being tormented]. Identification with black South Africans is therefore predicated on viewing them as fellow sufferers. This sense of solidarity with fellow sufferers is commonplace. Kariuki mentions that when “Ghana became independent on 3 June 1957 there was great rejoicing among the detainees” hence the celebration for which Kariuki and Kirira composed *Rwimbo rwa Africa* (154). But as “Song of Kimathi” illustrates, the Ghanaian and South African experiences and others elsewhere, were important only to the extent that they resonated with the actualities of the colonial rocking of the equilibrium of the Kikuyu cosmos. Put differently, whereas the concern for the rest of Africa may not have been necessarily incongruous with Mau Mau interests, it is still sensible to conclude that the movement’s primary concern was to reverse the particularity of the dispossession of Kikuyu *ithaka na wiyathi* (land and freedom).

“The Song of Kimathi” eulogizes Dedan Kimathi, regarded as one of the iconic leaders of the Mau Mau movement. Kimathi is said to have led the Mau Mau forces in Aberdares Forests from 1952 to 1957. The British captured him and executed him in 1957 (Kariuki 152). Here we examine three of the eight stanzas of the song that Kariuki incorporates in his memoir:

*Ria Kimathi witu ambatire
Kirimaini ari wiki
Nietirie hinya na umiriru
Wakuhota nyakeru*

When our Kimathi ascended
Into the mountains alone
He asked for strength and
 Courage
 To defeat the White men

*Tukurira tondu turi andu airu
Natutiri nyakeru
Naturiri a kirathimo kiao
Ngai witu ari mbere*

We are tormented because we are
 black
We are not like the White
 Men
We have not received their
 Advantages
But yet is our God in front.

*Mwihumbei ukiriria wake
Kunyarirwo kana gukua
Mukimenyaga mari a uthamaki
Wa Gikuyu and Mumbi*

You must put on endurance
To face tribulation or death
Knowing that you belong to the Kingdom
Of Gikuyu and Mumbi (152-153).

The song is unambiguous in its revolutionary intent. It clearly has racial undertones as it establishes the distinction between the white colonizing entity and the colonized black. Yet the invocation of the Uthamaki wa Gikuyu na Mumbi or the Kingdom of Gikuyu and Mumbi tends to delimit the “we” of the song to the Kikuyu who claim ancestry from Gikuyu and Mumbi. That effectively excludes the rest of the Kenyan ethnic groups from the equation, a point that several commentators have alluded to in their insistence that the Mau Mau war was a purely Kikuyu affair (Daniels 23). It should, however, be noted that Kariuki does not claim authorship of the song. He actually states that it “was composed in the forest” where as we have already observed he admits he never was (152). But as he further elaborates it was “very well known in our country.” The question to ask, therefore, is not whether or not Kariuki wrote the song because he clearly did not, but what function it serves in his memoir. For one thing, the song eulogizes Kimathi, one of the most influential leaders of the Mau Mau movement. Second, it espouses and epitomizes the ethos of the Mau Mau movement in its quest to recapture lands lost to the British colonial hegemony. Third, the song punctuates the dominant prose of the text, creating variety and forestalling boredom.

Fourth, the addition of this very well known collective text to the prison narrative, is that not only does it enhance Kariuki's "we-feeling" with the Mau Mau rank and file, but it imbues his text with a sense of intertextuality or heteroglossia that is a salient feature of prison narratives.

It is instructive that both songs bear apparent religious undertones, even overtones, with several allusions to God or Ngai. (In Thunder from Mt. Kirinyaga Maina wa Kinyatti argues that the Kikuyu Ngai was different from the Christian God). Kariuki seems to also use the songs to consolidate his assault against the colonial conception of the Mau Mau as savage heathens. The line "*Ria Kimathi witu ambatire/Kirimaini ari wiki*" / [When our Kimathi ascended to the mountain alone] recalls Jewish prophet Moses with his solitary sojourn to Mt. Sinai where he received the ten commandants. It would seem, casting Kimathi in the role of Moses justifies Mau Mau. The song injects religious fervor into the bloody struggle. The messianic connotation in turn tends to absolve the song's inaccuracy in claiming that Kimathi ascended the mountain alone. The songs also exhibit a sense of syncretism, a mixture of Kikuyu indigenous precepts and aspects of Christianity whose core objective is mobilization of the people against colonial tyranny and terror. "The political songs," as Clough observes, "some of them reworked Christian hymns and others simply using hymn tunes with a completely different text, followed Mau Mau activists into the forests, and became an important element in evening observances" (144).

Billingsgate is a narrative aspect that as Ioan Davies notes is a commonplace in prison writing. This aspect of style entails using disparaging terms to refer to what the incarcerated views as his or her foes. In this regard, on several occasions Kariuki uses coarse language to describe prison officers. He refers to Noah, the African prison officer who presided over the castration of detainees at Nyangwethu as “coarse-fibred, stupid” (163); he describes another officer, Chester of the Lodwar camp as “brutal and foolish” (82), and officer Mansfield of the same camps as “lugubrious and foolish” (149); he refers to the officer in charge of Yatta camp as fit to be the “Chancellor” of a “University of Fools” (117).

Kariuki uses allegory, for instance, to describe the ambivalent character of prison warders. He writes:

It must be seem strange to an outsider that while warders would sell tobacco and newspapers today, tomorrow they would meticulously search our quarters on the orders of their superiors for the same tobacco and triumphantly haul us for punishment if they discovered anything. We say that when a man takes a dog out hunting a jackal, the dog will run far ahead out of sight and start playing with the jackal in a hidden place because they really of the same kind. When the man catches up with them the dog will straight away start barking fiercely and chasing the jackal again at a safe distance. This is because it is the man who gives the dog food which it will not get if it disobeys his orders. (102)

Kariuki turns to the store of oral tradition to extrapolate on the contradictory conduct of the warders. In this allegory, the dog symbolizes the warders who secretly connive with the jackal, representing the prisoners while out of the sight of the man, figuring white colonial officers. If Kariuki draws from this common pool of orature to enrich his

written text, it must also be stressed that it is perhaps the profusion of Kikuyu proverbs in the text that most imbues the texts with a Kikuyu flavor and particularity. To ensure that the reader is left in doubt as to the source of the proverb, he often prefaces his proverbs with “we Kikuyu have a proverb or say, a “we” that proclaims collective ownership of the often terse, immutable and compact oral text that reflects Kikuyu philosophy and metaphysics. These include, “*Murimi ndaunagwo guoko*” / (He is working in the cornfield should be fed there) (34-35); “*Mwana angiguikiria ruhiu nawe ndukoe umuikirie*” [If a child throws a panga at you, do not throw it back because you will appear more foolish than the child, who may injure you with it (61); “Ndiri njega ndiringanaga na muthi mwega” / (A good pestle never has a good mortar) (78).

It is, therefore, quite tempting to dismiss Kariuki’s text as Olney does, as lacking literary merit and unworthy of readerly interest and attention. Yet, such a hasty conclusion would be unfortunate as it would be synonymous with throwing out the baby with the bathwater. It seems to me essential to consider Kariuki’s narrative style in the light of the narrative imperative that is chiefly located in staging a counter-discourse to the British version of the Mau Mau. While Kariuki does not completely leave the stylebook in the schoolbag, as Harlow would put, it is apparent that to him, as to most prison narrators, the content was more important than the form.

Writing on the abiding effects of the recurrent beatings in the detention camps, Kariuki remarks: “I failed to die but the scars on my knees and chest will always be

with me and I still suffer severe attacks of *pain* in my abdomen and thorax” (162). The body in pain during the colonial regime that Kariuki’s presents unwittingly is his own body that was later to found assassinated in a thicket at Ngong Hills in the Kenyatta regime. Reading the text with the benefit of hindsight makes it possible for us to appreciate a number of things. For one thing, Kariuki was a supreme example of what Ioan Davies would characterize as diehard revolutionaries “dedicated to transforming a system which they believe is corrupt and immoral and to speaking the truth as they see it” (31). Being a revolutionary meant that to him activism was more paramount than art. At any rate not all prison writers or narrators aspire to or are able to attain artistic excellence. When the articulation of an ideological or political position is paramount in a prison text, it becomes necessary, as Harlow cogently puts it, to keep “problems of style” and aesthetics in the “schoolbag” (10). What was more important to Kariuki was to give an account of himself and to elaborate his role in the struggle in and outside the detention camps. He projects himself as a selfless crusader for justice in colonial times who was willing to face the risks and dangers attendant to following the path he chose, a fact that is borne out by his eventual assassination. In alluding to the colonial regime’s torture on his body as making a martyr out of him, one cannot help but notice Kariuki’s unconscious prescience since in the end he paid the ultimate price of political martyrdom in Kenyatta’s reign. Concerns about Mau Mau Detainee’s form or content do not therefore diminish the stature of a text penned by of Africa’s most committed

political reformists about his suffering and the suffering of others in the infamous colonial detention camps.

III. Private Diary as Public Record: Gakaara wa Wanjau's Mau Mau Author in Detention

Gakaara wa Wanjau's detention diary Mau Mau Author in Detention (1983), which he wrote in the Gikuyu language, won the 1984 Noma Award, a literary prize awarded to the best book published in Africa. More than three decades intervened between the time when the diarist penned the entries of this private diary while locked as a Mau Mau detainee in the turbulent 1950s and its eventual publication. Like Josiah Mwangi Kariuki's Mau Mau Detainee that was the first in the series of Mau Mau memoirs, Wanjau's diary has become an important cultural, and socio-historical document or commentary to which numerous studies of the Mau Mau period make reference. Derek R. Peterson's "The Intellectual Lives of the Mau Mau," Marshall S. Clough's Mau Mau Memoirs, Daniel Branch's "Loyalists, Mau Mau, and Elections in Kenya, 1957-1958," and Lonsdale J. Kershaw's Mau Mau from Below are examples of studies that make references to the diary.

Yet to my knowledge little or no study has attended to the significance of genre in Mau Mau Author in Detention, how the diary genre impinges on the diarist's overt political, cultural, and moral agenda. I am therefore interested in investigating the relationship between detention as the site for self-writing, or self-narrating, and the diary as the mode of expression. What was the diarist's motivation for writing the

diary? How does his diary conform to or transgress the Western conventions of diary? How does the diary stage the interplay between memory and the passage of time, between the grammatical “I” and the presumed collective “we”? What does the diary reveal about trauma and truth claims in autobiographical writing? What does it mean that a private, clandestine diary would ultimately become a public record, a focal point of a nation’s at once disturbing and formative history? In what follows, I discuss these questions. But first, who was Gakaara wa Wanjau?

Gakaara wa Wanjau was born in 1921 in Nyeri District, Central Kenya, to parents who were some of the earliest Christian converts at the Presbyterian mission at Tumutumu. In Wanjau’s memoriam in Research in African Literatures, Kimani Njogu draws attention to the fact that the diarist “came into the world at the moment of struggle,” his birth coinciding with the arrest of the leader of the workers’ movement, Harry Thuku, and the killing of 150 people demanding his release, as well as with when one Mary Nyanjiru led women in confrontation with the police in the streets of Nairobi (142). Upon the completion of his high school education at Alliance High school in 1940, he served as a clerk in the King’s African Rifles, as the African unit of the British colonial army was then known. He later went on to fight on the British side during World War II, an experience that planted the seed of rebellion among any number of African soldiers and exposed them to military training that they would put to use in their subsequent bloody confrontation with the colonial forces in Kenya.

Wanjau's writing career began in 1948 with the publication of Uhoru wa Ugurani (On Marriage), which inaugurated written Gikuyu fiction. He had founded his own publishing house, African Book Writer's Ltd. in 1946, after returning from the war in Burma (present-day Myanmar). In 1951 he founded Gakaara Book Service and the monthly newsletter Nwagua Atia? (What's up?). In the same year he published a reprinted Ngwenda Unjura (I Want You to Kill Me!). He also published *Ihu ni Ria U?* (Who Is Responsible for the Pregnancy?); O Kirima Ngagua (To Any Destination); Murata wa Mwene (My Buddy); and Marebeta Ikumi ma Wendo (Ten Love Poems). Wanjau had an active role in composing, publishing, and distributing anticolonial songs. These popular radical songs were proscribed by the colonial administration. Some of the songs he wrote featured in the Jomo Kenyatta trial at Kapenguria.

It is however, the writing and publishing of Witikio wa Gikuyu na Mumbi (1952), a political creed modeled on the Christian creed and Roho ya Kiume na Bidii ya Mwafrika (1948), his Swahili political treatise, that perhaps led to his detention. He was arrested on the night of October 20, 1952 during the so-called Operation Jock Scott that saw the arrest of tens of thousands of Kenyans when governor Everling Baring declared the State of Emergency. Incidentally, Wanjau was arrested on the same night that other nationalist leaders, Jomo Kenyatta, Bildad Kaggia, Ochieng Oneko, Fred Kubai, and Paul Ngei were arrested. Wanjau was held in detention up until 1959, and remained under strict colonial surveillance until 1960. By the time of his death at eighty in 2001,

Gakaara wa Wanjau had left a personal archive amounting to over 7,000 pages of material, mostly written in Gikuyu language, accumulated over the course of a long time of writing and publishing (Peterson 74).

Wanjau therefore exemplifies Africans who the colonial administration detained mainly because of their counter-hegemonic writing but who defied odds to continue writing during their incarceration as well. Mau Mau Author in Detention is incarceration literature qua incarceration literature or as Barbara Harlow would put it, literature of the “places of writing in prison”(4). At any rate, the title of the diary draws attention to Wanjau’s conception of himself as a writer affiliated with the Mau Mau movement and narrating self “in prison.” Yet the diary is not the only work that Wanjau produced while behind the bars; he edited the detention camp newspaper Atiriri, corresponded with family and especially his wife Shifra Wairire, and, like JM Kariuki, wrote numerous letters of protest. Derek R. Peterson has commented extensively on the nature and purpose of the family letters, even hinting at the detainees’ recourse to correspondence with spouses as a kind of “surveillance” to ensure adherence to marital fidelity (79). Therefore, it is imperative to stress that Wanjau’s literary output consists of a wide range of genres from plays to songs and poems, from short fictions to journalistic pieces, from political treatises to manifestoes and official and personal letters. Thus while the focus of this study is Wanjau’s work as a diarist, (and we shall refer to him as such), it would be imprecise to pigeonhole his oeuvre to a single genre of

writing. But as a prelude to the analysis of his motivations for choosing the diary to record his incarceration, I now turn to the question: What is a diary?

It would be presumptuous and incorrect to claim that the diary is indigenous to Africa. Thus, it is necessary to trace the trajectory of the diary-writing conventions from elsewhere but Africa. To be sure, the *tarekhe* (chronicle) tradition among the Waswahili of the Kenyan coast existed for centuries, but *tarekhe*, like its related genre *shajara* (diary), may have come to the Waswahili as a result of the Arabic encounter. Wanjau's knowledge of Kiswahili language in which he sometimes wrote, may suggest his acquaintance with the Swahili literary tradition. But it seems to me that the European missionary influence accounts more for his literacy and embrace of literary genres like diary. As already mentioned, his parents were some of the earliest converts to Christianity at the Tumutumu Presbyterian mission. In other words, Wanjau owed to the European encounter his knowledge and use of the diary form.

The watershed of the genre of diary in Britain and perhaps the Western world seems to have been the year 1825 when Samuel Pepy's celebrated diary was decoded and appropriated, although the actual existence of genre predates this period (Hassam 8). Commending on the ascendancy of the diary in the west, Andrew Hassam observes;

The diary in Western culture has developed from the historical chronicle, through private *aide-memoire* romantic autobiography, to the journal intime and the dream diary of psychoanalytic self-discovery. Written in private for the diarist's eye alone, the diary has accumulated in its development a range of specific cultural values centered on the concept of a unique and essentially rational human subject. (8)

Conceptions of what a diary is or is not have evolved in different directions, but overall there is today relative consensus over the existence of two broad divisions of diary: the nonfiction diary (e.g. Wanjau's Mau Mau Author in Detention) and the fictive diary (e.g. Dostoyevsky's Notes from Underground and Wahome Mutahi's Jail Bugs). Yet even in this regard, modernist and postmodernist approaches to life writing in general and diaries in particular tend to complicate and problematize the frontier between fiction and nonfiction. Debates also still rage over whether, for example, the diary is, as Hassan puts it, the "sanctuary of discrete narratorial selfhood"(9). The interaction between a "self" narrating itself and diary is at the very core of the discourse on the definition of the genre.

Christina Sjoblad defines diary as a "text written in first person, with dated passages, in chronological order, where the writing subject speaks not only on events in their surroundings, but also about her feelings and thoughts concerning those events" (517). Sjoblad includes in her definition critical aspects of diary namely, the grammatical first person narrator, organization of diary entries according to chronology, and inscription of dates. On the whole, Mau Mau Author in Detention seems to fit Sjoblad's conception of diary.

Wanjau's diary covers the range of events related to his incarceration from October 20, 1952 to August 1959, as well as the period of one year of restrictions imposed upon him after his release from detention. The diary also contains a preface,

an introduction, and appendices. Included in the appendices are lists of selected fellow detainees, principally men, a list of detention camps, a facsimile of his detention letter, and samples of his revolutionary writing that might have contributed to his incarceration. Concerning the focus of his diary Wanjau explains in the preface:

The core of this book is the story of experiences of a representative sample of Mau Mau leaders, who were arrested on 20 October 1952, when the Emergency was declared, and taken to the Indian Ocean island of Manda, Lamu, and later to other detention camps in different parts of Kenya. I was not able to put down each and every happening for each day. But I believe I managed to capture the major significant happenings of the detention camps, beginning with Kajiado detention camp and the other camps of which I was later to go the rounds. (xi)

The diary was clandestine, and as he states in the preface, it was written on the pages of sixteen different exercise books and kept and concealed in a wooden box with a false bottom. He parted ways with the bulk of what forms his diary in 1957 when his wife Shifira Waireri was released from prison. He made clandestine arrangements to have the box containing the diary delivered to Shifira who took care of it until his release in 1959. This means the entries capturing the period between 1958 and 1959 were written separately (xii). The question why he wrote the diary begs for an answer. It is to this question that we now turn.

In seeking an answer to the question as to why Wanjau wrote the diary, we may take into account the fact that overall he wrote other works as well before, during, and after his detention. The facticity of his authorship that is foregrounded in the title, a title that also proclaims identification with the Mau Mau tends to suggest that for Wanjau,

writing was a matter of course. In other words, Wanjau did what writers do, what was natural for him to do, in prison and outside prison: which was to *write*. Yet to say he wrote the diary because he was a writer is a rather facile explanation of the impetus for writing. Although his prior experience in writing would have been to his advantage in lightening the challenge of writing, he was writing in a detention context, where writing itself constituted defiance of the colonial dispensation. Thus his diary-writing was clandestine because it was pestilential, replete with risk and danger. He was not just writing, he was taking a great risk to write. So perhaps the question: Why did he write the diary? should be substituted with: Why did he risk writing the diary? In attempting to account for the motivations of his diary-writing project, we should perhaps examine his stated “objective,” but also his intended audiences, as well as the colonial, and detention realities. Put differently, in establishing the reason for writing the detention diary, we must consider both the text and the context.

It seems to me that offering a counter narrative to the spurious civilizing mission inherent in the imperial metanarrative was the centerpiece of Wanjau’s prison writing. He states in the passage quoted above that he wanted essentially to tell the “story of the experiences of a representative sample of Mau Mau leaders” detained during the Emergency. Wanjau tended to believe the narration of the dehumanizing experiences of the “sample of representative” leaders would shatter the colonialists’ façade of human and humane treatment of colonized subjects. In other words, Wanjau’s story, written in

detention about detention, would prove to the world that the British colonial forces were guilty of “war crimes” despite their claims to the contrary. Regarding official distortion of historical records Wanjau observes:

It is a well known fact that when the liberation war was over colonialists put to the flame many documents and files that bore witness to the war crimes they committed against the Mau Mau fighters. The colonialists destroyed these records of acts that would have earned them, had they become part of recorded history, international infamy and shame. . . (xi)

Wanjau’s remark echoes JM Kariuki’s prescient remark in Mau Mau Detainee when he predicted: “the future historian of these times may find it difficult to get our side of the story. Many documents vital to this task will be burnt before independence” (215).

Kariuki’s prediction about the British intentions to hide the record of torture, murder, and plunder is borne out by recent historical research of which Caroline Elkins’s Imperial Reckoning is an instance. In her research historian Elkins reports that she learned there were many missing files and that the “colonial government had intentionally destroyed many of these missing files in massive bonfires on the eve of its 1963 retreat from Kenya” (xiii).

Apparently Wanjau’s reputation as a radical and prolific writer made fellow detainees to not only encourage him to record the events in detention but also moved them to entrust him with their own experience so he could, for lack of a better term, “immortalize” these experiences for posterity in his diary. Wanjau wrote

When some of my fellow detainees felt they had undergone an experience worth recording, they let me know. I would then enter it into my diary. They

trusted me with their information for they were aware of my pre-detention efforts in spreading nationalist awareness through publication. God willing, they hoped, we would leave detention alive and I would publish a book on the happenings in detention. (x)

In short Wanjau's diary is another attempt to convey the Mau Mau side of the story, not to let it remain untold or as his fellow detainees admonished him, "Son of Wanjau, you should not allow these happenings to go unrecorded"(Wanjau x). It did not matter to Wanjau that the British colonial officialdom would consider a narrative incriminating its officials as "unnarratable". Thus his diary project is clearly, as Hassam would characterize it, "writing as an act of political defiance" (1). In this regard, Wanjau's diary serves the same counter-hegemonic purposes as JM Kariuki and Wamboi Otieno's memoirs in debunking the British official narrative of colonial civility and native savagery in the cataclysmic events related to the Emergency period in Kenya.

The sense of the political and personal narrative imperative at work in Wanjau's project is accentuated by the choice of the people to whom the book was dedicated and the at once somber and heroic tone of the words of the dedication. He dedicates the diary to his father, Rev. Johana Wanjau, "who was killed in the course of his Christian ministry during the War for Freedom" while the diarist languished in detention. Next on the list is his mother, Rahel Warigia, and his wife who were fellow detainees, and his children who were virtually orphaned by the detention of parents. Lastly, Wanjau dedicates the text to "all Kenyans involved in many different ways in the struggle for freedom"(vi). The dedication suggests the deeply political and personal motivation

behind writing the clandestine diary. Given that he wrote the diary in Gikuyu language, one could argue that his primary audience was largely Kenyan and particularly Kikuyu. It was imperative, in his view, for the nascent Kenyan nation, and particularly the youth, not to miss the point of the struggle for independence through the mis-education of a bigoted and skewed Eurocentric historiography. Thus in the section concluding his acknowledgment he invokes the metaphor of death for the Kenyan nation saying, “A nation which does not know its own history is a dead nation.” In writing Mau Mau Author in Detention, Wanjau projects *his story* as a vibrant example of a lesson in Kenya’s own history that would ensure the longevity and survival of a nation that would otherwise be dead.

In writing the diary, Wanjau incorporates the experience of others, going, as he puts it, “beyond the recounting of happenings in which I was personally involved, to recounting experiences in detention camps to which I may not have been”(xii). This raises the question: To what extent is his diary a private or personal undertaking? Like JM Kariuki who wrote about the Mau Mau experience in its entirety including the forest experiences where he concedes he never was, Wanjau admits including in his diary events he never witnessed, events that supposedly happened to other detainees. This raises questions of memory and truth claims that I will soon return to.

At this point it behooves us to ruminate about the connection between the narrating “I”, narrated “I” or the authorial “I”, and the collective “we” whose multiple

experiences fill the entries of the diary. Philippe Lejeune has proposed that in a typical autobiographical enterprise, the author is also the narrator and the protagonist. In the light of Lejeune's autobiographical pact, the name appearing on the cover of the text as author also applies to the narrator and the main character. If it were to conform to this paradigm Mau Mau Author in Detention would therefore have to be primarily about the narrating "I" and narrated "I" who is the same person as the author, namely Gakaara wa Wanjau. It would seem that where in the Western imagination and thought the diary could be generally be perceived as a sanctuary of selfhood and self-indulgence, a record of a first narrator *about* herself or himself *for* herself or himself, Wanjau's diary is as much about himself and for himself as it is about others and for others. In fact I suggest that the "I" of Wanjau's narrative both complements and competes with the collective "we" and in the end appears to lose. This claim is borne out by the degree to which the plural pronoun outnumbers the singular one despite the fact they are both putatively on one side of the narrative strategy to win the reader's sympathy and empathy against the third person pronoun, "them" representing the colonial forces. Wanjau's first diary entry dated 21 October 1952, exemplifies the readiness of the narrating "I" to give way to the narrated "we":

At about 5.00 a.m. we were put into two prison trucks whose sides were built with wire mesh. We had been handcuffed in twos, and then chained in groups of six. We were driven in the direction of Athi River . . . A British prison officer and a group of African prison guards was waiting for us. We had been held and would continue to be held, he told us, under Emergency regulations . . . Each of us would be issued with the following: an iron-bar bed; an old and used sleeping

mat; and two old and used blankets. We would obtain a daily ration of foodstuffs, from which we could cook our meals. We would not be able to go out except when guards escorted us to the lavatory or to the washroom or to eat . . . We had had rice, black ndengu, meat and tea . . . Some people said we would all end up at Mahiga, like all those people from Olenguruoni. (1-2)

The plural pronoun “we” is not only one of the first words in the first diary entry, it in effect suffuses this passage as it does the rest of the diary that purports to be a homodiegetic text, or one with a first person narrator. It is not until the end of the entry that the “I” emerges in a brief paragraph with;

For my part, I suspected I would have been tried for publishing the Creed of Gikuyu and Mumbi (see appendix 8). I had seen a card in which this creed was printed, pinned to the warrant of my detention order which had been signed by the imperialist Governor of Kenya, Sir Evelyn Baring (2).

Kwame Anthony Appiah in his In My Father’s House has argued that in a literate culture, “the authorial “I” struggles to displace the “we” of oral narration” (83). In the case of Wanjau’s diary the contrary seems to be true. There is a sense in which Wanjau’s “I” tends to deliberately seek to be engulfed in the collective “we.” The “contestation” between the “I” of selfhood and the “we” of collectivity is analogous to an odd situation in the battlefield in which the former eagerly seeks to succumb to the latter’s friendly fire.

Thus Wanjau records his detention experiences and those of others. His diary is therefore a collectivized narrative of group experiences, a narrative that tends to collapse the boundary between the authorial “I” of one detainee and the narrated

experiences of the other detainees with whom the narrating and narrated “I” binds up itself in the identitarian knot of a collective “we” of victimhood and heroism. The narrative tends to conflate the individual narrator and the other narrated individuals rather than “othering” them. When Wanjau speaks about “we,” like JM Kariuki and Wambui Otieno, he principally refers to the Kikuyu, although on some occasions it refers to fellow detainees. It should be noted that both the “Creed of Gikuyu and Mumbi” and Roho ya Bidii kwa Mwafrika for which Wanjau suspects he was detained for writing, had Kikuyu land rights, identity, and ancestry as their centerpieces. Even in instances when Wanjau alludes to the African he essentially means the Kikuyu African.

It is tempting to conclude that Wanjau’s willingness to have his sense of self ostensibly swallowed by the collective “we” justifies the “universal” application of the Sonjo saying: “I am because we are, and since we are so I am,” to all things African and all societies African (Olney 69). The Sonjo saying tends to undercut the reality of reciprocity between the individual and her society by stressing a “one-way traffic” of individual dependency on society. But what Wanjau’s diary epitomizes is reciprocity or interdependency between the individual and the collective. It is instructive that the leitmotif of Wanjau as an author is foregrounded in the title and articulated in the body of the text, implying that although the “we” had stories to tell, they needed an author of Wanjau’s authority, ingenuity, virtuosity, and skill to record these “happenings” to immortalize them as he did. “Son of Wanjau,” he reports his colleagues as beseeching

him, “you should never allow these happenings to go unrecorded.” But even in telling their stories, he found an “excuse” or an alibi to tell his own. In the context of Wanjau’s text, we can hypothetically rephrase the Sonjo truism into: “I am because we are, and since I am so we are.” The narrating and narrated “I” is embedded in the narrated “we, rather than being swallowed or engulfed by it. The diary is therefore as much a record of an individual’s life and opinion as it is a record of group experience. In other words, Mau Mau Author in Detention is hardly a personal record of an individual about himself and for himself; hardly the “sanctuary of a discrete narratorial selfhood.”

Wanjau states in the preface that he kept the clandestine diary with the hope of publishing it for public consumption so that it “would give an objective picture of life in Mau Mau detention camps.” He continues: “Today I consider my account objective and as such of considerable historical and national value” (xiii). It is significant that the diarist would insist on the objectivity, even the historicity of his diary. Wanjau presupposes that objective truth is not only attainable but is in fact both present and foremost in his diary. Yet it is imperative to note that “objectivity” is somewhat a perpetually elusive attribute that no one should confidently claim for themselves, as borne out by my own experience as a journalist in which I saw claims of objectivity by any number of media channels turn out to be nothing but optical illusions. Yet the diarist here is at pains to dispel all doubt about the truthfulness of his account, even

regarding events that he did not witness, events that others narrated to him. He writes in a passage discussed earlier in this section:

I have gone beyond recounting of happenings in which I was personally involved, to recounting experiences in detention camps to which I may never have been as these experiences were related to me by people who were there. Witness is borne to the veracity of happenings and experiences by the mention of the names of the detainees who were involved as well as those of colonial and African personnel in the detention camps. (xii)

Nonetheless, his truth claims tend to raise more questions than it provides answers. For instance, how sure was the diarist that the people who related the experiences he never witnessed told the truth? Secondly, is the recounting of names of individuals involved sufficient proof of authenticity of truth claims? Thirdly, should we take the diarist's own experiences as nothing but the whole truth? In endeavoring to answer these questions we have to concede that the "relationship between writing and the reality that it aims to represent" is not always harmonious (Hassam 7). It would seem that almost every narrator in the rubric of life writing claims for herself or himself truthfulness at the point of narrating even though they may admit having lied on one or more occasions about something earlier. The problem with truth is that even those who lie do so claiming that they are telling the truth. Wanjau himself dramatizes the challenge of sifting truth from lies with regard to one of the most hilarious white colonial detention officers at Manda camp named Martin, but who the detainees nicknamed "Naked Martin." Martin attempted to coerce the detainees into confessing they had taken the

Mau Mau oaths and that such confessions would ensure their release from detention. In the diary entry of April 13, 1954, Wanjau writes that Martin's characteristic utterances were: "I am the way unto a return home!" or "I am your salvation: the white man does not tell lies" (89). But Martin's truth claims were spurious. By the time he left Manda following an official transfer, his efforts at "cooperation" from the detainees had been exposed for the lies that they really were. Wanjau notes, "Some people were unhappy, feeling terribly deceived by Naked Martin over the question of "cooperation" (89). The white man who cannot lie had lied to the detainees at Manda. "Some" who cooperated still did not earn their freedom. It is not at all surprising that when detainees received the news of Naked Martin's death months later when his boat capsized, they expressed little sympathy (150).

But Naked Martin's truth claim as the white man who cannot tell a lie epitomizes the racial ideology of white supremacy underpinning the official colonial hegemonic metanarrative of the Mau Mau movement and the counter-insurgency. For one thing, it saw as axiomatic the relationship between white racial identification and truth telling. Also, according to this ideology the things the Mau Mau said and did were inherently heathen, reprehensible, and abominable. To other ethnic groups in Kenya, the colonial propaganda machine had said the "Mau Mau cannibals . . . relished the flesh of infants and women's breasts" (29). The detainees were keenly aware of the fact that

Martin espoused a view about the Mau Mau that was pervasive in both the metropolis and the colony of imperial Britain. Wanjau writes in the entry of March 2, 1954:

Four Agikuyu interrogators were escorted into compound 1 by Martin in the company of four camp guards armed with heavy clubs and shields . . . They told us, “Confess the oaths you have taken. In the Gikuyu countryside everybody else has confessed. We have come to take you home. An abomination has been committed: people used women’s menstrual blood and the organs of manhood in oathing rituals. A delegation sent by the British government has uncovered all these things and reported back in England about them. (79)

The official narrative of the hegemon essentially posed allegations as fact and painted the Mau Mau as filthy, barbarous and savage. Was it true that women’s menstrual blood was used in the oathing? In her memoir, Wambui Otieno states that women in their menstrual period were not even allowed to take the oath. She writes: “I was asked whether I was menstruating. (I later learned that a menstruating woman was disqualified from taking the oath)”. I answered “No,”(33). JM Kariuki’s graphic description of the oathing process also makes no mention of women’s menstrual blood. Wanjau’s claim that he hoped to paint an objective picture of the detention camps therefore serves the counter-hegemonic purposes that the rest of the Mau Mau memoirs serve. It is “objective” in the sense of being different from the official narrative that demeans and demonizes the movement. The thrust of Wanjau’s narrative seems to extend the frame of the irony of Martin, the lying white man who claims he cannot lie, to encompass the entire Eurocentric (mis)conception of Kenya’s liberation struggle. Wanjau tries to counter the white man’s lies with a set of what he believes and presents as *the* truth. I

must stress that it is not within the scope or intention of this study to verify this claims. It is a task well suited for the historians, although Mau Mau historiography is contested territory in Kenya with its many and varied sets of historical truth claims. The history is often dependent on where the historian stands. It is enough to view Wanjau's text as underlining the existence of discourses capturing the Mau Mau experience that are antithetical to the official discourse, discourses that project as mendacious British colonial claims of a civilizing mission in Africa.

The dynamics of memory at work in writing a diary are different from other genres of life writing. In autobiography in general there is a time lag between when the writer writes and the occurrence of the event written about. John Sturrock has gone as far as to assert that in autobiography the "writer is addressing us from the moment of writing, not from the moment of remembering" (56). The diary is different because of its attribute of immediacy that is associated with the act of writing "daily" and often immediately after the event. In other words, the "moment of writing" is quite close to the event it engages. It would seem, then, that the diary itself is both a product of and catalyst for memory, for recollection of recorded events. It is perhaps for this reason that some autobiographers are known to have used their private diaries as a source material for their autobiographies. In this regard both the diary and the autobiography would be focusing on the life and opinions of the narrator, but where the former is truncated and has "areas of indeterminacy," the latter exhibits relative lucid exposition,

cohesion, and coherence. Also, unlike the autobiographer who generally has knowledge of the direction and outcome of the events narrated, the diarist merely records events as they occur but has no knowledge of the outcome, hence the somewhat plotless or “unshaped” shape of diary.

On the whole, Wanjau’s diary reflects the typical characteristics of the diary genre graphologically, if not thematically. As we discussed earlier it incorporates too much of the communal concerns to represent a faithful adoption of and adherence to the Western diary which frequently revolves only around a self-narrating itself to itself.

Mau Mau Author in Detention contains hundreds of dated entries from October 21, 1952 to February 1957 representing the diarist’s memory of the detention years. There are few but longer and more reflective entries devoted to his exile at Hola and life as a restricted person from May 2, 1958 to May 19, 1960. It is evident that in writing the diary about his and other people’s experience, Wanjau relied on both his and their memory of immediate and distant past events. The collaborative dimension of Wanjau’s diary suggests that his diary inhabits and profits from what we term a Mau Mau collective memory. Wanjau writes

Although this book took shape several decades ago, when I put down in dairy form my personal experiences during the Emergency, I owe a debt of gratitude to all those people who helped in refreshing my memory on certain matters and who cared enough to take the trouble to obtain old documents belonging to the period of our arrest an detention. (vii)

If the diarist recorded experiences as they happened or immediately afterwards, why does he mention the necessity or expediency of having his memory refreshed by others? Wanjau clearly confesses that an infallible memory was beyond his grasp. His candor in admitting that he has an imperfect memory does not necessarily undercut his truth claims, but somehow underscores the collective effort behind the diary, that what we now have is not a private diary per se as such, but a communal diary rooted in and authenticated by oral and documentary evidence. What this also means is that we perhaps encounter a diary that is not quite what was written in detention, that there was some reworking and rewriting that went into the diary that would eventually won the Noma Award, as some critics have observed. This is compounded by the fact that we are dealing with what some have characterized as a less than perfect English rendition of the original Kikuyu language text.

Yet we should not be distracted by obsession with what was lost so much so that we lose sight of the pivotal fact the diary makes the memory of the traumatic experience of Mau Mau detainees in colonial detention camps as its centerpiece. Wanjau records how detainees were interrogated, humiliated, brutalized, overworked, and deprived of basic food and water. When a warder lost his cache of bullets at Manda, the detainees, as was often the case, were subjected to a humiliating strip search. Wanjau wrote: “It was a terribly humiliating experience, all the people being made to strip in front of each other irrespective of age. This engendered deep resentment...”(124). At the same

detention camp the detainees were denied water and resorted, as Wanjau points out, to secretly digging a well to save themselves from dying of thirst:

People would take quick turns to in the well-hole. In the meanwhile the elderly men lying on their beds sang political hymns to the rhythm of the digging in order to drown the noise and distract the attention of the guards standing outside from hearing our carryings on. We had appointed our own sentries to keep a look out; at any sign of trouble, the digging would stop. (69)

Needless to say the ploy employed by the detainees to procure water for themselves recalls the Swahili epic hero Fumo Liyongo, who was imprisoned for political reasons, but successfully stages his prison escape bid by using music to drown the noise arising from his act of severing prison chains.

It is instructive that in his diary Wanjau talks of the torture of detainees emanating from the guards as well as so-called “reformed” detainees. In an incident recorded in the entry uncharacteristically covering a period of ten months (April 5, 1956 to February 15, 1957), the diarist reports that a group of “reformed” detainees poured icy water on their unreformed colleague until he died (195). In exposing the fact that some detainees were complicit in the plight of their fellow detainees, Wanjau demonstrates remarkable candor. He also reveals African complicity in the infamous Hola massacre that occurred while he had been exiled at Hola. He wrote:

Those of us who were working on our farms, about three miles away from Hola Closed Camp, learned about one hour later about the massacre in which 11 detainees battered to death. So we trooped to the hospital with heavy hearts and the women wept and wailed when they saw the battered bodies of our people. The injured men lay in a mass with bandages covering their broken limbs, skulls and ribs. Well might they weep with springs of bitterness bursting in flow at the

realisation that the act of hateful carnage had been perpetrated not by white colonialists but our Black brothers. (201)

Wanjau's disclosure and frustration with African complicity on the part of fellow detainees and African guards in the suffering of the general detainee population perhaps buttresses his argument about the objectivity of the narrative his memory and that of others engenders.

What is also interesting is that remaining true to form, Wanjau reveals little regarding his own personal trauma apart from some limited details about how dealt with the ostensibly malicious and vindictive interrogation panels, his mother and his wife's detention, and his father's murder attributed to his own fellow Mau Mau fighters. Overall he does not dwell too much on his own trials and tribulations, although he could find time and space to include in his diary the narration of JM Kariuki's torture, to whose memoir Mau Mau Detainee he makes numerous references. Therefore, on the whole the diary links individual memory and collective memory of the traumatic Mau Mau experiences.

Mau Mau Author in Detention indeed is a classic example of a narrative of incarceration narrating self without being overly preoccupied with selfhood. It represents domestication or nativizing of the diary, a European form in an African setting. I have argued that unlike its European counterpart, Wanjau's diary flows almost seamlessly between self-representation and collective representation of any number of people with shared experience and memory. In other words it demonstrates the

synthesis of singularity and plurality of being and becoming with the homodiegetic “I” embedded in the collective “we” and the collective “we” embedded in the “I.”

Therefore, although Wanjau chooses the European diary form he deliberately departs from it by projecting an “I” that is keenly aware of its strong attachment to the “we.” I insist that this kind of “I” does not evaporate or dissolve in the wake of the print culture as Appiah would have us believe, but it exemplifies reciprocity between the sense of selfhood and community.

In enacting the dialectic of accepting and rejecting European form and genre, Wanjau’s diary resembles any number of works of African literature. Christopher L. Miller in his Theories of the Africans has even questioned whether the African novel should be considered as bearing a European form given the level of Africanization it has undergone. He further cites Ahmed Kourouma’s Suns of Independence and Mariama Ba’s So Long a Letter as instances of works that borrow from Europe but reject certain aspects of the European form or genre. Kourouma departs from Europe’s standard French to write in *franchophonie*, a devalued variant of broken French, while Ba adopts the European epistolary novel but refuses to conform to some of its conventions including having a true exchange of letters between characters. The dialectic between Wanjau’s borrowing from Europe and deviating from European literary norms is accentuated by the diarist’s choice of Kikuyu as the language of expression. By presenting the experience of detention in the colonial detention camp through a

pluralized and collaborated voice, Wanjau offers a powerful counter-hegemonic narrative that disturbs the official or authorized narrative.

IV. Swimming Against the Current: Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter*

The complexity of inter-ethnic relations and tensions in Kenya is enacted remarkably in Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's life narrative, Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History. The autobiography of a Wambui Otieno, a woman of Kikuyu descent who married a Luo, epitomizes decades of female struggle against the dictates of patriarchy, ethnic myopia, imperialism, colonialism, and despotism in Kenya. The story of Wambui Otieno's life is a tale of a "manly" woman who was nicknamed "Msaja," the Baganda word for man to underscore her unflinching masculine attributes and propensity to decouple perceived sex and gender roles (92). Her narrative points to a life of struggle in which she fought both actual confinement, particularly in the colonial era, and figurative confinement of her body and mind as a woman in a misogynic, phallocratic, phallocentric colonial and postcolonial environment. In brief, Wambui Otieno's Mau Mau's Daughter (1998) is replete with contradictions, ambivalences, defiance, and determination as she straddles the antithetical worlds of the Kikuyu and the Luo, concrete ethnic identity and ambiguous or multiple ethnic identity, feminism and misogyny, and the values of antiquity and modernity. Swimming against the current seems to be what best describes Otieno's life as amply illustrated by her account of her own life.

A towering female public figure in Kenya's history and collective memory, Otieno was largely unknown among the Uhuru generation, the generation of which I am part, of those born after Kenya's independence in 1963. For people of my generation Otieno's rise to national prominence is more or less associated with two events in her life; the protracted legal dispute over the place and space to rest her husband's remains after his death in 1986, and her marriage at 67 to a 25 year-old man in 2002. Otieno fought valiantly in the court for the right to inter her first husband, lawyer SM Otieno, in their Upper Matasia home on the outskirts of Nairobi, but lost to her husband's Umar Kager clan that had insisted that he be buried in his ancestral home at Nyalgunga, Nyanza Province in the western part of Kenya, as it was contrary to Luo custom to bury a kinsman anywhere but "home." The dramatic case became something of not only the enactment of the conflict between modernity and antiquity as some observers have said, but quite clearly the dramatization of a deep-seated antipathy between the Luo and the Kikuyu. Otieno reveals in her autobiography the underlying political currents that shaped and molded the outcome of one of the most famous legal battles in Kenyan history.

Otieno's autobiography is a unique enough contribution to Kenya's literary history, inviting as it does critical analysis for any number of reasons, not least among them the fact that it is the first attempt ever to narrate and narrativize confinement by a female insider of the Mau Mau freedom struggle against Kenya's bloody colonial

history. The female voice is virtually absent or silent in the prison narratives of the Mau Mau period. As is so often the case, male voices narrating captivity outnumber the female ones a great deal. Indeed the male voices of victims of the horrendous atrocities visited on Kenyan freedom fighters by the British colonial administration in prisons and detention camps are legion and include Jomo Kenyatta's Suffering without Bitterness (1968), Josiah Mwangi Kariuki's Mau Mau Detainee (1963), Waruhiu Itote's "Mau Mau" General (1967), Harry Thuku's An Autobiography (1970), Mohamed Mathu's The Urban Guerrilla (1974), Bilgad Kaggia's Roots of Freedom (1975) and Gakaara wa Wanjau's Mau Mau Author in Detention (1988). But as Marshall S. Clough notes in his Mau Mau Memoirs: History, Memory and Politics "few women are mentioned by name in the memoirs" (141).

For several decades Charity Waciuma's autobiography Daughter of Mumbi (1969) remained the only female narrative that came close to illuminating the Mau Mau period, providing as it did the female perspective in a field dominated by a myriad of male voices. Yet Waciuma's role in the struggle was rather peripheral and her legacy somewhat ephemeral since she did not participate as fully in the struggle for independence, and never suffered actual incarceration and torture as Otieno. Muthoni Likimani's collection of the accounts of female Mau Mau detainees in Passport Number F.47927: Women and the Mau Mau in Kenya is another useful text. But it comprises accounts mediated through the collector's skeptical stance and is bereft of the

experiential engagement and attribute of Otieno's life narrative. Therefore, properly speaking, it is Otieno's autobiography that so far stands or sinks as the sole female island in the expansive sea of male voices that narrativize confinement in colonial Kenya from an experiential point of view. It is only Otieno's account that sheds light on what it meant for a woman to confront the monstrosities of the colonial machine as an active participant in the freedom movement.

In her autobiography, Otieno attempts to write about her role, to give an account of herself, to take stock and to make sense of her life of struggle, defiance and rebelliousness from the colonial period to the regime of Kenya's second president Daniel arap Moi. For people of my generation and posterity, Mau Mau's Daughter provides a wider, albeit incomplete, view of this phenomenal Kenyan woman in her own voice, a view that transcends the two putatively notorious and isolated events of her husband's burial saga and her subsequent marriage to a young man twice her junior in age. In what follows I analyze Otieno's autobiography as a narrative of literal and symbolic confinement. Moreover, I probe how issues related to memory, the pronoun "I," truth, and trauma impinge on the content and form of Otieno's moving attempt to give an account of herself in her Mau Mau's Daughter.

On the whole Otieno's Mau Mau's Daughter is written in the tradition of The History of Mary Prince: West Indian Slave (1831), the nineteenth-century slave narrative that inaugurated the black female voice in narrating and narrativizing

confinement in the Americas, and perhaps in the rest of the world. As Joanne Braxton suggests in her Black Women Writing Autobiography: a Tradition within a Tradition (1989), Prince seems to have laid the foundation for the female narrative voice in black life writing, with its attendant feminine sensitivity and sensibilities. For instance, Prince recounts, albeit with evident reticence, her suffering on account of being a slave and a woman, at the hands of her apparently licentious and oppressive slave master. Prince found repugnant the master's habit of exposing his nudity to her and commanding her to bathe him, but she would disobey him only at her peril. Like Prince, Otieno recounts her trials and tribulations as a freedom fighter and as a woman in colonial Kenya including her prison rape at the hands of a colonial prison officer. It would seem, there are striking similarities between the voices of female victims of confinement, confinement that may be literal slavery, detention, kidnapping, and imprisonment or symbolic or both literal and symbolic, from any number of geopolitical entities since Prince's account of herself. Foremost in these narratives is the double strike of being victimized as a woman and as a member of an underprivileged group, such as slaves for Prince and the colonized for Otieno. How Otieno's account differs from the myriad of male narratives of confinement capturing the same or similar historical periods in Kenya will also be one of the central questions of analysis in this section. Also deserving rigorous analysis are these questions: What is her motivation for writing the story of her life, particularly regarding her incarceration and her role in the freedom movement so many years after

the fact? What is gained or lost with the passage of time as she wrote most of what forms the bulk of this life narrative long after the fact? To what extent is Otieno's story the story of all or other women in Kenya? Can she be said to be speaking for the rest of the women who have not and will not immortalize their experiences in written form? And to what degree is her individual narrative akin to an allegory of the Kenyan nation in Fredric Jameson's terms, which entail reading individual stories from "Third-World" as national allegories? (69).

Mau Mau's Daughter is divided into twelve coherently headed chapters with eighteen photographs of Otieno, her family, friends and acquaintances across time and space scattered here and there to supplement the text. The text also contains traditional and freedom songs in Kikuyu and Swahili with their English renditions (as in Kariuki's Mau Mau Detainee) as well as excerpts from a wide array of pieces of literature including Shakespeare. The inclusion of these songs and excerpts imbues the text with intertextuality and Bakhtinian heteroglossia or linguistic variability that makes her work transcend its singularity as an isolated individual enterprise. On the whole Wambui's narrative covers two main periods of her life namely; her childhood and freedom struggle (the bulk of the narrative) and her marriage to SM Otieno of a perceived "enemy tribe" and the turns and twists in her life after his death. The emphasis in this study is on narration of confinement, and hence I will focus on aspects of Otieno's life narrative that capture her literal incarceration and her narration of multiple symbolic

“prisons” into which she is locked. I argue that it is her relentless struggle against these systemic structures of imprisonment, literal and figurative, that make her the very epitome of a rebel perpetually swimming against the current.

Many and varied reasons can be advanced for Otieno’s attempt to narrativize her Mau Mau years and after. If the title of her autobiography is anything to go by, there seems to have been a keen desire on her part to foreground and underscore her role in the liberation movement in colonial Kenya. Indeed she devotes the bulk of her text to illuminating her activities, rebelliousness, ingenuity, and organizational skills as a Mau Mau scout and her involvement in the oaths, sacrifices, trials and tribulations, and pitfalls and windfalls associated with the struggle. It is apparent she intends to address the void occasioned by the paucity of female voices that narrate the tumultuous historical period of Kenya’s fight for independence from British colonial domination. But she seizes the opportunity of telling this female narrative of the freedom movement in the colonial era to clarify the circumstances surrounding her marriage to SM Otieno upon her release from detention, as well as the stability of her marriage and the acrimonious relations with her husband’s kinsmen over her right to bury him.

In what way do these crucial issues in Otieno’s life writing measure up to James Olney’s list of motives for writing autobiography? Drawing on Benjamin Franklin, Olney argues that whereas the impetus for the Western autobiography is a desire to satisfy the curiosity of descendants, to provide an example for others, to relive an

essentially enjoyable life and to satisfy vanity, the African autobiography is more interested in preserving a passing world, describing the African milieu for the outside world, and describing a representative case of a peculiarly African experience (Olney 26). My quick response to the question above is that Otieno's Mau Mau's Daughter or any other African product of life writing for that matter, need not measure up to Olney's overly essentialized and dated views on the motives for autobiography. Yet it seems to me that the emphasis on her role in the struggle for Kenya's independence tends to project her as an example for the present age and posterity to emulate. Moreover, her inclusion of her first marriage and its subsequent ramifications, putatively already always in the public domain, presumably hinges on the need to clarify certain events and issues, to tell her story in her own voice from her own perspective. Hence, one of the implied and underlying factors behind the writing of this autobiography is possibly to provide a corrective on several matters in her life, both in the colonial and "postcolonial" period. Otieno's role in the struggle movement and her husband's burial saga are inextricably tied up together, so much so that one is inclined to conclude that, in the main, the drama and trauma surrounding the latter impelled her to write the story of her life in which the former reigns supreme. It is as if she uses her hitherto largely unheralded role in the freedom struggle to indict the structures and strictures of the legal system and political establishment of post independence Kenya for subjecting to deprivation and denying rights to someone who fought so gallantly for the country's

liberation from colonial bondage. Her narrative can hence be summed up as the lament of an unsung hero leveled against a thankless world.

As a backdrop to her eventual dehumanizing incarceration at the height of the Mau Mau rebellion, Otieno gives us a glimpse of her ancestry, and early childhood, thereby contextualizing and pointing to the impetus for her taking the plunge into the shark infested waters of politics and the liberation struggle. She traces her life from her multiple ancestral roots from among the Ndorobo, Masai and Kikuyu, debunking early on the myth of ethnic purity that has often been at the very core of political tension in Kenya as evidenced, for example, in the post-election mayhem following the December 2007 general elections.

Reading Otieno's autobiography one senses the imposing presence of a Kikuyu woman who is not only Kikuyu; she is an African woman with multiple, conflictual, and contending identities. I will presently argue that in a sense, Otieno's narrative is perhaps metonymic of Kenya's multiple ethnic composition with over forty-two different linguistic groups, a multiplicity that has proven to be at once a boon and a bane. Yet it is to her filiations with legendary leader Waiyaki wa Hinga of Maasai parentage and whose Maasai name was Koiyaki Ole Kumale, her great grandfather, that she attaches particular importance. In her first of a series of correctives, Wambui is at pains to exonerate Waiyaki, a familiar historical figure, from charges of collaboration with the British colonists. She writes:

Waiyaki's personal history is well known in Kenya history, for he was the first Kikuyu to be exiled by the British. The first Europeans arrived in Kikuyuland when Waiyaki was the *muthamaki* (king or ruler). It is difficult to tell how far Waiyaki's rule extended because the country was not so open in those days. The European gave Waiyaki the title of "paramount chief." But who gave the Kikuyu leader's title? There were no chiefs in our system, but if *muthamaki* is properly translated into English, it would mean "king" or "ruler." Some people claim that the Europeans made Waiyaki powerful since he collaborated with them. However, Kikuyu oral history contradicts this since it is evident that Waiyaki already had power when the first Europeans arrived. The Kikuyu as their leader elected Waiyaki after successful raids into Maasailand. (14)

Otieno inevitably adapts the Kikuyu oral history version of Waiyaki's encounter with the Europeans which vindicates him as an intrepid and powerful indigenous leader rather than the Eurocentric historical version that applies to her ancestor the misnomer "paramount chief," for the almost untranslatable Kikuyu term *Muthamaki* for a kind of consummate leader. And as if to add insult to injury, Eurocentric historians, Otieno laments, brand her Waiyaki a collaborator with the colonial forces. As Cora Ann Presley remarks cogently in the introduction to the autobiography, Otieno intends to "change the interpretation of the place of Waiyaki in Kenya's history" (Presley 5). Further Otieno elaborates how according to oral tradition the British exiled Waiyaki to Kibwezi and buried him alive after he resisted their expropriation of Kikuyuland. In this way her memoir is also an attempt to liberate the "incarcerated" history of her great grandfather's heroism.

Why does Otieno foreground her being born in such a "good" family as Presley terms it? (5). First this seems to indicate the premium Otieno places on her ancestry,

having descended from a family of leaders. In any case, as she shows in a subsequent passage, Kenya's future president Mzee Jomo Kenyatta was raised by her own great grandmother:

Kenya's current leaders live in fear that the children of Waiyaki, whom they believe have the potential to unite the nation, will take leadership again. Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, was no exception. Jomo Kenyatta was raised by my grandmother, who was his aunt, a member of the Ambui family. He established even closer ties with the Waiyaki clan when he married Ngina of the Catheca wa Ngekenya family.¹ (17-18)

Secondly, Otieno perhaps intends to imply that her own heroic acts in the liberation movement stem from her great grandfather's heroism and shrewd leadership. She writes fondly of his apparent admonition to the Kikuyu: "You must not surrender one inch of our soil to foreigners, for if you do so, future children will die of starvation" (16). She adds that Waiyaki had "died a hero" (17). Hence, we can safely conclude that Otieno tends to suggest that her anger and angst toward the European "foreigners" stemmed from the example of courageous resistance from Waiyaki and that she was impelled to join in the fray by a desire to take vengeance upon those who buried her great grandfather alive in Kibwezi.²

While in the movement she shares with one of the female oath-takers her "indignation that Waiyaki had been brutally murdered by the whites" (34). The life and fate of her great grand-father seems to have sowed the seed of rebelliousness in Otieno and bore special significance on her involvement in the liberation movement and the activism that characterized her life in post independence Kenya.

Which one between the Eurocentric and Otieno's version of the Waiyaki story is true? In the contexts of our analysis of autobiography, this is perhaps asking the wrong question. Following Georges Gusdorf's cogent caveat we should not be in the business of establishing the historical veracity of Otieno's autobiography. We take it that this autobiography is her attempt to explore her past, an exercise which as Maurice Halbwachs states, may sometimes entail "touching up" (51). Yet like most other autobiographers, she is legitimately anxious about how we as readers perceive her tale. For instance, after narrating how she was involved in entertaining Princess Margaret, a member of the British royal family who was visiting Nairobi, by composing and singing a subversive song she declares: "I must assure the reader that this is not fiction" (51). She is thus anxious that we accept her story as true. This is significant to her because in the first place, her autobiography is motivated by a desire to offer correctives regarding her, her family, and the Mau Mau movement. Because hers is a counter-argument, a counter-discourse to both the colonial discourse and that of her local opponents, her efforts to declare her story as "true" is an expedient rhetorical strategy. She counters the implied accusation that the Mau Mau fighters were atheists by stating: "Make no mistake, Mau Mau believed in God. We held prayers facing Mount Kenya and regard God as our shield" (43). Also, Wambui denies allegations from her husband's relatives that she had a stormy marriage: "Contrary to these false accusations, SM and I lived happily" (99). Are her claims true? We do not know and it really does not matter. What

matters here is her claim that what she says is true; her anxiety to project her story as credible and reliable not whether it is so.

Nonetheless, it bears clarifying that Wambui Otieno's narrative of confinement, coming as it does forty years after the fact of her detention, lacks the immediacy that is for instance evidenced in JM Kariuki's Mau Mau Detainee which was written immediately after independence, when the embers of the struggle were still glowing. There are several possibilities to be deduced here: (1) She could have been too far removed from the actual events to render an accurate account of what really transpired; (2) or the passage of time would have enabled her to see things more lucidly; (3) and more importantly, her perceptions could have been tremendously influenced by the subsequent events and experiences in the intervening decades, shaping and molding her memory and her interpretation of her detention story. It may well be that the passage of time enabled and enhanced her capacity to tell a story whose telling is like opening an old wound.

On the whole Otieno does not only valorize the rebellious spirit that typifies her life, she attempts to interpret this rebelliousness as predicated upon having descended from Waiyaki. She swims against the current from a relatively young age, refusing to accept things uncritically from the time she was at the Christian Missionary-run Mambere Girls School in Central Kenya. She states:

At Mambere, I started to be politically aware—the rebel in me started to emerge. First, I was of an age to start questioning some things I hated most; and also the

school's version of what happened between my great-grand-father and the white man motivated me. Another reason is that I loved, and still love my name Wambui and consider it a beautiful name. But that was not the case with Miss Brownly. To her, our African names did not exist. (29)

It is significant that Otieno would contest the official "school's version" of her great grand-father's role in the colonial encounter. This is in harmony with the re-writing of history that forms part of the purpose and intent of her autobiography as Presley correctly suggests in the introduction. Otieno contests the Eurocentric rendition of her family and national history; or put differently, she is dissatisfied with *his-story* and hence embarks on writing *her-story*. But in a display of cultural nationalism, Otieno also rejects the colonial school system's attempt to make African students disavow their cultural roots including their names and language. In a sense, Otieno's cultural nationalism here echoes Ngugi wa Thiong'o's sentiments in Decolonising the Mind, in which he berates the insidious colonial scheme that was aimed at enfeebling the indigenous minds by making them self-haters. Wambui states that she was greatly disgusted by her teacher Miss Brownly's endeavors to obliterate Wambui, her "beautiful [maiden] name" and to impose upon her the alien "Virginia Tiras" (29). This account in Otieno's autobiography recalls Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings in which Viola Cullinam, a white woman "baptizes" the autobiographer "Mary" for the white woman's own convenience. In both autobiographies there is a deliberate bid to ignore or trample upon black women's agency or subjectivity expressed through the right to be called what one desires. Otieno

concludes that her encounter with colonial or colonial-induced disdain toward her culture helped catalyze her hard-line stance. Otieno chose not to follow the path her Christian mother walked, where shunning things African such as circumcision songs and dances was customary. She writes:

You will therefore understand my surprise and indignation when at Mambere I found Scottish dance being taught with pomp and glory. We were taught the dance and became so good that we often performed for visiting dignitaries. In my mind, however, nothing could convince me that the Kikuyu dance was inferior to the Scottish one. In defiance, I rebelliously learned all the tribal songs and dances . . . All the contradictions of my Christian upbringing and the cultural bias I experienced in school led me, inevitably toward the rebellion. (31-32)

The autobiography is in a sense a genealogy and chronology of Otieno's rebellious spirit. Rebelliousness is at work when she joins the Mau Mau movement to fight against the British colonial hegemony while in her mid teens. She takes the first of nine oaths pledging allegiance to the movement in 1952 at the age of sixteen (33). Upon leaving school the following year when the British administration declared the State of Emergency in Kenya, she was fully immersed in the movement, working as a scout and taking the remaining nine oaths. As a scout in the guerrilla movement, Otieno learned how to smuggle arms and information from colonists, an undertaking that was at variance with her role in the Girl Guides movement in her school days. Also she narrates how she led African female prostitutes into becoming spies for the movement as well as decoys to entrap the colonial officers and police men who sought sensual and sexual gratification from them. Her mixed ancestry and fair skin stood her in good

stead in the face of the colonial police out to restrict the mobility of Kenyans from any number of ethnic origins as a way of suppressing resistance. Otieno narrates the dangers attendant to her guerrilla activities:

The reader might infer from my narratives that scouting was an easy job. To the contrary, it was an occupation full of unpredictable pitfalls with danger lurking in every corner. Scouts lived from day to day, as one wrong could mean death. I remember one time when I ran into a police screening team near Khoja Mosque in Nairobi. I was smuggling a faulty gun that I was taking to be repaired. The penalty for possessing an unlicensed firearm those days was a mandatory death sentence. My words saved me. I managed to keep cool on the outside and was not searched. Luckily I had perfected the art of assuming an innocent young girl's expression. That coupled with my very light complexion, always helped disguise my identity. Who would suspect a woman who looked like a Goan? However, that incident left me shaken as it had been another close shave with death. (43)

The hide and seek game she played with the colonial forces meant being arrested for brief periods and released albeit with further restrictions on her mobility. Banishing any feelings of guilt was the hallmark of the freedom struggle: "The other source of inspiration is believing in whatever one is doing and not having a guilty conscience" (43).

She consistently violated the imposed restriction orders and still ventured in and out of Kiambu district near Nairobi in furtherance of the underground activities of the Mau Mau movement. It was, however, indeed a matter of time before, as Otieno reveals, she would eventually bear the full brunt of ruthless treatment at the hands of the colonial police force for her revolutionary activities. As she mentions in her autobiography her eventual arrest and detention was the outcome of an act of betrayal

by someone she really trusted and loved, her own fiancé (85). She soon became a detainee, held captive by the colonial state from July 8, 1960 to January 23, 1963. This literal confinement by state apparatuses was the pinnacle of her suffering and tested her rebellious disposition to the limit. Otieno was arrested in her Kaloleni home in Nairobi and flown to the island of Lamu on the Kenyan coast where she was detained. Her little innocent children were detained with her and suffered pangs of hunger and malaria and the general deprivation concomitant with detention. Describing the Lamu-bound flight Otieno writes: “My children, who now suffered detention for no fault of their own, had only biscuits and canned beans to eat; they had to sleep hungry” (78). At Lamu a British colonial prison officer named Rudolf Speed raped Otieno, impregnating her and inflicting untold physical, psychic, and emotional pain upon her. She reports the rapist as telling her after repeatedly violating her for days during her incarceration that “impregnating me was a decision of the British government” (83).

Clearly, in her explanation of the circumstances leading to her detention, Otieno does not consider herself culpable, reprehensible or guilty of any crime warranting the action the government took against her. As most theorists have observed concerning narratives of confinement, there is almost always the narrator’s projection of a self - image of innocence (see Millet and Ioan Davies). For Otieno, her actions were far from being wrong; what was wrong was the betrayal that may have led to her arrest and incarceration. It is remarkable how other Kenyan prison writers such as Abdilatif

Abdalla and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, showcase similar tendencies in attempts to make sense of their confinement. In trying to explain how he was implicated and imbricated in sedition and sentenced to a three-year prison term by the Kenyatta, Abdalla maintains that the discovery of his anti-government literature "*Kenya Twendapi?*" ostensibly following betrayal by a confidant, was what chafed him, not his actions. Ngugi speculates that his detention was connected to his involvement with community theatre at Kamiriithu village. By stating that he suspected he was detained for organizing peasant theatre at Kamiriithu, Ngugi, on his part too, equally raises the implicit question "what did I do wrong?" Following in this tradition Otieno presents her revolutionary actions as justified and justifiable. She therefore portrays the colonial system's antithetical reactions as excessive, unjust and unjustifiable. In all these cases, the personae narrating confinement at once plead innocence and expose the wrongness of their confinement. It is however in narrating what the female body undergoes while in state captivity that Wambui's narrative perhaps exemplifies one of its key differences from male narratives.

Male writers write in various details about the brutal beatings and torture of the male body. Gakaara wa Wanjau and JM Kariuki write about how they were stripped and flogged ruthlessly and repeatedly in front of other detainees, male and female, for the "crime" of writing while in the detention camps. In these male narratives emphasis is on their endurance of physical pain rather than unmasking the metaphysical or

emotional pain. However, in narrating her ordeal as a woman detainee Otieno attempts to deal with the trauma of the violation of her body that transcends physical pain. It is to this trauma that we now turn.

To be sure, like her male counterparts, Otieno expresses her anger and horror at being reduced to a mere number as most prisoners are. Upon her arrival on the island of Lamu, Otieno ceases being known by name. She writes about a vicious interrogator who, “shouted at me, reminding me that I would only be Number 59” (83). This depersonalization, objectification, and dehumanization irked her immensely as it did Ngugi and Soyinka when they were reduced to numbers upon detention. She makes references to the physical force that was applied upon her body as the “official” rapist pushed her. “He pushed me to the ground with such force that my back was hurt, causing a scar in my spine that I carry to this day” (83). Like her male counterparts in the Mau Mau era, Otieno is subjected to intense interrogation, which in itself is a form of torture as Scarry observes in her The Body in Pain. Otieno was even branded a “terrorist” by her colonial captors as her fellow male freedom fighters were branded. Yet, it is quite apparent that being a woman meant suffering in ways male detainees would possibly neither suffer nor fathom. Being female made her vulnerable to the use of rape as a weapon against her. This is not to say rape was not a possible tool used against male detainees. Indeed as Caroline Elkins claims in her Imperial Reckoning, the Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya (2005), rape of male detainees was a common

practice in colonial Kenya. The point is that male and females do not experience rape in the same way, repugnant as the experience may be to both sexes. And even though individual victims deal with the effects differently regardless of their sex, it is a fact that only women are capable of being impregnated in the ordeal as Otieno was. Whether it is true that her rape and pregnancy was the official ploy of the British government or not, it goes without saying that the ordeal left her with long-lasting emotional scars.

Granted male prisoners may have suffered the sexual humiliation of the type described by Maina wa Kinyatti in his prison memoir Kenya: A Prison Notebook in which he writes graphically about the eroticized pleasure of the male prison warders as they scrutinized and squeezed prisoners' genitals. Kinyatti narrates with unflinching candor details of searches on the prisoners' bodies at a prison facility:

The conditions that prisoners in Kenya endure are extremely barbaric. Every morning at 5 a.m. male prisoners are ordered out of their cells stark naked for internal searches. The guards search their mouths and armpits, ears and nostrils. They pull, twist and squeeze their genitals. They order the prisoners to face the walls with their legs spread apart to examine their anuses for concealed weapons, money and other contraband. They use sticks to probe the prisoners' rectums. In a sense the guards are more interested in the prisoners' buttocks than in the search. (i)

Kinyatti's graphic recounting of these experiences contrasts sharply with Otieno's near-silence on or muted reference to the rape she experienced. Otieno narrates about how male British soldiers put her on a boat one night and ferried her to Shella Island, away from other detainees. She continues: "Although the British often harassed women, it

was an unusual thing for a woman to be arrested by men alone, let alone taken to an isolated island at night. You can guess what happened to me: I was brutally raped” (81). Later on she recounts another encounter with the official rapist who repeats his attack in a Lamu hotel. She adds: “When I awoke, I pleaded with him to let me go. He raped me two more times before he let me go” (83). What we can glean from her narrative is the places of her rape, the perpetrators of the rape, and her subsequent disorientation. We can only glean, as Otieno’s narrative completely avoids the graphic details of Kinyatti’s narrative. Also, it could well be said, Otieno does not consider it necessary or desirable to provide graphic details; in so much as such an attempt may only serve to pander to the voyeuristic tendencies of the reader. “I was brutally raped” sums up the nature of the rape, and it is left to the reader to imagine and fill in the gaps or better still stifle the imagination about the nature and depth of the horrific act. At any rate to reveal, as she does, that one was raped is on its own a courageous act.

But perhaps more importantly, we may theorize on the paucity of details in the rape by locating the experience in the profundity of the whole gamut of trauma. It would seem the trauma of rape may rob its victims of the gumption or the language to express it much less expressing it in detail. Elaine Scarry has argued that there is a way in which pain is inexpressible in language. Scarry suggests that for the one experiencing or “having” pain it is real, for the one “hearing” pain there is no pain (4). Experientiality

becomes integral in the recognition as well as narration of pain. The inexpressibility of the pain explains the paucity of details regarding this extremely punitive measure.

Indeed perhaps Otieno reveals much more than her forerunner in female narratives of confinement, Mary Prince, who merely berates her slave master for habitually exposing himself to her and commanding her to bathe him. There is need to read between the lines, to read the silences of Prince's narrative and possibly reaching the hypothetical conclusion that she might have been a victim of rape as Otieno was. The difference is that Otieno explicitly mentions the rape while Prince may be said to be skirting around the issue. Yet in both cases, as mentioned earlier, victimhood is inextricably tied up to both womanhood and membership in a "wrong" or underprivileged and underdog group. Both female autobiographers, Otieno as freedom fighter and Prince as slave, deal with traumatic experiences upon which dwelling too much may be tantamount to the symbolic re-opening of the wound that we alluded to earlier. This fear of re-opening wounds is presumably the basis for the near-silence on rape in Otieno's account and silence in Prince's account. Even though such silences or near-silences may tend to some degree "incarcerate" the truth, it has to be acknowledged that expecting the victims to tell more than they choose to tell may be demanding too much of them. It should be reiterated that behooves the readers to "read" the silences and near-silences which in themselves speak volumes about the depth of the

experiences and the significance of the emotions involved. But to what extent is Otieno's account of herself representative of womanhood in general?

The controversy surrounding the testimonio, I, Rigoberta Menchu stems from among other things, the narrator's claim that her experience is metonymic of the experience of all the poor people of Guatemala. Otieno does not overtly make such a large claim. On the whole, she portrays herself, not as a typical female figure more than willing and able to toe the line of patriarchy, but as a woman extraordinaire swimming against the current, and living ahead of her times. She disavows the subservience of her Christian mother and her ilk, joins the struggle for independence, and earns herself the title "Msaja" meaning man that she embraces heartily because of her allegedly masculine attitude and actions. Hence, Otieno's large claim is not about being metonymic of Kenyan women or women in general, but the claim that her life is extraordinary and exemplary. If autobiography is a form of stripping and bathing in public, Otieno does not strip and bathe in public because she believes her body is like all those other female bodies; on the contrary she suggests that she is a very special person in a very special body. One could however argue that her female body is essentially inhibited and encumbered regardless of whether it is in or out of actual prison. Her politics might be extraordinary; her body it seems is not. Her gendered body, therefore, represents the means with which her extraordinary politics is tested.

Wambui Otieno's autobiography comes across as a uniquely feminine portrayal of self as to make tenable the conclusion that it represents the life of other women in similar or same circumstances. To be sure male prison writers addressing the Mau Mau period highlight the valiant acts of women fighters and the trials and tribulations at the hands of an atrocious colonial terror machine. Gakaara wa Wanjau narrates for instance how male prisoners were alarmed that female detainees were denied feminine necessities during their periods of menstruation or about the frequent sexual abuse and rape. However, none of the male writers addresses these issues with the sensitivity that we encounter in Otieno's autobiography. She delineates how throughout her life the female body is contested territory. For instances she narrates how her mother and other adult women in her social milieu were only reticent about disclosing the inevitable physiological changes she would undergo in her puberty;

I remember when I first menstruated at the age of fourteen. I had not the least idea what was happening to me. I thought it was the eighteen-year disease mentioned in the Bible. I ran to my mother in fright but instead of consoling and reassuring me, she angrily chased me away and told me to talk to my older sister, Gladwell. When I told her of my "disease," she laughed for five minutes before she could even talk to me. This was complete cruelty. (28)

Otieno views her female relatives' reactions to her search for answers regarding her body as "complete cruelty." Her mother's anger and her sister's mockery only served to create in Otieno feelings of self-hate. Both mother and sister fail in helping her to accept her female body and a process that is both natural and expected, indeed an abiding and defining quality of femininity.²

Otieno swims against the current not only by embracing as we mentioned earlier, radicalism from her time at Mambere Girls School, but also adopting in her autobiography a stance that is discordant with her mother's reticence on matters sexual. This can be testified by the preponderance of references to these physiological processes in the female body throughout her autobiography. For instance, Otieno talks about policewoman E.P. Heriz-Smith who "gave me cotton wool, as I was having my menstrual cycle" (78). But even more significant is the centrality of menstruation in her attempt to contextualize the oath taking through her female prism. Otieno mentions that the fact of her femininity was critical in the oath taking as the men presiding over the process asked her whether she was menstruating before administering the oath. She adds in parenthesis: "(I learned that a menstruating woman was disqualified from taking the oath at that time, as menstruation was regarded as dirty and a cause of misfortune)" (33).³ This is a telling point in Mau Mau's Daughter, because it tacitly suggests that although women fighters were valued in the political struggle, their bodies were still largely held captive in the "prison house" of patriarchy. Thus her story exposes the incarcerating tendencies and strategies of patriarchy. In other words, although women would be an integral part of the struggle, they were still women, perpetually encumbered by and consigned to the prison house of their own "dirty" female bodies in the purview of a phallocentric and misogynic society. It seems to me this is Otieno's implicit indictment of the patriarchy of the *Mau Mau* movement, the kind of patriarchy

whose shadows loom over her account of politics in postcolonial Kenya, and particularly her husband's burial saga. That an issue such as menstruation would be placed front and center in an autobiography underscores the centrality of the female voice in Mau Mau's Daughter. Male writers deal with issues as only ephemeral and epiphenomenon. Only a radical female voice, such as Otieno's would consider it expedient and prudent to foreground such intimate matters surrounding the female body and in the process expose the myths and misrepresentations of the female body. She therefore, lives up to her billing as one who swims against the current of misogyny, patriarchy and self-defeating reticence.

The atypically defiant female presence that pervades the construction of self in Mau Mau's Daughter's recalls Amadiume's militant Igbo "women who wanted to become not men, but males" (15). In other words as Amadiume observes the flexible gender configuration among the Igbo not only allowed for "matrifocality within a patrilineal society" but also pointed to the interplay between gender and power (15). In other words it is the power associated with maleness that these women crave and attain in accordance with the dictates of the Igbo malleable gender system. The manliness epithet inscribed in Otieno's nickname Msaja (Man), as in the case of the Igbo militant women, gestures towards decoupling sex and gender roles. Yet, if the female "militancy of the Igbo women" which made them virtually "female husbands and male daughters" was socially and generally endorsed, Otieno's militancy and striving for

“maleness” was frowned upon by the strictures and structures of the heavily patrifocal Kenyan and Kikuyu milieu. One could also argue that Otieno’s nickname Msaja, therefore, at once suggests acknowledgment of her militancy and her deliberate transgression of gender barriers. Embedded in the “maleness” of the nickname is the power and privilege that men enjoy or enjoyed and the courage and temerity that Otieno displays in her attempt to attain such power and privilege against all odds. This monument of herself that Otieno constructs in the memoir depicts her as an extraordinary woman doing extraordinary things.

But is Otieno’s attempt to project herself as exceptional, a “manly” woman almost always going against the grain, indicative of her failure to identify with other women? Does she speak for other women? Can she? Her royal ancestry from Waiyaki wa Hinga, the Kikuyu *Muthamaki*, implies that she does not belong in the category of the subaltern Kenyan women contemporaneous to her time. Her family was by any standards materially well endowed, and possessed hundreds of acres of land. Her father was, as she states, the first African chief inspector of police, a position that ensured a steady and reasonable income. Yet she seems to have grown up under the ravages of rural poverty, including having to fetch water from the stream located in a difficult terrain. She writes:

The worst childhood memory I have is of the many hours I spent carrying water to our homestead. Since there was no piped water system, we fetched water from a nearby stream known as Kiharu. The path to Kiharu was very steep, rough, and winding, yet we made as many as ten round trips each day carrying

big-gallon tins full of water . . . I came to dislike Kiharu so much that I have not returned there since I left home in 1954. (26)

Otieno can therefore identify with millions of toiling women within and without Kenya from an experiential point of view. Significantly, it is her autobiography that perhaps has the most comprehensive list of female Mau Mau detainees (See for example, the list on page 79). In the main, male writers frequently list their fellow men, and rarely mention women by name or elide them entirely. Also Mau Mau's Daughter is the only Mau Mau memoir that devotes tremendous space to the activities of female freedom fighters. By resisting subjugation throughout her life, she seems to be telling other less resistant women that it is possible and necessary to move women's concerns from the back burner to the front burner. In her autobiography she often connects her own experience with the plight of other women. She tends to see her experience as exemplary to other women. It is important to her that "my case [the burial dispute regarding her husband] helped bring attention to the plight of other women. For example, it encouraged Flora Braganza of Tanzania, who sued her deceased husband's relatives in the Tanzania supreme court on the right to bury him"(124). In a sense Otieno projects her experience as emblematic of women problems worldwide. Even concerning her prison rape, it is to other women that she turns for solidarity and empathy. Stating why she sought refuge and comfort in the company of other women after the odious ordeal she writes: "The terrible night left a scar in my heart to this day...The same cruel things were done to many women fighters. No one but the victim would be

able to understand how such an officer's brutal act affected one's life psychologically" (84). The women were principally fellow rape victims whether in reality or vicariously. Only they would fully understand.

Otieno clearly indicates that although she is an exceptional woman, the atrocities and deprivations she suffered as a woman resonate with the experiences of any number of other women across time and space. It is therefore tempting to perceive in Otieno's "I" a more inclusive "we" in which women speak about themselves, about their concerns in their own voices. This is so because she appears not to be interested in the unitary "self" alone but the community.

Otieno speaks for the women freedom fighters that helped bring Uhuru at great personal pain and sacrifice including rape and detention for quite a sizeable number of them. She also speaks for women who "rebel" as she does by marrying outside her ethnic group. It is quite in keeping with her character that she "did not heed my mother's advice to find a Kikuyu to marry" (93). For the Kenyan woman of Otieno's generation, marrying outside one's ethnicity was rare. It was a bold step for Otieno to escape the ethnic prison. Marrying across ethnic frontiers may be far more commonplace nowadays. But the tensions and mutual suspicious still abound. There are hence many Kenyans in mixed marriages that would identify with Otieno's story.

But is Wambui Otieno's story a kind of national allegory in Fredric Jameson's terms? In his essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,"

Jameson proposes the reading of non-western texts as national allegories. He states: *“the story of a private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society”* (69). While not endorsing Jameson’s use of the contentious term “third world” it is germane to acknowledge the validity of his claim in light of the interplay between Otieno’s private destiny and the destiny of the general Kenyan public. Otieno’s plural heritage encompassing the Ndorobo, Masai and Kikuyu blood and her marriage to a Luo man presents Kenya’s own national character. Kenya is made of forty-two different ethnic groups, assuming a kind of plural heritage. The Western media’s attempt to characterize the post election violence in Kenya in the early part of 2008, as simply pitting the Kikuyu against the Luo, was too facile. It ignored certain concomitant factors at play in the Kenyan crisis such as the conflict over resources; the colonial origins of the tensions between communities emanating from the divide-and-rule British colonial strategy; the large-scale despair among unemployed youths making the poor turn on the poor in an orgy of self-destruction; the upsurge in criminal gangs capitalizing on the anarchic ambience; and the general greed for power among the political elite that made fanning inter-ethnic violence a stepping-stone to power. At any rate the similarity between Otieno’s story and the story of the Kenyan nation lies in the fact that in both cases plurality has proven a condition of possibility for cohesion and tension, for certainty and ambiguity. Otieno for instance invokes her multiple ancestry with pride and certainty. But for the most part, when she talks about

“we” in her narrative, she means the Kikuyu as in “We Kikuyu have a saying, “Rutiumaga mukaro” (Once a King always a King”)(17). Otieno’s “we” may also refer to all women, all Kenyans, all Africans and all humans; with all these various references imbuing the “we” with ambiguity.

It should not be forgotten that the map of Africa, as is the rest of the formerly colonized world, was the arbitrary work of the European colonists who brought together peoples who were largely “strangers” under the alien name and concept of “nation.” “Alien” because any and all definitions of nation, including Benedict Anderson’s oft-quoted idea of nation as “an *imagined* political community—and imagined as both *limited* and *sovereign*” fall flat in characterizing Kenya’s incongruous and contestatory polities (6). The forty-two different ethnic groups in Kenya found themselves lumped together in a Kenyan nation without their consent and without necessarily having a sense of “we” or commonality that is often associated with nationhood. Following Walker Connor, I suggest that Kenya is a supreme example of a state that contain[s] more than one nation”(37). The state of the Kenyan state that properly speaking fails to live up to being categorized as a nation is predicated on its history from pre-colonial and colonial times. Inter-ethnic conflict existed in the pre-colonial era. Yet when they held sway over what came to be known as Kenya from the late 19th century, the British colonists exacerbated matters by their divide and rule policy that either sowed or watered the seed of discord and suspicion between various linguistic groups or

intensified tensions that were always already there. The tendency of the British to at best divide and rule or at worst rule and ruin, is exemplified and highlighted by the effective colonial propaganda that was aimed at creating antipathy toward the mainly Kikuyu Mau Mau detainees amidst other ethnic groups in which the camps were located from Lodwar to Lamu from Manyani to Kisumu. Regarding this issue Otieno writes:

Colonial officials then saw how dangerous our fight had become and decided to use the usual tactics of divide and rule. Having realized their propaganda had failed, they began circulating lies, saying, for example, that the Kikuyu ate human flesh and killed women and children. (51)

Hence in its ethnic underpinnings of its conception of itself as a nation, Kenya is a constellation of multiple and sometimes incompatible nationalities. That ethnic identity comes first before Kenyan identity seems innocuous on the surface yet it has within it the very potent and pestilential forces that negate nationhood. So strong are ethnic ties that the choice of where to live particularly in the countryside and often in poor urban settlements, voting, and the allocation of posts, and national resources are almost always contingent upon ethnic considerations. To a certain extent even the choice of a marriage mate depends on ethnicity. That is why Otieno's choice of a Luo man for marriage was antithetical to her mother's wishes. Her husband's Umar Kager clan, was equally uncomfortable with the union, and proved by the disparaging remarks they directed upon Otieno during the burial saga that they considered the trial a contest between the Luo and their Kikuyu nemesis.

Otieno's multi-faceted ancestry was not of her making and she embraces it heartily, as Kenyans should in fact embrace the multiple ethnicities that form their "nation." But Wambui goes one better, by not only accepting her own mixed ancestry about which she could do nothing, she does something by marrying someone from another ethnicity, reaching out across ethnic and cultural boundaries and creating for herself the oxymoronic nomenclature entailing the combination of Wambui and Otieno, and hence setting her apart from her contemporaries. Even after being ill-treated and chided by Luo mobs in the immediate aftermath of the burial suit, she still found the heart to work for and with pro-multiparty systems party the Forum for Restoration of Democracy (FORD) then led by Oginga Jaramogi Odinga, a Luo. Otieno argues that the Moi regime fought her through the legal system to ensure she loses her right to bury her husband because she was a fierce critic of the corruption and nepotism in his administration. In effect, her interpretation of the genesis of her loss in the legal tussle lends credence to the fact that that it is foolhardy or myopic to theorize about Kenyan's political quagmire by simply focusing on ethnicity alone in isolation of other complex factors. Yet, even after having said that, it is crucially important not to overlook the ethnic underpinnings of Kenyan's conception of itself as a nation. I am arguing that Otieno's story becomes a lesson in what Kenyans should do, namely accept their fate as Kenyans brought together by forces beyond them, but turning their diverse ethnicities into bridges and not boundaries, to use Alamin Mazrui's expression in a different

context (see Mazrui's Swahili Beyond Boundaries). I am suggesting that for Kenyans to feel as one they have to symbolically commit "ethnic suicide" and become somewhat de-ethnicized by subsuming the primacy of their ethnicities in a more accommodating and inclusive Kenyanness. In this regard, Wambui Otieno has demonstrated how to swim against the current.

In sum, *Mau Mau's Daughter* is an autobiography that makes female issues a focal point, although not exclusively. The autobiography is Otieno's endeavor to break free from both literal and symbolic imprisonment and rightly stakes its claim to the body of significant literature of confinement about the colonial epoch in Kenya but written in the "safety" of the postcolonial moment. Moreover, it is also readable as a call to Kenyans to break free from the jailhouse of ethnic purity.

V

Conclusion

It is evident that the narratives of captivity capturing the colonial era are shaped and defined by the template of the Mau Mau experience. The Mau Mau war is indelibly etched in the corpus of literature of incarceration of the colonial period in Kenya. These narratives are at complete variance with the colonial official narratives that painted the Mau Mau movement and those associated with it as savage, barbaric, and atavistic. On the whole these alternative national tales discount the authorized version of the Mau

Mau historiography in the British colonial imagination. They project the indigenous narrators' heroism and victimhood and "innocence." In these narratives the incarcerated victims of colonial terror attempt to narrate their individual selves and therefore seek to reclaim a sense of selfhood and humanity within the matrix of a wider collectivity characterized by frequent conflation of the boundary between the singular pronoun "I" and its plural counterpart "We." Also, these written incarceration texts echo and emulate aesthetically and thematically the oral texts that thematize and narrativize incarceration.

Yet there are intrinsic differences between the texts on when and where they were written or published, and the level of optimism about Kenya's future prospects as a nation. For instance, JM Kariuki's Mau Mau Detainee was written on the eve of independence soon after his release from detention. It is therefore not surprising to note the confidence it expresses in the ability of post independence Kenya to govern itself without aping the colonial tendency to incarcerate political opponents. In his memoir Kariuki is full of praise for president Kenyatta who would ironically turn out to be the "shining" exemplar of tyranny and intolerance. Gakaara wa Wanjau's Mau Mau Author in Detention was written for the most part in prison, but would not be published until the 1980s. In the preface the author laments about the neglect of independence heroes of which he considered himself to be one, thus underscoring the disenchantment that marked the postcolonial moment in Kenya. Wanjau hopes that exposing future

generations to the heroic history of the freedom fighters who fought and were brutalized in colonial detention camps would help reclaim their lost sense of nationhood. In other words, Wanjau situates his Mau Mau Author in Detention within the tradition of the alternative national narrative, which he posits as an antidote to Kenya's loss of itself as a nation after independence, the key for Kenya to find itself again. Nonetheless the bulk of his text is a record of the atrocities of the colonial regime for which he has no kind words. Perhaps the most trenchant attack on postcolonial Kenya comes from Wambui Otieno whose memoir was published in 1998. But her critique of the postcolonial moment and political repression of post independence Kenya conveniently overlooks Kenyatta's errors of omission and commission and how he set the precedence in large-scale incarceration of political critics.

The tradition of holding captive political dissenters, which began in the colonial period continued unabated in the first two regimes of post independence Kenya. It is to the texts created by individuals incarcerated for political reasons in the post independence period that we turn next in Chapter 4.

Notes

1. By “Kenya’s current leaders” Otieno is making reference to the Moi regime that lasted between 1978 and 2002. It was current in the sense that she wrote the autobiography while Moi was reigning
2. A replay of this rejection from older female relatives for girls grappling with the onset of the physiological changes wrought by puberty is reenacted in several female autobiographies such as Esmeralda Santiago’s *When I was Puerto Rican*.
3. In Kenya the lack of access to sanitary pads is one of the many reasons for girls dropping out of school. Menstruation became a national issue in 2005 when women successfully petitioned the president to exempt feminine needs from taxation.

Chapter 4: Narratives of Incarceration in the Postcolonial Period

I. Introduction

Ghana's independence in 1957 ushered in a new dawn in Africa. The optimism and euphoria that engulfed the continent as country after country across the continent gained independence from colonial rule, has been well documented. Independence from colonial rule in Africa was largely perceived as a watershed moment in the continent's potential and possibility for confronting its own destiny without "outside" interferences. Nevertheless, as Neil Lazarus has suggested in his Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction (1990) expectations exceeded reality. The optimism of independence soon turned into disillusion and dreams into nightmares. Kenya is a supreme example of how independence did not translate into total emancipation, of how there was transition from hope to despair due to tyranny and curtailment of freedom. This chapter examines key prison narratives that emerged in postcolonial or neocolonial Kenya during the Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi regimes. I begin by examining two important prison texts, Abdilatif Abdalla's Sauti ya Dhiki (1973) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Detained (1978) penned in the Kenyatta regime. Then I turn to Alamin Mazrui's Chembe cha Moyo (1981) and Wahome Mutahi's Three Days on the Cross (1991), written in the

Moi era. Each set of two texts is representative of the period in which it emerged or covers.

Kenyatta was arrested under the orders colonial of Governor Evelyn Baring on October 20, 1952 and remained in prison until August 21, 1961. Three months before his release, he was elected in absentia as the president of the Kenya African National Union (KANU). Upon his release a member of the then Legislative Council resigned willingly so Kenya would take his spot. In the election that followed KANU won 83 of the 124 seats in the Legislative Council. As leader of KANU Kenya become Kenya's first Prime Minister on June 1, 1963. When Britain granted independence to Kenya in a ceremony replete with euphoria and optimism at Uhuru Park, Nairobi, with the Kenyan flag replacing the Union Jack, Kenya retained the position of Prime Minister. In 1964 Kenya became a republic and Kenya became its first president. He remained president until his death on August 22, 1978. A former political prisoner and detainee himself, Kenya took a cue from the "colonial potentate" to detain and imprison, and even assassinate critics and dissidents. The assassinations of Pio Gama Pinto, Tom Mboya, and JM Kariuki are attributed to his state terror machine. Both Abdalla and Ngugi were survivors of the Kenya terror machine who lived to tell the story.

Daniel Toroitich arap Moi, Kenya's vice president succeed his former boss, ruling Kenya for 24 years with an iron-fist until his retirement in 2001. Initially a

moderate political leader, Moi seems to have been jolted into dictatorship by an abortive military coup mounted against his regime in August 1982. He espoused what he fondly called the “Nyayo philosophy,” from the Swahili word “nyayo” for ‘footsteps.’ Upon ascending to power Moi vowed to literally walk in his predecessor’s footsteps, which he claimed meant clinging tenaciously to the principles of “love, peace, and unity” in order to foster truly prosperous Kenyan nationhood. But that love, peace, and unity epitomized the Kenyatta era is a theme found only in the official authorized Kenyan national narrative. On the other hand, the alternative narrative has it that Kenyatta set the pace and precedence in silencing opposition through detention, imprisonment, and assassination. Kenyatta is therefore painted in this version of the Kenyan story as one whose example it was dangerous for anyone to follow. According to this alternative national narrative Moi became more and more inclined to emulate his predecessor’s worst qualities, following Kenyatta’s footsteps in turning Kenya into a virtual police state. Moi’s regime saw a monumental increase in political detentions, censorship of media and books, and ruthless crackdown on opposition activism in every cranny and crook of the country. The assassination of foreign affairs minister Robert John Ouko in 1990 was the apex of political intolerance in the Moi regime. Mazrui and Mutahi are examples of survivors of the state terror of the Moi regime who lived to tell their experiences. The prison narratives under review capture and represent the carceral

experience and imagination of the Kenyatta and Moi regimes, vindicating Basil Davidson remark that postcolonial Africa is in “deep trouble” (9).

II. Multiple Voices of the “I” in Abdilatif Abdalla’s *Sauti ya Dhiki*

Kenyan poet Abdilatif Abdalla, whose Swahili anthology *Sauti ya Dhiki*, (Voice of Agony) we now turn to, falls within the category of prisoners of conscience across Africa, for whom prison was a site for writing poetry. Abdalla burst onto the Kenyan public stage in the late 1960s when, then 22 and described by the media as a “revolutionary young man,” he was arraigned before a Mombasa court on charges of sedition (*East Standard* March 20, 1969). In the preface to *Sauti ya Dhiki*, Abdalla states with unequivocal candor, that he was imprisoned because of being found guilty of writing and distributing in a number of towns on the Kenyan coast, a pamphlet titled “*Kenya Twendapi?*”/ ‘Kenya: Where are we headed?’ (xiii). As a member of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga’s Kenya Peoples’ Union, (KPU), Abdalla had been incensed by KANU government’s successful ploy to bar the opposition party’s participation in both the 1966 and 1968 national elections. Abdalla’s involvement in compiling and distributing “*Kenya Twendapi?*” was in response to what he saw as the disenfranchising of Kenyans affiliated to KPU and hence the derailment of the democratic process in the newly independent East African nation. Moreover, he was expressing his disenchantment with the ever-dwindling freedom of expression. Fredric Jameson’s characterization of the

third world intellectual who “produces both poems and praxis” is therefore befitting of Abdalla (25).

Like Soyinka’s famous poem “A Shuttle in the Crypt” and prison memoir The Man Died as well as Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Detained, Abdalla’s Sauti ya Dhiki was written on toilet paper behind prison walls. This collection of poems stands as Abdalla’s response to what he perceived as the government’s criminalization of dissent. It encapsulates the many and varied moods and affective states that engulfed him as he figuratively journeyed in the psychic landscape that the prison ambience fostered. The poet evinced and expressed a wide range of emotions including bitterness, defiance, confidence, regret, and self-doubt as he “traveled” under the conditions of deprivation and dehumanization that this figurative prison journey occasioned. As Soyinka stated regarding his prison poetry, “the poems are a map of the course trodden by the human mind during the years of incarceration” (qtd. in Afejuku 21). Soyinka’s conception of prison poetry as a map suggests that in such poetry readers are able to trace the inmate’s mental, psychic or philosophical journeys. As a map would consist of any number of details and destinations, it contains a whole range of mental or psychic courses or journeys that prison poetry contains. The prisoner as poet is also impelled to speak in many tongues.

In what follows I investigate how poet and political activist Abdilatif Abdalla engages with issues of self representation, self narration, and incarceration. I am

interested in exploring how the poetic intentions of the poet interact with the narrative perspective, and how the prison context influences the content and form of the text. I argue that the poet's "I" appears in motley of colors and is heard in multiple voices as to problematize the notion of a stable, unitary self. At any rate, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have remarked the very notion of a stable unitary self has increasingly come under attack in recent autobiographical criticism. Smith and Watson assert that focusing on "autonomous" individuality or "the sovereign self" is one of the ways in which seminal readings of life narratives in the West have notoriously "narrowed the range of vision" (Smith and Watson 128). They see as misreading initial interpretations of the "I" which hinged on the presumption or assumption that the concept of individuality was sufficient as a determining force in life writing. They write:

But if we recall the diverse modes of life narrating by marginalized, minoritized, diasporic, nomadic, and postcolonial subjects throughout the history of life writing, the concept of individuality is insufficient as determining force. (129)

Smith and Watson call for a more nuanced reading of the "I" in life narratives, a reading that goes above and beyond the facile fascination with an "I" exclusively bound to an autonomous and concrete individuality. They state that James Olney in his Metaphors of the Self: The Meaning of Autobiography, exemplified such nuanced reading when he shifted the terms of debate from "self" to the concept of "subjectivity." Experimental life writing such as Roland Barthes's Roland Barthes's, Michel Lieris's Rules of the Game, Scratches and Scraps, and Luc Sante has amplified the conundrum of the "I."

Indeed the idea of a fragmented self or subject has lately become commonplace, and so is the complicated and often conflicted interplay between subject and object. One could perhaps claim that as early as the early 19th century W.E.B. Dubois was well aware of the instability of the “I” when he conceived of the “double-consciousness” of the African American experience. Smith and Watson posit the existence of at least four types of the “I”; (1) the historical; (2) the narrating; (3) the narrated and; (4) the ideological “I”s. Thus in their purview, the traditional approach to studying the “I”- then and the “I”- now is also inadequate in making sense of the manifold manifestations of the pronoun.

Smith and Watson state that the historical or real “I” a historical is a person located in a particular time and place, whose story the autobiographical act enacts or narrates but whose life is far more complex and transcendent than the story can possibly fully contain or fully embrace. One could think of the autobiographical mode as offering only a slice of that life while other slices exist elsewhere (e.g. in the archives of the police, hospital, schools, churches, family album, or in the memory of others). Nevertheless, this “I” that lives in the real world, they posit is unknown and unknowable. In other words the “I” representing the real historical Abdalla is much more complex than the one presenting the carceral imagination and experience of the late 1960s and late 1970s. The real Abdalla is scattered in the public and private archives of his native Kenya and the countries of his exile (e.g. the schools, airline

manifests, payrolls, mosque registers, family albums, prison and court records, conference panels) and cannot be fully represented by the “I”s or personae of his poetry. Are we left with no viable option but to cling to the “agnostic” belief that despite or because of his poetry Abdalla’s real “I” is both unknown and unknowable?

It would seem what the readers encounter is the narrating “I,” the one telling the story whose range of vision is limited and remains within the confines of the story and lacks the broader experiential history of the historical “I.” Yet this narrating “I,” though knowable and known is equally complex. Smith and Watson assert that the narrating “I” is neither a unified nor stable subject; it is “split, fragmented, provisional, multiple” (60). Invoking Bakhtin in elucidating further on this fragmented subject, always in the process of coming together and of dispersing, they note:

We can read, or “hear” this fragmentation in the multiple voices through which the narrator speaks in the text. In fact, an “I” speaks in tongues or heteroglossia, to paraphrase Bakhtin. These voices can include the voice of publicly acknowledged authority, the voice of innocence and wonder, the voice of cynicism, the voice of postconversion certainty, the voice of suffering and victimization, and so on. (60)

The narrating “I” in Abdalla’s Sauti ya Dhiki speaks in many voices, “speaking in tongues” as it were. The narrating “I” of the preface written in the Tanzanian commercial capital Dar es Salaam in February 22 1973 where the poet was newly exiled upon release differs markedly from the various narrating “I”s or voices of the poems written in prison. Presenting the poet as a political exile in a neighboring country, the “I” of the preface consists of a candid, if tacit, recovering of the memory and

deciphering of the meaning of a just ended carceral experience. It is characterized by a detached prose at once commenting on and summing up the substance of the prison poetry that preceded its writing. It is “writing about writing” that is self-reflexive and explanatory. It is the narrating “I” that comes in the form of a historian of self, writing the history after the fact, and a critic of one’s own earlier literary productions, produced under different circumstances. Despite the apparent similarities between imprisonment and exile which as Kofi Anyidoho ably demonstrates in his edited volume, The Word Behind Bars and the Paradox of Exile (1997), it would be erroneous to conflate these two conditions that involve one’s dislocation from a familiar abode. On the other hand it would seem each poem has its one or more of its own grammatical narrating “I”s, speaking in multifarious voices and exhibiting any number of colors and coming in different guises (e.g. defender of truth, political activist, prisoner, potential martyr, sage and agent of change, self-doubter and neophyte, unborn fetus, disinherited kin, patriot, Panafricanist, brother, friend, philosopher, consensus builder, etc).

It bears noting that, following Francoise Lionnet, Smith and Watson distinguish between the narrating “I” and the narrated “I” by viewing the former as the subject of history and the latter as the agent of discourse. In other words the narrating “I” is the speaking subject while the narrated “I” is the object, the protagonist of the narrative. The narrated “I” is a version of the self that the narrating “I” projects to the readers. Yet like the narrating “I” the narrated “I” is also multiple, fragmented, and

heterogeneous. The similarity between the tags of the narrating and narrated “I”s does not imply that they are one and the same thing. The similarity of the tags mainly lies in the fragmentation the “I”s embody. Yet there are still differences because the narrating “I,” comes across as, for example, the philosophical storyteller, while the narrated “I” is the philosopher character whose story is told.

Lastly, the ideological “I” is to be seen, Smith and Watson argue, as the definition of self that is contingent on prevailing ideological, cultural, and historical notions of personhood during one’s own time. In other words, the cultural and historical situatedness of the autobiographical narrator is determined by the particular moment in history in which he or she lived or lives. The overarching ideological concept of self, of one’s relations to society or estimation of what is evil or good; all these factors are, therefore, present in the autobiographer’s time and space and influence his definition of personhood. In this poststructural perspective, it is possible to read Abdalla’s ideological self, particularly his Marxist activism, as a product of the cultural context that shaped and molded him. Abdalla disclosed in an interview with Chacha Nyagoti Chacha that he was being exposed to and enthused by Marxist literature and ideology that became a crucial catalyst in his political activism (Chacha 19).

Also relevant to our discussion here is what Smith and Watson term “alternatives to an individual self” in the postcolonial world of which Abdalla’s poetry is part.

Calling Western norms of identity into question, these writers, at diverse global locations, produce self-narrations through which they call attention to their status as the West's former "Others" and seek to be heard in different terms, to be accountable, to count. For such autoethnographers the emancipatory dimension of contemporary autobiographical practices and cultural work is primary, as they creatively inquire into histories of their own cultural erasure in the name of civilizing missions and employ modes of oral storytelling. (131-132)

These alternatives to the individual self challenge or dismantle the Enlightenment idea of a unified selfhood, a universal "I" that defies time and location. Gakaara wa Wanjau's use of the "I" discussed in chapter 4 is a supreme example of an "alternative self" commingled with the collective, at once telling its own story and the story of the collectivity, and in the process transgressing upon the conventions of the Western diary. What is not clear is whether the diarist sees himself as part of the West's former or current "Other" given that the diary was penned in a colonial detention camp. How Wanjau's autoethnographical interests suffuse the text and present a counter-hegemonic stance challenging Britain's "civilizing mission" in Kenya was discussed at length in chapter 3. Let it suffice to say that, like Abdalla, Wanjau "seeks to be heard in different terms, to be accountable, to count" as Smith and Watson would put it.

The account Abdalla seeks to give of himself, one could argue, is a self-study that attempts to extrapolate upon the carceral experience and imagination with the tools of poetic prosody, and Kimvita, a dialect of Kiswahili that the British hegemony in East Africa minoritized and marginalized. As I will argue presently, Abdalla's use of

Kimvita is as not only an indicator of cultural nationalism or autoethnographical tendencies, but represents, like Wanjau's Gikuyu, in its intent and intensity a resolute counter-hegemonic endeavor. Yet, the postcolonial context of Abdalla's writing and incarceration means that the thrust of his counter-hegemony is, in the main, leveled against not a colonial autocrat but a postcolonial autocrat, in Achille Mbembe's terms. The context is therefore both different and the same: the transition from the colonial autocrat to the postcolonial autocrat did not change the reality of autocratic rule. In both situations the incarcerated individual feels inhibited, dehumanized, demonized, and deprived, and is probably driven by the emancipatory impulse to narrate herself or himself into being, to tell her or his own story, to count. By writing Sauti ya Dhiki, Abdalla may be said to be trying to claim subjectivity, to create himself from the passivity of an "object" as the prison system would wish him to be, to a speaking rational "subject."

It is instructive that Abdalla does not state explicitly that he wrote the anthology of prison poems in order to transform himself from object to subject nor does he present any other overall objective. In the preface Abdalla states the reason of his incarceration i.e that he was imprisoned for sedition, but not the overall reason for his writing while incarcerated. He only singles out six poems the context of whose writing or the identity of whose audience he reckoned needed some clarification. For instance, he states that he wrote "Tuza Moyo"/ 'Take Heart' in response to a poem he quotes from a sympathizer

who he does not name; he wrote “Zindukani”/ ‘Wake Up’ for the Coastal people; ““Sikakawane na Kimya”/ ‘Don’t be too Quiet” for his elder brother Ahmad Nassir; and “Kwa heri”/ ‘Bye bye’ for his fellow inmate Israel Otieno. On the whole therefore, Abdalla leaves it up to the reader to decipher his motivations for writing. His summation of the collection of poems is largely ambiguous when it comes to the overarching motivations of his writing. He states:

Mashairi yaliyomo humu yanaahusiana na yaliyonifika hata ikabidi nifungwe; kifungo chenyewe; niliyokuwa nayo moyoni; imani yangu na maoni yangu kuhusu yaliyokuwa yakitendeka nje ya kuta za gereza.

The poems in this collection are preoccupied with the circumstances of my imprisonment; the experience of imprisonment, my inner most thoughts, my beliefs and opinions on things that transpired beyond the prison walls (xvii).

Abdalla’s summation therefore does not categorically specify why he wrote the poems. Embedded in this statement of content that tends to lack intent, is an implied narrative imperative that is perhaps not explicitly articulated. Nonetheless, the import of this statement is that in it Abdalla calls attention to the very act of narrating itself, underlining the need or desire to narrativize or narrate self. To unlock the answer to the question: “Why?” we have to look beyond the poet rather than look up to him. Granted he states regarding, the poem “Moyo Iwa na Subira” that it was motivated by the need to comfort himself after hopes of being released from prison on Kenyatta Day October 20, 1971 were dashed (xiii). But if we bestow undue authority to this selective authorial statement, we may fall into the snare of concluding that it is the only poem the poet

writes to console himself. Conversely, we would miss the point if we entirely ignored what the poet says about his motives or motivation for writing. For one thing, the poet drops telling hints over and above the ones discussed above, in disclosing the motivation behind his writing, hints connected to prison as the reason and site for writing that we cannot afford to overlook. He states: “[P]engine nisingeyatunga mashairi haya kama nisingelikuwa nimefugwa”/ ‘[P]erhaps I would never have written these poems if I was not imprisoned’ (xiii).

Roland Barthes’s introduction of the notion of the “death of the author” and W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley’s idea of “intentional fallacy” tended to debunk any tangible basis for the author to claim he or she had this or that intention for writing whatever they write. However, I resist the temptation to buy wholesale Barthes’ proposition of the death of the author, or Wimsatt and Beardsley’s “intentional fallacy” and to conclude that the onus rests only with critics to surmise the writer’s motive. I propose that in trying to extrapolate upon the authorial intentions, we should neither ignore entirely what the author says are his motives nor exclusively dwell on what the work does not say about itself. Thus I insist on readerly inference, (and not intuition), that takes into account the context and the text to be perhaps the more appropriate option in explaining the motivation for writing. As I have already stated, staking a claim on “subjectivity” and counterposing a different mythology of oneself or offering a counter-hegemonic account of oneself, seems to be a possible and plausible reason for

Abdalla's prison poetry. So is seeking comfort which Abdalla reductively applies only to one poem, yet the therapeutic or scriptotherapeutic properties of his entire collection of poems is self-evident as is the very act of writing itself. Again, these are not the only possible reasons why Abdalla composed his prison poems, but further debate on the question of motivation should not detain us here (see Chacha's Ushairi wa Abdilatif Abdalla: Sauti ya Utetezi).

Following Kimani Njogu in his Poetry as Dialogue, I am prompted by the "dialogic reverberations" in Abdalla's poems in Sauti ya Dhiki to extend the frame of reference of the idea of heteroglossia and dialogism beyond the novel genre, contrary to Bakhtin's earlier configuration of the concept (Bakhtin 499). I am also attentive to the way in which Abdalla participates in a social dialogue in his poetry, both taking and giving at the same time so that in Bakhtin's terms, his word "in language is half someone else's." I argue that there are in Sauti ya Dhiki fragmented, multiple, and heterogenous "I"-s that imbue it with a sense of multivocality, which we cannot afford to ignore. In other words, in his collection of poems, Abdalla speaks in tongues, in different languages and accents to articulate the feelings and imaginings of multiple "I"s. Pinpointing the multiplicity of languages at play in the social heteroglossia, Bakhtin wrote:

Thus an illiterate peasant, miles away from any urban center, naively immersed in an unmoving and for him unshakable everyday world, nevertheless lived in several language systems: he prayed to God in one language (Church Slavic), sang songs in another, spoke to his family in third and, when he began to dictate

petitions to the local authorities through the scribe, he tried speaking yet a fourth language (official –literate language, “paper” language). All these are *different languages*, even from the point of view of abstract socio-dialectological markers (506).

In a sense, I claim for Abdalla’s poetry, the “illiterate peasant’s” capacity and tendency to speak “different languages” by different “I”s that the poet parades to us in an attempt to narrate himself, to orchestrate different themes, to serve his various “semantic and expressive intentions”(498). The difference in utterances and voices accounts for the varying subjective positions and subjectivities that are embodied in the “I” of Abdalla’s poetry.

Bakhtin specifically locates the dialogic aspect of artistic expression in the genre of the novel. He bases his analysis on the concept of heteroglossia (linguistic variability), which typifies the novel, and as a consequence tends to set it apart from the other genres. Bakhtin argues that the novel is more prone to intertextuality, since it has the capacity and capability of entertaining a multiplicity of social voices and a wide range of “links and interrelationships.” Bakhtin’s assessment of the stylistic elements of the novel is keenly attentive to the lack of uniformity in the novel, pointing to what he aptly describes as the “dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia (32). Further, he argues that the novel contains a number of voices, which may be also seen as different languages that come to bear on the formation of the literary entity. A novel therefore consists of languages that are both varied and at the same time internally variegated. Based on his notion of the novel as a meeting point for

these voices and languages, Bakhtin gives us his definition of the novel as: a diversity of social speech types, sometimes even a diversity of languages and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized (32).

In focusing on the uniqueness of the individual speaking person's speech, Bakhtin is not oblivious to the fact that whatever we say does not necessarily originate with us. He argues that an individual's speech is an extension and an expansion of another person's speech. There is a sense in which an individual uses another person's speech, in the novel (as in the real life), but in the process individuates and transforms its earlier meaning or nuances. Thus, Bakhtin views heteroglossia as "another's speech in another's language," underscoring continuities and disjuncture in speech or utterance, characterized by retention, adaptation and appropriation as the speech travels from one user to the next and from one context to the other (40).

In sum I use Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic and heteroglossia to demonstrate the various voices that emerge in Abdalla's prison poetry as evident from his style and thematic concerns, and how prison as a writing site impinges on the writing. I bring to the fore the multivocality of his poetry and to demonstrate how it speaks to Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. In this regard, I want to propose that the title *Sauti ya Dhiki*, loosely translated into English as 'Voice of Agony,' is not one singular voice, but is perhaps better interpreted as multifarious voices of agony or anguish expressed by the one prison poet (Ohly 82). The multiplicity of voices is evident not only from the

diversity of themes that preoccupy Abdalla, but the various stylistic and linguistic strategies he employs in his anthology. Moreover, Abdalla purports to speak for others—the underprivileged and deprived—in expressing disillusion with the illusion of prosperity in post independence Africa in general and Kenya in particular. His *sauti* or voice is hence a synthesis of many voices, not a cacophony, but a polyphony through which we vicariously hear the unspoken agonies of the silent fellow sufferers or unspeaking others. But let us briefly make forays into the Swahili prosodic tradition in which Abdalla’s poetic oeuvre belongs.

Sauti ya Dhiki is a collection of 40 stanzaed poems that Abdalla wrote in the period of his incarceration between September 1969 and December 1972, with only one poem, “N’sharudi” (I am back), being written after the completion of his prison term. All the poems adhere strictly to the rules of Swahili prosody. In one of his lectures at the University of Dar es Salaam in the early 1970s Abdalla explained the reason for his insistence on prosody: “wataalamu wa ushairi wa Kiswahili kwa umoja wao wamekubaliana kuwa shairi la Kiswahili ni lazima liwe na vina na mizani. Vitu hivi viwili ni kama roho ya shairi la Kiswahili.” / ‘Scholars of Swahili poetry have unanimously agreed that the Swahili poem must have rhyme and metre. These two things are like the soul of the Swahili poem’(Chacha 34). It is not entirely true that *all* scholars of Swahili poetry concurred then or concur now with that view, unless by “all” Abdalla implies all prosodists.

Clearly, Abdalla's assertion "watalaamu wa ushairi wa Kiswahili kwa umoja wao wamekubaliana kuwa shairi la Kiswahili ni lazima liwe na vina na mizani," 'scholars of Swahili have unanimously agreed that the Swahili poem must have rhyme and metre' demonstrates how much premium poets like him attach to adherence to Swahili prosody. But this seeming protectionism emanates from construing Swahili poetry as a heritage handed down from generation to generation amongst the Swahili. It is therefore appropriate to situate Abdalla's poetry within the Swahili prosodic convention, which also entails the tradition of using poetry as a vehicle for protest and resistance as Mulukozi amply illustrates in his essay "Protest and Resistance in Swahili Poetry 1660-1885"(1982). We shall return to the question of poetry as resistance shortly, but at this point it is necessary to give an overview of Abdalla's poetry within the matrix of Swahili prosody.

As Abdalla's remarks above show Swahili prosodists consider *mizani* (metre) and *vina* (rhyme) not only as the mainstay of Swahili verses but mandatory as well. In their view, reckless deviation from this norm would render a poem *guni* (defective or deficient) resulting in the devaluation of the artistic composition (60). Sheikh Amri Abeid, (1954) William Hichens (1962), Lyndon Harries (1962), J.W.T. Allen (1967), and Shariff (1988) attempted the explanation of these highly rigid and clearly defined prosodic conventions. However, as Mohamed H. Abdulaziz in Muyaka: 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry (1979), and Gudrun Mieke and others in Kala Shairi (2002),

show the classifications are often problematic in many ways, not least among them the tendency to conflate *utendi* and *mashairi*, which are two distinct poetic genres with the former consisting of longer narrative or epic poems, while the latter consists of poems that are relatively short and may be lyrical. In his discussion of Muyaka's poems, Abdulaziz cogently cautions: "At the purely metric and rhyme level the *mashairi* forms give one an impression of a highly rigid framework that would be bound to give rise to artificial diction and the reducing of the whole poetic work to mere versification" (48). But Abdulaziz's rigorous analysis of Muyaka's verses reveals the poet's outstanding artistic astuteness within the confines of prosodic conventions, an astuteness that made Muyaka a model to look up to by his 19th century contemporaries and future generations of Swahili poets, including Abdalla. If Muyaka's mastery of prosody enabled him to successfully merge form and content to produce verses of considerable appeal across generations, Abdalla too succeeds in debunking the myth of empty artificiality and insipid versification in his poetry.

Abdalla's poems in Sauti ya Dhiki, like Muyaka's, belong to the *mashairi* genre. In the volume his shortest verses such as "Tuza Moyo," (6) "Tendekezo," (62) and "Kokoiko," (64) have only one stanza of four lines each while the longest poem, "Kutendana" has 147 strophes. The bulk of the poems are short, roughly under eight stanzas each. The Swahili quatrain *tarbia*, is made up of four lines with two hemstiches each with eight vocal syllables to the hemistiche and a rhyme pattern ab, ab, ab bx.

Therefore the total number of measured syllables in each stanza is 64. As Abdulaziz aptly argues, Muyaka was instrumental in popularizing this syllabic measure and rhyme pattern (50). In Abdalla's volume another pattern too, ab, ab, ab, bx also appears severally. One other important aspect of *mashairi* as a poetic genre is the last line in the first stanza, called *kituo*, which acts as a refrain and is often repeated in all the subsequent stanzas for emphasis and musical purposes. The centrality of the musicality is underscored by J.W.T. Allen's observation that "[a]ll Swahili verse form was and almost all is composed to be sung" (179). Abdalla's own brother Ahmed Nassir (Juma Bhalo) is an accomplished *taarab* music composer and singer while Abdalla himself has recited or sung his poems in various places and times in accordance with the tradition of performance in Swahili poetry (82).

However, it must be mentioned that Abdalla does employ a wide range of styles within the *mashairi* genre. He uses 8 main poetical patterns and another 17 minor ones (Ohly 83). Besides the predominant *tarbia* or quatrains, he also uses *tathlitha*, a verse with three-lines in each stanza as in "Nakumbuka,"/ 'I Remember You,' (11) "Mamba,"/ 'The Crocodile' (10) and "Watiliye Pamba"/ 'Do not Listen to Them' (61).

Abdalla also uses the *msuko* poetical form in which the last line is shortened and is not divided into two hemistiches with a caesura, as in "Kamliwaze"/ 'Comfort her' (5). But since "Kamliwaze" indeed has five lines in every stanza, it may also be said to be a *takhmisa* or a verse with five lines in each stanza. There are variations that

can be seen in the measured syllables in the stanzas. For example instead of the 8+8 in each hemistich we also encounter verses such as in “Yatakoma,”/ ‘Suffering will End’ (28) with 6+6, “Watiliye Pamba” /‘Do not Listen to Them’ (61) which has 8+5 and “Mamba” (10) with 4+8 as the metric measure in each line.

Abdalla’s use of dialogue verse forms also deserves mention in this overview of his poetry. There are at least three types of dialogue verses that he uses in his prison poetry; (1.) the *fumbo* or riddle; (2.) dialogue between two characters; and (3.) dialogue accompanied with authorial comment. The *fumbo* that typically anticipates audience participation is a dialogic characteristic of Swahili poetry that demonstrates Abdalla’s keen awareness of a common and shared poetic tradition. In effect, the *fumbo* affirms Kimani Njogu’s premise that Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism should not be restricted to the novel, justifying what Njogu describes as the emergence of “a discomfort within dialogic criticism with the privileging of the novel genre” (1). A good example of *fumbo* is the poem “Mamba” (10). Such verse form presupposes that there is an audience that should provide the answer to the riddle hence Ohly’s appropriate reference to it as “semi-dialogue” (85). In “Mnazi” (17) two brothers argue over their father’s inheritance of mnazi / the palm tree, while in “Kutendana”/ ‘The Mutual Act,’ (89) there is a heated dialogue between a man exhibiting desire and a woman rejecting his sexual overtures, with the author interjecting intermittently as the third voice to adjudicate in the row that ensues.

It would seem that in writing poems that adhere strictly to traditional Swahili poetic prosody, Abdalla presumably undercuts his spirit of resistance and protest, and betrays a desire to conform to an established artistic order. Yet his choice of the Kimvita Swahili dialect rather than the so-called Standard Swahili, underscores his spirit of resistance and protest. The Interterritorial Language Committee that recommended and popularized the Kiunguja dialect of Zanzibar as *Kiswahili Sanifu*, Standard Swahili, was the brainchild of the colonial presence in East Africa and did not have African representation. The arbitrary touting of Kiunguja as the purest and most authentic Swahili dialect from all the twenty some dialects, has been a matter of contention since the colonial period in East Africa, with some arguing that it is indeed the Kimvita dialect that deserves pride of place, because the oldest Swahili poems were composed in it, particularly, the poems of eminent and vastly influential poet Muyaka bin Hajji. Whereas the contingency of place of birth is crucial in Abdalla's use of Kimvita, it bears noting that in using it so skillfully in what has come to be regarded as one of the most compelling Swahili poetry anthologies in contemporary times, Abdalla manages to launch a subtle assault on those privileging Kiunguja as the dialect of sublime artistic expression. The choice of Kimvita too speaks to the politics of identity with Abdalla situating his identity within the social milieu in which he was born and bred in Mombasa, the cradle of Kimvita.

Since all the poems are dated chronologically, I concur with Ohly who describes this anthology as a kind of “poetical diary” that registers Abdalla’s varying moods, feelings and thoughts while he languished behind prison walls so much so that we can follow them “month by month” (87). The poems trace in almost chronological fashion the wide range of thematic concerns that preoccupied the poet, therefore accentuating the polyphony of his prison poetry. I will shortly be returning to the question of multivocality. But let me mention here that Ohly’s characterization of the collection as a form of “poetical diary” suggests its affinity with or proximity to what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson term genres of “life writing” such as autobiography or memoir. Regarding autobiography William Howarth succinctly remarks that it is an attempt by individuals to “carve a public monument out of their private lives” (92). The interplay between the private and the public sphere is quite pronounced in Sauti ya Dhiki as this collection of poems constitutes Abdalla’s imposing “public monument,” at once attracting critical acclaim and raising condemnation within and without literary circles. Yet, what is foremost in the content and context of Sauti ya Dhiki is the spirit of defiance and resilience as an examination of the wide range of themes in the volume would reveal. In other words, Abdalla’s poetry comes across as a form of resistance to what he perceives as tyranny and bad governance in postindependence Kenya.

The political engagement that implicated and imbricated Abdalla in what the Kenya government viewed as seditious activities was not in the least extinguished by

his prison experience. If anything his incarceration seems to have at once further embittered him against the state apparatuses, and invigorated his zeal to operate as both artist and political activist. Indeed for Abdalla, art and activism appear more or less like Siamese twins, as the examination of his thematic concerns in Sauti ya Dhiki bears out. On the whole Sauti ya Dhiki is Abdalla's response to the vicissitudes and injustices of imprisonment, a manifesto of his political ideology, and an indictment of Kenyatta's authoritarian rule and the apparent impunity with which the regime broke independence promises. His poetry is therefore necessarily tendentious. That Abdalla would muster the courage to mount such a trenchant critique of Kenyatta's government within prison walls at a time when writing against the government was tantamount to committing suicide is an astounding feat. One may speculate that perhaps by sustaining a stance antithetical towards the government while within prison walls, Abdalla was being true to his character and nature. And yet the various explicit and implicit ways within which Abdalla expresses his iconoclasm and militancy are an index of his multiple poetical voices with which he resists oppression from state apparatuses.

Abdalla projects himself as the fearless voice of truth in his anthology that abounds with poems bearing overt political overtones. The very first poem in the collection *N'shishiyelo ni Lilo* ("I am unshakeable") is a supreme example of Abdalla's uncompromising position and his politicization and thematization of the "truth" as he riles against the ruling elite in Kenya:

Walinena walimwengu, wa zama zilopisiye
Kwamba kweli i tungu, kwa yule aambiwaye
Nami haya ndugu yangu, sasa niyaaminiye
Asojua nasikiye, apeleleze ajuwe

Kweli naifahamu, haipendwi aswilani
Kwa mja hiyo ni sumu, mbaya iso kifani
Mwenye kuitakalamu, hapendezi katwani
Sasa nshayaamini, ni kweli haya ni kweli

Kweli imenitongeya, kwa kuinena mwendani
Wale nilowaambiya, wamenitiya dhikini
Wameniona mbaya, kumshinda Firauni
Kweli,sasa naamini, si wangi waipendao

Kweli naliwaambiya, wakuu wa nti hini
Haeleza moya moya, kwa wanati wa ntini
Kuhusu walofanyiya, upande wa Upinzani
Sasa kuwamo tabuni, nalipwa kwa hiyo kweli

Kweli lilipowatoma, kama dasturi yake
Wao wakaona vyema, afadhali wanishike
Wanishike hima hima, hima ndani waniweke
Ngomeni n'adhibibike, nijute kusema kweli

Mno wanganiadhibu, adhabu kila namna
Na mangi yanganiswibu, ya usiku na mtana
Hayatakuwa sababu, ya kuniasa kunena
Kweli nitapoiyona, tanena siinyamai

Mateso yao yangawa, nda kuumiza mtima
Hayatakuwa ni dawa, ya kutonipa kusema
Ni bure wajisumbuwa, nilipo nnasimama
Si 'mi wa kurudi nyuma, kweli ilipo 'tasonga

Kweli naitiya tamma, nikuage ndugu yangu

Kweli si mwenye kukoma, kuwambiya walimwengu
Kweli si'yati kunena, katika uhai wangu
Nami kwa upande wangu, hi'yambiwa 'takubali

So said the people of the world, of times past
That truth is bitter, for the one being told
As for me, my comrades, I have come to believe so
May the one who does not know, seek to know

Truth is not at all palatable, this indeed I know
For man it is poisonous, dangerous beyond compare
Whoever says the truth, does not become popular at all
Now I believe this, it indeed is so

Truth has imperiled me, for speaking it my friend
Those to whom I spoke, subject me to anguish
They view me as evil, more evil than Pharoah
Now I know the truth, is not loved by many

I spoke the truth, to the leaders of this country
I recounted one by one, to the citizens of this country
How they had been deprived, in their opposition ranks
Now being in trouble, is the price I am made to pay

When truth seared them, as it was wont to do
To arrest me, they deemed it fit
To arrest me speedily, to incarcerate me speedily
To make me suffer in the fort, so I may regret speaking the truth

However much they punish me, punishing me in whichever way
Whatever hardship I undergo, in daytime and nighttime
I will not be dissuaded, I cling to my utterances
Whenever I see the truth, I will speak [it], I will not keep mum

Even if their torture, is heart-wrenching
It would not be the antidote, for stopping me from speaking

They are wasting their time, [as] I am immovable
I am not the sort that retreats, where the truth is that is where I
go

Let me stop here on matters of truth, to bid you farewell brother
I will not stop telling the truth, to let the world know
I will not abandon the truth, in all my life
And I will accept the truth, when someone else tells me. (1-4)

The poem opens with reference to the ancient sages, who stated “*kweli i tungu*”/ ‘truth is bitter.’ Invoking the wisdom of *wahenga* or ancient sages is not uncommon among the Swahili and most other African communities. This invocation is in effect a reference to a shared and common text from the collective linguistic and literary fund that is recognizable to a wide spectrum of East African Swahili speakers. Bakhtin’s assertion that “the word in language is half someone else’s” is proven here as Abdalla attributes the axiomatic statement to ‘the people of times past’ and puts the borrowed words to his own use (504). Quite appropriately Abdalla uses an archaic expression “*wa zama zilopisiye*”/ ‘of times past’ rather, than a more contemporary expression as “*zama zilizopita*,” to at once ensure there is harmony in the metre and rhyme, with for instance the last word in each line in the stanza ending with the syllable ‘ye,’ and also to emphasize the antiquity of the sages and hence the depth of their wisdom and the veracity of their views. Abdalla makes a shrewd choice of words to reinforce his argument on the necessity and the hazards of speaking the truth.

These images (notwithstanding that they may be somewhat trite) target the sense of taste, compelling the reader to imagine or experience mentally the taste of bitterness and to envision the danger of truth as something with ominous fatal potentialities, namely poison, in the purview of those in power. In the sixth stanza the poet appeals to our sense of touch when he says “Kweli lilipowatoma, kama dasturi yake” / ‘When the truth seared them, as it was wont to do’, imbuing truth with the burning or searing ability like fire. In appealing to our sense of taste and touch, the poet reifies and concretizes an abstract a term as truth.

In this poem, Abdalla comes across as an inexorable purveyor and defender of the truth. As the voice of truth, the poet knows he must remain steadfast and unflinching in the wake of state repression. The final stanza is very emphatic on this, using the repetition of “kweli”/‘truth’ in every line to drive the point home. He is cognizant of the fact that the “[t]ruth is not at all palatable,” and yet he is firm in his determination to speak it. The poem is quite explicit in pointing to those he told the truth; namely the Kenyan political leadership, and the Kenyan population. It is tempting and perhaps rightly so, to ask as Pontius Pilate did ask Jesus Christ according to the Gospels; what is the truth? A closer examination of the text and context suggests that the political message in “*Kenya Twendapi?*” is the “truth” at issue here. The government found the message unpalatable and deemed it necessary to lock its putative source and carrier behind bars. In stating, “Wameniona mbaya, kumshinda Firauni,”

/'They [the government] view me as evil, more evil than Pharaoh,' the poet alludes to the infamous and obstinate Pharaoh who in Biblical and Koranic tradition is cast in very negative light and is regarded—like Satan the Devil—as the very epitome of vice and darkness. Pharaoh, like Satan, is said to have opposed the outworking of God's purposes by obstinately refusing to release the Israelites from bondage. The line therefore suggests what we may call "pharaohization of opposition" to governmental authority. In stating that the government regarded him worse than Pharaoh, Abdalla stresses the intensity of government antipathy towards opposition and dissent. In other words, the line underscores the government's predilection toward pharaohization, criminalization or demonization of his political activism. But as he clearly shows in this first poem, he is far from being muted in his vocation as the voice of truth, which pines for the pathway to social justice and the expansion of democratic space in Kenya.

Abdalla's idea of truth is inextricably linked to activism and advocacy for social justice. His voice of presents his voice of truth as one which could not be muted by his prison experience, and if stopping his questioning and defiant mind was the government's rehabilitation plan for him, it had terribly failed as his prison poetry demonstrates. In respect to the government's failure to at least muffle or at best mute his resistance, the poem succinctly puts it in the line, "Ni bure wajisumbua, nilipo nnasimama" / 'They are wasting their time, [as] I am Immovable.' "N'shishiyelo ni Lilo" is therefore a poem that serves as a preamble to Abdalla's uncompromising

political stance and protest against the Kenyatta regime. The same theme of defiance is articulated in the poem “Siwati”/ ‘Never Shall I Abandon it,’ in which the poet says:

Siwati n’shishiyelo, siwati kwani niwate?
Siwati ni lilo hilo, ‘talishika kwa vyovyote
Siwati ni mimi nalo, hapano au popote
Hadi kaburini sote, mimi nalo tufukiwe

Never shall I abandon, whatever I have clung to, why should I abandon it?
Never shall abandon it, I will stick to it whatever happens
Never shall abandon it, neither here nor anywhere else
Until we are both in the grave. (9)

In stressing his determination, the poet uses the repetition of “Siwati” in every line in the entire poem. The rhetorical question, “kwani niwate?”/ ‘why should I leave it?’ presumes that the option of abandoning his activism is at best untenable and at worst unthinkable. So committed to the political struggle is the poet that he is willing to die for it as the line, “Hadi kaburini sote, mimi nalo tufukiwe”/ ‘Until we are both in the grave” (where “it” is a pronoun referring to the poet’s political activism). This poem is in harmony with Abdalla’s impassioned message of willingness to sacrifice even one’s own life in the pamphlet *Kenya Twendapi?* And as the last stanza in “Siwati” seems to suggest, he believes God would always be on his side in the just cause.

Siwati nimeradhiwa, kufikwa na kila mawi
Siwati ningaambiwa, niaminiyo hayawi
Siwati kisha nikawa kama nzi; hivyo siwi
Thamma nakiri siwi, na Mn’ngu nisaidiya

Never shall I abandon it, I would rather face every sort of evil

Never shall abandon it, even when they tell me I believe in the unattainable
Never shall abandon it, and become like a fly, that way I cannot be
That indeed I cannot be, and God help me. (9)

The appeal to God for help in his political struggle is another continuation of the trope of the marriage of politics and piety in Abdalla's art and activism, never mind that Mn'ngu is clearly a typographical error of the contracted form of "Mungu"/ 'God,' namely "M'ngu." It should be noted in parenthesis, that the deletion of certain vowel sounds is not uncommon in spoken Kimvita and in many of his verses Abdalla captures the essence of the spoken word. Here we encounter the synthesis of the devout religious and firebrand political self of Abdalla's poetry. Other poems in which the explicitness of Abdalla's message is unmistakable include "Yatakoma," (28) "Siwati," (9) "Kuno Kunena," (23) and "Mamaetu Afrika" (36).

Yet, there are also poems in which the poet masks his message in metaphor thus requiring the readers to delve behind the surface to decipher the underlying meaning(s) and implications. In such instances, he comes across as an astute riddle maker who metaphorizes human experience and challenges the audience to untangle the riddle. In this regard his poems serve multiple purposes including being; (1) interactive entertainment (e.g. crossword or jigsaw puzzles etc) which fully engages the intellect and attention of the audience for realization of the complete range of meaning; (2) a testament to the poet's creative ability and ingenuity; and (3) a decoy that may camouflage both the message and the intent of the poet. For Abdalla the fourth purpose

of riddle making is especially important, given the prison environment in which he wrote and the prevailing curtailment of freedom of expression during the Kenyatta presidency. Abdalla's poem "Mamba," is a classic example of the use of metaphor as a stratagem for critiquing a regime he found wanting, immoral and rotten. He wrote:

Nami nambe, niwe kama waambao
Niupambe, upendeze wasomao
Niufumbe, wafumbuwe wawezao

Kuna mamba, mtoni metakabari
Ajigamba, na kujiona hodari
Yuwaamba, kwamba 'taishi dahari

Memughuri, ghururi za kipumbavu
Afikiri, hataishiwa na nguvu
Takaburi, hakika ni maangavu

Akumbuke, siku yake itafika
Roho yake, ajuwe itamtoka
Nguvu zake, kikomeche zitaifika

Afahamu, mtu hajui la kesho
Hatadumu, angatumia vitisho
Maadamu, lenye mwanzo lina mwisho.

Let me also speak, so I can be like those who speak
Let me adorn the poem, and make it appealing to the readers
Let me compose a riddle, that those who can may untangle [it]

In the river there is a crocodile, highly conceited
He brags, and regards himself as invincible
He claims, he will live forever

He is a braggart, thumping his chest foolishly
He imagines, his might will not dissipate
For indeed pride, is before a fall

He should remember, when his day comes
He should know, his spirit will leave him
His might, will reach its end

Let him know, no one knows about tomorrow
He will not last forever, even if he uses threats
As what has a beginning, must also have an end. (10)

In this poem written in the *tathlitha* genre, (three lines in each stanza), Abdalla presents the riddle of a rapacious and supercilious reptile, the crocodile, deluding itself with the possession of an illusory and elusive immortality. He openly challenges the readers to unravel the riddle. The oral performance involving an artist presenting riddles, (especially those with comparisons with animals), to audiences and challenging them to unravel them is not uncommon in the African oral tradition. It is instructive that in declaring his intention in the beginning of this poem, Abdalla uses the contraction of “niambe” namely “nambe” literally meaning “I speak” rather than to “niandike”/ ‘I write,’ reflecting consciously or unconsciously the orality with which riddles are associated. The relative brevity of the poem harmonizes with the nature of the genre of *mafumbo* in the Swahili oral tradition; just long enough to provide clues for the audience to respond to the conundrum. The power of riddles lies in their indirectness and the figurativeness. The power and beauty of metaphor is a distinguishing feature of riddles.

Yet the unraveling of the tenor represented by the vehicle “mamba” or crocodile in this poem would hardly have been “pleasing to the ruling regime in Kenya. Therefore, the poet’s use of metaphor is a stratagem in which he assails Kenyatta’s arrogant leadership and false sense of security. The point of the poem is that no matter how powerful Kenyatta may be and no matter how long he holds the reins of power, there is bound to be an end to his rule and his life. Abdalla reminds Kenyatta that as a mortal his time to expire must surely come, sooner or later. Abdalla, yet again turns to the authority of the ancient sages and invokes a famous Swahili proverb “Hakuna lenye mwanzo lisilokuwa na mwisho”/ ‘There is nothing with a beginning that has no end.’ However, apparently, due to the dictates of metre and rhyme, the poet paraphrases the proverb and renders it as “lenye mwanzo lina mwisho”/ ‘what has a beginning, must also have an end.’ Although the syntactic structure of the proverb is altered in the poem, the substance remains the same, i.e. it aptly carries the Swahili and Islamic worldview on transience or impermanence as quintessential attributes of human life on earth. The metric pattern in the poem is 4+8 with the second hemistich seeming to at once complement and to respond to the first one in each line, evoking the enactment of a real exchange between the artist who presents a riddle and the audience which attempts to figure out the solution.

When we relate the form to the content, it seems to me that the four-syllable first hemistich is contrasted with the eight syllable second one, with the first one showing

the reality of the shortness of human life, whereas the long one shows the appearance of longevity or eternity. Further, the overall brevity of the poem, apart from situating it within the tradition of performance of riddles as we discussed above, also accentuates the brevity of human life and the inevitability of death. In other words, Abdalla attempts to imagine the demise of Kenyatta, and the end of tyranny in Kenya. Thus the crocodile of Abdalla's poem is synonymous with what Achille Mbembe calls the "postcolonial potentate" or "postcolonial autocrat" who is blinded by a rather warped attitude toward mortality and his own subjectivity. As Mbembe argues apropos the autocrat, his ostensibly absolute subjectivity is hallucinatory, fake and empty. Its facticity lies in caricature only: "The absolute does not exist in reality" (165). Given the autocrat's imagined and imaginary immortality and invincibility, it takes considerable courage for an imprisoned poet to even think about the autocrat's death; it is tantamount to thinking the unthinkable or imagining the unimaginable. As a matter of fact to have the audacity to imagine the crocodile's end or the President's death as Abdalla does in this prison poem was considered treasonable at the time of its writing. It goes without saying that imagining the potentate's demise is made possible by what words at the disposal of a consummate wordsmith can do in spite of or because of the actuality of incarceration.

This is bold poem at once aptly represents Abdalla's angst and anger and anticipates Kenyatta's death, an eventuality that came to pass on 22 August 1978, eight years after the poem was written. It also recalls the rise and fall of the Pate dynasty on

the Kenyan coast as captured by Sayyid Abdallah Ali bin Nasir in his classical *utendi* (long narrative poem) titled Inkishafi, (Revelation) in which the ruling elite are depicted as having lolled in luxury and pomp but ultimately expired and were interred and forgotten (for the exposition of the poem, see Mohamed Mulamali's Ikisiri ya Inkishafi and John Allen's exposition of the poem in *Al-Inkishafi: Catechism of the Soul*). However, if Abdalla hoped as the poem shows that despotism would end with Kenyatta's death, his hope was misplaced. "Mamba" is therefore the apogee of Abdalla's iconoclastic outlook on Kenyatta's rule. Following Mbembe's characterization of the representation of the autocrat in popular culture, it is appropriate to conclude that Abdalla wrests "from the state the power to represent itself and to publicly exhibit the autocrat" (160). In the Kenyan case Kenyatta was the autocrat. Abdalla makes words to "publicly exhibit the autocrat" as a beastly mortal capable of dying like the victims of his tyranny. The poet therefore demonstrates that he did not have the fear and inhibition that plagued even the bravest of critics then.

To be sure the reading of "*mamba*" as at once specifically symbolizing Kenyatta and epitomizing the gamut of Mbembe's postcolonial potentates in general, is cogent.¹ In this instance, the particular and the general are two sides of the interpretative coin. What is curious though is how earlier critics found it necessary to elide the particular and dwell solely on the general in their interpretation of poems such as this. For example Kenyan critic Chacha Nyaigoti Chacha deemed it plausible to interpret

“*mamba*” the “crocodile” as a representation of complacent African leaders and dictators in general (74). Tanzanian critic F.E.M.K. Senkoro similarly stated almost evasively that the ‘crocodile’ is emblematic of the exploitative classes in capitalist societies (126). Polish literary scholar Raymond Ohly, then working at the Institute of Swahili Research at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, made the terse statement, “mamba” is a derogatory symbol” but he offers no further elucidation (89). Another Tanzanian critic Euphrase Kezilahabi simply stated “Shairi liitwalo mambo sitafafanua hapa, lakini nafikiri msomaji mwenye busara ataweza kubaini “mamba” ni nani.” (‘I will not explicate the poem entitled “crocodile” here, although I think any shrewd reader should be able to discern who the crocodile is in the poem)’(5). Kezilahabi did not explain why he fails to explain the poet’s figurative reptile, but in the same breath remarks that its meaning is obvious to the “shrewd reader.” Kezilahabi takes no pain to explain what he means by “shrewd readers.” Granted Abdalla may have had the “shrewd readers” in mind when he stated in the first stanza “Niufumbe, wafumbue wawezao,” / ‘Let me compose a riddle, that those who can may untangle [it].’ But in the second line of the first stanza, the poet also mentions that “niupambe, upendeze wasomao” / ‘Let me adorn it, and make it appealing to the readers,’ not shrewd readers alone. Looking at it superficially, it may seem as though Kezilahabi had simply no patience for inept readers. But I contend that Kezilahabi’s reticence was, in

effect, driven by other considerations, considerations that typified critical responses to Abdalla's poetry especially in the 1970s and 1980s.

In no way am I attempting to point out blind alleys in these initial exegeses of Abdalla's poem, nor am I accusing these critics of mendacity. Their reading of the poem quite correctly resonates with Mbembe's characterization of Africa's postcolonial autocrats who may range from Id Amin Dada of Uganda to Dr. Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, from Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central Africa Republic to Sani Abacha of Nigeria, all of whom were contemporaneous with the writing of the poem. Further, the poem may be conceived of as a mark of the poet's prescience as it anticipated then future despots, such as Daniel arap Moi and Mwai Kibaki of Kenya, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda. In any event, Abdalla's other poem, "Mamaetu Afrika"/ 'Our Mother Africa,' as Senkoro rightly observes, offers compelling evidence of the poet's concern with the destiny of the whole continent of Africa in view of its tumultuous history from slavery, to colonial to realities of neo-colonialism and postcolonial disenchantment. My point though, is that for the critics then it became expedient and "politically correct" to remain within the realm of such generalizations, presumptions, and assumptions, even if the text and context pointed to Kenyatta as the poet's principal 'crocodile' with a phoney sense of immortality. This politically correct interpretation was not wrong by any standards of literary interpretation. What is remarkable is how it almost became the *only* way of interpreting

the poem. We can safely speculate that it was fear that led to this cautious reading of Abdalla's poetry. Four things may be deduced from this scenario (1) it was within the province of the critics to avoid direct mention of Kenyatta in their analyses as such mention was not necessary to validate their critical claims; (2) Abdalla as an artist was operating within his province of "poetic license" and perhaps even "poetic justice" in utilizing metaphor as a stratagem; (3) the recourse to self-censorship by the critics, even those from neighboring Tanzania, imply that they may have been cognizant of the pervasive climate of suppression and repression of dissent and dissidence in the East African region and territorial boundaries were no guarantee of safety from reprisal; (4) lastly, not *all* intellectuals wanted to needlessly ruffle the feathers of the ruling elite. On the contrary, a considerable number of intellectuals were cowed into taking the line of least resistance, playing safe rather than sharing the fate of those on the long list of prisoners of conscience. Chacha remarks that Abdalla uses figures of speech to "obscure meaning from his tormentors in order to avoid being annihilated"(127). But, in a sense, Chacha, Senkoro, Kezilahabi and other critics were motivated by the same fear of "annihilation," to adapt reticence when it came to unmasking the implied specificity of reference to Kenyatta in Abdalla's figures of speech. In critiquing the critics for their failure to fully elucidate and enlighten we must take into account these extenuating circumstances.

Nonetheless, the fact that the voices of dissidence suffuses Abdalla's collection of poems does not preclude the presence of other voices with which the poet speaks.

Doubt and didacticism, for example, seem to be strange bedfellows, but in Abdalla's poetry they go hand to hand. This synthesis of points of view that seem antithetical to each other recalls Bakhtin's proposition that an individual does not have one single point of view, but she inhabits multiple 'worldviews' through the various social discourses she speaks (450). As mentioned earlier Abdalla's marriage of art and activism lends itself to arousing the readers to action. It is therefore in harmony with this rabble-rousing stance that we encounter poems calling on the masses to awake from their slumber and to act against tyranny, such as in "Wasafiri Tuamkeni,"/ 'Travelers, Let us Arise,' "Zindukani"/ 'Wake Up!' "Jana na Leo na Kesho,"/ 'Yesterday and Today and Tomorrow,' "Semani wenye Kusema,"/ 'Speak those who can speak,' and "Kokoiko!" whose onomatopoeic filiation to the crowing of a rooster renders it almost untranslatable.

Chacha Nyaigoti Chacha describes Abdalla's Sauti ya Dhiki as a collection of poems aimed at "kufundisha umma wa ulimwengu wa tatu"/ 'teaching the third world public' (65). Yet a closer examination of the poems betrays the poet's intermittent feelings of inadequacy, such as in "Telezi,"/ 'Slipperiness' "Wasiwasi Enda Zako,"/ 'Dread, Go Away' "Moyo Iwa na Subira,"/ 'Oh! Heart, be Patient' and "Njia Panda"/ 'At a Crossroads.' In what follows, I show how Abdalla's didacticism contrasts with his expressions of doubt to create voice diversity or polyphony that undergirds the writing of his poetry.

Abdalla is averse to metaphorical slumber, which can be interpreted to mean acquiescence and quiet acceptance of totalitarianism. In a number of verses he calls on the public to awake from this state of acquiescence and confront their own destiny. In typical didactic fashion he says in “Kokoiko!”

Kokoiko! Kokoiko! Awika jimbi awika
Vitandani muliyoko, namuanze kurauka
Asoitika mwito, atachelewa kufika
Yule aliyekutwika, ndiye atayekutuwa

Kokoiko! Kokoiko! The rooster is crowing
Those of you sleeping, start getting up quick
The one not heeding the cockerel, will be late
The one who put the load upon you, is the one who will unload it from you. (64)

As hinted earlier “Kokoiko! Kokoiko!” is onomatopoeic imitation of the crowing of a rooster. Perhaps it is Abdalla’s infusion of such dramatic effects in his poetry that impelled Ohly to comment that “Abdilatif is attracted by the theatre” (88). Needless to say in this poem we hear the voice of a rooster, a non-human entity acting out in the human drama. Reading polyphony in the imitation of crowing in the poem should not be perceived as ascribing undue significance to a tangential detail of the poem. But it should be borne in mind that the crowing of the rooster signifies that the time has come to wake up and to act, “Vitandani muliyoko, namuanze kuamka”/ ‘Those of you sleeping, start getting up quick time for action.’ It is therefore quite apparent that the philosophy actuating Abdalla’s poetry privileges the dynamism of political activism rather than the stasis of acquiescence.

Despite Abdalla's outright militancy and iconoclastic writing, as a prisoner of conscience he could not help but engage in soul-searching. Chacha alludes to this internal conflict when he discusses what he calls the poet's "mjadala na nafsi"/ 'dialogue with his soul' (66). Sauti ya Dhiki is not then merely a testament to the poet's venting of his anger at the jaded political landscape, economic disparity and bad governance; it accords him an opportunity to look at himself, and to do so critically. Whereas there is no doubt about Abdalla's commitment to political engagement and the struggle for change in Kenya, there are poems in the anthology that show moments of self-interrogation and self-doubt. For instance in the poem "Telezi"/ 'Slipperiness,' the poet interrogates, not his role in the struggle but his approach. He writes:

Japo hivyo zilikuwa, ndiya hazipitiki
 Bali mimi haamuwa, kwenenda japo kwa dhiki
 Kumbe vile nitakuwa, mfano wa samaki
 Ni mfano wa samaki, kuiendeya ndowana

Zikanibwaga telezi, sikujuwa kuzendeya
 Ningekwenda kwa henezi, yasingenifika haya
 Lakini tena siwezi, mwenendo huu kutumiya
 Sitawata kutembea, ila tabadili mwendo

Though that is how the paths were, there were impassable
 Yet I decided to proceed, despite the hardships
 Little did I know, I will be like a fish
 Like a fish, taking itself into the hook

I fell on slippery ground, I did not know how to walk on it
 I should have been more cautious, to avoid whatever befell me
 But I will not ever again, walk in that fashion
 Though I will not stop walking, I will change my approach. (23)

In the poem, Abdalla likens himself to “samaki”/ ‘a fish’ that foolishly lets itself into the hook, oblivious of the danger the hook poses to its survival. This is a self-depreciating image that exhibits the poet’s awareness of his folly, but awareness that only surfaces after the harm is already done. So in this poem we witness the voice of regret and self-blame, underscoring the multiple voices with which Abdalla presents his poems. In this instance it has dawned on the poet that his approach was somewhat imprudent and flawed. Abdalla arrives at the moment of what Ioan Davies describes as the “reformulation of [revolutionary] ideas in such a way that they [would have] profound implications for the direction of the political movement” (54).

The spirit of this poem contrasts with the poet’s apparent cocksureness in “Nshisheyelo ni Lilo”/ ‘I am Unshakeable’ and “Siwati” /‘Never shall I Abandon it’ in which he leaves no iota of doubt as to his capacity and capability to remain steadfast in the struggle. In “Telezi”/ ‘Slipperiness Abdalla queries his own conduct in the struggle and evidently wonders whether it was judicious to have confronted the regime with the tactics he had chosen, such as writing, and distributing *Kenya Twendapi* along with a threat to use “alternative means” of removing the despot in power. This admission of his tactical shortcomings and imprudence presumably comes as a result of the reflection that incarceration makes possible. In this case Abdalla views his tactics as those of a neophyte unschooled in the intricacies and complexities of the murky and slippery

terrain of the struggle. The fall implied in the poem is his arrest and subsequent conviction.

In the 1979 interview with Chacha, Abdalla discloses that his arrest was a result of being betrayed by someone he trusted (6). Embedded in this poem therefore, is also a heavy sense of regret for trusting the wrong person and trusting too much. He had learned his lesson as the poem shows, so that he expresses his intent to change the “approach,” rather than completely abandon the journey. At this point we do well to examine further the preponderant metaphor of the journey in Abdalla’s poetry. This metaphor is particularly exemplified in the poems “Ndiya Panda” ‘At a Crossroads’ and “Wasafiri Tuamkeni”/ ‘Let Us Arise, Travelers.’ Needless to say, the metaphor emanates from the recurrent journey motif or leitmotif in both religious and secular literature. For example, the Qu’ran contains journeys made by Prophets Muhammed, Abraham, and Moses. Regarding the journey metaphor and the Bible, Floyd V. Filson observes that “the journey narrative is one of the dominant literary patterns of the Biblical story” spanning from the nomadic wanderings of the patriarchs from Ur to Haran to the missionaries journeys of the apostles (68). In both the secular and spiritual spheres, many are the times when life itself is perceived as a journey. But it is probably the journey or pathway to just a world—as Mari J. Matsuda would put it—that should be given primacy in an explication of these poems since this is Abdalla’s principle preoccupation in his art and activism (8).

I want to emphasize that in utilizing the journey as metaphor Abdalla's poetry lends itself to intertextuality and thus speaks to Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. In other words as Bakhtin postulates with regard to the novel, there is, in Abdalla's poetry the tendency for borrowing utterances from others and infusing whatever is borrowed with his own idiosyncrasies. Further, the echoes of Abdalla's own poems can be discerned in the subsequent poems of other poets. In line with Kimani Njogu, I reiterate yet again that dialogism and heteroglossia (linguistic variability) are not limited to the genre of the novel merely on the basis of what Dorothy Hale describes as the novel's "generic promiscuity" in her explication of Bakhtin's social and linguistic theory (449). It may well be that dialogism itself exhibits a certain level of "promiscuity" that makes it applicable beyond the novel.

In another poem "Ndia Panda," Abdalla expresses his dilemma of choice and indecision as he faces the challenge of which way to go in the journey. The voice we hear is that of a lost traveler as the excerpt below demonstrates:

Safari naloianza, bado ningalimo kwenda
Sitawata kujikaza, isipate kunishinda
Nataka kuimaliza, ndivyo nipendavyo tenda
Sasa niko njia panda

Ilipofika safari, silijuwi la kutenda
Nimekwisha kufikiri, lakini limenishinda
Nawatakanyi shauri, nijuwe ndia ya kwenda
Mojawapo ya ndiya panda

I am still on the journey, the journey I began
I will not relax, so as not to be vanquished

I want to stay the course, that is what I want to do
Now I am at a crossroads

When the journey began, I had no idea what to do
I have pondered about it, but I find no answers
I implore you for guidance, so I can know where to go
Which one of the crossroads. (79-80)

This poem is an index of the crisis of confidence. In the line “Nimekwisha kufikiri, lakini limenishinda,”/ ‘I have thought about it, but I find no answers,’ the poet concedes that as a traveler he is unable to successfully navigate the place and space that the journey demands of him. Determined to stay the course, Abdalla seeks for the readers’ help to navigate his way in the labyrinthine journey with the words “Nawatakanyi shauri, nijuwe ndia ya kwenda” / ‘I implore YOU [in plural] for guidance, so I can know where to go.’ The title “Njia Panda”/ ‘At at Crossroads’ is a fitting image of a tortured and divided self. This voice of indecisiveness and self-doubt is another of the multiplicity of voices that emerge in Sauti ya Dhiki.

The poems in Sauti ya Dhiki are both a product and an act of memory. Joseph Roach in his Cities of the Dead propounded the theory of memory that sees everything as a surrogate mother of memory, with the capability to produce memory or to be produced by it. Roach envisions memory in various manifestations; memory as embodied; and memory as cognitive activity and memory as mental activity. The view of memory as embodied suggests the interface between body and memory, which may entail a conception of memory that is not bound up to a concrete cognitive process. It is

apparent that both the embodied and cognitive aspects of memory are at play in Sauti ya Dhiki.

One could argue that there is a sense of immediacy between either the feeling or the event that inspires each of the poems in the collection. This point is accentuated by the precise dating that accompanies each poem as to justify Ohly's conclusion that the collection is a poetical diary. The reading of Sauti ya Dhiki as poetical diary raises the question: Does the memory play the exact same role in the poetical diary as it does in the prose diary? Put differently, is Sauti ya Dhiki aided by memory or does it function as a memory aid in the same way as, for example Gakaara wa Wanjau's Mau Mau Author in Prison or Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground? It should be clarified that the generic difference between poetry and prose exerts different demands on memory and its use. Whereas Wanjau's diary relies on memory to record events and opinions on almost daily basis, (which diary in turn becomes a memory aid), one senses that Abdalla attempts to record his feelings and impressions, almost "month by month" as Ohly remarks. The emphasis on "feelings" or the affective dimension of the poet's incarceration implies that there is a diminution on the apprehension of memory as an aid to writing and writing as an aid to memory; the focus is less on events than the affective response to the events. (I use the terms "feelings," "affect", and "emotion" interchangeably here in their broad perception although I am aware of the varying nuances between them in certain other contexts). It should also be noted that certain

glaring inaccuracies exist in the entries of Abdalla's poetical diary as to bring to question the historicity of the recorded "affect" or emotion. For example in the preface Abdalla claims he wrote the poem "Moyo Iwa na Subira" on October 20, 1971, after his dreams of being released on the previous day in a Presidential amnesty came to naught. Yet the poem is actually dated March 20, 1971.

On the whole memory in Abdalla's poetry is neither a tool for nor a product of historical exactitude. What counts here is the record of the poet's affective response to a thought, concept, or real and imagined experiences emanating from inside and outside prison during the period of his incarceration. In a sense, the poems in this collection emblemize memory as an act of which writing was a mode of actualization. If the dates count for little or no real historical value, the record of the poet's affective response to the trauma of incarceration cannot be undervalued or devalued. In "Jipu" (7) for instance, Abdalla equates the prison experience to affliction from a painful boil, which continually torments the victim's body until the boil "ripens" and bursts giving way to discharge of pus; in "Nakukumbuka" (11) ('I Remember') he presents the trauma of separation from a loved one who is reduced to a mere memory due to incarceration; in "Wasiwasi Nenda Zako" (32) he represents the trauma of being tormented by anxiety over conditions at home while in prison; in "Telezi" (24) he reveals the traumatizing feelings of self-blame and self-doubt that gnaw at him as he rethinks his pre-incarceration activities and activism. The recording or representation of

these feelings or experiences is what counts not the precise moment when they were experienced.

The poem “Usiniuwe”/ ‘Don’t Kill Me’ (51) in which the poet adopts the voice of a fetus deserves some consideration. A superficial reading of the poem would see it, as most critics have, as protest against abortion, as the narrating and narrating “I” is a fetus pleading with the mother to spare his or her life. The question to ask is: Why should a political prisoner write about abortion? Why does he impersonate an innocent fetus facing imminent extermination? There could be any number of answers to these questions. But to me it is the prisoner’s quest for a kind of solidarity with the fetus that is the conscious or unconscious impetus behind this poem. I find striking resemblances between the unborn threatened with abortion and the incarcerated; they are both confined for given terms in their “prisons”; they are both helpless, and unloved. In a way the political prisoner regards himself as innocent as the fetus at the mother’s mercy. I tend to think the womb in Abdalla’s poem symbolizes prison while the mother symbolizes the imprisoning and loveless state. In the 18th stanza the persona states:

Sitakosa mlimwengu, ambaye atanileya
Anionee utungu, kama tulo damu moya
Si kama wewe mama, usonisikitikiya
Nasikiza ombi langu, mamangu nihurumiya

I won’t lack someone, who will take care of me
Someone who will empathetize with me, like a blood relative
Unlike you mother, who feels no compassion for me
Listen to my pleas, be merciful to me mother. (53)

Therefore the fetus recognizes the mother's callous and heartless attitude and hopes to find mothering and nurturing elsewhere. The mother's callousness is analogous to the callousness of the Kenyan state under Kenyatta, which had little regard for prisoners of consciences such as Abdalla who like the fetus regarded himself as "innocent." This hope for nurture elsewhere is a symbol, I think, of the poet's desire for exile as an antidote to the tyranny in his native country. The prescience embedded in the poem should not be overlooked. It is a fact that since his release from prison in the early 1970s Abdalla has been living in exile, in Tanzania and United Kingdom and presently Germany. The countries of his exile have served as surrogate mothers in the wake of the lack of figurative maternal love from his native Kenya. It is reasonable to speculate that in pleading "Usiniuwe!"/"Don't Kill me!" Abdalla was meditating on the possibility of his political assassination by agents of the Kenya government. The thought or memory of death or being killed pervades his poetry and underlines the trauma of incarceration (e.g. see "N'shishiyelo ni Lilo" (1); "Mamba"(10); "Muosheni" (75); and "Leo N'singekuwako").

Yet it is the individual memory of his experience within the collective memory of his coastal people and Kenyans at large that Abdalla would like to situate the record of his incarceration or more accurately the record of his affective response to incarceration. Clearly, Abdalla essentially sets out to etch his poetry in the wide

collective memory, carving out for himself an enduring public monument. Sauti ya Dhiki then, embodies a private and public memory tied up together.

As this study has shown the conditions of incarceration under which the poems in *Sauti ya Dhiki* were written did little to dampen either Abdalla's creative flow or his spirit of resistance and protest. Abdalla distinguished himself from poets who chose to compose the plaudits that massaged the ego of the postcolonial potentate in Kenya. Faraj Dumila in his Wasifu wa Kenyatta (1971) and Boukheti Amana in his Malenga wa Vumba (see the poem "Wasifu wa Baba Kenyatta"/ 'The life Kenyatta the Patriarch') are cases in point. Abdalla was never one to stoop that low. Had he lost too much faith in his country to write works in praise of its leadership? It is apparent that Abdalla's activism and artistic inclinations would never have endeared him to the ruling elite in Kenya. When he completed his prison term in 1972, he wrote "N'sharudi" 'I am Back,' in which he essentially announces his return to the normal routine in the fight for social change. In the poem he disavows harboring bitterness or resentments against his detractors, betrayers and tormentors. But he soon found out that he was never safe in Kenya, as long as he held tenaciously to his ideological position. He soon fled to Tanzania, where he worked at the Institute of Swahili Research as a research fellow before going to Britain where he worked at the Swahili Service of BBC Radio. Now teaching Swahili at Leipzig University in Germany, Abdalla is yet to end his exile.

Written under incarceration and surveillance against a system that imprisoned him for his writing in the first place makes Abdalla's Sauti ya Dhiki one of the bravest and most vocal voices of protest against despotism to come from Kenyan prisons. As our analysis of Sauti ya Dhiki demonstrates, Abdalla marries art and activism, lending his poetry a political engagement that is laced with multifarious voices ranging from the lament of a prisoner, a critique of his coastal people, anxiety over his family, affirmation of the commitment to the struggle, the confidence exuding sage and all-knowing counsellor, and the unsure and befuddled neophyte in search of counsel and direction. It is clearly evident he is one of the writers who Ioan Davis describes as "dedicated to transforming a system which they believe is corrupt and immoral and to speaking the truth as they see it" (31). Already a poet prior to his incarceration, Abdilatif Abdalla captures his affective responses to the ontological and existential reality of the debilitating conditions without losing sight of the writing in prison as a daring act of recalcitrant defiance; or put differently a bold reaction to the imprisoning action of the postcolonial potentate. And in reading his prison poetry we embark on an exploration or mapping of his psychic journey as we "listen" to his articulation of a wide spectrum of voices whose fulcrum is the denunciation of the postcolonial autocrat. Emerging from prison as a site for writing, Sauti ya Dhiki remains a landmark contribution to the canon of modern Swahili poetry.

III. Torture, Trauma, Truth, and the Manifesto in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's

Detained

On the night of December 31, 1977 special security agents of the Kenyatta government arrested Kenyan leftist intellectual and writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o at his Limuru home in the outskirts of Nairobi. He was never told the reason for his arrest. He was never arraigned before a court of law. Thus, Ngugi began his detention without trial at the Kamiti Maximum security prison. He was detained for nearly a year, until December 12, 1978. The closest the government deigned to explain the reason for his confinement, was presenting him, while he was languishing in detention, with a vague and elliptical detention order signed by then, Vice President Daniel arap Moi on December 29, 1977:

The detailed grounds on which you are detained are:- You are detained on the following grounds: 1) You have engaged yourself in activities and utterances which are dangerous to the good government of Kenya and its institutions. In order to thwart your intentions and in the interest of the preservation of public security your detention has become necessary. (204)

Clearly, the "detailed grounds" were anything but detailed. There is little to glean from the nebulous detention order as to the exact reason for the detention; not only is the official document terse, it is indicative of the government's inability or unwillingness to pinpoint Ngugi's specific "crimes." Hence for him, as is evident from his prison text Detained that forms the focus of this study, it became expedient during and after detention, to only speculate on the possible motives for his arrest and detention, such as

his involvement in the Kamiriithu community theatre, and the Marxist ideology informing his literary and critical output. In a statement to the Detainee Review Tribunal Ngugi wrote:

I have not been charged or told so, but I am convinced in other words that I am where I am because I have written about and believed in a Kenya for Kenyans, because I have attempted to hold up the mirror through which Kenyans can look at themselves, in their past, their present and their future. I am here because a tiny section of that society—but more influential because of the political and ill—gotten economic power it wields over the laboring majority—has not particularly liked the image of its role in Kenyan history. They have therefore struck with vengeance at the hand that raised the mirror . . .(188)

Yet, by detaining Ngugi without trial, the “good government” of Kenyatta was not only acting within the law of the land, but was acting according to its own tradition of repression and suppression, demonstrating powerfully one of the various ways at its disposal, by which it consistently dealt with political opposition and dissent soon after independence from British colonial rule in 1963. Indeed there was a long list of political detainees before Ngugi, men and women who were detained without trial because the government found their political positions contrary to its interests. The hostile political ambience forced Ngugi to flee his native Kenya soon after his release from detention and to remain in exile as a negropolitan writer in Europe and the United States for over two decades. His return to Kenya from exile in 2004 with its attendant complications, including the rape of his wife and his robbery may form the subject of another paper, and should not detain us here.

Ngugi wrote part of Detained on toilet paper while in detention and completed the rest of it upon his release. The text encapsulates Ngugi's trenchant critique of and reflection on the conditions of incarceration, the legacy of imperialism and colonialism, the class chasm between the "peasant" masses, with which he identifies himself, and what he calls the "comprador bourgeois class." Besides narrating his individual dehumanization, deprivations, and degradation at the hands of state apparatuses as a political detainee, Ngugi ponders his country's past, present and future political economy and cultural milieu, as the excerpt above indicates. In sum, Detained may be regarded as a statement of Ngugi's highly revolutionary ideological stance. Written in the heyday of his Marxist leanings, the text has a partisan, defiant, revolutionary, and militant tone, making it appear to be the manifesto of Ngugi's private and public self as an intellectual then committed, as Janet Lyon would put it, to linking his "voice to the countless voices of previous revolutionary conflicts"(4).

Evidently, there cannot, and should not be only one way of reading Detained. At any rate the text is highly hybridized, containing as it does, fragments of letters, official documents, newspaper excerpts, records of parliamentary debates, traditional and revolutionary songs, Christians hymns, parody of Biblical passages, poems, dramatic dialogue, references to historical documents, and bits and pieces from memoirs and other literary works. In a way the text's "generic promiscuity," to use Dorothy Hale's expression, legitimates any number of varied and variegated exegeses

and classifications (449). Indeed Ngugi's life narrative has been the subject of much critical engagement since its publication in 1981, with any number of critics classifying it as a memoir, *consolatio*, autobiography, *testimonio*, historical document, and prisoner's diary. In "Detained as a Modern *Consolatio*" Govind N. Sharma situates Ngugi's prison narrative within the tradition of the *consolatio*, a genre that both Saint Augustine with his De Civitate Dei and Cicero with his Consolatio, inaugurated in the first century A.D. (521). Simon Gikandi has read Detained as a prison memoir; drawing attention to prison as a "site of reflection" and an occasion for establishing affiliation with the tradition of literary resistance" (198). Following Gikandi's emphasis on literary resistance, the late Yvonne Vera reads Detained as a "diary of imperialism and insurgency" (Vera 135). This study distinguishes itself by its emphasis on Ngugi's thematic preoccupation with truth, torture, and trauma and the manifesto as a genre that manifestly undergirds Ngugi's Detained. In what follows I examine the thematization of truth and the portrayal of torture and trauma in Ngugi's prison text, before turning to the text's manifesto attributes.

Ngugi quotes a rather sympathetic prison superintendent at Kamiti Maximum Prison as asking him: "Tell me the truth, was the play really being acted by workers and peasants?" The play in question is Ngaahika Ndeenda widely believed to have been the reason for Ngugi's detention. Like most other observers, the sympathetic prison officer was doubtful about Ngugi's claim that the actors in the play were not university

students or professional thespians masquerading as the peasants and workers of Kamiriithu. In the conversation with the superintendent, as in the rest of his prison memoir, Ngugi insists that the actors were indeed peasants and workers, his pet expressions. But this conversation is also evidence of Ngugi's own deliberate thematization of truth, a leitmotif that we see running in any number of prison narratives, including the tale of Sela and Mwambu and the Liyongo Epic (see chapter 2). Ngugi foregrounds this thematization of truth by quoting famous Swahili poet Shabaan bin Robert's poem in the pretext;

Kweli itashinda namna tunavyoishi
Kweli haihofu tisho wala nguvu za majeshi
La uongo lina mwisho, Kweli kitu cha aushi
Kweli itashinda kesho kama leo haitoshi

Truth will prevail in this life
Truth fears neither threat nor military force
Falsehood will cease, but Truth is abiding
Truth will prevail tomorrow, if not so today. (qtd. in Ngugi vi)

But how should we approach the question of truth in Ngugi's prison narrative? Should we regard his narrative as the "abiding" truth, even the absolute truth, of the circumstances surrounding his detention? In Detained Ngugi presumably sets out to outline his life and opinions in relation to political detention without trial and its individual and collective ramifications. We get less of the details of his experiences and more of his interpretation of his own personal history as a committed writer, of his locale in the interminable continuum of struggle against tyranny, and of Kenya's own

conception of itself as a nation. His “history of a kind” as Janet Lyon would put it, is not official history as such but an alternative history or counter-history driven by the revolutionary impulse and an oppositional set of truth-claims that official historians would either find unpalatable or dismiss as untrue.

Yet to insist upon asking whether Ngugi speaks the truth in Detained is perhaps insisting upon asking the wrong question. The revolutionary ethos that drives his writing and defines his memoir in terms of political manifesto sees truth in terms of resistance to any and all forms of oppression and exploitation. Ngugi appropriates the concept of truth in Robert’s poem in the pretext, representing “truth” that is mediated through leftist leanings, revolution and counter-hegemonic writing. In a sense Detained is Ngugi’s truth, abiding truth in Robert’s terms, because it runs counter to the official narrative of detention. It is truth because it is bold and fearless just like the truth of Abdilatif Abdalla’s prison poetry, exposing the harbinger to untold peril and danger but prevailing nonetheless. It is a kind of truth that is not defined by factual evidence but the willingness and ability to expose a system the harbinger of truth finds unjust and oppressive.

When the sympathetic prison superintendent’s requested Ngugi: “Tell me the truth” he may have been echoing the general wish of readers of Ngugi’s text. They hope to read the truth, to be told the truth. I hasten to add that indeed, the readers of Ngugi’s memoir are told nothing but the truth, but it is the truth of art and should be best

understood as such. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have cautioned, interpreting life writing can be both rewarding and treacherous:

Autobiographical texts may be a minefield for the unwary reader, but they can also be a field of play and an occasion for critical reflection on changing reading practices, audiences, and ethics. (369)

The caveat is couched in the parlance of both the battlefield and sports arena to drive the point home. In the context of this caveat, interpreting the “truth” of Detained may be the fun of soccer, football, baseball or athletics to some but not all. Thus a reader who insists upon truth as it is associated with veracity and fact may not only earn the title “unwary reader” for themselves but may also be blown up into a thousand pieces in the minefield of autobiographical text in which Detained belongs. The truth of Detained, I think, lies in its ability to harness aesthetic possibilities of art that make it a powerful tool in speaking to historical events without being constrained by factuality.

As Ngugi recounts in his memoir, nothing can prepare one for the foreboding sense of dislocation and disorientation that incarceration engenders. The mental torture that the uncertainty over when or whether one would be released from detention takes its heavy toll on the victim. He writes:

For those who wait in prison, as for those outside prison, dreams of freedom start at the very minute of arrest...One of the cruelties of detention—unlike ordinary imprisonment—is precisely this *not* knowing when one will get out. For ordinary convicted prisoner—we are talking of the unfairness of the trial, the so-called justice involved—he knows the duration of his sentence and no matter how long it is, his emotions and intellect can adjust to it. Not so the political detainee: he can be released after an hour, a day, a week, or after fifty years! (147)

Ngugi writes about the pain of uncertainty, this “ignorance of when” from the point of view of one who does not merely depend on the carceral imagination but from an experiential point of view of the carceral (147). He speaks from experience as it were, making his description lucid and profound. He debunks the view that there is any conceivable or justifiable differentiation between detention and torture when he states: “Some ask: were you tortured in detention? But detention itself is torture” (147).

Ngugi loathed the humdrum prison routine describing it as “dull, monotonous, repetitious, tortuous in its intended animal rhythm of eating, defecating, sleeping, eating, defecating, sleeping” (117). Besides the de-individuating effect of being known by a number that we discussed above, Ngugi reveals the use of disease as a weapon wielded upon detainees. Like the despotic regimes in Brazil and Argentina, Detained exposes the official intentional and callous denial or delay of medical attention to ailing detainees (See Diana Taylor’s Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty war” (1997)). Ngugi himself recounts how it took a whole month for the prison authorities to accede to his request to have his toothache attended to. But when he stubbornly refused to be taken to hospital “in chains,” he was left to heal on his own, which he did. Yet it is correct to conclude, following Elaine Scarry in her The Body in Pain, that when the prisoner’s body is in pain, it is used as a weapon against him or her in the service of the torturer. In Ngugi’s case, by aching, his tooth had become a weapon in the hands of the state to torture him from within the

body. And by both delaying and denying medical attention, prison authorities enhanced and ensured the use of the body as a weapon against the “self” inhabiting that same body.

Ngugi invokes the image of the “cage” or the “dungeon” in several instances in his characterization of detention to underline its degrading and traumatizing properties. Stripped of his sense of humanity, Ngugi felt he was reduced to an encaged dangerous animal or like a slave in a dungeon. These expressions and images indicate the depth and breadth of trauma and torture that detention enabled and enhanced. He also depicts himself as wrestling “demons” or “dragons” in an effort to remain sane in the detention conditions aimed at, as he puts it, “turning his brain into a mess of rot”(9). The demons and dragons suggest the hell-like experience that detention felt for Ngugi. It is interesting that experience in the cage as a political prisoner motivates Ngugi to write what I term his at once political manifesto and art manifesto. It is to this generic question of manifesto that we now turn.

Most scholarship on the manifesto acknowledges or affirms the affinity between modernity and the genre. In her Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern, Janet Lyon theorizes on the close link between modernity and the genre of manifesto. The title of her text in itself implies the link she envisages between manifesto and modernity. Manifestos are therefore perceived as a consequence of modernity and exhibit modernity’s political or revolutionary temperament. Art manifestos such as Tristan

Tzara and others' Dadaist Manifesto, for instance, are associated with the avant-garde movement that arose in the era of modernity and intended to revolutionize the theory and practice of art (music, painting, writing etc). But there are also other kinds of manifestos, ranging from disciplinary manifestos (e.g. Basarab Nicolescu's Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity, really a manifesto of quantum physics), and cultural nationalist manifestos (e.g. Molefi Asante's An Afrocentric Manifesto and its emphasis on black cultural nationalism) or ideological manifestos (e.g. Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto). It bears clarifying that these categories are to be taken heuristically since in practice there are frequent overlaps between them. Also, it would seem there is often an underlying shock effect, tension, and political thrust in most manifestos. As Lyon views manifesto as "an emblem of political combat," arguing that "to write a manifesto is to participate symbolically in a history of struggle against dominant forces"(4). She draws attention to the stylized use of the pronouns "we," "us," and "them" in manifesto. In her description of manifesto, Lyon states:

The manifesto participates in a reduced understanding of heterogeneous social fields, creating audiences through rhetoric exclusivity, parceling out political identities across a polarized discursive field, claiming for "us" the moral high ground of revolutionary idealism, and constructing "them" as ideological tyrants, bankrupt usurpers, or corrupt fools. (3)

It is important to stress that I am less interested in either the apparent negativity in Lyon's definition than in what the definition does in characterizing the nature of the voice and tone of manifesto as a genre. As Lyon posits, there is there is in manifesto a

Manichean dialectic between “us” and “them;” with “us” representing those struggling against the dominant forces on the one hand, and “them” representing tyrannical agents of the dominant forces on the other. Manifesto does not aspire to an ecumenical or universal message that would have appeal to all and sundry; it includes and excludes audiences through its rhetorical strategies, implying that by what it says and how it says, it almost explicitly defines its audiences. It may be cogent to use Leigh Gilmore expression the ““you” and “we” who will listen and respond,” in characterizing audiences that the manifesto creates (707). The narrating “I” in the autobiographical manifesto is far from apolitical; it is implicated in a political enterprise that links it to the collectivized and politicized “us” or “we.”

Martin Puchner in his The Poetry of Revolution links the manifesto genre to revolution and elucidates upon the political and ideological underpinnings of the genre. Puchner alleges that although Marx and Engels’s Communist Manifesto was not by any means the first manifesto ever, it not only became a socialist/ communist icon but gave tremendous impetus and direction to the genre of manifesto:

Even though the Manifesto became the single most significant manifesto, the text that defined for many subsequent writers what a manifesto should be, Marx and Engels did not create these genre alone; the manifesto has a history or prehistory before the Manifesto. (11)

Puchner alleges that it is Engels who suggested the title “manifesto” for their collobarated work after coming to the conclusion that what they were working on was

more than simply a credo as they had initially conceived of it. To Engels credo was suitable only for presenting a set of precepts, but the work of the kind they were engaged in their joint venture, called for a genre oriented to a “narrative” form. Puchner identifies a close affinity between the manifesto genre and the history of socialism and communism, demonstrating how as Puchner asserts, “manifestos weave together social theory, political acts, and poetic expression” (2). Manifesto, he concurs with Lyon, is obsessed with “changing the world” and even stages “history as revolution” (21). He also identified “impatience” as an important attribute of the genre: “Throughout its subsequent history, the manifesto would be defined by its impatience, by the attempt to undo the distinction between speech and action, between words and revolution” (22). He however draws attention to the emergence of the art manifestos particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, resulting from what he terms the intrusion of the genre into the realm of art (20). Puchner conceives of the resultant “art manifesto” as

an art forged in the image of the manifesto: aggressive rather than introverted, screaming rather than reticent; collective rather than individual. Radical modernism and avant-garde art must therefore be regarded as an art not based on the doctrines or theories proclaimed in the manifestos but on the formal influence of the manifesto, its poetry, on art. (6)

One could add that there is perhaps often a very thin line between the political manifesto and the art manifesto in that both adopt a “screaming” and “aggressive” tone and voice in not only addressing their subject matter but in their insistence on changing the world. These categories, as we pointed out above, are essentially created for

heuristic purposes. It is well to say the art manifesto is often not entirely apolitical. It may well be that, particularly in the case of Detained, it is not tenable to distinguish between political manifesto and art manifesto. When Ngugi declares and narrates in Detained about his divorce from English as a medium of artistic expression and his marriage to Gikuyu, his narratives takes on the characteristics of the art manifesto. Ngugi exhibits the combative spirit of cultural nationalism and stubborn insistence on the use of indigenous African languages that he would fully expound in his post-detention intellectual works particularly, Decolonising the Mind and Writers in Politics. In a passage parodying the cultural insight of an illiterate “Muugikuyu warder,” Ngugi counters the cultural war that the European hegemony wages against African culture and values:

Have you ever any European calling himself Mutiso, Kamau, Onyango, Kiplagat or Simiyu? Have you seen Europeans bothering about your languages? . . .What have Europeans done to you people so that you follow them like dogs their master? What have they done to you that you despise your own tongues and your own country? (129-130)

It is instructive that the warder’s lesson on culture and patriotism is presented directly without quotation marks. There is a sense in which Ngugi’s cultural consciousness is conflated with that of the warder who comes across as an unlikely source of such deep knowledge that we can today safely characterize as truly Ngugian. The warder’s sentiments strike a chord with Ngugi. The prison warder’s series of questions suggest the extent to which the indigenous Africans have been duped to loathe themselves, their

languages and names. Ultimately, the warder's lesson on culture has the trappings of an epiphany or pseudo-epiphany for the writer because, as he claims, his idea of writing a novel in the Gikuyu language then crystallizes and is actualized.

That night I sit at the desk and start the story of Wariinga in the Gikuyu language. It flows just like that, and for the first time since my incarceration, I feel transports of joy. That which I have toyed with but feared—writing a novel in Gikuyu—is happening before my own eyes, and I have government toilet-paper for writing material, and a government-paid warder as a consultant. I am willing to learn. (130)

The passage draws attention to a number of paradoxes namely; 1) the paradox of prison as the site for writing; 2) the paradox of having the prison warder as the source of inspiration; and 3) the paradox of using toilet paper as the material upon which to write. All these three are subjected or subject themselves to unlikely uses, uses not officially sanctioned or intended by the incarcerating authorities. A lot could be said for the political implication of writing in prison with the unwitting “assistance” of the prison warder. But it seems to me that the crux of the message in the passage above is Ngugi's disavowal of English as a medium of literary expression and his embrace of his own Gikuyu tongue. The result was his historic novel, Caataini Mutharaba-ini, which was subsequently translated as The Devil on the Cross, a novel that marked a linguistic watershed in his literary oeuvre. The passage is, in this regard, an instance of the presentation of Ngugi's art manifesto, a forceful declaration or demonstration of how he was determined to change the world of his literary expression and possibly of others as

well, by ditching English and clinging tenaciously to his mother tongue as an artistic carrier of lived and imagined human experience.

It is imperative to reiterate that I draw on Puchner's and Lyon's characterization of manifesto as a generic classification to undertake a study of Detained as manifesto. Yet it bears clarifying that reading Ngugi's text as manifesto does not imply it is only a manifesto. But what is gained by such reading? It seems to me that approaching Detained as a manifesto enables us to enter an interpretative frame that best explains what underpins and underwrites the necessarily combative, tendentious tone of the text. There is ample evidence that Ngugi's text displays attributes that conform to the generic conventions of as propounded by Lyon's and Puchner. In other words, reading Ngugi's Detained as manifesto enables us to make more sense of the polemics and partisanship of his prison writing, and the "high moral ground" from which he speaks against what he considers the reprehensible political leadership of his country and its foreign partners in crime.

Therefore, broadly speaking, reading Detained as manifesto entails, first and foremost perceiving it as emblematic of Ngugi's Marxist political combat with the dominant capitalist forces in Kenya. In the text Ngugi constantly identifies himself with the patriots and peasant masses. It is instructive that he suggests that his detention was predicated on the Kenyatta's government displeasure with his involvement with the peasants of Kamiriithu in organizing community theatre. Moreover frequently, he calls

himself the son of peasants. Hence the politicized narrating “I” of Ngugi’s Detained is an attempt, as Gilmore would put it, to “weld the personal to the collective and posits an international “you” and “we” who will listen and respond” (707). These pronouns “you” and “we” allude to individuals within and without the Kenyan frontiers, who make up the audiences that Ngugi addresses with the manifestly “rhetorical exclusivity” of his memoir. What he writes and how he writes it inevitably excludes, and alienates those it critiques. Those excluded include individuals that Ngugi describes in the opening sentence of the preface as powerful and wealthy and responsible for his detention (xi). In other words, the manner in which his text includes and excludes audiences through its rhetorical devices, particularly the distinction it draws between the patriots, laborers, workers and masses of peasants on one side, and the comprador class, the colonial agents and the despots in power on the other side, is beyond any shadow of a doubt. Speaking from a “high moral ground” Ngugi vilifies those who he regards as “ideological tyrants” both in pre-independence and post-independence Kenya, or what Achille Mbembe would call the “colonial potentate” and the “postcolonial potentate” respectively (292).

The manifesto is thus decidedly polemical and combative in its representation of historical ‘reality’ and its articulation of political ideology, operating as it does on the “moral high ground of revolutionary idealism.” Ngugi exhibits these polemical and combative tendencies in Detained as he rails against the inadequacies and injustices of

colonial and postcolonial eras in Kenya. Lyon's theorization of three distinct characteristic of manifesto is particularly illuminating in apprehending the genre that she claims is an "undertheorized genre" (1). Lyon postulates that manifesto often manifests itself through: first, a foreshortened, impassioned, and highly selective history which chronicles the oppression preceding the "present moment of crisis"; secondly, the enumeration of grievances against a group; and thirdly, the using of epigrammatic, declarative rhetoric that challenges the oppressor and calling the audience to action (3).

Some characteristics of a manifesto are exhibited in Detained by the way in which Ngugi chronicles Kenya's long history of tyranny and oppression from colonial to post-independence eras, as exemplified by his unexplained incarceration; he presents a litany of President Jomo Kenyatta government's errors of omission and commission, and ultimately exhorts his Kenyan readers to continue without letup in the struggle for just rule, despite enormous sacrifices to some, such as incarceration or death. I argue that Ngugi's message to the audience is not to awaken them to a new struggle, since in his purview the struggle is already always in force.

Far from being fortuitous or gratuitous, the foregrounding of ideology as a guiding principle in this study is based on an awareness of Ngugi's unambiguous Marxist leanings (but filtered through the lens of Kenya of the 1970s and 1980s), which motivated and molded his political activism and intellectual activities for decades leading up to his detention without trial in 1977. Ngugi's novel Petals of Blood (1977)

and the play he co-authored with Micere Mugo, Trials of Dedan Kimathi (1981) exemplify the Marxist zeitgeist that pervaded his writing then. The period of Ngugi's detention and the writing of Detained was characterized by the emergence of a number of leftist intellectuals disenchanted with the postcolonial situation in Kenya, most of whom embraced Marxism, particularly its antithetical attitude towards capitalism and ever-increasing gulf between the poor and the rich. On the other hand the government demonized Marxism and viewed it to be tantamount to treason, hence the heavy crackdown and imprisonment and detention of intellectuals with Marxist leanings. Ali Mazrui's summation of the actions and attitude of the Moi regime during the cold war era sheds light on the dangers and risks that then dogged Kenyan leftist intellectuals. Mazrui writes:

The government of Kenya was co-opted into the Western camp, sometimes at the expenses of Kenya's own citizens. Being socialist or left-wing as an intellectual became a political hazard. All sorts of laws and edicts emerged about subversive literature. My own nephew, Dr. Alamin Mazrui of Kenyatta University, was detained without charge by the Moi regime for more than a year for being a left-wing Kenyan academic in the company of such other left-wingers as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo. Intellectual opposition to capitalism in Kenya became increasingly a punishable offence. Lives of socialists were sometimes in danger, as in the case of the relatively powerless Pinto, who was assassinated. (59)

In what follows I will show specific examples of how Ngugi's text displays the three key elements of the manifesto, namely the foreshortened history of oppression; the list of grievances; and the call to the audience for action.

It needs to be stressed here that central to Ngugi's Marxism was the notion of Kenya's history. Patrick Williams has accurately underscored the primacy of history in Ngugi's ideological orientation.¹ Williams remarks, "[p]erhaps the single most important terrain of intellectual struggle for Ngugi is history: in general, the history of imperialism; more locally, the (African) histories of Africa and Kenya; most precisely the history of the resistance of the Kenyan people, with Mau Mau as its high point"(210). By devoting more than half his prison memoir to a particular history of the country, he locates himself, and his fellow detainees, within the trajectory of victims of state repression. In other words, we encounter here "history as revolution" in Puchner's words, using history as a basis for undoing and redoing an unjust world. The history to which Ngugi gives so much primacy is in essence a counter-history, counter-hegemonic, as is his entire prison-writing project, involving Caitani Mutharaba-ini and his Gikuyu novel, later translated as Devil on the Cross (1981). Ngugi places the present moment of his detention in a "foreshortened history of oppression," a history of oppression which began in the colonial period and continued unabated, after Kenya gained independence from Britain in 1963.

Ngugi's engagement with a particular history of his country is an appropriate point of departure for locating his version of a shortened history of oppression as an integral strand of the manifesto genre. In a highly poetic moment of Ngugi's prose, he states towards the last half of his life narrative: "Life in prison is not all endless

confrontation and ‘profound’ meditations on history” (116). However, even a cursory examination of his text shows that although his representation of detention does not depict it as being endless brooding on history, history of particular kind is central to the thrust of his self-narrative. In fact this “foreshortened history of oppression” dominates his text, tracing oppression from colonial to postcolonial times. Ngugi’s “‘profound meditations on history,” his preoccupation with Kenya’s history suffuses his text, as to give it the semblance of a historical document. Indeed for Ngugi, contemplating Kenya’s past is more than idle engagement with historical curiosities; it is both necessary and desirable for apprehending the legacy of oppression culminating in and emblemized by his detention. In other words, Ngugi seems to maintain, that it is only by historicizing the “present moment of crisis” that we may fully grasp the nature and scope of the crisis or as he puts it himself, a way of “know[ing] why we are where we are” (55).

Ngugi situates the genesis of the repressive and exploitive ways of the then current regime to colonial occupation in Kenya, the period he calls “the seventy years of destructive alien presence” (29). It bears stating that positing the British colonialists as “aliens” implies the apparent distinction between alien and indigenous, and suggests the polarized dichotomy between “them” and “us” that is typical of what Lyon terms the “rhetoric of exclusivity” of the manifesto genre. Ngugi’s engagement with history focuses on exposing what “them” (the British) did to “us” (Kenyans). “Pillage, plunder

and murder,” writes Ngugi. “[it] was the British way”(46). The history of oppression consists of the wanton and relentless “plunder” and “pillage,” of Kenya’s indigenous human and natural resources, including the expropriation of land. But Ngugi also associates the colonial regime with the “murder” of Kenyans, particularly those who stood up for their rights. Ngugi recounts the exploits of the “long line of resistance heroes” who died at the hands of the colonial government such as Nguunju wa Gakeere, Dethan Kimathi, Koitalel arap Samoei, Waiyaki, Menza wa Mekitilili, Arap Manyei, and victims of the Muranga massacre (46). Seeing himself as part of the concatenation of resistance Kenya’s history, Ngugi finds it necessary to present a foreshortened history of resistance and the vicious state response, which preceded the Kenyatta regime. Apart from painting the colonial government as murderous, Ngugi suggests that in fact, detention was part of the colonial legacy: “Detention was an instrument for colonial domination. In its origins and purposes, it is clearly a colonial affair” (44). British colonialists, Ngugi opines, left the effective example of how to deal with dissent and opposition by enacting and enforcing detention laws (43). Ngugi is, therefore, interested in “origins,” the root of the problems plaguing postcolonial Kenya, not the least being detention legislation, which he terms “obnoxious,” and which he identifies as being the brainchild of the colonial dispensation (50). Under these colonial laws not only were Africans detained without the trial, but also they were kept under inhuman

conditions about which KANU, the future governing party, but then a people's movement, lamented vehemently before independence (50).

Ngugi's historical account also faults the British for not only demonizing freedom fighters such as the Mau Mau movement, but also devaluing indigenous African culture, elevating white bourgeoisie culture, and creating tribalism as part the divide-and-rule stratagem. Ngugi states:

Thus, the famed traditional rivalry between the Agikuyu and the Luo people was clearly a later colonial invention. The fact is that, right from the beginning, the two nationalities had the biggest working class elements. The unity of the Muugikuyu worker and the Jaluo worker (because of their numbers) was always a threat to imperialism in Kenya . . . They had to create artificial rivalry. (82)

At the same time as Ngugi presents the portrait of heroic Kenyans he also draws attention to Kenyans who were complicit in the suffering of their compatriots, by dint of their collaboration with imperialist agents. In this category belong Kenyans who were collaborators through and through and those like Harry Thuku and Kenyatta, who were initially exemplary freedom fighters, but metamorphosed into turncoats, in order to serve the interests of their colonial and imperialist masters upon release from detention. Also culpable in Ngugi's historical account of suffering is the Christian Church for teaching "[o]bedience of the oppressed to the oppressor" (42). Ngugi views the Church in colonial times as serving the same purpose of subjugating the masses as the brute force of the police, albeit insidiously. He writes:

[T]hese were the ultimate aesthetic goals of colonial culture carefully nurtured by nailed boots, police truncheons and military bayonets and by the carrot of a

personal heaven for a select few. The end was to school Kenyans in the aesthetic of submission and blind obedience to authority reflected . . .(42)

Ngugi further argues that the subjugation of the indigenous population entailed inhibiting or thwarting indigenous efforts at cultural expression. Ngugi highlights the paradoxical situation illustrated by the efforts of the British to erect the Kenya National Theatre at the heart of Nairobi city, where it is inaccessible to Kenyan nationals, and in which no Kenyan plays were allowed to be staged. Ngugi observes: “The institution of British theatre in Kenya in the 1950s was a reactionary response to the resurgence of a popular dance and theatre following the return of Kenyan soldiers from the European-generated Second World War” (67). As a result the colonial administration made frantic efforts to start British theatre clubs in all the major towns in the country, to oversee cultural performance in schools and ensure the elevation and promotion of British cultural values and practices. For instance, Ngugi notes that at his former school, Alliance High School, it became customary to stage Shakespeare’s plays “attended by colonial governors and applauding administrators” in line with the apotheosis of the so-called British high-brow culture (67).

Ngugi is at pains to clarify that whenever and whatever acts of oppression were inflicted upon people perceived to be a threat to the interests of the ruling colonial elite in Kenya’s past, they were not isolated incidents, but were instead systemic and normative. He writes: “Thus the . . .acts of animal brutality were not cases of individual

aberration but an integral part of colonial politics, philosophy and culture. Reactionary violence to instill fear and silence was the very essence of colonial settler culture” (38).

Having considered Ngugi’s account of the crisis, at this point I turn to his list of grievances. I consider as grievances, what he cites as the immediate and direct causes of the “moment of crisis,” the ambience of despotism in postcolonial Kenya in general and his incarceration during the Kenyatta regime in particular. Most of these grievance, although not all, are therefore contemporaneous with the moment of crisis and/or the moment of writing. Ngugi’s grievances may be divided into two, individual and collective where the collective signifies the mass of “peasants,” as he calls them, although I must concede that these two sets of grievances are inextricably tied to one another. In his narrative, Ngugi himself tends to frequently collapse the binary between his individual self and the collective. Even when the grievances appear to affect him in his individual capacity, there is a sense which Ngugi foregrounds the relational or collective significance of his suffering. The aggrieved and politicized “I,” which necessarily speaks from a “high moral ground,” almost always becomes the synecdoche for the collectivized “we.”

On the whole in Detained, Ngugi levels complaints against several institutions and systems such as neo-colonialism, imperialism, the executive arm of government, intelligentsia, law enforcement officers, and legislators, as well as specific individuals. He presents a list of grievances against the Kenya postcolonial state, and its bourgeois

henchmen. He criticizes the “comprador bourgeoisies” led by President Kenyatta, for betraying the dreams of independence. “The comprador bourgeoisie,” he charges, “which had been growing in the womb of the colonial regime desired to protect and enhance its cosy alliance with foreign interests” with a view to exploiting the Kenyan masses and perpetuating the colonial legacy (53). He therefore depicts post-independence Kenya as a reincarnation or resurrection of colonialism; hence his repeated use of the metaphor of “colonial Lazarus” in characterizing his country. Ngugi implies that like the Biblical character Lazarus whose death was nullified by being raised by Jesus Christ, the symbolic death of colonialism at independence was rendered null and void by embracing of colonial ethos, values and systems by the postcolonial Kenyan state. In other words, the return of “colonial Lazarus” in the garb of African nationalist leaders, translated into a repetition of the cycle of repression, oppression, and exploitation of the Kenyan masses. Like their colonial predecessors the Kenyan ruling elite followed the ethos of “pillage, plunder and murder”(46).

Ngugi harshly criticizes Kenyatta’s obsession with self-aggrandizement, and a reenactment of the quintessential colonial culture of exploitation of the masses. Ngugi believes the greed of the few “comprador bourgeoisies” which motivates them to work in cohorts with their imperial allies, is what consigns millions to poverty. The ethos of “pillage, plunder and murder” inspires revolutionary statements such as JM Kariuki’s famous line, which Ngugi quotes to reinforce his indictment of capitalist greed: “We do

not want to create a Kenya of ten millionaires and ten million beggars” (95). Like their European settler predecessors, who were “parasites in paradise” (29), Ngugi describes the new political dispensation as a “dependant class, and a parasitic class in the *kupe* sense (56). The image of ‘kupe,’ the Swahili word for ‘tick,’ accentuates the notion of dependency of this class on the sweat and blood of the peasant masses. Ngugi singles out JM Kariuki as “one of the bitterest critics of the post-independence betrayal of the Kenyan people” who was assassinated because he stood up against these rapacious “lucky few,” who impoverished the masses with their greed (95).

Apart from outright elimination of opponents, Ngugi inevitably lists the government’s inheritance of colonial detention laws as a grievance. It was a salient part of the great betrayal of independence and had direct ramifications on him in his individual capacity as a political detainee. At independence, only few inconsequential terms were amended, Ngugi correctly notes, leaving the detention laws intact and open to abuse by the nascent KANU governing party. Ngugi observes that it was still within the government’s legal right to waive the “normal democratic assumption of a Kenyan’s guilt for crimes of thought and intention” (51). Ngugi faults the KANU government for retaining and consolidating “all the repressive colonial laws” and continuing to keep its citizens in detention in conditions as bad if not worse than the ones it complained against in the colonial era. He quotes one of his fellow detainees, Wasonga Sijeyo, as saying: “I have been in colonial detention for five years. I have been in this compound

five years. But these two years have beaten all the previous twelve years” (127). Things were getting worse rather than better. The KANU regime had intensified the suffering and deprivation of detainees by including various forms of torture. Ngugi writes:

The detaining authorities are not of course content to just inflict the wound: they must keep on twisting hot knives into it to ensure its continued freshness. This takes various forms: physical beating with the possibility of final elimination; strait-jacketing to ensure bodily immobility; sleeping on cold and wet cement floors without a mat or a blanket so the body can more easily contract disease . . . (100)

In his individual capacity as a detainee, Ngugi suffers the de-individuating consequences of being known merely by a file number namely, K 6, 77 (3). Ngugi writes: “From Saturday 31 December 1977 I had died to my name Ngugi. Henceforth I would answer to a lifeless number on a file among many files”(19). Simon Gikandi has cogently argued about how galling and devastating such de-individuation was to a writer of Ngugi’s stature, who was already remarkably famous, both nationally and internationally at the time of his detention (198). In Detained, Ngugi claims that the aim of the confinement was to “teach a lesson in submission” (xi). He was denied privacy with the prison authorities imposing upon him 24-hour surveillance even on matters such as attending to the demands of nature. He was denied of freedom to receive and send information, the freedom to write freely, and even access to the radio or newspapers. Upon release from detention several months after Kenyatta’s death, the state still continued to consign Ngugi to pariah status. He was trailed by secret police;

he was charged for drinking after hours; he is denied reinstatement to his faculty position at the University of Nairobi; and even after attending an interview where he beat all candidates, he could not offered a new position at the same state-run and state-controlled university. But his persistent protest while in detention as his writing of Detained with its acerbic critique of the Kenyatta regime is an index of not having learned the “lesson in submission” that the government intended for him to learn.

The other grievances Ngugi holds against the Kenyan government involve its imitation of the colonial mentality of denigrating and disparaging indigenous cultural expression. The Kenya National Theater continued to stage foreign plays, while the government banned the performance of Gikuyu plays of the Kamiriithu Theatre Group with which Ngugi was associated. The ruling elite continued to ape the “white bourgeoisie” culture by developing and maintaining aversion for local names and languages, things which otherwise epitomize what he terms “authentic” indigenous Kenyan culture (59).

In her theory of the manifesto, Lyon cites the ending of Franz Fanon’s Wretched of the Earth (1969) as a classic example of a call to the audience for action:

Come, then comrades, it would be as well to decide at once to change our ways. We must shake off the heavy darkness in which we were plunged and leave it behind. The new day which is already at hand must find us firm, prudent, and resolute. (Fanon qtd. in Lyon 29)

In what way does Ngugi call the audience to action in Detained? In responding to this question, it is necessary first of all to identify who is Ngugi's intended audience. In his statement to the Detainee Review Tribunal quoted earlier in this essay, Ngugi addresses the Tribunal. It is tempting therefore to say that the chairman and other members of the Tribunal constituted his audience for that particular fragment of his text. But the inclusion of the document as well as others like it, in the published text is an index of Ngugi's desire for the details of his detention and the depth of his reflection on detention, and his country's history, to be read by a larger audience. When Ngugi declares in the statement that he always wanted a "Kenya for Kenyans," there is little doubt that he wanted the Kenyan masses to read this text and its collection of fragments (188). Ngugi's vision of a Kenya for Kenyans is necessarily exclusionary, particularly when considered in the light of his countless attack on alien and foreign institutions and influences on his native country. He exhorts his audience thus:

Kenyan people, wherever they were, under whatever circumstances, had to keep on insisting on certain irreducible democratic and human rights. If we do not do this, if we succumbed to the culture of fear and silence, Kenya would have merely moved from a colonial prison to a neo-colonial prison. (112)

Ngugi exhorts his audience not to succumb to the "culture of fear and silence" and thereby let their independence become a transformation from one symbolic incarceration to the next. It is noteworthy that Ngugi invokes the collective and politicized pronoun "we" also present in Fanon's text (23-26). It is this collectivized

“we” that Ngugi appeals to for action. This is the “we” of the “moral high ground” of the manifesto genre and is in tandem with the “rhetoric of exclusivity.” Obviously excluded in this implied “we” is the “comprador class” that suffers the brunt of Ngugi’s sustained attack. Ngugi issues a caveat earlier in the text that suggests the exclusion of this category of people; “There is no way I could have written this prison memoir without treading on some sensitive toes” (xi). These include Kenyatta and his henchmen.

It is imperative to exercise care in determining whether Ngugi calls the Kenyan masses to a class struggle pitting the poor against the opulent. I propose that it may be more germane to conclude that Ngugi merely exhorts the masses to *continue* with a class struggle that is always already in progress. We can deduce this from Ngugi’s negation of claims that his play was “calling for a class struggle in Kenya”(188). “How” asks Ngugi, “could the play call for something that was already there? (188). But rather than completely disavow the “class struggle,” it appears Ngugi simply endorses and encourages it in his impassioned message. Sustaining the resistance spirit and staying the course is Ngugi’s call to the audience for action.

In Detained therefore Ngugi locates himself within the context of a longer history of struggle and detention (even assassination) of others like him, before him and in his time. It is a story of the “I” within the matrix of a wider collective “we” which consists of several other “Is” beyond the narrating “I,” some of whom are separated

temporally and spatially. It is a kind of history that inevitably and necessarily runs counter to the official narrative. It is a foreshortened history, selective, and subjective, a history that fixes its accusatory gaze on the aberrations and oppression of successive regimes in Kenya, and their zealous efforts to silence real “patriots” like him. It would seem to Ngugi, patriotism is synonymous with resistance to oppression and exploitation in colonial and postcolonial Kenya.

On the whole, Ngugi uses history as a tool to contextualize the oppressive regimes in Kenya and to underscore the necessity for embracing the ethos of resisting and removing such regimes. Ngugi’s invocation of a foreshortened colonial and postcolonial history, his enumeration of sins of commission and omission, and his call for action in *Detained*, suggest an attempt at pinpointing the diagnosis and prognosis of Kenya’s symbolic national illness and proposing a peasant-led revolution as a the radical surgery needed to ameliorate the condition. The political ideology of changing the Kenyan world that informs Ngugi’s intellectual and political activities is at play in *Detained*. Lyon’s statement about the nature of manifestoes is applicable to his art and activism: “Laying their finger on the pulse of the new world—“the moment of social transition”—the manifesto’s revolutionary artisans mark the artistic praxis that will create the new world”(16). In a sense therefore, Detained is once a political manifesto and an individual and collective record of the truth, torture and trauma of detention.

IV. Taking Refuge in Poetry: Alamin Mazrui's Chembe cha Moyo

This section is a meditation on the poetics and politics of Alamin Mazrui's prison poems titled Chembe cha Moyo, (1988) which can be loosely translated as 'Arrow Head' or 'Cupid's Arrow'. If the poems in Chembe cha Moyo capture the anguished perception of tragedy and trauma that detention signified for Mazrui, it also underlines the love-hate relationship between the poet and his Kenyan nation-state. Like Abdilatif Abdalla's Sauti ya Dhiki (1973), Chembe cha Moyo as a text is centrally situated within the context of incarceration and political struggle for change. Sauti ya Dhiki and Chembe cha Moyo are both collections of prison poems that essentially grapple with issues of personal and collective dignity and freedom in the wake of despotism and decay in the postcolonial or neocolonial moment. They represent rare collections of poems in Kiswahili that have emerged from prison in the colonial and post independence period. Abdalla wrote Sauti ya Dhiki in prison while serving a jail term for sedition in the Kenyatta era in the late 1960s and early 1970s while Mazrui wrote the play Shadows of the Moon (1991) and Chembe cha Moyo (to which this study now focuses), while he was locked up as a political detainee in the Moi era in the 1980s. By the time of his detention Mazrui had already burst onto the Kenyan literary scene in a powerful way. His literary oeuvre had begun with Kilio cha Haki, a pre-detention play that placed him among the leading East African playwrights principally

because of its superior aesthetics and anti-capitalist antics. The publication of Kilio cha Haki would become both a blessing and a curse; imprinting indelibly Mazrui's name in the canon of Swahili literature and rising the ire and mire of the paranoid Moi regime. In a sense Mazrui's detention seems to have been essentially linked to the regime's displeasure with the publication and popularity of Kilio cha Haki.

One could perhaps say that Mazrui's poetry of incarceration Chembe cha Moyo has not elicited as much critical attention as his pre-incarceration play Kilio cha Haki. Critical responses to Chembe cha Moyo are few and far between. Critics who have analyzed it such as K. W. Wamitila in Uhakiki wa Fasihi (2001, Kimani Njogu and Rocha Chimera in Ufundishaji wa Fasihi (1997), and Florence Ngesa Indede in "Mabadiliko katika Umbo la Kiswahili na Athari zake katika Ushairi wa Kiswahili"(2008), tend to concentrate on the stylistic and linguistic elements and do not attend at all or enough to the context and themes of the text.

In this section I intend to bring to the fore not only Mazrui's thematic preoccupations, but also the ethos underlying his prison poetry in Chembe cha Moyo in contrast to Abdalla's Sauti ya Dhiki. Among the questions I examine are: What is the connection between the text of his poems and the detention context within which they were written? How and to what extent does he thematize truth? What is the place or role of the "I" pronoun in Mazrui's poetic world? Does the "I" enter the stage in multiple guises as expressions of the poet's various ways of self-narration? How is the

“I” related to the “we” of the collective identity? The study also addresses the questions of trauma and memory as they are related to the text and context of the carceral imagination and experience. However, in what follows, I turn to a brief life history of the prison poet and the circumstances of his detention, as well as the possible impetus for his writing.

Alamin Mazrui was born on March 10, 1948 at Kibokoni, Mombasa on the Kenyan coast. As his last names suggests, he belongs to the famous Mazrui family, once a powerful dynasty that has had tremendous influence on the cultural and political history of the Kenyan coast. He was born and bred in a highly religious milieu. His father was the Kenyan Chief Kadhi in the 1960s and so was his grandfather. But young Mazrui’s calling was never to be one in the religious realm of his father or grandfather before him. He was to take after his uncle Professor Ali Mazrui, who brazed the trail in secular education and has attained iconic stature, as exemplified by his being named one of the best hundred public intellectuals of modern times.² Alamin Mazrui’s academic journey began at Kizingo Primary School, then Khamisi High School where he completed his A-Level education in 1968. After a brief stint as a chemist for STS, a chemical testing firm in Mombasa, Mazrui moved to the United States for higher education. He joined Rutgers, State University of New Jersey where he obtained a Bachelor’s of Science degree. But he later pulled out of a Masters Degree in Food Science at Rutgers after developing asthmatic complications that hindered his

participation in laboratory sessions. He was subsequently forced to make a drastic shift in his academic career by taking a Master's of Art degree in Applied Linguistics. He later joined Stanford University from where he graduated with a PhD in Linguistics in 1980. He was teaching at the Kenyatta University and served as the university's representative in University Academic Union (UAU) at the time of his detention. Like Abdalla, Ngugi, and Micere Mugo, and other so-called dissident intellectuals, Mazrui found Kenya under Moi uninhabitable and was forced into exile after his release in May 1984. After a brief teaching stint at Port Harcourt University in Nigeria he moved to The Ohio State University in the United States where he was between 1989 and 2007. He now teaches at his *alma mater* Rutgers, State University of New Jersey.

Njuguna Mutahi and Mugo Theuri state in We Lived to Tell that when Moi ascended to power in 1978 he vowed to follow closely in his mentor's footsteps, hence his *Fuata Nyayo* (follow the footsteps) clarion call"(1). When Moi released Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Adam Mathenge, and Martin Shikuku who Kenyatta had detention it almost looked like he was contradicting his promise to follow his predecessor's path of tyranny, suppression and repression. But the veneer of populism in the nascent Moi regime waned fast. Moi started a spirited campaign to ban numerous organizations such as the Kenya Civil Servants' Union, Students Organisation of the University of Nairobi (SONU), and Universities' Academic Union (UAU) to which Mazrui was an official. Hot on the heels of this ban of organizations was the return of detention without trial.

Mazrui was plucked from the classroom in March 1984 during the first round of detentions in the Moi era under the Prevention of Public Security Act, Cap.57 of the Laws of Kenya. He joined the long list of officials of the newly proscribed university faculty union who were detained such as Dr. Willy Mutunga, Kamonji Wachira, Prof. Edward Oyugi, Maina Kinyatti, and Mukaru Ng'ang'a.

One of the most salient aspects of Chembe cha Moyo is the apparent silence about detention as the place of writing in the blurb and introduction. The blurb vaguely dwells on generalities, merely stating that “Chembe cha Moyo ni mkusanyiko wa mashairi yenye mdundo wa kisasa kututongolea hisia za ndani zinazotokana na mazingira mapya katika mataifa ya Ulimwengu wa Tatu.”/ ‘Chembe cha Moyo is an anthology of poems with a modern resonance revealing inner feelings that emerge from a new environment in the Third World nations.’ Either the blurb does not say whose “inner feelings” are at stake or it presumes that those feelings are typical of all individuals in the Third World! Neither does it account for the presumed newness in the Third World. This calls to mind Chacha Nyaigoti Chacha’s characterization of Abdilatif Abdalla’s Sauti ya Dhiki as an indictment of misrule in the Third World in general without as much as attempting to allude to the specificity of the Kenyan situation. I want to argue that in the context of literature of resistance and the turbulent 1970s and 1980s in Kenya both Chacha and the blurb writer were probably using Third World as a “synonym” for Kenya.

The loudness of the silence regarding the “Where” of Chembe cha Moyo writing is accentuated by the militant tone of the poems in the collection, which pull no punches about where they were written. Yet it is difficult to surmise the “Why” of writing of Chembe cha Moyo without also unearthing the “Where” of its being written. It is, I think, in unraveling the connection between where and why that we can come close to telling the motivations for Mazrui’s poetry. In an informal conversation with me, Mazrui disclosed that he had indeed discussed unequivocally the question of why and where in his original introduction of the anthology. Nonetheless, fearing that such candid revelation would short-circuit the book’s distribution and sales, the editorial team at the Nairobi office of Heinemann publishers decided to elide it altogether. The introduction that we are left with in the published version is, therefore, a relic, dwelling as it does on the “safe” stylistics and aesthetics of Swahili poetry in general makes no mention about why and where Mazrui wrote his collection of poems.

This apparent reticence contrasts starkly with Abdalla’s preface in Sauti ya Dhiki in which he mentions that he wrote the poems as a prisoner jailed for sedition. Although we can characterize Abdalla’s explanations for writing as rather nebulous and imprecise, the candor in the pretext is self-evident. What accounts for this difference? For one thing Abdalla and Mazrui were incarcerated and wrote and published under different circumstances. It should be noted that Abdalla’s editor at Oxford University Press was his own brother Abdillahi Nassir and therefore perhaps hardly a disinterested

participant in presenting the context and site of the writing of his brother's poems. But more significantly, it would seem, the attack on books, writers, and intellectuals was presumably much more pronounced in the Moi regime under which Mazrui's Chembe cha Moyo emerged. Thus, while as a writer Mazrui may not have been afraid of revealing detention as the site for writing; his publisher was much less inclined to risk the ire and mire of the Moi terror machine. The publisher seems to have reckoned that he had taken some risk already in publishing the poems in the first place, and was able but unwilling to go any further.

However, although the pretext succumbs to the culture of silence that the Moi regime perfected, it is still not impossible to speculate about the motivation for Mazrui's poems. For one thing the bulk of the poems are preoccupied with incarceration with some of them being quite explicit in this regard. The first poem "Niguse"/ 'Touch Me' is a case in point.

Nitokapo Kizuizini
Nitamwomba yoyote mwendani
aniguse
taratibu
pole pole
lakini
kwa yakini

Niguse tena
Unijuze tena
Unifunze tena
maisha yalivyo
maisha yaonjavyo
ladha yake ilivyo

Nipo hapa nimekukabili
Niguse tena tafadhali
Niguse!
Niguse!

When I come out of Detention
I will beseech any of my beloved ones
to touch me
softly
slowly
but
surely

Touch me once again
Let me know once again
Instruct me anew
about how life is
about how life tastes
the taste of life
I am here facing you
Please touch me once again
Touch me!
Touch me! (1)

From the very first line of the first poem, Mazrui foregrounds the facticity of incarceration, alluding to the moment “Nitokapo Kizuizini”/ ‘When I come out of detention.’ The plea “Niguse” in the title and that is repeated throughout the poem underscores the deprivation of human contact and the human touch that the speaker in the poem has experienced in the detention. The speaker desperately yearns for the human touch, literally and figuratively, and envisions the momentous and joyous

moment of release that would make such contact both possible and probable. The reference to “Kizuizini”/ ‘Detention’ is overt not tacit, amplified as it were, with the upper case initial “K”. And yet this allusion to the condition of detention in particular and incarceration in general is not isolated but indeed suffuses Chembe cha Moyo far too much to assume that it is accidental.

Since the silence on the facticity of detention in the introduction and blurb deprive us of potentially useful tips as to the motivation for writing we are left to speculate from what we can glean from the poems. Thankfully, the poems do not disappoint as such in this regard, as “Niguse” illustrates. Other poems that explicitly mention or thematize incarceration include; “Kifungoni”/ ‘Incarceration’ (14); “Kizuizini”/ ‘Detention’ (27); “Nayayesha Pingu”/ ‘I am Melting Handcuffs’ (33); and “Hakuna Yeyote”/ ‘Alone’ (40). Mazrui wrote both Shadows of the Moon and Chembe cha Moyo under the depressing conditions of detention and against the wish of the prison authorities. Prison generally tends to be anti-books and anti-writers. As Jack Mapanje has stated regarding the prison system in Malawi under Kamuzu Banda, the Bible seems to be the only “innocuous” book one is allowed to access. Mazrui used the margins of the Bible that he as given him by the prison authorities, ostensibly in hopes of softening him, to scribble his poems and play. Also he had to resort to stealing pens from prison warders and once from a pilot, to be able to write. On the whole the write-

and-hide game he had to play indicates that it needed more than the simple will to write to be able to write under prison conditions.

Writing then appears to have been a compulsion, something that needed to be done in spite of or because of the prevailing anti-writing detention surroundings. In answering the question concerning the “where” of the writing, one should take into account the fact that the locale was the most unlikely. So why write from such an unlikely locale? As the title of this section suggests, I think, seeking solace in writing was an important motivation for Mazrui’s prison writing. The therapeutic properties of writing seem to play a crucially important role in the writer’s motivation, particularly in the genre of poetry that lends itself towards free release of pent up feelings and emotions. But this self-expression also enables and enhances self-narration, albeit in the somewhat incoherent and circuitous poetic form. This brings us to the grammatical “I” of Mazrui’s Chembe cha Moyo.

I contend that there are multiple “I”-s in Mazrui’s prison poetry that reflect and refract the poet’s self and reality as a real historical person detained for political reasons. They range from the optimistic to the nihilistic, from militant to the resigned, from the devout to the irreligious, from confident to the doubting, from the cultural nationalist to the Pan-Africanist, etc. In “Niguse,” the “I” refers to an incarcerated but yet optimistic self. There is optimism, if cautious optimism, because the yearned for desire for the human touch is now more than just a remote possibility due to apparent

prospects of freedom. In this opening poem, Mazrui presents a self that needs to learn to be human again as the second stanza suggests:

Niguse tena
Unijuze tena
Unifunze tena
 maisha yalivyo
 maisha yaonjavyo
 ladha yake ilivyo

Touch me once again
Let me know once again
Instruct me anew
 about how life is
 about how life tastes
 the taste of life

It is an “I” whose selfhood hangs on to a receding sense of *being* but which takes refuge in the knowledge of the real possibility of *becoming* human again. Through the desperate tone of the narrating and narrated “I” Mazrui compellingly reveals how life in detention and outside detention are worlds apart. Clearly, by using the “I” in transition from non-being to human being, the poem reveals profoundly the magnitude of dehumanization that detention may wrought on individuals. The same notion of optimism is expressed in the poem “Nitangojea”/ ‘I will Wait’ (8) in which the narrating “I” projects itself as exercising patience and looking forward to reunion with a beloved one. Yet expressing or representing oneself in terms of the possibility of release

and relief in the foreseeable future despite the present moment of crisis, accords with the search for refuge in poetry that underwrites the ebb and flow of Chembe cha Moyo.

But the optimistic “I” is sometimes replaced by a doubtful, even a nihilistic “I” in the range of poems in the anthology. In “Mtabiri”/ ‘Seer’ (52) one encounters an “I” presenting itself as a prophet of doom bereft of any iota of hope for a better future.

The speaker in the poem predicts assertively;

sauti tishi zimenijia
kusudi kunitabiria
hatari zilotukalia
na kutukamia

fearful voices have come to me
warning me of what is yet to come
about the danger we are bound to face
dangers that are about to engulf us. (52)

The narrator then lists a host of oddities that according to his predictions are set to occur (e.g. a female goat bearing through the mouth a grotesque offspring that is neither completely goat nor sheep; a human mother conceives a deformed child with a wound in place of the eyes; and the human population pounded by the “mvua ya mauti”/ “rain of death” etc.) The upheaval in the system of things shakes even angelic hordes. The speaker concludes.

Ndimi mtabiri
Mwona Mbali
Nami naogopa

I am the prophet
The far-sighted one
And I am fearful. (53)

It is possible to perceive this tremor or transformation in the social equilibrium as an indicator of social revolution, the kind envisioned by political activists who are not contented with folding arms and watching their societies crumble under tyranny and misrule. The leftist ideology that underpins Mazrui's entire literary output in general seems to lend credence to this supposition. However, the grotesque and unattractive images of the changes that ensue undercut the possibility of the prediction of revolution and positive change. The speaking self in the poem is overwhelmed with fear, ending the poem with little or no hope of a bright future as the lines "Naogopa"/ 'I am fearful' clearly indicate.

In "Mashindano"/ 'Contest' (31) the poet reenacts the Greek narrative of Sisyphus who continually rolls a boulder up the hill only for the boulder to come down tumbling. Although the speaker in the poem alludes to a third person struggling to heave the rock up an endless hill, one is bound to discern that the person in question is indeed the narrating self from the line "Ole wangu wee!"/ 'Oh! Woe to me!' in the final stanza. Also, although the rock is not directly said to be rolling back in "Mashindano", the sense of futility that pervades the poem suggests such possibility.

Chembe cha Moyo has also a female “I” that both identifies with and articulates the position and condition of being female. In “Ninakwenda Nairobi”/ “I am going to Nairobi” (29) the speaking self is a woman who candidly reveals to her lover her intention of going to Nairobi to peddle her flesh as a prostitute due to poverty. She consoles him, assures him of her love and tries make to him understand why her recourse to prostitution is expedient and necessary. The economic imperative that drives her to prostitution, risking her relationship with her love and reducing her to a sexual object, is at very the core of Mazrui’s historical materialist ideology. Mazrui seems to be interrogating the oppressive economic capitalist system that would compel individuals to forego their humanity in order to survive economically. At any rate the poem presents an acute sense of self-demolition or self-immolation in what we may call the “woman condition,” for lack of a better expression. Whether “Ninakwenda Nairobi” is a demeaning image of womanhood or not it represents one of the multiple “I”-s that inhabits the universe of Mazrui’s poetry.

Another example of a poem in which there is a female “I” is “Bega kwa Bega”/ ‘Should to Shoulder’ (4). In this poem the “I” does not refer to a whore in the making as in the case of “Ninakwenda Nairobi”, but to the supportive wife of a freedom fighter in the colonial period in Kenya. She declares assertively:

Lakini kumfuata mume wangu naendelea
Nchi yangu kuipigania
Utu wangu kujirudishia

But I will continue to follow my husband
In the struggle for my country
To reclaim my personhood. (4).

The wife of the freedom fighter is at one with her husband in the struggle for freedom. Her female condition, the traditional female chores in the household, and her role as mother do not dissuade her from participating fully in the war of liberation. The female “I” in “Bega kwa Bega” is a classic example of a ball juggler, anticipating the modern career woman who has a fulltime job both at home and away. But more importantly she epitomizes countless courageous Mau Mau women fighters who supported their male counterparts in waging war against British colonial rule in Kenya during what historian Caroline Elkins has described in her Imperial Reckoning as the most atrocious confrontation between the colonized and the colonizer in the world.

Mazrui’s invocation of the voice of an unknown and unnamed female freedom fighter excavated from Kenya’s collective memory of the Mau Mau phenomenon may seem on the surface pointless. After all he was writing and living, albeit in detention, in the postcolonial moment. Yet it is the underlying continuity between the colonial and postcolonial moments that is crucial in this invocation. For one thing, the postcolonial dispensation resorted to detention without trial as a weapon to deal with political dissent in exactly the same way as the colonial dispensation before it. It is therefore plausible to conclude that Mazrui found solace on ruminating about the continuity of relentless opposition to misrule in the postcolonial period as in the colonial one. He could identify

with this female imaginative “I” of yester years, because her voice of dissent in the colonial past was like the voice of countless other dissenters, him included, in the postcolonial present. Thus the “I” of “Bega kwa Bega” may also imply an unstated “we” that is transhistorical and “transgender” in nature. This sense of solidarity that links political prisoners, real and potential ones, across time and place, is a typical motif in prison literature.

In “Nasaha ya Mzazi” (54) / ‘Parental Admonition’ the narrating “I” is a parent admonishing and consoling his or her own son who has become a victim of travesty or miscarriage of justice.

Lakini usiwe ni wa kushutuka
'Siwache machozi yakakudondoka
Yako ndiyo haki isiyo shaka
Yenye kukuvua joho la lawama

But do not be alarmed
Do not shed tears
There is no doubt you are right
Rightfulness that absolves you from blame. (54).

Given the fact of Mazrui’s detention without trial, one could conclude that he is himself the principal audience or addressee of the poem. But he is also the source or creator of the parental voice that relays the never-give-up message in the poem. Thus in a way the poet utilizes the “I” in the poem to transform himself into his own fictive parent and counselor. In other words poetry enables Mazrui to create himself in the imaginative and affective image of his father or mother and through that to proclaim his innocence

and his victimhood. He speaks to himself consolingly through the parental “I” as a way of coping with detention. This reinforces the proposition that the poet deliberately embraces poetry as a vital source of comfort in the face of the despondency that detention presented.

Yet in trying to present various versions of the “I” that tend to reflect and refract his selfhood, Mazrui does not always foreground the ideological at the expense of the essentially human. The sense of being or becoming human that his various “I”-s in Chembe cha Moyo aspire to or despair aspiring to is not obscured by a quest for ideological abstractions. This is so despite or because of poet’s manifestly Marxian leanings. Granted Mazrui’s uncle Ali Mazrui has aptly characterized his nephew, as a Kenyatta University instructor “who was detained without charge by the Moi regime for being a left-wing Kenyan academic” (60). Also, certain poems in this collection are unequivocal in their advancement of socialist ideals (e.g. “Chungu”/ ‘Ants’ (18) in which the poet admires the cohesion and cooperation that epitomizes the “socialism” of ants and “Taji la Wema”/ ‘The Crown of Virtue (26) in which the speaker calls for socialism in the line “Basi upisheni ujamaa”/ ‘Give socialism a chance’). But in the poem “Mimi ni Mimi”/ “I am Me” (12), there is a vehement disavowal of ideologues and the ideologies and ideals with which they identify themselves or are characteristically identified. The narrating “I” refuses to be branded in accord with any ideological orientation:

Waniita mkomunisti
Waniita mkapitalisti
Na mimi ni binadamu tu,
Kwani hilo halitoshi?

They call me a communist
They call me a capitalist
And yet I am just human
Isn't that enough? (12)

The narrating "I" in this poem conceives of a selfhood that is not mediated through opposing ideological branding or paroxysms. Ideologies or ideological branding whether accurate or inaccurate gloss over the quintessential human element embodied in the self. Furthermore, emphasis on ideological differences tends to overlook our common humanity, or that we are fellow passengers in the train of life, to paraphrase Charles Dickens in A Christmas Carol. As the next stanza shows, the nations globally face the same or similar challenges as to make fiery arguments over ideology or ideological identification count for little or nothing;

Nchi zinajiwakia
Mamama wakiomboleza, wakilia
Tumbi ya watoto wakiumia
na maneno yote tunayotumia
kuuana na kuangamia

Nations are burning
Mothers mourn and cry
Countless children are hurt
by every word we use
To kill and annihilate one another. (12).

What is needed, the poem seems to suggest, is a quest for pragmatic solutions to human problems, not engagement with empty ideological differentiation or the needless fomenting of animosity based on real and imagined ideological differences.

Implicated in this humanist impulse in Mazrui's poetry is awareness of personal tragedy and trauma. It is true that some of the poems are concerned about the global village, about humanity and about the disenchantment with the postcolonial situation in Africa. But Chembe cha Moyo is more than a chronicle of the faceless "inner feelings" of the Third World as the writer of the blurb purports; it is more about what the blurb and the introduction do not say, namely meditation on the personal trauma and tragedy of incarceration. The poems in the anthology amply demonstrate how incarceration, isolation, torture and trauma are inextricably bound up together. Therefore, poems like "Niguse"(1), which thematize incarceration do not only locate detention as the site for writing, but also bring to the fore the extent of the site's traumatizing potential. Apart from "Niguse," there are a number of poems in the anthology that underwrite this sense of trauma in Mazrui's poetic narration of self and confinement. For example, in "Kifungoni"/'Incarceration' (13) the speaker relates both the desolation of his sense of self and the dissipation or disappearance of hope for recovery:

Kwa kuangalia juu mbinguni
Na kulia sana kwa matumaini
Samawati imeingia
Mwangu machoni.

Kwa kuota mahindi mashambani

Na kulia sana mahuzuni
Manjano imeingia
Mwangu machoni.

Waache majemadari waende vitani
Wapenzi waende bustanini
Na walimu mwao darasani
Ama mimi, tasubihi nipeni
Na kiti cha kale, cha zamani
Niwe vivi nilivyo duniani:
Bawabu mlangoni
Katika kingo ya maumivu ya ndani
Maadamu vitabu, sheria na zote dini
Zitahakikisha mauti
Nikiwa na njaa au kifungoni

Because of looking up in the heavens
and weeping so much with optimism
The color blue has entered
into my eyes.

Because of the sprouting of maize in the fields
and weeping so much with sorrow
The color yellow has entered
into my eyes.

Let the commanders go to war
Lovers to the park
And teachers to their classrooms
As for me give me prayer beads
And an ancient chair, an old one
So that I can remain the way I am in the world
A Sentry at the door
On the banks of inner pain
So long as books, the law and every religion
Will ensure my death
While I am famished or incarcerated
(13).

The speaker's "kulia sana kwa matumaini"/ 'weeping so much with optimism' in opening stanza is not a mark of optimism, but a post-optimism reevaluation of his state as an incarcerated individual. At any rate that weeping has borne no tangible benefits. To the contrary, his eyes have turned blue, for nothing, one could say, because the much hoped for divine intervention from above has not come to change his material reality. It is instructive that the initial "weeping with optimism" soon turns into "kulia sana kwa mahuzuni"/ 'weeping so much with sorrow.' The trauma is intensified by the knowledge that while one languishes in detention; other people such as army generals, teachers, and lovers, go about their duties as if there is nothing amiss. But for the speaking "state guest" incarceration is never business as usual because of the attendant traumatizing deprivation of rights and agency that it causes. The recourse to "tashbihi"/ 'prayer beads' is not driven by optimism or deep religious devotion but a resignation to one's despondent destiny. The speaker in saying "maadamu vitabu, sheria, na zote dini/ zitanihakikishia mauti"/ 'So long as books, the law and every religion/ Will ensure my death' is fundamentally a *death wish*. When the speaker alludes to "inner pain" he seems to imply the deep psychological trauma that gnaws at him in his incarcerated state. This inner pain is certainly related to what the blurb writer terms "hisia za ndani"/ 'inner feelings' except that the inner pain here points to Mazrui's imaginative projection of the trauma of detention rather than the hazy and faceless Third World to which the blurb points.

Other poems that thematize trauma include “Kizuizini”/ ‘Detention’ (27) in which the speaker is a beloved child narrating to the mother his ordeal of anger and mistreatment in detention; “Mfukuzwa,”/ ‘I am a Reject’ (15) and “Hakuna Yeyote”/ ‘Alone’ which narrativizes crippling solitude and isolation; “Chuo”/ ‘School of Liberation’ (2) which highlights trauma as part of the costly price of the liberation struggle; and “Hisia”/ ‘Feelings’ (3) which parades the wound on the psyche that detention inflicts upon individuals such as feelings of self-blame or self-hate.

There is a sense in which Mazrui’s Chembe cha Moyo is thematically and stylistically similar to and different from Abdalla’s Sauti ya Dhiki. We have already discussed the obvious differences in the pretexts of the two texts with regard to revealing the location of writing. We also noted that there are indeed differences in the contexts within which these poems were written. Mazrui wrote his poems in the early 1980s while in detention in the Moi era, almost a decade after Abdalla had written his Sauti ya Dhiki as a convicted seditionist in the Kenyatta regime. Nonetheless, the political undertones and overtones of both Abdalla’s imprisonment and Mazrui’s detention need not be overemphasized; both were incarcerated for political reasons because they were perceived as representing a real or imagined danger to the respective regimes. Also, not only do these prison poets have similar roots on the Kenyan coast, having been born and bred on the island city of Mombasa in an essentially Arabized and Islamicized Swahili socio-cultural milieu, but Marxist thought also substantially

influenced them. The thrust of the poems that narrate their carceral experience is for the most part as political as the reasons for their incarceration. In unraveling the signification of Chembe cha Moyo and Sauti ya Dhiki, therefore, it is imperative to adopt an interpretive frame that takes into account the texts' political contents, contexts and connotations.

Abdalla and Mazrui's literary styles are seemingly worlds apart. Their poetic styles seem to be governed by different aesthetic principles with the former strictly adhering to *arudhi* (traditional Swahili prosody) while the latter in the main adopting *mashairi huru* (free verse). Abdalla made manifest his poetic manifesto in a discourse at the University of Dar es Salaam in the mid-1970s when he declared: "Watalaamu wa Kiswahili kwa umoja wao wamekubaliana kuwa shairi la Kiswahili lazima liwe na vina na mizani. Viti hivi viwili ni kama roho ya shairi la Kiswahili." / 'Swahili scholars have unanimously agreed that the Swahili poem must have rhyme and meter. These two things are like the soul of the Swahili poem.' (qtd. in Chacha 34). On the other hand, Mazrui's introduction to Chembe cha Moyo constitutes his poetic manifesto, in which he claims:

Nafikiri kauli ya sawa zaidi ni ile isemayo kuwa ilhamu ya washairi hawa wapya imeamshwa na hali nyingine tu ya mazingira, kwamba mdundo wa ilhamu yao unatokana na ngoma nyingine, kwamba katika maisha yao wamekumbana na bahari nyingine za ufasaha ambazo mawimbi yake yamewapeleka kumudu mbinu nyingine za unahodha wa fasihi.

I think its more cogent to say that these new breed of (Swahili) poets are inspired by different environmental conditions, that the resonance of their inspiration emanates from other sources, that in their lives they have encountered another sea of virtuosity whose waves have made them masters of a different set of techniques of literary aesthetics. (ix)

Mazrui counts himself among this new crop of Swahili poets who do not follow the prosodic conventions. In his principles of poetry he therefore rejects the *insistence* on rhyme and meter that Abdalla espouses. But rejecting the insistence on adherence to prosody does not mean he does not employ these aspects in his poems. To the contrary there is tremendous evidence of rhyme and meter in Mazrui's Chembe cha Moyo. What one notices though in Mazrui's principles and practice of poetry is a deliberate attempt to create a synthesis between the antithetical prosodists and proponents of free verse. So while Abdalla's comes across as a prisoner of prosodic style, Mazrui frees himself from the chains of conventions without completely abandoning them. In other words although rhyme and meter may be said to be as prevalent in Chembe cha Moyo as in Sauti ya Dhiki, Mazrui's poems cannot be easily classified or pigeonholed in specific conventional Swahili poetic subgenres such as *tathlitha*, *tarbia*, *takhmisa*, *msuko*, or *malumbano* as Abdalla's. Moreover whereas Abdalla writes principally in the Kimvita dialect of Mombasa, Mazrui 's poems are more oriented toward Kiswahili Sanifu or Standard Kiswahili. This does not imply that he strictly adheres to standard Swahili usage. His use of non-standard words such as when he pluralizes words that are not usually in the plural form by adding the prefix "ma" (e.g. "mahuzuni" in "Kifungoni"

(14), and “mamama” in “Mimi ni Mimi” (12) etc) illustrate how he is not averse to deviating from conventions of Standard Kiswahili grammar as well.

And yet there are striking resemblances in the thematic concerns in the two anthologies. In a sense both poets embark on a psychic journey and philosophical journey which entails articulation of a wide range of “voices” as a means of dealing with the reality of incarceration. The multivocality of the multiple “I”-s that inhabit the poetic universe of their collection of poems represent multifarious conceptions and narrations of self and confinement. Both poets capture in the carceral imagination and experience the aporia and uncertainty of the revolutionary struggle, (e.g. in Mazrui’s “Ni Ipi Njia Yetu?”/ ‘Where Do We Go From Here?’ (32), and “Hisia”/ ‘Feelings’ (3) and Abdalla’s “Telezi”/ ‘Slippery Ground’ (24); and “Njia Panda”/ ‘At a Crossroads’ (79). Interestingly Mazrui’s shorter “Jana Leo na Kesho”/ ‘Yesterday Today and Tomorrow’ (CCM 42) is almost a replica of Abdalla’s longer “Jana na Leo na Kesho” ‘Yesterday and Today and Tomorrow’ (SYD 42). Both poems philosophize on the passage of time that inevitably preoccupies the incarcerated self to whom the when or whether of release almost always carries unmistakable urgency with it. It bears stating, however, that having been sentenced to a specific prison term, Abdalla may have had kept his focus more on when rather than whether he would be released although there was the remote possibility of early release through a presidential pardon that was never to be. For a political detainee like Mazrui, as Ngugi wa Thiong’o states in Detained, it

was presumably both a question of when and whether one would be released. But whether in prison or detention, the passage of time is pivotal.

Like Abdalla, Mazrui also thematizes truth in for instance “Kweli”/ ‘Truth’ (50) in which and “Maudhui”/ ‘Content’ (69). In “Kweli” Mazrui writes;

Kweli wambwa ni uchungu
Hauliki abadani
Ni mwiba wa nungunungu
Ubambuaye lisani
Na kwetu ‘si walimwengu
U sumu mwetu moyoni

Lakini nakuuliza
u mchungu kwake nani?
Fukara asojiweza
Wamuumiza nini?
Ana kipi kiliwaza
Asipokukini?

They say truth is bitter
It is not palatable at all
It is the spike of the porcupine
That hurts the tongue
And for us humans
It is poison in our hearts

But let me ask you
To who is it bitter?
How does it hurt
The poor one who has nothing?
What does he lose
For speaking the truth? (50)

Mazrui recurs to the motif of truth as bitter, poisonous and unpalatable, in “Kweli” and politicizes truth as much as Abdalla in “N’shishiyelo ni Lilo” (I am Unshakeable). The

persona in Mazrui's poem contends that the response to the kind of truth propounded here is contingent upon one's class status. One could say it is Marxian or Mazruian truth that defines the rift between the haves or have-mores and have-nots, between peasants and plunderers. Both poets seem to perceive truth as synonymous with exposing the misdeeds of the ruling elite, thereby equating truth with opposition to misrule. This truth is therefore reductive and tendentious and is confined within the political matrix of the *agon* between reactionary and revolutionary forces. That is why for instance, the poor person in Mazrui's poem would lose nothing by both speaking and pondering the truth concerning the connection between his poverty and the greed of the ruling elite. It is the perpetrators of his poverty, who would be incensed by the truth of that connection, hence the selective bitterness of this kind of truth. The subject of political or politicized truth exemplifies the extent to which Mazrui's prison poetry dialogues and generally concurs with Abdalla's.

Nonetheless, the personae in Mazrui's Chembe cha Moyo do not seem to be on the same page on matters of religious truth with their counterparts in Abdalla's Sauti ya Dhiki. To be sure both anthologies display a passionate revolutionary stance that blurs the line between religion and politics. Their stance also entails envisioning universal positive change across the continent of Africa as demonstrated by poems such as Abdalla's "Mamaetu Afrika"/ 'Our Mother Africa' (36) and Mazrui's "Kilio cha Afrika"/ 'The Cry of Africa' (30; "Nilivuka"/ 'I Crossed' (10). But it is their

articulation and projection of religious fervor that sets them apart. It needs to be reiterated that both Mazrui and Abdalla were brought up against a backdrop of deep Islamic religious tenets. Yet the personae of Abdalla's poetry tend to evince more religious devotion than Mazrui's, believing and trusting in Allah's intervention in human affairs. In Abdalla's "Tuza Moyo"/ 'Take Heart' (6) the persona has a deeply prayerful attitude:

Akhi tuliza mtima, uwate kusunoneka
Hakuna lisilokoma, siku 'fika 'tatoka
Kusubiri ni lazima, na kumuomba Rabbuka
Wasiya wako 'meshika

Dear brother take heart, and stop mourning
There is nothing that has no end, when the day comes I will be free
It is imperative to be patience, and to pray to God
I have heeded your advice. (SYD 6)

To the contrary the personae in Mazrui's poetry is typified by misgivings and doubt about Allah's willingness and ability to intervene. In "Risala"/ 'Message' (24) the persona expresses doubt about God's ability to read and respond to a written petition from all struggling and suffering humankind. The persona states:

Lakini enyi mafukara wa dunia
Hofu yangu kubwa nawambia
Mungu huenda ikatukia
hajui kusoma ... hili nachelea

But eeh! Your wretched of the earth
I will reveal to you my fear
It may well be that God
I suspect is illiterate ... (24).

The persona of Mazrui's poem therefore does not share the same level of profound belief and implicit trust in God as that of Abdalla's poem. The invocation of the image of God either unwilling or unable to read also implies unwillingness or inability to respond promptly to pressing human needs particularly those pertaining to the poor. On the whole, the personae in Mazrui's poetry at once questions and subverts received religious truth as they do any number of time-tested and tried Swahili aphorisms (e.g. the questioning of the proverb 'Hasira Hasira,' 'Wrath is Profitless,' in "Hasara Hasara?"/ 'Is Wrath Really Profitless?' (23). It is in this respect that one could read in Chembe cha Moyo's personae both traces of nihilism, agnosticism, or the Nietzschean God-is-dead notion.

As a comparison with Abdalla's Sauti ya Dhiki shows, the recourse to poetry as refuge hardly loses its saliency as poets narrate themselves and their confinement in multiple voices and "I"-s while they undertake the psychic and philosophical journey that their poetry makes both possible and expedient. Mazrui's thematic concerns are as multi-layered as Abdalla's although for both poets, incarceration is the quintessential pivot around which the poems revolve. Stylistically Mazrui demonstrates how he selectively accepts conventions of Swahili poetic conventions such as meter and rhyme but rejects being their prisoner. Together with his play Shadows of the Moon, Chembe cha Moyo stands as Mazrui's monumental attempt to give account of himself with

regard to his detention without trial in the Moi regime, adding to the trajectory of literature of incarceration in postcolonial Kenya.

V. Where the Actual and the Fictional Share a Bed: Fictionalizing Experiential Reality
in Wahome Mutahi's Three Days on the Cross

Georges Gusdorf theorized that we are all closet autobiographers and whatever we read or write from academic essays to textbooks to letters, from autobiography to fiction, almost always betrays this autobiographical impulse in us. Efforts to distance ourselves from this impulse, do not, Gusdorf argued, negate the fact that we tell or read something of the story of our own individual lives in whatever we read or write. For example, we can trace elements of the autobiographical even in expository works such as Edward Said's Orientalism, in which, as Aijaz Ahmad reveals, Said attempts to come to terms with "what it meant to be Palestinian living and teaching in the USA, armed with not much more than a humanist intellectual training, a successful career as a literary critic, and a splendid mastery of European textuality" (161). Said himself sees the compilation of Orientalism as an exercise whose aim was to "inventory the traces upon me" (Qtd. in Ahmad 162). There are any number of individuals in the academe that would identify with Said's implicit attempt to make sense of his place in the world as he presents his scholarly arguments, whether or not they agree with these arguments or not. Put different it is difficult not to be prompted by Said's intellection to reflect upon one's own situation and life in relation to or opposition to his. The pervasive power of the autobiographical is enacted in Said's writing and our reading of his work in that

inherent in both cases is his meditation upon his own life narrative and our meditation upon our own life narratives.

In the pretext of Three Days on the Cross (1991) Wahome Mutahi states in the disclaimer that his is a “work of fiction and all the characters do not bear resemblance to any persons, living or dead” and that the “country which is the setting of the story is supposed to bear no resemblance to any existing African country.” His refusal to admit that his fictional work is a representation of his own sentient prison experience is therefore, one could say, a tactical rhetorical device that enables him to tacitly narrativize his prison experience without appearing to be doing so. This conclusion is not only simply premised on the theoretical assumption that all novels are autobiographies or autobiographical, a supposition supported by among other critics Olney, Nietzsche, and Gusdorf; rather there are far too many concrete resemblances between the author Wahome Mutahi and Ongudipe Chipota, a key character in the novel and between the unnamed country and Mutahi’s own native Kenya to escape any perspicuous reader’s attention. As Patrick Mutahi has pointed out in his essay “Why Jail was Good News to Me,” the atmosphere of political repression and suppression then prevalent in Kenya necessitated such circumvention as a way of avoiding state terror and reprisal. I therefore propose reading Three Days on the Cross (1991) as Mutahi’s prison memoir in the guise of fiction; a fitting example of a fictional writer as a closet autobiographer representing his own experience tacitly rather than overtly. At the very

least, the novel is inspired by Mutahi's own prison experience as a political prisoner. His resemblance to the Chipota, journalist protagonist is at once compelling and telling, although, for sure I must admit, it is difficult to ascertain what the writer adds or leaves out in his novel from the actual events that inspired his writing.

This section focuses on the intercourse between the actual and the fictional in Wahome Mutahi's Three Days on the Cross. Following Jan Alber in his Narrating the Prison, this study assumes that an absolute distinction between novels and autobiographies is impossible (7). Mutahi utilizes the novel genre and its diegetic properties to represent his own experience as a victim of what Joanna Summers would have described as the "barbarous force" of a totalitarian regime (19). I attempt to address the following questions: What are Mutahi's motivations for writing this prison narrative? Why does he fictionalize his prison experience? How does he harness the narrative aspects of the polydiegetic novel genre to represent the various sides playing out in an arena of tyranny, torture and trauma? Is it possible to excavate the multiple "I"s of conventional autobiography in a novel operating within the matrix of an apparently detached and disembodied omniscient narration? To what extent does Mutahi thematize truth and what is the role of this thematization in bridging the actual and the fictional?

Born in 1954 in Nyeri, Central Kenya, Wahome Mutahi had close affiliation with the Catholic Church, serving as an altar boy and later joining a seminary.

Nonetheless, He dropped out of the seminary in 1972 due to what his son Patrick Mutahi alleges was the incongruity between the religious strictness and the writer's "liberal mind," rendering the seminary less than an ideal environment for him or rendering him less than an ideal candidate for that environment (3). He then joined Kirimara High School in Nyeri for his A-level education where his fascination with literature blossomed, constituting the bedrock for his illustrious literary and journalistic career. Mutahi passed his A-level examination and joined the University of Nairobi to study Literature in 1974.

Among his instructors was famous African writer and professor Ngugi wa Thiong'o who would exert tremendous influence on young Mutahi. Not only did Mutahi become a writer imbued with a revolutionary impulse like Ngugi, but also wrote some of his works in his Gikuyu language like his literary mentor. Moreover, Mutahi's Igiza Productions, which staged plays in bars and other lowbrow social spaces, was presumably inspired by Ngugi's Kamiriithu theatre.

Mutahi graduated with a BA in Literature in 1978 and worked in the Kenyan civil service in an administrative capacity as a District Officer in Meru and Machakos Districts. In a sense, he was then part of the government machinery that would later on brand him a nemesis. Yet, when Mutahi left government services to study for his MA in Literature at University of Nairobi he could not have envisaged the degree of antipathy that the Moi government would exhibit towards him for his intellectual and creative

activities. He did not complete his MA studies after being offered a tantalizing position as a sub-editor at The Nation newspapers. In 1982, the year when the regime experienced an abortive military coup, Mutahi inaugurated the Whispers column, which endeared him to millions of his East African readers and at the same time enraged the status quo in Kenya. The humor column that lasted for over two decades until Mutahi's death in July 2003 was a witty but biting critique of misrule and the rot in Kenyan society. By the time of his demise Mutahi had carved a niche for himself as one of the foremost political commentators on the state of the nation in Kenya. He also had established a rich literary output including, The Miracle Merchant (2003) Doomsday (1999), Jail Bugs (1992) and Three Days on the Cross (1991), not to mention numerous scripts of plays in Gikuyu. His iconic stature on the Kenyan literary scene is demonstrated by the creation after his death of the Wahome Mutahi Prize for Literature awarded to the most humorous literary pieces in Kenya.

Mutahi's rising literary and journalistic star was concurrent with rising tension between the government's reactionary stance (of which Mutahi as District Officer was initially a cog in the wheel) and the revolutionary dissidents and dissenters. The apogee of this tension was reached in the 1982 abortive coup staged against the Moi government by a section of air force junior officers led by Hezekiah Ochuka. Ochuka faced a court martial and was executed in 1987. The administration felt impelled to silence opposition and any and all perceived enemies, real and imagined, with the

degree of zeal that either equaled or exceeded that of both the colonial regime and the Kenyatta era. In the aftermath of the attempted coup the country witnessed one of the most ruthless crackdowns on government critics and political activists in post-independence Kenya. Activists therefore resorted to clandestine operations, which started before the attempted coup but intensified after it. Among the leading underground organizations was Muungano wa Wazalendo wa Kuikomboa Kenya (Mwakenya) loosely translated as ‘The Patriotic Movement for Kenya’s Liberation.’ Intellectuals in exile such as Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Micere Mugo, Maina wa Kinyatti, and Abdilatif Abdalla were said to have been engineering the movement’s dissident activities from overseas in cohorts with local cells in Kenya. The movement published and distributed the putatively seditious pamphlets Mpatanishi and Pambana.

It was in connection with these seditious publications that Mutahi was arrested and jailed. He was arrested on November 14, 1986 together with his younger brother Njuguna Mutahi. They both pleaded guilty to the charge of failing to prevent a felony and were promptly and speedily sentenced to 15 months in prison each. The writer’s son, Patrick Mutahi provides in Wahome Mutahi’s World a description of the prosecutor’s submission in court that bears quoting at length:

Wahome admitted before Chief Magistrate H.H. Buch that between April and October 1986 in Nairobi, he failed to report to police that he was “of the knowledge” that a group of people intended to publish a seditious publication. The Deputy Public Prosecutor Bernard Chunga told the court that Wahome came across a publication titled *Mpatanishi* (loosely translated as ‘hold together’ which he was given by Njuguna. He did not report the illegal

publication to the police. He received the publications three more times but did not report to the police or relevant authorities. Chunga observed that the publications were extremely seditious and were meant to incite and cause disaffection against the government. He added that Wahome knew that the publications were illegal, he was aware that the authors were members of a subversive movement and lastly, he knew the consequences of being found with such the publications. (79)

The electronic and print media reported the terse court proceedings of a seemingly straightforward sedition case as they did in any number of cases then. But it is through reading prison literature that emerged then that one would unearth the untold tales of torture and trauma; only such literature would narrate the unnarratable given the prevailing ambience of suppression and repression. Three Days on the Cross was the first ever fiction attempt to risk telling the untellable, albeit in the relative “safety” of the smokescreen of fiction. Mutahi’s brother Njuguna Mutahi would later co-edit with Mugo Theuri We Lived to Tell: The Nyayo House Story that documents the survivors’ account of their experiences at Nyayo House. We Lived to Tell documents the actual accounts of actual survivors and the atrocities they faced at the hands of Moi’s secret agents. Regarding the individual and collective trauma that the Nyayo House experience occasioned, Mutahi and Theuri state:

But for all who went through the experience and survived to tell, an indelible mark of physical and mental trauma still lingers. For those who died, a hollow feeling of helplessness and anguish haunts families, relatives and friends. Nyayo House chambers were meticulously planned and built, using public funds of course, specifically for torturing and killing Kenyans who were deemed to be enemies of the Kanu regime. The ultimate objective was to crush the culture and spirit of resistance to the Moi dictatorship that was behaving as if Kenya and its people, as well as resources, were private property of the ruling elite. (x)

Mutahi and Theuri point out that the building was “appropriately” named Nyayo (Swahili for footsteps) the “name president Moi fondly gave himself when he assumed power”(x). But why do they term the Nyayo House an appropriate name? Mutahi and Mugo argue that the name epitomizes Moi’s “intention to follow the bloody footsteps of his mentor and the first president of Kenya, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta” (ix). They maintain that the Nyayo torture and death chambers were part of the trajectory of dictatorships whose seeds were sown in colonial Kenya and had flourished considerably in the postcolonial moment.

Three Days on the Cross revolves around the experiences of two victims of secret police activity in an imaginary country under the leadership of the Illustrious One. Chipota, a journalist, and Momodu, a banker, are arrested separately by ununiformed police officers on suspicion of being affiliated with a subversive underground movement. After being blindfolded and moved from one police station to another, they end up in the basement of a building in the heart of the city where they spent three harrowing days of intense humiliation, interrogation and torture, hence the allusion of three days in the title. Among other ordeals they are kept with little or no food in waterlogged cells in the basement and periodically taken to the topmost floor of the highrise building before a team of mean interrogators, lead by Inspector Ode, who subject them to untold verbal, physical, and psychological abuse. In their blind zeal to

protect the regime of the Illustrious One, the interrogators try to force confessions out of the two detainees even when there is no concrete base for the suspicion.

As it turned out, neither Chipota nor Momodu was a member of an underground movement. Although indeed Mrs. Momodu found an apparently seditious pamphlet in her husband's pocket prior to his arrest, he had received it at the bar while too drunk to know what it contained and never read it at all. It turns out that Father Kerekou who Momodu's wife turns to for help, has discentious intentions towards her and seizes the opportunity to get her husband out of the way so he can fulfil his desire. Momodu is therefore detained through an act of betrayal masquerading as patriotism. After three days of torture and interrogation without obtaining confessions, the frustrated interrogators decide to eliminate the duo. They feared that if the two survive, they would reveal the secret of the basement cells and the interrogation chambers in the apparently innocuous building gracing the city's skyline. The turning point in the story is when a reformed secret police officer named Kandie, goes against his oath of allegiance and reveals to the press the underhand activities of his former force. In the end he tries to save state captives. But he only succeeds in saving Chipota, the journalist, as Momodu, the banker, is executed.

Kandie's expose of atrocities in the unnamed city building has striking resemblances with the expose of Nyayo House horrors in real life. The only difference is that Mutahi managed to write and publish the story of the fictional expose during the

twilight years of the Moi regime. On the other hand, the actual expose of the Nyayo House horrors and the publication of We Lived to Tell occurred only after the end of Moi's twenty-four year rule in 2002. What is really remarkable is the prescience in Mutahi's Three Days on the Cross; he accurately anticipated both the overwhelming media interest and public shock when tales of dehumanizing torture and murder became officially public knowledge in the reign of Moi's successor Emilio Mwai Kibaki. Equally remarkable is the resemblance of the world of Mutahi's fiction and the actual accounts of other survivors. Chipota, the journalist, encounters a cell in which former occupants have left graffiti to either record their presence there once in the stream of time or to give friendly caveats to new inmates:

Part of the graffiti read: "EXPECT NO MERCY HERE, YOU ARE FINISHED BROTHER. DON'T LET THEM FORCE A CONFESSION OUT OF YOU, RASTA. NEVER GIVE UP. Chipota wondered whether he would be there long enough to write something also. (33)

Echoes of Chipota's cell are clearly discernible in the actual account of Wanyiri

Kihoro's Never Say Die (1998). Kihoro writes:

Back in the aquatic cell, I saw lamentations of inmates who had passed through the pipeline. That "so and so you are the one who put me in this trouble." Some decided to put their names down and announce there were in the cell at one time. Others inscribed, "Expect No Mercy", "South Africa is Here", "Not Yet Uhuru" and "I am Lost". I added mine – "Never Say Die" (92).

The resonance between the fictional and the actual is self-evident. The expressions

"EXPECT NO MERCY HERE" in Three Days on the Cross and "Expect No Mercy" in

Never Say Die not only make a statement about the level of cruelty and ferocity at play but also seem to be alluding to the same place of torment and the same tormentors.

Another interesting coincidence is the impulse to inscribe oneself or one's own thought on the wall. For Kihoro his own writing on the wall becomes the title of his prison memoir that chronicles in great detail his prison experience. In both the cell graffiti of Mutahi's novel and Kihoro's memoir, there is an underlining sense of solidarity and identification amongst past, present, and future cell dwellers. Some insist on leaving their names as Kihoro reveals while others leave only anonymous statements. For some of the detainees or state captives the inscriptions on the walls become their own autobiographies or memoirs. One could conclude that those names, caveats, and thoughts represent the graffiti writers' desperate attempt to be remembered, as a means of immortalizing their memory for posterity. Their state of desperation is exacerbated by not knowing whether or when one would come out of the dungeon alive.

George Ogola has observed that "[a]lthough it was Whispers that firmly inscribed Mutahi's name in the Kenyan literary scene, he was also among a generation of novelists and playwrights who attempted to write about the repressive political climate of the 1980s" (63). Mutahi's most salient contribution to the literature capturing the turbulent 1980s are his novels Jail Bugs and Three Days on the Cross, for which the carceral experience and imagination constitutes the focal point. Other books that emerged at the time include Maina Kinyatti's A Season of Blood: Poems from Kenyan

Prisons (1995); Garth Bunde's Jailbirds of Kamiti (1991); Karuga Wandai's Mayor in Prison (1993); Kimani Kigga's Prison is Not a Holiday Camp (1994); Wanyiri Kihoro's Never Say Die (1998). It is interesting that all these other texts are preoccupied with incarceration, a factor that all the titles overtly proclaim.

In the preface to Wahome Mutahi's World Kimani Njogu correctly remarks that Mutahi's Three Days on the Cross and Jail Bugs "represent a fictionalization of the fifteen-month ordeal he experienced during the government crackdown of Mwakenya movement of the 1980s and are part of the nation's body of prison literature which can be traced to colonial days" (xi). One could add that the search for the possible motivations for the fictionalization of the author's own carceral experience is inextricably bound up with the motivations for writing the prison narratives. It is tempting to simply take prison as an alibi or allegoris for writing.

Yet it is quite clear that although Mutahi's prison works are properly speaking post-incarceration, it required a higher motivation to write given the risk and danger involved. Granted writing after the fact, may have meant he did not have to play the write-and-hide game that writers of prison narratives who wrote while in prison such as Gakaara wa Wanjau, Abdilatif Abdalla, and Alamin Mazrui were forced to play. But clearly, Mutahi's prison narratives were written against the grain during the Moi regime when such ventures were perceived to be tantamount to suicide. Mutahi would well have easily been imprisoned again or detained, if not worse, for writing Three Days on

the Cross and Jail Bugs. His status as an ex-prisoner was not a guarantee for avoiding further imprisonment. On the contrary, as a journalist and creative writer whose works often ruffled the features of the Moi administration, Mutahi was almost always already suspected of sedition or anarchism. It seems to me that Mutahi sought to narrate what the heavily censored and self-censored Kenya media did not and could narrate about the seemingly faceless activists and government critics whose “guilty” pleas and prison terms were the only things paraded to the unsuspecting public. What Mutahi chose to narrate was thus not only by then unnarrated but also unnarratable in the purview of the State and the Fourth Estate in which he belonged. He intended to expose to the public sphere what only those with experiential knowledge could articulate, if indeed traumatic situations can be adequately and competently articulated. As Kate Millet would put it, Three days on the Cross displays the qualities of “literature of the witness, the one who has been there, sees it, knows it” with the French term *temoignage* describing this kind of literature (15). In other the words, the first-hand experience and knowledge of suffering at once authenticates his authorship or imbues it with authority and motivates the writer to present his testimony of the condition of confinement. Similarly, it could be said Mutahi’s awareness of the general public ignorance of the Kenyan torture chambers impelled him to risk telling the untellable that he had personally seen, experienced and known.

In Jail Bugs, the first-person narrator states: “Let us start by way of one-way introduction. It has got to be one-way introduction because you are out there and I am in here” (1). The narrator draws a distinction between the reader outside prison walls and the imprisoned narrating and narrated “I”. It is not, I think, a case of “overreading” or misreading to point out that the narrator’s differentiation which the “introduction” embodies at once implies the uninitiated reader’s ignorance and the inmates’ experiential knowledge of the conditions inside. This same public ignorance is presented in a more telling way in a passage in Three Days on the Cross that deserves quoting at length. The omniscient narrator states:

The Special Police Department was located in the heart of the city, in a building that had been erected three years before Wandie’s transfer there. It was a 30-storey building which, apart from housing intelligence people, also housed other government and private offices. However, many of the people who worked there or visited the building did not know that the top most floors were taken by the Special Police Department. Hardly any stranger knew that the basement of that building had 10 cells. Very few people also knew that the police had an exclusive lift and it operated between the offices upstairs and the basement. (142)

The Special Police Department of Mutahi’s fictional world is a representation of the now defunct Special Branch Police unit that the Moi regime used to silence opposition. The public building “in the heart of the city” is arguably Nyayo House, located in the Nairobi Central Business District, in whose basement and top most floors some of the worst atrocities of police torture occurred.

Yet as is in the case of the fictional torture chambers of Mutahi's fiction, the Kenyan public was generally oblivious to the human rights abuses in the basement and top floors of the actual building in the heart of the city of Nairobi. As both victim and witness, Mutahi seems to have resorted to fiction as a means of staging an expose of the excesses of the Moi regime. This leads us to conclude that disclosure of the inhuman conditions in which the Moi government put its opponents is at the very core of the human condition that characterizes Mutahi's prison narratives.

While fictionalizing the actual experience was an expedient means of saying the unsayable, it also expanded the writer's range of vision and perspective, particularly with the use of an omniscient narrator. One could say Mutahi articulates his actual experience imaginatively to present us with the world of suffering that transcends his individual suffering. It is tenable to conclude that Ongundiye Chipota, the journalist who survives police torture and shooting represents Mutahi's experience and vantage point. In any case, Chipota, like Mutahi, faces torture and incarceration on grounds of being associated with a subversive underground organization, and lived to tell. But the novel is not about Chipota's experience alone. The novel presents a sense of multiple consciousness and multivocality with any number of characters articulating or trying to articulate where and how they stand in a postcolony trying to come to terms with itself. Many and varied voices and perspectives are enacted including those of Momodu, the banker who is arrested and tortured with Chipota and is ultimately executed for being in

possession of a seditious pamphlet that he never read; the lecherous Father Bosco Kerekou who betrays Momodu to the police so that he can have the latter's wife; Kandie, (mentioned in the excerpt above) the junior police attached to the Special Police Department who goes against his oath of office to help expose the tales of torture and helps save Chipota's life; and Inspector Ode, the sadistic leader of the torturers. The omniscient narrator, therefore, enables Mutahi to explore imaginatively the different and disparate actions and attitudes of individuals affected by the political economy of the tumultuous 1980s in Kenya.

It is instructive that few of the characters in Mutahi's Three Days on the Cross bear Kenyan names. Momodu and Ongundiye almost sound like names from West Africa. It would seem that Mutahi uses non-Kenyan names to reinforce his claim in the disclaimer that the story is neither about Kenya or set in Kenya. We can argue hypothetically and speculatively, that because Mutahi was not imprisoned or victimized in any direct way for capturing the carceral experience and imagination in the novel, his ploy worked. Also, by the time he published the novel in 1991, Kenya was in the throes of unprecedented and unstoppable mass action to bring about a multi-party political system to which Moi acceded in 1992. It could be that the Special Branch fell for Mutahi's ploy or they had mellowed enough to overlook the potential implications of this veiled expose of their underhand activities. So the book sold like hotcakes, not to

mention being awarded the 1992 Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature, Kenya's most prestigious literary award.

Yet neither the police silence or inaction or Mutahi's disclaimer, can dissuade the bulk of Mutahi's Kenyan readers from reading the unnamed country as their own and Chipota as Mutahi himself. The remarkable resemblances between Mutahi's fictional text and the Kenyan context within which he lived and wrote are unmistakable. Within the tale of torture and murder is the subtext of potholes on the roads, of endemic corruption, religious hypocrisy, land grabbing, sycophancy, distrust, illegal abortions, university students' riots and ruthless police reaction to that, and a host of negative day-to-day realities that are perhaps still clearly recognizable to Kenyan readers but were more recognizable in the twilight years of Moi's rule when the story was written. Not that these aspects of society were unique to Kenya, but they helped situate the fictional world in the actual Kenyan world. Thus, if Chipota was a representation of Mutahi, then Professor Kigoi who had close ties with Chipota in his university days could be seen to present Professor Ngugi wa Thiong'o while Ode would signify James Opiyo known for his ferocity and brutality in the odious interrogation and torture of victims in the heyday of the Mwakenya crackdown.

In Three Days on the Cross Wahome has therefore used subtle means to inscribe his sense of self and personal history and individual experience. The novel is essentially an exercise in self-narration. It is therefore, an individual narrative embedded within a

collective narrative trajectory that embraces both the victims and their perpetrators, and is enabled by a penetrating and detached omniscient narrator. While the omniscient narrator penetrates the psyche of all the key characters in the novel, it is when his or her stance is trained on Chipota that we are able to unfathom the multiple “I”-s or selves of the narrated Chipota essentially constituting various versions of Mutahi himself. For instance, we have Chipota the partygoer; Chipota the Good Samaritan who rushes an aborting woman to hospital; Chipota the university student under the tutelage of a sentimental Professor Kigoi; Chipota ducking police truncheons at a students’ riot; Chipota the investigative journalist exposing the scandals of the high and mighty; and Chipota the political detainee on the brink of execution. These versions of Chipota are similarly some kind of versions of Mutahi, not necessarily in the exact same way, but nonetheless they narrate and narrativize Mutahi’s life and opinions and his trials and tribulations.

Given the absence of an I-narrator in Three Days on the Cross, how do we account for the novel’s autobiographical characteristics? To be sure there is no explicit “I” narrating the story. Nonetheless, there is evidence to suggest that there is an implicit “I” permeating the story and manifesting itself in multiple ways. The apparent resemblances between Chipota’s fictional experience and Mutahi’s actual experience suggest the author’s oblique attempt to represent himself through the “I” of Chipota’s consciousness. To this end, Chipota is the vehicle that carries Mutahi’s real experience,

a surrogate of Mutahi's real "I" or self. However, it is crucial to underscore the fact that Chipota's consciousness as an extension of Mutahi's "I" is necessarily limited. It is a fictional representation of a real or historical "I" who as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson allege is perhaps unknown or unknowable. The "I" implied by Chipota's consciousness is therefore not an exact replica of Mutahi's inaccessible "I"; it is clearly an attempt to create not himself, but someone *like* himself. Mutahi's self-narration therefore, first and foremost, consists of creating Chipota and imbuing him with a consciousness and an implied "I" that resemblances or comes very close to resembling his own.

But the omniscience of the narration Mutahi adopts enables him to imagine a whole range of other "I-s" regardless of whether they were victims or victimizers, traitors or betrayed in the intriguing milieu of the imaginary police state. The characters inhabiting Mutahi's fictional world may each aspire to an individual identity in the disparate "I-s" as well as claim membership to any number of implicit "we-s". Inspector Ode and his team of torturers and interrogars each represent individual "I-s" at the very least, but they also belong together and could claim a collective "we". The same applies to the imagined community of victims of torture; including Chipota and Momodu who are at once individuals but identify themselves as a "we" defined by virtue of being fellow sufferers. At the same time all the characters could rightly

claim a collective “we” as citizens of the unnamed state inspite of or because of the ideological stances or where they stand on the torture and power equation.

The plural pronoun “we” like its singular counterpart “I” exists, in the main, implicitly in Mutahi’s novel. In a sense, in the case of Three Days on the Cross, neither is the “we” of the oral tradition engulfed by the “I” of the print culture, but both the “we” and the “I” are tacitly present in the omniscient narration. It seems to me that by narrating self, incarceration and nation obliquely, Mutahi is calling into question the truth of Kenya’s conception of itself as a nation.

Therefore the question of truth in Mutahi’s novel-cum-prison memoir cannot be fully grasped or untangled without acknowledging the imaginative ethos that underpins his writing practice and project. The truth of Mutahi’s fiction is both fictional and actual. It is the truth of fiction, to use Achebe’s words, since it operates in the imaginative realm and is not bound by factuality and historical veracity. For instance, in real life, Mutahi worked for the Daily Nation not Daily Horn as Chipota his fictional surrogate character. Also Mutahi was incarcerated for fifteen months and not three days as Chipota et cetera. But Daily Horn and Chipota and the other things and people inhabiting the world of Mutahi’s novel are true on their own fictional terms. It is undeniably true that Mutahi’s incarceration narrative is reflected, or at least, refracted in Chipota’s narrative.

Like the oral narratives analyzed in the second chapter of this study, Three Days on the Cross thematizes truth. It is interesting that victims and perpetrators and those associated with them stake claim on truth. But it is quite clear whose claims to truth stand the taste of legitimacy. Father Kerekou who betrays Momodu lies to the police about Momodu's links to the outlawed underground movement. When he calls the police to recant his earlier false statement due to a guilty conscience, it is too late. The overzealous secret police keen to squeeze confessions from suspects had by then gone too far to stop and ultimately eliminate Momodu, precisely because of the lying and lustful clergyman's lies. In a way religious truth is called into question because its custodians such as Father Kerekeou are shown as consummate liars. It would seem, Mutahi himself a former altar boy, found the religious faction of Kenyan society complicit in the suffering of others at the hands of secret police as shown by Father Kerekou's betrayal and lies. Perhaps Mutahi implicitly points an accusing finger at the Church because it was complicit in its silence while atrocities were continually orchestrated by a Christian president whose attendance at Sunday services and donations to churches was legendary.

Another example of a religious leader who brings religious truth into question for living a lie is Catherine who had captured the minds and hearts of the villagers of Father Kerekou's childhood. She had come to the village with fiery religious zeal, helping Father Bruno spread the word and run a nursery school. She epitomized

religious purity and devotion until she left the village as mysteriously as she had come.

Mutahi writes:

The truth came out later from a man of the village who worked as a cook in the town nearest to the mission. He came for his leave and told the story that the same Catherine who had been the toast of the village was in jail for murder. He had explained that she had killed her husband in town when they lived in a slum as sellers of illicit drink. She had run away when the police discovered the murder and suspected her. The village where she was unknown, offered refuge. (38-39)

The disclosure of the truth was so devastating to Father Bruno, who had been suspected of having had an affair with mysterious Catherine that, he “died in his sleep a few months later” (39). It is not surprising that parishioners too like Mrs. Momodu would feel no scruples in lying about the amount of time she suspects her husband to have been associated with the subversive movement.³

The secret police consider it sacrilegious for anyone to perceive them as liars, claiming for themselves unlikely truthfulness. Reacting to Chipota’s claims of innocence in the interrogation process, Inspector Ode shouts: “Are you saying that we are telling lies? Are you saying that we are a bunch of liars” (52). The truth is that of course, the interrogators are lying and there are indeed a bunch of liars trying to force confession from an innocent Chipota. They are frustrated with his reluctance to confess because confession would otherwise endorse their lies about his alleged guilt, transforming lies into truth and expediting the appearance of justice in a court of law. As it turns out, because there is no evidence for either Chipota’s or Momodu’s guilt that

can stand legal scrutiny, the last best hope for obtaining conviction for this bunch of liars is confession under duress. And because no confession was forthcoming from the two suspects, despite trying to hoodwink both separately that the other had confessed, the police resort to complete silencing through extra judicial execution. The police fear that these innocent captives might reveal the truth about the hitherto unknown torture chambers. Incidentally, it is Kandie, a repentant police officer working in the torture chambers, who is instrumental in both saving Chipota's life and exposing the truth of the skeleton in the police closet. When the otherwise gagged media finally found the evidence and temerity to publish the truth, the public is shocked beyond measure:

The *Daily Horn* sold out by nine o'clock (in the morning). Not a single vendor had a copy of the day's issue and those readers who had managed to get their copies guarded them jealously, refusing to let even their friends borrow them. The story was bombshell whose impact was felt all over the country. Many people who read it were shocked while others could not believe that what had been written was the truth. (155)

Inured to tales of lies, "others could not believe what had been written was the truth."

One could say that the expose of the scandalous torture chambers in Mutahi's fictional universe, which emerges at the climax of the narrative, is analogous to the author's overall intent to expose similar or same skeletons in the police closet of the actual Kenyan world. In other words, the fictional and the actual continually fuse in the ebb and flow of Mutahi's imaginative projection of the carceral. The graphic descriptions in Mutahi's novel evince a truth of fiction that reflects and refracts the claims of torture

that have historically been documented as an abiding legacy of the Moi era in Kenya. It is to this description of torture and the attendant trauma that we now turn.

Momodu and Chipota undergo what amounts to state kidnapping. Both are plucked from the unsuspecting public while going about their ordinary business. Chipota is offered a ride in a vehicle near his residence while waiting for public transport only to realize he has fallen into the hands of plainclothes police. In the case of Momodu, plainclothes policemen pick him while he is parking his vehicle in the morning at the bank where he works. They lie to him that a bank robbery had occurred and he needed to accompany them to the police station to record a simple statement: nothing big. Then he would return to report to work. The torture begins with arrest and sudden loss of freedom and agency because the arresting officers either feign ignorance of the reason for their actions or simply refuse to reveal it. The anxiety intensifies with the suspects being locked up at the police stations without their names being entered in the occurrence book. They are shuttled from police station to police station and from cell to cell in a tortuous exhibition of the mystery of power. Even when eventually their captors make charges of sedition and membership in a dangerous organization there is still no guarantee or timetable for either their appearance in court or release. In harmony with Elaine Scarry's theorization, even the hostile interrogation that they undergo is part and parcel of the torture that typifies barbarous police force. But it is the state's bid to exhibit power by penetrating the body of victim in Foucauldian terms

through physical torture that best exemplifies the inhumanity of humans to fellow humans in Mutahi's novel. For instance, in describing Momodu's ordeal in the interrogation room on the top most part of the building in the heart of the city, the narrator says:

The squatting man held the cigarette between his right hand thumb and finger and moved toward Momodu's penis. Momodu felt heat, and even before the burning cigarette touched him, he screamed, "No, no, don't do that to me! Please don't do it to me!". . . Nobody seemed to have heard him because the cigarette man once again pulled a puff and moved a burning cigarette towards Momodu's penis. This time he did not stop half way. He touched the penis with the burning cigarette. (152-152)

We encounter graphic details of the physical torture that is also sexualized and is aimed at dissolving the victim's world and sense of self. The attack on Momodu's male member has profound psychological, physiological and symbolic significance. It is a threat to his manhood, his sense of being a man or manly. The attack is, thus, a form of emasculation that is aimed at intensifying the trauma connected to his captivity. It underlines the torturers power and the victim's powerlessness. But the genitals are also highly sensitive areas and would feel the full force of the burning cigarette much to the chagrin of the victim and the victimizers' pleasure. Scarry has theorized on how torture entails transforming the victim's own body into a weapon against him or her. One could therefore say that the pain inflicted on Momodu's penis is meant to transform that vital body part, into a vicious weapon against him. It is significant that while his manhood was under attack in the torture chambers, Father Kerekou, his betrayer, was scheming to

have illicit sexual intercourse with his wife. The attack on Momodu's penis and Kerekou's adulterous scheme both reinforce the signification of Momodu's castration.

Mutahi offers graphic details of torture even in its sexualized form that perhaps reveals something about the difference in the depiction of torture between male and female writers from corpus of Kenya prison narratives. Three Days on the Cross exhibits the same penchant for graphic details that we find in for example Mutahi's own Jail Bugs, Maina wa Kinyatti's Kenya: A Prison Notebook and Onduko bw'Atebe's Verdict of Death. On the other hand economy of detail, however, seems to characterize the corpus of female prison narratives exemplified principally by Wambui Otieno's Mau Mau's Daughter, Charity Wachiuma's Daughter of Mumbi, Muthoni Likimani's Passbook Number F. 47927 and Wangare Maathai's Unbowed: A Memoir (2006). Could it be those men subscribing to a kind of shock culture that revels in exposing minute details of violence? Are women more given to focussing on the psychological or emotional? These questions are beyond the scope of this study, but perhaps merit further investigation.

However, what is intriguing is how Mutahi's dose of detail is almost a replica of the harrowing experience recorded in We Lived to Tell. A few examples will suffice;

In total there were seven torturers who were armed with machine guns, batons and whips. Two would work on me until they got tired. A woman torturer would mainly be interested in working on my sexual organ which she would pierce with a sharp needle, burn the tip and testicles with a smouldering cigarette while a man held my legs apart. That would continue for several hours every day until

I passed out (Kamau Munene, journalist with the Kenya News Agency in Kirinyaga District). (36)

A brown, pretty woman speaking English and Kiswahili with a Kikuyu accent, was brought to the cell in the basement. I was brought to the open space between the toilet and the control room. She started interrogating me in a persuasive manner urging me to confess. She fondled me, taunting me. . . The interrogators then came and found us talking with the brown woman. They reprimanded me and tied my testicles using rubber bands. It was very painful. In the meantime, the brown woman was burning me on my thighs, penis, and scrotum with a cigarette. (37)

Others were threatened with circumcision such as Professor Edward Oyugi and Cornel Akello Onyango. We read in We Lived to Tell:

Cornels Akello Onyango was dazed when a beautiful young woman menacingly approached him brandishing a razor blade. “Get ready to be circumcised,” she barked as he walked towards me...The look on her face left no doubt that she was capable of carrying out the threat. (33)

In both the fictional world of Mutahi’s Three Days on the Cross and the actual witness accounts in We Lived to Tell, torture is clearly sexual. It recalls the castration of several detainees at Nyangwethu detention camp near Naivaisha in the colonial days, which is alluded to in JM Kariuki’s Mau Mau Detainee. It is however the demolition of masculinity that is at the heart of the apparently sadism encounter. This objective is accentuated more in the actual account with the presence and centrality of the female figure as the chief emasculator.

It is plausible to conclude here that Three Days on the Cross is a fictionalized expose of a kind of bitter truth based upon Mutahi’s own actual traumatic memory of

the dungeons of Nyayo House in the heart of Nairobi. It is a memory shared by numerous survivors including those whose accounts are recorded in We Lived to Tell. However, other victims of state terror, like Momodu in Mutahi's novel, did not live to tell the story of their ordeal. Yet the survivors, who told their story, as Mutahi does in Three Days on the Cross, seem to have written as a form of healing from or coping with the trauma to which the torture chambers exposed them. In this regard, the novel, being as it is a prison memoir in disguise, is yet another supreme case of scriptotherapy within the carceral matrix.

VI. Conclusion

The postcolonial narratives of incarceration are varied in form but not in intent and content, in their preoccupation with innocence, victimhood, counterhegemony, and in the presentation of a kind of "truth" that unsettles the official truth. Truth tends to exert a certain magnetic force upon the postcolonial narratives of incarceration as it does upon the precolonial and colonial narratives before them. The thematization of truth in the post independence narratives of incarceration is hardly fortuitous. To be sure there are noticeable differences in how the writers project their versions of "truth." One could say, for example that Abdalla's poetical truth is clothed in a thick garb of Islamic philosophy; Mazrui's poems ostensibly tell their truth in an agnostic voice almost on the fringes of Islam, while Ngugi and Mutahi unequivocally blow the whistle on the façade of Christian purity as to render Christianity an unlikely basis for their artistic truth. Yet

all these works revolve around the injustice of political incarceration and tyranny and have the truth of the revolutionary impulse as their governing principle. I contend that the revolutionary truth undergirding these narratives transcends and defies the dictates of both veracity as in Ngugi's "factual" memoir Detained or verisimilitude as in Mutahi's fictional narrative Three Days on the Cross. On the whole these works seem to suggest that the revolutionary change the writers aspire to for Kenyan society, must or should begin with countering state lies masquerading as official truth. In other words, these prison narratives point to the connection between governance and art: the people's welfare should be the responsibility of good governance and good art. Ngugi's assertion in his Detained, which we have read as a political and art manifesto, epitomizes the revolutionary thrust of this literature of incarceration. He writes:

Art should encourage people to bolder and higher resolves in their struggles to free the human spirit from the twin manacles of oppressive nature and oppressive man. (133)

It is quite apparent that the narratives of incarceration under review are less interested in freeing the Kenyan "people" from "oppressive nature" than from "oppressive man," the Kenyan government. They boldly tell the truth about the lies of the oppressive man, the state and its apparatuses. This constitutes the first step forward toward changing the Kenyan world and facilitating the emergence of good governance for the people, shielding them from bad governance by providing good art, good writing.

The authorized version of the Kenya national narrative as told by the state and its apparatuses is that at independence in 1963, the country made a complete break with its colonial master, ushering in the dawn of a new era, a new *modus operandi* in running its affairs. That is the tale told by the official media, official documents, authorized historiography taught in the schools and colleges, official speeches etc. According to this narrative, the post independence state, at most, fulfilled the independence dreams of millions of Kenyans who yearned for an end to political intolerance, brutality, and trampling upon democratic rights. In the purview of this authorized version of Kenya's national tale, the "post" of the postcolonial moment, means what it says in it's the fullest sense of the term, namely the complete cessation of everything remotely colonial that existed prior to independence.

On the other hand the tales of political incarceration of the postcolonial moment challenge and contest the appropriateness of the term "postcolonial" because they point to continuity in the political oppression and suppression that began in earnest during the colonial era. The "post" in postcolonial diminishes in meaning and significance because there seems to be little difference between the chronological "then" of colonization and the "now" of postindependence. In other words, the fact that incarcerated Kenyans would continue to expose the state's inhuman and inhumane treatment of its political captives says something about the lack or loss of freedom in Kenya. The continued explicit or implicit clamor for freedom in an ostensibly "free and "democratic" country

raises questions about whether freedom and democracy really exist or are allowed to exist in sufficient measure. One could say that these confinement narratives suggest that post independence Kenya is in reality *not* free from the pernicious habits of the colonial oppressor. It would seem the colonial mentality constitutes both a formative and pervasive force for the ruling elite in post independence Kenya. The vicious circle of political intolerance in the Kenya is a consequence of what Ngugi in his Detained characterizes as the “colonial Lazarus,” essentially the figurative transfer of the Kenyan masses from the “colonial prison to the neocolonial prison”(62, 113). In sum, contrary to the official account, the incarceration narratives imply that the more things had changed in Kenya after independence, the more they remained as they were during the colonial era.

Notes

1. See also Alamin Mazrui and Mphande Lupenga's article "History as Weapon: Ngugi's Evolving View of Mau Mau." Transafrica Forum 8.3 (1991): 19-28.
2. Ali Mazrui makes references to this honor bestowed upon him by the Foreign Policy Magazine, Washington, DC, 2005, as well a host of other honors in an interview with Seifudein Adem in "Witness to History? Interview with Ali Mazrui." HollerAfrica. 4 Dec. 2008 <<http://www.hollerafrica.com/showArticle.php?catId=1&artId=259>> .
3. As George Ogala rightly remarks, Mutahi's trenchant critique of religion is pervasive in his literary output, including his satire column Whispers and the last novel published before his death, The Miracle Merchant.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the extent to which narrating confinement is an act of self-exploration. It also sought to find out the explicit and implicit motivations for narrating confinement; the link between the context of confinement and the text; and the narratological tools that these narratives of confinement employ. Other related questions that I sought to answer include: Is form/genre relevant or irrelevant in narrating and narrativizing confinement? To what extent does the collective become embedded in the individual experience of incarceration? What is the relationship between the narration of confinement and trauma, memory, truth telling, and the I-pronoun?

Chapter 2 of this study made a case for the inclusion of oral narratives in the classification of prison literature. The chapter began by addressing the orality-literacy debate and discounting the view that civilization should be measured by literacy, that the oral tradition is divorced from literature, and that there is no such thing as oral texts. To ask: “When do oral forms become texts?” is to needlessly deny them the status enjoyed by written texts for which characteristically no such question arises. In other words it seems superfluous to ask: When do written forms become texts? The obvious answer is when they are written. Thus, oral forms become texts when they are uttered. I argued that to the extent that certain oral narratives narrativize and thematize incarceration, they invite and merit inclusion in the category of oral prison narratives.

Finally, I embarked on analysing two oral prison narratives as case studies, namely the Sela and Mwambu story from the Bukusu of Western Kenya and the Liyongo Epic from the Swahili of the East African coast.

Chapter 3 focused on the narratives of incarceration of the colonial period in Kenya. The chapter first contextualizes the narratives by providing an historical overview of the tumultuous Mau Mau war that Kenyans waged against the British colonial administration. I analyzed three texts, namely, JM Kariuki's Mau Mau Detainee, Gaakara wa Wanjau's Mau Mau Author in Detention, and Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's Mau Mau's Daughter. As can be seen from these titles, all the three memoirists make a personal inscription on the collective template of the Mau Mau legacy. It is tempting to conclude that the preponderance of this template in the memoirs capturing the period hinges on the keen awareness by both the memoirists and the publishers that Mau Mau sells. But beyond the sales and economic imperative, the persistent thread that runs through these texts is an attempt to reclaim selfhood and to locate oneself within the Kikuyu nation and Kenyan nation.

Most prison narratives seem on the surface to be personal life histories in which incarcerated individuals narrate themselves into existence in a desperate attempt to reclaim their selfhood and sense of humanity. But it seems to me that close reading of these narratives indicates that Kenyan prison literature is a frame through which we can read Kenya's history, a tool with which we can feel Kenya's national pulse. Also, while

precolonial oral narratives of incarceration may be appropriated to allegorize the colonial and postcolonial realities of Kenyan peoples, the colonial and postcolonial narratives tend to cannibalize the nation-state. Lastly, these narratives of confinement lend themselves towards rumination on the double function of the state as a “source of security” and as an “agent of destruction and death” as Simon Gikandi put it, albeit in a different context. It would seem more often than not they emphasize the image of the state as the peoples’ nemesis “standing literally between subjects and their local and global desires” (Gikandi 84).

Clearly, that a perpetual *agon* exists between the incarcerated self and the rulers is beyond all doubt. Inevitably, there is no guarantee that either side of the struggle would win over public sympathy and support everytime everywhere. At any rate, it would be impractical to expect a uniform and unanimous response to both the authorized and unauthorized national narratives. It would seem quite possible for even an individual to display malleability and variability in responding, reacting differently to the same narrative at different times and places. If the late Oyekan Owomoyela’s essay “Dissidence and African Writers: Commitment and Dependency?” (1981), is anything to go by, there are indeed individuals in and outside Kenya for whom it is improbable or impossible for the narrative of the incarcerated self to persuade or convince. Owomoyela casts aspersions at African rebel writers’ claim to humanism and faults the “tendency in Africanist and international circles to claim the struggle between

them [writers] and rulers is one between enlightenment and anomie” (85). He finds particularly reprehensible dissidence in African societies that is fashioned after the Western world or is sponsored by it, terming such dissidence “anachronistic and misguided” (84). To Owomoyela these rebel writers are principally motivated by megalomania. Therefore, according to this logic, the so-called antithesis between darkness and light that is often invoked is simply and squarely a power struggle between the rulers in power and the power-hungry writers who are anxious to take over with the support of the Western world. Adopting Owomoyela’s viewpoint implies discounting the incarceration narratives and the “truth” the incarcerated selves purport to tell through them. On the other hand, there are those who would stand on the side of the “dissidents” and disbelieve the official rhetoric and narrative and who would perhaps regard Owomoyela and like-minded individuals as ostensible paramours of the ruling class and its egregious pattern of misrule across Africa. But returning to Owomoyela’s suggestion about the African dissident writer in general, one or two questions beg for answers: Is it possible, for instance, that the entire gamut of incarcerated selves analyzed in this study exhibit unbridled ambition for political power as? Are they anachronistic and misguided, always driven by the lack or loss of power? These are questions for which I have no definite answers for the moment.

What appears definite to me as a result of this study is that these narratives of political confinement suggest the existence of what we may call the paradox of

patriotism. The incarcerating authorities claim they incarcerate political prisoners or detainees to rid the nation of unpatriotic elements; those who narrate their incarceration claim they are incarcerated because of their patriotism, their love for nation or country. Indeed from colonial to postcolonial times, the thread that runs through the narratives of political confinement is that of vilification of state brutalization of dissenters, but also an explicit message that victims of state terror, particularly the detainees and prisoners, are almost without exception veritable patriots. What we have then is juxtaposition between the official or authorized national narrative and the alternative national narrative that are dialectically opposed to each other. In other words, the incarcerating narratives also tell the national narrative albeit in an odd way that gives it a spin that deviates from the official narrative which posits the state as always already pure, infallible, and just. They instead paint the wheelers and dealers in the state as greedy, corrupt, despotic, anti-people, anti-freedom, and unjust. In a sense both the authorized national narrative and the alternative national narrative vie for public space, to be heard and believed by a public whose credulity is often stretched to the limit.

In his Writers in Prison, Ioan Davies proposes prisoner narratives often project the innocence of the narrator/protagonist. This study has found a predisposition among prison narrators towards parading or proclaiming their innocence, bearing out Davies's claim. It is as if, as Davies remarks, the writers are posing the question: "What did I do wrong?"(44). This question is bound up with thoughts of and solidarity with other

prisoners of conscience or detainees in the same or similar circumstances. It is significant for instance, that those writing in the postcolonial moment, link their “undeserved” suffering with that of those of the colonial period, whose innocence they invoke and identify with. The writers even try to make connections with prisoners and detainees beyond the Kenyan historical reality, traversing temporal, spatial, and geopolitical considerations.

The preoccupation with the interplay between self and society perhaps explains the preponderance of multiple “I”-s in the whole range of prison narratives. The polyvocality of the “I” in each narrative problematizes the simplistic interpretation of the stories as representing the historical “I” whose name appears on the cover of the book. This multiple and fractured mode of self-representation tend to appropriately signify the fragmenting and disorienting attributes of the carceral experience and imagination on the tortured self. Quite often there is also a tendency to embed the collective “we” in the narrating and narrated “I.” But it seems to me that the notion of an African self as being peculiarly selfless, unselfish has been blown out of proportion. I reiterate that at the core of every autobiographical act is, at the very best a concern and the very worst, an obsession with self and that rather than the individual’s complete dependency on society often emphasized, these prison narratives suggest a level of reciprocity between self and society.

In theorizing on the possible motivation for the writing of the narratives, this study has found that apart from a desire to reclaim selfhood, an attempt to give counterhegemonic accounts of themselves, incarcerated writers are inspired by the therapeutic attributes of writing. In other words scriptotherapy is an important consideration in their decisions to narrate their tales of incarceration. This implies that the carceral experience is far from being simply an allegory for narration or narrativization.

If it is true as Joana Summers remarks that crisis is seminal for the autobiographical act, the prison context presents a unique crisis for the autobiographical act. The prison writers present or represent themselves as witnesses who claim credibility for their narratives. They therefore posit their stories as nothing but the “truth” even things they never personally witnessed such as Gakaara wa Wanjau’s diary with entries of events he never witnessed but which he claims are true or JM Kariuki’s narration of fighting in the forests although he admits he never was there. This study has shown that insistence on veracity and verification in these prison narratives may lead to fallacious and frustrating conclusions. One could perhaps argue that these narratives should rather be taken as truth of fiction or autobiographical truth, detailing, as Georges Gusdorf pointed out not exactly how things had been or were but how the autobiographer wished things had been or were.

The study also found the thematization of truth in these narratives a commonplace, suggesting the centrality of truth as a thematic preoccupation in narratives of incarceration. Although the accounts of prison that we encounter are not absolute truth or gospel truth, they tell a kind of truth. Yet it bears adding that it is perhaps what we may call revolutionary truth rather than simply the truth of fiction that drives the narratives of confinement. This revolutionary truth tends to exert a massive magnetic force upon these writers and upon their works, defying verisimilitude and veracity and putting change on the front burner. Put differently, whether the truth the narratives tell is factual, autobiographical, imagined, or fictional, it seems to be a kind of truth that is defined by the ethics and politics of revolutionary change.

As far as memory is concerned the study found that the narration of the prison experience might both rely on memory and be an aid to memory. In a sense the narration and narrativization inscribes the carceral experience and imagination in both the individual and collective memory. But since memory also entails recall and reconstruction it enables the representation of the experience, not as it *really* was, but as it is remembered. The possibility for reconstruction and “touching up” as Sutton puts it, accounts for the fluidity and malleability of the autobiographical truth and its proximity to fiction.

Given the diversity of genres that formed the centrepieces of analysis in this study, from oral or to written, from memoirs to diaries, from poems to fictionalized

accounts of the actual carceral experience, it is cogent to conclude that prison literature crosses many and varied genres and subgenres. There are certain parallels between oral narratives that narrativize incarceration, some of which seem to be set in the mythical past (e.g. the Sela and Mwambu story from the Bukusu of Western Kenya) and the written colonial and postcolonial narratives of incarceration. These parallels include the use of songs as counterhegemonic tools and the portrayal of the incarcerated as victims rather than villains. In a sense the incarcerated are projected as worthy of audience sympathy, empathy, and identification due to the underlying innocence, the inscription of a highly persuasive self that is often foregrounded in these tales. On the whole the narratives adhere to conventions of their genre or subgenre. In a sense to the extent that prison narratives adhere to generic conventions, to that extent they can be said to be prisoners of genre. Yet what also emerges in some of these prison narratives is a tendency to transgress conventions, refusing to be prisoners of style and genre. Gakaara wa Wanjau's deviation from the fundamental "tenets" of the Western diary in his Mau Mau Author in Detention and Alamin Mazrui's revolt against Swahili prosody in Chembe cha Moyo are cases in point.

Where the texts do not directly transgress generic conventions, they are still "transgressive" because they were not officially supposed to be told or written in the first place. Coming from individuals dubbed dissidents, dissenters and dangerous, prison texts are something of an outlaw genre. They are necessarily tendentious,

partisan, polemical and unapologetic about the prisoner's ideological and political stance. As Barbara Harlow correctly observes, the reading and writing of these texts itself is transgressive since it constitutes a counterstrategy against the grain of the incarcerating state and its apparatuses (4). In other words even the audience or critic is enmeshed in a quagmire for which it is impossible or improbable to remain completely neutral.

Equally important in these texts is the description, sometimes really detailed and graphic, of the trauma and torture visited upon the incarcerated self. The narratives whether they are fictional or non-fictional, in prose form or poetic form, almost always foreground the ferocity and barbarous force employed by state apparatuses to “uncreate” the prisoners and detainees, to dissolve the victims' world. The torture is either physical or psychological or both and begins from the very moment of arrest when the individual loses freedom and agency. Whereas it is possible to say that representing details of individual or collective torture and trauma serve to help heal from the wound, hence the apprehension of telling as therapy, it is also apparent that telling also constitutes an expose of the government's underhand activities. In other words, as Wahome Mutahi's Three Days on the Cross demonstrates, the state masquerades as a civilized and human entity while it secretly and savagely tramples upon human rights of individuals it perceives as enemies, real or imagined. It therefore,

behooves the survivors of state torture, terror and trauma, to tell, to expose these atrocities to the unsuspecting public.

Regarding the silences and near-silences of the colonial and postcolonial period, the study found that the paucity of female voices in the colonial and postcolonial narratives of incarceration is a salient feature. The female narrative of incarceration is itself metaphorically incarcerated or classifiable as “missing in action”. The women who attempt to narrate their incarceration are few and far between, and when they do so, as Wambui Otieno does in Mau Mau’s Daughter, they tend to be swimming against the formidable current of phallocentricism and phallocracy. This paucity of written texts by women is in stark contrast to the practice of telling oral narratives which as any number of scholars have observed is principally regarded as the role of women who serve as both custodians and reservoirs of the oral tradition. One could surmise that the low levels of literacy among women political prisoners in the colonial era account for the paucity of oral texts of incarceration by women. But in the Kenyatta and Moi era there was significant increase in literacy levels across gender. Women political prisoners, who could have written such as Chelagat Mutai, did not. And those who did exhibit certain levels of reticence as exemplified by Otieno’s muted reference to her rape while in detention.

The imbalance between women writers and male writers makes it difficult to make sensible conclusions about the differences and similarities between the content and form of their narratives of incarceration. For instance, is the lack of graphic detail of torture and trauma typical of women narratives as exemplified by Wambui Otieno's near-silence on rape in Mau Mau's Daughter? It is difficult to be conclusive on this matter. There is a need for further studies to unravel the reasons for the paucity of written narratives of political incarceration by women. This study therefore calls for more investigation in this area to account for both the paucity of written female prison narratives and the differences and similarities between them and those by men.

In addition, the fact that I focused on prison narratives by prisoners of conscience meant that I left out other texts within the corpus of Kenya's long tradition of prison literature that cry out for intellectual investigation. These include texts written by so-called ordinary and hard-core criminals such as John Kariamiti's My Life in Crime and Michael Karanja Ngugi's Miaka 53 Jela. Further, there is a need to compare the stylistic and thematic concerns of the prison narratives of political prisoners and those so-called ordinary and hard-core criminals. Are there any significant differences or similarities between them? Do ordinary and hard-core criminals represent and insist on their innocence as their political counterparts or do they instead exhibit profound penitence and regret? Do bravado and the spirit of adventure drive prisoners deemed criminals qua criminals to narrativize or narrate their carceral experiences or do they

have the same motivations as the prisoners of conscience? Do they view their imprisonment as political? And is it perhaps expedient to regard most or all crimes as political? I also suggest comparative studies that would entail Kenyan prison literature and the specific regions or countries in Africa and beyond. Lastly, I suggest that it is imperative to carry further research on the Kenyan and African oral tradition, that could not for practical reasons be included in this study, in order to excavate other “buried” prison oral texts and to extrapolate upon them.

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