



EMERGENCY STORIES

Wambugu Wa Nyingi

This interview was conducted by Chao Tayiana at Mr Wambugu's house near Nyeri in October 2018. The interview was conducted in Swahili and translated and transcribed by Maureen Ngayu and Adam Rodgers Johns. Evans Maingi, Gabriel Moshenska and Anthony Maina and Moha Boru were also present at the interview.

Wambugu: Will you leave me something small?

Chao: We must. We might even-

Wambugu: I ask this because I have met many.

Wambugu: For one, you will tell me where to start. Tell me, where do we start?

Mbugua: We would like Sir... tell us about your birth. From your birth to-

Chao: Yes, where-

Wambugu: *{laughs}*

Mbuga: I also told her-

Chao: That's why we came with him.

Mbugua: We were at the MAUMAU flag site. And I told her you were one of those who welcomed Kenyatta.

Wambugu: Yes.

Mbugua: That meeting, Ruringu Flag site

Chao: Yes.

Mbugua: This man was one of them, by then he was a young man.

Wambugu: Those are many years back. I don't even see anyone who was there those days among all of you.

Mbugua: So we can start with birth and then we continue.

Wambugu: As for birth, I was born in 1927. That's when I was born. I was born there *{inaudible}* close to the road where you came through coming to this side. That's where we were. From there I herded sheep. I did that for long and then went to school but I didn't learn for so long. It was called *{inaudible}* those days; the class that I attained. My dad got disturbed and said, "You're going (to school) and getting caned by the teacher. Just stay here."

Chao: Was it a missionary school?

Wambugu: What?

Chao: Was it a church school or...?

Wambugu: Yes it was just a church school. You know all schools that were here in Kenya... going to school was brought about by the white man. And the missionaries are the ones who ran it. The church I went to school at was called Independent Church.

{Asking Mbugua} Is it called by any other name?

Mbugua: Mm-hmm. *{negation}*

Wambugu: It's called Independent Church. That's where I went to school. From there I stayed ... those days of school were 1936 err '34, '35, '36. Those days are when I was in school. When we got to 1940, I became an adult. I started working where they had land.

Chao: White men? Settlers?

Wambugu: Yes the settlers are who had land. I herded sheep, cattle. I took care of everything. They were rich. No jokes about that. Rich. They said they wanted to take milk to Mombasa via pipeline. They didn't want motor vehicles to carry it. Take it via pipeline because they had a lot of wealth. I stayed there and worked from 1941 to '42 when I started training myself on tractors and motor vehicles. I stayed longer until 1946. That '46, there were some of our people who went overseas to advocate for the nation. As we were being harassed a lot.

We used to cut “*Benco*”. Myself I cut “*Benco*” with my bare hands. To cut this “*Benco*” there is extreme cold as it is around the base of Mt. Kenya. I was still very young while I was cutting it. I was still very young, not so grown. But the beatings we received was excessive. We were treated less than human. When the white man was seen coming, our leader Nyapara would get so nervous that he beat us so we could work. Yet we were already working. From there 1946 – I will cut some details short and not tell everything. Err 1946 I started in politics. I would stay with these old men and when sent somewhere I would run. I became a messenger to be used by these people.

Chao: Of Nyeri?

Wambugu: Yes because I was a young boy. When told to go somewhere, I would run; not just walk in the manner that you walk nowadays. If told to ‘do this’ I would do it. So those days in 1946 is when Kenyatta came back here the second time. He was going overseas. He stayed long but he was going because of politics which had gotten into his head. He was sent by the people so he would keep watch. They partnered with some white man called Brockway who was a politician from overseas.

Chao: I have heard of him.

Wambugu: So they broadcasted these issues and went again and again. Then in 1946 he (Kenyatta) came back here the second time and said, “I have come back. Now let’s work on getting our freedom and our land returned to us.” All these hills you can see far and wide up to Nanyuki, Nakuru, it was white man who watched that land. Days went by and rumors went round. And people said there was a lot being said by politicians. We talked a lot and for long. In 1949, there started some unrest here and there. So Kenyatta would come back then go for meetings. We went to Nairobi, Kaloleni, Ruringu, Nakuru, Mombasa-

Chao: Did you go for all the meetings?

Wambugu: I didn’t go for all but I went for some.

Chao: You knew what was going on?

Wambugu: Yes. When I got a chance I would go. You know there were no cars. Cars were few.

Chao: What about the rail? Train?

Wambugu: Bicycle?

Chao: No. Train.

Wambugu: Train was there. It would come here to Nanyuki and even to Naivasha. So we started like this until 1952. In 1952, the criminal (colonizer) now said he would 'arrest these people and lock them in jail.' The government then planned to take all the leaders in 1952; even I myself was arrested that day. That year. I was arrested in 1952, December 24. Was when I was arrested.

Chao: Were you arrested in Nyeri?

Wambugu: I was put in a detention camp. It was that these detention camps were set up so many, all over Kenya. And Kenyatta's crew went to Kapenguria and had a case. I didn't have a case myself. We stayed there from 1952.

Chao: Which camp?

Wambugu: Yes, from 1952 is when the settlers said that all the people would be kept together. They (people) were kept here at Biringi.

Wambugu: You would find young men and unmarried girls left in the towns. They were left there. They are who made the name MAU MAU. I think you too have heard people going round saying... when someone wants to say that one is bad, there is a name they would coin them.

So let's say young people, just as yourselves, are left here and then the whole village is set ablaze. Goats are taken. Everything is taken. Mothers and the young babies are kept in the village. Built up and fenced with barbed wire. Then they dug a trench 8 feet wide, 6 feet deep. Then they planted pointed poles in about 8 rows and columns to keep the MAU MAU out and inhibit the inhabitants from giving food to the MAU MAU.

Chao: Where then did you get food from while you were inside the camp?

Wambugu: They would release us for one hour to go to the farm, take the food and go back home. You wouldn't dare finish two hours. Just one. Once you heard the whistle blow, everyone would run home because if you didn't go you would be killed. Those young men left at home as in this town would then come to be killed by these barbarians and the incoming home guards. So when asked, "Are you killing MAU MAU?" they would say, "Yes. These MAU MAU are so many and they are such terrifying people." Yet you have heard those people who were left? Those left home were young men and unmarried girls.

So if Queen would ask, "How of the MAU MAU?" They would say, "We are combating them severely." All so they would get supplied with airplanes, guns and authorization to

beat these people up. And those accused of this, even if you visited, there would be nothing of the sort. They had no weapon to fight with. Even if they got a form of weapon, they had made it themselves. It was alleged thus by the British so they would get these resources to annihilate the Africans and get to settle in the country. This went on for a while. Many were beaten repeatedly.

The most important thing that came about- because I did enter many of these detention camps- about 12 countrywide. I would leave one and go to another. Those days we were chained at our ankles. If you see this leg, a lot of poison got into it.

Chao: Rust?

Wambugu: Yes, rust got inside. If I itch; I get wounds. And I had it, day and night, for about eight years. When going via ship or plane I would still have it on. There came about one camp and we were taken there; by the name Hola. Hola is where things started. Because the colonizers were saying- Now at the time people here were really getting beaten, then you would be asked, "And you? Do you want freedom or don't you?" You had to say you didn't want it.

Chao: You had to say you didn't want freedom for them to stop the beating?

Wambugu: Yes. You had to say you didn't want it for them to stop the beating. And they beat one thoroughly till you surrender and denounce your need for freedom. And not only in one camp; all the camps were just like this. Now at the camp we were 123 people.

Chao: Hola?

Wambugu: Hola. The colonizer said, "We shall get in there and finish them because they are the only ones left who have refused to denounce their need for independence." Their commander stood up and gave the order.

So, from 10:00 AM in the morning, they put down axes, spades on a road same as the one you have left behind and this house would be the camp. Because the law didn't want people beaten inside the camp. If you lock people up and kill them, then the whole British Empire would leave. Questions would arise about taking, beating and killing Africans as there was no law permitting such monstrous acts. So we were to get outside and take that spade and axe. At the same time you would be beaten so it would be said that you refused labor.

Chao: So they would remove you from the camp-?

Chao: - And beat you?

Wambugu: At the camp's gate. We went outside. So these items were placed there and you'd be told, "You, take that and that." This command was not verbal. There was no further word spoken, just blows. The beatings were indescribable. You would even see one slowly dying. We were beaten.

One white woman saw what was happening and cried out in horror. A white woman screamed. She ran and made a phone call. I wasn't where she made the call but I heard that it didn't go through to England. It went through to Cairo then Cairo called England. The Queen's government called Kenya asking, "Why are you killing people inside their homes?" The camp warders said they hadn't beaten us but that we drank contaminated water. Rubber tire water was poisonous.

Chao: So they would claim they didn't kill you?

Wambugu: Yes. Even the camp's commander was called and was told, "Finish that once and for all." The order came from England. Now of those beaten severely, it was said there died 12 people. The 12th person was me. But 11 of those beaten died. We were picked from among dead bodies. A car would pick them up and take them to the ward. One getting to the ward, we were kept there. Some details I am cutting short as I cannot say it all at one go.

Chao: Please don't cut anything out Grandpa.

Wambugu: It can't all be said because you know in the whole clan I was beaten and – I will mention all I know but no.

Now one white doctor came to assess the dead bodies. He broke the news that I had just been covered by dead bodies. "This person is not yet dead. Not yet. Take him to the ward." It was while I was there that I regained my consciousness and my strength. So he would come and give me an injection. I stayed in this state till the 3rd or 4th day. Then on the 5th day, I came back to life. That ends there.

Chao: Thank you so much Grandpa.

Wambugu: The government formed a committee from England. "You say these people drank water?" "Yes. Rubber tire water?" "Yes." There were appointed (to the council) 16 people.

Wambugu: Advocacy for us to go to court. The court was there for those people who had been taken as slaves a few years back. The court was at Fort Jesus; atop of it.

Chao: Fort Jesus?

Mbugua: Fort Jesus. The court is still there but I think it's a monument now. Atop Fort Jesus.

Wambugu: So that was the court we appeared before. We did have the case. Let's say the settlers had a prosecutor called State Council. The State Council was the settlers young men's council. We had that case to determine if it was water we had drunk or that we were beaten. So it would be known. We did case for a while. There were about four people (witnesses) ahead of me. I got there and said the truth of the matter wasn't water. We were beaten in this way and that way.

Chao: You told the truth.

Wambugu: We were removed from camp and taken to the place where we were to work but there was no work given. We were just beaten.

Chao: If I may ask you grandpa, you were six people in court?

Wambugu: We were 26 people.

Chao: Were they all from Hola with you or were they from all over?

Wambugu: They came from Hola. They were picked up and brought before the court by the English Committee.

Chao: You were all from Hola then?

Wambugu: Yes these were people from Hola. "How were you beaten?" So one would give their account then another his own and so on. To determine truly if it was the water we had drunk or it was the beatings we had received. You know there was no prison law to beat people. Just because these people came in and took land and became settlers. It was not the norm for British.

They (committee) would ask, "Why are you going to teach people and uplift them and their home, for them to know how to read among other things, and instead you beat them?" And so it was known that this name: MAUMAU, was simply branded on them. This was not a lawful name. It was just made up because there were hidden motives they were protecting for them to take over the land. The aim was to wipe everyone out for them to say it was uninhabited and thus acquire it.

When I got back to Manyani, no one would dare beat us. Not even one warden. They wouldn't enter with their shoes or any weapon to take their reports. He (warder) would just pass by like anyone else. No more sticks and batons. I stayed there for a year. In 1961, I was released.

Chao: From Manyani?

Wambugu: From all the camps. I was returned. The emergency was over. Ask what you would want to; explain to the others so they may ask anything.

Mbugua: It would be good for Grandpa to tell us all the camps he passed through consecutively.

Chao: The mission we are on right now is to identify where the camps were. You may find yourself standing on land that previously existed as a camp unknowingly. Our greatest work is to find those camps.

Wambugu: I don't know if there is a newspaper here. One that is in better condition.

Chao: Sisal.

Wambugu: In Voi?

Chao: Yes in Voi. He stayed in Voi and when freedom was attained, he stayed there. He didn't come back to Nyeri.

Wambugu: I know them. These people who worked on the Sisal farms. From here you get into a camp called-

Wambugu: I was arrested in 1952, date 24. I was taken to a camp called Kiariuwa. Write what you need to.

Chao: Where is Kiariuwa?

Mbugua: It's up ahead at Kangubiri where there is an old man who- where those bones-

Wambugu: I was taken to Kiariuwa. I stayed there for about three months.

Chao: Did they tell you why they had arrested you?

Wambugu: Would they tell me and yet I knew? They called us politicians. Instigators of the masses. They destroy the town. You didn't need to ask why. It was known that the young men of Kenya African Union, as I was an officer of KAU. I was no junior member. No, I was a young man but I was no junior officer.

Chao: So they knew the men of KAU?

Wambugu: On the day Kenyatta was arrested, they were arrested as 6 major leaders. The other leaders who were arrested were those who represented large populations. I forget their name. It's somewhere in the back of my mind- Trustee. There were trustees at the time. I myself was a trustee of this region. If Kenyatta or any other important person needed anything, they would call me directly.

Not a phone call: There were no telephones. But whatever happenings there were in the village, they would find their way to be known in Nairobi. They would ask about certain events that happened on certain dates. Because these are politicians-

Wambugu: So, I went to his place and told him I was bringing people who want to see the other people who were there. Just as you are asking. So he removed those bones, skeletons, skulls... From there I was cuffed. From Kiariuwa, I went to Athi River where we stayed about a year. From there I was again cuffed, put on a plane and taken to Lodwar.

Chao: If I may ask Grandpa, before we continue, what was the reason for moving you from one camp to another? Was it by bad behavior or did they allege some lie? Or was it-?

Wambugu: No.

Chao: What was the essence of different camps?

Wambugu: Now as you've heard when people are arrested- for instance we are all seated together now. Let's say we are the committee that cooks up this story. Then we know a certain group are situated at spot inside the camp and we want to take half of them and keep this half here. We take some to another area to keep them from interacting by mixing them up. So they would not know each other and they will find it hard to refuse our agenda.

Wambugu: At Athi River, we were taken some to Mombasa. It was ordered that any young man or general who objected the law should be taken to that side. That's why we had chains around our ankles. Not that those with ankle chains were good people. They are criminals, they will beat the rest. We were taken by plane to Lodwar.

Now you have a chain around your ankle, not a rope. You then have to carry a heavy building block to build a house for them. Like for one very boastful white man who famously called himself the 'Lord of Lodwar'. His name was Whitehouse but the people called him 'Lord of Lodwar'. We were to build his house. He was a DC. What did we carry with? You had a chain around your ankle. You would take this big block and drag yourself to where the builders were.

Chao: What of Lodwar's heat?

Wambugu: You knew nothing else just carry and drag. Now the chain would eat into the flesh but there was nowhere you were allowed to rest. From Lodwar, we were taken to Kisumu Ondiaga. We stayed there a while dragging the chain around. The Luo women at one time left what they were doing, joined us and followed suit. They perceived that we were doing a good thing yet we were still receiving beatings. We entered Ondiaga and stayed for a few days.

Chao: What exactly is the camp's name?

Wambugu: It is called Ondiaga. Ondiaga teaching camp, not detention. It is still there, Ondiaga. From there we were taken by boat through the lake with our ankle chains on. If the boat would have tipped over we would have simply died. With the chain around our ankle, what else was one to do? So, we entered and stayed. The man who was there said, "These people are insolent. They shall see." We survived 12 days with no food or water.

Chao: Mageta?

Wambugu: Mageta. No water. The guards told us we had no choice and that we'd have to remain as we were. Warders would patrol the camp and we slept in a small room such as this one.

Chao: How many were you?

Wambugu: There were about 400 of us at Mageta. That's just one camp. There were other camps there. We stayed longer and a doctor was brought in and reported that we were almost dying, we were brought for milk and a spoon. They would put two spoonfuls of milk in a cup and you were told to drink it.

Explain to him, he wants to know.

Wambugu: It's good to explain to him. I am not tired. So he can get a variety of questions to ask.

Wambugu: We were brought that doctor so he could give us some milk. You wouldn't be taken to drink lots of water you would just die because you had just spent 12 days without food, all your intestines had shrunk terribly. That little milk would be ingested slowly for about 30 minutes. Then you would get another dose of 3 spoonfuls which would then be left for another 30 minutes. Then you would get another dose of 4 spoonfuls of milk.

This continued until you could take 10 spoonfuls of milk, then you would get served half a cup of porridge. Consistently over time, to the point where you could drink a full cup then you would be released outside and monitored on whether you would live or die. But no one died. Afterwards, this food rationing stopped. We stayed a while longer and later returned to Ondiaga for 3 days.

Here we were terribly beaten to a point our cries would be heard. The leaders came and said we would have to be moved. So we were shoved into a cargo train and taken back to Athi River. From Kisumu to Athi River. Here we found that a lot had changed. Those who had opted for salvation and who had tired of the fight for freedom now became our enemies.

Mbugua: Those who denounced the oath.

Chao: You found them there?

Wambugu: Yes. They were kept there and we would find them there. They were worse than the prison warders because they knew our language and heard all we would say.

Wambugu: We stayed with them until the fighting began. We were 208. We found others. Now the fighting started. We all fought, the 208 of us, those we found there and the warders too.

Chao: Is it known where Athi River Camp stands today?

Wambugu: In Nairobi somewhere.

Mbugua: Albino prison.

Wambugu: At the army base. It was an army base.

Chao: And now does the museum know?

Wambugu: It was an army camp. Even today, if you ask about the army base, it is there. The barracks they slept in, is where we stayed.

Chao: Okay.

Wambugu: Now the fight was tough. Planes flew overhead. At every fence post, you would see a warder armed with a gun. Their work was simply rotating (in shifts). Not one. They came from the ground and surrounded the camp until the commissioner came. He said, "The fighting should stop and here is where you'll stay." We wouldn't hear any of it. We refused to be grouped with the defectors. If you leave us they will kill us.

The commissioner removed some, took them to Kajiado and the rest were taken to Manyani. I was taken to Manyani. We found others here- we were about 90-

Chao: Still by train?

Wambugu: Yes to Manyani. Others were taken to Kajiado. We stayed a while and then we were brought to Mwea One.

Chao: Irrigation scheme?

Wambugu: Yes where... That which makes... it's the prisoners who dug those trenches of water. To the benefit of the owner.

Chao: But in the history books we are told Mwea Irrigation Scheme is the best in Kenya. But we don't know who made it possible.

Wambugu: Those who made it possible are us. Many were killed in this labor. There was one leader, even this one was there. This governor and another black man called Isaiah Mathenge Mwai was the PC here. Have you heard of PC by that name? He was a prisoner.

Wambugu: He was a commissioner.

Mbugua: You can see now.

Unknown: That's why their matters are hidden and MAUMAU is not talked about.

Mbugua: Up to the time Kibaki took over.

Wambugu: Mudio was a junior to this white man. This man you see here was his junior.

Wambugu: That newspaper was written abroad not here. I took it and came with it. Even some other newspapers I saw-

Wambugu: We were beaten in Mwea. We dug holes 8 feet wide and 8 feet deep. Filling them with soil and then digging out again and again. But the warden would be standing at the top with a long cane so if you stood up you would get struck and ordered to get back to work.

Chao: How many people were at the Mwea Camp?

Wambugu: We were many. About 90 people.

Chao: And where were the other irrigation schemes like Yatta?

Chao: They used MAUMAU for-

Wambugu: Yes there is some other place. The same place where the camp is. It would be used for something else like work but Mwea was the toughest. There was a lot of work.

Unknown Male: Can you ask him if he needs to take a break at any time. Just in case.

Chao: Grandpa your friend said we should not tire you out. If you need to take a break, let us know.

Wambugu: There is no problem, thank you.

Chao: Yes, he said there is no problem if you want to take a break, we can take one as well.

Wambugu: I told you guys this story cannot be finished in a day.

Wambugu: We did that work and put in cement. You know it. So you put in sand, gravel and water. Then put it on your head. Then stand like a pole from morning to midday. If you moved your head, you would regret it. And there are four warders there just to beat you. All you did was stand there. It would get to a point that you look into the pores created by nails, they would be dripping water. So we would stand and if it got unbearable and you fell, you might end up dead based on where the heavy hat fell on you. If it fell on your torso, that would be the end of you, no doubt. We stayed there and were later taken to another camp called Kadogu.

Mbugua: It is still in Mwea.

Wambugu: Yes. There were many camps called Gathigiriri, Kadogu... it is just there from Kadogu, we didn't stay long. We were taken to- the once big road in Nairobi-Langata.

Mbugua: Nairobi Prison now I think it is Nairobi Industrial Prison.

Wambugu: Yes the other prison hadn't come up yet.

Chao: Kamiti?

Mbugua: Not Kamiti

Chao: Langata?

Wambugu: Yes Langata. It is somewhere close.

Wambugu: We have to take these people there because if we are to take them to jail, you would be put in a cell with people who have been sentenced to death. You would be given a life sentence and locked up in there. And we had yet to appear in court. On Thursday, there would come a white CID. He would come to interrogate you. You would get severely questioned. If he found fault in anyone, he would decide that they would hang.

Chao: Right there?

Wambugu: Right there. There would be no further discussion. That's the reason why we were locked up together with those already convicted. And he (CID) only came to select. These are the determiners of who would be added to the hang list of the day. We then realized their plan was to finish us in this manner. We made a pledge – the cell held 4 people- that those who will be locked up together in groups of 4 would be the ones to be hanged. They would face the court and be hanged.

Chao: Right inside the camp?

Wambugu: Yes it's not any distance. They came to the camp on Thursday and the hanging was done on Friday. He (CID) came on Thursday to make ready those who would hang on Friday. We discovered that they had a plan to kill us; one that their government knew nothing about but they would finish us. Those whose room would be opened- when their cell is locked- should know that there is no one who would die twice. They should die there and then so the government finds out what was happening. That's what we decided amongst ourselves in every cell. There were about 20 such cells.

Chao: How did you communicate?

Wambugu: Are you asking about secrets of Mikwate? These are very tough people. They have very big secrets. We would just talk. Even some guards were our friends. We would have committees with these warders. So the room I was in was opened. We were 4 people. Let us say the room was not bigger than the tables before us. We all stood up. The officer sat there, the warder on this other side. The room was quite small where we stayed. We said to one of us to give us a signal. Given that, we took that table and hit the white man with it.

Chao: You threw the table at him?

Wambugu: To beat him. No small beating. And we removed the table stands and beat the warder out of the room to find the other prisoners. People couldn't step outside as there was a racket created by our plates and the people headed for supper. The alarm went off sounding out to the nation. Kiano, Boya and other ministers came because the planes would fill the camp. Inside, they had their work cut out for them as the prisoners had grown fearlessly bitter.

No one outside would go back inside as they wanted to eat. And we didn't want to eat at that time. We went back to the cell. These leaders; Kiano and Boya went up the house. There was a house above the cell. They said, "Stop the ruckus and stop the fighting. We have come."

Chao: Kiano? James?

Wambugu: Kiano. He was a minister. You don't know Kiano?

Chao: I know him. Jane Kiano, I know his wife.

Unknown: Who is Jeremiah Kiano?

Chao: The wife is the founder of Maendeleo ya Wanawake.

Unknown: I think they are in the photo Kenyatta when they're coming from... I mean with Mboya- from Lancaster

Mbugua: Yes Mr. Julius Gikonyo Kiano.

Wambugu: He is called Gikonyo Kiano.

Wambugu: You know Mboya but there were many ministers. They said, "Stop. No more noise. Be quiet." So we went back inside to the same cell we were before. We didn't think of death. If we did, we couldn't have done this. The warder came and locked the cell as we were inside and asleep. You know that day the government arrived, the camp was under government watch to investigate what caused us to do this and why things were happening as such. We stayed for about 4 days. That's when I was moved to Hola.

Unknown: What year was that?

Wambugu: It was the year 1958.

Mbugua: It is unredeemable.

Wambugu: One would swear that no word would leave his mouth to speak to others. Even if you kill me I will never say what we did back then. To say what we did in asking for freedom. What did we see? What did you do to become so tough... I won't tell you. Lying is wrong. I will not tell you.

Mbugua: Were you taken to Sayusi?

Chao: Mageta.

Wambugu: Mageta. I never went to Sayusi. Sayusi was Mageta. It is one. Sayusi on the side the sun rises and we were on the other side.

Mbugua: Lamu?

Wambugu: I had gone to Lamu long before and later left.

Mbugua: So Lamu was one of the camps you went through.

Wambugu: I went there.

Chao: Lamu?

Wambugu: Yes. But it was a long time ago. Around the colonial period.

Chao: Was it Manda or Lamu?

Wambugu: Manda Island.

Unknown: Before Hola or after?

Mbugua: Before Hola. Hola was the last stage.

Wambugu: Hola was the last. From Hola to Manyani. From Manyani to Mweru. From Mweru to where you came through on the road.

Mbugua: He was dumped on the roadside. I will show you. When he was brought to the present day Mweru Secondary School, emergency was over. Schools were opened. Kangubiri was opened in 1959 but these (Wambugu) were hardcore and were left in Mweru. Being left there, they realized they had no other option. At the intersection we left, they took him there with two blankets- just at the roadside- there was a village there called Gatitu. I showed you. They came and took him slowly in his blankets, left him on the roadside and they left.

Wambugu: My two blankets and two plates. I was left there. I asked one girl I had left as a child. I saw a big tree.

Chao: You recognized her?

Wambugu: Yes. I saw her face and immediately knew her. I asked her, "Where is Nyingi's family?" She showed me behind the shop, you can see where the house is. My dad had died much earlier.

Chao: What happened when you got home?

Wambugu: I got home to find no one there. The house hadn't been padlocked. There's some place my sister slept. I took the mat and my blankets, spread them out and slept there. Mother found me inside.

Chao: She found you asleep?

Wambugu: Yes.

Chao: What did she say?

Wambugu: She was just overjoyed to see me alive.

Chao: She didn't know you were still alive all this time?

Wambugu: No one knew where I would go. You see even the government didn't know where I was. But they knew this was my home. I cannot get lost and I would go there.

Mbugua: I wanted to ask something. We have remodeled the Kangubiri cells. How many people were locked in one cell?

Wambugu: I didn't go into the cells.

Chao: How many?

Wambugu: So many, up to 200. You know people come from outside, they are beaten here and then shoved into the room. Just like how one shoves maize into a barn, "Get in there."

Chao: In this camp Grandpa, we want to know what was life like; from waking up-?

Wambugu: What kind of life?

Chao: What time would they wake you? Would they give you food or deny it?

Wambugu: Those old camps where these people came, there was no such thing as sleep at any one time. You will hear dead bodies being brought and stored down under. Another is beaten and about to lose his life in your presence inside the cell. You would try to help but there was no water. No resources. There is no time to analyze how many we were. You would wait for the morning for the warders and white man to come for each of us to give an account of what we had been arrested for or what we had done.

Then we would be told to go in a predetermined direction based on these facts. We would then find out in the least populated of the house a number close to 90 or 100. There was no organized way. Food is cooked from your hometown, where you came from. You'd see a child bring food. Mothers would also bring food.

Chao: They would bring it for you?

Wambugu: Yes. They would stand somewhere and when asked, "Who do you want?" would answer, "I want so and so." Then you'd be released to pick the food, share with some and it was finished.

Mbugua: They didn't cook for you?

Wambugu: Not at all. No one was given food. Those initial camps, none of them. That Kangubiri and Kairiuwa which they didn't get to see.

Mbugua: He says in the beginning no one was given food. So if your family brought it, you would share.

Wambugu: What is the reason why you haven't taken them there so they see where the camp was?

Mbugua: I'll take them because we are here with them.

Wambugu: But we would have to go with you. If you were to-?

Wambugu: Have you heard?

Mbugua: In present day Kenya, if you are jailed in a prison, you come out with a course because we have masonry, carpentry... I don't know whether in their time in detention camp, whether they came out with skills.

Chao: Can you ask him?

Mbugua: If I may ask, these days when you are arrested and imprisoned for 5 to 10 years, you leave with a course whether it is for carpentry or tailoring...

Wambugu: You will leave there with a course, as you ask, of death. The suffering, the broken limbs, that's the course we were taught. Dying, being broken down, beatings and maiming is the course we took. No other. If one said they wanted freedom- by saying freedom, one knew what to expect was death, maiming and nothing else.

So when you see this body; if God doesn't want you to leave the world, you will not leave it. Even of the bullets rang out without ceasing. I saw one person, I don't know if he is still alive. He is from Muranga. He was shot in his stomach and bullets went out through his back and he was still alive from 1952. So only God knows your situation.