

The Homecoming

by Tallin Aghourian

YES, IT WAS GUILT she felt as her husband took her to the airport. The simple fact was that she could go to Kenya, and he could not. But did she have more right than he did to go to Kenya, to go home? He wrote so often about Kenya, about homecomings, so when would he get his? She could see sadness in his face and it was longing she heard in his voice when he called while she was there, asking her to narrate the scenery on her long drives from town to town. How was she to describe what she saw, when the Kenya he remembered was gone? Kenya had changed; the people were utterly demoralized. Yet, she hoped the day would come soon when she could finally take him home, and she hoped he would be standing next to her when she did, not lying in a box.

There was nothing she could do about his exile except travel with four eyes, and see the country for him. When she returned to the States, the grilling would begin. He would ask her questions after the long trip when her body was tired and all she wanted to do was sleep and he would keep asking even as she was falling apart. He wanted to know what had happened to his theater group: who was still alive, what were they doing? She would tell him to look into her eyes. She wasn't sure if he saw those scenes that she had captured, but he always looked.

Thiong'o and Mumbi, their two children, stayed home this trip. The two had been named after her husband's parents as Kikuyu tradition required. She herself was named after her mother's mother, Njeeri. Kikuyu creation myth told that in a grove of wild fig trees, the god Gikuyu found a beautiful woman. He named her Mumbi, meaning creator, and she bore him nine daughters; the third was named Njeri. Most Kikuyu families named their girls after one of these nine daughters, and while Njeri was a common enough name, Njeeri's extra e made her stand apart.

It was these traditions and stories that her husband held onto in his writing. If – no, when – they returned, he would again be able to experience them first-hand and perhaps they would perform the Ngurario ceremony, without which, according to tradition, their marriage was incomplete.

Traveling without her children, especially her son, recognition was less likely. She and her daughter could be anybody; Njeeri wa Ngugi and Mumbi wa Ngugi, the wife and daughter of any man named Ngugi. But Thiong'o wa Ngugi made it clear who they were. Yes, they were the Professor's family. When will the Professor be returning to Kenya? Soon, soon, she would answer, and hope.

Njeeri never intended her stay in the United States to extend so long. She left Kenya in 1972, seventeen years old, filled with the hopes of what an education abroad could mean for her future. The Lions' Club of Glens Falls New York sponsored her trip and set her up at nearby Fort Edward High School in a town that had been a British position during the American War for Independence but had switched sides. And so, Njeeri found

herself in a picturesque, upstate hamlet where British colonialism was seen only in the centuries-old buildings and experienced only on designated heritage days. But she left a Kenya that had yet to know a decade of independence from British colonialism; a Kenya still reeling from its effects and discovering what it meant to be postcolonial. The spirit of the Mau Mau still lingered – they were the Kikuyu men who had receded into the mountains to train, who had come out warriors ready to fight. Their memories were within reach, not yet receding into the blurry glow of history.

In men like James Ngugi the spirit thrived, working its way out in his teachings at University College in Nairobi and in his growing collection of writing. Ngugi challenged the colonial mindset in which he felt the people of Kenya and Africa were stuck and urged for a return to native languages, traditions and culture. Though the current Kenyan government, headed by President Jomo Kenyatta, had evolved from the Mau Mau, Ngugi's writing won him few friends in the ranks.

Njeeri first became acquainted with Ngugi through his writing. She finished high school in New York, spent two years at a community college, and moved to New Jersey in 1978 where she enrolled at Jersey City State College to study psychology. A professor assigned Ngugi's *The River Between* and the writer's real and normal portrayal of Kikuyu life enchanted her. One day, taking a break from waitressing tables at the restaurant where she worked, she picked up his book and was approached by a handsome African-American who charmed her with his knowledge of Ngugi and the Kiswahili language. The two married, staying together long enough to have a daughter, but eventually divorced. She still felt tied to Kenya, like she was living in two places at once, and felt like she was sacrificing for his sake.

Her first return to Kenya in 1980 marked the end of her permanent home there. Her family and friends had sent her off to the United States so she could bring back what she learned to Kenya, but now Kenyatta was dead and Daniel arap Moi had moved up in power. He brought with him corruption, repression and depression. Her family urged her to return, told her there was nothing left in Kenya; and she knew they were trying to protect her from the new dangers. She returned to New Jersey where she continued her education and started working with the state's social services, helping put families back together.

IN 1977, James Ngugi learned just how much the government appreciated his writing. It was the same year he legally changed his name to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, following his decision to write only in Kikuyu, the language of his people. Dropping the European name meant dropping ties to the pretensions of colonialism. Why should he carry around a name that alienated him from his own body? He joined the Kamirithu Community Education and Cultural Center, based in the town where he was born 39 years earlier. The Cultural Center embarked on a program to uplift and bring change to lives of the villagers in Kamirithu, and to do so in Kikuyu. The community wanted plays, and with this agenda, Ngugi and Ngugi wa Mirii took on the task of producing a script. A final script of *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, (*I Will Marry When I Want*) was ready by June 1977. The performance date was set for October 2, the 25th anniversary of the Declaration of the

State of Emergency by British officials which had marked the beginning of the Mau Mau struggle. What work they had gone through to prepare! How Ngugi had learned his language all over again!

The villagers came together and constructed the open-air theater where they would perform. The play was a success, but the government thought otherwise. On December 16, citing public security, the license for further performances of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was withdrawn. To Ngugi it seemed like it was public insecurity; government officials who felt threatened by the community's new-found confidence.

But the government also felt threatened by Ngugi's increasing critical stance. His books pointed more and more to corruption and lies in the current government rather than focusing on the old colonial system. A university professor working with peasants, saying he was learning from them? What was he really up to? Kenyatta's government, the Kenya African National Union (KANU) dared not wait to find out.

In the midnight hours between December 30th and 31st, they came with a standard-issue detention order signed by Vice President Moi. They were able to wrest him from his home, five children and pregnant wife, Nyambura, who remembered to call out for the car keys, instinctively knowing he would be gone for a long time. At the police station, Ngugi was forced to sign a statement:

You have engaged yourself in activities and utterances which are dangerous to the good Government of Kenya and its institutions.

In order to thwart your intentions and in the interest of the preservation of public security your detention has become necessary.

That was all it took to be thrown in jail without trial or charge. All it took to spend a year in Cell 16 of the Kamiti Maximum-Security Prison.

In his cell Ngugi wondered how it was that the same freedoms the Mau Mau had fought for were now disappearing. They told him he couldn't write anymore, not without approval, but he had to, he had to write! On the prison's rough toilet paper he composed what would become *Caitani Mutharaba-ini* (*Devil on the Cross*), his first novel in Kikuyu, and *Detained: A Prison Diary*. As a fleeting gesture of goodwill, Moi – now president – released Ngugi and the other detainees, but the University of Nairobi refused to reinstate Ngugi. His family received threats and harassment; Ngugi was jailed twice more before embarking on a book promotion tour to London in 1982. He never came back.

IN 1987, the Kenya Students Organization at Jersey City State College asked Ngugi, five years into his exile and teaching at Yale, to come speak to them. Njeeri, a member of the organization, coordinated his trip and travel arrangements. They met face-to-face when

she picked him up at Grand Central Station with her daughter and a fellow group member. Ngugi was intrigued by this Kenyan woman who still spoke Kikuyu after living in the U.S. for so long. He felt magic when she, in desperate hurry, grabbed his hand and darted across the fields at Jersey City State because they were late for the lecture. She was freshly divorced and made clear that she didn't plan on getting involved, but Ngugi waited her out. By 1989 they were living together in New Jersey.

They both worked hard to bring his children to study in the United States. Though Nyambura, his first wife, was still alive in Kenya, their relationship had drifted after so many years apart. The children trickled in and filled their home, attending various universities. The kids, now grown, were slightly embarrassed by their father's living arrangement and urged Njeeri and Ngugi to wed in a ceremony they organized.

After they married in July 1992, Njeeri's trips to Kenya radically changed. By custom, she could no longer be welcomed at the airport by her family, no longer stay at her mother or sister's home. She was now to stay at Ngugi's home. It was tricky and it took a little bit of doing on her part to accept being welcomed at the airport by a family she didn't know. Since Ngugi's exile had made the traditional Kikuyu wedding ceremony impossible, Kimunya, the one son Njeeri had not met, fulfilled his father's duty and received Njeeri into Ngugi's home. Nevertheless, and despite the fact that Nyambura had died, it remained Ngugi and Nyambura's home and not hers. Going home to Kenya was now something entirely different.

The plane touched down at roughly 2:30. The temperature somewhere in the high seventies, it was relatively cool for the last day of July in 2004. When Njeeri turned to look at Ngugi, she could see his excitement, despite the tiredness and exhaustion. She looked to her children, only ten and nine years old, and saw how happy they were that their Daddy was with them, finally taking that family trip they had all dreamed of for so long. Even before they got off the plane, before they greeted anyone, Thiong'o was talking about the creek. He wanted to show his Daddy the creek where he had played. Njeeri was proud that they accomplished this after so many years. She would never have to feel guilty again about leaving Ngugi at home and hopping on a plane to Kenya. He was here, standing – standing! – next to her, not in a box as she had dreaded.

Kiragu Chege, Ngugi's first wife's nephew, who headed the welcoming committee, was one of the first to greet them. He slipped his arm under Ngugi's and helped him walk over to the room where he would conduct his first order of business back in Kenya, a press conference. As soon as the KANU government fell in 2002 and Mwai Kibaki was elected president, when Ngugi was officially no longer in exile, Kiragu had started sending Ngugi emails asking when he would return to Kenya. It was a little odd, Njeeri thought, that he was communicating with them. Yes he was family by marriage, but not very close. She didn't think much of it, and besides Ngugi had helped educate Kiragu, who was a well-off engineer; maybe he wanted to thank the man he thought of as his uncle.

As they stepped in the pressroom, they were hit by the concentrated heat of dozens of bodies cooking under the brilliant camera lights. The Assistant Minister of Justice greeted them and introduced the family to the reporters. Mumbi and Thiong'o sat on a couch to the side, while Njeeri and Ngugi sat front and center. Ngugi began speaking as reporters silenced cell phones.

"I am very moved by the welcome I and my family have received. Indeed the atmosphere is very different from when I had to go away." He continued listing the family's statistics, speaking slowly and clearly, so the eager press would get it all right. Njeeri put her hand on his shoulder and watched the sweat bead on Ngugi's nape.

"This is the first time we are traveling together, as a family, in Africa."

Njeeri sat, quietly listening, hands clasped in her lap. First time traveling as a family, yes. The year she had enrolled Mumbi and Thiong'o in a dusty school in Mang'u, her hometown, was before Moi was gone, before Ngugi could come out of exile. But the two spent a year there and learned Kikuyu. While they had made certain arrangements for their safety, the guards were soon abandoned as the kids wanted to go to school on their own. But with Moi out of power, a new, friendlier government in place now, certain dangers seemed all but things of the past.

"Let me tell you, I am so glad to be back on Kenyan soil."

The tiny room was getting hotter. Njeeri toyed with the handkerchief around her fingers and waited for an opportunity to wipe Ngugi's brow.

"I left Kenya on June 5, 1982, for London, to help with the launching of my books: *Devil on the Cross*, *I Will Marry When I Want*, and *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, with a confirmed return flight of July 31 on that same year. Despite the government's ban on my return to the classroom at the University of Nairobi where I used to work, I said I would never go into exile. But on the verge of my return, I received information that a 'red carpet' awaited me at this very airport. I did not like the word red, for in those despotic times, it had more than one meaning. Given my relationship with the regime, I did not come back to find out the real meaning of the word."

Ngugi didn't return once during those twenty-two years. Not when his mother died, nor his first wife. Even though Kikuyu tradition demanded his presence, as a sign of respect towards his late wife and her family, he couldn't endanger his new family by returning. Njeeri knew those were the hardest times for Ngugi in his exile.

Kiragu, sitting just out of view of the television cameras, periodically leaned behind Ngugi and tapped Njeeri on the shoulder to ask questions. Ngugi talked on.

"Living in exile, especially for a writer, has its toll. While one may have a broad picture of what is going on inside, one loses the feel of the everyday. I return to link with that

feel of the everyday. I have come back with an open mind, an open heart and open arms. I have come to touch base. I have come to learn.”

“Are you back to stay, or are you just visiting?”

“I’m visiting for a month, because as I said in my statement, I’m still working for the University of California, Irvine. But I hope this will be the beginning of my more regular interactions with Kenya.” Njeeri nodded her head as he spoke the words “more regular interaction.”

“What if the government gives you a position at a Kenyan university?”

“They have not offered me! I don’t know how I would respond to that, but I will wait and see if they offer.” She smiled, then laughed; they were already trying to wrest Ngugi away! But what if he was offered a position at a Kenyan university? Would she come to Kenya and find a job as she had done when Ngugi was offered the position of Director of UCI’s International Center for Writing and Translation? She had left New Jersey, then boarded a plane to Irvine and found herself a job. She had wanted Ngugi to be able to make a decision based on what he wanted, knowing that his family would be secure either way.

As the questions continued, she saw Ngugi tire. It had barely been two weeks since the surgery to unblock an artery in his neck. The heat in the room would not let up and beads of sweat turned into rivulets. Finally she wiped his brow and neck with the white handkerchief. She tucked the cloth behind her and thought nothing of it. The press noticed and announced, “Mother Njeeri does her duty.”

They asked Ngugi if he would run for office. She immediately perked up and answered for him “No, no, no, no, no!” Would Njeeri like to speak to the press? “Oh no, no, no.” This kind of work was Ngugi’s field. She understood she had married a writer and the public lifestyle that came with it, but she preferred to stay out of the glare of the lights.

Outside the conference room walls, Jomo Kenyatta airport pulsed with the energy of the people. They came to be able to say they were the ones who welcomed him back to Kenya that first time. Hundreds and hundreds came in chartered buses, private cars and taxis down the airport road with the fiberglass elephants, to the busiest port in Kenya. More than a thousand people packed the terminal and overflowed outside its automated glass doors. Squeezed tight, with just enough room to raise their arms and express their welcome.

A large group huddled in the center. The men wore goldenrod-yellow tunics mottled with black spots and draped over their shoulders and hung black-and-white animal pelts and sheepskins around their necks and strapped to their shins. They carried slender sticks towering a foot or two over their heads. They tapped the stick down with the beat of their song, shifting their weight in a steady rhythm. Some wore sunglasses, some slacks and collared shirts. The women stood separately, dressed in white, their hair wrapped up in

radiant cloths, dancing as the men did. They all sang the same song, the old Mau Mau one they would chant when their fighters returned home; they now sang it for Ngugi and his family. They all danced the same dance and beamed the same smiles, laughter and joy.

When Ngugi and his family finally left the conference room, they met more blinding flashes and the muffled whirl of tape spinning in television cameras. Ngugi walked cautiously, carrying a wooden cane and answering questions. They continued down the long hallway and finally reached the stairway that would lead them to the people waiting below.

Mumbi and Thiong'o bounded ahead while Ngugi took his time. Njeeri watched Ngugi with concern. Just as she thought he wouldn't be able to make it down the stairs, just as those with them were urging Ngugi to get in front of the group for pictures, Thiong'o became aware of his father's difficulty. He turned around, extended his hand to his father and helped him down the remaining steps.

Njeeri could see the huge group of people as she came down the stairs. Their chanting, singing and yelling, all combined into one celebratory vibration that filled the terminal. She spotted students, the Kamirithu theater troupe, and occasionally a familiar face pushing to get through to them.

But where was the security? Nothing was organized; there was no stage to allow Ngugi to address the crowds who craved to hear his voice. This wasn't how it was in South Africa where Ngugi had just received an honorary doctorate alongside Nelson Mandela.

They began to push their way through the crowd, circled by a few airport security guards who widely waved their walkie-talkies around. Perhaps it would be less intense outside the terminal doors. They were greeted by a wall of noise as they stepped out.

"Thaa! Thaitaiya Ngai, Thaa! witu wa Kirinyaga ni gutuchokeria Ngugi!" The Mau Mau song sung for the detainees who made it home alive. Peace! Thanks be to the God of Kirinyaga for bringing Ngugi home.

Outside, it was cooler, but impossible to notice when the people were packed so closely together. The crowds generated intense heat, noise and anxiety. Every few moments Njeeri took note of where her children were.

"NGUGI FOR CHANCELLOR! NGUGI FOR CHANCELLOR!"

Njeeri noticed Mumbi's eyes welling up as she kept getting pushed and shoved by the jubilant crowd and the guards who were trying to rush them into the waiting car. Thiong'o – he was out of sight. Where is my baby?

"Ul-ul-ul-ul-ul-ul-uluuu." Traditional ululation, a good sign.

Njeeri frantically scanned around until she spotted him. Come, she mouthed and pulled him close.

“NGUGI FOR CHANCELLOR!”

"THAAI!"

“Ul-ul-ul-ul-ul-ul-ululuu”

"NGUGI FOR THAAI!

UL-UL-UL

CHANCELLOR

NGU-”

With a slap of the car door, the noise appreciably decreased. But the crowd remained fervent.

The sedan inched its way through the people, leaving disappointment in its wake. How could he not address all these people who had come to see him?

As they continued to drive away, Ngugi began to feel more and more guilty for not talking to the people with whom he longed to reconnect. Not yet outside the airport compound, he had the car stopped. A crowd gathered and he spoke.

They were finally back. Njeeri realized that she no longer had to see everything for him. He could see it himself and reconnect with Kenya, just as he had longed to do. She regarded her husband from a distance as he spoke to the crowd expressing his love for them, for the Mau Mau, and for finally being able to return.

The first eleven days of the trip passed by a whirl. On August 7 they visited Kamirithu and his old home. Ngugi knelt down, pressing his forearms to the ground and kissed the soil as he let out a long sigh. Njeeri knelt down beside him and did the same.

He wanted to see his first wife’s grave. Njeeri handed him a wreath, Kiragu led him to the site. He asked to be left alone and stood for a few minutes. He cupped a heap of soil from the mound and raised it slightly to the sky. He rubbed it against his hands and watched the earth slip between his fingers.

They moved on to Kamirithu Youth Polytechnic, the high school Moi built when he razed the open-air theatre just months before Ngugi’s exile in 1982. The townspeople knew that if it weren’t for Ngugi, they wouldn’t have a school in their tiny village. “It is not a negative thing,” Ngugi said to them. “It is positive. We can only be grateful he helped keep up the spirit of Kamirithu.”

About forty or so thespians had rehearsed and re-rehearsed their roles in *Ngaahika Ndenda*, which they performed for Ngugi and his wife. At times Ngugi rose and joined in on the entertainment. He was content. He was reestablishing the ties, re-remembering the faces and places he had forgotten.

On Monday, August 9, after having left Mumbi and Thiong'o with family, Njeeri and Ngugi traveled to Kampala in Uganda, where Ngugi had attended Makerere University and earned his B.A. in English in 1964. He lectured there, saying he felt as at home in Uganda as he did in Kenya. On Wednesday, Njeeri and Ngugi returned to their Nairobi apartment where Kiragu met them a few hours later around 7:30 pm. They were staying at the Norfolk Apartment Towers, in a high-security area of Nairobi in between Harry Thaku and Kijabe Roads, about 400 meters away from the Central Police Station, in a complex surrounded by high walls, topped with electrical fencing, and patrolled by security and guard dogs.

In the two-story apartment, Ngugi discussed with Kiragu the second round of touring that would soon start. Njeeri half-listened to their conversation while relaxing in her husband's long loose tunic and pants, the same one he wore when they arrived in Kenya. She was exhausted by the day's travels, and shortly before midnight she picked up a few scattered dishes to take to the kitchen before going to bed.

A few seconds later, Ngugi rose to let Kiragu out so he, too, could retire for the evening. As he opened the door, instead of Kiragu going out, four men came in. They burned Ngugi's forehead with a cigarette as he tried to keep them out. They had two guns and a glistening machete, so to resist them even more would have been foolish. They were most likely robbers – locals nicknamed the city Nairobi robbery.

Njeeri looked out the kitchen and saw the men. What she had been told about robbers kicked in. Give them everything and they will leave you alone. They didn't even have to ask her and she handed over her gold earrings, rings and wedding band. She emptied out her purse, gave them all the cash she had. Cellphones, take the cellphones. Ngugi's laptop and rings? Take them.

Why won't they leave? Ransack the house, take whatever you want. Just take it and go! They stayed and stayed, started to get increasingly violent. They pulled Kiragu off to a bathroom. They dragged Ngugi to the living room, ordered him to sit in the corner as they muzzled him and covered him with a blanket. They moved Kiragu again.

They approached Njeeri. Where is Kiragu? Why is he not helping, doing something? One of them pulled off her pants. Another tried to push him away, as if saying, this is not the plan. But he was too tiny to prevent the attack. The other man pulled himself over his belt, not bothering to undo his pants. He penetrated her, she screamed. Ngugi ran out from the corner, made it to the front door, shouting, challenging them to kill him; he had to get help. He opened the door and all four men, running in from wherever they were,

pounced. They struggled on the narrow hallway that overlooked the parking lot courtyard.

She saw Ngugi, held by the neck, her rapist pointing a gun to his temple. She grabbed the gun and held on. He slashed her forearm, sending blood gushing to the floor, but she refused to let go. Please, please! She remained focused on Ngugi; she knew if they wrung his neck too tightly the fresh stitches from his surgery would open. A main artery, and he would be gone.

Okay, they would go back inside! They would go back in, yes quietly! Njeeri kept her grip on the barrel of the gun, and said she'd let go when they got back in. As soon as she and Ngugi crossed the threshold she let go and turned to swing the door closed. But not soon enough. The gun was stuck inside the doorway. No way was Njeeri going to let that door open so they could pull out their gun, or worse, get back in. She screamed for Kiragu to help them push the door. It was four against two. Where the hell is he?! Does he have the other gun?

Suddenly the weight pushing back at them disappeared. They pulled out the gun and left.

Njeeri threw open every window in the apartment and screamed. "I've been raped! I've been robbed!" She was met with silence. Kiragu appeared. He yelled too, but in a lower voice. She screamed she had been raped. He told her to put her pants back on. The phone line had been cut and they had surrendered all their cellphones. Ngugi looked for a way to get help. Njeeri feared for their lives if they were to go outside.

She continued shouting out the windows to the walkway where she had seen security patrolling earlier. "Call the police! We've been robbed." Nothing. She screamed until her voice no longer made it out her throat. Finally she yelled that Professor Ngugi had been robbed. Let everyone know exactly what had happened.

Finally! A tiny young woman answered their calls. Njeeri communicated with her through the window, still frightened to open the door. The woman, Mwendu, came upstairs and Njeeri felt safe. Mwendu gave her cell phone to Njeeri so she could call for help. She offered Njeeri a pair of sandals so she could go out to the ambulance and rode with them all the way to the hospital. Then she disappeared.

They spent the next few days at Nairobi hospital. Kiragu stayed with them, though he had not been injured. He coordinated the media visits and decided just who got in to see the pair. Talks and tours were canceled. The people were disappointed, not because they wouldn't see or hear Ngugi, but because his visit was marred by this. Was this how he and his family were to remember their homecoming visit?

Rumors began to swirl immediately. They said the entire plot was an elaborate set-up by Ngugi to have Njeeri circumcised. They said the plot was successful. They said that it was a publicity stunt to promote Ngugi's new book. None of it hurt Njeeri more than the circumcision rumors, since she was so opposed to female genital mutilation.

The story was on endless repetition in the media. Things got jumbled and crisscrossed. Njeeri was baptized Mary Njeeri, the attack became attempted rape.

On the fifteenth, Ngugi spoke out at the hospital. “In her case it was not attempted rape. It was rape, period.” He criticized the media for their foul-up and for mixing up her name.

The next day Njeeri spoke to the press. She wouldn’t let silence continue to stigmatize rape victims. She wasn’t going to let her attacker run with her secret. She didn’t want to run from him; let him run from her. Tears flowed as she affirmed that she was raped. It didn’t matter that he hadn’t ejaculated inside her. “The minute you touch a woman, a child, or anybody against their will, whether there’s penetration or not, that is rape.”

Speaking out was a necessary element of her healing process. “It would have been very easy for me to take your word as attempted rape, get on the plane to America and heal myself.”

Forgetting her own pain she added, “I brought him back to you, then somebody almost killed him. It’s not fair, it’s not right, it’s not right.”

After they left the hospital and resumed their tour, women came to her on the streets, held her and cried. In that embrace of tears they understood her pain, and she understood theirs.

Where they had remained under a blanket of silence, women praised her courage for speaking out. But she agonized over the way she had exposed herself; the way she had given so much. It wasn’t regret, but when the pain and weight wouldn’t go away, she knew she couldn’t do it the same again.

In the following days police arrested three security guards from the Norfolk towers, Kiragu’s driver – and Kiragu. Police suspected Kiragu had masterminded the attack and recruited the security guards. Njeeri suspected there was an even higher level of involvement. The one scrawny guard, the one that had tried to push the rapist away, was still missing. He invaded her every nightmare, and occupied her fears during the day, knowing that he was still out there. She felt that he was the link to the higher circle, to whatever politicians wanted to harm and humiliate Ngugi; he didn’t fit in with the rest of the guards.

When she read Kiragu’s police statement – how he said that he didn’t know she was raped until they got to the hospital – she saw many things that conflicted with her and Ngugi’s statements. She knew he was lying, knew he was guilty. Why did he twist his statement around when he too was a victim in the attack, when Ngugi and Njeeri had never even implicated him? How was it that he had broken free just as the attackers left? How come he wasn’t harmed at all in the attack? Why had they only taken his cellphone when he had on a glittering watch and a brand new suit?

With these thoughts constantly reeling in her head, Njeeri learned to brace herself knowing that even as he sat in jail – no bail for a violence-with-robbery accusation, a capital offence – Kiragu might be able to buy his way out, not by influencing the court, but by silencing witnesses and spreading rumors.

It was a nasty feeling, knowing that someone you trusted, someone you called your own had done this to you and your family. But why? Njeeri puzzled over this. Political ambition? Financial gain? Nothing made sense.

The heady smoke of roasted goat billowed across Njeeri's hometown in Mang'u. They next day they were returning to California, but there was one last thing to do in Kenya on this first visit. She felt a little nervous, but it took her mind off of the past two weeks.

Dressed in a deep blue tunic embroidered with a thick band of brilliant gold around the neck and sleeves, she was a bride again. The wedding that she and Ngugi first had in New Jersey just over 12 years ago would finally be complete. In performing the final rite of the traditional Kikuyu wedding ceremony – Ngurario – Ngugi would carve a piece of the goat's right shoulder, then she would slice another piece. As they ate the morsels, the villagers would signal their acceptance through ululations and the two would finally belong to each other.

During the ceremony that day, they ate the roast goat, drank from big horns, and danced and laughed as Ngugi, in a "love-test," had to identify Njeeri from ten other women wrapped head-to-toe in bright Swahili kanga cloths. Later, they had their rings – small beaded ones to replace their lost bands – blessed. When her friends asked her how she felt she laughed that she was relieved; she was finally a married woman. But she found even deeper comfort in knowing that they had returned – and would return again.

Reporting Summary

I first came upon this story in a brief article on the BBC News homepage in August of 2004. The only reason it caught my attention at the time was because I had attended a lecture given by Ngugi just a few months earlier at UC Irvine. I became reacquainted with the story when I came across an issue of the quarterly UCI magazine from Spring of 2005 that was conveniently buried under a stack of papers on my desk. I was intrigued by Njeeri's story, what caused her to speak out, and how she, as a psychologist and counselor herself, was dealing with the situation.

I called her with my intentions of writing a story on the attack and how she was dealing with it. She accepted, unsure of what angle I wanted to take, and thus began a series of interviews. As the interviews progressed the narrative moved away from the attack and toward the actual homecoming. The majority of my information was gathered from these interview sessions. The reconstruction of extended airport homecoming sequence was made possible by a videotape recording that Njeeri kindly let me watch.

I also researched to Kenyan history, from pre-colonialism to the current government. I researched the status of rape in Kenya, its frequency and what courses of action women have available to them. I looked into the Kikuyu, their traditions and myths. I even found a Kikuyu-to-English dictionary in the hopes that it would give me some better understanding of the culture. I also read every article pertaining to the homecoming, the attack, the investigation and anything that mentioned Njeeri's name on the websites of three Kenyan newspapers who very generously provide free access to their archives. I read snippets of Ngugi's writings and researched his background. Especially helpful was *Detained*, his prison diary.

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