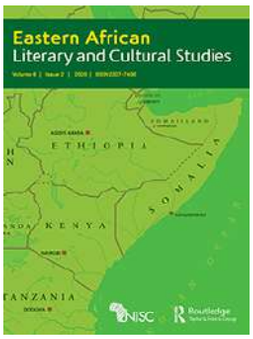

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Mau Mau Author in Detention: The Subversive 'We' in a Colonial Era Detention Diary

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ABSTRACT

In seeking an answer to the question as to why Kenyan author Gakaara wa Wanjau penned *Mau Mau Author in Detention*, we may consider the fact that he wrote other works as well — before, during, and after his detention. The facticity of his authorship is foregrounded in the title. In other words, Wanjau did what writers do, what was natural for him to do, in prison and outside: write. Yet to say he wrote the diary because he was a writer is a rather facile explanation of the impetus for writing it. 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. In attempting to account for his motivation for writing, one is bound to encounter a curious contest between the individualised 'I' and the collectivised 'we' as well as subversion of the conventions of diary as a Western literary genre.

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Prolific Kenyan writer Gakaara wa Wanjau's detention diary, *Mau Mau Author in Detention* ([1983] 1988), which he wrote in the Gikuyu language,[1] won the 1984 Noma Award, a literary prize awarded to the best book published in Africa. More than three decades intervened between when the diarist penned the entries of this private diary while incarcerated as a Mau Mau detainee in the tumultuous 1950s and its eventual publication. Like Josiah Mwangi Kariuki's *Mau Mau Detainee*, which was the first in the series of Mau Mau memoirs, Wanjau's diary has become an important cultural, and socio-historical document or commentary to which numerous studies of the Mau Mau period make reference.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 Londsdale 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

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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' (2001: 140), 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' (Njogu 2001: 140). Upon 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 *Uhoro 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 Mynamar). 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 Unjurage* (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 modelled 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 20 October 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 until 1959, and remained under strict colonial surveillance until 1960. By the time of his death aged 80 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 period of writing and publishing (Peterson 2008, 74).

Wanjau therefore exemplifies Africans whom the colonial administration detained mainly because of their counter-hegemonic writing but who defied the odds to continue writing during their incarceration. *Mau Mau Author in Detention* is incarceration literature or, as Barbara Harlow would put it, literature of the 'places of writing in prison' (1992, 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 as a narrating self 'in prison.' Yet the diary is not the only work that Wanjau produced while behind bars; he edited the detention camp newspaper *Atiriri*, corresponded with family and especially his wife Shifra Wairire, and, like J.M. 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 (2008, 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, in which he sometimes wrote, may suggest his acquaintance with the Swahili literary tradition, but it seems more likely that the European missionary influence largely accounts for his literacy and embrace of literary genres like the diary. As already mentioned, his parents were some of the earliest converts to Christianity at the Tumutumu Presbyterian mission. In other words, Wanjau may have owed to the European encounter his knowledge and use of the diary form.

The watershed of the diary genre in Britain and perhaps the Western world seems to have occurred in 1825 when Samuel Pepys's celebrated diary was

decoded and appropriated, although the existence of the genre predates this period (Hassam 1993, 8). Commenting 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 in time 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. (1993, 8)

Conceptions of what a diary is or is not have evolved in different directions but, overall, there is today relative consensus on 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 problematise 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' (1993, 9). The interaction between a 'self' narrating itself and a diary is at the very core of the discourse on the definition of the genre.

Christina Sjöblad 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' (1998, 517). Sjöblad includes in her definition critical aspects of diary, namely the grammatical first-person narrator, organisation of diary entries according to chronology and inscription of dates. On the whole, *Mau Mau Author in Detention* seems to fit Sjöblad's conception of diary.

Wanjau's diary covers the range of events related to his incarceration from 20 October 1952 to 19 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. (1988, 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 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 (1988, xii). The question of why he wrote the diary begs 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 consider the fact that 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: *write*. Yet to say he wrote the diary because he was a writer is a rather facile explanation of the impetus for writing it. 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 counternarrative to the spurious civilising mission inherent in the imperial metanarrative was the centrepiece 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 dehumanising experiences of the 'sample of representative' leaders would shatter the colonialists' façade of human and humane treatment of colonised 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 … (1988, xi)

Wanjau's observation echoes J.M. Kariuki's prescient remark in *Mau Mau Detainee* in which Kariuki predicted that future historians would not have access to records

that fully reflected the experiences of Mau Mau detainees because these would be destroyed before Kenya's independence from British Rule (1988, 215). Kariuki's prediction about the British intentions to hide the records of torture, castration, 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' (2005, xiii).

Apparently Wanjau's reputation as a radical and prolific writer made fellow detainees 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. (1988, x)

In short, Wanjau's diary is an additional 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 1988, 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 characterise it, 'writing as an act of political defiance' (1993, 1).

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 sombre 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 their parents. Lastly, Wanjau dedicates the text to 'all Kenyans involved in many different ways in the struggle for freedom' (1988, vi). The dedication suggests the deeply political and personal motivation behind writing the clandestine diary. Given that he wrote the diary in Gikuyu, 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 acknowledgments he invokes the metaphor of death for the Kenyan nation stating, '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-state 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' (1988, xii). This raises the question: To what extent is his diary a private or personal undertaking? Like J.M. 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 to which I will soon return.

At this point it behoves 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 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 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. (1988, 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. 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 … 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. (1988, 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 collectivism 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 collectivised 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 identarian 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,' 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 centrepieces. 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 1980, 69). The Sonjo saying tends to undercut the reality of reciprocity between the individual and his or her society by stressing a 'one-way traffic' of individual dependency on society. But what Wanjau's diary epitomises is reciprocity or interdependence 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, this 'we' needed an author of Wanjau's authority, ingenuity, virtuosity, and skill to record these 'happenings' to immortalise its plural connotation, as he did. But even in telling their stories, he found an 'excuse' or an alibi to tell his own. 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' (1988).

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' (1988, 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. 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. (1988, 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 attempting 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 1993, 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 whom 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 13 April 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' (1988, 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' (1988, 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 (1988, 150).

But Naked Martin's truth claim as the white man who cannot tell a lie epitomises the racial ideology of white supremacy underpinning the official colonial hegemonic metanarrative of the Mau Mau movement and the counter-insurgence. 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' (1988, 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 2 March 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. (1988, 79)

The official narrative of the hegemon essentially posed allegations as fact and painted the Mau Mau as filthy, barbarous, and savage. 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 demonises 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 these 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 as Michel-Rolph Trouillot, in his iconoclastic *Silencing the Past* (1995) has so eloquently argued. 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 civilising 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' (1993, 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 vague, 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 21 October 1952 to February 1957, representing the diarist's memory of the detention years. There are a few but longer and more reflective entries devoted to his exile at Hola and life as a restricted person from 2 May 1958 to 19 May 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 and detention. (1988, 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 candour 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 win the Noma Award, as some critics have observed. This is compounded by the fact that we are dealing with what some have characterised as a less than perfect English rendition of the original Kikuyu language text.

Yet we should not be distracted by an obsession with what was lost, so much so that we lose sight of the pivotal fact that the diary makes the memory of the traumatic experience of Mau Mau detainees in colonial detention camps its centrepiece. Wanjau records how detainees were interrogated, humiliated, brutalised, 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 … ' (1988, 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. (1988, 69)

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 (5 April 1956 to 15 February 1957), the diarist reports that a group of 'reformed' detainees poured icy water on their unreformed colleague until he died (1988, 195). In exposing the fact that some detainees were complicit in the plight of their fellow detainees, Wanjau demonstrates remarkable candour. He also reveals African complicity in the infamous Hola massacre that occurred while he was exiled at Hola. He writes:

> 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 were 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. (1988, 201)

Wanjau's disclosure of 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 he dealt with the ostensibly malicious and vindictive interrogation panels, his mother and wife's detention, and his father's murder attributed to his own fellow Mau Mau fighters. All in all, 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 J.M. 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* (1985) has even questioned whether the African novel should be considered as bearing a European form given the level of Africanisation 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 *francophonie*, 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 pluralised and collaborated voice, Wanjau offers a powerful counter-hegemonic narrative that disturbs the official or authorised colonial narrative.

Note

1. The translation from Gakaara wa Wanjau's Gikuyu original *Mwandĩki wa Mau Mau ithaamĩrio-inĩ* to English was undertaken by Ngigi Njoroge.

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