The Victims' Biographies

Paulo Nzili

Paulo was born in 1927 at Mulumine in Makueni District, and is now 85 years old. He was forced to join the Mau Mau in March 1957 but decided to abandon the movement about six months later. As he was travelling home in August 1957, he came across three armed African Policemen who demanded that he surrender to them. They arrested him and took him to the Embakasi Detention Camp.

A few days after arriving at the Camp, Paulo was forced to strip naked and squat with his hands between his legs. He was then violently forced to the ground and his legs were held astride. Paulo was then castrated with pliers. After being castrated Paulo’s genitals became heavily swollen and he was taken to the King George Hospital. Paulo stayed in hospital for two weeks before being taken to Manyani Detention Camp.

At Manyani Detention Camp Paulo witnessed detainees being beaten with sticks on a daily basis, the beatings were so brutal that some detainees died as a result. Detainees were also subjected to hard labour at the Camp. After almost a year in detention he was released without charge. At no point was he brought before a Court of law. Paulo has never been able to have children following his castration.

Paulo describes his ordeal in his own words in his witness statement, an extract of which is below:

“I was taken to an open area in the camp where Luvai stripped me of my clothes in front of all the other detainees. Kwatanthi was told to pin me to the ground. He was a very strong man. He pulled my right arm violently from behind me, through my legs which caused me to somersault over onto my back. They tied both of my legs with chains and Kwatanenhi pinned down both of my hands. Luvai then approached me with a large pair of pliers which were more than a foot long and castrated me. Both the veins of my testicles were completely cut but the testicles themselves are still in place. As a result, my testicles have completely shrivelled up.

The pain was too much to bear. I lost consciousness and when I woke up I was in the King George Hospital in Nairobi (now known as Kenyatta National Hospital). My genitals were swollen, indeed my whole body was swollen. I was in dreadful pain. The swelling to my entire body and the pain continued for two weeks.”

Wambugu Wa Nyingi

Wambugu Wa Nyingi was born in 1928 in Nyeri District, Central Province, and is now 84 years old. Prior to his arrest he worked as a tractor driver and was a member of the Kenya African Union (KAU), a political party which advocated freedom, independence and land rights for Kenyans. At no point did he take the Mau Mau oath.

On 24 December 1952, Wambugu was arrested at his home by a group of seven white officers from the Kenya Regiment at about 1am. He was taken to
Kia Riua Screening Camp in Aguthi where he was detained for about six to eight months. He was never charged with an offence, nor was he brought before a court during the subsequent 9 years he was detained. At that camp he witnessed a particular incident where 16 detainees had their names called out. They were all then beaten and 14 were killed by the assistant chiefs with the help of the Home Guards.

Wambughu was transferred from camp to camp around Kenya where he was subjected to forced labour and beaten daily with canes and sticks. On one occasion, he was beaten senseless by the prison wardens. At Mageta Island Detention Camp in Lake Victoria he was denied food for twelve days. This was ordered by the white officers. He recalls that there was one white officer nicknamed “Goliath” because he beat the detainees so hard.

From Mageta Island Wambughu was transferred back to Athi River Camp, where he was detained for about three months. Whilst at Athi River Camp, a white Wambughu was taken away, tied upside down by his feet and beaten whilst cold water was poured on him. Wambughu still has black marks around his ankles as a result. At the same time Wambughu was interrogated and told to confess to having taken the Mau Mau oath.

He was transferred to Mwea Camp which was presided over by an English officer named Terrance Gavaghan. Wambughu was personally interrogated by Gavaghan, whilst being beaten by his officers. On one occasion, Wambughu was beaten with 72 strokes of a cane whilst Gavaghan watched.

Wambughu was then transferred to Hola Camp. He was personally involved in the incident where eleven detainees were beaten to death after they refused to dig their own graves. In this incident Wambughu was severely injured and lay unconscious for three days with the eleven corpses because the guards thought he too had died. He was eventually taken to hospital.

He was finally released from detention in January 1961. In total he spent 9 years in detention without charge.

Wambughu describes his ordeal in his own words in his witness statement, an extract of which is below:

“I was battered on the back of my head and around my neck repeatedly with a club. I believe that the beating went on for up to 20 minutes. I saw one detainee very badly injured and his insides were exposed. All of a sudden another crushing blow hit the back of my head. I saw red and I passed out. All the 11 were killed with clubs and no firearms were used. I lost my friends, Migwe Ndewga and a Turkana detainee.

I lay unconscious with the 11 corpses for two days in a room where the corpses had been placed awaiting burial. The people who put me there thought I was also dead but I was in fact unconscious. A European doctor came to check on the bodies. As he was checking the bodies he noticed that I was alive and I was taken to a hospital outside the camp. I regained consciousness on my second day in hospital, the third day after the incident. The other survivors informed me that I had laid with the dead for two days before I had been taken to hospital. They said, “you are so lucky, god loves you so much such that you slept corpses for two days and survived”."
Jane Muthoni Mara

Jane was born around 1939 at Nguguini in the Embu District, and is now 73 years old. In 1954, when she was about 15 years old, Jane was taken from her home, accused of being a Mau Mau sympathiser and arrested. She was transported to Gatithi Screening Camp.

Upon arriving at the Gatithi Screening Camp, Jane and the other detainees were told to sit with their legs outstretched and the guards walked over their legs with their studded boots. She was beaten and whipped at the same time. Jane was then taken to a tent and interrogated. Jane refused to answer their questions and in response the interrogators forcefully inserted a glass bottle full of hot water into her vagina. This abuse was supervised by a white officer and was administered to many women. She knew of several women who were seriously injured as a result of the abuse.

Jane was then transferred from camp to camp where she was systematically beaten with whips and sticks and deprived of food and water. Whilst at Embu Prison, where she stayed for about 6 weeks Jane was forced to carry heavy bricks on her head throughout the day whilst enduring constant beatings. As a result of this, Jane developed severe neck pains. Jane knew of many people who died in the camps because of the abuse they received. Jane was finally released in 1957.

Jane describes her ordeal in her own words in her witness statement, an extract of which is below:

“Suddenly there were four guards hovering around me. I was then pinned down to the floor by one man when held my shoulders. Two other men held each arm and one man prised open and held my thighs apart. Edward was sitting on a chair directly in front of my spread legs and was pressing on my bare feet with his spiky army boots. I was screaming and resisting and trying to wriggle and free myself from the men who were holding me down. Suddenly Edward produced a glass soda bottle. Waikanja told him to push the bottle into my vagina which he did. I felt excruciating pain and then realised that the glass bottle contained very hot water. Edward literally forced the bottle into me with the sole of his foot while Waikanja was looking on and directing him.

I was in so much pain and I could not stop crying and screaming. I felt completely and utterly violated by this sexual torture, but I continued to insist that I had not taken an oath. This lasted for about 30 minutes and was very painful. When I was in the tent, I saw this being done to the other three women. I had never seen anything so brutal and terrifying in all my life.”