

***The Tale of The Secret Kenyan Birth of Barack Obama Jr.:
A Strange Story of a Transatlantic Telephone Call, a Fateful
Confusion Over the Meaning of the Word "Present", and a Brief
Excursion Into the Wonderful World of Conspiracy Theory in
American Politics***

or

***A Full and Complete Transcription of a Phone Call between Ron
McRae and Sarah Onyango Obama of Kenya on Oct. 16, 2008,
which has been wrongly alleged to contain a statement by Barack
Obama Jr.'s grandmother that Barack Obama Jr. was born in
Kenya
with notes, analysis, and commentary***

Greg Doudna

Dec. 9, 2008

published at www.lulu.com

Sarah Obama never said, nor was quoted as saying, nor intended to say, in this phone conversation that she was "present when Barack Obama Jr. was born in Kenya."

Eighty-seven-year old Sarah Onyango Obama of Kogelo, Kenya, located in eastern Kenya near the border with Uganda, is the matriarch of the Kenyan Obama relatives on Barack Obama Jr.'s father's side. "Grandma Sarah", or Mrs. Obama as she will be called here, is the step-grandmother of Barack

Obama Jr., hereafter often referred to simply as "Obama". Mrs. Obama raised Obama's father, Barack Obama Sr., as a child in Kogelo. Mrs. Obama has been featured in a number of news stories focusing on her great happiness that her grandson was running for President of the United States. Despite her age, she was filmed dancing and singing with others of the village at the news of Barack Obama's election victory.

Bishop Ron McRae, an American open-air evangelist from Pennsylvania, called the Sarah Obama household on October 16, 2008. The Kenyan Obama compound at that moment was described as packed with dozens or possibly hundreds of Kenyans, including Kenyan police security. Far away in America, Barack Obama Jr., the Democratic Party candidate for President of the United States, had just finished his third presidential debate with his Republican rival John McCain and was favored to win the Presidency of the world's most powerful country. Those present at the Sarah Obama house had probably watched the debate hours earlier on a solar-powered television (there is no electricity in impoverished Kogelo).

One of those present in the Sarah Obama household was an African contact of McRae, "Brother Tom". Brother Tom is elsewhere identified by McRae as Kweli Shuhubia, said to be a Kenyan evangelist living in the vicinity. Brother Tom set up the phone call between McRae and Sarah Obama. McRae asked that the phone call be put on a speakerphone. McRae then talked with Mrs. Obama through translators in Swahili for 14 minutes. It is unlikely the Kenyan Obamas knew they were being taped.

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In this conversation McRae sought to obtain evidence on tape in support of a conspiracy theory circulating in certain right-wing circles in America, namely, that Barack Obama Jr. was not born in Hawaii in 1961 as represented, but actually was secretly born in Kenya. According to this theory, Obama's mother, then-18 year old Ann Dunham, waited until about seven or eight months into her pregnancy to take a grueling transcontinental flight halfway across the world to Kenya, there to discover that because of her pregnancy she was not allowed by an airline to get on the plane back to the US, and so was forced to have her baby--the future President of the United States--in a hospital in Kenya. Motivated by a desire to ensure that her child would be regarded as a US citizen with all rights thereof, she or

fellow-conspirator family members plotted to have little Barry Jr.'s birth recorded in Hawaii as if it happened in Hawaii, including placing a notice in a Honolulu newspaper of the birth which was published a few days later.

The plot succeeded (so the story goes), and the secret of the true circumstances of Barack Obama Jr.'s birth in Kenya was closely held by the family, so much so that neither Ann Dunham nor any other family member ever spoke of a trip of Ann Dunham to Kenya in all the years since. All would have remained well for Barack Obama Jr. (the story continues) if he had not decided to run for President of the United States. Here the plot thickens. For the new bouncing half-white, half-black baby boy of 1961, born to Ann Dunham following her relationship with a charismatic older black African fellow student at the University of Hawaii and briefly her husband, Barack Obama Sr., showed ambition at an early age. A kindergarten teacher of Obama fondly recalled that young Obama had modestly announced at that tender age that he aspired to become President of the United States when he grew up.¹

Alas, the youngster's lofty dream was headed for a train wreck in the year 2008, when against all odds he in fact was elected President of the United States. For the will of the people notwithstanding, the United States Constitution--that set of legal constraints wisely set in place by the framers to protect the new republic from runaway fickle democratic fervor--contains a requirement that Presidents of the United States be not only citizens, but "natural born" United States citizens. Those alleging that Barack Obama Jr. was secretly born in Kenya believe his secret Kenyan birth disqualifies him from being President.

The story of the secret Kenyan birth has such mystery and dramatic appeal that it is almost painful to have to point out that there are blemishes to the theory, the leading one being a complete and total lack of evidence, or statement of a firsthand witness, of any kind in support of the theory, with the alleged exception of the phone call which is the subject of the present discussion. No witness, document, evidence, or testimony has been produced which locates Ann Dunham anywhere outside the United States at any time in her life prior to 1967, when she and young Barack Jr. went to

¹ "Iis Darmawan, 63, Senator Obama's kindergarten teacher, remembers him as an exceptionally tall and curly haired child who quickly picked up the local language and had sharp math skills. He wrote an essay titled, 'I Want To Become President,' the teacher said" (*Associated Press* wire service story, Jan. 25, 2007).

live for several years in Indonesia.² Neither the outgoing Bush administration, the Republican Party, the McCain campaign, nor any of Obama's earlier rivals for the Democratic nomination disclosed any awareness of evidence that Obama was born in Kenya, or in any other way ineligible to be President. Yet the notion is fervently believed, like an urban legend that will not die. This is the background to the issue surrounding the Oct. 16, 2008 phone call of Ron McRae to Sarah Obama. For this phone call is claimed to be *the* missing evidence for the theory.

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As noted, on Oct. 16, 2008 the American minister Ron McRae called the Obama household in Kenya, evidently from his home in Pennsylvania, with the help of his on-location contact "Brother Tom", also known as Kweli Shuhubia. In the days following the October 16 phone call, Shuhubia went searching elsewhere in Kenya for incriminating documents proving that Obama had been born in Kenya and sent emails to McRae seeking sums of money necessary to pry open the necessary documents from their top secret sources. Excerpts from these emails, which give the impression of being reports from someone on a paid assignment, were included as attachments to court filings associated with a lawsuit filed by Philip Berg of Pennsylvania challenging Obama's legitimacy to be President. There is no information on whether McRae responded to the requests from his African contact for money, or whether if he did he received anything back of value. In any event, apart from the unsubstantiated claims of sensational top secret documents in Kenya in Shuhubia's emails requesting money, no evidence

² David Weigel summarizes in *Slate* magazine: "There is no record of Dunham *ever* traveling to Kenya, much less the year after the Mau Mau rebellion ended, when she was pregnant and when she had no disposable income to speak of. 'Ann's mother would have gone ballistic if her daughter had even mentioned traveling to Kenya in the final stages of pregnancy,' says David Mendell, author of the biography *Obama: From Promise to Power*. Reached by phone, Ron McRae doesn't claim to know when or how Dunham got to Kenya, only that she gave birth in a Third World country because 'she didn't want to take a chance on that flight back' and that 'everyone in Kenya' knows this. If so, they've kept it a pretty solid secret from the international reporters who've visited the country since Obama rose to prominence" (David Weigel, "Change They Can Litigate", Dec. 4, 2004, *Slate* [www.slate.com]).

has come to light proving Obama was born in Kenya.³

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Nearly two months earlier, on August 21, 2008, a Pennsylvania attorney and a former deputy attorney general for Pennsylvania, Philip Berg, had filed a suit in the US District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania charging that "Obama's grandmother on his father's side, half brother and half sister claim Obama was born in Kenya. Reports reflect Obama's mother went to Kenya during her pregnancy . . . Stanley Ann Dunham (Obama) gave birth to Obama in Kenya, after which she flew to Hawaii and registered Obama's birth." Berg provided no documents or statements from relatives of Obama or any other witness either in his court filing or to the public, backing up these allegations. There was a very logical, if trivial, reason why he did not make publicly available any evidence or statements of witnesses for these allegations; he said that he had none. He claimed the evidence for his claims existed elsewhere. Berg would not identify who told him these things concerning Obama for which he personally had no evidence. But trust him, Berg said, the charges were *true*. Although they hadn't let on to the public yet, world leaders knew the truth of Obama's Kenyan birth, claimed Berg: "*world leaders at this point--because I've talked to people over in England, over in Europe, they're aware of the situation, they say 100% he was born in Kenya, therefore they're not going to want to deal with him as president . . . world leaders know he's not qualified.*"⁴ (Berg never disclosed the identities of the highly placed world figures he said were telling him 100% that Obama was born in Kenya.)

³ Shuhubia refers to his investigation, which appears to involve minimally travel and lodging expenses, as an "operation", an "assignment", and writes McRae asking "let me get the next course of action"; these are interspersed with allusions to requests to McRae for additional funds. My favorite line in Shuhubia's emails: "From what [Obama's] brother in Huruma-Nairobi says verbally he refused 2000US Dollars from Dr. Jerome Corsi, a white American who wanted to bribe him to get the same information but was immediately deported on [7-10-2008] by the Kenyan Government. According to him if we can raise ten times that amount then he is willing to help." (Shuhubia's emails can be seen at http://www.americasright.com/2008_11_01_archive.html.)

⁴ Philip Berg on the Alex Jones show ("Alex Jones Interviews Philip Berg", <http://obambi.wordpress.com/2008/10/16/alex-jones-interviews-phil-berg/> [Part I at 6:03; Part II at 1:09]).

The inclusion of the allegations in a lawsuit made them newsworthy and credible to some right-wing blogs and talk radio shows. A determined coterie of believers in the Obama secret birth conspiracy began to grow. The story gained traction.

Early hopes for the Berg lawsuit were dashed on October 24, 2008 when US District Judge R. Barclay Surrick rudely dismissed Berg's suit, stating that Berg's attempts to gain standing to pursue the case were "frivolous and not worthy of discussion." However the summary dismissal of the lawsuit was but a minor setback in the view of a growing number of believers intent on exposing to the American public the astonishing fraud they believed Barack Obama had perpetrated upon the American people, and in the process saving the United States from the hellish disasters, possibly of biblical proportions, that many of the believers believed a Barack Obama presidency would usher in.

On Oct. 30, 2008 Berg filed an appeal of Judge Surrick's decision, a Petition for a Writ of Certiorari, to the US Supreme Court.

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A new development happened on October 23, 2008. Berg now claimed on the Michael Savage radio program that he had in his possession and would produce in the next day or two a tape of a phone call which was evidence, he said, that Barack Obama Jr. was born in Kenya. As reported by the online WorldNetDaily.com,

Berg claimed on Oct. 23, 2008 on the Michael Savage program that "There has been a real sham [from Obama] pulled off for the past 20 months. I'll release it [the tape] in a day or two, affidavits from her [Grandma Sarah Obama] talking to a certain person. I heard the tape. She was speaking [to someone] here in the United States." Berg said the telephone call was from Obama's paternal grandmother affirming she "was in the delivery room in Kenya when he was born Aug. 4, 1961."

Berg's sensational claim occurred a little over one week before election day, Nov. 4, 2008, when American voters would elect the next president of the United States. Without the promised tape or transcript itself, the blogs

excitedly reported Berg's description of what he was promising to produce. On the weekend prior to the voting of Tuesday, Nov. 4, Berg released the tape of the Oct. 16 phone call between McRae and Sarah Obama and a written transcript of the first part of that tape which he characterized as including a statement from Barack Obama's grandmother that Barack Obama Jr. was born in Kenya. At last! (some thought)--a first production of actual evidence! The partial transcript was widely circulated virally on the internet through right-wing anti-Obama sites. Most people found the recording difficult to understand, but the transcript received attention. There it was, right on the transcript, the question put to Barack Obama's Kenyan grandmother and her answer:

Ron McRae: Was she present when he was born in Kenya?

Translator: Yes. She says, "Yes she was! She was present when Obama was born."

The believers in the Kenyan birth theory were ecstatic. What more need be said? It was the smoking gun (so it was thought). Grandma Sarah Obama had never been out of Kenya in her life. But here she had revealed the truth so long concealed, *and they had it on tape*. She had been present when Obama was born--*that is what she said*--evoking images of grandma right there in the hospital room, perhaps changing diapers in the days to follow, perhaps taking the young white girl under her wing until the newlyweds were ready to return to America . . . *it was now clear* (the believers thought). Obama had been born in Kenya, the Hawaii birth story was a lie, and Obama's biography a conspiracy of epic proportions. Obama would be constitutionally forbidden from taking office and America would be spared the horrors of an Obama presidency, case closed. Or so it was represented.

On Oct. 30, 2008 Berg included his transcript of the McRae phone call as an attachment to his Supreme Court appeal. It was his prize piece of evidence. Berg informed the Supreme Court: "The Birth of Obama in Kenya has been verified."⁵

⁵ Philip Berg, "Petition for a Writ of Certiorari", Oct. 30, 2008, p. 9.

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On November 4 a massive turnout of American voters elected Barack Obama Jr. the 44th President of the United States, and the first African-American to attain the office. Television cameras showed tens of thousands celebrating in Chicago the evening of Obama's victory, and an iconic shot of Jesse Jackson standing in the crowd with tears pouring down his cheeks weeping for joy reflected the hearts of millions. I cried myself. After eight years of almost unrelenting dark days and horrors of the Bush era, there was a ray of hope for a better day in America, maybe even a better world. I was not entirely immune from conspiracy theories myself; up until practically the last moment I had half expected the Republicans to steal the election. But it had not happened. Obama had actually *won*. Tomorrow, the hard work would start, and no doubt disappointments. Nothing would come easy. But the moment was worth savoring.

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On Nov. 12, 2008, attorneys for the unsuccessful 2008 American Independent Party candidate for President, former US Ambassador to the United Nations Alan Keyes, filed a "Petition for Writ of Mandate" with the Superior Court of California in Sacramento County. Referring to the transcript of the phone call between McRae and Sarah Obama of Oct. 16, the Petition noted that "Mr. Berg provided documents [to the Supreme Court] to the effect that Senator Obama was born in what is now Kenya . . . and that his paternal grandmother was present at his birth". The Petition characterized as a "fact" that Obama's paternal grandmother stated that "she was present during [his] birth . . . [she] affirmed that she 'was in the delivery room in Kenya when he was born Aug. 4, 1961.'"⁶ The suit sought an injunction to prohibit California's 55 electors from voting for Obama in the electoral college vote scheduled for Dec. 15, 2008 unless documentary proof was received and verified by the California Secretary of State that the allegations were false and that Obama was affirmatively proven to be a "natural born citizen" by a series of tests not required of any previous President-elect.

⁶ Keyes et al., "Petition for Writ of Mandate", Nov. 12, 2008, section 79.

The rationale for the higher standard of proof demanded in the case of Barack Obama was principally the existence of the allegations themselves in the lawsuits of Berg and others, which "in and of themselves, demonstrate Petitioners' argument that reasonable doubt exists as to the eligibility of the Democratic Party's nominee for President".⁷ (Earlier, in 2004, Alan Keyes had been the Republican candidate for US Senator of Illinois defeated by Barack Obama Jr.)

On Dec. 1, 2008 an organization called "We the People Foundation" ran a full-page ad in the *Chicago Tribune* entitled "An Open Letter to Barack Obama: Are You a Natural Citizen of the U.S.?" It claimed "compelling evidence" that Obama was "barred from holding the office of President by the 'natural born citizen' clause of the U.S. Constitution . . . your grandmother is recorded on tape saying she attended your birth in Kenya". Addressing Obama, the letter warned, "All state Electors are now on Notice that unless you provide documentary evidence before December 15, that conclusively establishes your eligibility, they cannot cast a vote for you without committing treason to the Constitution." The same group published similar full-page ads in the *Washington Times*, *USA Today*, and other major US newspapers. Major news media began reporting on the ads.

This is the background to the significance of the Oct. 16, 2008 phone call of Ron McRae and Sarah Obama. What really happened in that phone call? Did Sarah Obama *really say that*?

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The transcript of the Oct. 16, 2008 McRae phone call to Sarah Obama included as an attachment to the Berg Supreme Court filing is widely available on the internet.⁸ But that transcript covers only the first 5:02 minutes of the 14:02 minute complete conversation. To the best of my knowledge, despite the discussion and court filings this phone call has generated, no transcript of the remaining 9 minutes of the conversation between McRae and Sarah Obama, which is to say the final 64% of that phone call, has been made available until now. This is to say, the transcript

⁷ Keyes et al., "Petition for Writ of Mandate", Nov. 12, 2008, section 63.

⁸ For example, "America's Right" blog, Nov. 2, 2008, at http://www.americasright.com/2008_11_01_archive.html.

here is the first publication of a full transcript of the entire telephone conversation.

What the full transcript shows

The full tape transcription makes clear that this phone conversation has not been represented accurately. There never was a statement by Sarah Obama at any point in this phone call saying or intending to say that Barack Obama Jr. was born in Kenya. Sarah Obama herself said that Obama was born in Hawaii and never said differently. There was a confusion over the meaning of where Mrs. Obama was "present" when Obama was born in Hawaii, but not over whether Obama was born in Hawaii. The Berg lawsuit affidavit transcript quotes a portion of the phone call in which, according to the Berg transcript, Sarah Obama answered that she was "present" when Obama was born (actually others speaking for Mrs. Obama, not Mrs. Obama, may have given that particular answer). But the Berg transcript omits the rest of the phone call which shows the sense intended was not that *Barack Obama Jr. was born in Kenya*, but rather that *Mrs. Obama was present in Kenya when Barack Obama Jr. was born in Hawaii*.

Also, a widely-circulated claim that family members of Sarah Obama sought to conceal or cover up what Sarah Obama communicated in this phone call is seen to be without any basis. According to McRae's account, after Mrs. Obama said Barack Obama Jr. was born in Kenya, family members around Mrs. Obama contradicted and covered up her statement, but Mrs. Obama herself (claimed McRae) remained firm on the point. This is completely untrue. A study of the transcript of the complete phone call shows not the slightest evidence that Mrs. Obama disagreed with anything said by her relatives on this point, or that relatives were blocking or contradicting Mrs. Obama's statements or intentions.

Throughout the conversation the Kenyan Obamas are oblivious that McRae's phone call is designed to try to get a statement on tape that Barack Obama Jr. was born in Kenya for use in a lawsuit intended to obstruct Barack Obama Jr. from becoming president of the United States. They think the caller, McRae, is simply confused. They try to the best of their ability to clear up his confusion and misunderstanding, attempting to be helpful. Mrs. Obama and her relatives are warm and courteous, welcoming the unknown American minister to come visit, both before and after the exchange. Their

unfailingly gracious and welcoming words to McRae, their lack of guardedness or caution or abrupt termination of the conversation at any point, are consistent with openness, not concealment or lying or deception. In short, the Kenyan Obamas had no clue that anything was happening in this conversation other than a simple misunderstanding on the American's part, which they labored to clear up.

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The transcript that follows with accompanying notes was made by me on the basis of the recording available on the internet.⁹ The transcript is accurate and complete to the best of my ability. For the record, I detect no sign of tampering in the recording, and I accept it as and believe it to be an accurate artifact of the event.

Greg Doudna
Dec. 9, 2008

Greg Doudna received an M.A. in Near Eastern Studies from Cornell and a Dr. Theology from the University of Copenhagen, and has produced a number of scholarly publications on the Dead Sea Scrolls focusing on restoration of ancient broken texts, including 4Q Peshar Nahum: A Critical Edition (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

⁹ The recording of the Oct. 16, 2008 McRae phone call with Sarah Obama is available, for example, at Jeff Schreiber, "America's Right" blog, <http://s16v.com/americasright/8167169.wma>.

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(Phone ringing.)

BROTHER TOM: Hello.

MCRAE: Uh, Bother Tom. Brother Tom, this is Brother McRae.

BROTHER TOM: Yes.

MCRAE: OK, how are you today?

BROTHER TOM: Oh, we are OK. How are you?

MCRAE: I am doing very well. You said you are there with, uh, uh, uh, Barack Obama's grandmother.

BROTHER TOM: Yes, yeah I'm, I am just at the home now with everybody here. We are, uh, we're waiting to talk to you a rather long conversation, and uh, ask things of you in America there. Vitalis Akech¹⁰ comes from a very, uh, Vitalis is from a good family and he is ready to talk.¹¹

¹⁰ Vitalis Akech Ogombe, known in this transcription as "Translator Ogombe". Ogombe is identified in an Australian news story as the "chairman of St. Richard Catholic Church" (<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2008/s2408535.htm>) and in the McRae affidavit attached to the Berg case as the "Kogelo Community Chairman". He identifies himself later in this phone call as a grandson of Sarah Obama. According to the McRae affidavit Ogombe is a step-grandson of Sarah Obama and a cousin of Barack Obama Jr.

¹¹ Affidavit transcription: "Yes, I am just in the home now. She is right here. We're,

MCRAE: Well good. Uh, she's not there at, at the present?

BROTHER TOM: Yes, she is here right now.

VOICE (in background): But she is unable to speak (unintelligible¹²).

MCRAE: OK.

BROTHER TOM: But she is not able to speak English.

MCRAE: Is--

BROTHER TOM: Yes.

MCRAE: Is it possible to speak to her?

BROTHER TOM: Yes, if you can put all your questions in, oh, ah, only me to, to--see, she only understands, and to know and speak Swahili.¹³

MCRAE: Uh, is it possible for you to put her on the speakerphone and translate for me?

BROTHER TOM: Yes. Yeah, yeah I can do that.

we're waiting to talk in a uh long conversation. And [unintelligible] a good family and she is ready to talk."

¹² Final word or two lost. May be "at all" or "English".

¹³ The speaker's statement that Sarah Obama only speaks Swahili evidently intends to mean "in contrast to English". Sarah Obama's native language is Luo, with Swahili a second language for her. An affidavit from Kweli Shuhubia ("Brother Tom") filed with the Berg lawsuit describes the procedure followed: "During the interview conversation, one of Ms. Obama's grandsons and myself acted as Swahili translators, and as Bishop McRae talked to and questioned Ms. Obama, we would translate what Bishop McRae said to Ms. Obama in Swahili, and then we would translate her Swahili responses to Bishop McRae in English. Ms. Obama can fluently speak Swahili in her native dialect, but cannot read or write." This somewhat differs from what *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof apparently was told during a visit he took to Sarah Obama's home in Kogelo in February 2008: "she speaks only her Luo tribal language and a little Swahili" (N. Kristof, "Obama's Kenyan Roots", *New York Times*, Feb. 24, 2008).

MCRAE: OK.

(sound of equipment moving)

BROTHER TOM: Yes?

MCRAE: OK?

BROTHER TOM: Yeah, OK.

(Brother Tom in background speaking in foreign language)

MCRAE: Ah--

(Mrs. Obama's voice in the background in a foreign language)

MCRAE: Miss--

(voices in background)

MCRAE: Miss Obama--

(Foreign language in background continues, and Mrs. Obama.)

VOICE (in background): McRae.

MCRAE: Uh, Mrs. Obama, my name is Bishop Ron McRae.

BROTHER TOM (in background): I think I (unintelligible) her, ah, Bishop John Mc-Ray-ah. John Mc-Ray-ah.

MALE VOICE (in background): Mc-Ray-ah.

BROTHER TOM (in background): Yea-ah.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE (to McRea): Go ahead?

MCRAE: I am, I am, the, I am the Bishop of the Anabaptists Churches of North America.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE (in background): In this whole world, that is what he says? (unintelligible/foreign language)

(Mrs. Obama in background.)

VOICE: Are you listening, ready to speak,¹⁴ but (unintelligible)¹⁵ in?--No no!¹⁶--Are you, are you, are you speaking English? Can you speak a little bit slow, OK?¹⁷

MCRAE: Now give me that again? Explain it to me again?

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: She says welcome. (Pause.) She is very grateful for, for, for your, ah, great people sir.¹⁸

MCRAE: OK thank you. Tell her I count it a great honor to speak to her, uh, since her son Barack Obama is running for president of the United States.

VOICE (in background): Eh, what do you know, do you know wha--, where he comes from, uh?

VOICE (in background): To visit the president's mother. America.

(Mrs. Obama in background.)

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Yeah, she is very informed for that and you please pray for Obama. She is asking you to pray for him, for Obama.

¹⁴ Or possibly "Are you listening? I'm ready to speak . . ."

¹⁵ "listening"? "fluent"?

¹⁶ Probably saying "No no!" to someone nearby, not McRae.

¹⁷ Berg affidavit transcription: "Are you speaking English and, and we will tell her in Luo. Okay?"

¹⁸ The "great people" presumably refers to the churches and continent Bishop McRae has identified himself as being over as ecclesiastical head. An alternative interpretation is she means the people of the United States.

MCRAE: Yes sir. Uh, Miss Obama, you, you can rest assured that I am praying for your son. Uh, your grandson.

(slight pause)

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Yes, yes, how supportive toward her there are also a feeling to her.¹⁹

MCRAE: OK.

VOICE (speaking to someone in background): Only a moment, don't worry.

(Mrs. Obama in background.)

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: So, she says she is very welcome for your prayer please grant to her and her son.

MCRAE: OK. And--

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: You know--uh-huh?--

MCRAE: And tell her that I will be coming there in December. I would like to come by and meet with her and pray with her.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: (Pause.) Yeah--

(foreign words in background.)

BROTHER TOM (in background): In December, when in December. He is coming in December and that he wants to come and talk with you. Eh--

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Yeah.

(Mrs. Obama speaking in background.)

¹⁹ Affidavit transcription: "Yes. It is helpful also towards it is beginning to help."

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Oh, she says yes, yes well come here. You are coming in December so that you can talk together, with her.

MCRAE: Amen. I, I'm, I'm so thankful.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Yes.

MCRAE: Uh, could I ask her, uh, could I ask her about his, uh, his, his, his actual birthplace. I would like to see his birthplace when I, when I come to Kenya in December. Uh, was she, was she, was she present when he was--

VOICE (in background): It is here.²⁰

MCRAE: Was she present when he was born in Kenya?

BROTHER TOM: I think, uh, uh I think--

VOICE (in background): (unintelligible)

BROTHER TOM (in background): He is asking her that, uh, he wants to know something that uh, was uh you, was they, was she present when, ah, he was born. Were they they there then?²¹

²⁰ Or possibly, "she was here". The Kenyan Obamas may have a different sense of "birthplace" than "where the birth happened". It is used in the sense of "roots" or "ancestral origins". The Kenyan Obamas are proud of Barack Obama Jr. and their village of Kogelo as the place of his ancestral origins, and they claim him as one of their own, even though Barack Jr. was born in Hawaii, the son of Barack Sr. from Kogelo. In this sense they claim Barack Jr. as "from" or "a native son" of their hometown even though knowing as a factual matter that he was born in Hawaii. For example, a *Voice of America* article datelined Nov. 5, 2008 Nairobi had this header: "Barack Obama's election victory was greeted with particular enthusiasm in Kenya, where he is viewed by many as a native son." Compare a brief flurry of attention given similar language used by the Kenyan ambassador to the United States. A *Los Angeles Times* article datelined Nov. 5, 2008 Nyangoma-Kogelo, Kenya, began: "Several hundred gathered in the village where Obama's father was born cheer the election of a native son". The body of that article included this quote from a resident of the village: "I feel so very good now because my neighbor Barack Obama is president of the United States," said Richard Onyango, 30, an unemployed resident."

²¹ The last phrase is difficult to nail down. Possibilities considered were "were they

(Male voice in foreign language in background.)

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Yes, they say that yes she was.²² She was present when Obama was born.²³

(McRae catches breath)

MCRAE: OK.²⁴ Uh, when I come in December I would like to go by the, the place, the hospital where he is born. Uh, could you tell me where he was born? Was he born in Mombasa?

they there again", "were they they there then?", and "were they they here then?" Of the three alternatives named, I rejected the third on phonological grounds (a distinct third "th-" sound following the second "they" seems unmistakable). I rejected the first, because while actually seeming to be the best match with what I hear it makes little sense. The affidavit transcription omits this phrase.

²² Or possibly, "Yes, she says that yes she was." Affidavit transcription: "Yes. She says, 'Yes she was! She was present when Obama was born.'"

²³ Ogombe may be relaying back to McRae a simple "yes" answer from those around Mrs. Obama ("they say that yes she was"). There is no sound of Mrs. Obama's voice herself at this point in the recording, and Ogombe's answer is immediately preceded by a male voice saying something in a foreign language. The question appears to have been understood by the Kenyan Obamas as "was she present in Kenya when he was born?" None of the audible questions' wordings as they were repeated for translation to Mrs. Obama reflect McRae's wording of "when he was born *in Kenya*". The Kenyan Obamas think the questioner is asking where Mrs. Obama was when Obama was born, not where Mrs. Obama was when Obama was born in Kenya. They answer that Mrs. Obama was present right there, in Kogelo, those many years ago when Obama was born in Hawaii. The Kenyan Obamas become aware of McRae's misunderstanding concerning the place of Obama's birth following McRae's next question, and they try their best to correct his misunderstanding. Again, the sense seems to be: "she was here when Obama was born", with "present" meaning "here" (and without saying or implying Obama was born in Kenya). Neither the question as relayed by Brother Tom to the translator, the question that was then asked in translation to Mrs. Obama, nor the answer translated back to McRae, have "born *in Kenya*". The answer that Mrs. Obama was "present" when Barack Jr. was born in Hawaii involves the meaning of "present" by which the Kenyan Obamas appear to mean "here". Little do they know the afterlife their innocent, good-faith answer, offered in openness and sincerity to the unknown American caller, will take on in the United States in the hands of those seeking to prevent their beloved kinsman from becoming President of the United States.

²⁴ The affidavit transcription ends at this point.

(Long pause. Puzzled sound from Translator Ogombe in background: "naah?")²⁵

BROTHER TOM: Uh, uh, I, I will need help.²⁶ I think, uh I think, I kind of, you know we'll be coming December (unintelligible²⁷) and Vitalis, and I talking to him, so I tell him--²⁸

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE (in background, simultaneously): --no, no-- what?!?

BROTHER TOM: --that you are a capitalist, that you were a little, that you were a little, a little, a little American bus--

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE (responding to background voices, sounding distressed): No--yes--

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE (to McRae): No! Obama was not born in Mombasa! He was born in America!

MCRAE: Wh-whereabouts, whereabouts was he born? I, I thought he was born in Kenya.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: No he was born in America, not in Mombasa.

MCRAE: OK. Do you know whereabouts he was born?

²⁵ The Kenyan Obamas are puzzled by the followup question by McRae, which probably strikes them as nonsensical. They begin to realize that McRae has a misunderstanding.

²⁶ Or "I will need to help" or "I will need uh help".

²⁷ One or two words sound something like "from oh-lair".

²⁸ Brother Tom appears to be addressing McRae (somewhat privately?) on the open speakerphone while the translator, Ogombe, in the background consults others concerning McRae's question. Ogombe's reactions appear to be to other input he is receiving in the background, not to Brother Tom. As I reconstruct it Brother Tom is speaking to McRae something about future arrangements but is not able to complete his thought (and we do not know what point he was getting at) due to Ogombe's return to answer McRae's last question.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: (Pause.) Huh?

MCRAE: Do you know where he was born? I thought he was born in Kenya. I was gonna go by and see where he was born.

(two male voices in background in foreign language speaking at the same time. Mrs. Obama or another woman in background.)

VOICE (background): It was Hawaii.

VOICE OF MRS. OBAMA OR ANOTHER WOMAN (background): Hawaii.²⁹

BROTHER TOM (background): Hawaii, yeah?

VOICE OF MRS. OBAMA OR ANOTHER WOMAN (background): Yeah.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE (background): Yes.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE (to McRae): Sir, she says he was born in Hawaii.

MCRAE: OK.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Yeah, in 1960 this was Hawaii, where his father, his father was also marrying there. This was Hawaii.

MCRAE: OK.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Yeah.

²⁹ Not clear whether this is or is not the voice of Mrs. Obama. It seems to be higher pitched than Mrs. Obama's lower voice elsewhere, and seems to be the same higher-toned, apparently woman's, voice (but could be a higher-toned male voice) who speaks a phrase in English a little later ("It was in Hawaii"), whereas Mrs. Obama reportedly speaks no English.

MCRAE: Was, was, was Mrs. Obama, was sh--was she present? Was, was Mrs. Obama, see I thought you said she was present. Was she, was, was she, was she able to see him being, being born in, in Hawaii?

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: (pause, silence) Hoh? (pause) Uh, yeah would you please pronounce?

MCRAE: OK I'm sorry. I, I thought she said she was present when he was born. I was—

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE (sounding exasperated): No, no! The, the woman was not present. She was uh not, a what--you see, she was here in Kenya, and Obama was born in America. That is, that's obvious.³⁰

MCRAE: OK.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Because, because the grandmother was married here in Kenya, and Obama was born in America, oh yeah, so his son, the little Obama, was marrying, was marrying, in America, in United States.

MCRAE: Oh, OK, fine. I mean, I--I just, I misunderstood what she was saying. I thought you said she was present when he was born.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: No, not present there. The present with me here was tonight. Not present so she can leave.³¹ No she was here in Kenya while he, uh, her son, the little Obama, was marrying in America. And, uh, he be present if it--

WOMAN'S VOICE (background): It was in Hawaii.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: --was in America there, why are they for,³² they go, they go, they go to some place, then the present isn't here sir,³³ he was

³⁰ The last word sounds something more like "obveracious" or "operationous", but I cannot think of any other word it can be than "obvious".

³¹ Or possibly "not present so she cannot leave". The speaker appears to mean "Not present [there], because she could not leave [here]."

³² Possibly "whatever for".

³³ Or "then the present is here, sir" or "then the present is uh here, sir".

born there in America.³⁴

MCRAE: OK.³⁵ Well tell, tell her I would like to come by and see her when I am there in December. I would love to, uh, meet her personally and pray with her.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: (short pause) When will you soon be sending?³⁶ (slight pause) Yes, when you come in December--

MCRAE: OK.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: So you can, when do you, when you come, what time?

MCRAE: Yeah, when I, when I come in December I would love to come by and visit with her and uh, pray with her while I am there in, uh, Kisuma.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Yes, when you come in December you find her here.

MCRAE: OK.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Once you, you give her a present they, they hoping that they know when you are coming.

MCRAE: OK. D-, d-, does she have a, does she have a Swahili Bible?

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Huh?

³⁴ Although confusing, the speaker seems to be trying to explain two meanings of "present". It can mean "here", but if you go "there" then it can mean "there". He seems to be trying to say: Mrs. Obama was present in Kenya, but not present in Hawaii, when Obama was born in Hawaii. The confusion is entirely over the meaning of "present".

³⁵ McRae's "OK" sounds resigned. He doesn't understand Ogombe's explanation and drops the topic.

³⁶ Possibly an allusion to a promised or anticipated gift. Since no gift has been previously mentioned in this call, the allusion could be to something said by Brother Tom to the Kenyan Obamas prior to McRae's call (this is conjectural).

MCRAE: Does Mrs. Obama, does, does she she have a Swahili Bible?

(Brother Tom's voice in foreign language.)

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE (to McRae): Yes. A Swahili Bible she has, yes.

MCRAE: OK.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: She has at home.³⁷

MCRAE: Alright.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Yes.

MCRAE: I would like to buy her a real nice large print Bible, if that would be fine.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Uh-huh?

VOICE (in background): You need to welcome him, he gets her a Union Bible³⁸, more over there, it might be Swahili. (pause, distinctly) Can it be delivered?³⁹

(Mrs. Obama in background)

³⁷ Or "just at home" or "she has it all".

³⁸ The *Swahili Union Version* published by the Bible Society of Tanzania is one of the major editions of the Bible in Swahili.

³⁹ The unknown male voice in the background (not Brother Tom) may be speaking to Ogombe, advising him what to say next to McRae, like closing a deal. The interest in the gift of the Bible may be in the monetary or exchange value it represents. Brother Tom has possibly briefed McRae earlier on the appropriateness of the offer of the gift, but there is some confusion over when it is to be sent. McRae does not hear some of the questions accurately and plans to bring his gift with him when he comes in December. The Kenyan Obamas--courteous and gracious--attempt politely to urge McRae to send the valuable gift now. The final phrase actually sounds more like "can he be delivered"; if that is perchance correct the pronoun "he" presumably still refers to the Bible, not to McRae.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Yeah, she says that is very fine. All you got to see out here it is more and more hideous so there is nothing better than to read. To give it now?

(pause)

MCRAE: OK.⁴⁰

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE (gently): No? Yes?

MCRAE: Alright, I didn't, I didn't quite understand all of that.

(pause)

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Oh?

MCRAE: Can she read Swahili?

(background voice in foreign language, and Mrs. Obama)

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Yeah, yeah, she, yeah, she, she can understands Swahili or Luo.

MCRAE: OK.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: But she can--she cannot read it.

MCRAE: OK, alright.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Someone reads it in Luo so she completely understands.

MCRAE: OK alright. Well tell her its been a pleasure to talk to her. Are you, are you, uh, s-- who am I speaking with right now?

⁴⁰ McRae does not appear to have heard or understood the question. His "OK" sounds uncomprehending.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Huh?

MCRAE: Who am I speaking with right now? Are you, are you kin to--

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: (unintelligible)⁴¹ you are speaking with Vitalis Akech.⁴²

MCRAE: OK.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Vitalis Akech is uh, a third grandson to Miss Sarah.⁴³

MCRAE: Oh OK, alright, it's, it's a pleasure to meet you.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: My home, my home is just a, a distance so the Grand-, Grandmother's her house home is most home. Just we, just we do favors.

MCRAE: OK good. Well its been a pleasure talking to you. Uh, please tell Mrs. Obama that I will be praying for her and I will be praying for her son.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Thank you, right now?

VOICE (in background): Right now?

(Voice in background, foreign language)

(Mrs. Obama in background.)

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: So, she says if you are willing to come here, your (unintelligible),⁴⁴ and she really hopes for it, eh?

⁴¹ Probably "Right now".

⁴² Vitalis Akech Ogombe.

⁴³ It seems slightly odd that Vitalis Ogombe is speaking of himself in the third person, but it is his voice.

⁴⁴ Sounds almost like "you with your son".

MCRAE: Amen.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Amen.

MCRAE: Alright, may the Lord bless her very much.

(Translator Ogombe in background, foreign language)

MRS. OBAMA (in background, loudly): Amen, amen, amen.

MCRAE: Amen. OK.

MRS. OBAMA (in background): sata sata, eh, ar sata yesu nah koh baraki.

BROTHER TOM: Hello?

MCRAE: Hello? What did she say?

BROTHER TOM: Did you hear her, ah--yes?

MCRAE: What did she just say?

BROTHER TOM: She was saying that uh, God bless you you're welcome. She was talking in a loc—in a local language.

MCRAE: OK, Amen. Alright, hey Tom—

BROTHER TOM: Uh, yes.

MCRAE: --Brother Tom, I will call you back here just in, in about five or ten minutes. I will call you back personally.

BROTHER TOM: OK, let you, ah, is there anything that you, you, you answer, uh, maybe to, to, to me, these, was there anything, and even, even the others, even the other brothers here, and uh the, the, even the other grand-, there is another grand-uh-son who is here, and uh, so many people in the room that is from Kogela all over.

MCRAE: Amen. Well--

BROTHER TOM: Yes.

MCRAE: Ah--I will look forward to meeting all of them when I come in December. Uh, I am a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ and I would like to, uh, meet with all of them as a family, and perchance talk to them about Jesus Christ and the salvation that is in Jesus Christ alone.

(background foreign language)

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Oh, she says he is welcome here. So you are, you are preaching and she hopes that you will do so--heh? Amen.

MCRAE: Amen. Amen. May the Lord bless all of you.

TRANSLATOR OGOMBE: Thank you.

MCRAE: Alright, may God bless you. Bye-bye.

BROTHER TOM: OK. OK.

MCRAE: Alright Tom, I'll call you back here shortly.

BROTHER TOM: Yes, OK, Uh, I am, I am, I am with Vitalis, and uh I think we're leaving, and uh, you call us in about a, a half an hour, alright?

MCRAE: OK I will do that. Alright thank you very much Tom.

BROTHER TOM: You're welcome.

MCRAE: Alright, bye-bye.

BROTHER TOM: You're fine.

[END]