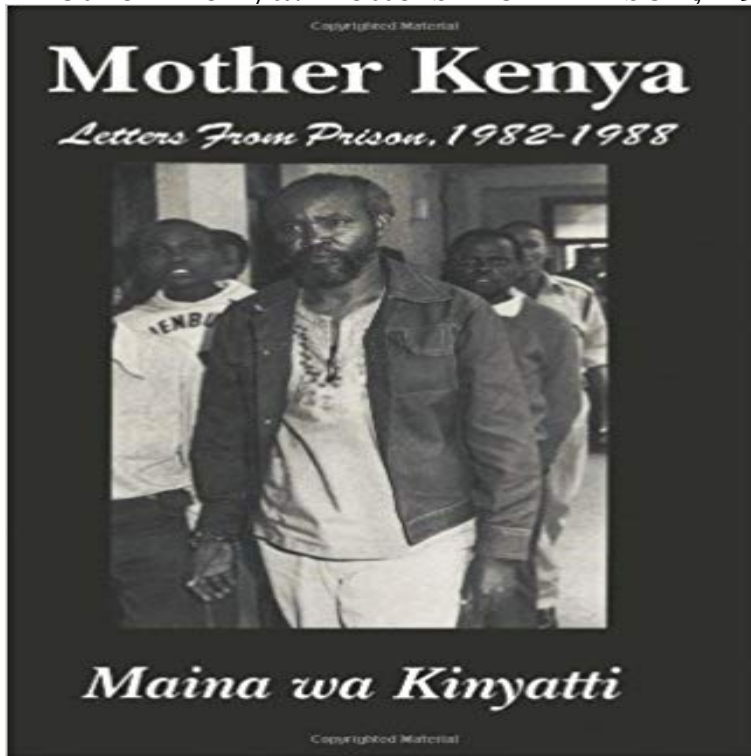


## Mother Kenya: Letters from Prison, 1982-1988



**PATRIOTISM AND STATE REPRESSION** It is June 2nd, 1982. The underground circles in Kenya are flooded with news of imminent arrest of various people who have taken a principled stand against the unpopular Moi-Kanu regime in Kenya. The previous day dictator Moi attacked them at a public meeting. Among the first names mentioned is that of Maina wa Kinyatti, the foremost historian in Kenya. Subsequent news items continue the story. Special Branch Police search Maina's house while he is out; Mumbi, Maina's wife, stands firm and demands a list of all the items the police take away. Maina defies the police who intensify search for him. The following day comes the news that Maina boldly walks to the police station, in his own time, having completed more important assignments first. Maina is subsequently charged with subversion and jailed for six years hard labor. He does not get any remission of the sentence and serves all six years. Most of this time was spent in solitary confinement. He was adopted by Amnesty International and P.E.N. International as Prisoner of Conscience. What was it in Maina that made him a particular target of the regime? What powerful force did he represent that the regime saw him as a danger to its very survival? An answer to these questions can be sought only in the context of the resistance movement that has emerged in Kenya almost at the time of independence in 1963. The roots of this resistance can be traced in the economic, political and social conditions after independence. While the official, ruling party version glorifies the early years of independence, the resistance movement sees the situation differently. Independence in Kenya has led to the looting and squandering of our resources, and the virtual silencing of our people. It has led to the increasing misery and impoverishment of the many. Aspirations

for better lives under uhuru have been betrayed by predatory politicians who talk of nation-building while fattening on the nations wealth and peoples labor. These conditions then resulted in an intensified resistance movement of which Maina was a part. Mwakenya places this resistance in its historical context: The most dramatic development...was the emergence of worker/peasant based underground group. They began articulating an ideology that fully reflected the workers struggle. The seventies saw the development of a vigorous underground press best symbolized by Mwanguzi, which ran to more than twelve issues. Between 1974 and 1982, the underground groups and newspapers had become the real voice of the Kenyan people. The political manifestation of these resistance activities was the December Twelve Movement (DTM) and the birth of its public newspaper, Pambana. By the time the first issue of Pambana was widely circulated in May 1982., the political situation in the country had reached a boiling point. The indirectly encouraged the coup of August 1982, which almost overthrew the weakened dictator Moi. But finding strength from British and U.S. governments support. Moi came back to power in a wave of killings. The arrest of Maina in 1982 is linked very closely with these developments. maina had come to be identified with a number of other activists as one of the people behind the surge of activity directed towards challenging the regime in every field. A full history of the post-independence resistance movement will reveal that Maina was one of the people behind the upsurge of the movement for democratic change from the mid-1970s. He was part of the December Twelve Movement which published the underground publication, InDependent Kenya which circulated widely in 981 and was published in London by Zed Press in 1982. Maina suffered a lot in prison. He was beaten and kicked. Disease and hunger were used as tools of torture. But Maina resisted to be

reduced to scum. The prison letters are testimony to his courage.

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