25 Years of Kenya
A Prison Notebook: REFLECTIONS

Grounding with:

Prof. Maina wa Kinyatti

Edited by Sungu Oyoo
Written 25 years ago, Kenya: A Prison Notebook has inspired generations and proved a great resource and a hand book in political education in Kenya and beyond. It chronicles Maina Wa Kinyatti’s arrest and detention by the Moi regime, and powerfully captures Kenya’s history.

Maina wa Kinyatti was then a university professor and foremost researcher on the Mau Mau (Kenya Land and freedom Army), the liberation movement that engaged the British colonialists in armed struggle for land and freedom. In 1982, he was arrested by state agents for ‘possession of seditious material’ and detained by the Moi regime. Maina wrote Kenya: A Prison Notebook over the course of the next six and half years he spent in detention - mostly in solitary confinement.

Maina’s work and writing remains a constant and painful reminder that the objectives of the freedom struggle the Mau Mau engaged in are yet to be achieved. Kenya is a neo-colonial state. Her economy is in the hands of global capital and imperialism, while constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms are everyday blatantly disregarded with impunity.

Maina’s generation continued with the struggle for a better society, and showed great courage by confronting a regime that was prepared to go to any lengths to suppress dissenting voices. Today, another generation is continuing with that struggle in fulfillment of its historical responsibility. Through this collection of reflections on Kenya: A Prison Notebook, young comrades from various movements and organizations interrogate the lived reality and material conditions of their generation whilst relating them to past struggles and experiences. They reflect on a range of themes; including the purpose of education as a tool for liberation or bondage; the unfinished task of national liberation; intergenerational inheritance of social struggles in Kenya; not forgetting the pain, courage, patriotism and organizing reflected in the book.

These reflections are a celebration of Maina wa Kinyatti and all those who engaged in struggles for a better Kenya and Afrika. They additionally are an urgent reminder of the need to organize more than ever given the lived reality and material conditions of our people - those living in deprivation, those whose rights are suppressed and freedoms infringed. They are a reminder that struggle, like change, is a constant. These reflections were inspired by a conversation at Ukombozi Library between Gacheke Gachihi, Nicholas Mwangi and Brian Mathenge.

A luta continua!

Sungu Oyoo - Editor
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Intergenerational inheritance of social struggles in Kenya -</td>
<td>Gaceke Gachihi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Maina wa Kinyatti: The patriot who stood at a time many would have preferred to lie down</td>
<td>Wanjiru Wanjira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Prisons do not disappear problems, they disappear human beings</td>
<td>Nicholas Mwangi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I shall never surrender</td>
<td>Lewis Maghanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Education for self-effacement</td>
<td>Wangui Kimari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The unfinished task of National Liberation</td>
<td>Kinuthia Ndung’u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The struggle for Social Justice is not a walk in the park</td>
<td>Esther Waigumo Njoki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>25 years later, Marxism remains a tool for our struggle</td>
<td>Brian Mathenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>What are the alternatives to jail?</td>
<td>Chebukati</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“June 9th 1982 After refusing to sign a written confession statement, I was given back my clothes, blindfolded, handcuffed and taken to the CID headquarters where I was physically abused, photographed, fingerprinted and charged with possession of a seditious publications entitled Moi's Divisive Tactics Exposed, a document the Police had planted in one of my research files “Prof. Maina Wa Kinyatti.

25 Years ago, Professor Maina Wa Kinyatti wrote Kenya: A Prison Notebook, borrowing from the narrative of great revolutionary and organic intellectual Antonio Gramsci, a political prisoner during the fascist dictatorship of Benito Mussolini in Italy during a period when Europe was undergoing a capitalist-imperialist crisis of fascism.

Comrade Maina Wa Kinyatti, a revolutionary and freedom fighter, spent 6 years in Prison primarily for writing Kenya's correct history and for being a member of the Mwakenya –DTM movement that fought for democracy and social justice in Kenya during the Kenyatta–Moi dictatorships. In blood and tears, he wrote one of the most beautiful and glorious chapters of the history of our resistance as a people - a history of constant struggle in defense of democracy and our collective memory, dignity and social justice. Published 25 years ago, Kenya: A Prison Notebook remains relevant and continues to inspire new generations of freedom fighters, students, peasants and social justice activists. It has sparked a re-imagination of political education and provided the social justice movement with great insights into the true history of resistance in Kenya, including lessons learnt during the struggles of Kenya's underground Movement, popularly known as Mwakenya.

It was in 2003 when, through Tirop Kitur, I got a copy of Kenya: A Prison Notebook from the then Release Political Prisoners (RPP) offices along Nairobi's historic Cabral Street. RPP was a political organization started by mothers of political prisoners and Kenyan exiled communities in London agitating for democracy and release of all political prisoners in Kenya. Comrade Tirop had been one of the Mwakenya detainees and was a political activist alongside Karimi Nduthu - first RPP coordinator, great revolutionary and urban guerrilla assassinated by the Moi regime in 1996. Karimi Nduthu was at the time of his assassination creating a political path for the mass movement anchored on the struggles and human rights work that RPP was engaged in. Indeed, the seeds for today's grassroots social movements emerged from the struggles of RPP and the Mwakenya movement - just as the seeds of RPP and Mwakenya had emerged from the struggles that preceded them.

The book fired up my patriotism and opened my eyes to Kenya's beautiful history of struggle, especially the resistance by ordinary people against the British imperialist backed Moi dictatorship. It sparked my anger and passion against injustices and human rights violations. It exposed me to the evils of the Moi regime, the blood that was shed and the price paid by many university intellectuals, workers and peasants during the struggle for democratic rights, including the freedom to organize and protest. It is through continuous organizing and protests such as the Saba Saba March in 1990 among other political activities that Moi's 24-year old dictatorship was removed from power in 2002.

The book became one of my best pieces of history and an authoritative reference on Kenyan struggle and resistance - and has inspired me into buying copies for my comrades as part of political education.

True to its nature, the neocolonial state firmly opposed any political organizing and research on the Mau Mau Movement that Maina Wa Kinyatti was bringing to light to educate the Kenya Masses on our true history. Maina
Due to fear of change and resistance the regime embarked on a mission to cleanse radicals and Marxist professors from Kenya Universities, destroying the culture of education and hitherto vibrant battle of ideas in university spaces. In the universities and other public spaces, the state removed progressive books by Karl Marx, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Steve Biko, Malcom X and any material that challenged the neo-colonial state and British imperialism in Kenya. During Moi’s reign, marked by ethnic mobilization and backward politics, university education in Kenya took a nosedive, destroying the foundation of generational values and a culture of patriotism that liberation movements such as the Mau Mau had inspired. Moism took Kenya down the path of economic destruction and neocolonial poverty; and entrenched divisive ethnic politics that is at the core of Kenya’s political mess today.

Maina wa Kinyatti was arrested and sentenced to six and a half years in prison for ‘possessing seditious material’. The Imprisonment of Maina Wakinyatii, Prof. Ewdard Oyugi, Kamonji Wachira, Katama Mkangi, Willy Mutunga, Ngugi wa Thiongo, and many others derailed the growth of an ideological political base in Kenya for progressive politics and the social justice movement.

As we mark 25 years of Kenya: A Prison Notebook we celebrate comrade Prof. Maina Wa Kinyatti as a great freedom fighter, revolutionary intellectual and a mentor to our generation’s struggle for freedom and social justice. As Milan Kundera once said, “The Struggle of People against Power is the Struggle of Memory against Forgetting”. Prison Notebook is an epoch of memory that we will never forget. An epoch of history that will continue sparking fire against injustice across many generations in Kenya. It’s a permanent spark of our fire of resistance, love of our country and a memory of the sacrifices of comrades of the December Twelve-Mwakenya Movement.

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I first met Maina Wa Kinyatti in 2000 and much later, we began organizing night political study sessions at the Polytechnic Institute in Nairobi as part of introducing us to class struggle and history of resistance in Kenya. Subsequent study sessions forged our comradeship and led to an opportunity to launch one of his books: History of Resistance in Kenya in 2008. Maina Wa Kinyatti and his wife Mumbi Maina have since then become my teachers on patriotism, love for our people and the struggle for liberation in Kenya and Africa.

Gacheke Gachihi is the Coordinator of Mathare Social Justice Centre (MSJC) and a member of the Social Justice Centres Working Group Steering Committee in Nairobi, Kenya. He is also involved in regional social movements and politics. He researches and writes about police violence, criminalization of the poor, social justice and social struggles, amongst others. His articles and video interviews are published for example by Review of African Political Economy (ROAPE), roape.net, Africa Is a Country (AIAC), Daraja Press, Verso Books, and others.

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In beautiful and captivating prose, Mzalendo Wanjira writes about Maina wa Kinyatti’s detention and ordeal in the hands of his captors - the pain, anger, frustration, resilience, commitment and loyalty to the cause. She recollects how her first encounter with Kenya: A Prison Notebook made her question the history she’d been taught, and more fundamentally, to understand the truth about post-colonial Kenya and its attempt to hide its glorious struggle against imperialism and in turn blind coming generations from their generational objective.

I first read Kenya: A Prison Notebook after my high school education. We were setting up Mathare Social Justice Centre when my friend and mentor Gacheke Gachihi handed me the book. I had loved history lessons back in school, but upon reading the prison notebook, I found myself angry at the deceit of those history lessons. Mwalimu had meticulously documented his struggle and I couldn’t put the book down. It was like I was discovering a whole new world that had been hidden from me. I got to see the role of the imperialists and more so traitors like Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Moi who in my schooling had been portrayed as heroes of the nation, but who were nothing more than villains and selfish individuals who cared not for the common mwananchi. I was enraged at discovering that my growing up in Mathare didn’t have to be marred with such difficulty if only our country had landed in the right hands. This book fired me up! It stirred in me an interest to dig deep and find out for myself what other truths had been hidden from the people to pacify them. It is also after reading Kenya: A Prison Notebook that I felt inspired to start the Matigari kids club where I started teaching children from Mathare our true history as a nation and as a continent, so they are aware and do not feel as betrayed as I felt when I got a hold of true record of history. This is the book that birthed the patriot in me and I am deeply grateful to Mwalimu Maina wa Kinyatti for dedicating his youth to documenting the real accounts of history and sharing them with the world.

**Reflections.**

The Prison Notebook really captivated my psyche, each page leaving me aghast. This was resilience par excellence, this was patriotism, embodied in the struggle of Mwalimu Maina Wa Kinyatti against an oppressive state. It was not lost to me that ideals are intangible, that you can’t see them nor touch them. This was the first time such ideals were vividly illustrated by the willingness to suffer and even die (if need be) for one’s beliefs. The ideals of national heritage, rule of law, fairness and good leadership were put on display for all to see. I saw a man stripped bare into a physical manifestation of those ideals in a person.

For many years after Moi’s dictatorship, much was spoken about the torture chambers and unlawful detention of people who didn’t agree with dictatorial policies or the injustices perpetrated by the regime and its cronies. To read every page (much of it was scribbled out in pieces of tissue) was to relive a time of great trial and tribulation. Kamiti Prison is speculated to be the infamous holder of Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi’s remains. Mwalimu would touch the cold walls of the prison and make out the scribbled messages of Mau Mau fighters imprisoned there by British colonial aggressors a generation before. This would urge him to fight on, to endure suffering with super-human resolve.

Tears would flow freely when Mwalimu Maina dreamt about his wife, his family and the warmth of the time he had been a free man. He would awake totally devastated at being in the clutches of prison. Anger would boil every time the Prison guards inflicted pain on the prisoners and beat them, the letters smuggled out of the prison to human rights organizations offering inklings of hope that someday the torment would end.

Mwalimu would at times stoke my laughter through his writings about the insanity of people being imprisoned for their ideas. It seemed trivial that someone in State House hated another because they could not stomach their truth. It was powerful for ordinary citizens to be revolutionary without lifting arms.
As a lecturer, he would often reminisce about his students and their sharpness. He used the academic platform to clearly show that this country was fought for and no one had a right to plunder our national resources. This was a brave position to take in a country where the status quo had a devious plan to defraud the majority Kenyans of their national rights. Even while in Kamiti Prison, Mwalimu did not tire of teaching his prison mates. He led them like a military officer behind enemy lines, encouraging them to keep their morale and to avoid the desperation to capitulate and work with the dictatorship.

Drawing from struggles of people and power from Cuba and other countries, Mwalimu would read letters of encouragement from his family and well-wishers. The prison authorities would hoard his letters and sanction others.

The character of Mwalimu shows clearly by the friends he earned by sheer admiration, especially the prison guard who was his undercover courier and who shared with him information regarding the outside. These individuals, though affiliated officially as state officers, were unable to hide from themselves the fact that this man was not a criminal. They were drawn to his calm demeanor and his copious consumption of books. Mwalimu read books in the prison, after intense lobbying, to help to keep his mind from wandering into the abyss of despair. He continued to sharpen his contradictions, to drink the bitter cup and keep on fighting.

The toll of a prison sentence is great. Almost seven years caged unlawfully. Mwalimu’s sacrifice was nothing less than monumental. I could not imagine the anguish it must have caused and oftentimes I couldn’t turn the page without sending my love to him. He stood during times when many would have just wanted to lie down. Like the honorable freedom fighters, he would not relent nor stop his good work to appease cronies of imperialism. For my generation, Mwalimu’s sacrifice was crucially important. We were born after this period and knew our history from those around us. To read Kenya: A Prison Notebook was to understand the truth about post-colonial Kenya and its attempt (by its derailers) to hide its glorious struggle against imperialism and in turn blind coming generations from their generational objective.

Mwalimu Maina wa Kinyatti, we love you and thank you for carrying the mantle and firing us up. For clearing our lenses and freshening our perspectives. For telling us nothing but the truth. Most of all for never betraying the struggle for Kenya and for Africa! Our homeland or death, we shall win!

Mzalendo Wanjira Wanjiru is co-founder of Mathare Social Justice Center and a member of the social justice movement.
Nicholas Mwangi explores how our generation has been forcefully torn apart from the true history of our land by hegemonies around knowledge and learning. He reminds us that though the neoliberal education system continues to depoliticise young people, we must dare to dream of a better society, educate ourselves politically, and organise towards a system that takes care of the majority and not a few in society, as Maina wa Kinyatti did.

Former Black Panther party member, feminist, philosopher and political activist Angela Davis asserts that; “Prisons do not disappear social problems, they disappear human beings. Homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the human beings contending with them are relegated to cages.”

Angela Davis’ critique on prisons best describes what the Moi government attempted to do with the radical Prof Maina wa Kinyatti in 1982, when they arrested and charged him with possession of what they termed seditious material. Maina wa Kinyatti was sent to disappear in solitary confinement. With his arrest, proponents of imperialism and capitalism had hoped to momentarily suspend discourse on homelessness and unemployment among other failures of capitalism and the emerging contradictions of a neo-colonial state which he was exposing to his students at Kenyatta University.

Prison writings, wherever they come from in the world, reveal that the idea behind the imprisonment of the writers is to separate, isolate, dehumanize and alienate people, revolutionaries, political activists and their ideas from the masses as in the cases of Italian Marxist revolutionary Antonio Gramsci, Gakaara Wa Wanjau, Mumia Abu Jamal, George Jackson, Abdullah Ocalan and Bhagat Singh to name a few.

Maina Wa Kinyatti suffered in the hands of his brutal captors for six and a half years, most of which he spent in solitary confinement. Aside from beatings, he was tortured by vermin, untreated diseases, hunger and loneliness. But he remained defiant, his courage and spirit unbroken. A true testament of a revolutionary.

In one of the passages in the book, as he awaits trial, Maina Wa Kinyatti says; “Tomorrow is the judgement day, but I am not worried, I am not frightened, for I am not the first Kenyan to be incarcerated for truth: Makhan Singh, Jesse Kariuki, Joseph Kangethe, Pio Gama Pinto, Dominic, Gatu, Bildad Kaggia, Abdilatif Abdallah and Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, just to mention a few, spent years in prison because of their political beliefs. I am proud to add my name to this list of patriots.” p47

A CHANCE INTERACTION
There are three books that have inspired, changed and awakened my political consciousness;
I. How Europe Underdeveloped Africa by Walter Rodney
II. Decolonizing the Mind by Ngugi Wa Thiong’o
III Kenya: A Prison Notebook by Maina Wa Kinyatti

While all these titles are among the best in Africa, Kenya: A Prison Notebook touched me most differently and fired me up by revealing the power of the state and its ruthless machinery. Coming from a generation that only grew up hearing stories of the atrocities committed by Moi’s government in the 80s, reading Maina wa Kinyatti’s book provided firsthand information on the cruelty of the regime towards innocent citizens and political critics.
Readers of this book will bear testimony that you are never the same once you read it.

I first read Kenya: A Prison Notebook in 2018 while a student at the University of Nairobi. I developed a habit of reading poetry during breaks from study. One day, while completing an assignment at the main campus library, I took one of these usual breaks and was walking around the bookshelves searching for poetry when I came across Maina’s book. I mistook it for poems about prisons rather than a detailed history and writings of Maina Wa Kinyatti in prison, and began going through it with my usual intent of reading a single page or poem and resuming my studies. However, the first pages immediately made me aware of my ignorance and I remained in the library for several hours that day reading the book. I promptly borrowed it and read it for the next three days.

What surprised me was that this was the first time I was hearing of Professor Maina Wa Kinyatti. It was also the first time I was reading his writing. I later learnt that he had written several other crucial titles such as the; History of Resistance in Kenya, Mau Mau: A Revolution betrayed, Dedan Kimathi speaks, Mwakenya: the unfinished Revolution among others. How could a scholar who had written so widely on the beautiful history of resistance in Kenya and Mau Mau be shunned?

The answer lies in the motive behind his arrest in 1982 on the basis of producing and possessing seditious literature. At Maina Wa Kinyatti’s house, the police confiscated 29 files of his research work on the Mau Mau movement and 23 books, including the works of Karl Marx, Engels, Lenin and Che Guevara. These were the materials considered seditious by proponents of capitalism. The government then only allowed the teaching of one theory - capitalism. The Moi regime had declared war against proponents of socialism, who included political activists, students and scholars. Spies were embedded in universities to monitor teaching and to remove any literature on marxism, socialism and communism. With the removal of such progressive books, the government had succeeded in setting up an education system that would consistently produce ignorant graduates and diehards of capitalism. Capitalism was presented as a natural God given system with no alternative to it.

This was eye opening for me with regard to how capitalism became so comfortable and even seemed to have found a home in Kenya. After the MWAKENYA MOVEMENT, which Maina wa Kinyatti was part of, there has not been serious and sustained opposition to capitalism and neo colonialism in Kenya as compared to other parts of Africa. Neo-liberal intellectuals still use education to continually depoliticize young people in institutions of learning.

The likes of Maina Wa Kinyatti and others dared to dream of a different ideology and of a system that took care of the majority and not the few in society, a system that prioritized quality healthcare, education and livelihood for everyone.

During one of the interrogations, one officer warns Prof Maina;

"Maina, we know that you have been using Marxism in the university to sabotage Nyayo philosophy. We also know that your research on the Mau Mau Movement is a political strategy to organize the people of central Kenya against the Moi government. Let me (be) clear: Nyayoism is a state ideology, therefore those who oppose it are enemies of the president and the ruling party, KANU. Our job, therefore, is to hunt them"
down, imprison or kill them. We crushed ngo roko conspirators and disorganized the GEMA economic saboteurs; we are determined to flush out the Marxist conspiracy.”

My generation was raised in a society that had gone to great lengths to demonize socialism and communism. Neo-liberal literature now fills libraries in every institution at the expense of progressive materials and teaching. Kenya: A Prison Notebook provides us with an example of a scholar who unapologetically disdains capitalism and imperialism, and who is willing to pay the highest price for their obliteration. Maina Wa Kinyatti could have chosen a comfortable life in academia and joined the ranks of reactionary scholars, but instead used his genius for the liberation of the working and wretched masses.

25 years after its publication, Kenya: A Prison Notebook remains as relevant as when it first appeared in 1996. It is a critical handbook for political education and organizing.

Nicholas Mwangi is a historian and member of Ukombozi library.
I SHALL NEVER SURRENDER

Lewis Maghanga gives us a timely reminder of how jails and other state institutions have historically and continue to be used to repress and break the Kenyans struggling to change the order of things. He draws similarities between the colonial administration and neo-colonial government, reminding us that the neo-colonial state is an appendage of global imperialism - and that the people of Kenya today still face the task of carrying on with the struggle for full independence and freedom.

INTRODUCTION:

That present day Kenya is a hotbed of police brutality and state repression is a fact that goes without saying. Characteristic of any despotic system, present day Kenya, through its state apparatus, exhibits immense intolerance to any form of dissent and views that are contrary to its neo-colonial agenda.

A look into the history of ‘independent’ Kenya, right from 1963 when the country attained self-rule, would reveal a pattern of political repression directed against anyone whose ideas seeks to change the present order of things. Throughout the years, many Kenyans have suffered arrest, torture detention and exile on account of being in opposition to the regime. Additionally, many have sacrificed their lives in order to see a better Kenya, in which freedom and liberty are actually enjoyed by the majority.

This reflection of ‘Kenya: A Prison Notebook’, by Maina wa Kinyatti, seeks to highlight the brutal nature of the neo-colonial state, particularly in relation to its own citizens who take it upon themselves to work towards genuine freedom, liberation and a better future for all. It also seeks to applaud the bravery, commitment and determination exhibited by Kenyan revolutionaries who ended up as political prisoners, such as Maina wa Kinyatti, based on their uncompromising position even in the face of dehumanising conditions and torture.

This diary is an expression of the neo-colonial brutality experienced by Kenyan prisoners. It is also a testimony to courage and fortitude.

REFLECTIONS:

Constitutionalism and the rule of law is almost always ignored when dealing with political prisoners in Kenya, as well as in other parts of the world. The arrest of Maina wa Kinyatti, as highlighted in the book, began with the unlawful ransacking of his house by six armed plainclothes policemen, determined to find ‘seditious publications’.

That agents of the state found publications on the Mau Mau ‘seditious’ says a great deal regarding the extent of the falsification of the history of Kenya by the government. Determined to relegate the status of the Mau Mau movement to that of a ‘terrorist’ organization, in conformity with the colonial narrative, the government of Kenya sought to destroy any meaningful material or publication regarding the Mau Mau movement. Any inquiry into the organising done by the Mau Mau, as well as its aims and membership, was strictly prohibited and discouraged by the Kenyatta and Moi regimes.

“Why are you doing research on the Mau Mau movement? Do you know the Mau Mau issue is political and sensitive and would divide the people of Kenya? Secondly, do you know it is a crime to do any academic research in this country without the government’s permission?”

The above questions, asked by superintendent Rono of the Police Special Branch to Maina wa Kinyatti, highlighted the attitude of the government with regards to Kenya’s Freedom struggle. That the government was eager to suppress any information regarding Kenya’s genuine independence movement emphasised the illegitimacy of neo-colonial Kenya’s regime.

Mention is made of the inhumane and degrading treatment accorded to prisoners upon admission in jail. Prisoners in Kenya, in addition to putting up with rough treatment from the police and prison guards, are often made to go without food for lengthy periods of time. Blankets, if provided, are often infested with bedbugs, lice and fleas. They are often stinking.
Food, when provided, was often of the poorest quality. As highlighted in the book;

- Breakfast is cold sugarless porridge full of sand, cockroaches and flies.
- Lunch is half-cooked ugali (maize meal) with yellow, dirty Sukuma wiki (collard greens).
- Supper is half-cooked cold ugali and rotten beans full of worms and stones.

In addition to the poor quality food, sanitation was often non-existent in the prison, with inmates made to live under unhygienic conditions. Clearly, these conditions were meant to break the spirit of the prisoners.

In their interactions with the prison guards, the political prisoners often discovered that indeed some guards empathised with their situation. Some of them even understood the nature of the repressive system of Kenya, and loathed the neo-colonial regime of President Moi and KANU. These guards, forced to be in their position solely due to the problem of unemployment and their search for a better life, stood in support, albeit clandestinely, of the political prisoners. Through these progressive guards, Maina wa Kinyatti, as well as other political prisoners, were able to get access to letters and other material and pass correspondence to comrades in the outside world.

Most of the Maximum Security Prisons, as mentioned in the book, were established by the British colonialists as detention centres during the Mau Mau uprising. The methods used by the prison personnel to torture the prisoners were used by the British colonialists during the Mau Mau war of independence. That the state apparatus still uses the very detention centres and detention methods used by the colonial administration shows how similar the colonial and the present neo-colonial regimes are. The present regime, far from serving the interests of the African people, simply exists to serve the interests of the former colonial masters. The government officials are mere puppets of Western imperialism. The very methods used by the British colonialists to control the African people, such as dividing the population along tribal lines, are still used to date.

If our state is an appendage of global imperialism, and if our state is merely a representation of the continuation of colonial rule, it goes without saying that the people of Kenya are faced with the task of carrying on with the struggle for full independence and freedom.

The author makes mention of the KANU government blueprint for national development, published through its political manifesto, known as ‘African Socialism.’ Despite its outlook and proclamation as an anti-capitalist program, it in fact led to the entrenchment of exploitation, inequality pervasive corruption and thievery. The program was anything but socialist; it was capitalism in disguise. Just as it is impossible to have African capitalism, African Biology, African Physics, African Chemistry and the like, there cannot be a scientific concept based on race.

With so many Mwakenya cadres broken, the Kenya Special Branch Police had succeeded in uprooting some of the movement’s underground cells and disorganising its leadership. Because of the information the police had assembled since February 1986, they were now in a better position to confront any Kenya political dissident they capture. In spite of the arrest and torture of so many revolutionaries, however, more and more Kenyans have been making the decision to join the struggle against despotism and fight for a brighter future for generations to come.

“I shall never surrender. I would rather die than betray my country. My country is larger than life itself.” And rightly so.

Lewis Maghanga is a revolutionary organiser and member of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Socialist League. He is also a member of Ukombozi Library.
EDUCATION FOR SELF-EFFACEMENT -
A STUDENT’S VIEW
WANGUI KIMARI (DEC 17, 2008)

Considering the ultimate limitations of instructing Kenya’s children in ‘civilised’ acts like eating a banana with a knife and fork at the expense of an education true to the nation’s history, Wangui Kimari wonders whether the current educational system simply upholds students’ self-effacement.

When my sister was in primary school (the school where we all were had a supposedly pious nature that was the talk of town), like all of the students within this institution she had to take a mandatory ‘ethics’ class. The title of this class appeared to us ambivalent, big and intimidating, but from what we could garner, ‘ethics’ were simply tacit rules that we needed to embody in order to live (or pretend to live) in religious harmony with each other.

One morning on our way to school in our car, the aforementioned sibling, age 13, obviously thinking of what she had learnt the previous day, informed us with uninhibited joy that during the ethics class – taught by the idolised Italian priest – the teacher focused on instructing the adolescent students how to eat a banana with a knife and fork. Obviously certain that it was a most salient lesson for these young African minds, this priest devoted over forty-five minutes to demonstrating one of the requisites of modern ‘civilised’ life. My sister’s happiness was due to the fact that she was among those who managed, although with admitted difficulty, to embrace the ‘challenges of modernity’ and perform the required feat.

I was only seven when I heard my sister relate this, and as one of the car’s occupants, I remember (even though at this age I was probably on my way to being quite a successful colonial project) being rather unsure of how to receive this news. Nonetheless, it appeared to be the most normal occurrence to the rest of the occupants, for I do not recall anyone responding with any ounce of indignation. This was in 1993, supposedly thirty years after independence.

It makes me wonder — now of course when my agitation is more articulate, and when (duly) I have much less of my childhood tolerance and when I can more clearly see the interdependent nature of life and thus have a more fervent need to deconstruct what was I was made — what exactly have we been learning and are we learning in schools in Kenya if such an ethics class was such a norm, that even adults were not be able to discern the unequivocal insinuations of such a lesson?

Later on and more than 15 years later, I am graciously offered a book entitled Kenya: A Prison Notebook, by one of my close friends, A. Shujaa. Despite years of education in this country and sufficient participation in public forums, I had never heard of the author, Maina wa Kinyatti. In reading further I am to discover the depths of my ignorance about the history of Kenya, for the experiences documented in this book — the catalyst of which, among many, was a yet imperceptible independence — were not unique to the author. I then ask myself, how many people were subject to such morbid life as Nyayoism — a word new to me — was being so severely implemented? How many people died in Kenya or were forced to leave their homeland in the early 1980s and 1990s? How many more hungry stomachs were created as we incessantly fortified a system where people have to compete for food? How many?

The answers to these questions and the experiences that generated them, I am positive, have not found their way onto the national curriculum.

So my query is, what is the purpose of school here in Kenya, if my attendance, and the attendance of my sisters, brothers, and colleagues, really just encourages and exacerbates a process of self-effacement? In their unswerving support of this type of education, are our parents and grandparents really just encouraging us to view them as persons without dignity because what we learn does not allow us to give them appropriate reverence? We are living the consequences of this education for self-effacement. It was a few years later after my sister’s ethics class that my cousin from my mother’s rural home picked out a stray potato leaf in a bundle of Managu leaves.
Before this, I had internalised the normalised prejudice (stated or not) that I was more intelligent than this cousin as I was city-born and likely to go further than she ever would, regarding her as a mere a country girl whose future would always be limited. However, on this day I can remember thinking how much more vital her knowledge was when compared to that of the textbook I had crammed and thus could wield like a weapon. In awe of her, I marveled.

It was perhaps at this time that I slowly began to see that, even if I could (albeit awkwardly) succeed in eating a banana with a fork and knife, the effortless natural knowledge that my cousin conveyed was more worthwhile than my extensive knowledge of the ‘sciences’. For in preservation of such wisdom, she knew a lot better than I did who she was, even if this was and would be an amalgamation of various influences. And in her knowledge of herself she would (a lot more easily than I) and as Fanon advised the youth, ‘out of tentative obscurity discover [her] mission, fulfill it or betray it.’

It is through many follies and sometimes fancies, often in foreign lands that I have learnt the histories of many that I should have learnt whilst in my country. Luckily, slowly by slowly, I begin to perceive the true patterns of the past. Accordingly, I then became concerned about the educational priorities of this country and ask what exactly are we really learning to do?

I know many more are to pass through this enforced system, and thus if so, if this is the structure of education we have chosen, there is a great need to reconsider what is being taught in the halls of our educational institutions. Or perhaps we would much rather continue dissecting fruit (rather awkwardly if I must say) than learn about ourselves?

If so, we can only await the further consequences of an education system that upholds our own self-effacement.

Wangui Kimari is participatory action research coordinator at Mathare Social Justice Centre
THE UNFINISHED TASK OF NATIONAL LIBERATION

Reflecting on the process of national liberation as a struggle against neo-colonialism, Kinuthia Ndung’u draws from Kinyatti’s example and looks at the role of revolutionary petty bourgeoisie intellectuals and students in the struggle against neo-colonial oppression. In today’s Kenya, this is a reminder to intellectuals and students that it is their duty to give ideological guidance to the ongoing class debate (hustlers-dynasty) and other struggles everywhere they find themselves.

The book, Kenya: A Prison Notebook, is a reminder of how the dream of freedom for the majority was turned into a nightmare of oppression by our neo-colonial state, a case of failed independence. It is a story of immense courage and self-discipline in the struggle. And today, years after independence, national liberation as a historical process remains on the agenda – a reminder that our national liberation is a struggle against neo-colonialism.

We draw great lessons from Comrade Kinyatti on the dialectical unity of theory and practice. Comrade Kinyatti also makes clear the noble duty of revolutionary petty bourgeoisie intellectuals and students in the struggle against neo-colonial oppression. A duty to escalate the prevailing conditions not only through political education and use of propaganda but also through active organisation. Comrade SS writes to comrade Kinyatti in prison that “the regime could not defeat an organised people, that a people united could never be defeated”. Written 25 years ago, this book is today a reminder to intellectuals and students that it is their duty to give ideological guidance to the ongoing class debate (hustlers-dynasty) everywhere they find themselves.

It is a reminder of our unfinished task, a reminder that it is not yet uhuru. It is an encouragement to struggles for autonomous political space at the university, independence of the Parliament and Judiciary, struggles against police brutality, struggles against democracy of the 1% and other contradictions inherent in our neo-colonial state. Comrade Maina Wa Kinyatti gives strength to the students of historic processes to provide theoretical tools with which to understand and interpret reality and transform society towards a socialist future. Kinyatti and his comrades exhibit great courage, commitment, perseverance and readiness to die for their conviction if need be, among other qualities of great revolutionaries. They are courageous enough to be role models to us and others engaged in ongoing and future struggles to create a new humanity in our nation.

Victoria e certa!
Kinuthia Ndung’u is a member of the Communist Party of Kenya
The struggle for social justice is not a walk in the park.

Drawing strength from Maina wa Kinyatti, Esther Waigumo Njoki shares her reflections on how we work and organise with others for a common cause. She emphasises the importance of defining the oppressors and the oppressed, of identifying our comrades and enemies, of educating cadres and cultivating their integrity, loyalty and commitment to the cause.

As a young cadre in the fight for social justice, I find the book Kenya: A Prison Notebook of so much relevance to our current struggle. There is much that we learn from the book, starting from how we need to organize ourselves all the way to how we relate, even with our oppressors.

First, I must admit that I admire the way Comrade Maina wa Kinyatti influenced and collectively worked with a strong network of people - some of who were abroad at the time - for a common cause. In the book, we see his former student coming to visit him in jail. We see his wife and family members all playing a role in the struggle either through encouragements, smuggling letters or books, passing information amongst other things. It is even more interesting how the author made friendship with the prison guards. Maina writes, “We have to realize that not all of the guards are our enemies”. This kind of approach is what we need in our present struggle for social justice as we organize.

Many are the times we have stereotyped certain people as our oppressors simply because they work for the deep state system though in reality, they too are victims of injustices happening around and only need a little ‘jump starting’ by awakening their political consciousness. There is a need to clearly define the oppressors and the oppressed and we can achieve this by actualizing our slogan, “Organize, Educate, and Liberate”.

“You are not my comrade, you are the enemy” is the response Maina wa Kinyatti gives to a police officer who referred to him as comrade Maina. It should be noted that this is the same officer who had ordered his junior officers to torture Maina - including not providing him with food or blankets. The integrity and loyalty displayed here by Maina wa Kinyatti is undisputed. That integrity and loyalty is something that we as social justice cadres need to aspire to have and guard jealously in us. Many are the times that our oppressors want to compromise our collective struggle by trying to compromise a few of our own. Disloyalty should be the last thing we ever witness from one of us! Even if we are to be promised the whole world in exchange for our loyalty to the struggle, we should be grounded enough to, for instance, stay homeless in our own motherland rather than betray our noble cause.

Lastly, the book reminds us that struggle for justice is not a walk in the park. The author suffered for six and a half years in the hands of his oppressors. He was tortured in so many ways and at some point was left alone in prison. At another point, he asks himself a question “Will I be able to finish this journey under this unrestrained barbarism?” It was worth documenting all these struggles, especially for us as young cadres, as these writings prepare us for the long journey and protracted struggle ahead. When the struggle gets tough, we draw strength from people like Comrade Maina wa Kinyatti who underwent worse experiences, but who never gave up on the struggle and instead remained defiant. His generation always found a reason to keep on fighting and as he confesses in one of the many lines he wrote while in prison “the struggle for democracy demands more stamina and passion; demands courage than tears; it calls for great sacrifices, for blood and death.”

I would really like to thank Comrade Maina wa Kinyatti for this inspiring book which is also very relevant in our current day struggle. Your resilience and commitment to save our motherland will forever be written not only in the books of history, but also in our hearts. Your efforts to make sure that you documented every aspect of the struggle are well appreciated and this has taught us the importance of documenting our daily struggles for the sake of generations that will come after us. I would also wish to
thank Comrade Gacheke Gachihi, who gave me this book when I was an intern at Mathare Social Justice Center, a space that inspired me to work for the community and engage in the wider struggle for social justice. Keep on mentoring young cadres, for it is never in vain!

ESTHER WAIGUMO NJOKI is a criminology and security studies graduate from Murang’a University of Technology, a member of Ghetto Foundation and the Social Justice Movement, and a community researcher. She is also a passionate farmer, a volunteer mentor with Equity Bank, and writes about the struggle for social justice. Her writing has been published by Review of Africa Political Economy (ROAPE).

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25 YEARS LATER, MARXISM REMAINS A TOOL FOR OUR STRUGGLE.

Brian Mathenge notes the actions of successive regimes in Kenya in overseeing the suppression of staunch Marxists and progressives who seemed a threat to the establishment - including political assassinations and arrests of those who happened to have different perspectives or ideological orientation - primarily because the ruling class was (and still is) frightened by efforts to educate and develop the consciousness of the masses. But as he reminds us, young cadres from the Social Justice Centre’s are today adopting Marxism as a tool for struggle, and 25 years after the publication of Kenya: A Prison Notebook, a defiant generation with a fighting spirit is ready to advance the struggle for socialism as a generational mission.

This year marks 25 years since the publishing of the Prison Notebook, a contemporary read written by Maina Wa Kinyatti, and published. The book is of unparalleled relevance to the current generation, especially in educating and radicalizing young progressives based on its account of the outrageous experiences and callous treatment Marxists faced during the establishment of the republic. The Kenyan masses expected a new dawn with the transition from colonialism to independence, only to be frustrated by a bunch of selfish individuals who advanced the entrenchment of capitalism and the establishment of a comprador class of organized criminals masquerading as the nation’s political steers.

Successive regimes in Kenya have overseen the suppression of staunch marxists and progressives who seemed a threat to the establishment, carried out political assassinations and arrested those who happened to have different perspectives or ideological orientation.

The first K.A.N.U. government headed by Jomo Kenyatta oversaw the assassination of Pio Gamma Pinto, a great socialist and an inspiration to the world’s quest for a socialist society. It also sent many Kenyans into forced exile whilst subjecting many more to illegal detention and torture. However, this did not scare the committed and selfless determination of Marxists, especially in academia.

His successor, Daniel Moi, also from the same old oppressive party was no different. Maina Wa Kinyatti, a History Professor, details the hostile suppression exerted by the K.A.N.U. government under Moi’s rule in Kenya: A Prison Notebook. The book contains spikes of aggression, pain, agony and the silent voice of the Kenyan people.

Maina was arrested in June 1982 and forced through harsh, coercive situations for ‘Possession of Seditious Material’, a colonial offence that is still present in the penal code today. His crime was holding strong to the conviction and values of Marxism. The government (Moi) was angry that he and other University lecturers, including Kamonji Wachira and retired Chief Justice Willy Mutunga were using the science of Marxism to develop consciousness of the University students. This clearly proves that the Ruling Class was (and still is) frightened by attempts to educate and develop the consciousness of the masses.

After Maina was arrested, he underwent a brutal interrogation, frustrations in court, and undignified conditions in prison to weaken him and make him surrender - but these conditions instead radicalized and strengthened him and many other comrades. They chose to hold dear to their beliefs and conviction. In a quoted Statement, Cde. Willy Mutunga says, ‘What the K.A.N.U. government doesn’t understand is that we are ready to walk on fire.’

The Colonial prison conditions that subjected prisoners to inhumane and degrading conditions still exist in today’s society, exposing the current system collapse and the un inventive character of the system. But those conditions did not deter the political prisoners. They agreed to use the prison as an organizing unit, made friendship with guards and other prisoners and started off a process of developing their consciousness. Even in prison, Maina contin-
The very methods used by the British colonialists to guard empathised with their situation. Some of often non-existent in the prison, with inmates made.

In addition to the poor quality food, sanitation was.

25 YEARS LATER, MARXISM REMAINS A TOOL that limits the students from taking part in progressive political organization.

Thanks to Comrade Gacheke Gachihi of Mathare Social Justice Center for his consistency, and especially for buying this book for many comrades in the movement. For sure, it is a gift that can never be equated to any other. We are thankful and honoured. Thanks to Vita Booksooks for the publishing and continued spread of the book.

'The first duty of a Revolutionary is to be educated.' We shall not bow, we shall not trade our identity, we shall not betray the cause!

Brian Mathenge is a social justice activist based in Nairobi. He is a member of Githurai Social Justice Center, a member of the Social Justice Center's working group, and a member of the Communist Party of Kenya.
WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES TO JAIL?
The book starts with an event that Maina can't forget for a lifetime. The arrest of Maina and other political prisoners are learning manuals and memoirs of honour to the struggle. Not compromising his beliefs and political stand made Maina’s life hard and miserable for years, but that was a revolutionary decision.

Religious antagonism is evident when Maina is given a Bible and not communist material because he confessed to be a communist. This is illustrated by the fact that his own book which was confiscated by authorities during the house search conducted at his Kenyatta University premises wasn’t returned, and he was instead told to find solace within an imperialist book that aimed at making us captives of God and his son. How do they separate you from your own thoughts but tell you to live side by side with someone else’s thoughts? My great Maina found a new job for the new Bible.

The food the prisoners ate wasn’t satisfying and from Maina’s brave words their immune systems had significantly deteriorated… you remember him speaking about lost eye sight? Getting basic needs becomes problematic even in a government manned institution.

THE MOI ERA/ERROR
Moi coming to power in a country whose independence has just been betrayed by his predecessor and deciding to follow in his predecessors footsteps (nyayo) brings the nation to a state of bad governance and economic turmoil. Political activism subsequently starts in different spheres – the air force, universities, churches, civil society and other organizations.

The people start organizing the masses toward change and political education cells are created. The organizing happening terrifies the state and it uses the dreaded ‘special branch’ unit of the police to rein in those involved in political activism. Those found organizing or in possession of the education materi-
al are arrested and detained without trial - or tried in kangaroo courts that help the state incarcerate them for long periods.

The arrest of university students came at a period when the nation had just dropped the colonial employees and was in need of people with different knowledge and skills to help build a nation. The detention without trial of university lecturers and people who were collecting and trying to put the story of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army together was a retrogressive measure to the people, but productive to the neo-colonialist enterprise as it kept people in a state of fear.

The delaying tactics witnessed from the state then, and which is still prevalent with regard to judicial matters, is a culture raised to create room for the denial of justice. From Maina wa Kinyatti’s words, it is clear that this is why they were held for so long before a predetermined sentence was later announced.

The situation in our prisons and remand facilities has not improved to date. The meals are still half cooked, and for you to feed well you have to offer some form of bribe for extra food - enforcing notions of class and privilege even among inmates. The prisoners who serve as cooks or servers aren’t bothered with the lives and welfare of fellow inmates but with bettering their stay in prison and relationship with the wardens. Many wardens are mentally disturbed because to the ills the state forces them to inflict on innocent people for the benefit of the ruling class, aiding the killing of a possible revolution that could change even their lives.

Segregation of inmates from basic needs and even matrimonial duties is still prevalent. Though inmates are supposed to be given a bed, uniforms, sheets, towel, sandals and personal effects, that doesn't happen - contributing to pathetic lifestyles within prison walls.

Despite prisons being overcrowded, the state has not invested adequate time and resources into alternative corrective mechanisms - probation [kifungo cha nje]
for instance. Many inmates today are in jail for petty offences. It's ironic for a government to jail someone because of a plant and give the corrupt top security catered for by taxpayers.

*Mutunge Mwangi alias Chebukati is a community volunteer, a social justice advocate and a political organiser. He is a member of the Social Justice movement and a communist.*
Books by Maina Wa Kinyatti

**DEDAN KİMATHI SPEAKS**

*We will fight to the Last Gun*

by Maina Kinyatti

Extensive archives belonging to the Mau Mau were long held by the British and were not made available widely. This book, written by one of the foremost researchers on the Mau Mau, is a result of years of village-level research which also recovered some of the movement's most important papers. Translated into English, they clarify the movement's own perspectives on their struggle and its difficulties, the relatively advanced nature of their goals as a national liberation movement, and their radical vision of a liberated Kenyan society.

Dedan Kimathii became President of the Mau Mau's ruling body in August 1953, and remained as its overall leader until his capture and execution by the British two years later. During his time as president he ordered the movement to keep documentation for the purposes of providing, as he put it “concrete evidence that we fought and died for this land.” This book is an important contribution to Kenyan history and the history of liberation movements around the world.

**AĞİKÜYÜ, 1890-1965**


by Maina Kinyatti

This book, written in Gikuyu this book is intended to serve as a textbook for students of history who are interested in studying the history and culture of the Agikuyu people and their involvement in the struggle for national independence. The material is chronologically arranged in four sections, covering the entire range of Kenyan history, from the colonial period to 1965.

The first section (1884-1920) covers the primary resistance to the establishment and consolidation of colonial rule. The second section covers 1920-1940 when the forces of independence operated within the framework of colonial “democracy”. In a practical sense, the period witnessed the peasant-worker alliance against colonial occupation, the formation of the first African political organizations, including the Young Kikuyu Association, East African Association, Kavirondo Young Association, Kikuyu Central Association, North Kavirondo Young Association, Ukamba Members Association, and Taita Hills Association. The period also witnessed the formation of the trade union movement and the intensification of the anti-imperialist cultural resistance. Section three 1940-1952 details anti-colonial efforts whose objective were to overthrow the colonial system through electoral politics and create a non-racial democratic society. From this formed a national anti-imperialist front, the Kenya African Union, in 1944 under the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta. At this stage, divergent class and individual interest began to manifest themselves within the African population. The fourth section, 1952-1963, was that of the armed independence movement, the formation of the Mau Mau movement with its armed wing, the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), led by Field Marshal Kimathi, which sought to eradicate the colonial system altogether.
HISTORY OF RESISTANCE IN KENYA 1884-2002

by Maina Kinyatti

This book is a contribution to the interpretation of Kenyan history, from the proletarian point of view. The book provides information on the people of Kenya; their history; their violent, brutal and deadly confrontation with the British imperialist invaders; their social and political struggle against the British occupiers and the national traitors; their transformation into the Mau Mau armed resistance; and their class struggle and revolutionary movement against the Kenyatta and Moi neocolonial regimes. During dictator Moi’s administration, the country was turned into a police state and the brutal torture of citizens became commonplace. Whatever form of torture one was subjected to, it inevitably led to either imprisonment or death. In vigorous language and with concrete examples, the author details the crucial role played by the Mwakenya-December Twelve Movement in the struggle against the Kenyatta-Moi dictatorships for democracy and social justice in Kenya, from 1975 to 2002.

MWAKENYA: THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION


This volume represents the development of the WPK/DTM-Mwakenya’s anti-imperialist line in Kenya from 1974 to 2002. The Mwakenya Movement (Muungano wa Wazalendo wa Kenya/ Union of Patriotic Kenyans) was an underground socialist movement in Kenya in the 1980s formed to fight for multi-party democracy.

Independence means self-determination and self-government. An independent nation is one with the autonomy to make decisions, which will advance the welfare of its people. It is a nation that controls its own resources, and has the political and economic scope to utilise these resources, human and natural, free of foreign interference.

Independence in this sense has little relevance to the current Kenyan situation. Citizens find themselves in a dependent neocolonial country, wholly subservient to foreign interests. The country’s economy is geared to the needs of foreigners, both to the ex-colonial masters and other Western imperialist nations. Neocolonialism is not merely an academic debate in Kenya, it is a condition in which the people live day-by-day, a form of oppression and exploitation every bit as effective as that practiced by the British imperialist powers.

Mwakenya believes that only a true revolutionary democratic system, controlled by Kenyans can bring fundamental changes in the country and liberate the people from foreign domination and national oppression, overhaul the corrupt neocolonial system, and establish an egalitarian system for the Kenyan people.
MAU MAU: A REVOLUTION BETRAYED
by Maina Kinyatti

THE NAME MAU MAU On May 12, 1950 thirty-nine Kenyan farm workers were arrested in Naivasha. They were accused of belonging to a secret organization whose political aim was to drive the British occupiers out of Kenya by violent means. They were brutally tortured by the colonial police, but they stubbornly refused to reveal the aims and the name of the clandestine movement. Nineteen of them, 15 men and 4 women, were brought to court and charged with membership in an unlawful society. They were jailed for seven years each. It was a kangaroo trial. The judge and prosecutor were colonialists; the interpreter was an indigenous traitor. During the trial one of the accused, Magrougi ole Kodogoya, under cross-examinations on the dock, absolutely refused to answer the questions put to him directly. Instead, he told the kangaroo judge that because of his commitment and dedication to the movement and the love for his country he would never reveal "maundu mau mau" (those, those things) the leadership of the movement told him not to reveal to the government. He would die first before he betrayed the movement. The colonial press, confused by the statement, but seeking the way to characterize the clandestine movement, seized upon the words "mau Mau (those, those) as the name of the movement. Further, the press explained that the aim of the movement was to overthrow the British rule in the country by armed struggle and establish an African government. To be a member of the movement, the imperialist press added, one must take a Mau Mau oath. This is how the name "Mau Mau" entered the political dictionary of Kenya's anti-imperialist resistance. Significantly, the name "Mau Mau" has been immortalized by the Kenyan people because it symbolizes their collective heroism against foreign domination and their undying love for freedom, liberty and justice. In other words, it has become synonymous with Kenyan national patriotism, anti-imperialism, military acumen, and most importantly, popular democratic revolution.

THE PEN AND THE GUN
by Maina Kinyatti

The Pen and The Gun will make an excellent addition to the study of the struggle for democracy, the imposition of dictatorship and state terrorism in Kenya. The book will also enrich Kenya's prison revolutionary literature and, at the same time, reveal the brutality of the Kenyan penal system. Linked to all of the above, it will shed light on the broader role of African nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Marxism-Leninism-Maoism in the African social revolution. the role of the working class and its peasant ally in the liberation of Africa from world imperialism is clearly defined.