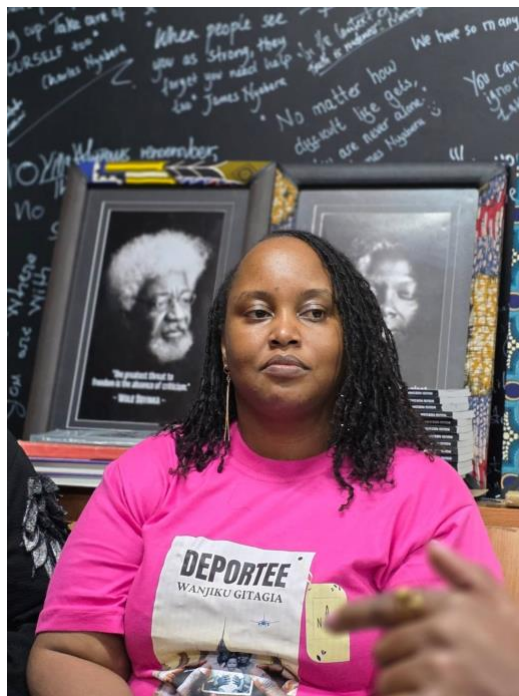




Meeting Report — 6th Session

DEPORTEE by Wanjiku Gitagia



Wanjiku Gitagia, author of Deportee, at the 6th Authors & Writers Book Club meeting, Nuria Books.

Book discussed	Deportee — a novel by Wanjiku Gitagia
Meeting number	6th meeting of the Authors & Writers Book Club
Venue	Nuria Books, Home of African Books, Nairobi
Special guests	1. Kinyanjui Kombani (novelist, playwright, scriptwriter) 2. Social Media Specialist
Copies sold through Authors and Writers Club	15 copies of Deportee

1. Overview of the Meeting

This report documents the 6th meeting of the Authors & Writers Book Club, held at Nuria Books (Home of African Books) in Nairobi. The featured book was *Deportee*, the debut novel of Kenyan writer Wanjiku Gitagia, a contemporary family drama set in Nairobi that follows Kim, a young man who returns home after failing to make it in the United States, only to be pulled into a web of family secrets, wrongful imprisonment, and hidden inheritance inside his mother Sandra's Runda mansion.

As with previous sessions, the club's format moved through four lenses: the author's personal journey from idea to bookshelf, the craft decisions behind the story, the business of publishing and marketing the book, and an open floor discussion among members connecting the novel back to their own works-in-progress. The author, Wanjiku Gitagia, was present throughout and engaged directly with the group's questions.

The session also produced an unplanned highlight: award-winning novelist Kinyanjui Kombani walked into the bookstore mid-session, was introduced to the group, and on learning his wife already owned a copy of *Deportee* sitting on their bookshelf at home, joined the circle. What followed was an extended, practical masterclass on traditional publishing in Kenya, captured in full in Section 5 of this report.

The club was also joined by a Social Media Specialist for the evening, who sat in on the marketing conversation and added practical, hands-on perspective to the group's discussion of genre marketing, faceless authors, free-copy strategy, and what a working relationship with a social media strategist actually looks like for an author. That contribution is woven into Section 6 of this report.

Through this book club, the author went on to sell 15 copies of *Deportee* in total. The full breakdown of that result is covered in Section 7.

2. About the Book

Deportee — Wanjiku Gitagia

Genre: Contemporary Family Drama | *Setting: Nairobi, Kenya*

A homecoming built on secrets.

Kim returns to Kenya after failing to make it in the United States, moving into the shadow of his mother Sandra's Runda mansion, wealthy, cold, and openly ashamed of him. As Kim sinks further into humiliation and self-doubt, the household around him is not what it seems: a quietly watchful house help, a family fortune with a buried history, and a wrongful imprisonment that connects everyone in the house to a truth Kim has never been told.

Core cast

- Kim: the returnee, humiliated and unraveling, who doesn't yet know his own real story.
- Sandra: the 'ice queen' mother figure: cold, wealthy, and carrying secrets of her own.
- Wangui: the house help who sees everything, and is far more than she appears.
- Njoro & Lisa: the buried family history: a wrongful imprisonment and a hidden parentage.

Themes explored

- Identity & belonging
- Class & wealth
- Family secrets

- Justice & redemption
- The deportee experience

A note on spoilers: the novel builds to a reveal-driven third act, so the club's questions, and this report, stay close to craft, process, and theme rather than the specific mechanics of the ending, so that members who have not yet finished the book are not spoiled.

3. In Conversation with the Author

The following is a summary of the discussion between the book club and Wanjiku Gitagia.

Meet the Author

Q: What pulled you toward this particular story, as a first novel?

A: Wanjiku explained that the idea grew out of things she had witnessed and heard about at close range, the quiet shame carried by people who leave for the United States full of promise and come back having 'failed' by the measure everyone back home is watching them against. She wanted to write toward that specific, under-discussed humiliation rather than a more triumphant homecoming story.

Character Development

Q: Did any character change significantly from your first draft to the version we read?

A: Wanjiku noted that Kim himself changed the most, early drafts had him more openly self-pitying, and editorial feedback pushed her to let his shame show through behavior and silence rather than direct narration, making him more sympathetic without excusing him.

Structure & POV

Q: Why present tense, and why close third instead of first person, for Kim's chapters?

A: She chose present tense and close third, she said, to trap the reader inside Kim's spiral in real time, first person felt too self-aware for a character who doesn't yet understand his own situation, while present tense removed the safety of hindsight.

Plot & Pacing

Q: The big reveals arrive largely through dialogue in the final act, was that a deliberate pacing choice?

A: Yes, she confirmed, she wanted the truth to arrive the way most family secrets actually do, spoken aloud in a room, under pressure, rather than through documents or narrated exposition, because that felt truer to how households like this one actually break their silences.

Themes & Setting

Q: Why tell this particular story through the lens of a deportee, rather than someone who never left?

A: She explained that the deportee's return creates an outsider's eye on a family that insiders have stopped questioning.....Kim notices what a character who never left might no longer see, which let the novel examine the household with fresh suspicion.

4. Crafting, Editing & Publishing

The Editing Journey

Q: How many drafts did *Deportee* go through before you considered it finished?

A: Wanjiku said the manuscript went through several full drafts, she added, removed scenes, with the middle stretch of the book requiring the most substantial rewriting to keep pace and tension consistent.

Q: Did you work with an editor, critique partners, or a writing group and what did they push you to change?

A: She confirmed working with both an editor, who consistently pushed her to trust the reader more to cut explanatory passages and let scenes and dialogue carry meaning instead of telling readers what to feel.

Publishing Path

Q: Why did you choose this particular publishing route for your debut, and what were the alternatives you weighed?

A: Wanjiku shared that she weighed traditional publishing against self-publishing and chose the path that let her retain more control.

Q: What did the submission or production process actually look like, week to week?

A: She described a process of manuscript preparation, editing rounds, cover design, and formatting that stretched over several months, with long stretches of waiting between milestones, a pace she said is common and worth planning for.

Q: What would you do differently if you were starting the publishing process again today?

A: Wanjiku said she would build her marketing and reader community earlier, well before launch day, rather than starting that work once the book was already printed.

Marketing & Readership

Q: What marketing efforts actually moved the needle, versus what you expected to work?

A: In-person events, book club invitations like this one, signings, and direct networking.

Q: How did you approach reviews, interviews, and book club invitations like this one?

A: Wanjiku said she said yes to nearly every invitation early on, treating each book club, interview, or review request as both a sales opportunity and a chance to get direct reader feedback on what was landing.

Q: What does a realistic marketing timeline look like for a debut novelist, from your experience?

A: She outlined a mix that has worked for her: book clubs, in-store book signings, micro-influencer book reviews, sustained networking within writing circles, and pursuing formal recognitions such as Library of Congress registration for the title and treating marketing as a long tail rather than a single launch-week push.

Q: What's one marketing lesson you'd pass on to a writer about to launch their first book?

A: Start building your platform and your reader relationships before the book is finished, not after, an audience takes far longer to grow than a manuscript takes to write.

“The book club actually worked through a lot more ground than what made it into the report.”

5. Surprise Guest: Kinyanjui Kombani on Traditiong Publishing

Midway through the session, celebrated Kenyan novelist, playwright, scriptwriter, and literary activist Kinyanjui Kombani walked into Nuria Books and was introduced to the group. In a fitting coincidence, his wife had already bought a copy of *Deportee*, and he had seen it sitting on their bookshelf at home. He joined the circle, and the club spent the next stretch of the evening picking his brain for book marketing and publishing lessons.

Kinyanjui has authored over 16 books. His latest release, *Dear Mama*, is currently a national school set book, a milestone that anchored much of the discussion below about how traditional publishing works in Kenya.

Five Lessons from Kinyanjui Kombani

1. Traditional publishing calls for zero upfront cost with editorial compromise

Kinyanjui said he has never paid out-of-pocket to publish any of his books. The trade-off is that the publisher requests edits and changes through a back-and-forth process, working to reshape the manuscript into a commercially viable product for *Dear Mama*, that meant shaping it to fit the target market for school curricula.

Why it matters: Traditional publishers such as Longhorn, East African Educational Publishers, or Oxford University Press absorb 100% of the financial risk: editing, graphic design, layout, printing, ISBN acquisition, and legal deposit copies. In exchange, authors give up some editorial control and time: evaluation can take months, and the publisher has final say on title, cover art, and structural edits to match market demand.

2. Built-in nationwide distribution networks

The publisher handles distribution operationally, placing physical books into brick-and-mortar bookstores and moving them into the wider market.

Why it matters: Distribution is the main bottleneck for self-published authors in Kenya. Traditional houses have longstanding supply-chain relationships with major bookstore chains (such as Text Book Centre), institutional distributors, regional shops, and school supply vendors. Infrastructure capable of moving thousands of physical units across all 47 counties.

3. The annual royalty model

Kinyanjui receives royalty payments at year-end based on total net copies sold. A royalty is the author's percentage cut of income generated from book sales, paid out periodically by the publisher.

- In traditional Kenyan publishing, author royalty rates typically range from 8% to 12% of the retail cover price (or net wholesale revenue).
- On a KES 1,000 book: roughly 35% goes to printing/production, 35% to the retail bookstore/distributor, 20% to the publisher for operational overhead, and about 10% (KES 100) goes to the author as royalty.
- In Kenya, royalties are usually calculated and paid annually (or semi-annually), alongside statement reports detailing total copies printed versus sold.

4. Direct marketing and institutional pitching

Even with a traditional publisher behind him, Kinyanjui actively markets his own books. For example, visiting schools directly to pitch *Dear Mama* and directing schools to order bulk copies straight from his publisher.

Why it matters: Traditional publishers handle macro-distribution, but personal marketing by the author is what moves the needle on high-volume institutional sales.

5. The author as a reseller buying at a discount

Under a traditional contract, an author who wants to sell copies independently, at book launches, personal events, or directly within their network, acts as a reseller, purchasing their own books back from the publisher at a trade discount.

Why it matters: Standard contracts grant the publisher exclusive commercial distribution rights, but publishers typically offer authors a bulk discount of 25% to 40% off the cover price. If an author buys at a 35% discount and sells directly at full price at an event, they pocket that margin immediately, rather than waiting for the annual royalty payout.

Additional context shared with the group

- The Educational / KICD Golden Standard: the primary financial driver for traditional publishers in Kenya is the school market (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) approval. Set books generate substantially higher volume sales than general trade fiction, which is why having Dear Mama on the school syllabus is so commercially significant.
- Contract & rights ownership: traditional publishing deals typically grant the publisher exclusive distribution rights for a set period, often 3 to 5 years, or the duration of copyright. Authors trade some agility (compared to self-publishing) for prestige, institutional access, and wide print distribution.

6. Marketing & the Business of Books

Beyond the author Q&A and Kinyanjui's contribution, a significant part of the afternoon was devoted to a broader conversation about how authors and writers market their books across genres, and what it looks like to work with a social media strategist. A summary of that discussion follows.

Marketing different books across genres

The group discussed how marketing approaches shift depending on genre and category, since a single playbook does not fit every kind of book:

- Literary and family drama titles (like *Deportee*) tend to rely more heavily on book clubs, personal storytelling, reviews, and word-of-mouth from readers who connect emotionally with the themes.
- School set books and educational titles depend almost entirely on institutional marketing. Pitching directly to schools, aligning with curriculum bodies, and securing KICD approval, rather than consumer-facing campaigns.
- Non-fiction and personal-development titles often market through practical, conversation-driven content, talks, podcast interviews, and platforms where the author's expertise is the draw.

The consistent thread across genres, the group agreed, is that marketing should match where that book's natural readers already gather, rather than authors trying to run every channel at once.

Faceless authors

The club also touched on the growing trend of 'faceless' authors -- writers who publish and market their books without building a personal public persona, often relying on pen names, branded pages, or publisher-led marketing rather than their own visibility.

- Advantages discussed: privacy, the ability to write across genres or under multiple identities without audience confusion, and separating the author's personal life from their public work.
- Trade-offs discussed: slower organic community-building, since so much of book discovery today runs through personal trust in an author's voice and presence; faceless authors typically need to lean more heavily on strong cover design, packaging, ad spend, or a publisher's distribution muscle to compensate for the absence of a personal following.

The group generally agreed that for debut authors in particular, having a visible, relatable presence remains one of the most cost-effective marketing assets available, though it is not the only viable path.

How many books to give out for free

A practical question raised was how many copies an author should realistically give away for free, to reviewers, influencers, media, and early readers, versus how many to sell.

- Review and press copies: a small, targeted batch (often somewhere in the range of 5–15 copies) sent to credible reviewers, journalists, or established book bloggers tends to generate more return than a wide, untargeted giveaway.
- Micro-influencer copies: gifting copies to a handful of engaged micro-influencers in relevant reading communities was discussed as often more effective than one large giveaway, since micro-influencers tend to have higher engagement and trust with smaller, more relevant audiences.
- Giveaways and competitions: occasional giveaways (for example, tied to a launch event or social media competition) can build buzz, but the group cautioned against over-relying on free copies, since each one given away is also a lost sale and lost royalty. Wanjiku advised that when printing out the copies, always factor in the 5-15 copies as extra for giveaway purpose.
- The general guidance shared: treat free copies as a marketing investment with an expected return. Ask what each copy is meant to generate (a review, a post, institutional interest) rather than giving books away without a specific goal.

Working with a social media strategist

A notable part of the discussion focused on what authors and writers stand to gain from working with a social media strategist, rather than managing their own promotion ad hoc. The group identified several concrete gains:

- A content calendar and consistency: strategists build a structured posting plan around key dates: pre-launch teasers, launch week, book club and event coverage, and ongoing 'evergreen' content, instead of the inconsistent posting most authors default to on their own.
- Platform-specific strategy: matching content to where a book's actual readers spend time (for example, Instagram and TikTok for visual, younger-skewing reader communities; X/Twitter and LinkedIn for thought-leadership and non-fiction; Facebook groups for many Kenyan book club and reading communities) rather than posting the same content everywhere.
- Turning the manuscript into shareable content: excerpting quotable lines, designing quote cards, short-form video hooks (a 30-second 'reveal' teaser, a behind-the-scenes writing clip), and reading-guide graphics that make the book easy for readers to share on the author's behalf.
- Building and nurturing a reader community: strategists help convert one-time buyers into a following, email lists, WhatsApp or Telegram reader groups, and recurring engagement (polls, character quizzes, Q&A sessions) that keeps readers engaged between books rather than only around a single launch.

- Data and analytics: tracking which posts, formats, or campaigns actually convert to sales or bulk institutional orders, so marketing spend and time go toward what is proven to work rather than guesswork.
- Managing paid promotion: running and optimizing small paid ad campaigns (boosted posts, targeted ads) more efficiently than most authors can on their own, since a strategist understands audience targeting and budget pacing.

The group's overall takeaway was that a social media strategist is a valuable not for 'growing numbers' in the abstract, but for converting an author's existing following and book content into a repeatable system, one that supports every future book, not just the current launch.

7. Sales Result

Through this book club, Wanjiku Gitagia was able to sell 15 copies of *Deportee* in total. Of these, 8 copies were sold within the month of July, a direct result of the momentum, word-of-mouth, and personal connections built through this Authors and Writers Whatsapp Group, while the remaining copies were bought earlier, when the author had her books on offer.

8. Photo Gallery – 6th Book Club Meeting



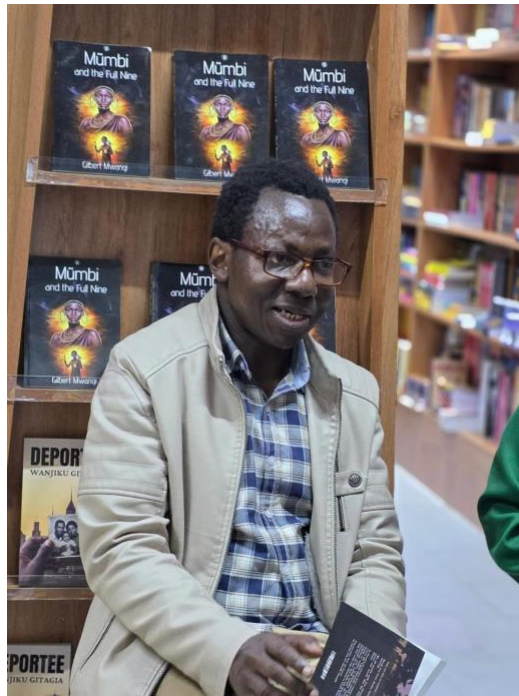
*Wanjiku Gitagia, author of *Deportee*, wearing the book's own cover art on her t-shirt.*



A book club member – Irene Muiruri, author of Love Will Not Be Enough, a contemporary African romantic suspense novel.



A book club member, Celestine Ajiambo, author of Infant Church. She is also a Religion History Author



Poet and Writer, Khainga O'Okwemba and the Founder of 'The Books Café' – a literary radio show on KBC English Service hosted, produced and presented by him.



Kinyanjui Kombani, celebrated Kenyan novelist and author of Dear Mama, who joined the circle after being introduced by the group.



A book club member, Dr. Tabby Musyoki – Author of Breaking the Orphan Spirit(a christian spiritual formation/faith-based workbook) and Mika's Big Feeling (a children's book)



A book club member, Jeff Waitthaka – a Book-Fluencer and a lover of books, supporting Kenyan Authors



The group at the entrance of Nuria Books — Home of African Books — with Wanjiku Gitagia (center-right, pink shirt) and fellow book club member and authors

10. Closing Note

To Wanjiku Gitagia, and to every writer in the room. Keep writing. Keep editing. Keep showing up for each other — the way this book club does.

This concludes the report for the 6th meeting of the Authors & Writers Book Club. The club looks forward to its next session, carrying forward the craft, publishing, and marketing lessons captured here, from *Deportee*, from Kinyanjui Kombani's masterclass on traditional publishing, and from the group's own ongoing conversation about how writers find their readers.