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ORGANIZATION: FRIENDS OF WIDOWS AND THE DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE INITIATIVES (K)-"FOWAD" (In short)

LIFE HISTORY AND DISADVANTAGE OF SOME CULTURES (ESPECIALLY TO WOMEN)

AUTHOR OF "MAU MAU'S DAUGHTER - A LIFE HISTORY"

WAMBUI OTIENO MBUGUA was born on 21st June 1936. A great grand-daughter of the first freedom fighter in Kenya, Waiyaki wa Hinga, who was buried alive by British colonialists on 6th September 1892.

I have written the above book from my memory, which my editor called in her introduction of the book "Memory is a weapon".

Don Mattera had written in few words as follows: Memory is a weapon. I knew deep down inside me, in that place where laws and guns cannot reach nor jack boots trample, that there has been no defeat. In another day, another time, we would emerge to reclaim our dignity and our land.

I remember with bitterness what happened to me during the Mau Mau fight - jail, restriction and detention.

I was born and educated in a missionary school and churches. I got baptized in Church of Scotland Mission. The land in which these schools are erected were given out by my grand-father, Munyua Waiyaki, nevertheless this generosity was not recognized by the British colonialists who continued harassing my family. I abandoned my baptism names because there was discrimination and hatred in the church. The white people had selected a separate place in the church where no African would be allowed to sit. African church ministers were not allowed to sit there either. Therefore there was no point using their names. African people started feeling those as unfriendly people who only used us as slaves. In 1946, Africans came out with an idea of building schools that they called independent churches and schools. The founders and these members of these places were nicknamed Karing'a.

I got involved in Mau Mau movement in early fifties at the age of 17, after the most exciting thing I did was to attend a political meeting at the age of 14, where Africans were demanding to be allowed to plant coffee. After taking a number of oaths, I was elected as the leader of scouting movement basically known as espionage. I was also a member of the youth group, youth choir women's wing and several other groups. I also joined the fight against segregation as African people would not enter European schools, hospitals, hotels etc. I also led the group that fought and held several strikes against the colonialists who would not allow the wives of jailed, restricted or detained husbands to visit them. This was my idea and the wives were allowed visit. I also had to steal letters from government offices and government houses. I know that few of you would understand what was expected of me as a scout.

My main job was to find out how a police station or home guard post could be attacked. The first thing to do was to enrol the African police officers as members of our organization. The information that was very vital to be relayed to us was how the police station was situated. Where was the armoury, where to converge while on the way to attack the station, get guns from the armoury and other fighting weapons, how many white police officers would be sober from 10.00pm to 12 midnight, which direction to run to and the safe place to converge. A mistake that would cause the freedom fighter to be caught would cost you your life.

It was not easy to keep the morale high. Many things could and did go wrong at the eleventh hour. I would ask myself whether there was any point in going on, since it was easy to be betrayed. I would take a course

of action only to be sabotaged by a traitor. I would seriously wonder why we should fight for freedom for the same people who were busy betraying the cause. The betrayals lent support to the colonialists. It would raise their morale to say that Africans are not yet ready to rule themselves.

When we felt like we were defeated, hungry, depressed or had lost hope, we were encouraged by singing Mau Mau nationalist songs. The songs were very inspiring and boosted our morale, especially while under very trying circumstances.

The other thing that raised our morale was from our enemies themselves. Those sent from England were young soldiers, obviously such would not resist women. We organized some groups of women of very low morals. They would drink with them and eventually get guns and other weapons. Knowing that they could also be betrayed intensified our fight.

When I was restricted at Kikuyu near my home, the District Officer would ask me several questions. I got fed up, I gave him one slap and he fell down. He then made a decision to direct me to report to Waithaka Chiefs Camp. The distance from my house and back to Waithaka is 14 miles. I had to make the journey between 8.00 and 10.00am. This did not bother me.

I was detained with three of my children at Lamu island in Coast Province. I was raped by a white officer. I did not know his name. I had been in Lamu for three days. Later on after 3^{1/2} months, the same officer-in-charge of Nairobi detainees returned to Lamu. All detainees had no names. They were given numbers, mine was no. 59. When my time came to be interviewed, he persuaded me to sign that I shall never take Mau Mau oath. I answered him that I had not taken any but even if I had done so, I would not surrender.

By sheer luck I was released due to illness. At the same time another African officer met me while I was going to buy milk for my children. He greeted me very warmly. By the way he looked, I could see that he was approachable. He asked how the life was in detention. I decided at once that this was the only time I would be told the name of the officer who had raped me. I therefore told him that the officer whose face looked like he had smallpox had been sending us biscuits, tinned beef etc. "You mean the huge officer who wore shorts?" I answered to the affirmative and he told me that his name was Chief Inspector Rudolf Speed. While back in Nairobi, Jomo Kenyatta was released and held a post of Minister for Constitutional Affairs. I reported to him what had happened and showed him a baby girl I had given birth to. He took up the case with the government, which was then occupied by several white ministers and officers. An African lawyer reported to the then Registrar General and the Commissioner of Police. It was on that very day that the officer was paid his dues and a ticket to England.

Jomo Kenyatta tried to get him arrested by sending two African officers who worked with Mr. Speed in Special Branch office but to no avail. I never saw the officer again until December, year 2002 in Pretoria, South Africa. He recognized me and I had recognized him long before he saw me but I was tongue-tied.

In 1961, I reluctantly married my late husband, an advocate of the High Court of Kenya. He died of heart failure. He was a wonderful man.

I have visited several countries abroad especially the United States and have met very many women including first ladies. All the time I talked mostly about culture in Africa and the maltreatment during the colonial times. I did not forget to mention the evils done by several African countries like misuse of funds in our exchequers, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and money from several donors. It became horrible corruption, which was scaring.

I joined the second, liberation for Kenya. I was the only woman when we registered Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD). One day we went to open an office in Kajiado in Rift Valley Province. We were beaten by people incited and paid by the Member of Parliament in conjunction with the District Officer.

The D.O. was transferred later to Central Province in Kiambu District. He is now a District Commissioner. I

was left for the dead. I therefore suffer when walking plus I have a heart disease as a result of all the beating I received. People around our area thought I was dead. You may have a look at these pictures taken soon after the beating in February 1992.

In 1986, my husband died of a heart problem. I prepared to bury him where he had chosen to be buried. This I did not do without informing the relatives especially his younger brother. He had also told his brother about where he liked to be buried. This issue became a big court case until it got another name, "S.M. Otieno saga" following his name. They would argue that if they did not bury him at his father's home, ghosts and demons would affect them. They even brought witchcraft in form of birds and hid them inside my fence. When they were seen I carried them and burnt them in the name of Jesus. They also said that if their son were buried elsewhere his children would die. I said that was fine.

Others argued that the children would lose identity. I told them that identity of a person in any country is gauged by the way one carried himself. He is no longer solely tied to the locality of his/her clan's land. The concept of identity in a modern society is shaped by the way you carry yourself, for your acquired knowledge, the way you establish yourself and your general behaviour. Children's identity can never come exclusively from a clan, and in this case a clan that is totally unknown to them.

The case ended on 15th May 1987 and I have not seen Otieno's brother to date. We surely don't have anything in common.

Imagine a man who made me embalm my husband's body 3 times in six months. He also made me visit a dead body twice a week to check whether anything had gone wrong.

Luckily my husband had ordered me not to attend his funeral and also his children. After the end of the case, my children left for America and Germany where they were studying. The case became more difficult because the Government, especially the President got involved.

My husband had told me not to attend his funeral if it is taken to Nyanza Province in South West of Kenya and he warned me if I tried he shall wake up, leave his coffin and beat me up together with those who will be accompanying me and then get back to his coffin and die for dying I must die. "Leave them I shall deal with them". Our friend who came to visit us asked him "SM" how shall you deal with them and you shall be dead. He answered her that if he cannot do it, God will do it for him. Surprisingly those judges who got involved together with his relatives are dead. Only his brother and his wife are living. The brother lost three daughters in one year and also lost another brother thereafter.

This case is very large. The best thing to do is to buy the book I have written on the issue, published in the USA in 1998 by Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 1800 30 Street, Boulder, Colorado 80301, and in United Kingdom, Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 3 Henrietta Street, Convent Gardens, London WC2E 8LU, Bibliographical References and Index ISBN 1, 55587-722-2 (paper back).

Wife inheritance after the death of a spouse only promotes prostitution. Today, the old men who are experts in choosing husbands, if they see that you are not agreeing with the first chosen husband, they sit down to select another one. If that is not prostitution then I do not know the meaning of the word. Women are in such big problems like poverty, homelessness and education. The most disgusting thing of this culture is that women spread it. Women start being taught by their mothers about the culture. They are given useless excuses that if they do not do this or that their children will die. These mothers have been taught for generations about how beautiful the custom is. Most of these young women and girls are forced into these cultures.

BRIDE PRICE

I am proud to tell you that I was the first woman to reject this system of marriage popularly known as African marriage. I specifically told my father that he had several goats, cows, etc. to sell. As for me, I said, I am your daughter and cannot be bought but when you have a problem invite me to help like you would with

your sons. When I informed my mother that I was going to get married again, she did not indulge into that discussion because she knew the answer.

Female Genital Mutilation is another outmoded culture. I thank my parents and the missionaries for getting me out of this. I do not know what it is all about.

From 1946 women under United Nations have been fighting about all the ills done to them. Let no man think that the fight is dying soon. On the contrary, it is extending. We have achieved a lot through the struggle, therefore young women do not let us down, let us fight to the bitter end.

Due to my experience as a widow during which time I have brought up several foster children without any external support, I felt the need to establish an organization that would address the problems and concerns facing the disadvantaged people. In particular, widows, orphans and the girl child are often mistreated and ignored by society, including their own families who regard them as liabilities.

For this reason, I decided to form an organization called FRIENDS OF WIDOWS AND DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE INITIATIVES (K) - (FOWAD). Through FOWAD, I intend to work with widows, orphans and other disadvantaged persons to educate them on their rights, encourage them and generally sensitize the society about the needs of such people.

After the death and the nasty burial of my husband, I lived alone for eighteen years. Widows, from my investigation, die of depression and loneliness. They are abandoned by their friends who were very good friends. Presumably, I found out that the wives of former friends think and believe that these widows are a threat, dangerous and could take their husbands. They also think that the widows will depend on them financially. Widows are made to get hatred and make decisions on how to live with their families who totally abandon them. In some tribes their properties are taken and others are forced to be inherited by their brothers-in-law. Since I'll come to this later when dealing with culture, I would want to say how I was sick and abandoned but God gave me a husband after several prayers. On 18th July 2003, I legally married a Kikuyu like me but who is much younger than me. The same time an old man, ten years older than me, married a young girl in the church. In the second case nobody made noise but in my marriage there was a lot of hullabaloo. These stereotype lives of women are demoralizing and are intended at making women look inferior. My new husband, Mr. Peter Mbugua, is a nice, polite and kind person. I do not feel depressed like before and I do not hate people.

It is a subject that is spoken everywhere. It is important for us to assist each other especially in order to fight the outmoded culture that deters us from development. Even though developed people of the world have given us their love and understanding, they also have several issues to deal with in their own countries. We tend to forget whatever we receive from them, they sacrifice their people who pay tax. They also deprive themselves of their full daily bread in order to share with us.

We waste a lot of our resources dealing with issues in the name of culture. Gender violence, misuse of funds, which we would use on education. It also deprives us of the opportunity and funds to teach our less educated sisters how to deal with income generation so that we become liable for ourselves. Women in Africa are treated like dogs who can have a man chosen to sleep with them in order that they may feed, clothe the widow etc. We could achieve this ourselves after all it is the women of Africa who deal with all stereotype jobs. When we go to sell things which are hand-made or food that we plant in our gardens, we hand over everything to the so-called husbands to show them how hard working we are in order to avoid violence and to get simple shelter. This is the worst corruption in our homes before these men extend stealing and corruption to the IMF and World Bank (WB). We have stolen from all donors targeting our dignity and self-respect.

With the support of such groups as Mifumi, GTZ and other stakeholders in development programmes, I believe FOWAD will make a difference in changing society's attitude towards widows, orphans and the girl child.

As I said before, my book has all this information but it is difficult for me to tell it all in a conference. Reading is knowledge. Thank you for giving me a chance to express about my life and also to be with you. I hope you will pray for me to get well after the beatings during Mau Mau and the fight of the second liberation.

Thank you and may God Bless You all.