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# Joseph Wanjie, Kikuyu Catholic Catechist

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## Resumo

Pretende-se, neste artigo, discutir o problema da mediação cultural, enfocando as relações entre um catequista Kikuyu e alguns missionários da Consolata. Isso será feito a partir da análise da biografia deste catequista, escrita por um missionário. As informações contidas no texto biográfico serão cotejadas com dados provenientes de outras fontes o que nos permitirá reconstruir a trajetória de um importante agente no que concerne às relações entre missionários católicos e nativos no Quênia.

**Palavras-chave:** mediação cultural, trajetória, biografia, Kikuyu, Missão Católica, antropologia.

## Abstract

This article discusses the problem of cultural mediation, focusing on the relations between a Kikuyu catechist and Consolata missionaries. It analyzes a biography of this catechist, which was written by a missionary. The information contained in the biography is compared with data from other sources that allow us to reconstruct the trajectory of an important agent in the relations between Catholic missionaries and natives in Kenya.

**Keywords:** cultural mediation, trajectory, biography, Kikuyu, Catholic mission, anthropology.

# Joseph Wanjie, Kikuyu Catholic Catechist<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This article discusses the construction of shared codes, using as a case study the relations between Consolata missionaries and the Kikuyu, in Kenya, and focusing specifically on the biography of one of the first Kikuyu Catholic catechists, Joseph Wanjie. This biography was written by the Consolatino Missionary Vittorio Merlo Pick, who also conducted ethnographic studies, as can be seen in some of the works he published (Merlo Pick, 1965, 1967a, 1967b, 1973 and 1976). The decision to focus on this biography is justified by the opportunity that the data it includes offers for the reconstruction of the trajectory of a key agent in the relationships between missionaries and natives in Kenya. It should be observed, however, that the data found in this biography will be compared with data from the historic and anthropological bibliography about themes such as the Kikuyu, the colonial question in Kenya, religion, and others, from articles and reports published in the magazine *Missioni Consolata*, as well as data from the Consolatino files in Rome.

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The theory of mediation proposed by Paula Montero (2006a and 2006b) focuses on the spaces of production of interactive relations, with the objective of understanding how two points of view interact to produce shared meanings. That is, by trying to escape traps created by analytical focuses based on the notion that the relations between populations belonging to distinct socio-cultural universes necessarily result in a loss or a cultural pastiche - a

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perspective that is dear to many Brazilian ethnologists - as well as perspectives inserted in the framework of the so-called post-colonial approaches, which are based on the principle that all cultural conformations are the result of hybrid or miscegenation processes, mediation theory is based on the investigation of the principles that articulate the diversity of codes in interaction in a single base.

The production of shared codes, according to Montero (2006b: 42), is the result, in the plane of significations, of the strategies put into play by the agents in interaction to impose their interests, and whose values can only be described contextually. In this sense, Montero affirms that mediation is constituted by a communication process and the construction of situations and textualities that engender shared meanings in the zones of interculturality, whose configurations emerge from the relations marked by coercion, inequality and conflict, but also from the production of agreements about significations, or that is, based on complicities, interests and alliances.

In this way, to investigate the spaces of production of interactive relations, or that is, to investigate how two points of view interact to produce shared meanings, it is necessary to place in the scene the agents of mediation and their practices, given that they are the ones that propose connections of plausible and or credible meaning for a given situation, based on their specific competencies in the domain of the codes. Thus, the challenge that is raised here is, according to Montero (2006), that of discovering the principles that place on a single foundation the diversity of the codes in interaction.

This being said, the question remains about how to conduct a study that can respond to the demands presented above. We discuss the biography of Joseph Wanjie in an attempt to understand the construction of codes shared by the Consolata missionaries and the Kikuyu natives, revealing the strategies used by these agents.

## Biography

The option for the use of biography has some theoretical-methodological implications that deserve to be discussed before we approach the biography that will be analyzed here. According to Howard Becker (1986), the first biographical document published in Sociology was *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, by William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, in the 1920s. This book,

based from a theoretical perspective on the social psychology of Georges Mead, served as a methodological example for a series of works conducted later in the sociology department of the University of Chicago, among which can be mentioned, *The Jack-Roller*, *The Natural History of a Delinquent Career*, *Brothers in Crime*, *The Professional Thief*, *The Fantastic Lodge* and *Hustler*.

This method, according to Becker (1986) - while it shares the narrative form, the first person discourse and the subjective perspective with classic autobiography - is distinguished from it by the perspective from which the work is conducted and by the methods used. The biographical method used in the works mentioned above are based on the supposition that a biography should be based on the objectives of the sociologist, who tries to assure that the subject of the biography addresses all of the issues that are of interest to him, and does not fail to speak about important events, that his interpretations are correctly presented and that the facts presented as authentic coincide with information from other sources. That is, the biography constructed from this methodological perspective is not a subjective narrative by an individual, but a narrative guided by the researcher to the issues that are of interest to sociology.

An important element to be emphasized in the biographical method of the Chicago School is its link to a perspective that emphasizes the interpretations that, in practice, people give to their acts. For these authors, it is not possible to understand the conduct of an individual without knowing how he or she perceives a situation, what obstacles he believes he faces and the alternatives available. Similarly, it would not be possible to understand the effects of the field of possibilities and of the social norms without considering the point of view of the actor.

Biography, according to Becker (1986), in addition to the advantages related to the wealth of details that it offers, gives meaning to the widely used concept of “process.” In this sense, the author affirms, it is necessary to seriously consider the proposals of George Mead that “nous apprenons que la réalité de la vie sociale est un échange de symboles significatifs au cours duquel les gens esquissent des actions et, ensuite, ajustent et réorientent leur activité en fonction des réponses (réelles ou imaginaires) que les autres ont fait à ces actions. La formation d’un acte individuel est un processus dans lequel la conduite est continuellement remodelée pour tenir compte des attentes des autres, exprimées dans la situation immédiate, ou anticipées par

l'acteur » (Becker, 1986 : 108). Nevertheless, Becker adds, the observation of a social process as proposed by Mead supposes a deep understanding of the life of others, in addition to raising problems concerning the comparability and the objectivity in the data collection. Due to the difficulties inherent to this methodology, sociologists, in general, do not employ it, and remain content with less complicated techniques such as questionnaires and interviews.

Also inspired by the methodological discussion of George Mead, Bourdieu developed a theory of action in which the observation and analysis of biographical data had an important role. In *L'illusion biographique* Bourdieu (1986) called attention to the characteristics of “life stories,” narratives a person makes of oneself that are submit to social pressure and to specific censorships, which highlight the longitudinal succession of the facts – a privilege that is conceded both by the narrator and by the researcher – and above all, by the need to analyze the conditions of production of these narratives, in which the position of the researcher performs an important role in the focus given by the narrator to his “life story.” Nevertheless, Bourdieu continues, the critical examination of the poorly analyzed and uncontrolled – or uncontrollable – social processes that permeate the construction of this artifact that is the “life story” is not constituted as an end in itself but relates to the construction of the notion of *trajectory*, “comme série de *positions* successivement occupées par un même agent (ou un même groupe) dans un espace lui-même en devenir et soumis à d’incessantes transformations. (...) Les événements biographiques se définissent comme autant de *placements* et de *déplacements* dans l’espace social, c’est-à-dire, plus précisément, dans les différents espaces successifs de la structure de la distribution de différentes espèces de capital qui sont en jeu dans le champ considéré” (Bourdieu, 1986: 71).

Said another way, Bourdieu, by using the concept of trajectory,<sup>2</sup> introduces a series of methodological conditions for working with biographical data. In addition to the already mentioned analysis of the data collection process, it is necessary, according to the author, to analyze a trajectory in relation to its field, which is a place of power relations, of dispute, a space of struggle for hegemony, by the monopoly of the rules of the game, which implies immanent trends and objective probabilities. That is, it is necessary to reconstruct the set

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2 In the words of Jean-Claude Passeron (1990), trajectory is a *ballistic* concept. That is, it supposes the analysis of initial force and direction of a moving object together with the force fields and the interaction that it undergoes.

of objective relations that place the agent in question in relation to the group of agents involved in the same field and who have the same type of opportunities. In this way, to understand a trajectory, Bourdieu affirms it is necessary to construct the successive states of the field in which it is developed. Not being fixed, the structure of the field is defined by the structure of distribution of capital among the agents who are engaged in this field at a given time.

The concept of *trajectory* is related to another concept that is important to Bourdieu, that of *habitus*, “the principle generator and organizer of practices and of the representations that can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without being the product of obedience to the rules, which are objectively adapted to its purpose without supposing the conscious intention of the ends and the expressed command of the operations needed to achieve them and which are collectively orchestrated, without being the product of the organized action of a regent” (Bourdieu, 1994:61). *Habitus* is thus the matrix of capital that the agent uses in his or her struggles to establish his or her interests in the interior of the *field*, allowing the researcher to understand the cards used by the agent in the game of positioning inherent to the *field*, and the construction of his or her *trajectory*.

With these methodological considerations about the use of biographical data, it is important to emphasize that, in the case in study, the analysis of the biography of Joseph Wanjie, it would not be possible to conduct a criticism of the social processes that are poorly analyzed and not controlled by the researcher at the time of data collection, as Bourdieu proposed, given that I did not conduct the biography to be discussed. Nevertheless, the fact that this biography was written by a missionary deserves some considerations. First, it must be emphasized as does Marta Amoroso (2006), that the sources used that were written by missionaries do not represent only the particular experience of those who wrote them, but the constructions modeled by known experiences of other missionaries in other contexts and by the doctrinaire and ideological content of the Catholic Church over time.

In this sense, it can be considered that, according to Oscar Calávia Saez (2006), in a text in which he discusses the absence of the autobiographical genre in Brazilian ethnology,<sup>3</sup> biographies in which indigenous people

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3 The sole exception, according to the author, would be the biography of Gabriel Viriato Raposo. This was collected, transcribed and edited by Father Silvano Sabatini and published by Editora Missioni Consolata, in 1972, under the title *Ritorno alla maloca, autobiografia di un índio Makuxi*.

discuss their conversions, thus making an effort to demonstrate the fruits of evangelical work, have been part of missionary literature since the Brazilian colonial period. That is, this literary genre is part of a long Western tradition, with well-known representations such as the confessions of Saint Augustine and Rousseau, although it is not present in the Catholic tradition in the same way as in the Calvinist tradition, in which Anglo-Saxon individualism has its origins.

Thus, Calávia continues, it should be considered that, by requesting that an indigenous person present an account of his or her life, he is requesting that the indigenous person adopt, invent or reinvent a genre that is new to him, and moreover, that he invent a first person narrative that certainly did not exist in the individual's local narrative meanings. That is, the autobiography resulting from this demand could not be anything but a *translation*. Nevertheless, the author continues, even though the editors or amanuenses accommodate the indigenous data in a pre-existing structure, "(...) their works also relate to indigenous narrative genres, which frequently leave their mark on the result" (2006: 184). These marks can be perceived, for example, by the type of fact narrated and by the way that it is presented. Calávia continues to argue that indigenous autobiographies, although they are based on Old World schemes, are not instant mimeses.

Although in the perspective adopted in this text, the issue is not to consider the construction of the autobiography or any other cultural artifact that is the fruit of intercultural relations as mimesis or as re-adaptation, in indigenous terms, of Western schemes, it is interesting to highlight in the argument of Calávia Saez the presence, in the narrative genre represented by the indigenous autobiographies, of indigenous and Western schemes. That is, it is interesting to highlight that the autobiography analyzed here is a production that results from a process of mediation, a relational process in which the agents involved reach an *agreement*, establishing a "common sense" for the preparation of this document.

## Joseph Wanjie

The biography of Joseph Wanjie, which will be discussed here, was written by Father Vittorio Merlo Pick and published by Editrice Missionaria Italiana in 1976. Merlo Pick also wrote other texts about the Kikuyu, *Mitti e leggende*



Kikuyu, Favole Kikuyu, Ndāna g Kikuyu enigmas- enigmi Kikuyu, the biography, Se il chicco di frumento... Padre Bernardo Perino. Missionario della Consolata, in addition to a dictionary and a method for learning the Swahili language. It would not be possible to present here biographical data about the author, but it is necessary to emphasize a characteristic that certainly gives a specific character to the biography of Joseph Wanjie: Merlo Pick was a missionary, which means that he had relatively intense contact with a type of literature that is quite common among religious Catholics, which are the so-called edifying readings, which include the books about the life of the saints and the reports of the conversion of the indigenous peoples. That is, the fact that he had more or less constant contact with this type of literature may have influenced the author to use, in the preparation of the biography, the narrative structure which is peculiar to it. In addition, it should be indicated that, having been written by a missionary and having data that emphasizes the role of the group of which they are a part in the conversion of the indigenous, this writing is inserted in the framework of missionary writings related to the “edification of the mission.”

In this sense, it can be observed that Joseph Wanjie’s biography particularly emphasizes facts related to his insertion into Catholicism, which include his approximation to the missionaries and the moments when Wanjie separates from them. It is all marked by a narrative tone that underlines Wanjie’s strong spirit, and that despite the adversities, he knew how to choose the most appropriate route. Later we will see a summarized presentation of this biography.

The first part of the biography was based on autobiographic notes left by Wanjie. These notes, according to Merlo Pick (1976: 8), were written “nella spontaneità della lingua materna e nella franchezza dell’espressione rivelano i forti sentimenti e la spiccata personalità del catechista africano, Joseph Wanjie” and address the events that occurred in Wanjie’s life until 1924.

The text begins with the description of Wanjie’s birth, which was probably in 1886, in which he emphasizes the fact that the women of his father’s cabana expressed joy at the birth of a male child. Later, he makes a quick description of Kenya’s situation in relation to the advance of European colonialism and then there is a brief ethnographic overview of the Kikuyu, particularly about their origin and establishment in the region of Mount Kenya, in which is located Murang’a, the village where Wanjie was born. Only then did

it begin to discuss Wanjie, emphasizing that, as a child all he wanted to do was to play with his friends and affirm himself in relation to them.

According to the biographic text,<sup>4</sup> Wanjie's approximation with the Catholic missionaries was intermediated by his friend Thuo, who was an orphan who began to work with the Consolatinos, first as a voluntary interpreter, later as a kitchen helper and then as an "assistant of religious practice." Thuo had helped Wanjie in issues related to faith, and was a constant presence in his life.

Another event presented as having had an important role in the approximation between Wanjie and the missionaries was the fact that he was stricken with pneumonia and was treated by Father Mario and Sister Flavia. After recovering from the illness, Wanjie was invited by Father Gays to work at the mission. At first he was reluctant, arguing that before accepting, he would need approval from his father. After a conversation with Father Mario, his father approved of his move to the mission. Wanjie was taken to the mission, which he left to participate in the Kikuya initiation ritual, the circumcision.<sup>5</sup>

Merlo Pick highlights that during this period that Wanjie was in the mission, he did not want to participate in the proselytizing activities, arguing that he did not feel he had the condition to speak to others, given that his non-circumcised status would not allow him to do so. Wanjie's departure to participate in the circumcision ritual marked a long period of distance from the mission. The author affirms that Wanjie was strongly questioned by his companions and parents about living at the mission and was convinced to not go back and if he did, he would lose his opportunity to enjoy the opportunities that life with the Kikuyu had to offer, such as, among others, the opportunity to have a number of wives, given that he was a young man and the son of a property owner.<sup>6</sup>

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4 Written by Merlo Pick, and based on Wanjie's autobiographical notes, it is difficult to determine which affirmations were made by one or the other. In addition, there are passages in which there are notes that recognize that certain information comes from interviews with missionaries who knew and had interactions with Wanjie.

5 According to Droz (2000), circumcision among the Kikuyu, inscribes the circumcised man or woman in the world of individuals who are responsible for themselves, who are capable of respecting conventions and of biologically and socially reproducing society. That is, circumcision marks the passage to adulthood.

6 According to the authors who write about the Kikuyu, such as Droz, Lonsdale and Kershaw, the agrarian issue occupies a fundamental place in the Kikuyu social organization, with non-landowners considered to be beings affected by evil spells for not having complied with the ritual obligations or

Perceiving Wanjie's delay in returning to the mission, Father Gays, with whom Wanjie appeared to maintain a closer relationship, sought him out. Arriving at the village where Wanjie lived, Father Gays was only able to see him because he went there without warning: Wanjie, at this time, did not want to see or speak with the missionaries. After a conversation with the priest, Wanjie changed his decision to not return to the mission. Nevertheless, by doing so, he placed himself in a difficult position, because, if he went to the mission, his opportunity to marry would be reduced, given that being Catholic was not highly appreciated by the Kikuyu.

Wanjie was able to escape from this situation due to a dispute he had with a village chief who did not like Wanjie, and to get revenge, placed Wanjie on a list of men who should work for the English. Since men employed by Europeans were exempt from this work, Wanjie requested that the missionaries intervene, by declaring that he worked for the mission. Thus, Wanjie could return to the mission without compromising his marriage, the negotiations for which were underway.

Although he had returned to the mission and attended the Catechism courses, which allowed him to become a Catholic, Wanjie did not agree to be Baptized. He argued that he had decided to marry before he was Baptized because, if not, he would have difficulty finding a wife and also because, once married, his wife's family would no longer have influence over her, which would mean that he would induce her to become Catholic like him. This argument appeared reasonable to the priests, who did not object to the reasons presented by Wanjie to delay his Baptism.

Wanjie returned to his village at the time in which the marriage should take place, and once married, announced that he intended to return to the mission and be baptized. This declaration generated protests from his mother and mainly his wife. But he remained firm in his proposal to become Catholic which nearly destroyed his marriage, because upon discovering Wanjie's intentions, his wife – who did not accept that he convert to Christianity and insisted in acting in accord with the Kikuyu tradition, had asked that he return her to her family. Wanjie had hesitated to do so and only did not because he had heard the advice of the vicar, who insisted on the indissolubility of matrimony.

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those related to their ancestors.

After a long period trying to convince his wife to become Christian, Wanjie decided to take drastic action: discovering that the missionaries planned to travel to Ethiopia to explore the possibilities of building a mission in Ethiopia, he sent them letters requesting permission to be part of the committee that would take the trip. He insisted on going to Ethiopia to obtain divine help to convert his wife, Wamboi, who, despite occasionally attending catechism classes, did not agree to be baptized.

The description of the trip to Ethiopia is a special chapter, in which are narrated the dangers the members of the committee experienced, such as assaults, lack of food and water, disease, the death of a missionary and the imprisonment of two others. The trip lasted two years, and when it began no one believed that the members of the entourage would return to Kenya alive. The high point of the saga of the trip to Ethiopia was when the description of Joseph Wanjie's return to the mission at Murung'a at which time he heard the news that Wamboi, his wife, would be baptized. She had needed medical care for a wound, was treated at the mission, and afterwards began to frequent the house of the nuns and the catechism classes, and was thus convinced to be baptized.

Wanjie, in addition to being frequently questioned by his Kikuyu relatives and friends about the fact that being Christian was also questioned about having only one wife. According to the author of the biography, it was inconceivable that he was rich and did not have more wives, because, occupying a high position, he would certainly receive many guests in his house. Not having many wives to plant and prepare food, he would not have the ability to feed all his guests. Wanjie responded that being only one person, he should have only one wife, and that he could use the money that would be spent to purchase another wife to feed his guests.

Occupying an important position among the Kikuyu and having attended the mission school,<sup>7</sup> where he learned to read and write, Wanjie began his career as a government employee in 1917 as a secretary of the Murang'a Indigenous Tribune. He then served as an interpreter to the district commissary, a member of the district tribunal, a member of the district African council and of the district school council. In addition, he was chief of his village

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7 This biography indicates that the first schools opened in Kikuyu territory were restricted to the sons of the chiefs.

and, in the interval between one job and another, he served as a catechist or teacher in the mission school.

Wanjie also participated in the council of elders of the mission of Murang'a, on which he held a prominent position. As a member of this council, he had taken the initiative to convoke an assembly of lay Catholics to discuss the issue of alcohol consumption, especially of *njohi*, the traditional kikuyu drink, which was served at all social and family ceremonies. This issue was widely debated and resulted in the taking of an oath<sup>8</sup> in which the Catholic Kikuyu agreed to no longer take alcoholic drinks.

According to Merlo Pick, Wanjie's many interventions during the first assembly of lay Catholics in Murang'a<sup>9</sup> were decisive in the decision to require the Catholics to send their children to school. The boys and girls were also required to attend the mission school. According to the decisions taken at this assembly, unjustified absences would be punished with fines. If young children were absent and it was the fault of their mothers, the fine would be in wood, while young men and women would be punished for their absences with manual labor. This decision had been justified by the importance that some Catholics, including Wanjie, gave to school instruction. This would be a way to make it useful for the others and would also allow the Catholics to confront the Protestants, whose religious education was almost entirely conducted in school.<sup>10</sup>

Wanjie also participated in the founding of the "Kikuyu Catholic Union," an association created in contrast to its Presbyterian counterpart the Kikuyu Provincial Association and the "Kikuyu Central Association – KAU,"<sup>11</sup> one of the first associations linked to anticolonial movements in Kenya, founded by Harry Thuku. Wanjie was elected president of the "Kikuyu Catholic Union," an association that, contrary to the KAU, had, a more important social than political scope, according to the author.

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8 Oaths had an important role among the Kikuyu: restricted to already circumcised men, the oath indicated the assumption of a public commitment that could not be broken.

9 The author did not specify when this event took place.

10 Upon narrating what took place at this assembly, the author commented that the decision to require school education for Catholics under penalty of fine contrasted with the current situation found in Kenya, in which parents sacrifice themselves so that their children have access to education. This author, however, attributed the interest in education to the movement of the Kikuyu to Catholicism.

11 KAU was founded in 1922, driven by a questioning of colonialism, above all that concerning the issue of land ownership.

Wanjie's intense participation in Catholic life had been crowned by the decision of his first son, John Gitau, to go to seminary. John Gitau was, according to Merlo Pick, a model seminarian, but was not ordained: on April 23, 1926, at 16 years of age, he died of meningitis. The death of his son at the seminary was, according to the author, a blow for Wanjie, but he turned to his faith to find the strength to overcome the loss.

Wanjie's career as a Catholic leader continued with his candidacy to become a teacher. In reality, he was part of the first group of Catholic candidates to be masters in Kenya. This group included: Francis Gicohi – from Tetu, Ignazio Murai – from Mugoiri, Joseph Wanjohi – from Karima, Paulo – from Gaturi, Jovenale Gitau – from Limuru, Juliano Njagi – from Niery and Joseph Wanjie – from Murang'a. His candidacy was accepted, and in 1929, Wanjie became an accredited teacher. Later, he became a "Jeanes Teacher", who would supervise teachers who had not previously been specifically trained to be teachers.<sup>12</sup>

His experience as a Jeanes Teacher had, according to the author, great importance on Wanjie's education as a leader. After leaving this activity, Wanjie became a member of the Murang'a District Council, and of the District School Board, and in 1939 was named to be chief of Murang'a, a role whose function was to serve as an intermediary between the local population and the representatives of the colonial government. Wanjie remained in this position until 1954 and was, according to the author, an excellent chief, demonstrating an uncommon sense of justice and impartiality.

As chief, Wanjie gave special attention to agriculture, and made a great effort to introduce new agricultural techniques. These, however, were not seen with much sympathy, above all by the women, who were responsible for cultivating the fields and were thus more reticent to new developments, according to the author. In this sense, Wanjie used his own fields as an example, on which he adopted new techniques and as a result had a more varied and richer production than the others who did not use them.

One of the last issues raised in Wanjie's biography was his activity during the Mau-Mau war. Although he agreed with the land ownership demands raised by the guerrilla movement, Wanjie did not agree with their xenophobic and anti-Christian proposals and condemned the methods they employed in

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12 Because of the war, the position of Jeanes Teacher was terminated in 1939.

the recruitment of new members, such as the clandestine oath<sup>13</sup> conducted under pressure. In this sense, according to Merlo Pick, Wanjie was a staunch opponent of the guerrillas, doing whatever he could to prevent them from entering the territory under his government. To do so, he had organized an efficient information system, which would allow him to prevent or staunch Mau-Mau attacks. Once, after having obtained information that the Mau-Mau would conduct an affiliation ceremony close to the mission, he convoked some Catholics and others that were loyal to him to surprise the Mau-Mau and arrest them. After this operation, Wanjie was placed on the Mau-Mau's black list and became one of their targets.

By becoming an enemy of the Mau-Mau and having defended his village and the mission of Murang'a from their intervention through the organization of *Home Guards*,<sup>14</sup> Wanjie had also defended those who inhabited the village under his command from reprisals from the colonial government that was fighting the Mau-Mau.

This made it possible, even at the height of the guerrilla movement, to complete construction of a church, which had been interrupted during the war, when the missionaries were held in concentration camps. The Sacred Heart Church was inaugurated on June 28, 1953 with the presence of Christians from Murang'a, the bishop, priests, nuns and seminarians from Nyeri. On the night before the inauguration, Christian youth and men armed with spears, swords, clubs and rifles mounted guard and conducted patrols around the mission, to impede the entrance of the Mau-Mau, who had tried on various occasions to enter the grounds and impede the church's inauguration.

At the church inauguration, Wanjie was awarded the "Cross of the Order of San Silvester." His friend Thuo was also paid homage, and received the "Cruz Pro ecclesia et Pontifice." Both received the crosses from the hands of Bishop Dom Carlo Cavallera.

Wanjie died on June 13, 1961, at the age of 65, leaving wife and nine children.

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13 Adhesion to the Mau-Mau guerrillas was marked by taking an oath. The oath, which had special importance to the Kikuyu, who considered it a public act to be taken by adult and responsible men, and could not be revoked, stirred fear in those who were required to take it under threat and in secret (for more about this see Kershaw, 1997, Lonsdale, 1987, 1990 and 1996 and Droz, 1998 and 2000, among others).

14 The Home Guards were paramilitary militia assembled in the period of the Mau-Mau guerrilla movement to protect farms and villages from guerrilla attacks.

## Conclusion

The text that sought to present the biography of Joseph Wanjie offers a narrative that reflects data from his life, but also relates to events from recent Kenyan history and questions related to the position of the Consolata missionaries in Kenya in the period in which it was written, like the disputes with the Protestants and the threats from the Mau-Mau guerrillas. This can be shown, above all, by the tone in which the events are narrated and the comments made by the narrator.

As we saw in the text, Wanjie's entire biography tends to emphasize his characteristics as a leader or his strength of character. In this sense, Bourdieu (1986) calls attention to a common characteristic of a life story or of ordinary biographies, which is that of presenting a life as a whole that from the beginning involves a type of original design or plan. Bourdieu sees this as a type of trap that should be avoided by a researcher. Instead of remaining tied to the idea of an "original plan," research should look for the connections between the positions occupied by the agent in his trajectory and the social mechanisms that make them possible.

In this way, to understand Joseph Wanjie's trajectory, it is first necessary to consider his social position. That is, it is necessary to consider that, according to the historic and ethnographic bibliography about the Kikuyu, agricultural success is essential for ascension to the status of *mûramati* – a complete or realized man. In this sense, authors such as Kershaw (1997), Lonsdale (1990) and Droz (1998) affirm that land ownership was a theme of primary importance for the Kikuyu, among which a man could only achieve the status of *mûramati*, or that is, of a realized man, if he managed his land well, if one of his sons had been circumcised and if he participated in the rituals, respected the elderly and the traditional interdictions.

Wanjie, according to his biography, was the son of a rich land owner. In addition, according to information also found in his biography, the schools opened by missionaries in Kenya in the first decades of the 20th century were restricted to the sons of chiefs. Thus, Wanjie was only able to attend school because he was the son of someone who had an important position in the Kikuyu social structure.

By approximating to missionaries and having lived for a time at the Murang'a mission, Wanjie was able to insert himself in the Christian world and abandoned his Kikuyu traditions. Nevertheless, despite this possibility,



he chose to follow the traditions of his group, undergoing the circumcision ritual that marked the passage of a youth to adulthood and also marked him as belonging to a certain age group (Droz, 2000). By doing so, Wanjie left open the possibility of becoming a leader, because according to the biography mentioned, only by being circumcised did he could address the other Kikuyu and being heard.

On the other hand, he could not have had access to the public positions that he held if he had not received schooling and simultaneously did not have a position of respect within his group. It was, therefore, this confluence between a high social position within his group and his contacts with the missionaries that made it possible for him to occupy the positions that marked his trajectory.

Another point that I would like to emphasize in Wanjie's biography concerns some issues that run through it, such as polygamy, circumcision, alcoholism and oath taking. These are issues that at times deeply touch the Christian or Kikuyu traditions and appear to constitute important elements of these traditions. Polygamy is a controversial issue for Catholicism, which has a principle of monogamous and indissoluble marriage. In this sense, the fight against polygamy is one of the objectives of the Christian missionaries from the beginning of their missionary work, as found in the reports about the missions or in the bibliography about the Christian missions. Recently, with the adoption of a position that respects the "culture of others," this struggle appears to have lost its priority, but polygamy continues to be a concern for the missionaries.

In relation to circumcision, in the particular case of the Kikuyu, this does not appear to have been a concern of the Consolatinos. The references made to the circumcision ritual in Wanjie's biography, and in the article published about the issue in the magazine *Missioni Consolata*, appear to be closer to an ethnographic description: the ritual was presented as a rite of passage, which is part of the Kikuyu traditions. Nevertheless, the issue of circumcision, both male and female, above all female, according to Droz (2000), was the focus of a campaign led by Protestant missionaries to eradicate this practice, which culminated in its prohibition in Kenya.

Alcoholism, meanwhile, is important to the missionaries who had tried to eradicate it in a number of ways. Nevertheless, in Wanjie's biography, alcoholism was presented as something that destroys people's ability to make

decisions, but the focus was placed above all on Wanjie's ability to convince the Catholic Kikuyu to stop drinking, and to take an oath to do so. According to Lonsdale (1990), the Kikuyu have an oath that must be taken voluntarily by adults, before witnesses and with the consent of relatives and they risk magic sanctions in case of perjury. I do not know if the oath conducted to end the use of alcoholic beverages was done according to the same precepts of traditional Kikuyu oaths, however, it came to occupy an important place among the Consolatina missionary practices, thus demonstrating to have been the fruit of practical relations among Consolatinos and the Kikuyu, in which the agents, by trying to impose their perspectives, engender shared codes in the plane of cultural configurations. (cf. Montero, 2006).

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